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E-Newsletter

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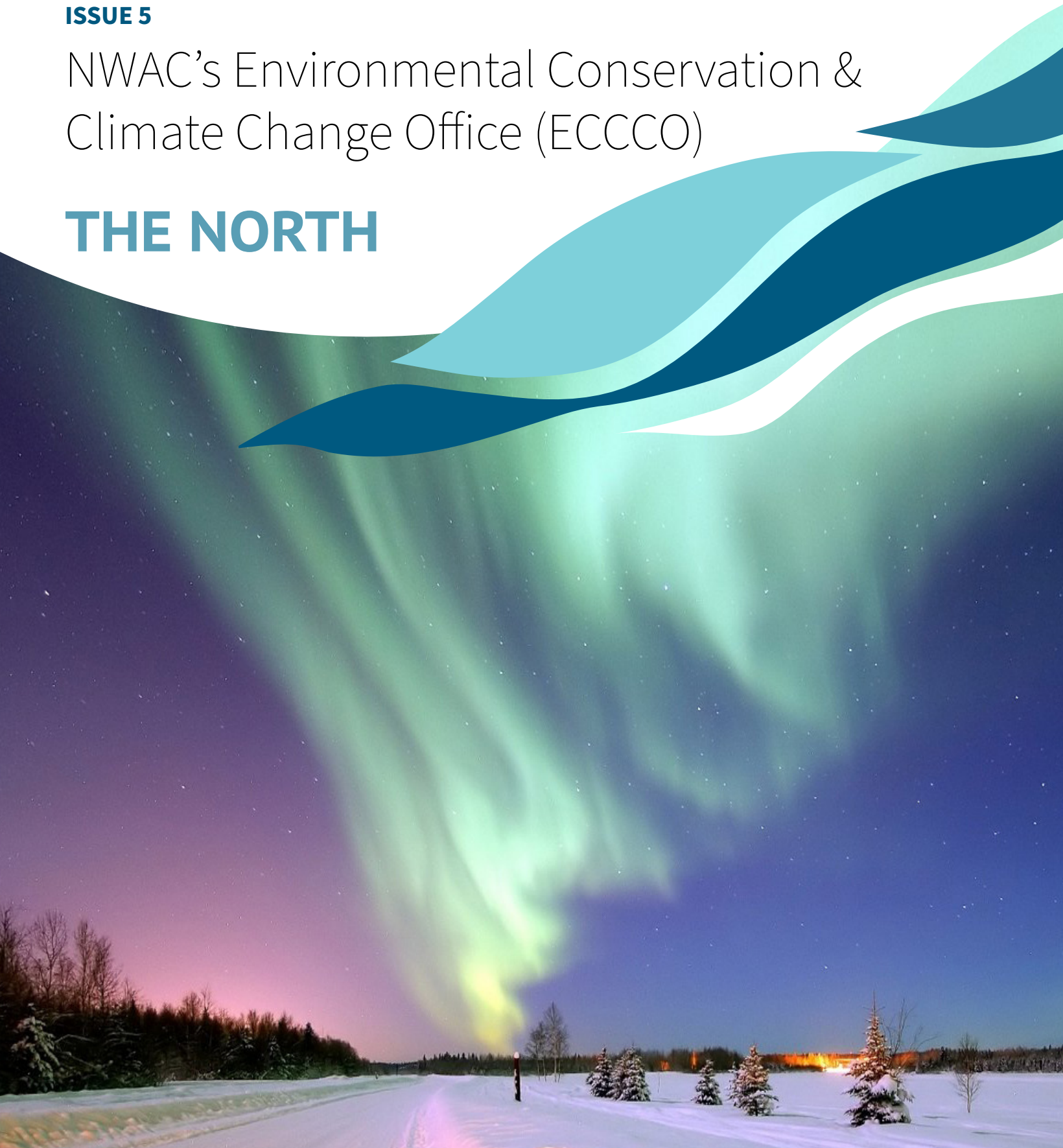
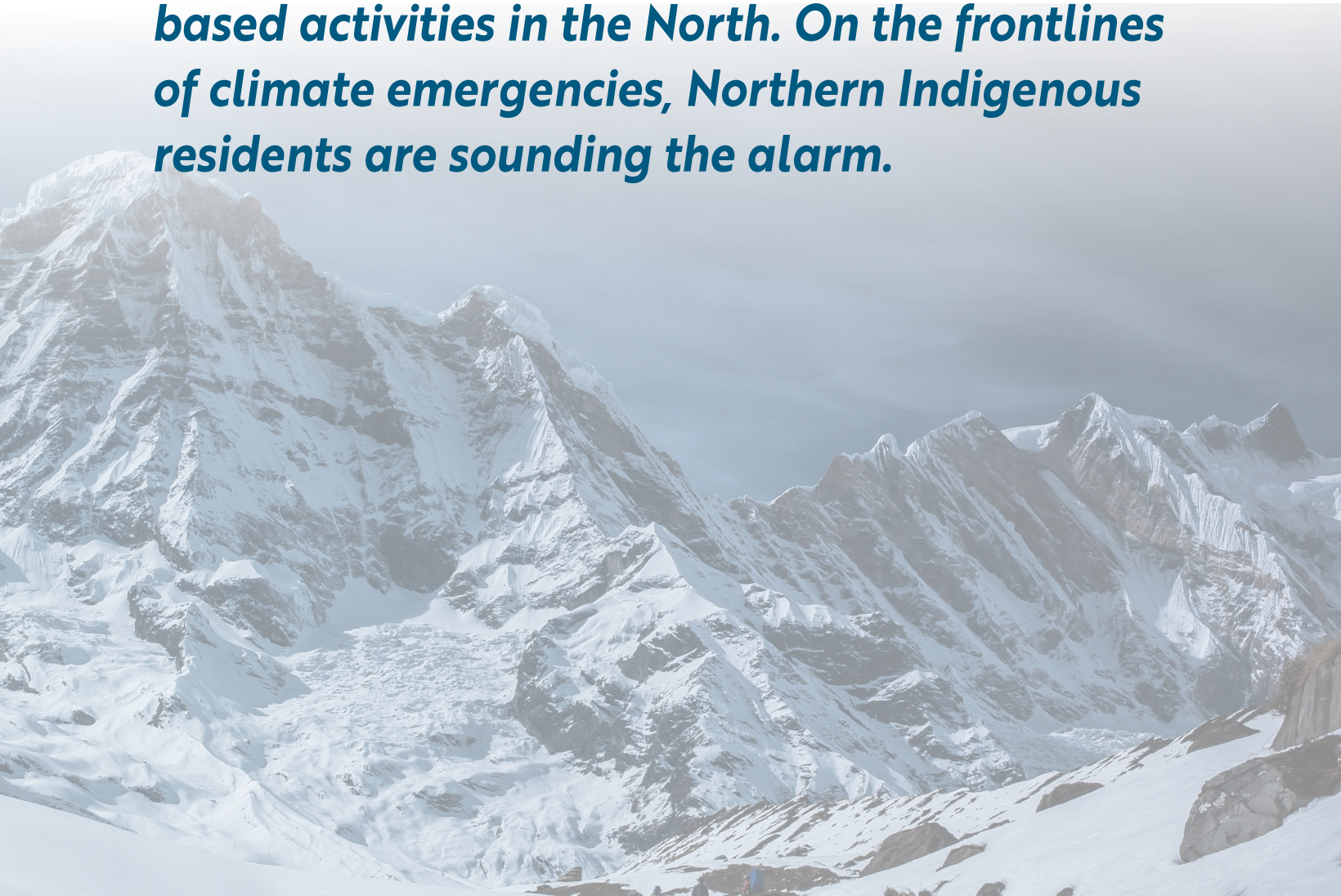
NWAC's Environmental Conservation & Climate Change Office (ECCCO)

