



SPECIAL FEATURES IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

ESKERS



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What are eskers?

Eskers are long, winding ridges of sand and gravel formed by sediment that has been deposited by meltwater of retreating glaciers. Eskers vary with size, but are frequently several kilometers in length and up to 100 metres in height.

Eskers occur more often on the tundra, but can also be found in forested areas. They are often the only well-drained, semi-continuous ridges over vast landscapes, and are therefore very important to many species of wildlife and often used as prime travel corridors.

Eskers are important habitat for a variety of denning animals, such as wolves, arctic and red foxes, and grizzly bears, and nesting habitat for birds, including raptors. With their exposed tops and steep protected sides, they provide micro-habitats for a diversity of plants and an escape for animals from biting insects. Lichens are abundant on eskers, making them important habitat for caribou.

Eskers are important to Indigenous peoples and have traditionally been used as burial sites. They are also sources of granular material used in road construction and maintenance.

Eskers in the NWT

Eskers occur throughout the tundra and boreal forest in the Northwest Territories (NWT). They are visible from the air, and can be seen winding through the landscape. Though they only make up 1-2% of the tundra landscape in the NWT, eskers are concentrated areas of biological and cultural importance.

How can we protect eskers?

To minimize impacts on eskers and associated conservation features, developers are asked to observe the following recommended best practices:

- If you are conducting land use activities, make sure you obtain current information and survey for eskers in your area of interest, identify any impacts of their proposed activities, and determine appropriate mitigation measures to minimize impacts on eskers.
- When activities could result in the esker no longer being available as wildlife habitat, conduct a cumulative effects assessment on a wider landscape to determine impacts on the larger ecosystem.
- Monitor and adapt land use activities and mitigation efforts to make sure there are minimal impacts on eskers.
- Conduct a general biophysical survey, including a rare plant survey and wildlife and wildlife habitat survey, for land use activities within the vicinity of an esker, with a focus on species that are known to use eskers in the surrounding ecosystem.

Where Can I Get More Information?

Visit the Conservation Network Planning **webpage** for other information sheets, reports and most recent maps.

Email Conservation Network Planning at **conservationplanning@gov.nt.ca**

