

## **A) Purpose/objectives of research project**

### **1. Purpose:**

Sustainable human-animal relations are subject to an ongoing 'understanding' between hunter and prey, breeder and stock, or musher and dog. The same applies to the management and harvesting of plants. For millennia, across the Circumpolar North, communities have honed, and passed on from generation to generation, their skills in 'reading' the needs and intentions of animals and plants. This fine-tuned ability we refer to as 'nonverbal interspecies communication.'

Historically, Western societies have given preference to language and the spoken and written word over nonverbal communication. Increasingly, scholars are coming to the conclusion that much of our world's demise (especially in terms of environmental stewardship and wildlife management) is the result of not listening to non-human living beings who do not use spoken or written words. Northern Indigenous and settler-descendent communities have nuanced histories of non-verbal communication with plants and animals, as can be seen in interspecies collaborative hunting and fishing practices, in the gathering of medicines and plant construction materials, as well as in artistic practices, such as traditional drum dancing.

Some of this nonverbal heritage has been documented as part of existing research on human-animal and human-plant relations in Canada and beyond. But to date, there exists very little detailed documentation of how hunters and animal trainers 'read' and communicate nonhuman actions in animal-human encounters. The loss of such nonverbal literacy can be compared to the loss of an ancestral language, and it deserves to be documented for generations to come. Such information can also help rethink existing animal and plant-related policy in Canada and internationally. We aim to collaborate with local communities in documenting living knowledge about nonverbal interspecies communication.

### **2. Objectives:**

This project seeks to create community-owned records of instances of nonverbal communication with animals and plants that will benefit future hunters, animal trainers, plant gatherers, and game managers, as much as it will enlighten current scholarship on nonverbal interspecies communication. Where applicable, and throughout the duration of the project, the objectives of the study will be subject to negotiation with our community steering committees. Deliverables, such as films and other publications, will be prepared in close consultation with the Steering Committees, and where appropriate under co-authorship with community members.

## **B) Proposed research plan and methodology**

Members of the project team will spend time with hunters and Elders on the land, observing and recording human-game interactions, including observations of game movement. Team

members are encouraged to assist with on-the-land activities as much as they can, while creating detailed descriptions of activities. Members will also record semi-structured and open-ended interviews with select hunters and Elders on the topic of observing and understanding animal and plant actions on the land. This may include the placement of game cameras and discussion of captured footage.

### **C) Significance of proposed project (cultural and/or scientific benefits)**

This project studies how humans, animals, and plants engage in sensory (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch) nonverbal (pre-linguistic) interspecies communication. We do so by ethnographically observing animal- and plant-human interactions, together with Inuvialuit hunters and trappers on the land.

We do not foresee duplication of previous research. While anthropologists have studied Inuit (and Inuvialuit) hunting practices, our co-led approach to nonverbal interspecies communication is novel. Following an extensive literature review, it is clear that our research premise and questions are original for the proposed region. This is confirmed by our research partners (co-leaders) and the Research Administrator at the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation (IRC). In part, the novelty of this research has to do with it being positioned at the intersection of the Social Sciences and Humanities (ethnography, ethnohistory, environmental humanities) and the Natural Sciences (ethology). It does not focus on any one species in isolation, but draws attention to intergenerational communicative interspecies heritage, including linguistic features.

Core research goals are to:

- Advance understanding of how senses are used across species to communicate meaning
- Highlight interspecies differences in perception/use of time and space
- Improve understanding of learnable nonverbal communication in game populations
- Identify strategies for productive interspecies collaboration involving humans
- Inspire public debate on the needs, intentions, and life worlds of nonhumans in the Anthropocene

### **D) Relation of project to previous work or other work in progress**

Our research project has multiple partner fieldsites in Mongolia, which will provide comparative data from hunting and herding contexts. Our research associates, including the PI, bring many years of ethnographic and ethno-ethological research experience ranging from Inner Asia, southern Siberia, and the Canadian Arctic. For more information on the project and its fieldsites, please go to [www.sensoryacts.ca](http://www.sensoryacts.ca).

