



SCREENING DECISION REPORT NIRB FILE No.: 25YN051

NPC File No.: 151157

August 17, 2026

Following the Nunavut Impact Review Board's (NIRB or Board) assessment of all materials provided, the NIRB is recommending that a review of Thompson Rivers University's "Responses of Permafrost Microbial Communities to Climate-Driven Thaw" is not required pursuant to Article 12, Section 12.4.4(a) of the *Agreement between the Inuit of the Nunavut Settlement Area and Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada (Nunavut Agreement)* and s. 92(1)(a) of the *Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act*, S.C. 2013, c. 14, s. 2 (*NuPPAA*).

Subject to the Proponent's compliance with the terms and conditions as set out in below, issued in accordance with s. 92(2)(a) of *NuPPAA*, the NIRB is of the view that the project proposal is not likely to cause significant public concerns, and it is unlikely to result in significant adverse environmental and social impacts. The NIRB therefore recommends that the responsible Minister(s) accepts this Screening Decision Report.

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REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The primary objectives of the NIRB are set out in Article 12, Section 12.2.5 of the *Nunavut Agreement* and are confirmed by s. 23 of the *NuPPAA*. The purpose of screening is provided for under Article 12, Section 12.4.1 of the *Nunavut Agreement* and s. 88 of the *NuPPAA*.

As set out under Article 12, Section 12.4.4 of the *Nunavut Agreement* and s. 92(1) of the *NuPPAA*, upon conclusion of the screening process, the Board must provide its written report the Minister indicating one of three options:

- (a) a review of the project is not required;
- (b) a review of the project is required; or
- (c) the project should be modified or abandoned.

PROJECT OVERVIEW & THE NIRB ASSESSMENT PROCESS

On June 8, 2026, the NIRB received a referral to screen Thompson Rivers University's (TRU) "Responses of Permafrost Microbial Communities to Climate-Driven Thaw" project proposal from the Nunavut Planning Commission (Commission), with an accompanying positive conformity determination with the North Baffin Regional Land Use Plan. All documents received and pertaining to this project proposal can be accessed from the NIRB's Public Registry by using any of the following search criteria or www.nirb.ca/project/126464.

- Project Name: Responses of Permafrost Microbial Communities to Climate-Driven Thaw
- NIRB File No.: 25YN051
- NIRB Application No.: 126464

Table 1: NIRB's Assessment Process

Date	Stage
June 8, 2026	Receipt of project proposal and positive conformity determination (North Baffin Regional Land Use Plan) from the Commission
June 9, 2026	Pursuant to s. 144(1) of the <i>NuPPAA</i> the NIRB requested the Proponent complete an online application to address information required for Screening
June 12, 2026	Receipt of online application from Proponent
June 12, 2026	Request(s) to Proponent for additional information in order to carry out screening pursuant to s. s. 144(1) of the <i>NuPPAA</i>
June 16, 2026	Proponent responded to information request(s) and provided additional information
June 17, 2026	Scoping pursuant to s. 86(1) of the <i>NuPPAA</i>
July 7, 2026	Public engagement and comment request (which included draft terms and conditions) was issued in English with translations provided once available
July 28, 2026	Receipt of public comments

Date	Stage
August 5, 2026	Proponent provided with an opportunity to address comments/concerns raised by public
August 10, 2026	Proponent responded to comments/concerns raised by public
August 17, 2026	Issuance of Screening Decision Report

1. Project Scope

Previously Assessed Locations	Kitikmeot and Qikiqtani regions (Dundas Harbour, Powell Inlet, Port Leopold, Beechey Island, Prescott Island, Pasley Bay)
New Locations	Kitikmeot and Qikiqtani regions (Grise Fiord Inlet, Coutts Inlet, Maxwell Bay, Aston Bay, Strzelecki Harbour, Fort Ross, Wrottesley Inlet)
Objective	The Proponent intends to investigate how permafrost thaw affects carbon release by studying microbial communities in permafrost and overlying soils across Arctic landscapes.
Timeline	August to September 2026

As required under s. 86(1) of the *NuPPAA*, the Board accepted the scope of the project as set out by TRU in the proposal. The scope of the project proposal includes the following undertakings, works, or activities:

- Sailing on Adventure Canada's *Ocean Victory* vessel, with access to shore by Zodiac and travel to sampling sites by foot;
- Collection of overlying soil samples, approximately 30 cm permafrost cores, and small bryophyte samples within 3 m × 3 m sampling plots; and
- Use of equipment (electric drill) to collect soil and permafrost samples;
- Site restoration and equipment cleaning between sampling locations.

2. Inclusion or Exclusion to Scoping List

The NIRB has identified that the vessel-related activities associated with Adventure Canada's *Ocean Victory*, including the vessel route and general cruise operations, were previously assessed under NIRB File No. 25TN071, for which a Screening Decision Report was issued on January 12, 2026. These vessel-related activities will not be reconsidered in detail as part of the current assessment, except where relevant to cumulative effects, changed circumstances, or continuing authorizations. The current assessment will otherwise proceed based on the amended project scope identified above.

3. Public Comments and Concerns

As outlined in Table 1 above, notices regarding the NIRB's screening of this project proposal were distributed to community organizations as well as to relevant federal and territorial government agencies, Inuit organizations and other parties with a request for interested parties to provide the Board with any comments or concerns regarding:

- Whether the project proposal is likely to arouse significant public concern; and if so, why;

- Whether the project proposal is likely to cause significant adverse eco-systemic or socio-economic effects; and if so, why;
- Whether the project proposal is likely to cause significant adverse impacts on wildlife habitat or Inuit harvest activities; and if so, why;
- Whether the project proposal is of a type where the potential adverse effects are highly predictable and mitigable with known technology, (and providing any recommended mitigation measures); and
- Any matter of importance to the Party related to the project proposal.

