

Access to the Land

Communities in the NWT are at the front lines of climate change. The north is warming at a rate 4-5 times faster than the global average. This is causing significant changes in the natural environment. Many northerners have cultures and lifestyles that are intimately connected with the land and water. Access to the land is a key part of each community's food security, and the mental health and wellness of its residents.

How is the changing climate affecting your community's ability to get out on the land and water? What are some solutions?

Some changes that have been seen in the NWT include:

- Less predictable ice conditions
- Landslides and increased erosion
- Formation of new wetlands
- Stands of fallen trees
- Shorter winter road season
- Shorter sea and lake ice season
- Changes in animal migration routes and timing
- Lower water levels in some streams and rivers



Questions for discussion:

- What **challenges and barriers** does your community face in getting out on the land and water?
- What **changes** (both negative and positive) have you seen **in how people get out** on the land?
- **What would help** your community spend more time out on the land and water?



Background and contact information on co-leads for the Access to the Land table:

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My team and I have been working with Jean Marie River First Nation for several years. Our research projects with the community started with permafrost mapping; locating permafrost patches, classifying their vulnerability to thaw and assessing the impacts of permafrost thaw on the community and their traditional activities. We have worked closely with community members to include as much traditional knowledge as possible in our project and have been successful with that. It allows us to stay focused on community concerns and create projects that are community driven. Because of permafrost thaw, the landscape is currently changing (and has been for a few decades now) and those changes greatly impact how people access their land.

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SmartICE (www.smartice.org) is a northern social enterprise focused on empowering communities through technology to adapt to unpredictable ice conditions. Our innovative and award-winning technology is the world's first climate change adaptation tool that integrates on-ice instruments and Indigenous knowledge to support safe ice travel. For example, local SmartICE operators travel along community trails towing an ice-thickness sensor on a sled. It provides the operators with real time information on ice thickness beneath them, while also generating an ice thickness map for community members to modify and adapt their traditional travel routes. SmartICE information will help in planning transportation of bulk goods and fuel to communities and support safe access to the land for winter harvesting, monitoring and cultural activities.

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NWT On The Land Collaborative & NWT Recreation and Parks Association

The NWT On The Land Collaborative (www.nwtontheland.ca) brings together government, charitable, corporate, and other partners to combine efforts and make it easier for communities to access money and resources for on the land projects that promote land-based education and cultural revitalization. Youth engagement is a very important component of these programs as is the development of skills and knowledge that enhance community strength and resiliency. We support projects that restore traditional ways, foster justice, and build better economies. Grants also help with environmental monitoring and stewardship programs that ensure the health of the land for future generations. Mental health, addictions, healing, and family wellness are concerns in communities across the NWT; they are also priorities for the Collaborative.