



SPECIAL FEATURES IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

GLOBALLY RARE AND MAY-BE-AT-RISK LICHENS



Photo credit: C. Björk

LICHENS

What are globally rare and may-be-at-risk lichens?

The term “rare” refers to species that exist in low numbers, have a restricted range or are of conservation concern due to population trends or threats. Globally rare lichens are ranked by **NatureServe**.

Lichens are composed of two different species that function as one, consisting of a fungus and algae living in a symbiotic relationship. The fungus protects the algae and provides it with moisture and the algae obtains food for the fungus through photosynthesis.

Lichens may be so abundant that they form the main vegetation type on a landscape. However, lichen species are likely to be globally rare or may-be-at-risk if they require very specific habitat types, such as alkaline rocks. Lichens

have many roles in northern ecosystems, including providing an essential food source for caribou in the winter. Lichens not only convert carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to oxygen, but they also have the ability to absorb pollutants out of the atmosphere.

Globally rare and may-be-at-risk lichens in the NWT

Generally, there has been a low sampling effort throughout the Northwest Territories (NWT) for lichen, which could lead to some species being misclassified as rare simply because there are very few records.

In 1999, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), in collaboration with the Working Group on General Status of NWT Species, began the **NWT General Status Ranking Program**.

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The program compiles information on NWT species and catalogues them in a central database. A ranking methodology is applied to each species in the catalogue, prioritizing species by their biological status and the need for more detailed assessments. This database is updated as new information becomes available and helps to identify conservation priorities for species.

There are 331 known species of lichen in the NWT. Of these, two are of global conservation concern. None of these species are currently ranked by **NatureServe** as globally rare.

How can we protect globally rare and may-be-at-risk lichens?

Practice “**Leave No Trace**” principles in the backcountry.

If you think you see a rare or at-risk lichen, take a picture of it and send it to Environment and Natural Resources at nwtsoer@gov.nt.ca to help us develop and maintain a comprehensive database on globally rare and may be at lichens in the NWT.

To minimize the impacts on globally rare and may-be-at-risk lichen and associated conservation features, developers are asked to observe the following best practices:

- If you are conducting land use activities, make sure you obtain current information and surveys for globally rare and may-be-at-risk lichen in your area of interest. As well, identify any impacts of your proposed activities, and determine appropriate mitigation measures to minimize impacts on globally rare and may-be-at-risk lichen.
- Monitor and adapt your land use activities and mitigation efforts to make sure there are minimal impacts on globally rare and may-be-at-risk lichen.

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



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