On or before July 28, 2026, the NIRB received comments from the following interested parties:

Table 2: Comments Received

Commenting Party	NIRB Doc ID No.
Government of Nunavut (GN)	362527
Crown – Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC)	362529
Transport Canada (TC)	362528

a. Summary of Comments and Concerns Received

The following provides a summary of the comments and concerns received by the NIRB in relation to the “Responses of Permafrost Microbial Communities to Climate-Driven Thaw” project proposal:

Government of Nunavut (GN)

- Has reviewed the proposed project and related documents and has no comments or concerns to raise with the Board at this time.

Crown – Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC)

- Recommends that the Proponent consider:
 - Providing clear environmental criteria for selecting alternative sampling sites, including appropriate setbacks from waterbodies;
 - Describing how wetlands, drainage features, saturated ground, thermokarst, ice lenses, and unstable terrain would be identified and avoided;
 - Recording the final sampling coordinated and confirm that the site-selection criteria were met.
 - Clarifying the maximum borehole depth, diameter, and number of boreholes at each site;
 - Explaining how boreholes would be backfilled or capped and how the original ground profile and drainage would be restored;
 - Providing contingency measures for groundwater, artesian flow, unstable ground, equipment difficulties, adverse weather, or shortened landing periods;
 - Clarifying whether wet or dry drilling would be used and describing the proposed cooling, cuttings-removal, and core-recovery methods;

- Providing the technical basis demonstrating that the selected drill and core bit are suitable for the anticipated permafrost and active-layer conditions;
- If water or drilling activities would be used, identify the source, quantity, containment, and disposal method;
- Continue to engage with the Kitikmeot and Qikiqtani Inuit Associations regarding its project proposal.

Transport Canada (TC)

- The project components and activities as they are described in the proposal do not require comments from Transport Canada.

4. b. Comments and Concerns with respect to Inuit Qaujimaningit, Indigenous and Community Knowledge

No concerns or comments were received with respect to Inuit Qaujimaningit or Indigenous and Community knowledge in relation to the proposed project. However, Inuit Qaujimaningit and Indigenous and community knowledge is incorporated into the terms and conditions recommended below based on information collected from prior and similar projects, data collected and mapped by the Commission, and other available sources.

5. Proponent's Response to Public Comments and Concerns

Due to the comments, and questions received from parties, the NIRB provided an opportunity for the Proponent to respond. The following is a summary of the Proponent's response to concerns:

- In response to concerns regarding environmental criteria for selecting alternative sampling sites, including appropriate setbacks from waterbodies, the Proponent noted that possible sampling sites will be assessed for level of stable terrain with firm ground and will avoid any sign of saturated soils, drainage features, or waterbodies in the area. In the case that waterbodies exist near sampling sites, sampling will be setback a minimum of 200 meters from the nearest sign of a waterbody, which will be measured by a GPS.
- In response to recommendations that recording final sampling coordinates and confirm that the site-selection criteria were met, the Proponent notes that the final sampling coordinates will be recorded by GPS and photographs taken to confirm compliance with site-selection criteria.
- In response to concerns regarding maximum borehole depth, diameter, and number of boreholes at each site, the Proponent clarified that maximum borehole depth will be no deeper than 2.1 meters. Once ground ice is reached, a single ground-ice core of 30cm in length will be collected at each site. Also notes that they identified the sampling plot at each site to be a maximum of 3 by 3 meters, although they expect the dug soil pit to be smaller, at 1 by 1 meters or a maximum of 2 by 2 meters. Only one soil pit and borehole will be dug/drilled at each site.
- In response to requesting information on how boreholes will be backfilled and how the original ground profile and drainage would be restored, the Proponent noted that dug soil pits will be backfilled using the materials removed during sampling. Upon soil layers will be kept separate on tarps to ensure that soil is returned in their original order during backfilling. Following backfilling, the surface layer will be restored to be level with the

surrounding terrain to prevent the formation of depressions that could affect drainage. No permanent caps or structures will be left in the hole or at the sampling site upon restoration.

- In response to concerns regarding contingency measures for groundwater, artesian flow, unstable ground, equipment difficulties, adverse weather, or shortened landing periods the Proponent noted that in the case that groundwater, artesian flow, unstable ground, or other unsuitable conditions are encountered, sampling will immediately cease and the site will be restored. If equipment difficulties arise, issues will be troubleshooted where it is safe to do so. However, if equipment challenges compromise safety or may negatively impact the site, sampling will stop, all equipment will be removed, and the site will be restored. In the event of adverse weather or sea conditions, as well as shortened landing period risks, sampling will not proceed.
- In response to clarification whether wet or dry drilling would be used and describing the proposed cooling, cuttings-removal, and core-recovery methods, the Proponent notes that samples will be collected using dry drilling and no external cooling will be used for drilling. Any drill cuttings produced will be returned to the borehole during back-filling and restoration.
- In response to providing the technical basis demonstrating that the selected drill and core bit are suitable for the anticipated permafrost and active-layer conditions, the Proponent notes that they are using the Hilti DD 150-U-22 core drill with a 10 cm diameter SPX-A Speed core bit, which is suitable for this work and similar setups have been successfully used for this purpose. The Proponent notes that they have selected this setup intentionally, as they believe: 1) it is the safest option for handheld operation by one person, 2) the core bits are most suitable across a range of frozen ground conditions, and 3) the core barrel design is least likely to get stuck in shallow core drilling.

ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ACCORDANCE WITH PART 3 OF *NuPPAA*

In determining whether a review of the project is required, the Board considered whether the project proposal had potential to result in significant ecosystemic or socio-economic impacts. Table 3. The Board took particular care to consider Inuit Qaujimaningit, Indigenous and Community Knowledge in carrying out its assessment and determination of the significance of impacts.