### **E) Confirmation of communication with the Inuvialuit for research on the Yukon North Slope and with Yukon First Nation(s) in whose traditional territory the research will be**

**conducted. Include individual(s) contacted, date of contact and attach any letters of approval or support to the application**

We have reached out to: Inuvialuit Cultural Centre (May 2022); Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Research Administration (Aug 2022); Inuvik HTC (Aug 2022); Joint Secretariat (Aug 2022); Aklavik HTC (Jan 2023); Wildlife Management Advisory Council (Jan 2023); Inuvialuit Game Council (Jan 2023). We were recommended by these parties to collaborate with an HTC. In March 2023 we were invited to present to AHTC in Aklavik and to IGC in Inuvik. Both meetings resulted in agreements to run a co-led study (documentation attached). Our NWT Research Licence application has been submitted and is awaiting University of Regina Research Ethics Approval. Attached, please find Letters of Support from the Aklavik Hunters & Trappers and the Inuvialuit Game Council.

**F) Suggested deposition of materials and samples that may be collected**

We have arrangements to deposit all of our findings with the Archives of the Joint Secretariat (<https://www.jointsecretariat.ca>) where it will be stored for future access by Inuvialuit communities.

**G) Any previous licences**

Our research team have not held any previous Yukon research licenses. The PI (Alex Oehler) has held a GNWT Research License in the past (2011).

Research Ethics Board  
University of Regina

Regina, May 3, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:


Attached, please find official written support for the co-led Sensory Acts project by the Inuvialuit Game Council (IGC) and the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee (AHTC). Both entities oversee human-animal relations in wildlife contexts on Indigenous Inuvialuit lands and water bodies of the ISR (Inuvialuit Settlement Region). While the hamlet of Aklavik is the home of both First Nations (Gwitch'in) and Inuit (Inuvialuit), we will be working with Inuvialuit hunters.

The attached agreements have emerged from preliminary community consultations that were conducted by the PI of this project in Inuvik and Aklavik, NWT, in March of 2023.

Sincerely,



Alex Oehler

**From:** Joe Thrasher joe.thrasher@jointsec.nt.ca   
**Subject:** IGC Support for co-leading project  
**Date:** April 11, 2023 at 11:10 AM  
**To:** Alex Oehler alex.oehler@uregina.ca  
**Cc:** Davonna Kasook igc-rp@jointsec.nt.ca



Hi Alex,

Good morning, on behalf of IGC, we would like to confirm with you that IGC is in support for the co-leading project “Sensory Acts: More than human communication in the Circumpolar North”.

Also, there was general support for this work and The Council did not see any disadvantages of it. However, the support will remain conditional upon support from the Aklavik HTC to proceed with this work. IGC only supports if Aklavik HTC supports. There was also a recommendation for you to approach Aklavik HTC and let IGC know if they support, and another was for you to ask the Aklavik HTC directly what their local research interests are.

Just a future reference as well, for research purposes like these, please approach the respective community HTC before approaching IGC.

Thanks,



**Joe Thrasher | IGC Resource Management Coordinator**

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Aklavik Hunters & Trappers Committee  
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Aklavik, NT X0E 0A0  
Email: [aklavikahtc@gmail.com](mailto:aklavikahtc@gmail.com)  
Tel: (867) 978-2723

March 29, 2023

Alex Oehler  
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University of Regina  
3737 Wascana Parkway  
Regina, SK  
S4S 0A2  
Email: [alex.oehler@uregina.ca](mailto:alex.oehler@uregina.ca)

**Re: Support Letter**

Dear Alex;

The Aklavik Hunters & Trappers Committee (AHTC) held their regular board meeting on March 13, 2023 and reviewed your emailed dated November 05, 2022.

