

October 2026

Planning for the Future of Herschel Island-Qikiqtaruk

The Inuvialuit Final Agreement recognizes the importance of Qikiqtaruk to Inuvialuit, through the creation of the Yukon's first territorial park. Care for this special place is guided by a management plan, but the land and sea are changing quickly. Coastal erosion, flooding, changing weather patterns, and impacts to heritage buildings are creating new challenges for park operations, Inuvialuit use and visitor experiences. We need to plan together to adapt to these changes.

Share your Thoughts

What is most important about Qikiqtaruk's future?

- Protecting heritage buildings
- Supporting Inuvialuit use and access
- Cultural camps and programs
- Research and learning opportunities
- Visitor experiences
- Environmental protection
- Other priorities

Working Together

Planning for Change in 2026

- **JAN** Working group meeting
- **MAY** Working group meeting
- **AUG** Elders and youth camp at Qikiqtaruk
- **SEPT** Working group meeting
- **OCT** **Community dinner and workshop (we are here!) ←**
- **NOV** Working group will share "What We Heard" summary and plan for next steps
- **2027** Working group will continue to provide updates to the community

Community open house, dinner and workshop

October 20, 2026

Open House: 2:00 to 4:30 pm

Community Dinner and Workshop: 5:00 to 6:00 pm

Visit: Herschel Island-Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park | Yukon.ca

What is Changing on Qikiqtaruk?

Recent years have brought considerable change to the Park. New weather patterns, flooding, and environmental instability are presenting new operational challenges for safety, logistics, and access. Heritage buildings are requiring increasing attention to conserve their heritage value and park function. Park visitation has shifted considerably, with cruise ship traffic representing the main vehicle for visitors. Inuvialuit visitation has changed, too.

It is an important time to come together to discuss how we can plan for change.



Above, top: comparison of dry and flooded periods in the summer of 2026 on Qikiqtaruk showing low water (left; 7 Aug 2026) and high (right; 17 June 2026). In 2026, during high waters, much of the area around the Pauline Cove Settlement had standing water, the northern shoreline was lost and the southern shoreline was actively eroded. Water flowed in and out of the settlement area through the northern shore, indicated by blue arrows.

Below: a comparison of photos taken of the air strip (foreground) on the same dates, where it completely flooded during high water on June 17. Graphic courtesy Team Shrub.

Vision for HIQ-TP



"Herschel Island-Qikiqtaruk is a place of traditional use, connection to the land, and where knowledge is shared with future generations. As a unique Arctic island, Herschel Island-Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park has a special role as a gathering place where Inuvialuit welcome and benefit from visitors experiencing, learning about and celebrating the island and its cultural and natural history. Those who manage and take care of the island work together to fulfill the Elders' vision of Qikiqtaruk as a park to protect and sustain the ecological integrity and heritage values for generations to come."

Herschel Island - Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park Management Plan 2019

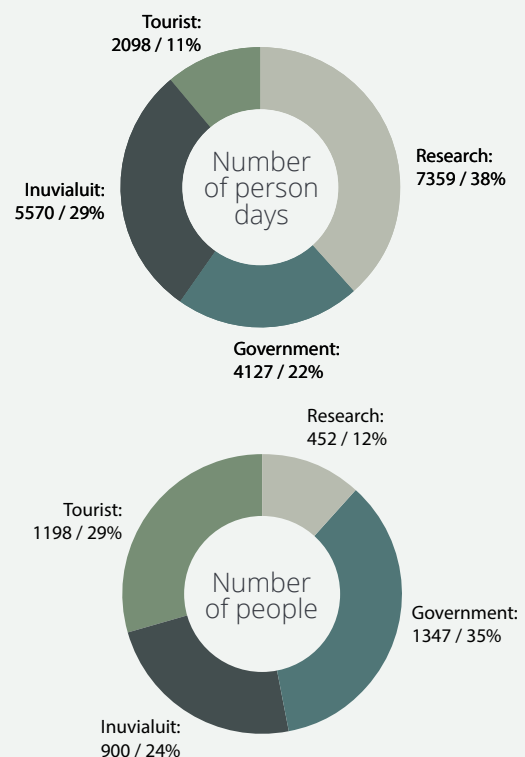
Who uses the Park?

