

Toolik Steering Committee RA Update and Feedback



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Who are Research Assistants at Toolik?

- Many stay at TFS for full summer, or make several trips
- Usually not students, but often working closely with graduate students or mentoring undergrads
- Often seasonal technicians
- Responsible for research objectives and making project decisions when PIs are not in camp

COVID 2022

- Hotel quarantine was ok, shorter duration made things much easier
- Quarantine requirement still prevented many people from getting to TFS.
- Timing fieldwork around spring break-up or animal migrations was not possible due to quarantine
- Dropping the quarantine but keeping a mitigation plan is appreciated

Work at TFS in 2022

- More projects and PIs at TFS with shorter quarantine
- Camp population cap made pre-field logistics difficult, cancelling some REU, summer technician positions
- Issues with helicopter coordination/safety defined much of the 2022 season for many projects



Helicopter Difficulties

- Coordinators (with exception of Robin) made changes to calendar and flight plans without communicating to users
- Pilot decisions changed field plans and led to cancelled flights or using helicopter hours for unplanned sling loading or fueling problems
- Safety concerns accumulated throughout season
- Many felt concerns with coordinators and safety went unaddressed

Life at TFS

- Wi-Fi remained poor in living areas, promised repairs never happened
- Camp events were well attended, bonfires were “a nice way to unwind”
- “there were lots of great people and great hiking/exploration opportunities, and the group events were always such a fun stress release”



Mental Well-being in camp

- Workload is “intense” especially for those with short stays
- Lack of personal space and privacy “wears on you”
- Single occupancy housing VERY helpful
- Lack of Wi-Fi in living areas made talking to family/friends or counselors challenging
- “The organized events were really great for breaking up the routine and bringing everyone together – they really kept me sane”

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

- Broad efforts throughout community to create a welcoming place for everyone
- Camp-wide social events were appreciated and generally well attended
- DEI efforts appreciated, and progress is being made. Noticeable shift in camp culture and priorities
- Many barriers still exist, especially for those unfamiliar with fieldwork



Food

- “Food was great!”
- Homemade and healthy snacks are a very popular
- Concerns about food allergies remain, especially with leftovers and contamination
- Fruity pebbles and hot Cheetos still not available



EDC Support and Remote Access

- Remote access was again critical for many projects
- Lack of specific skillsets limited measurements and made for difficult troubleshooting
- Great thanks in particular to Elizabeth Traver, Amanda Young
- Immense thanks to the Toolik staff who helped with snow clearing preparations at the Imnavait weir

GIS Support

- “Randy Fulweber and Rowan McPherson.. ...were always willing to help out, pay close attention to details, and also willing to learn new survey techniques.”
- Entire GIS team was terrific!

Sample Storage and Shipment

- Multiple requests for an option of a southbound truck on Tuesday or Wednesday. Very important for time sensitive samples
- Importance of getting samples shipped out cannot be understated



TFS Shared Equipment Requests

- Additional carts for around camp would be helpful
- Bikes breaking out-paced bike repairs for much of the summer
- Additional tricycles for common use requested
- Shop Vac for use in the labs would be nice
- Common use tools seemed to be absent from science workshop most times (tape measure, mallets)

Other recognitions

- “Kevin was a tremendous help and always friendly”
- “Mike, Chad, and Justin were very helpful with any issues that arose”
- The short time while Robin was in camp made a huge difference for helicopter plans

Future Directions and Challenges

- “it's kind of hard to know what you're getting into before you arrive at Toolik, several people throughout my time there that seemed clueless as to what Toolik was like which makes it hard to prepare for”
- Toolik Merchandise – “there is clearly a market for this and could be a great source of additional funding, perhaps for TUNDRA award”
- Repairs needed in older buildings (Wet Lab), and coordinating repairs with users of the buildings

Summary

- Respondents had a good season overall
- Preventable helicopter issues led to failure to complete some science objectives
- Toolik staff (especially EDC and GIS) were a tremendous help as always