THE NORTH



There is no question that climate change is happening faster in the North. This issue of NWAC's ECCCO E-newsletter looks at how climate change is forcing Indigenous women and youth to adapt their traditions and land-based activities in the North. On the frontlines of climate emergencies, Northern Indigenous residents are sounding the alarm.



Northern Indigenous youth taking matters into their own hands

By Sarah Niman

Daniel Masuzumi, 19, sued the Federal Government last autumn for failing to meet its climate goals and endangering the climate. Masuzumi and 14 other youth filed La Rose v Canada, a lawsuit asking the Federal Court of Canada to order the government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move away from reliance on fossil fuels.

Masuzumi lives along the banks of the Mackenzie River in Fort Good Hope, Northwest Territories. He is Fort Good Hope Dené and K'asho Got'ine. Like most Indigenous youth living in the North, Masuzumi has seen climate change impact his community's way of life.

His family relies on the river to freeze during winter so they can transport goods and access their cabin via snowmobile. Increasingly warm temperatures make the ice unsafe to travel over; last year, Masuzumi and his family were unable to access their cabin until the river reopened in the spring.

Increasingly warm and dry weather makes the Mackenzie River run lower. When this happens, the barge connecting Fort Good Hope to the mainland cannot run. This effectively cuts off Masuzumi's community from receiving groceries and other supplies by barge. Instead, those supplies are flown in at much higher costs.

