

WE MUST ACT NOW: CLIMATE CHANGE

Words and Photos by Maia Lepage



Youth from across Canada met in Inuvik August 17th-21st, 2009 to discuss Climate Change. Margaret Akoaksion a delegate from Ulukhaktok, says that she has already seen the effect of climate change first hand. "The weather has been strange. One day it snows and the next day it rains. We haven't really had a summer," says Akoaksion. "When I get back home, I want to share what I have learned with the community and increase awareness about climate change." Many other attendees felt the same way and shared their stories. Floods in Nunavut, storms in the Yukon, droughts in the prairies, each story painting a big picture that climate change is a reality we need to address.

"One of the major benefits of having the conference in the north was being able to hear traditional knowledge from the elders and hearing stories of how it used to be and how it has changed," says Josh Prowse, a law student from Victoria who attended the Climate Change Summit in Inuvik. "Hearing stories about how generations of families would fish on the same rivers but now, because of climate change, those rivers are no longer accessible is really eye-opening. To realize that climate change isn't a thing in the future but it is something that is already affecting lives today is something pretty powerful."

Representatives from the three territories and southern Canada came together to create a declaration that they will present to the Canadian Government at Powershift, a climate change conference which is being held in Ottawa, Ontario on October 23-26th, 2009. "The declaration is a good product from an excellent summit," says Dennis Bevington, the Member of Parliament for the Northwest Territories who attended the youth summit. "I think it is very apropos to have the young leaders from the three territories here together in Inuvik talking about this extremely important issue. It speaks to their desire to come together as northerners. I feel it carries a lot of strength." Bevington has been an environmental advocate for many years, and has won awards from the Arctic Energy Alliance for his zero emissions office building, which uses solar and biomass energy. Bevington spent the week observing the conference and was very impressed with the results. "Like any action, you have to have a plan of attack to get your message across," states Bevington. "I've seen a lot of work that is going on here to make that happen, and anything that I can do to help, I will be quite willing to do so."

2009 is a crucial year for talks on climate change. Twelve years ago, the Kyoto Protocol was established,



(LEFT) Group picture of all the conference participants at the Gwichin Wellness (TOP LEFT) - Margret Akoaksion, from Ulukhaktok, expresses her opinions during a brainstorming session. (TOP RIGHT) Dennis Bevington answers questions from the press during the Climate Change Conference in Inuvik.

which states that countries will pledge to reduce their greenhouse gases. At the time, Canada had agreed to reduce their emissions by 6% by 2012 however; many experts say that those targets will not be attained. With time quickly winding down on the Kyoto Protocol, a Conference of the Parties (COP) is being planned for Copenhagen, Denmark for December 7-18th, 2009. Representatives from 192 countries will be present to formalize a new agreement regarding climate change. The new agreement will take effect when the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012. "Climate change is an incredibly vital and important issue," states Prowse. "It is necessary that the government take actions to halt climate change. If our government isn't doing that, it is our responsibility as Canadians to think about that and decide whether our government is doing a good job."

"I hope that leading up to Copenhagen, along with other young people from across the country, we can make our government listen and build a stronger Canadian position going in to Copenhagen," says Bevington. "These young people are on the right track and their message is important." ✦



Everyone has a carbon footprint

YOUR FOOTPRINT IS THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS THAT YOU DIRECTLY (OR INDIRECTLY) CAUSE. WE CAN ALL TAKE STEPS TO REDUCE OUR CARBON FOOTPRINT AND HERE ARE A FEW TIPS:

- Set your thermostat a few degrees lower in the winter and a few degrees higher in the summer to save on heating and cooling costs.
- Walk or bike to work. This saves on gas costs while improving your cardiovascular health and reducing your risk of obesity.
- Buy local meats such as muskox, reindeer or char. Purchasing from local sources also keeps money in the local economy.
- You can make very effective, non-toxic cleaning products whenever you need them. All you need are a few simple ingredients like baking soda, vinegar, lemon, and soap. Making your own cleaning products saves money, time, and packaging.
- Use a reusable water bottle as often as possible. Not only is bottled water expensive, it also generates large amounts of waste.