These charts show the number of person days and number of people by group from 2005–2025, excluding cruise ship visitors and minor groups such as media.

Key park management priorities include protecting the ecological integrity in part by minimizing and mitigating the impact of visitors, and enhance Inuvialuit connections to the island, specifically by supporting initiatives that provide time on the island such as Elders/Youth camp and Inuvialuit student internship.

It is an important time to come together to discuss how we can plan for change.

2005–2025

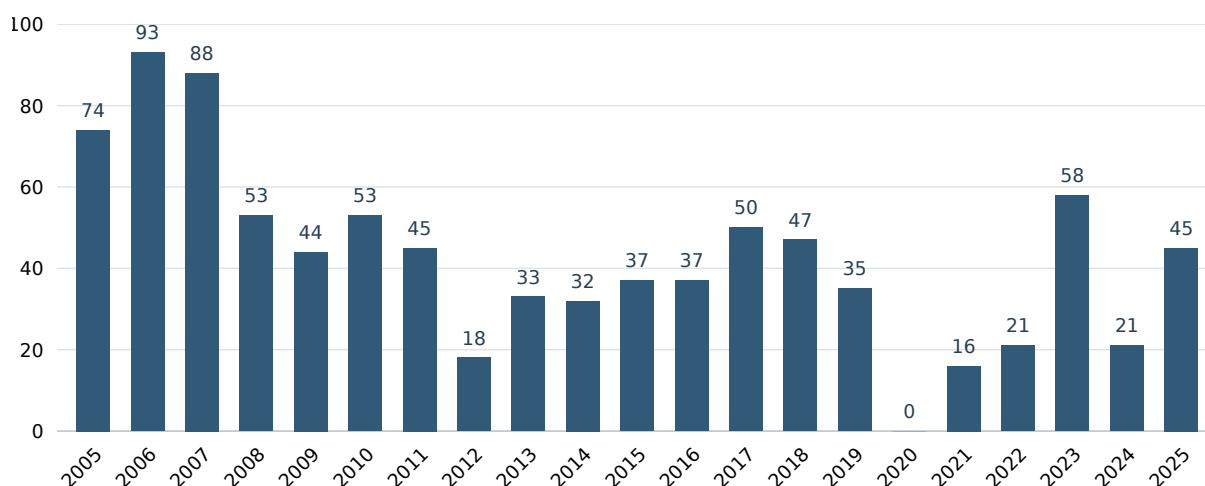


Inuvialuit Presence and Leadership on Qikiqtaruk

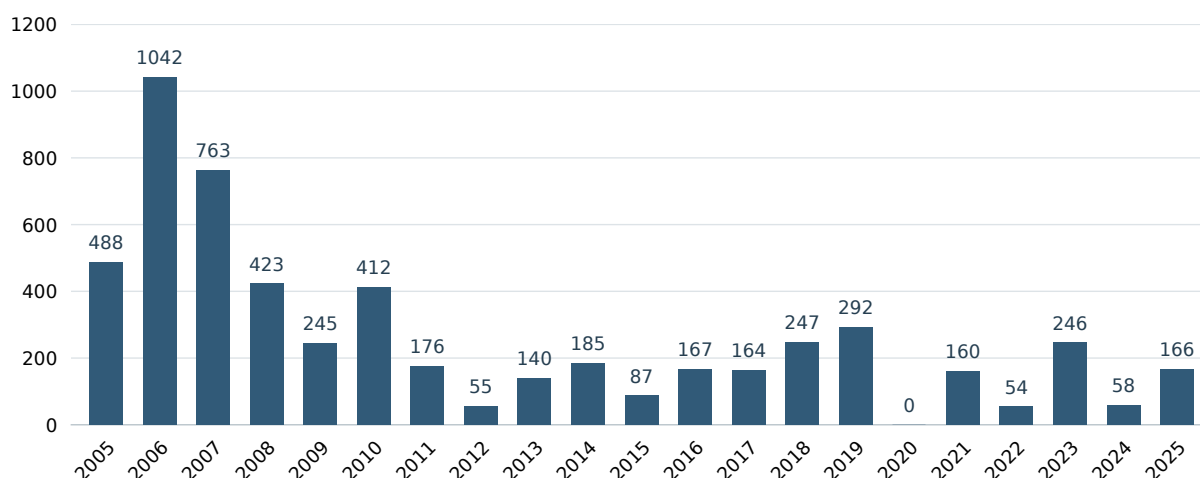
Strengthening Inuvialuit time and leadership on the Island is a key management priority for Qikiqtaruk. The 2016 visitation summary noted a decline in Inuvialuit presence, linked to a pause in Elders/Youth camps and reduced seasonal visits by the Mackenzie family. Since then, key initiatives have successfully renewed Inuvialuit engagement on the island, including:

