

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The primary objectives of the NIRB are set out in Article 12, Section 12.2.5 of the *Nunavut Agreement* and are confirmed by s. 23 of the *NuPPAA*. The purpose of screening is provided for under Article 12, Section 12.4.1 of the *Nunavut Agreement* and s. 88 of the *NuPPAA*.

As set out under Article 12, Section 12.4.4 of the *Nunavut Agreement* and s. 92(1) of the *NuPPAA*, upon conclusion of the screening process, the Board must provide its written report the Minister indicating one of three options:

- (a) a review of the project is not required;
- (b) a review of the project is required; or
- (c) the project should be modified or abandoned.

PROJECT OVERVIEW & THE NIRB ASSESSMENT PROCESS

On October 28, 2025, the NIRB received a referral to screen McGill University’s “Assessing changing cryohydrogeologic conditions with locally relevant landscape indicators in Nunavut, Canada” project proposal (NIRB File No: 25YN076) from the Nunavut Planning Commission (Commission), with an accompanying positive conformity determination with the Keewatin Regional Land Use Plan. All documents received and pertaining to this project proposal can be accessed from the NIRB’s Public Registry by using any of the following search criteria or www.nirb.ca/project/126246.

- Project Name: Assessing changing cryohydrogeologic conditions with locally relevant landscape indicators in Nunavut, Canada
- NIRB File No.: 25YN076
- NIRB Application No.: 126246

Table 1: NIRB’s Assessment Process

Date	Stage
October 28, 2025	Receipt of project proposal and positive conformity determination (Keewatin Regional Land Use Plan) from the Commission
October 29, 2025	Receipt of online application from Proponent
October 29, 2025	Scoping pursuant to s. 86(1) of the <i>NuPPAA</i>
November 27, 2025	Translated Public engagement and comment request (which included terms and conditions) was issued in English and Inuktitut
December 8, 2025	Receipt of public comments
December 12, 2025	Pursuant to Article 12 s 12.4.5 of the <i>Nunavut Agreement</i> and s. 92(3) of the <i>NuPPAA</i> , an extension to the 45-day timeline for the provision of the Board’s Report was requested from the Minister of Nunavut Arctic College
January 20, 2026	Issuance of Screening Decision Report

1. Project Scope

Location	The project covers seven winter overflow sites in the Kivalliq and South Baffin regions, including locations near Arviat, Rankin Inlet, Whale Cove, Coral Harbour, and Iqaluit. Sites are 10–125 km from communities and occur on Municipal, Inuit Owned, and Crown lands
Objective	The proponent aims to assess changing cryohydrogeologic conditions by integrating Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ) with scientific groundwater and permafrost studies. Expected outcomes include understanding why overflow areas form, improving predictions of future overflow hazards, and supporting safer winter travel planning.
Timeline	Field campaigns occur twice per year (Fall and Spring), with sampling also during Winter 2025/26 and Winter 2026/27 if needed.

As required under s. 86(1) of the *NuPPAA*, the Board accepted the scope of the project as set out by McGill University in the proposal. The scope of the project proposal includes the following undertakings, works, or activities:

- Travel to the sample sites via snowmobile, ATV, or truck;
- Travel to and from sites will take place when a local community member deems it safe and at times to not disrupt community members or wildlife activities (i.e. caribou);
- Set up trail cameras mounted on wooden posts facing the overflow areas and nearby lakes which will take daily photographs;
- Collect water samples (less than 4L) from overflow water and nearby lakes twice a year, once in the Fall and once in the Spring (not using boats);
- Install small Solinst leveloggers and iButton sensors in the waterbody to record daily water temperature, electrical conductivity, and water level;
- Share research results with each community’s Hamlet Office, Hunters and Trappers Organization, and Wildlife Office;
- Clean up all sites at the end of the project, remove all materials taken to the sites.

2. Inclusion or Exclusion to Scoping List

The NIRB has identified no additional works or activities in relation to the project proposal. As a result, the NIRB will proceed with screening the project based on the scope as described above.