Table 3: Summary of the Board's Assessment of Factors s. 90 *NuPPAA*

Factor	Comment
The size of the geographic area, including the size of wildlife habitats, likely to be affected by the impacts.	▪ The physical footprint of the proposed project components is comprised of 13 sampling locations across the Kitikmeot and Qikiqtani regions. ▪ The proposed project would take place within habitats of far-ranging wildlife species such as migratory and non-migratory birds, Arctic fox, Arctic hare and Species at Risk such as Polar Bears. The Proposed project team would also be transported on Adventure Canada's <i>Ocean Victory</i> vessel, which sailing route would take place within marine habitats of beluga whales, narwhals and bowhead whales.

Factor	Comment
The ecosystemic sensitivity of that area.	▪ The Project is located within Arctic environments that are considered ecologically sensitive due to the presence of permafrost, seasonal ice, and associated wildlife. ▪ Based on the temporary and localized nature of the activities and the proposed mitigation measures, the Board considers the potential for significant adverse effects to be low.
The historical, cultural and archaeological significance of that area.	▪ The Proponent has identified multiple archeological, cultural, and historical values within or near some proposed sampling areas and has committed to sampling outside of these known historical areas.
The size of the human and the animal populations likely to be affected by the impacts.	▪ The proposed project is unlikely to result in impacts to local human and animal populations.
The nature, magnitude and complexity of the impacts; the probability of the impacts occurring; the frequency and duration of the impacts; and the reversibility or irreversibility of the impacts.	▪ A zone of influence of up to 15 km from the most potentially disruptive project activities was selected for the NIRB's assessment. ▪ With adherence to the relevant regulatory requirements and application of the mitigation measures recommended by the NIRB, no significant residual effects are expected to occur.
The cumulative impacts that could result from the impacts of the project combined with those of any other project that has been carried out, is being carried out or is likely to be carried out.	▪ The NIRB has not identified any past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects at this time; however, the Board has recommended terms and conditions along with mitigation measures designed with consideration for the potential for cumulative effects in the Board Views section.
Any other factor that the Board considers relevant to the assessment of the significance of impacts.	▪ No other relevant factors were identified; however, see below for Regulatory Requirements mandating mitigation and/or reporting.

Regulatory Requirements

The Proponent is also advised that the following legislation may apply to the Project:

Acts and Regulations

1. The *Fisheries Act* (<http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/F-14/index.html>).
2. The *Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act* (<http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/n-28.8/>).
3. The *Migratory Birds Convention Act* (<http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/M-7.01/>), the *Migratory Birds Regulations* (https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/C.R.C.,_c._1035/index.html) and the *Migratory Bird*

Sanctuary Regulations (https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/C.R.C.,_c._1036/index.html).

4. The *Species at Risk Act* (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/s-15.3/>). Attached in **Appendix A** is a list of Species at Risk in Nunavut.
5. The *Wildlife Act (Nunavut)* and its corresponding regulations (<http://www.canlii.org/en/nu/laws/stat/snu-2003-c-26/latest/snu-2003-c-26.html>).
6. The *Nunavut Act* (<http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/N-28.6/>). The Proponent must comply with the proposed terms and conditions listed in the attached **Appendix B**.

Views of the Board

In considering the above factors, the Board has identified the following and respectfully provides its views regarding whether or not the proposed project has the potential to result in significant impacts. The NIRB has also proposed terms and conditions that would mitigate the potential adverse impacts identified.

Ecosystem, wildlife habitat and Inuit harvesting activities:

Valued Component	Ecosystem, Wildlife Habitat, and Inuit Harvesting Activities
Potential effects:	Temporary disturbance to wildlife and wildlife habitat may occur due to sampling activities and increased human presence. This may result in short-term avoidance of the immediate area by wildlife that may be harvested by Inuit.
Nature of Impacts:	Impacts are expected to be localized, low in magnitude, and short-term in duration. The Project footprint is limited to discrete sampling locations, and activities are temporary in nature. While the Project occurs within Arctic ecosystems that support wildlife of importance to Inuit harvesting, disturbance is not expected to result in long-term habitat alteration or displacement.
Mitigating Factors:	Mitigation includes limiting activities to small, defined areas, minimizing duration of field presence, and avoiding unnecessary disturbance to wildlife. All activities are temporary, and no permanent infrastructure is proposed.
Proposed Terms and Conditions:	Wildlife – General: 7 and 8 Migratory Birds and Raptors Disturbance: 9 through 12 Caribou and Muskoxen Disturbance: 13 through 15

Valued Component	Surface Land, Terrain, and Permafrost
Potential effects:	Minor surface disturbance may occur at discrete sampling locations as a result of permafrost coring and soil sampling activities.
Nature of Impacts:	Impacts are expected to be small in scale, localized, and short-term. Disturbance would be limited to temporary sampling sites, with no permanent alteration of land or terrain. Permafrost cores and soil sampling are limited in size, and sampling locations are dispersed. Recovery would be supported by restoration/backfilling.