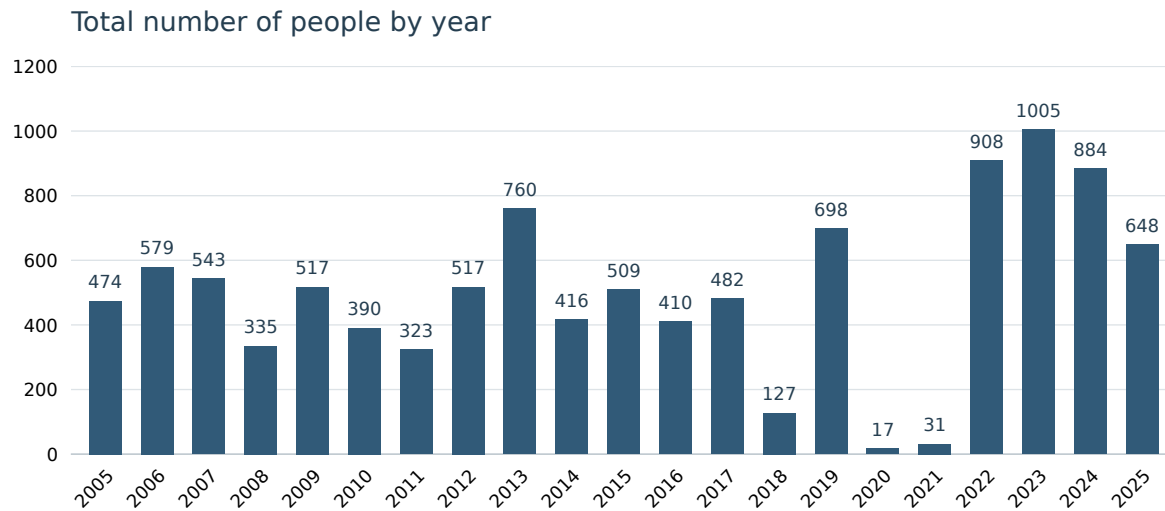
- Inuvialuit student internship (Yukon Parks & Team Shrub)
- Elders/Youth camps in 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021 (Aklavik HTC, Yukon Parks)
- Increased employment of Inuvialuit field support (Researchers)
- Continued support for Inuvialuit involvement in cruise ship visits (Yukon Parks)

Total number of Inuvialuit persons by year



Total number of Inuvialuit person days by year





Youth and Elders On the Land Camp



Qikiqtaruk On the Land Camp (OTL) 2026
Photo: Paden Lennie

Herschel Island-Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park (HIQ) in partnership with the Aullaviat/ Anguniarvik Working Group (AAWG), hosted a seven-day On the Land Camp (OTL) with 14 participants from Aklavik in August, 2026. The goal of the OTL was to give Inuvialuit the opportunity to gain access and learn about HIQ, a place to share stories, pass

on traditional knowledge/history and participate in traditional and subsistence activities alongside YG Parks and Heritage staff, Land Guardians and researchers. Two camp cooks and two knowledge holders were hired and worked with the AAWG land guardians to facilitate the camp and activities. As learning opportunities, Alfred Wagner Institute (AWI) hosted a research activity and Government of Yukon Archaeology and Paleontology staff held an artifact session. Participants involved in the camp varied in age from young youth (7) to Elders, which was a unique opportunity to see the participants learn and experience many camp life activities and research projects as well as learn about monitoring that is ongoing on Qikiqtaruk.

