

NWT Environmental

Research Bulletin (NERB)



NWT Cumulative Impact Monitoring Program (NWT CIMP)

A source of environmental monitoring and research in the NWT. The program coordinates, conducts and funds the collection, analysis and reporting of information related to environmental conditions in the NWT.

NWT Environmental Research Bulletin (NERB)

A series of brief plain language summaries of various environmental research findings in the Northwest Territories. If you're conducting environmental research in the NWT, consider sharing your information with northern residents in a bulletin. These research summaries are also of use to northern resource decision-makers.

Assessing trends in caribou harvest

Harvesting caribou is an important part of the culture and diet of northern Indigenous communities. To understand changes in caribou harvesting, we looked at whether households were able to meet their caribou needs and, if not, why not. Data from local harvesters was provided as part of a voluntary survey in six communities; five in the Northwest Territories (NWT) and one in Yukon (YT). We found that 50 percent of survey participants reported that their household needs for caribou were not met, with the biggest factor for each community being lack of availability.

Why is this research important?

Caribou are a key component of northern culture, diets, and ecosystems. It is especially important to understand changes in caribou health, availability, and harvest patterns, as well as the reasons for these changes.

What did we do?

We looked at survey data collected by the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Society (ABEKS) between 2010 and 2020. The survey respondents included local Gwich'in and Inuvialuit harvesters in Fort McPherson, Inuvik, Aklavik, Tsiigehtchic, NWT and Old Crow, YT, although not all communities participated every year. Responses were summarized for each community and compared to one another. We identified whether households were able to meet their caribou needs and, if not, what were the reasons.

What did we find?

- We found that the majority of local harvesters are experiencing challenges accessing enough caribou to meet their household needs.
- Across all survey participants, 50% stated that their household needs for caribou had not been met.
- The rate of household needs for caribou not being met varied for each community: 88% (Inuvik – Gwich'in), 70% (Aklavik), 60% (Inuvik – Inuvialuit), 55% (Tsiigehtchic), 36%, (Old Crow, YT), and 30% of the time (Fort McPherson).

- The reasons given for why land users were unable to meet their caribou needs differed for each community. The most common reason given for each community was a lack of availability of caribou.
- Common responses to the “other” category included: health issues, old age, lack of transportation, and increased number of hunters.

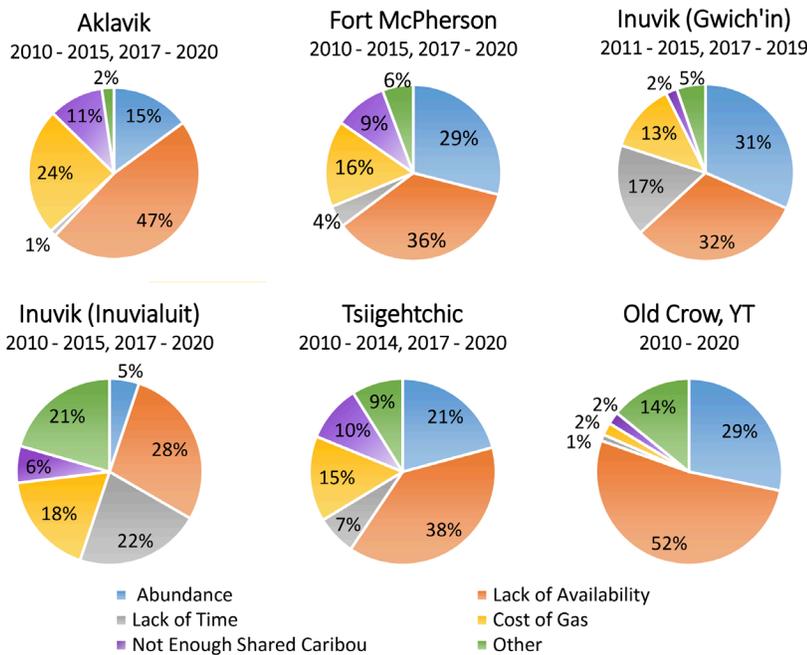
What does this mean?

Overall, local harvesters are experiencing challenges in accessing enough caribou to meet their household needs. The two biggest challenges for harvesters are a lack of availability (i.e. caribou were too far away or in a bad location for harvesting) and abundance (i.e. there were not enough caribou). These two factors may be signs of changes to the caribou population or behaviours.

What's next?

This information can help inform management decisions for caribou and the need for increased herd management. It can also contribute to conversations about food security and harvest management. This research can help ensure that caribou continue to be prioritized when considering future land development, introducing and revising policies, and supporting harvesters.

Reason for Caribou Needs Not Being Met



Recommended Reading

Russell, D. & M. Svoboda. 2015. *Analysis of caribou related questions & indicator update, 2008-2014*. https://eb16e6af-c5eb-4522-b647-72da117fa461.filesusr.com/ugd/ee3e9e_852e6f919ae6498a85c46f0ea572f9fc.pdf

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