3. Public Comments and Concerns

As outlined in Table 1 above, notices regarding the NIRB’s screening of this project proposal were distributed to community organizations as well as to relevant federal and territorial government agencies, Inuit organizations and other parties with a request for interested parties to provide the Board with any comments or concerns regarding:

- Whether the project proposal is likely to arouse significant public concern; and if so, why;
- Whether the project proposal is likely to cause significant adverse eco-systemic or socio-economic effects; and if so, why;
- Whether the project proposal is likely to cause significant adverse impacts on wildlife habitat or Inuit harvest activities; and if so, why;

- Whether the project proposal is of a type where the potential adverse effects are highly predictable and mitigable with known technology, (and providing any recommended mitigation measures); and
- Any matter of importance to the Party related to the project proposal.

Additionally, proposed project-specific terms and conditions, should the project proceed, were attached for consideration and comment.

On or before December 8, 2025, the NIRB received comments from the following interested parties:

Table 2: Comments Received

Commenting Party	NIRB Doc ID No.
Government of Nunavut (GN)	358460
Transport Canada (TC)	358454

a. Summary of Comments and Concerns Received

The following provides a summary of the comments and concerns received by the NIRB in relation to the Assessing changing cryohydrogeologic conditions with locally-relevant landscape indicators in Nunavut project proposal:

- GN and TC did not have any comments on the project proposal

4. b. Comments and Concerns with respect to Inuit Qaujimaningit, Indigenous and Community Knowledge

No concerns or comments were received with respect to Inuit Qaujimaningit or Indigenous and Community knowledge in relation to the proposed project. However, Inuit Qaujimaningit and Indigenous and community knowledge is incorporated into the terms and conditions recommended below based on information collected from prior and similar projects, data collected and mapped by the Commission, and other available sources.

ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ACCORDANCE WITH PART 3 OF NuPPAA

In determining whether a review of the project is required, the Board considered whether the project proposal had potential to result in significant ecosystemic or socio-economic impacts. Table 3. The Board took particular care to consider Inuit Qaujimaningit, Indigenous and Community Knowledge in carrying out its assessment and determination of the significance of impacts.

Table 3: Summary of the Board’s Assessment of Factors s. 90 NuPPAA

Factor	Comment
The size of the geographic area, including the size of wildlife habitats, likely to be affected by the impacts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The project consists of seven discrete, point-based sampling sites and involves no construction, land clearing, drilling, or permanent infrastructure, spanning locations of up to 125 km from key

Factor	Comment
	<p>communities and 2 km away from Ikkattuaq Migratory Bird Sanctuary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proposed project would take place within habitats of far-ranging wildlife species such as caribou, wolves, grizzly bears, arctic fox, arctic hare, migratory and non-migratory birds, and Species at Risk such as Polar Bears. While sites occur within general wildlife habitat ranges, no habitat alteration, loss, or fragmentation is proposed the project is localized and temporary.
<p>The ecosystemic sensitivity of that area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No specific areas of ecosystemic sensitivity have been identified by the Proponent within the physical footprint of the proposed project. The sites are not located within protected or critical habitats, and the project involves no land clearing, excavation, or habitat modification. All activities are temporary and low-intensity, and therefore the ecosystems in the project area are not considered sensitive to the proposed works and activities.
<p>The historical, cultural and archaeological significance of that area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No specific areas of historical, cultural and archaeological significance have been identified by the Proponent within the physical footprint of the proposed project.
<p>The size of the human and the animal populations likely to be affected by the impacts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proposed project is unlikely to result in impacts to local human and animal populations.
<p>The nature, magnitude and complexity of the impacts; the probability of the impacts occurring; the frequency and duration of the impacts; and the reversibility or irreversibility of the impacts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For low-impact, short-duration activities, the zone of influence is typically limited to the immediate area surrounding active work sites, where effects are expected to be localized and temporary. ▪ With adherence to the relevant regulatory requirements and application of the mitigation measures recommended by the NIRB, no significant residual effects are expected to occur.
<p>The cumulative impacts that could result from the impacts of the project combined with those of any other project that has been carried out, is being carried out or is likely to be carried out.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The project is not expected to contribute to any meaningful cumulative impacts. Activities are temporary, infrequent, and non-invasive, and do not involve land clearing, habitat alteration, or permanent infrastructure. Access occurs along existing community travel routes, and all equipment is removed at the end of the project. As a result, the project does not add to long-term landscape change or ongoing disturbance.