Wild game has sustained Masuzumi's family and community for thousands of years, but hunts that used to take a day now take over a week. Warming temperatures cause moose and caribou to change their herding and migratory patterns hundreds of kilometres away from Masuzumi's community.

Climate change impacts are seen most acutely across the North, and Indigenous youth are quick to respond to these changes with actions plans, advocacy and activism.

The La Rose lawsuit is sparking conversation across Turtle Island about the older generation's responsibility to create a climate that can sustain the younger generation.

Indigenous youth are not simply waiting for government decision-makers to respond to lawsuits. All across the North, the younger generation is learning, building and responding themselves.

Indigenous youth in Tuktoyaktuk, NWT recorded a documentary about the ways they've seen soil erosion impact their community's landscape. Though they are under 20 years old, the documentary participants say they recognize how permafrost melts and how warmer temperatures and water levels have changed in their lifetimes.

Yellowknife's Ecology North staff introduce science-based climate tools to youth in schools, so they can take climate change discussions into their communities.

Northern Indigenous youth are taking their responsibility to be stewards of the land seriously. During the leadup to the federal election in 2019, many youth took advantage of the national audience to further climate change discussions by highlighting their own community's concerns and challenges.

"The La Rose lawsuit is sparking conversation across Turtle Island about the older generation's responsibility to create a climate that can sustain the younger generation."

The cost of renewable energy in Canada's North

By Isabel McMurray

Diesel is the energy generating backbone of many remote Indigenous communities in Canada due to its low costs in comparison to renewable energy sources. Diesel is also considered a carcinogen by the World Health Organization, which has been linked to lung cancer. Despite mounting concerns, many communities in Canada's North continue to have to rely on diesel to power their homes.

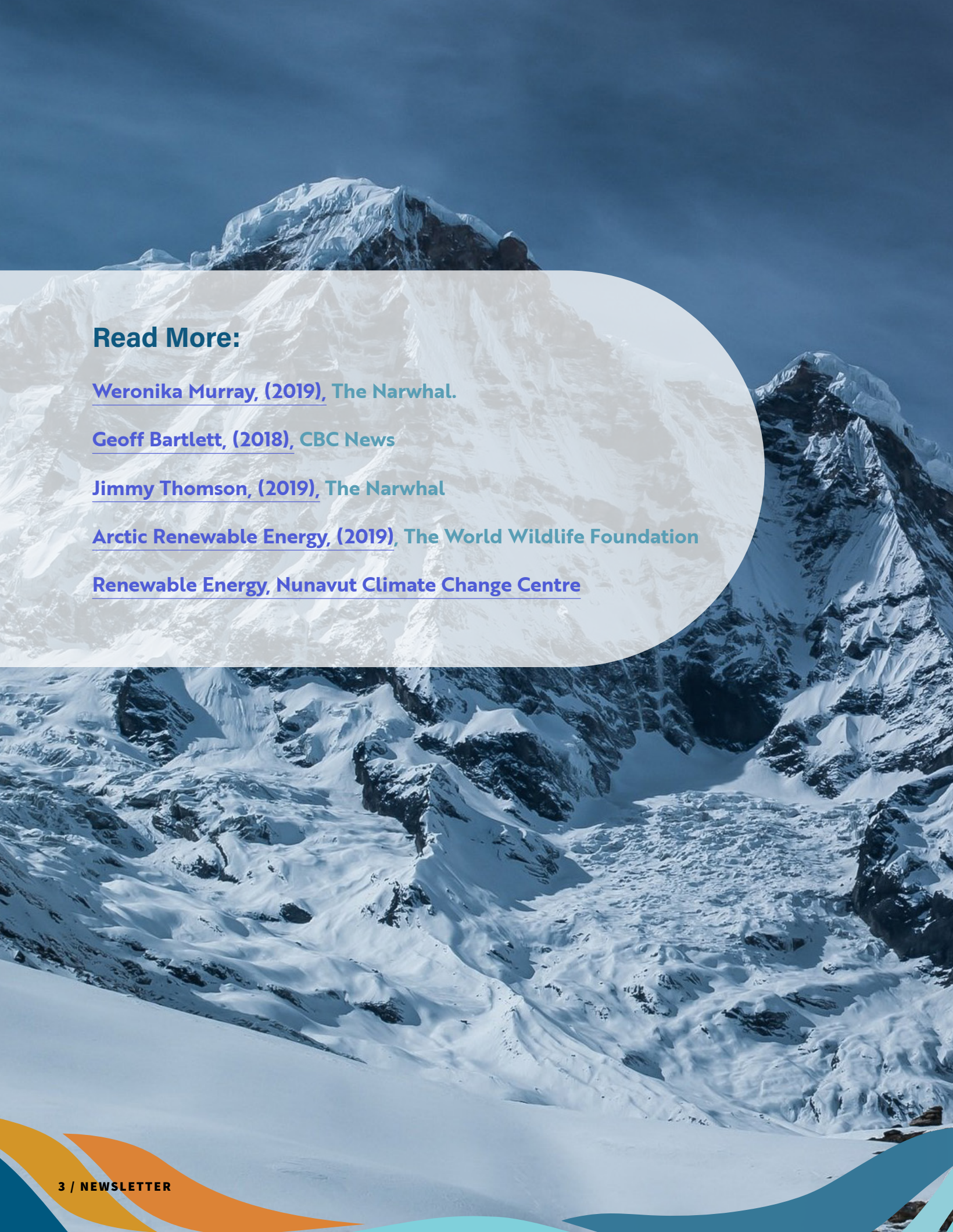
Renewable energy sources are preferable, but Nunavut's Climate Change Centre has found that establishing reliable renewable energy technologies in the coldest places in Canada comes with complications. Many technologies are not designed for extreme weather conditions. Solar farms, although incredibly useful during the long summer days, are unable to produce and store as much energy during long, dark winter months. Older wind turbine models were not designed for arctic environments; many early wind projects in Nunavut failed in the cold. Hydro energy requires a river that doesn't freeze to the bottom or dams.

