



ATHABASCA WORKING GROUP

2016-2017 Environmental Monitoring Program in:

Camsell Portage

Changes to the AWG Program

The Athabasca Working Group (AWG) environmental monitoring program began in 2000 and continued for 18 years in 7 northern Saskatchewan communities: Wollaston Lake/Hatchet Lake, Black Lake, Fond du Lac, Stony Rapids, Uranium City, and Camsell Portage. Northern community members were involved with choosing the sampling locations, the types of plants and animals sampled, and with the sample collections themselves each year.

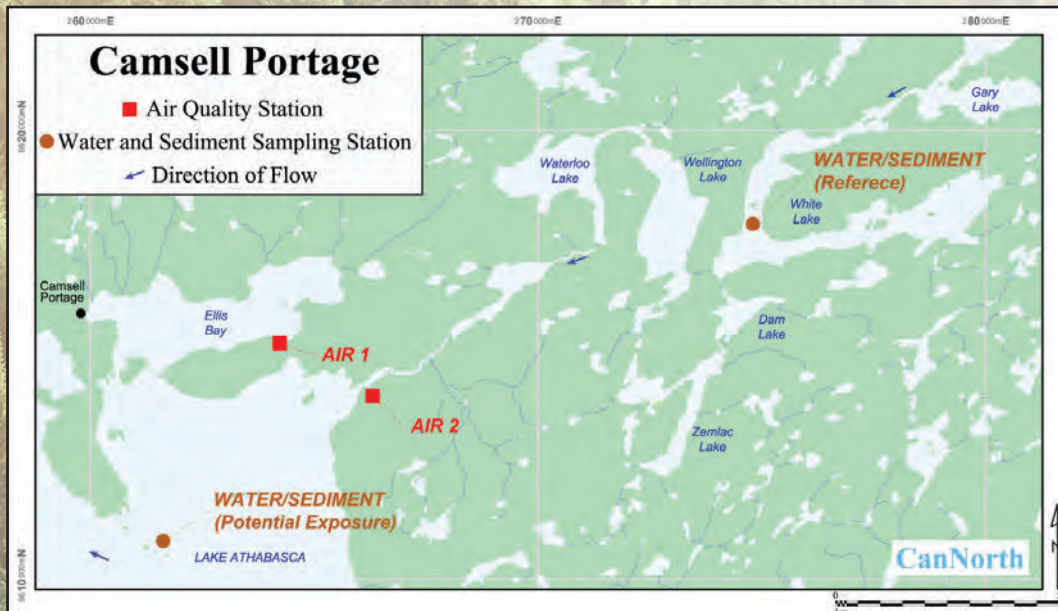
In consultation with the Athabasca Joint Engagement and Environmental Subcommittee, the AWG program ended in 2017 and has been replaced by the Community Based Environmental Monitoring Program (CBEMP) moving forward.



The CBEMP will consist of a community-specific traditional foods study completed in one or two communities per year, and rather than a region wide sampling program, samples will be collected in areas known to be used by traditional users of each community. Going forward, a traditional foods study will be conducted, starting in Black Lake and Stony Rapids in 2018.

Purpose

The purpose of this brochure is to inform the public of the 2016 and 2017 AWG program results in the Camsell Portage area, and additionally, to conclude the findings of the AWG Program as a whole. The map shows the Camsell Portage study area. Water, sediment, and fish were sampled from a reference site and a potential exposure site near the community in 2016 and 2017. White Lake was chosen as the reference site because it is not expected to contain parameters from uranium operations due to the direction of water flow, and Lake Athabasca was chosen as the potential exposure site because it is downstream of uranium operations in northern Saskatchewan. Two locations were also monitored for air quality near Camsell Portage and plant and wildlife samples were collected when available.



Key Parameters

The focus of the AWG program was to monitor certain parameters related to uranium operations that were of concern to human and environmental health. These included: copper, lead, nickel, molybdenum, zinc, radium-226, uranium, selenium, and arsenic. All of these parameters occur naturally in the environment and in parts of northern Saskatchewan they can sometimes be found in high amounts.

In order to help establish whether the key parameter levels found in samples were naturally occurring, whether they may have been from uranium operations, and whether they posed a risk to the environment, the amounts measured were compared: 1) between reference and potential exposure sites, 2) to past results, and 3) to available guidelines.

