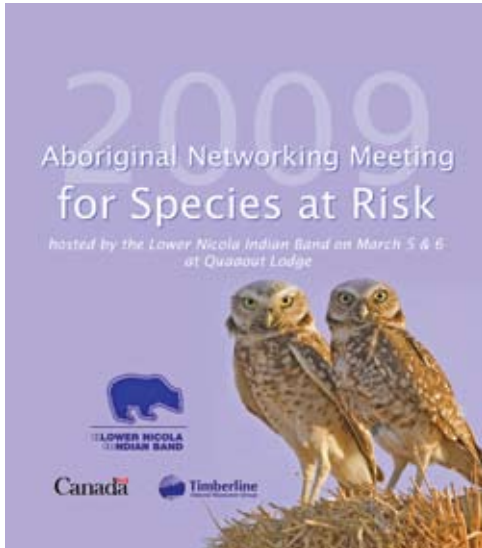




# Aboriginal networking for species

by Pedro Lara Almuedo, Conservation Biology  
Extension Specialist



Event poster, courtesy of  
Dave Caswell.

Despite the current economic situation and the existing funding challenges, species at risk-related issues continue to be a high priority for both First Nations and government agencies. This was one important take-home message from the “2009 Aboriginal Networking Meeting for Species at Risk” hosted by the Lower Nicola Indian Band on March 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. This meeting, held near Chase, BC was co-sponsored by the Lower Nicola Indian Band, Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Timberline Natural Resource Group.

The communal fire of the Quaaout Lodge welcomed the 45 representatives of First Nations, provincial and federal government agencies, consultants, and environmental agencies on the first day of the workshop, which was dedicated to the theme of Species at Risk (SAR) Management Planning. **Chief Felix Arnouse** (Little Shuswap Indian Band) welcomed everyone to his band’s traditional territory. **Ernie Phillip** (Little Shuswap Indian Band) provided a warm opening prayer and **Greg van Rossum** (Lower Nicola Indian Band) introduced the agenda of the workshop. The first speaker of the session, **Barry Smith** (Canadian Wildlife Service), acknowledged the important role of First Nations in the conservation of SAR and the relevance of conserving Canada’s biodiversity in the context of the Strategy for Protection of Species at Risk and the *Species At Risk Act*. Smith stressed the need to enhance stewardship practices that address SAR and critical habitat.

**Chief John Kruger** (Penticton Indian Band) commented on the need to review funding for First Nations that support initiatives to protect habitat for SAR within traditional territories. **Dave Fraser** (BC Ministry of Environment) presented the Conservation Framework ([www.env.gov.bc.ca/conservationframework/](http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/conservationframework/)) as an innovative approach to planning, prioritizing, and delivering effective conservation of BC’s ecosystems and species diversity, which is critical, particularly in the new climate change scenario. Fraser provided several examples of how the Conservation Framework is

addressing multi-species and ecosystem conservation (e.g., Okanagan Sagebrush steppe conservation initiative, a collaborative project with Ktunaxa First Nation in the East Kootenays to conserve over 300 species and 30 plant communities at risk). **Bob Jamieson** (Shuswap Band) provided his experience on management strategies for SAR within the Shuswap Reserve in Invermere. He discussed how they are balancing the development needs of the Shuswap community with the conservation needs of 37 relevant species within their territory, including animals such as the badger, the salmon, the woodpecker, and the ground squirrel, as well as key ecosystems (grasslands) and related disturbance processes (burns). **Tasha Sargent** (Grasslands Conservation Council) talked about the importance of grassland ecosystems in BC and presented the Planning for Change Initiative ([www.bcgrasslands.org/planningforchange.htm](http://www.bcgrasslands.org/planningforchange.htm)), which provides a framework to support land use planning and development decisions that affect grasslands. Sargent also touched base on the Green Bylaws Toolkit ([www.greenbylaws.ca](http://www.greenbylaws.ca)) as an effective example of how to assist municipalities in this purpose, shared her experiences with the City of Vernon and the City of Kamloops, and announced that the Grassland Conservation Council is already working on a new initiative to provide First Nations with a similar decision support toolkit. **Ian Mackenzie** (Grasslands Conservation Council) gave an overview of the Priority Grasslands Initiative ([www.bcgrasslands.org/projects/conservation/priorityinitiative.htm](http://www.bcgrasslands.org/projects/conservation/priorityinitiative.htm)), a GIS-based mapping effort that provides geographically explicit support to land use planning. Mackenzie reviewed the application of this GIS tool in two particular examples: one, a Grassland Portfolio for the Thompson Basin Ecosystem and the other, an Ecological Assessment for the Aberdeen Area Plan within the City of Kamloops.