Factor	Comment
Any other factor that the Board considers relevant to the assessment of the significance of impacts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No other relevant factors were identified; however, see below for Regulatory Requirements mandating mitigation and/or reporting.

VIEWS OF THE BOARD

In considering the above factors, the Board has identified the following and respectfully provides its views regarding whether or not the proposed project has the potential to result in significant impacts. The NIRB has also proposed terms and conditions that would mitigate the potential adverse impacts identified.

Ecosystem, wildlife habitat and Inuit harvesting activities:

Valued Component	Wildlife (Terrestrial Species and Species at Risk)
Potential effects:	Temporary and localized disturbance to wildlife associated with overland travel and field personnel presence during fieldwork.
Nature of Impacts:	The potential for impacts is considered to be limited due to infrequent and temporary activities. No habitat alteration, vegetation removal, fragmentation, or mortality risk is expected, and no population-level effects are anticipated. All effects are fully reversible.
Mitigating Factors:	Proponent intends to travel to and from the field locations with community members on regularly utilized community routes and only when the conditions are safe and at times that will not disrupt local community member and wildlife activities. All equipment is small, temporary, and removed at the end of the project.
Proposed Terms and Conditions:	Wildlife General – 7 through 9 Migratory Birds and Raptor Disturbance – 10 and 11 Caribou and Muskoxen Disturbance – 12 through 14 Land Use and Restoration of Disturbed Areas – 15

Valued Component	Soil and Vegetation
Potential effects:	Negligible, short-term, and localized effects associated with temporary human presence along existing community travel routes
Nature of Impacts:	The potential for impacts is considered to be limited due to infrequent and temporary activities. The project does not involve soil disturbance, excavation, compaction, grading, or vegetation removal. All effects are temporary, low magnitude, and fully reversible
Mitigating Factors:	The Proponent indicated that sites will be accessed using regularly utilized community routes. No waste will be deposited, and all equipment will be removed at the end of the project.
Proposed Terms and Conditions:	Land Use and Restoration of Disturbed Areas – 15 through 17

Valued Component	Public and Traditional Land Use Activities
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Potential effects:	Negligible, short-term, and localized effects associated with temporary human presence. No interference with harvesting, travel, or other traditional land use activities is anticipated however, the Board is recommending terms and conditions to ensure project activities are informed by available Inuit Qaujimaningit and that project activities do not interfere with Inuit wildlife harvesting or traditional land use activities.
Nature of Impacts:	The potential for impacts is minimal due to the temporary and low-impact nature of the activities and any resulting impacts would be expected to be reversible.
Mitigating Factors:	The Proponent will coordinate timing of site visits with local community members and use existing travel routes to avoid interfering with harvesting or other land use activities.
Proposed Terms and Conditions:	Other – 18 and 19

Socio-economic effects on northerners:

Valued Component	Economic Impact, and Local Business
Potential effects:	Potential positive impacts to the local communities are minor, short term, and localized, and based on potential use of local harvesters, guides, and services resulting from the proposed research activities.
Nature of Impacts:	Impacts are low magnitude, localized, temporary, and positive in nature. No long-term or regional-scale economic effects are anticipated
Mitigating Factors:	The Proponent has committed to using local services and hiring locally where possible, which supports short-term community-level economic benefits.
Proposed Terms and Conditions:	Other – 20

Technological innovations for which the effects are unknown:

- No specific issues have been identified associated with this project proposal.