Mitigating Factors:	Mitigation includes limiting activities to small, defined sampling areas, minimizing ground disturbance during access, restoring disturbed areas, and removing all materials from the field.
Proposed Terms and Conditions:	Waste Management: 6 Drilling on Land – 16 through 18 Land Use and Restoration of Disturbed Areas: 19 through 23

Valued Component	Public and Traditional Land Use Activities
Potential effects:	Negligible, short-term, and localized effects associated with temporary human presence. No interference with harvesting, travel, or other traditional land use activities is anticipated however, the Board is recommending terms and conditions to ensure project activities are informed by available Inuit Qaujimaningit and that project activities do not interfere with Inuit wildlife harvesting or traditional land use activities.
Nature of Impacts:	The potential for impacts is minimal due to the temporary and low-impact nature of the activities, and any resulting impacts would be expected to be reversible.
Mitigating Factors:	It is possible that the area could be used for traditional activities; however, no comments were received from the nearest communities on this aspect. The Board is recommending the Proponent engage with local residents if possible and practical, regarding planned activities in the area to ensure project activities are informed by available Inuit Qaujimaningit and that project activities do not interfere with Inuit wildlife harvesting or traditional land use activities.
Proposed Terms and Conditions:	Other – 27 and 28

Socio-economic effects on northerners:

Valued Component	Historical Sites
Potential effects:	Ground-based activities such as travel by foot, sampling activities and drill use may disturb or inadvertently damage known or previously undiscovered archaeological or historical sites encountered in the field.
Nature of Impacts:	The potential for impacts is low in magnitude, but the Proponent has requested a 100 km radius from sampling sites, which may increase chances of finding known or unknown archeological and historical sites. Any effects would be site-specific and avoidable with appropriate mitigation measures; however, if disturbance occurred, effects to archaeological or historical resources could be permanent.
Mitigating Factors:	Known archaeological or historical sites would be avoided where possible, with field routes and sampling locations planned in advanced using available information community input. If any archaeological or historical materials are encountered, work will stop immediately and protection measures will be followed. Ground disturbance will be kept to a minimum throughout the project.

Proposed Terms and Conditions:	Heritage Sites- 24 through 26
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Significant public concern:

Valued Component	Public Concern
Potential effects:	The Project has the potential to raise public concern related to environmental disturbance and scientific activities in the region.
Nature of Impacts:	No significant public concern was identified during the screening process. The Project is small in scale, temporary, and consistent with similar research activities previously conducted in the region.
Mitigating Factors:	Public notification and opportunity for comment were provided through the NIRB screening process. No concerns were raised by the public or reviewing parties. The Board has considered the comments received from reviewing parties, including CIRNAC's recommendations regarding site-selection criteria, borehole closure, drilling methods, and engagement.
Proposed Terms and Conditions:	Other – 27

Technological innovations for which the effects are unknown:

- No specific issues have been identified associated with this project proposal.

Administrative Conditions:

To encourage compliance with applicable regulatory requirements and assist the Board and responsible authorities with compliance and effects monitoring for project activities, the following project-specific terms and conditions have been recommended: 1-5.

In considering the above factors and subject to the Proponent's compliance with regulatory requirements and the terms and conditions necessary to mitigate against the potential adverse environmental and social effects, the Board is of the view that the proposed project is unlikely to cause significant public concern and its adverse ecosystemic and socioeconomic impacts are unlikely to be significant or are highly predictable and can be adequately mitigated by known technologies.

RECOMMENDED PROJECT-SPECIFIC TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The Board is recommending the following specific terms and conditions to apply in respect of the project:

General

1. Thompson Rivers University (the Proponent) shall maintain a copy of the Project Terms and Conditions at the site of operation at all times and make it accessible to enforcement officers upon request.
2. The Proponent shall operate in accordance with all commitments stated in correspondence provided to the Nunavut Planning Commission (NPC File No.: 151157) and the NIRB

(Online Application Form, July 16, 2026). This information should be accessible to enforcement officers upon request.

3. The Proponent shall operate the site in accordance with all applicable Acts, Regulations and Guidelines.
4. The Proponent shall ensure that it meets the standards and/or limits as set out in the authorizing agencies' permits or licences as required for this project.
5. The Proponent shall ensure that all personnel, staff and contractors are adequately trained prior to commencement of all project activities, and shall be made aware of all operational plans, management plans, guidelines and Proponent commitments relating to the project.

Waste Management

6. The Proponent shall manage all hazardous and non-hazardous waste including food, domestic wastes, debris and petroleum-based chemicals (e.g., greases, gasoline, glycol-based antifreeze) in such a manner to always avoid release into the environment and access to wildlife until disposed of appropriately or at an approved facility.

Wildlife – General

7. The Proponent shall not substantially alter or damage or destroy any wildlife habitat in conducting this operation unless otherwise authorized by the appropriate authorizing agencies.
8. The Proponent shall not chase, weary, harass or molest wildlife. This includes persistently circling, chasing, hovering over, pursuing or in any other way harass wildlife, or disturbing large groups of animals.

Migratory Birds and Raptors Disturbance

9. The Proponent shall carry out all phases of the project in a manner that protects migratory birds and avoids harming, killing or disturbing migratory birds or destroying, disturbing or taking their nests or eggs. In this regard, the Proponent shall consider Environment and Climate Change Canada's *Avoidance Guidelines*. The Proponent's actions in applying the *Avoidance Guidelines* shall be in compliance with the *Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994* and with the *Species at Risk Act*.
10. The Proponent shall not disturb or destroy the nests or eggs of any birds. If active nests of any birds are discovered or located (i.e., with eggs or young), the Proponent shall avoid these areas until nesting is complete and the young have naturally left the vicinity of the nest by establishing a protection buffer zone¹ appropriate for the species and the surrounding habitat.
11. The Proponent shall avoid the seaward site of seabird colonies and areas used by flocks of migrating waterfowl, a minimum distance away on the recommendation of the appropriate authorizing agencies.
12. The Proponent shall not pursue seabirds or waterbirds swimming on the water surface and shall avoid concentrations of these birds if encountered on the water.

¹ Recommended setback distances to define buffer zones have been established by Environment and Climate Change Canada for different bird groups nesting in tundra habitat and can be found at www.ec.gc.ca/paom-itmb.

Caribou and Muskoxen Disturbance

13. The Proponent shall avoid interfering with any paths or crossings known to be frequented by caribou during periods of migration as identified by current land use plans in place and/or by Inuit Qaujimaningit.
14. The Proponent shall not locate any operation or undertake activities that could block or cause any diversion to migration of caribou or muskoxen.
15. The Proponent shall immediately cease activities likely to interfere with the migration or calving of caribou or muskoxen until such time as the caribou or muskox have passed.