At this time, the AHTC would like to provide you with support for this project. Here is a copy of the motion:

**MOTION# 03/23 – 002**

**MOVED BY Brandon McLeod; SECONDED BY Dorothy Erigaotak.**

Be it resolved that the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee support Alex Oehler, Department of Anthropology, University of Regina for the partnership research of the project: Nonverbal animal/plant communication and we are also in support of hiring a local member to work as liaison for this project and when come to Aklavik anytime as our members are always doing something on the land.

**MOTION CARRIED.**

We thank you for providing AHTC with the information and we wish you all the best in the research.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact the office at 978-2723.

Thank you,

*Michelle Gruben*

Michelle Gruben, Resource Person  
Aklavik Hunters & Trappers Committee

## STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP)



More than Human Communication  
in the Circumpolar North

<b>Organization:</b>	University of Regina	<b>SOP #</b>	<b>SOP-SACTS-001</b>
<b>Division:</b>	Dept. of Anthropology	<b>Effective Date:</b>	August 10, 2023
<b>Issued by:</b>	Alex Oehler, PI	<b>Location/Camp:</b>	Aklavik HTC territory
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Observation of hunter-wildlife interactions on the land</b>		
<b>Revision:</b>		<b>Replaces:</b>	

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this SOP is to provide proper protocols and assist research staff in determining proper conduct prior and during all field operations involving the handling of domestic animals and wildlife in the NWT.

### **Scope:**

Encompasses all SACTS research associates, including University of Regina SACTS project staff and co-leading members of the Aklavik HTC located in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region during periods of collaborative fieldwork on-the-land (outside of communities).

### **Responsibilities:**

- The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for development/implementation of the plan.
- Research Staff (university researchers):
  - Successfully complete Animal Care Course (CCAC)
  - Adhere to protocols set out by University of Regina Research Ethics Board
  - Maintain Wilderness First Aid certification
  - Successfully complete provincial or territorial Hunter Safety Training (if applicable)
- Research Staff (Aklavik Hunters & Trappers members)
  - Adhere to Wildlife Act Aklavik HTC Regulations R-031-93
  - Pass Superintendent-approved trapping education program
  - Successfully complete provincial or territorial Hunter Safety Training (or equivalent)

### **Goal:**

The goal of this SOP for “Observations of hunter-wildlife interactions on the land” is to guide data collection on nonverbal communicative strategies used by hunters and wildlife. By recording hunter/wildlife interactions (e.g., how each observe/detect/interpret the presence and movement of the other) we can contribute important insight to the general state of knowledge about non-linguistic communication between species. Some non-linguistic communicative modalities in hunting contexts can include mimicry, calling, driving, and flushing. Communicative capacity also includes understanding the use of posture, gesture, scent, and sound. Our researchers will apprentice in the use of such skills under the guidance of experienced local hunters and trappers, while not altering established hunting practices.

### **Conservation:**

This research does not in and of itself encourage or require the capture, handling, or killing of animals. However, activities such as mimicry, calling, driving, and flushing can be aimed at capturing and killing game species. We choose to work in a hunting context, because previous research indicates hunters and trappers possess rich knowledge of the communicative capacity of wildlife. Some of the hunted

species in the NWT have special conservation status (e.g. Polar bear, Beluga whale), yet constitute legal game for (some) Indigenous harvesters. Our research does not alter the number or type of game taken. We follow the “three Rs” by: 1) replacing lethal action with non-lethal observation where possible; 2) reducing the number of potential wildlife encounters from a statistically representative sample size to numbers adequate for qualitative analysis; 3) refining observational protocols through recursive methodology that allows previous interactions to immediately inform subsequent instances.

**Contingency Plans:**

Hunters and trappers, like scientists, can on occasion obtain non-target species (e.g., bi-catch) in their traps, nets, or with their firearms. Bi-catch will be minimized with the help of appropriate and regulated species-specific trap use (see Oehler, Application to Handle Wildlife, p. 2), as well as through hunter safety training. Hunters and trappers do not usually carry animal first aid kits or anesthesia for instances in which game are accidentally wounded. Where this is the case, we will follow the hunters’ and trappers’ protocol for termination, because our observations take place on their traplines and/or on Inuvialuit private lands, and as part of Inuvialuit economic and traditional activities, which fall under the regulations of the HTC and the Inuvialuit Game Council.