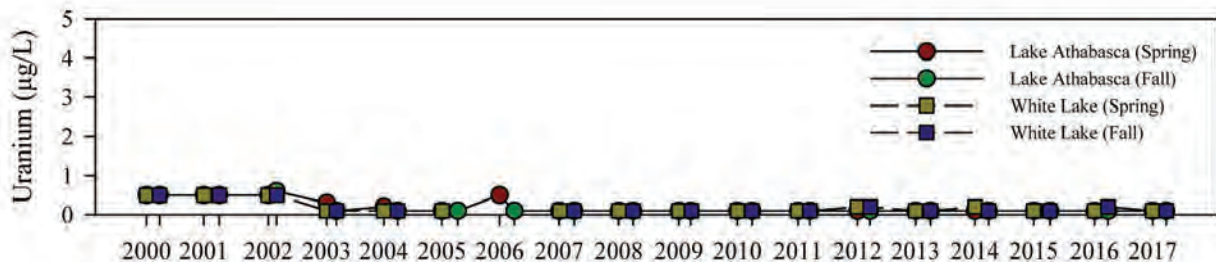


Photo credit: Doug Chisholm

Water

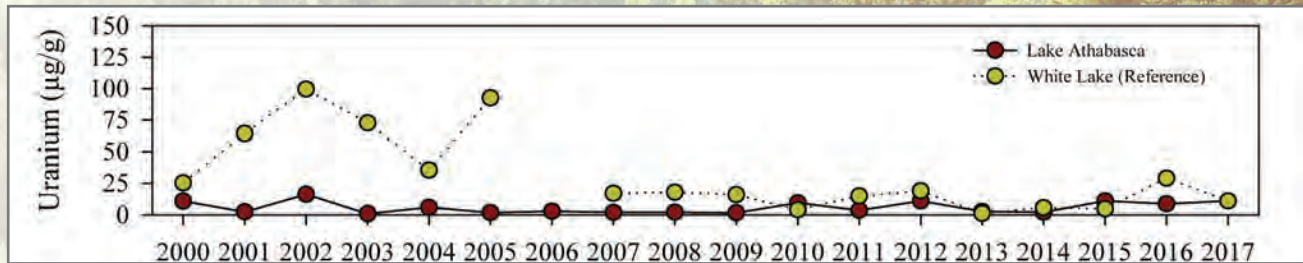
Water samples were collected in the spring and fall of 2016 and 2017 at two locations near Camsell Portage: Lake Athabasca (potential exposure waterbody) and White Lake (reference waterbody). The levels of the key parameters in the water samples were well below the guidelines for the protection of aquatic life and for drinking water quality.

The graph displays the levels of uranium found in the Lake Athabasca water samples since the year 2000. The uranium drinking water guideline is 20 micrograms per litre, which is much higher than any level ever found in the 18-year history of AWG monitoring.



Sediment

Sediment is the mud on the lake bottom. Parameters from uranium operations may be carried by flowing water to lakes where they may be left in the sediment on the lake bottom. In 2016 and 2017, sediment samples were collected from the same locations used for water sampling in the Camsell Portage area.



All of the key parameter levels from the potential exposure site (Lake Athabasca) were below the available guidelines in 2016 and 2017. In addition, the levels of the key parameters in White Lake and Lake Athabasca have remained similar between lakes and over all the years of AWG sampling. The graph displays the low levels of uranium in the sediment from Lake Athabasca since 2000.

Fish



Lake whitefish and northern pike were targeted in the reference waterbody of White Lake and the potential exposure waterbody of Lake Athabasca in 2016 and 2017. However, northern pike were not captured in White Lake in 2017 and lake whitefish have not been captured in White Lake since 2005. Over the course of the AWG program, the levels of key parameters in fish were often lower than the levels the laboratory could measure and were similar from year to year.

Mercury is an important parameter for human health. Though mercury is not related to uranium mining and milling, it is recommended that the “Mercury in Saskatchewan Fish: Guidelines for Consumption” document be consulted prior to fish consumption in all areas of Saskatchewan. Larger and older predatory fish generally contain more mercury than smaller fish of the same species from the same waterbody. To view the document, go to www.publications.gov.sk.ca and search “mercury in fish”.

Canada’s Food Guide recommends eating at least two servings of fish per week and the benefits of eating fish far outweigh any risks from consuming fish that contain low levels of contaminants (such as mercury). These benefits include:

- 1) fish are an excellent source of high-quality protein and valuable vitamins and minerals, including vitamin D, which helps the body use calcium to build strong bones and teeth; and
- 2) fish are low in saturated fat and cholesterol and are a very good source of omega-3 fats, which help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and promote healthy brain development in infants.

Wildlife



According to the Population Health Unit of the Athabasca Health Authority (2005), wild game are an important source of vitamins, minerals, and protein and are low in saturated fats. The AWG program collected samples of meat from moose, barren-ground caribou, and lynx for testing from the AWG communities when available.