Drilling on Land

16. The Proponent shall not conduct any land-based drilling or mechanized clearing activities a minimum distance of the normal high-water mark of any water body as required by an authorizing agency.
17. If an artesian flow is encountered, the Proponent shall ensure the drill hole is immediately plugged and permanently sealed.
18. The Proponent shall ensure all drill holes are backfilled or capped prior to the end of each field season. All sumps must be backfilled and restored to original or stable profile prior to the end of each field season.

Land Use and Restoration of Disturbed Areas

19. The Proponent shall use existing trails where possible during project activities on the land.
20. The Proponent shall ensure that the land use area is always kept clean and tidy.
21. The Proponent shall avoid disturbance on slopes prone to natural erosion, and alternative locations shall be utilized.
22. The Proponent shall remove all garbage, fuel and equipment at the end of each field season and/or upon completion of work and/or upon abandonment.
23. The Proponent shall ensure that all disturbed areas are restored to a stable or pre-disturbed state using Best Available Technology Economically Achievable (BATEA) upon completion of work and/or abandonment.

Heritage Sites

24. The Proponent shall ensure that archaeological and paleontological sites are not purposely or inadvertently disturbed by clients or staff as a result of project activities.
25. The Proponent shall ensure that all clients and staff are aware of the Proponent's responsibilities and requirements regarding archaeological or palaeontological sites that are encountered during land-based activities. This should include briefings explaining the prohibitions regarding removal of artifacts and defacing or writing on rocks and infrastructure.
26. No activities shall be conducted in the vicinity (50 metres buffer zone) of any archaeological/historical sites. If archaeological sites or features are encountered, activities shall immediately be interrupted and moved away from this location. Each site encountered

needs to be recorded and reported to the Government of Nunavut-Department of Culture and Heritage.

Other

27. The Proponent should engage with local residents regarding planned activities in the area and should solicit available Inuit Qaujimaningit and information regarding current recreational and traditional usage of the project area which may inform project activities. Posting of translated public notices and direct engagement with potentially interested groups and individuals prior to undertaking project activities is strongly encouraged.
28. The Proponent shall ensure that project activities do not interfere with Inuit wildlife harvesting or traditional land use activities.
29. The Proponent should, to the extent possible, hire local people and access local services where possible.

OTHER NIRB CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the project-specific terms and conditions, the Board is recommending the following:

Change in Project Scope

1. Responsible authorities or Proponent shall notify the Nunavut Planning Commission and/or Parks Canada as appropriate, and the NIRB of any changes in operating plans or conditions, including phase advancement, associated with this project prior to any such change.

Copy of licences, etc. to the Board and Commission

2. The NIRB respectfully requests that responsible authorities submit a copy of each licence, permit or other authorization issued for the Project to the NIRB to assist in enabling possible project monitoring that may be required. Please forward a copy of the licences, permits and/or other authorizations to the NIRB directly at info@nirb.ca or upload a copy to the NIRB's online registry at www.nirb.ca.

Use of Inuit Qaujimaningit

3. The Proponent is encouraged to work with local communities and knowledge holders to inform project design, to carry out the project, and to confirm or validate the perspectives represented in publications, and reports as part of the project. Care should be taken to ensure that Inuit Qaujimaningit and local knowledge collected for the project is used with permission and is accurately represented.

Bear and Carnivore Safety

4. The Proponent should review the Government of Nunavut's booklet on Bear Safety, which can be downloaded from this link: http://gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/bear_safety_-_reducing_bear-

[people_conflicts_in_nunavut.pdf](#). Further information on bear/carnivore detection and deterrent techniques can be found in the “*Safety in Grizzly and Black Bear Country*” pamphlet, which can be downloaded from this link: https://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/sites/enr/files/resources/safety_in_grizzly_and_black_bear_country_english.pdf.

5. There are polar bear and grizzly bear safety resources available from the Bear Smart Society with videos on polar bear safety available in English, French and Inuktitut at <http://www.bearsmart.com/play/safety-in-polar-bear-country/>. Information can also be obtained from Parks Canada’s website on bear safety at the following link: <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/nu/quttinirpaaq/visit/visit6/d.aspx> or in reviewing the “*Safety in Polar Bear Country*” pamphlet, which can be downloaded from the following link: http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/nu/quttinirpaaq/visit/visit6/~media/pn-np/nu/auyuittuq/pdf/shared/PolarBearSafety_English.ashx.
6. Any problem wildlife or any interaction with carnivores should be reported immediately to the local Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment Conservation Office (Conservation Officer of Taloyoak, phone: (867) 769-7011, Conservation Officer of Resolute Bay, phone: (867) 252-3879, Conservation Officer of Grise Fiord, phone: (867) 980-4164, Conservation Officer of Arctic Bay, phone: 439-9945, Conservation Officer of Pond Inlet, phone: (867) 899-8819).

Species at Risk

7. The Proponent review Environment and Climate Change Canada’s “Environment Assessment Best Practice Guide for Wildlife at Risk in Canada”, available at the following link: http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/virtual_sara/files/policies/EA%20Best%20Practices%202004.pdf. The guide provides information to the Proponent on what is required when Wildlife at Risk, including *Species at Risk*, are encountered or affected by the project.

Migratory Birds

8. The Proponent review Canadian Wildlife Services’ “Key migratory bird terrestrial habitat sites in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut”, available at the following link: <http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/317630/publication.html> and “Key marine habitat sites for migratory birds in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories”, available at the following link: <http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/392824/publication.html>. The guide provides information to the Proponent on key terrestrial and marine habitat areas that are essential to the welfare of various migratory bird species in Canada.
9. For further information on how to protect migratory birds, their nests and eggs when planning or carrying out project activities, consult Environment and Climate Change Canada’s Incidental Take web page and the fact sheet “Planning Ahead to Reduce the Risk of Detrimental Effects to Migratory Birds, and their Nests and Eggs” available at: http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2013/ec/CW66-324-2013-eng.pdf.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing constitutes the Board's screening decision with respect to the Thompson Rivers University's (TRU) "Responses of Permafrost Microbial Communities to Climate-Driven Thaw". The NIRB remains available for consultation with the Minister regarding this report as necessary.