**Pre-Fieldwork Procedures:**

	Steps	Check
1	Ensure <b>Travel Authorization Request Form</b> has been approved prior to fieldwork departure ( <a href="https://www.uregina.ca/policy/browse-policy/policy-EMP-050-005.html">https://www.uregina.ca/policy/browse-policy/policy-EMP-050-005.html</a> ).	
2	Ensure <b>Travel and Fieldwork Risk Assessment</b> has been logged with required individuals ( <a href="https://www.uregina.ca/hr/hsw/assets/docs/pdf/Procedures/travel-and-fieldwork-risk-assessment-form.pdf">https://www.uregina.ca/hr/hsw/assets/docs/pdf/Procedures/travel-and-fieldwork-risk-assessment-form.pdf</a> ).	
3	Ensure adequate <b>health and dental insurance</b> plans have been selected for remote fieldwork (student researchers: <a href="https://www.ursu.ca/services/health-dental-plan/">https://www.ursu.ca/services/health-dental-plan/</a> )	
4	Ensure all applicable <b>Travel and Fieldwork Safety Procedures</b> are being followed ( <a href="https://www.uregina.ca/hr/hsw/assets/docs/pdf/Procedures/travel-and-fieldwork-procedures.pdf">https://www.uregina.ca/hr/hsw/assets/docs/pdf/Procedures/travel-and-fieldwork-procedures.pdf</a> ).	
5	Ensure <b>Student Agreement Assumption of Risk</b> form is filled and submitted, if applicable ( <a href="https://www.uregina.ca/hr/hsw/assets/docs/doc/student-travel-and-fieldwork-assumption-of-risks.doc">https://www.uregina.ca/hr/hsw/assets/docs/doc/student-travel-and-fieldwork-assumption-of-risks.doc</a> ).	

**Procedures for Preparing Departure from Communities:**

	Steps	Check
1	Ensure <b>Safety Planning Record</b> has been logged with appropriate (HTC/UofR) individuals in nearest community prior to departure. ( <a href="https://www.uregina.ca/hr/hsw/assets/docs/doc/travel-and-fieldwork-safety-planning-record.doc">https://www.uregina.ca/hr/hsw/assets/docs/doc/travel-and-fieldwork-safety-planning-record.doc</a> ).	
2	Ensure all <b>Emergency Equipment</b> has been updated and packed prior to each departure from community (First Aid Kit, 2-Way Satellite Messenger, Winter Road Survival Kit, Personal Floatation Devices, compass/topographic maps, etc.).	
3	Ensure <b>sufficient gasoline</b> (for skidoos, boats, vehicles) has been obtained and securely stored for all days of travel based on planned route (including emergency ration) before each departure from community.	



4	Ensure sufficient <b>food</b> (freeze dry/canned), <b>water</b> (purifier/filter), and <b>shelter</b> (tents, sleeping bags) have been packed for anticipated number of people and days spent on the land.	
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**Procedures for Observing Wildlife:**