Unfortunately, no mammal samples were obtained from the Camsell Portage area in 2016 and 2017. However, the test results of barren-ground caribou, moose, and lynx samples from other AWG communities showed low levels of key parameters that were similar to previous results throughout the AWG program's history.

For hunters: it is recommended to always use lead-free ammunition when hunting wildlife to prevent potentially harmful exposure to lead. Lead bullets may fragment into tiny pieces upon impact, which may then be eaten unknowingly.

Plants

Plants such as blueberries, cranberries, and Labrador tea are good sources of Vitamin C, fibre, and carbohydrates (MacKinnon et al. 2009).

Wild plants are important because they have traditionally been used for both food and medicine. Samples of blueberry (2016), bog cranberry (2016), and Labrador tea (2016 and 2017) were collected and analyzed from the Camsell Portage area.

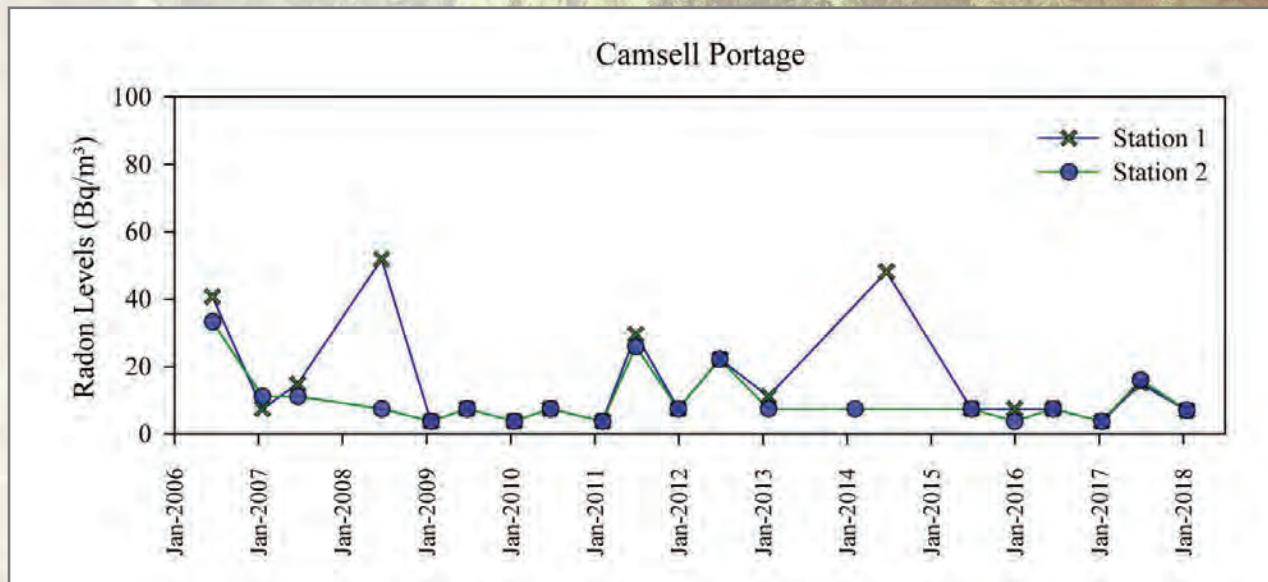
The results from the beginning to the end of AWG monitoring showed low levels of the key parameters in all three plant types.



Air

Air quality was monitored at two locations near Camsell Portage in 2016 and 2017 by measuring radon levels. Radon is an odourless and tasteless gas produced by the natural breakdown of uranium and radium-226 in the soil and water. As a result, radon levels are naturally higher in areas where uranium is found in the ground. Seasonal differences may occur because the ground thaws and releases radon gas into the air during the summer months.

Camsell Portage radon levels have been low over the entire duration of the AWG program. The graph displays the results since 2006.



Conclusion

Over the 18 years of sampling that made up the AWG Environmental Monitoring Program, there were no concerns regarding the amounts of key parameters in the water, sediment, fish, mammals, and air in the Camsell Portage area.

Thank You for 18 Years

The AWG program was made possible thanks to the involvement of northern residents. Special thanks to Dennis Larocque and his family who did a great job collecting AWG samples from the Camsell Portage area for many years.

Thank you to the AWG members, including representatives from the seven northern communities and industrial partners, Cameco Corporation and Orano Canada Inc. (formerly AREVA Resources Canada Inc.).



Pictured: Dennis Larocque (top and bottom left); Ryan Froess, Program Manager (bottom right).



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