

On September 1, 2023, Quebec's Chief Forester published a letter⁵ concerning the need to reflect on forest management in Quebec in the context of climate change. In this letter, he acknowledges that changes to the forest caused by climate change will have "considerable impacts on wildlife habitats, forest-based activities and communities, [...] whose environmental, economic and social consequences will have repercussions for many years to come".

Although the forested areas in Nunavik are located above the limit of attributable forests in Québec, it remains an important part of the natural and social landscape for the Inuit, Naskapi and Cree peoples. The forest tundra, which is considered part of the forest territory of the domain of the State by the *Regulation respecting the sustainable management of forests in the domain of the State*, covers nearly a third of the Nunavik region, while the use of wood resources extends to the northernmost villages. Forest patches are important for camp construction, hunting and trapping, the use of non-timber forest products, and as habitat for wildlife species. A study in collaboration with the Avataq Institute documented multiple traditional uses of wood resources in Nunavik, such as the construction of boats, sleds, huts, or caches for food, for building fires, as well as for making branch mattresses, tools, traps, tents, art objects and children's toys⁶. The use of shrubs as food in times of famine has also been documented. Even today, driftwood is used in camps, to make fire, emergency signals, paddles, and tents. Nunavik's forested territories are thus an integral part of the traditional practices of the Inuit, Naskapi and Cree peoples. Furthermore, the taiga biome, which is the transition between the boreal forest and the tundra, just before the tree line is equally important in Nunavik. The tundra vegetation consists in dwarf trees, bushes, berries, and grasses. They are the *nunajait*, or "things of the Earth", each with their utility.

The KEAC was pleased to learn, at the February 28, 2024, presentation, that ongoing forest surveys are planned for the region. The committee wishes to reiterate the importance of regular monitoring of Nunavik's ecosystems, particularly in the context of a potential significant increase in mean annual temperature in Quebec's Arctic territory by 2100. New conditions in terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems will influence the abundance, distribution and productivity of plant and animal species that are crucial to the way of life of the Inuit, Naskapi and Cree populations.

All the Nunavik region falls within SOPFEU's Northern Protection Zone. In this zone, SOPFEU detects all forest fires, but only intervenes if the fires are within 20 km of a village or strategic infrastructure. With climate changes, the risk of forest fires is expected to increase, particularly in softwood-dominated regions such as Nord-du-Québec. Extreme events, for instance the large-scale fires observed in 2023, will also be more frequent. While northern villages are adequately protected from fire by SOPFEU, the territory itself is not. The fragility of northern ecosystems puts them at particular risk of regeneration failure, where forest stands are unable to regrow following the passage of fires. These landscape modifications could have a major impact on the subsistence activities of the Inuit, Naskapi and Cree populations. The KEAC recommends that the MRNF and SOPFEU hold discussions with local and regional authorities to determine whether forest fire protection measures in northern zones are still appropriate and, if necessary, review these measures considering climate forecasts for the region.

⁵https://forestierenchef.gouv.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/Conseil_Reflexion- Amenagement_forestier_CC_20230901-1.pdf

⁶ [Inuit knowledge and use of wood resources on the ... - Études/Inuit/Studies - Érudit \(erudit.org\)](#)

As mentioned in previous communications, the KEAC proposes that Nunavik develop its own forest management plan and take an active part in integrated land and natural resource planning. Although Nunavik's forests are not industrially exploited, they are nonetheless used for more than just traditional activities. For example, trees can be cut for mineral exploration, road construction, firewood harvesting, and other land uses. Kangiqsualujuaq even operated a small sawmill to cut spruce lumber for several years. Many of Nunavik's forest patches are remarkably diverse and represent crucial areas for maintaining the region's rare and fragile biodiversity. Special conservation measures should continue be put in place to protect these areas. In this context, the committee recommends a specific management plan for the forests north of 55th parallel, which will respect the principle of conservation, the Inuit right to harvest wildlife resources recognized in Section 24 of the (JBNQA) and must comply with the JBNQA's environmental protection provisions (Section 23).

Since the 1970s, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has recognized the concept of community forest, which is defined as "all situations in which local populations are closely associated with a forestry activity. These situations range from the establishment of woodlots in regions lacking wood and other forest products for local needs, to the traditional activities of forest communities, to commercial arboriculture on farms and the processing of forest products at family, artisanal or small industry level⁷". This vision of the forest gives importance to all the links between the forest and human beings, without limiting itself to commercial exploitation alone. The community forest concept is, to a certain extent, provided for in section 6.3.1 of the JBNQA which concerns the cutting rights authorized for the communities of Kuujuaq and Kangiqsualujuaq. These communities have exclusive cutting rights on a parcel of land, which can be used for personal or community purposes. The KEAC recommends that the concept of community forests, where forest management responds to the needs of communities and not industries, be integrated into the Sustainable Forest Management Act and that all northern villages located in the bioclimatic domain of the forest tundra have access to such a forest.

In conclusion, the KEAC emphasizes that Nunavik's forest provides essential environmental, social, and economic services to the communities that inhabit this territory. The committee considers that this reality justifies the need for ongoing acquisition of knowledge about this forest, as well as for management adapted to the northern environment, including consideration of climate change.

Best regards,



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Chairperson, KEAC

⁷ [Community forestry: a ten-year review \(fao.org\)](http://www.fao.org)