Administrative Conditions:

To encourage compliance with applicable regulatory requirements and assist the Board and responsible authorities with compliance and effects monitoring for project activities, the following project-specific terms and conditions have been recommended: 1-5.

In considering the above factors and subject to the Proponent’s compliance with regulatory requirements and the terms and conditions necessary to mitigate against the potential adverse environmental and social effects, the Board is of the view that the proposed project is unlikely to cause significant public concern and its adverse ecosystemic and socioeconomic impacts are unlikely to be significant, or are highly predictable and can be adequately mitigated by known technologies.

The Board is recommending the following specific terms and conditions to apply in respect of the project:

General

1. McGill University (the Proponent) shall maintain a copy of the Project Terms and Conditions at the site of operation at all times and make it accessible to enforcement officers upon request.
2. The Proponent shall operate in accordance with all commitments stated in correspondence provided to the Nunavut Planning Commission (NPC File No.: 150949), and the NIRB (Online Application Form, October 28, 2025; Project Summary, October 28, 2025, and Additional Information, October 28, 2025). This information should be accessible to enforcement officers upon request.
3. The Proponent shall operate the site in accordance with all applicable Acts, Regulations and Guidelines.
4. The Proponent shall ensure that it meets the standards and/or limits as set out in the authorizing agencies' permits or licences as required for this project.
5. The Proponent shall ensure that all personnel, staff and contractors are adequately trained prior to commencement of all project activities, and shall be made aware of all operational plans, management plans, guidelines and Proponent commitments relating to the project.

Air Quality

6. The Proponent shall eliminate unnecessary idling to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as much as possible.

Wildlife – General

7. The Proponent shall not chase, weary, harass or molest wildlife. This includes persistently circling, chasing, hovering over, pursuing or in any other way harass wildlife, or disturbing large groups of animals.
8. The Proponent shall not hunt or fish, unless proper Nunavut authorizations have been acquired.
9. The Proponent shall ensure that all wildlife have the right-of-way on any roads or trails. Vehicles are required to slow down or stop and wait to permit the free and unrestricted movement of wildlife across roads or trails at any location.

Migratory Birds and Raptors Disturbance

10. The Proponent shall carry out all phases of the project in a manner that protects migratory birds and avoids harming, killing or disturbing migratory birds or destroying, disturbing or taking their nests or eggs. In this regard, the Proponent shall take into account Environment and Climate Change Canada's *Avoidance Guidelines*. The Proponent's actions in applying the *Avoidance Guidelines* shall be in compliance with the *Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994* and with the *Species at Risk Act*.
11. The Proponent shall not disturb or destroy the nests or eggs of any birds. If active nests of any birds are discovered or located (i.e., with eggs or young), the Proponent shall avoid these

areas until nesting is complete and the young have naturally left the vicinity of the nest by establishing a protection buffer zone¹ appropriate for the species and the surrounding habitat.

Caribou and Muskoxen Disturbance

12. The Proponent shall avoid interfering with any paths or crossings known to be frequented by caribou during periods of migration as identified by current land use plans in place and/or by Inuit Qaujimaningit.
13. The Proponent shall not locate any operation or undertake activities that could block or cause any diversion to migration of caribou or muskoxen.
14. The Proponent shall immediately cease activities likely to interfere with the migration or calving of caribou or muskoxen until such time as the caribou or muskox have passed.

Land Use and Restoration of Disturbed Areas

15. The Proponent shall use existing trails where possible during project activities on the land.
16. The Proponent shall ensure that the land use area is kept clean and tidy at all times.
17. The Proponent shall remove all garbage, fuel and equipment at the end of each field season and/or upon completion of work and/or upon abandonment.

Other

18. The Proponent should engage with local residents regarding planned activities in the area and should solicit available Inuit Qaujimaningit and information regarding current recreational and traditional usage of the project area which may inform project activities. Posting of translated public notices and direct engagement with potentially interested groups and individuals prior to undertaking project activities is strongly encouraged.
19. The Proponent shall ensure that project activities do not interfere with Inuit wildlife harvesting or traditional land use activities.
20. The Proponent should, to the extent possible, hire local people and access local services where possible.