1	Adhere to the hunting and trapping directives of the <b>Wildlife Act</b> and <b>AHTC Regulations</b> , including to hunting seasons, ensuring protected game zones are accessed at optimal times for specific populations.
3	Minimize disturbances by observational activities that may lead to abandonment of home ranges, pre-emption of feeding, disruption of social structures, and alteration of predator-prey relationships. (ENR, Wildlife Care Committee)
4	Prepare for environmental conditions that may be encountered during a field operation, terminating activities temporarily or permanently if animal or human safety concerns are mounting. (ENR, Wildlife Care Committee)
5	Prevent or minimize intensity and duration of pain, distress, and/or demographic and other population effects experienced by animals as the result of research activities. (CCAC Wildlife Guidelines)
6	Be cognizant of concurrent research/hunting/industrial activities and minimize cumulative effects on animal populations in specific areas, and on ecosystems in general. (CCAC Wildlife Guidelines)
7	Ensure access to (and through) sensitive areas for observational activities minimize disturbance to the animals and their habitat (CCAC Wildlife Guidelines), regardless of season or zone.
8	When using aerial, ground, or marine surveys, be sure to conduct these in a manner that minimizes disturbance to animals (CCAC Wildlife Guidelines). Follow the three Rs in discerning when and where to use drones, trail cameras, sound recorders, and/or other survey devices.

**Procedures for (Lethal) Capture of Wildlife:**

1	Review traps, nets, and associated techniques to ensure the equipment used is legal, effective, and suited to the species and situation, avoiding non-target species (bi-catch). (CCAC Wildlife Guidelines and Wildlife Act)
2	Ensure traps are monitored at least every 72 hours, remain well maintained, and de-activated prior and immediately following the trapping season for each targeted species and zone. (Wildlife Act)
5	While legal and effective live-capture traps may be used in some instances, the end goal is not to live-handle target animals, but to kill them humanely. No chemical restraints will be used.
6	Hunters may orchestrate their pursuit of a target-species by taking advantage of the presence of a non-target species as a quasi-lure animal, in which case no reporting is due.

**Procedures for Killing Wildlife:**

1	Personnel conducting lethal termination must be competent (and licensed) hunters, ensuring an effective and humane death for each animal hunted.
3	When using lethal traps, follow the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards (AIHTC).

4	Where the use of firearms is required, the marksperson must be legally permitted to use the firearm, and they must be familiar with the anatomy of the target animal. (CCAC Wildlife Guidelines)
5	Always use appropriate ammunition gauge for any given target species.
6	Lead-free ammunition should be used whenever possible to prevent contamination. (CCAC Wildlife Guidelines and Provincial/Territorial Hunter Safety)
7	Attempt to shoot target species in such a way as to minimize stress for non-target animals. (CCAC Wildlife Guidelines)
8	Avoid shooting animals in terrain from which carcass recovery may pose special challenges. (CCAC Wildlife Guidelines)
9	Before approaching large game, wait for 15 minutes after lethal shot has been placed. (Provincial/Territorial Hunter Safety)

**Procedures to Ensure Human Safety:**

1	When handling raw flesh, blood, innards, excrement, or any other part or fluid of a killed animal, be sure to properly wash and/or disinfect all contact points after procedure to avoid the transmission of zoonotic diseases.
3	Carry legal non-expired bear spray cannisters when traveling outside community, and follow ECC Bear Safety guidelines ( <a href="https://www.gov.nt.ca/ecc/en/services/bear-safety">https://www.gov.nt.ca/ecc/en/services/bear-safety</a> ) and ECC Wolf Safety Guidelines ( <a href="https://www.gov.nt.ca/ecc/sites/ecc/files/resources/fact_sheet_wd_wolves_in_the_northwest_territories_nov_2018.pdf">https://www.gov.nt.ca/ecc/sites/ecc/files/resources/fact_sheet_wd_wolves_in_the_northwest_territories_nov_2018.pdf</a> )
4	Be prepared for other risks and hazards by always wearing a helmet when traveling by skidoo, ATV, or side-by-side. Always wear a PFD when on or near open water bodies.
5	Follow all <b>Travel and Fieldwork Safety Procedures</b> (UofR) as preventive measures to minimize risks.

**Supporting Documents:**

1	Wildlife Research Permit (GNWT)
2	Wildlife Observation Permit (GNWT)
3	Wildlife Handling Permit (GNWT)
4	Animal Care Committee Approval (University of Regina)
5	Aklavik Hunters & Trappers Letter of Support
6	Inuvialuit Game Council Letter of Support