

Terrestrial Ecozones (Nunavut)

Abstract

Ecozones are one of several levels of ecological regions that cover all of Canada. An ecozone is a discrete system, which has resulted from the mesh and interplay of geology, landform, soil, vegetation, climate, wildlife, water and human factors. Four of the fifteen terrestrial ecozones of Canada are found in Nunavut: Northern Arctic, Arctic Cordillera, Southern Arctic, and Taiga Shield.

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1. Northern Arctic

Most of the land in the Territory lies in the Northern Arctic, a non-mountainous region of dark winters where snow can fall year round. The ground is covered with snow from September until June, although total average annual precipitation is under 200 centimetres. During the short summer, the sun shines almost 24 hours a day and the bare landscape is strewn with colourful flowers. The peoples of the Arctic have inhabited this region for over 5000 years. Sparsely populated, the ecozones main economic activities remain hunting, trapping and fishing.

2. Arctic Cordillera

The highest peaks are found in the Arctic Cordillera along the eastern edge of the Territory. The summit is Barbeau Peak, on Ellesmere Island, which reaches a height of 2616 metres. Characterized by windswept vistas of ice and rock, this ecozone is largely devoid of plants and animals. An exception is provided by pockets of tundra meadow where ground-hugging shrubs and colourful flowers appear during the brief summer. In contrast, there is a wealth of marine life. The fjords and coastlines harbour populations of Bowhead Whale, Narwhal Whale and Polar Bear. Ellesmere and Auyuittuq national parks were established to protect these spectacular landscapes for future generations. This is the most sparsely populated ecozone in Canada.

3. Southern Arctic

The Southern Arctic is characterized by its many lakes, which are surrounded by wet sedge meadows and sprawling shrublands. Here, abundant large mammals, such as caribou, muskoxen and moose, have attracted Dene and Inuit hunters for thousands of years. Much of the local economy is still based on subsistence hunting, trapping, and fishing.

4. Taiga Shield

The south-western part of Nunavut is located in the Taiga Shield. The term “taiga” refers to the northern edge of the boreal coniferous forest, sometimes referred to as the “land of little sticks.” Combining Boreal and Arctic climates flora and fauna, this region, rich in game and minerals, was first settled over 7000 years ago. The abundance of water in the Taiga Shield attracts hundreds of thousands of birds which come to nest or rest and feed on their way to arctic breeding grounds.

Map Sources

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References

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Related Web sites (1999 – 2009)

Federal Government

Environment Canada. Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Network (EMAN)
<http://www.eman-rese.ca/>