OTHER NIRB CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the project-specific terms and conditions, the Board is recommending the following:

Change in Project Scope

1. Responsible authorities or Proponent shall notify the Nunavut Planning Commission and/or Parks Canada as appropriate, and the NIRB of any changes in operating plans or conditions, including phase advancement, associated with this project prior to any such change.

¹ Recommended setback distances to define buffer zones have been established by Environment and Climate Change Canada for different bird groups nesting in tundra habitat and can be found at www.ec.gc.ca/paom-itmb.

Copy of licences, etc. to the Board and Commission

2. The NIRB respectfully requests that responsible authorities submit a copy of each licence, permit or other authorization issued for the Project to the NIRB to assist in enabling possible project monitoring that may be required. Please forward a copy of the licences, permits and/or other authorizations to the NIRB directly at info@nirb.ca or upload a copy to the NIRB's online registry at www.nirb.ca.

Use of Inuit Qaujimaningit

3. The Proponent is encouraged to work with local communities and knowledge holders to inform project design, to carry out the project, and to confirm or validate the perspectives represented in publications, and reports as part of the project. Care should be taken to ensure that Inuit Qaujimaningit and local knowledge collected for the project is used with permission and is accurately represented.

Bear and Carnivore Safety

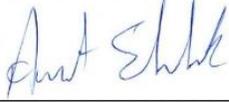
4. The Proponent should review the Government of Nunavut's booklet on Bear Safety, which can be downloaded from this link: http://gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/bear_safety_-_reducing_bear-people_conflicts_in_nunavut.pdf. Further information on bear/carnivore detection and deterrent techniques can be found in the "*Safety in Grizzly and Black Bear Country*" pamphlet, which can be downloaded from this link: https://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/sites/enr/files/resources/safety_in_grizzly_and_black_bear_country_english.pdf.
5. There are polar bear and grizzly bear safety resources available from the Bear Smart Society with videos on polar bear safety available in English, French and Inuktitut at <http://www.bearsmart.com/play/safety-in-polar-bear-country/>. Information can also be obtained from Parks Canada's website on bear safety at the following link: <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/nu/quttinirpaaq/visit/visit6/d.aspx> or in reviewing the "*Safety in Polar Bear Country*" pamphlet, which can be downloaded from the following link: http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/nu/quttinirpaaq/visit/visit6/~/_media/pn-np/nu/auyuittuq/pdf/shared/PolarBearSafety_English.ashx.
6. Any problem wildlife or any interaction with carnivores should be reported immediately to the local Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment Conservation Office.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing constitutes the Board's screening decision with respect to McGill University's "Assessing changing cryohydrogeologic conditions with locally relevant landscape indicators in

Nunavut, Canada”. The NIRB remains available for consultation with the Minister regarding this report as necessary.

Dated January 20, 2026 at Iqaluit, NU.



Albert Ehaloak, *Acting* Chairperson

Attachments: Appendix A: Species at Risk in Nunavut

APPENDIX A: SPECIES AT RISK IN NUNAVUT

Due to the requirements of Section 79(2) of the *Species at Risk Act*, S.C. 2002, c. 29 (*SARA*), and the potential for project-specific adverse effects on listed wildlife species and its critical habitat, measures should be taken as appropriate to avoid or lessen those effects, and the effects need to be monitored. Project effects could include species disturbance, attraction to operations and destruction of habitat. This section applies to all species listed on Schedule 1 of *SARA*, as listed in the table below, or have been assessed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), which may be encountered in the project area. This list may not include all species identified as at risk by the Territorial Government. The following points provide clarification on the applicability of the species outlined in the table.

- Schedule 1 is the official legal list of Species at Risk for *SARA*. *SARA* applies to all species on Schedule 1. The term “listed” species refers to species on Schedule 1.
- Schedule 2 and 3 of *SARA* identify species that were designated at risk by the COSEWIC prior to October 1999 and must be reassessed using revised criteria before they can be considered for addition to Schedule 1.
- Some species identified at risk by COSEWIC are “pending” addition to Schedule 1 of *SARA*. These species are under consideration for addition to Schedule 1, subject to further consultation or assessment.

