

Canadian Wildlife Service
Arctic Ecology Map Series
Critical Wildlife areas

Descriptive report

Arctic Red River

ARCTIC RED RIVER
(Sheet #N.W. 66/136)

This large scale (1:500,000) map sheet encompasses about 32,000 square miles of the lower Mackenzie River system including the Arctic Red and Peel Rivers. The sheet includes a portion of the Yukon Territories within its boundaries.

The map area contains a wide variety of wildlife habitats the most notable of which are the "hanging delta" located between the Mackenzie and Arctic Red Rivers, the southern or upper delta of the Mackenzie River, the alpine region of the Richardson Mountains and the valleys of the Peel, Arctic Red and Mackenzie Rivers.

Barren-Ground Caribou winter and migrate in the taiga regions of the northeast portion of the map sheet as well as the valley and sub-alpine regions of the Peel River. Marten and other furbearers are common, particularly in the northeast portion of the sheet. Canada Geese, ducks, beaver, muskrat and mink and moose are abundant in the Ramparts and Ontaratue River deltas and the delta of the Mackenzie River. Dall Sheep, Woodland Caribou, and Grizzly Bear are common to plentiful in alpine and sub-alpine regions, while good populations of moose, Black Bear, Canada Geese and furbearers are found in the main river valleys and other localized areas of suitable habitat.

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Important moose concentrations are found in the sheltered willow bottoms of lakes and streams of the upper Peel River system near its confluence with the Snake River and the junction of the Hare and Bluefish Rivers on the extreme eastern area of the map sheet.

Fish populations include Lake Trout, Grayling and Whitefish. The river systems contain an abundance and variety of fish at certain locations. Primary species are herring, Whitefish and Inconnu.

The human residents of the map area are chiefly Indians, and are concentrated in and around the settlements of Fort Good Hope, Arctic Red River and Fort McPherson. Native industries include trapping and domestic fishing with some employment in the commercial sawmills on the Arctic Red River and in small scale domestic logging near the settlements.

The following is the descriptive text for units mapped on this sheet.

UNIT NUMBER

DESCRIPTION

- 1 The caribou in the delimited area migrate from the north to winter in this unit. Over 600 animals have been seen in small scattered groups and over 2,400 reported another time. The exact winter distribution is presently uncertain. The identity of those caribou is open to question. The apparently small migration and occurrence in small groups suggests they may be Woodland Caribou, however that behavior may be a result of the topography of the area. Since they summer north of tree-line, winter within the boreal forest and tend to bed down in open spaces and on frozen lakes it is suggested that they are Barren-Ground Caribou. They may be escaped reindeer from the Reindeer herd. They are important for their proximity to the Reindeer herd as well as their occurrence and number in this localized area. These animals should be considered as Barren-Ground Caribou. (Hawley)

- 2 This unit is a staging area for Whistling Swans. Some of the non-breeding population of swans molt in this area. Most use occurs from May 10th to June 20th. (Barry)
Moose concentrations and marten occur all around Travaillant Lake and extend south across the Mackenzie River. (Bissett 1967)

- 3 Islands of the Mackenzie River constitute a spring staging and molting area for swans (25,000), Snow Geese (100,000), White-Fronted Geese (30,000), Canada Geese (10,000±), and numerous ducks. This area is used May 15th to June 10th by birds en route to the Mackenzie Delta. (Barry)

- 4 Peregrine Falcons. A single bird and a nesting female were observed in August 1968. (Yorath)

UNIT NUMBER

DESCRIPTION

- 5 Barren-Ground Caribou have utilized this unit for several years. Numbers vary from about 1,500 to 10,000 or (reportedly) 20,000 animals. They may be a segment of the Great Bear Herd which numbers near 50,000 animals. However, many animals are known to summer between Paulatuk and Horton River while reports by Kelsall and Thomas indicate the animals of the main herd summer much further east. In at least two winters, caribou were continuous from the western portion of the unit to Colville Lake and eastward to the Horton River. This unit may be utilized from October through March. However, after about 1 January, herds will be located in the timbered area south of 69°. In some years the animals may leave the entire area by mid-January on a continuing southward trek. (Hawley)
- 6 This is an extension of the important marten area mapped on the Great Bear River sheet to the east. (Williams, Hall)
This unit consists of the most important marten area in the Northwest Territories. (Hall)
- 7 Woodland Caribou are abundant throughout the year in this unit. No detailed information on numbers or seasonal distribution are available. (Hawley) The main portion of this unit extends onto the Great Bear River map sheet.
- 8 The area is widely known as the best beaver habitat with consistently high densities in the northern Mackenzie District. The area supports more willow and poplar than Unit 14 and is more productive. Although no good quantitative data exists, it appears the area contains beaver colony densities of near 1.0 per square mile. (Hawley)
This area is one of the best beaver areas in the Northwest Territories (Stevens). Confirmed by Stevens, Bryant (1957), Hawley, Fuller (1952).

