

My YLS on NCC Experience

“Young Leaders Summit on Northern Climate Change”

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Before embarking on my trip to Yellowknife although I was nervous and anxious, I was also very excited. Once I arrived in Yellowknife, I met seven other young women who were eager to learn and excitedly preparing to soak in all of the knowledge we were about to collect on climate change in the North.

On our trip we met with a series of interesting, knowledgeable and influential figures in the North including MLA's, the NWT Premier, and Yellowknife's Mayor. I noticed that many expressed the same ongoing concerns in relation to climate change, that is, about the water levels, forest fires, the animals, and access to fresh foods.

Every stop we made in every community was busy and we always had people to speak with, things to learn. Our first stop was pretty relaxed. We made it to Fort Providence. We had travelled all day so it was dark when we got to our campsite. We set up camp and called it a night.

The following day, we set out to Kakisa where we were able to speak with the chief. He spoke about the recent forest fire that had affected their tight knit community. They had to work as a team and cut down trees close to their homes to protect themselves and their families.

The forests around their grave site were burnt and as we drove around Kakisa, we noticed that so much of the lands were affected by the fire. This was difficult to see, but a very real and very serious example of the impacts of climate change on our Northern communities. The day ended with a campfire, we invited the Chief and his wife along with a few of their family members to join us. The conversations were interesting and productive and the dried fish was delicious!

The following day, we packed up camp and went to meet two scientists who were to take us to a site affected by the forest fire. They spoke to us about how the fire impacts the soils, the plants, and of course the trees. The Jack Pine is a tree native to and dominates these forests. This tree species is adapted to a mild amount of forest fire and is threatened by the recent increase in intensity and frequency of fires. Other tree species that are able to tolerate fire will eventually take over, changing the types of plants and animals that exist in these forests.

We went on to Hay River where a woman named Kim took us to a fossil site which has not been exposed to very many people, and so, we felt very fortunate to be there. The fossils we found were mainly sea creatures. Kim explained to us that the hill we were searching for fossils in and around had once been under water. This was one of my favorite parts of the trip and our time there ended far too soon!

We then drove out to the Alexander Falls and had lunch. It was a beautiful, pristine place. We walked up close to the falls and enjoyed the view. We walked further down the hill and we were able to stand underneath the falls as well, what a wonderful experience!

After packing up, we made our way to the NFTI (Northern Farm Training Institute) facility for a tour. We were shown their gardens and the animals they harvest. Seeing the NFTI facility made me very interested in learning how to grow a garden in a greenhouse. We have one here in Iqaluit and I would love to see it expand along with our access to country food so that one day we could be self-sustaining and no longer need food shipped up.

Next, we spoke with an Elder living in Hay River. We made a good meal and learned so much more about their personal and larger experiences with climate change. Their main concern was the animals coming closer to the communities due to their habitat being burnt or destroyed. She told us they would come and eat their garbage. What kind of diet is that for an animal that we may one day hunt to feed our families? This made me think and connect incidents of polar bears entering the towns at home, for likely similar reasons, destruction of their environment, lack of food sources.

The elder also mentioned something I found really important, that we need to educate our youth about our lands and our traditions. She feels that if our youth respect our traditions then they will respect our lands.

Our last and final stop was Behchoko where we met the Chief and talked about how they started their own government, which has been considered to be a great success. They also spoke extensively about taking youth out on the land to learn the ways of their ancestors, the ways of spirituality, stewardship, survival and self determination. They travel up a path by a river which their ancestors used to travel on. They learn important skills on how to survive on the land. We need more activities like this for our youth, not only in the north, but all over Canada.

We then made our way back to Yellowknife where we had a few more people to speak with and a press conference to attend. By the end of the trip full up of knowledge and experience about climate change(s) in the North, ready to share and act on it with those in our home towns, in the hopes of one day making a change.

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