



**Yellowknife during the wildfires of 2014.** Multiple scientists, academics and government officials met in Yellowknife to discuss their past four years of work on a wildfire research partnership. NNSL file photo

# GNWT more prepared for wildfires

*Government research partnership with academics creates greater understanding of impacts*

by **Brett McGarry**

Northern News Services

Scientists, academics and members from multiple government departments, federal and territorial, convened in Yellowknife on March 6 to discuss the outcome of a wildfire research partnership.

The results are the sum of the "thousands of hours" of collaborative research between the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), multiple universities and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

Those results have provided the GNWT and territorial fire operations more precise tools to monitor fires and make better decisions should a large fire season happen again.

Early on, ENR attracted research partners in Canadian and American academia and NASA, who were beginning

the Arctic Boreal Vulnerability Experiment (ABOVE).

NASA funded scientists got boots on the ground in 2015, which informed the airborne campaign ABOVE in 2017.

"We tend to focus on the unique perspective you get from satellites looking down on the land, using sensors or other instruments to look down from airborne campaigns," said Chip Miller, deputy science lead at NASA's jet propulsion laboratory in Pasadena.

Miller also said the products used can now detect a fire as small as a hectare in "about 24 hours."

Richard Olsen, manager of fire operations with the GNWT, said they have gained access to monitoring and sensor products used to monitor fires with more precision to make more informed decisions.

"The biggest change I've seen is the use of remote sensing and the inclusion of that in monitoring and decision making," Olsen said.

"There are at least six different products we've incorporated into our monitoring programs and we're getting to the point where we can discover fires in a relatively short period of time."

In addition to the technology being used, the information that has been produced as a result of the research will help decision makers predict how these fires act and the impact it has on the landscape.

"The improvements in modelling and the idea about how we can try to understand that if a fire occurs on this landscape, we can project what it's going to potentially do and what the impact will be," Olsen said. "From an operation perspective too,

we're focused on what the fire may do. A big part is the response of the forest after, which may play into what the subsequent fire behaviour might be down the road."

The devastating fires of 2014 left over three million hectares burned in the NWT, producing smoke and ash that spread across the entire territory and disrupting daily life.

Andrew Applejohn, senior science adviser, said all departments of the government starting working to develop a research project to assess the scope of effects to communities, wildlife, water resources and landscapes.

"We were working before the fires were really out," said Applejohn. "We started in November 2014 to try and put together a workshop to address the research partnership and to look at the actual and potential impacts of the wildfires."

According to Wilfred Laurier University's Jennifer Baltzer, the research really shines in showing hot spots of change in the ecosystem, such as changes to lichen growth, foraging quality or changes to permafrost.

"We're in a much better situation now to make predictions about those hot spots of change and we can pass that off to the management community, so they can make appropriate decisions about how to manage some of these non-traditional resources," said Baltzer. "Without the research, we can't make those decisions and I've think we've had a critical pass off of some of this knowledge. We now have the ability to exchange that knowledge."

Miller also pointed out that these types of assets are taken for granted or not prioritized.

"What we're talking about is ecosystem services," said

Miller. "Those typically are not monetized. They are just taken for granted. Everyone assumes the land will continue to provide them, but they have very high value and need to be protected and considered not just pieces of infrastructure."

As the first four years of research is reflected on, Applejohn says it's remarkable how fruitful the partnership has been and looks forward to the next research cycle.

"We're really here to look at what the results of those research programs mean for us as a government, us as residents in this territory and how we move ahead," said Applejohn. "We've finished one research cycle here, but we're really interested in looking to the future and how we can work collaboratively to be as successful in the next four years as we have in the last four years."

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## Woman who crashed truck into Sushi Cafe gets 2-year driving ban, fine

A Yellowknife woman who crashed a truck into the front of Sushi Cafe last summer, causing significant damage to the Franklin Avenue restaurant, has been ordered to pay a fine and stay off roads for the next two years.



**COPS & Courts**

with Brendan Burke

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Kimberly Ongahak, 36, dabbed her eyes with a tissue before apologizing to the restaurant owners in NWT territorial court Friday.

Ongahak, the court heard, was impaired when she took a friend's Ford F150 pickup truck without permission in the early hours of July 15, 2018. Ongahak made a right turn on 53 Street, where she lost control, spinning 180 degrees into the front of Sushi Cafe, according to an agreed statement of facts.

No one was inside the restaurant when the vehicle plowed into the building.

She didn't have a driver's licence at the time of the crash, the court heard.

Ongahak pleaded guilty to impaired operation of a vehicle

in December. She has no prior convictions for driving offences.

Crown prosecutor Billi Wun said the "very serious" crash caused extensive damage to the "popular" and "prominent" downtown business, negatively impacting the community as a result. The restaurant was forced to close its doors for weeks to renovate the damaged property.

Wun told the court the Crown expected Sushi Cafe owners to submit a victim impact statement and a restitution request, but said nothing had been filed by Friday morning.

Wun called for a three-month conditional sentence – house arrest – followed by one year of probation. The offence triggers a mandatory one-year driving ban.

Jay Bran, Ongahak's lawyer, asked Judge Robert Gorin to consider only a fine between \$2,000 and \$2,500 along with the mandatory driving one-year driving prohibition.

Bran told the court his client has struggled with alcohol addiction since she was in her early teens. Bran said she has taken steps to overcome her addiction since the July crash.

Given Ongahak's lack of a record for driving offences, her guilty plea and background, Judge Gorin ruled no form of imprisonment was necessary. Instead, he ordered Ongahak to pay a \$2,000 fine, and prohibited her from driving for two years. She must also stay at least 10 metres from the restaurant.

Two other charges related to the July accident – dangerous operation and taking a vehicle without permission – were withdrawn by the Crown following Ongahak's formal conviction Friday.

## RCMP to host Women's Information Session

Yellowknife RCMP are set to host an information session for women interested in pursuing a path in policing.

Residents are invited to attend the RCMP detachment, located at 5010 Veterans Memorial Drive, for a presentation Thursday at 6 p.m.

"The presentation is a unique opportunity to meet with other female recruiters and police officers and hear real life career experiences from police officers," stated Cpl. Charmaine Parenteau, a G Division recruiter, in an email.

A Mountie will be on hand to outline the application process, and to field questions from would-be recruits.

## No injuries in Ingraham Trail accident: RCMP

A portion of the Ingraham Trail was reopened Monday after being temporarily closed due to an accident involving a tractor-trailer, state Yellowknife RCMP.

A tractor-trailer and an SUV were involved in an accident at kilometre 18 on the Ingraham Trail, according to a news release from Mounties Monday afternoon.

No one was injured in the accident, state police.

Yellowknife RCMP did not specify when the accident occurred.

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