Dated August 17, 2026 at Iqaluit, NU.

Ant Elkh

Albert Ehaloak, Chairperson

Attachments: Appendix A: Species at Risk in Nunavut
Appendix B: Archaeological and Palaeontological Resources Terms and Conditions for Land Use Permit Holders

APPENDIX A: SPECIES AT RISK IN NUNAVUT

Due to the requirements of Section 79(2) of the *Species at Risk Act*, S.C. 2002, c. 29 (*SARA*), and the potential for project-specific adverse effects on listed wildlife species and its critical habitat, measures should be taken as appropriate to avoid or lessen those effects, and the effects need to be monitored. Project effects could include species disturbance, attraction to operations and destruction of habitat. This section applies to all species listed on Schedule 1 of *SARA*, as listed in the table below, or have been assessed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), which may be encountered in the project area. This list may not include all species identified as at risk by the Territorial Government. The following points provide clarification on the applicability of the species outlined in the table.

- Schedule 1 is the official legal list of Species at Risk for *SARA*. *SARA* applies to all species on Schedule 1. The term “listed” species refers to species on Schedule 1.
- Schedule 2 and 3 of *SARA* identify species that were designated at risk by the COSEWIC prior to October 1999 and must be reassessed using revised criteria before they can be considered for addition to Schedule 1.
- Some species identified at risk by COSEWIC are “pending” addition to Schedule 1 of *SARA*. These species are under consideration for addition to Schedule 1, subject to further consultation or assessment.

If species at risk are encountered or affected, the primary mitigation measure should be avoidance. The Proponent should avoid contact with or disturbance to each species, its habitat and/or its residence. All direct, indirect, and cumulative effects should be considered. Refer to species status reports and other information on the Species at Risk Registry at <http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca> for information on specific species.

Monitoring should be undertaken by the Proponent to determine the effectiveness of mitigation and/or identify where further mitigation is required. As a minimum, this monitoring should include recording the locations and dates of any observations of Species at Risk, behaviour or actions taken by the animals when project activities were encountered, and any actions taken by the proponent to avoid contact or disturbance to the species, its habitat, and/or its residence. This information should be submitted to the appropriate regulators and organizations with management responsibility for that species, as requested.

For species primarily managed by the Territorial Government, the Territorial Government should be consulted to identify other appropriate mitigation and/or monitoring measures to minimize effects to these species from the project.

Mitigation and monitoring measures must be undertaken in a way that is consistent with applicable recovery strategies and action/management plans.

Schedules of *SARA* are amended on a regular basis, so it is important to check the *SARA* registry (www.sararegistry.gc.ca) to get the current status of a species.

Updated: September 2024

Terrestrial Species at Risk²	COSEWIC Designation	Schedule of SARA	Government Organization with Primary Management Responsibility³
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	Special Concern	Schedule 1	Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)
Common Nighthawk	Threatened	Schedule 1	ECCC
Eskimo Curlew	Endangered	Schedule 1	ECCC
Harlequin Duck	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Harris's Sparrow	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Horned Grebe	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Ivory Gull	Endangered	Schedule 1	ECCC
Olive-sided Flycatcher	Threatened	Schedule 1	ECCC
Peregrine Falcon	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Red Knot Islandica Subspecies	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Red-necked Phalarope	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Ross's Gull	Threatened	Schedule 1	ECCC
Rusty Blackbird	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Short-eared Owl	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Porsild's Bryum	Threatened	Schedule 1	Government of Nunavut (GN)
Transverse Lady Beetle	Special Concern	No Schedule	GN
Caribou (Dolphin and Union Population)	Endangered	Schedule 1	GN
Caribou (Barren-ground Population)	Threatened	No Schedule	GN
Caribou (Torngat Mountains Population)	Endangered	No Schedule	GN
Grizzly Bear (Western Population)	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Peary Caribou	Endangered	Schedule 1	GN
Polar Bear	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Wolverine	Special Concern	Schedule 1	GN
Atlantic Walrus (High Arctic Population)	Special Concern	No Schedule	Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)
Atlantic Walrus (Central/Low Arctic Population)	Special Concern	No Schedule	DFO
Beluga Whale (Cumberland Sound Population)	Threatened	Schedule 1	DFO
Beluga Whale (Eastern Hudson Bay Population)	Endangered	No Schedule	DFO
Beluga Whale (Eastern High Arctic-Baffin Bay Population)	Special Concern	No Schedule	DFO
Beluga Whale (Western Hudson Bay Population)	Special Concern	No Schedule	DFO
Atlantic Cod (Arctic Lakes Population)	Special Concern	No Schedule	DFO
Fourhorn Sculpin (Freshwater Form)	Data Deficient	Schedule 3	DFO
Lumpfish	Threatened	No Schedule	DFO
Thorny Skate	Special Concern	No Schedule	DFO

² The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has responsibility for aquatic species.

³ Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) has a national role to play in the conservation and recovery of Species at Risk in Canada, as well as responsibility for management of birds described in the Migratory Birds Convention Act (MBCA). Day-to-day management of terrestrial species not covered in the MBCA is the responsibility of the Territorial Government. Populations that exist in National Parks are also managed under the authority of the Parks Canada Agency.