If species at risk are encountered or affected, the primary mitigation measure should be avoidance. The Proponent should avoid contact with or disturbance to each species, its habitat and/or its residence. All direct, indirect, and cumulative effects should be considered. Refer to species status reports and other information on the Species at Risk Registry at <http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca> for information on specific species.

Monitoring should be undertaken by the Proponent to determine the effectiveness of mitigation and/or identify where further mitigation is required. As a minimum, this monitoring should include recording the locations and dates of any observations of Species at Risk, behaviour or actions taken by the animals when project activities were encountered, and any actions taken by the proponent to avoid contact or disturbance to the species, its habitat, and/or its residence. This information should be submitted to the appropriate regulators and organizations with management responsibility for that species, as requested.

For species primarily managed by the Territorial Government, the Territorial Government should be consulted to identify other appropriate mitigation and/or monitoring measures to minimize effects to these species from the project.

Mitigation and monitoring measures must be undertaken in a way that is consistent with applicable recovery strategies and action/management plans.

Schedules of *SARA* are amended on a regular basis, so it is important to check the *SARA* registry (www.sararegistry.gc.ca) to get the current status of a species.

Updated: September 2024

Terrestrial Species at Risk²	COSEWIC Designation	Schedule of SARA	Government Organization with Primary Management Responsibility³
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	Special Concern	Schedule 1	Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)
Common Nighthawk	Threatened	Schedule 1	ECCC
Eskimo Curlew	Endangered	Schedule 1	ECCC
Harlequin Duck	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Harris's Sparrow	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Horned Grebe	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Ivory Gull	Endangered	Schedule 1	ECCC
Olive-sided Flycatcher	Threatened	Schedule 1	ECCC
Peregrine Falcon	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Red Knot Islandica Subspecies	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Red-necked Phalarope	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Ross's Gull	Threatened	Schedule 1	ECCC
Rusty Blackbird	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Short-eared Owl	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Porsild's Bryum	Threatened	Schedule 1	Government of Nunavut (GN)
Transverse Lady Beetle	Special Concern	No Schedule	GN
Caribou (Dolphin and Union Population)	Endangered	Schedule 1	GN
Caribou (Barren-ground Population)	Threatened	No Schedule	GN
Caribou (Torngat Mountains Population)	Endangered	No Schedule	GN
Grizzly Bear (Western Population)	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Peary Caribou	Endangered	Schedule 1	GN
Polar Bear	Special Concern	Schedule 1	ECCC
Wolverine	Special Concern	Schedule 1	GN
Atlantic Walrus (High Arctic Population)	Special Concern	No Schedule	Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)
Atlantic Walrus (Central/Low Arctic Population)	Special Concern	No Schedule	DFO
Beluga Whale (Cumberland Sound Population)	Threatened	Schedule 1	DFO
Beluga Whale (Eastern Hudson Bay Population)	Endangered	No Schedule	DFO
Beluga Whale (Eastern High Arctic-Baffin Bay Population)	Special Concern	No Schedule	DFO
Beluga Whale (Western Hudson Bay Population)	Special Concern	No Schedule	DFO
Atlantic Cod (Arctic Lakes Population)	Special Concern	No Schedule	DFO
Fourhorn Sculpin (Freshwater Form)	Data Deficient	Schedule 3	DFO
Lumpfish	Threatened	No Schedule	DFO
Thorny Skate	Special Concern	No Schedule	DFO

² The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has responsibility for aquatic species.

³ Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) has a national role to play in the conservation and recovery of Species at Risk in Canada, as well as responsibility for management of birds described in the Migratory Birds Convention Act (MBCA). Day-to-day management of terrestrial species not covered in the MBCA is the responsibility of the Territorial Government. Populations that exist in National Parks are also managed under the authority of the Parks Canada Agency.