Renewable energy technology in the North requires immense start-up costs, as all materials have to be transported to distant construction sites. Climate change causes delays when warming temperatures shorten the usable window of winter ice roads and make the barge shipping season unpredictable. In the long run, renewable energy technology brings environmental and economic benefits, but upfront costs remain prohibitive for many communities and leave diesel as the cheaper alternative.

Cheap is a relative term in the context of this article. In his reporting for The Narwhal, Jimmy Thomson noted the average electricity price in Canada is 11 cents per kilowatt hour, while the price in Kugaaruk, Nunavut is $1.12 per kilowatt hour, or $1.30 without diesel subsidies.

Several organizations have an eye to the potential of renewable energy in the North, despite financial obstacles. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the winners of the CanInfra Challenge demonstrated that the upfront costs to build community-scale energy projects using various technologies are significantly less than long-term diesel costs. The WWF continues researching funding frameworks and renewable energy possibilities to construct three such projects in 2020.

"Despite the environmental and eventual economic benefits of building renewable energy projects, these costs are prohibitive to many communities and leave diesel as the cheaper alternative."



Read More:

Weronika Murray, (2019), The Narwhal.

Geoff Bartlett, (2018), CBC News

Jimmy Thomson, (2019), The Narwhal

Arctic Renewable Energy, (2019), The World Wildlife Foundation

Renewable Energy, Nunavut Climate Change Centre

Vuntut Gwich'in declares a climate change state of emergency

By Richelle Martin

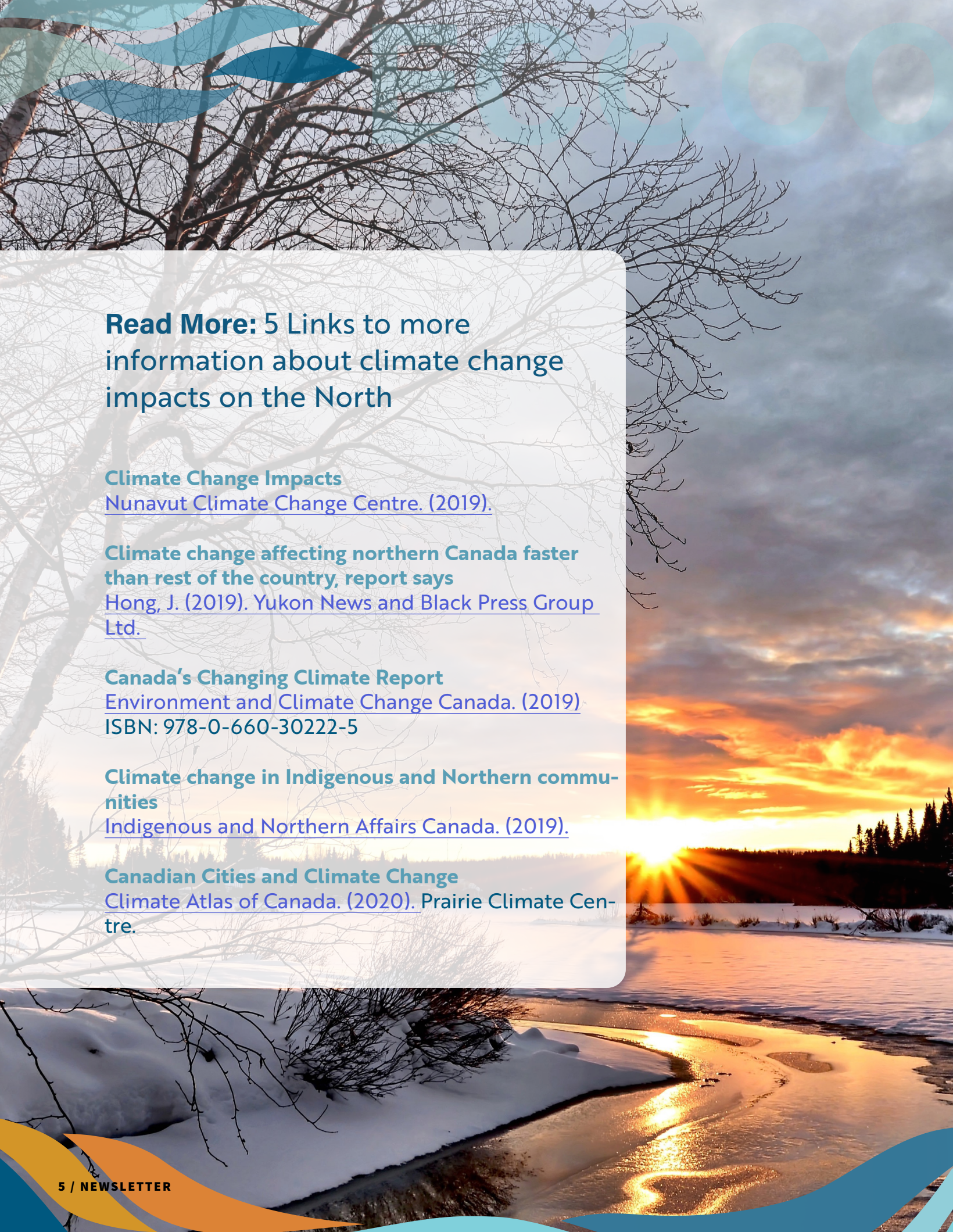
The Vuntut Gwitch'in First Nation in Old Crow, Yukon, is Canada's most Northwestern community. The average annual temperature in Old Crow increased 3.7 degrees Celsius between 1948 and 2016, over two times higher than the average increase across Canada. Although 3.7 degrees may not sound like a lot, the changing climate detrimentally impacts the Gwitch'in traditional activities and subsistence living. For example, unprecedented warm days during winter months cause unsafe ice travel, and early spring thawing and flooding change caribou migration routes.

In response, the Vuntut Gwitch'in First Nation became the first Indigenous community to declare a climate emergency on May 19, 2019. Their climate emergency declaration is called Yeendoo diinehdoo ji'heezrit nits'oo ts'o' nan he'aa which translates directly to "after our time, how will the world be?" Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm told the CBC, "It's going to be the blink of an eye before my great grandchild is living in a completely different territory, and if that's not an emergency, I don't know what is."

The Vuntut Gwitch'in First Nation brought a resolution for a climate emergency declaration to the Assembly of First Nations Annual General Meeting in July 2019. The AFN Chiefs-in-Assembly adopted the resolution with unanimous consensus. The resolution recognizes that "[t]he climate crisis is significantly altering First Nations' relationships with the lands the Creator has bestowed upon First Nations and upon which First Nations have inalienable rights as entrenched in Section 35 of the Constitution Act (1982), affirmed in the UN Declaration, and confirmed in Treaties and other constructive arrangements between First Nations and the Crown."

Across the world, 1,355 different jurisdictions and local governments have declared climate emergencies to date, many across Canada. The Government of Canada declared a climate emergency in June 2019. These declarations are meant to raise awareness where climate change risks are severe and require fast responses akin to during times of war.

"Yeendoo Diinehdoo Ji'heezrit Nits'oo Ts'o' Nan He'aa": "After Our Time, How Will the World Be?"



Read More: 5 Links to more information about climate change impacts on the North

Climate Change Impacts
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Climate change affecting northern Canada faster than rest of the country, report says
Hong, J. (2019). Yukon News and Black Press Group Ltd.

Canada's Changing Climate Report
Environment and Climate Change Canada. (2019)
ISBN: 978-0-660-30222-5

Climate change in Indigenous and Northern communities
Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. (2019).

Canadian Cities and Climate Change
Climate Atlas of Canada. (2020). Prairie Climate Centre.

Native Women's Association of Canada

L'Association des femmes autochtones du Canada

WWW.NWAC.CA