APPENDIX B: ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND PALAEOONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR LAND USE PERMIT HOLDERS



INTRODUCTION

The Department of Culture and Heritage (CH) routinely reviews land use applications sent to the Nunavut Water Board, Nunavut Impact Review Board and the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. These terms and conditions provide general direction to the permittee/proponent regarding the appropriate actions to be taken to ensure the permittee/proponent carries out its role in the protection of Nunavut's archaeological and palaeontological resources.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- 1) The permittee/proponent shall have a professional archaeologist and/or palaeontologist perform the following **Functions** associated with the **Types of Development** listed below or similar development activities:

	Types of Development (See Guidelines below)	Function (See Guidelines below)
a)	Large scale prospecting	Archaeological/Palaeontological Overview Assessment
b)	Diamond drilling for exploration or geotechnical purpose or planning of linear disturbances	Archaeological/Palaeontological Overview Assessment and/or Inventory and Documentation and/or Mitigation
c)	Construction of linear disturbances, Extractive disturbances, Impounding disturbances and other land disturbance activities	Archaeological/Palaeontological Overview Assessment and/or Inventory and Documentation and/or Mitigation

Note that the above-mentioned functions require either a Nunavut Archaeologist Permit or a Nunavut Palaeontologist Permit. CH is authorized by way of the *Nunavut and Archaeological and Palaeontological Site Regulations*⁴ to issue such permits.

⁴ P.C. 2001-1111 14 June, 2001

- 2) The permittee/proponent shall not operate any vehicle over a known or suspected archaeological or palaeontological site.
- 3) The permittee/proponent shall not remove, disturb, or displace any archaeological artifact or site, or any fossil or palaeontological site.
- 4) The permittee/proponent shall immediately contact CH at (867) 934-2046 or (867) 975-5500 should an archaeological site or specimen, or a palaeontological site or fossil, be encountered or disturbed by any land use activity.
- 5) The permittee/proponent shall immediately cease any activity that disturbs an archaeological or palaeontological site encountered during the course of a land use operation until permitted to proceed with the authorization of CH.
- 6) The permittee/proponent shall follow the direction of CH in restoring disturbed archaeological or palaeontological sites to an acceptable condition. If these conditions are attached to either a Class A or B Permit under the Territorial Lands Act Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada directions will also be followed.
- 7) The permittee/proponent shall provide all information requested by CH concerning all archaeological sites or artifacts and all palaeontological sites and fossils encountered in the course of any land use activity.
- 8) The permittee/proponent shall make best efforts to ensure that all persons working under its authority are aware of these conditions concerning archaeological sites and artifacts and palaeontological sites and fossils.
- 9) If a list of recorded archaeological and/or palaeontological sites is provided to the permittee/proponent by CH as part of the review of the land use application the permittee/proponent shall avoid the archaeological and/or palaeontological sites listed.
- 10) Should a list of recorded sites be provided to the permittee/proponent, the information is provided solely for the purpose of the proponent's land use activities as described in the land use application, and must otherwise be treated confidentially by the proponent.

Legal Framework

As stated in Article 33 of the *Agreement between the Inuit of the Nunavut Settlement Area and Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada (Nunavut Agreement)*:

Where an application is made for a land use permit in the Nunavut Settlement Area, and there are reasonable grounds to believe that there could be sites of archaeological importance on the lands affected, no land use permit shall be issued without written consent of the Designated Agency. Such consent shall not be unreasonably withheld. [33.5.12]

Each land use permit referred to in Section 33.5.12 shall specify the plans and methods of archeological site protection and restoration to be followed by the permit holder, and any other conditions the Designated Agency may deem fit. [33.5.13]

Palaeontology and Archaeology

Under the *Nunavut Act*⁵, the federal government can make regulations for the protection, care and preservation of palaeontological and archaeological sites and specimens in Nunavut. Under the *Nunavut Archaeological and Palaeontological Sites Regulations*⁶, it is illegal to alter or disturb any palaeontological or archaeological site in Nunavut unless permission is first granted through the permitting process.

Definitions

As defined in the *Nunavut Archaeological and Palaeontological Sites Regulations*, the following definitions apply:

“archaeological site” means a place where an archaeological artifact is found.

“archaeological artifact” means any tangible evidence of human activity that is more than 50 years old and in respect of which an unbroken chain of possession or regular pattern of usage cannot be demonstrated, and includes a Denesuline archaeological specimen referred to in section 40.4.9 of the Agreement between the Inuit of the Nunavut Settlement Area and Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada (Nunavut Agreement).

“palaeontological site” means a site where a fossil is found.

“fossil” includes:

Fossil means the hardened or preserved remains or impression of previously living organisms or vegetation and includes:

- (a) natural casts;*
- (b) preserved tracks, coprolites and plant remains; and*
- (c) the preserved shells and exoskeletons of invertebrates and the preserved eggs, teeth and bones of vertebrates.*

Guidelines for Developers for the Protection of Archaeological Resources in the Nunavut Territory

(Note: Partial document only, complete document at: www.ch.gov.nu.ca/en/Archaeology.aspx)

Introduction

The following guidelines have been formulated to ensure that the impacts of proposed developments upon heritage resources are assessed and mitigated before ground surface altering activities occur. Heritage resources are defined as, but not limited to, archaeological and historical sites, burial grounds, palaeontological sites, historic buildings and cairns. Effective collaboration between the developer, the Department of Culture, and Heritage (CH), and the contract archaeologist(s) will ensure proper preservation of heritage resources in the Nunavut Territory. The roles of each are briefly described.

⁵ s. 51(1)

⁶ P.C. 2001-1111 14 June, 2001

CH is the Nunavut Government agency which oversees the protection and management of heritage resources in Nunavut, in partnership with land claim authorities, regulatory agencies, and the federal government. Its role in mitigating impacts of developments on heritage resources is as follows: to identify the need for an impact assessment and make recommendations to the appropriate regulatory agency; set the terms of reference for the study depending upon the scope of the development; suggest the names of qualified individuals prepared to undertake the study to the developer; issue an archaeologist or palaeontologist permit authorizing field work; assess the completeness of the study and its recommendations; and ensure that the developer complies with the recommendations.

