CANADIAN MOUNTAIN NETWORK

RESEARCH PROJECT SUMMARY

Mobilizing Mountain Metrics that Matter: Inuit-Led Environment and Health Monitoring in the Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve

Locally-responsive and timely environment and health monitoring programs have been identified as a key adaptation strategy in the face of changing environmental and climatic conditions in mountain regions. Inuit in the community of Rigolet, Nunatsiavut, Labrador have relied on hunting, trapping and harvesting in the mountain landscapes in and around the newly-emerging Mealy Mountain National Park (MMNP) for generations. Labrador is one of the fastest-warming regions in Canada, and climate change and the resulting environmental impacts are impacting both humans and the environment. This project responded to the Rigolet community's identified need to create locally-appropriate and Inuit-led environment and health monitoring platforms to support human well-being, ecosystem stewardship and thriving communities.

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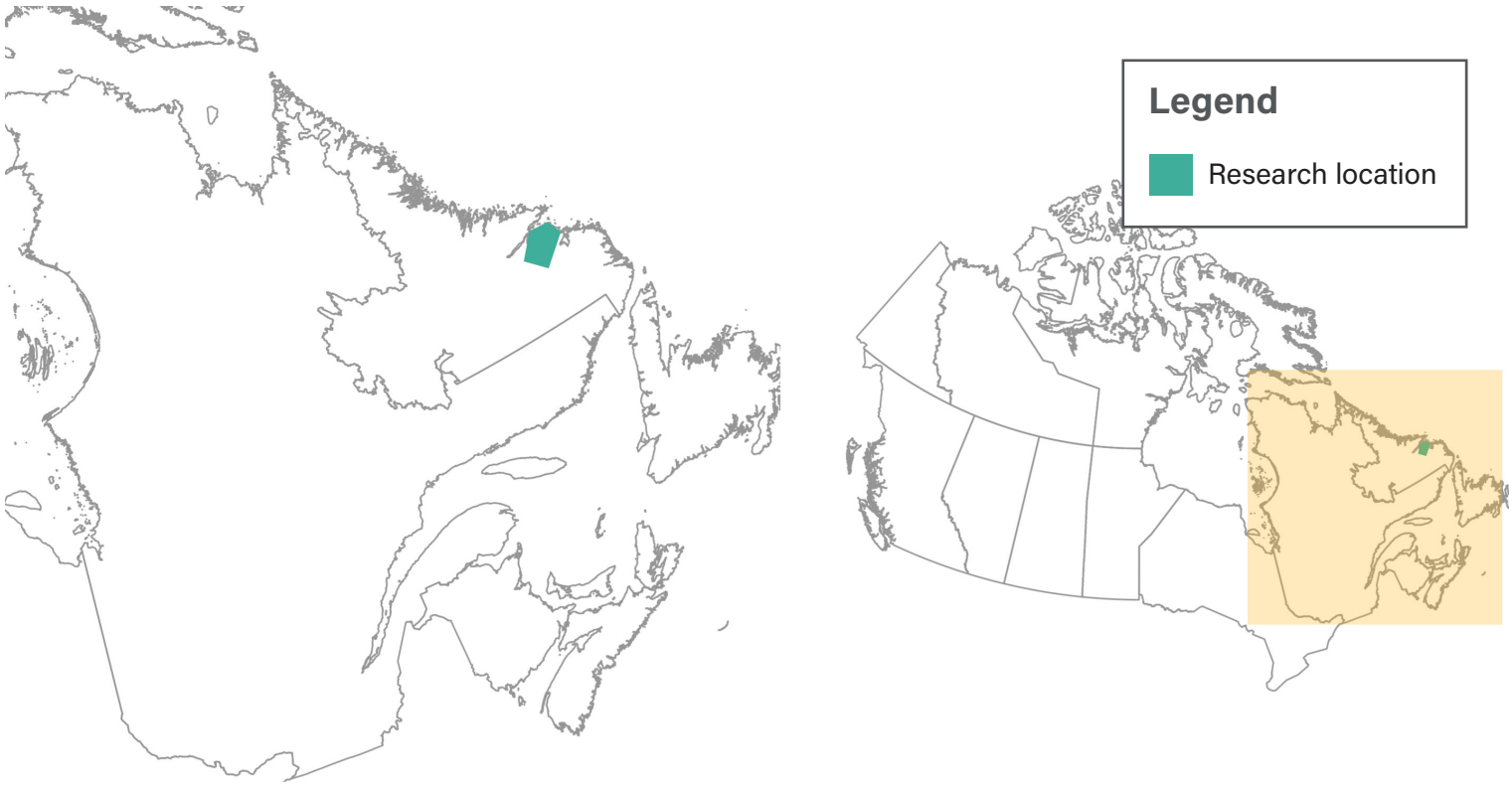
Trainees: Ruth Pottle, Jane Shiwak, Derrick Pottle (Mentors), Rene Ritter (Wilderness First Aid Educator), Shania Williams, Rodney Wolfrey, Shane Wolfrey, Samantha Williams, Ella Jacque (Youth Participants)



Project Partners

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Objectives

This project expanded and enhanced community-driven monitoring systems in Rigolet to track, analyze, and respond to climate change impacts on health and well-being.

There were four key objectives:

1. Characterizing mountain metrics that matter to Inuit;
2. Expanding and enhancing community-driven climate-health monitoring systems to cover MMNP;
3. Examining climatic determinants of Inuit health and wellbeing in mountain regions; and
4. Promoting climate-health awareness among communities in mountain regions.

Mealy Mountains

Research Plan

The research and objectives of the project were community-identified and met Inuit priorities in the community. This research was community-led, participatory, and based on mixed-methods in order to better understand the climate-health nexus for the MMNP. The impact of COVID-related restrictions caused a restructuring of the original project plan, pivoting to the following two Inuit-identified areas of interest:

1. The transfer of cultural knowledge through social distancing events and activities, where youth learned cultural skills and place-based practices from Elders and knowledge holders in the community; and
2. Examining and promoting awareness about the relationship between caribou population declines and Inuit health and well-being.

Key Outcomes & Impact

The Mealy Mountain Monitoring Mentors program in Rigolet, Nunatsiavut, Labrador brought together Inuit youth with Elders and adults in the community to learn cultural and land-based skills. These skills included learning how to create clothing such as a mitt-making course, a dickie-making course (parka-making), and also a wilderness first aid course. The groundwork has now been laid to facilitate on-the-land experiences that connect Inuit youth with Elders in the Mealy Mountains. This work will continue beyond the life of this funding as the project was able to construct future basecamps for on-the-land experiences between youth and Elders, and for safety shelters for Inuit caribou monitors at two strategic locations in the Mealy Mountains.

We assessed the changes in caribou populations in and outside of the Mealy Mountains with regards to Inuit health and ecological change. Through this focus, we were able to produce peer-reviewed articles on the following topics: 1) links between caribou population changes and Inuit identity and cultural continuity; 2) links between caribou population changes and Inuit social connections and social change; 3) impacts of colonial wildlife management on Inuit well-being; 4) Inuit experiences of ecological grief in relation to the caribou population changes; and 5) methodological papers outlining the process of working collaboratively with Inuit to co-produce health and environmental knowledge through audio-visual strategies.

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