During the first day’s breakout sessions, participants further discussed the situation, opportunities, and challenges for grassland conservation in their communities and also reflected on applying and adapting different SAR strategies to Aboriginal land management objectives. **Brian Toth** (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council) presented on successful experiences in maximizing First Nations involvement in SAR-related processes, based on the example of two recovery projects for the white sturgeon in the Nechako ([www.nechakowhitesturgeon.org](http://www.nechakowhitesturgeon.org)) and Upper Fraser Basins. **John Manitowabi** (Wickwemikong First Nation) shared his experience in



# at risk conservation and management

land use planning for wildlife and plant SAR within his traditional territory, stressing the importance of data collection and data sharing for the different natural values and features of their land and of using GIS technology as an analysis and decision support tool. Manitowabi also said there was a need to invest in SAR educational initiatives for the new generations.

The second day's session, dedicated to the theme of Species at Risk Recovery Actions, was introduced by **Christina Ciesielski** (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council) with a presentation on outreach and harm-reduction initiatives for the Nechako White Sturgeon. Ciesielski stressed the importance of working with and involving local communities in SAR recovery initiatives through both face-to-face and media-outreach efforts, and provided a background of the outreach work developed through the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council website ([www.cstc.bc.ca](http://www.cstc.bc.ca)).

**Tracy Sampson** (Nicola Tribal Association) gave an overview of a recovery effort for the Interior Fraser Coho salmon that involves stocking assessment, monitoring, and habitat restoration activities. **Tom Wood** (Environment Canada), **Belinda Claxton**, and **Ken Cossey** (Tsawout) presented on a multi-party community effort to conserve and restore the Cordova spit (Tixen), an unique dune system on Tsawout territory in Vancouver Island.

The second day's breakout session saw participants discuss capacity, technology, funding, and other challenges and opportunities for developing and implementing SAR management strategies.

**Paul Williams** (BC Wildlife Park) talked about the Burrowing Owl ecology and the existing captive breeding and release program in the Kamloops–Nicola Valley area. He stressed the importance of partnerships, private landowner and volunteer participation, and also the need to focus conservation efforts on habitat and ecosystems (in this case, grasslands) rather than on a single species. **Glenn Thiem** (Nicola Similkameen Innovative Forestry Society) related his experiences on modelling and managing First Nations species of interest and on sharing information and databases to support First Nations land stewardship decisions through their website ([www.nsifs.bc.ca/](http://www.nsifs.bc.ca/)). **Laura Isaac** (Lower Nicola Indian Band) and **Dave Caswell** (Timberline) offered their views on the habitat suitability modelling, field assessment and outreach, communication, and education work developed for the Lower Nicola Indian Band ([www.lnib.net/](http://www.lnib.net/)) on 14 dry ecosystem SAR. Finally, **Mary Sandy**

(Esh-Kn-Am) gave a presentation on how to transform Indigenous Knowledge into management planning and shared the results of the workshop held in Merritt in February on this specific topic. Closing the second day's session were **Aaron Sam** (Lower Nicola Indian Band Councilor) and **Harold Joe** (Lower Nicola Indian Band Councilor), who offered acknowledgements and prayers. Greg van Rossum (Lower Nicola Indian Band) thanked all participants, presenters, organizers, hosts, and funders for their contributions to this successful networking and knowledge sharing event, which provided, among others, the following take-home messages:

- There is a need to build long-term partnerships with First Nations to deliver effective and successful SAR initiatives, based on both common goals/interests around the conservation of SAR and also on the common understanding and respect of the interests of the different partners.
- Well-directed extension and outreach efforts also play a key role in engaging First Nations communities and values in SAR management, by assisting in building true co-operative partnerships, reducing communication barriers, and facilitating First Nations participation in SAR-related initiatives.
- There is a need to shift the conservation paradigm from single species to habitat, fostering habitat stewardship efforts and integrating the First Nations' holistic approach to land and natural resources conservation and management.
- Funding and capacity building remain the two main barriers among First Nations communities to increasing their capability to deliver effective SAR and habitat conservation initiatives.
- There are still concerns among First Nations on how SAR protection within their territories could affect or constrain their right to use natural resources to develop their communities. As a result, innovative approaches to allow for sustainable resource use, which are compatible with the conservation of natural values, are needed.
- The need to change the way we, as a global society, currently envision economic development, the need to re-engage in taking care of the land and its natural values, and the need to promote ways of revenue sharing to support First Nations self governing, are key overall issues that still need to be addressed. 🌲

*The communal fire of the Quaaout Lodge welcomed the participants of this workshop.*



Pedro Lara Almuedo photo