The primary regulatory agencies that CH provides information and assistance to are the Nunavut Impact Review Board, for development activities proposed for Inuit Owned Lands (as defined in Section 1.1.1 of the *Agreement between the Inuit of the Nunavut Settlement Area and Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada (Nunavut Agreement)*), and the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, for development activities proposed for federal Crown Lands.

A developer is the initiator of a land use activity. It is the obligation of the developer to ensure that a qualified archaeologist or palaeontologist is hired to perform the required study and that provisions of the contract with the archaeologist or palaeontologist allow permit requirements to be met; i.e. fieldwork, collections management, artifact and specimen conservation, and report preparation. On the recommendation of the contract archaeologist or palaeontologist in the field and the Government of Nunavut, the developer shall implement avoidance or mitigative measures to protect heritage resources or to salvage the information they contain through excavation, analysis, and report writing. The developer assumes all costs associated with the study in its entirety.

Through his or her active participation and supervision of the study, the contract archaeologist or palaeontologist is accountable for the quality of work undertaken and the quality of the report produced. Facilities to conduct fieldwork, analysis, and report preparation should be available to this individual through institutional, agency, or company affiliations. Responsibility for the curation of objects recovered during field work while under study and for documents generated in the course of the study as well as remittance of artifacts, specimens and documents to the repository specified on the permit accrue to the contract archaeologist or palaeontologist. This individual is also bound by the legal requirements of the *Nunavut Archaeological and Palaeontological Sites Regulations*.

Types of Development

In general, those developments that cause concern for the safety of heritage resources will include one or more of the following kinds of surface disturbances. These categories, in combination, are comprehensive of the major kinds of developments commonly proposed in Nunavut. For any single development proposal, several kinds of these disturbances may be involved

- *Linear disturbances: including the construction of highways, roads, winter roads, transmission lines, and pipelines;*
- *Extractive disturbances: including mining, gravel removal, quarrying, and land filling;*

- *Impoundment disturbances: including dams, reservoirs, and tailings ponds;*
- *Intensive land use disturbances: including industrial, residential, commercial, recreational, and land reclamation work, and use of heritage resources as tourist developments.*
- *Mineral, oil and gas exploration: establishment of camps, temporary airstrips, access routes, well sites, or quarries all have potential for impacting heritage resources.*

Types of Studies Undertaken to Preserve Heritage Resources

Overview: An overview study of heritage resources should be conducted at the same time as the development project is being designed or its feasibility addressed. They usually lack specificity with regard to the exact location(s) and form(s) of impact and involve limited, if any, field surveys. Their main aim is to accumulate, evaluate, and synthesize the existing knowledge of the heritage of the known area of impact. The overview study provides managers with baseline data from which recommendations for future research and forecasts of potential impacts can be made. A Class I Permit is required for this type of study if field surveys are undertaken.

Reconnaissance: This is done to provide a judgmental appraisal of a region sufficient to provide the developer, the consultant, and government managers with recommendations for further development planning. This study may be implemented as a preliminary step to inventory and assessment investigations except in cases where a reconnaissance may indicate a very low or negligible heritage resource potential. Alternately, in the case of small-scale or linear developments, an inventory study may be recommended and obviate the need for a reconnaissance.

The main goal of a reconnaissance study is to provide baseline data for the verification of the presence of potential heritage resources, the determination of impacts to these resources, the generation of terms of reference for further studies and, if required, the advancement of preliminary mitigative and compensatory plans. The results of reconnaissance studies are primarily useful for the selection of alternatives and secondarily as a means of identifying impacts that must be mitigated after the final siting and design of the development project. Depending on the scope of the study, a Class 1 or Class 2 Permit is required for this type of investigation.

Inventory: A resource inventory is generally conducted at that stage in a project's development at which the geographical area(s) likely to sustain direct, indirect, and perceived impacts can be well defined. This requires systematic and intensive fieldwork to ascertain the effects of all possible and alternate construction components on heritage resources. All heritage sites must be recorded on Government of Nunavut Site Survey forms. Sufficient information must be amassed from field, library and archival components of the study to generate a predictive model of the heritage resource base that will:

- allow the identification of research and conservation opportunities;
- enable the developer to make planning decisions and recognize their likely effects on the known or predicted resources; and

- make the developer aware of the expenditures, which may be required for subsequent studies and mitigation. A Class 1 or 2 permit is required.

Assessment: At this stage, sufficient information concerning the numbers and locations of heritage resources will be available, as well as data to predict the forms and magnitude of impacts. Assessments provide information on the size, volume, complexity and content of a heritage resource, which is used to rank the values of different sites or site types given current archaeological knowledge. As this information will shape subsequent mitigation program(s), great care is necessary during this phase.

Mitigation: This refers to the amelioration of adverse impacts to heritage resources and involves the avoidance of impact through the redesign or relocation of a development or its components; the protection of the resource by constructing physical facilities; or, the scientific investigation and recovery of information from the resource by excavation or other method. The type(s) of appropriate mitigative measures are dictated by their viability in the context of the development project. Mitigation strategies must be developed in consultation with, and approved by, the Department of Culture and Heritage. It is important to note that mitigation activities should be initiated as far in advance of the construction of the development as possible.

Surveillance and monitoring: These may be required as part of the mitigation program.

Surveillance may be conducted during the construction phase of a project to ensure that the developer has complied with the recommendations.

Monitoring involves identification and inspection of residual and long-term impacts of a development (i.e. shoreline stability of a reservoir); or the use of impacts to disclose the presence of heritage resources, for example, the uncovering of buried sites during the construction of a pipeline.