

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.

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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.

Trends in berry harvesting

Summary

Harvesting berries is an important part of the culture and diet of northern Indigenous communities. To understand recent changes in berry abundance and quality, this project looked at berry harvesting trends, as reported by local harvesters in six communities; five in the Northwest Territories and one in Yukon between 2013 to 2020. Local harvesters provided data through a voluntary survey. It was found that the abundance and quality of berries has improved in the last three years, which coincides with more harvesters meeting their household berries needs.

Why is this research important?

Berries hold cultural significance for Indigenous people, as a source of food and medicine. Changes in abundance or quality of berries can impact harvests and the ability of households to meet their berry needs for the year, impacting their well-being.

What did we do?

We looked at trends in berry abundance, quality, and the ability of households to meet their berry needs by using survey data collected by the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Society (ABEKS) between 2013 and 2020. The survey data was provided by Gwich'in and Inuvialuit harvesters in Fort McPherson, Inuvik, Aklavik, Tsiigehtchic, NWT and Old Crow, YT. As part of the survey, participants used a scale of one to four to rate berry abundance from few (1) to many (4) and berry quality from low (1) to high (4). We combined the average berry abundance and quality ratings of all communities for each year. We also examined the average response of each community on whether the survey participants were able to meet their needs for berries.



Credit: A. Fyon, iNaturalist.ca

What did we find?

- We found that ratings of berry abundance and quality have remained relatively stable since 2013, with a recent increase starting in 2018. There are similar trends and a clear link between berry abundance and quality. The ability of harvesters to meet their berry needs was also found to have improved in recent years.

Which berries were included in this study?

Local harvesters were asked to describe the abundance and quality for: salmonberries, blueberries and cranberries, crowberries, kinnickinnick, red bearberries, soapberries, and toad flax.

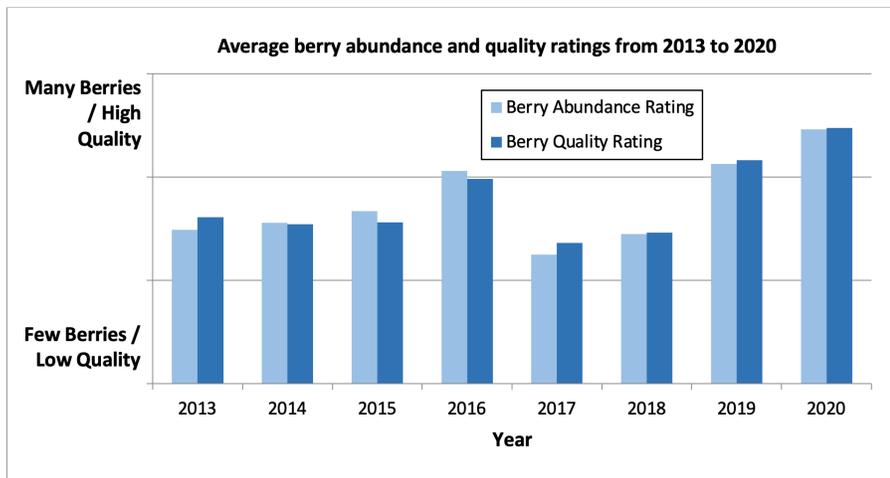
Recommended Reading

Kuhnlein, H.V., and Turner, N.J. 1996. *Traditional plant foods of Canadian Indigenous peoples: Nutrition, botany and use. Food and Nutrition in History and Anthropology. Vol 8.* Gordon and Breach Publishers.

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Were household needs for berries met?								
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Aklavik	Yes	No	No	-	-	No	Yes	Yes
Fort Macpherson	No	No	No	-	No	No	Yes	Yes
Inuvik (Gwich'in)	No	Yes	-	-	No	No	No	-
Inuvik (Inuvialuit)	Yes	No	No	-	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Old Crow	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Tsiigehtchic	No	Yes	-	-	No	No	No	Yes

Note: Blank spaces indicate there weren't any responses to the relevant survey question provided by that community that year.

What does this mean?

Recent increases in berry abundance and quality is very encouraging. More high-quality berries available means less effort is needed for harvesters to fulfill their needs.