Numerous breeding ducks, and breeding and molting Canada Geese occur within this unit. Whooping Cranes have also been observed here. (Barry)

UNIT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
9	An important beaver area surrounding the critical Ramparts River unit. (Stevens, Bryant, <u>et al.</u>)
10	The boundary delineates the Peel River Game Preserve established by the Government of the Northwest Territories. Important wildlife areas within this unit have been described under separate unit numbers.
11	Good fall Grizzly Bear area. (Boxer) No further data available.
12	<p>This area appears to be the main wintering area of the "Porcupine Herd". However, reports by Munro and Fuller indicate that the caribou winter well up toward the crest of the Ogilvie Mountains. Many reports of caribou wintering up the Wind and Bonnet Plume Rivers have been received. The main wintering areas appear to be the Road, Trail and Caribou Rivers east of the Richardson Mountains, Eagle Plains, and Porcupine Plateau (head of Lord Creek to the west). Several thousand (general hunter estimate is about 10,000 but sometimes higher) winter in that eastern area from November through March. The caribou when moving northward either follow along the east side or cross the mountains into the headwaters of the Rock and Eagle Rivers. Those caribou thus reach the Arctic Slope across the Rat River to Big Fish River, up the Bell River to Rapid Creek or via the Driftwood River to Blow River. Migration routes are continually variable. (Hawley)</p> <p>Wintering herds of caribou (the Porcupine Herd) have been observed in this area by Boxer.</p>
13	Migratory routes en route north to the coast. The Porcupine Caribou Herd. (Boxer)

UNIT NUMBER

DESCRIPTION

14 Beaver are fairly abundant in the area between Fort McPherson and Arctic Red River. Habitat consists of fairly unproductive acidic lakes and beaver probably depend much more on aquatic plants for food than on poplar and alder, the primary foods of the beaver of the Mackenzie Delta. Productivity is low and the populations are easily disturbed by man. Previous harvests of fairly low intensity have resulted in large population reductions according to Bryant 1957. Population densities are probably between 0.5 and 1.0 beaver colonies per square mile. (Hawley)

15 The Dall Sheep in the area north of the Rat Pass in the Richardson Mountains seem to be increasing in population despite increased non-selective hunting by residents of the area. In 1964, the population was considered to be about 58 animals from records kept by geologists who flew helicopters extensively throughout the summer. In 1969, over 100 animals were estimated by hunters in one day although they were unable to get exact counts of all groups observed from the ground. No objective, comprehensive surveys or studies have been made of sheep in the area so range and numbers have not been documented. Superficial information indicates this population is discrete and separate from the sheep in the British Mountains and the sheep south of Rat Pass although no physical barrier excludes their mingling. Harvests from the area are not well documented but kills of from 6 to 50 per year have been recorded.

Grizzly Bear are commonly encountered in this area and appear to be quite numerous. Geologists working the area extensively remarked that they saw more bear (80+) than sheep (58 known to be different). (Hawley)

Confirmation of Dall Sheep occurrences in the Richardson Mountains by Barry, Bissett 1967, Williams and Stevens.

UNIT NUMBER

DESCRIPTION

- 16 This unit encompasses the Mackenzie Delta which extends north on the Port Brabant sheet. An Arctic Char migration occurs up the Husky Channel and Rat River areas of this unit from August 15th to freeze up approximately September 5th. (Barry) The Delta is considered a critical area and sustains a wide variety of fish and wildlife resources. This unit is discussed in detail in the description of the Port Brabant map sheet.
- 17 The lower portion of Jackfish Creek and Rengling River is used by resident Grizzly Bear year round. Den sites have been reported but not pinpointed. No investigation of abundance has been made although fresh tracks are common throughout the summer within the area.
- The lower portion of Jackfish and Rengling River and the edge of the Delta in that area is an important wintering ground for moose which summer further east and south. Although the total population is not large (not precisely known) it is concentrated. A fire along the northeast edge has reduced use of that area temporarily. (Hawley)

REFERENCES

Personal Communications

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V. D. Hawley (Canadian Wildlife Service)
W. E. Stevens
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R. Williams
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