Heritage Buildings at Risk

Qikiqtaruk contains some of the Yukon and Inuvialuit Settlement Region's most significant heritage buildings. Many are experiencing increasing impacts from flooding, erosion, and changing environmental conditions.



Did you know?

- Some buildings on Qikiqtaruk are more than 130 years old.
- Several buildings have already been moved inland to avoid erosion.
- The island contains important Inuvialuit, whaling, RCMP, and mission-era heritage.
- Historic buildings continue to support research, storage, interpretation, and cultural programs.



Northern Whaling & Trading Company Store and Warehouse (NW&TCO Store)

History and Value

Christian Pedersen built the NW&TCO Store in 1926. Pedersen was born in Norway but lived in the United States. His company traded furs from Alaska all the way to Banks Island and beyond. His company left Qikiqtaruk in 1936. The building was then used by the RCMP until 1964.

Its function as a store, gives it the strongest connection to Pedersen's NW&TCO Company.

Use

The NW&TCO Store was re-roofed in 2022 and currently is used to store tools and materials for building maintenance. It is also used by researchers to store equipment.

Current Situation

In 2001 a large addition on the west wall was ruined in a storm and removed. Between 2003-04 the NW&TCO Store was lifted and moved 10m inland away from Ilutaq (Pauline Cove). Continued erosion led to the building being moved an additional 8m in 2024. Despite this move, cribbed supports continued to be washed away in storms. In 2026 a stainless-steel support was dug into the beach at the northwest corner. It is hoped that this will prove harder for storms to dislodge. The building remains under severe threat from erosion.



Northern Whaling & Trading Company Shed (NW&TCO Shed)

History and Value

It is believed that Christian Pedersen's built the Shed for the Northern Whaling & Trading Company shortly after 1926.

The Shed is considered the least historically significant of the NW&TCO buildings because of its small size and humble function. Its reuse of material from a ship characterises the ethic of reuse which was common on Qikiqtaruk.

Current Use

The Shed is used for general storage and sometimes for garbage before its removal from the island.

Current Situation

The NW&TCO Shed was lifted and moved inland away from Ilutaq (Pauline Cove) in 2008 but was not moved in 2024. During highwater, water flows under the building and its northwest corner overhangs the cove. Its roof leaks and it is under severe threat from erosion.



Canada Customs Warehouse

History and Value

Built by Christian Pedersen's NW&TCO in 1926 and used by the RCMP from 1936 to 1964. Afterwards it was used as storage by researchers and Inuvialuit.

Similarly to the NW&TCO Store, the Customs Warehouse is associated with fur trading. The Warehouse provided storage for Pedersen's American operations. Items inside were not subject to Canadian customs duties and monitored by the RCMP to ensure compliance. This links the Warehouse to the assertion of Canadian sovereignty in the western arctic.

Use

The Customs Warehouse is currently used for general storage, but the poor condition of the roof makes it suitable only for items of lesser value.

Current Situation

The Customs Warehouse was moved away from Ilutaq (Pauline Cove) in 2001 and 2024. The building's entire footprint is underwater during high water events. The roof leaks and its replacement has been planned. While shielded from Ilutaq by the NW&TCO Store the Custom's Warehouse is still threatened by erosion.



Community House

History and Value

The Pacific Steam Whaling Co (PSWCo) built the Community House in 1893. It functioned as a recreational space for whaling crews while over-wintering. Its social use continued with its next user being Anglican Minister Issac Stringer. Stringer lived in the building and likely held services there. In 1906 the RNWMP took over the building, and it remained their centre of operations on Qikiqtaruk until they left permanently in 1964, after which time both researchers and Inuvialuit used the Community House until the opening of the park. It is recognised for its sturdy craftsmanship.

Use

The Community House has many uses: Yukon Parks office, interpretive centre and hosting visitors and events, lodging and food preparation, and storage (artifacts and general).

Current Situation

The Community House was lifted onto cribbing in 2023 and is situated on a slightly raised area of Simpson Point. It is not currently in danger from flooding or erosion. The Community House interior is only partially useable due to mold.



Bone House

History and Value

The PSWCo built the Community House, Bone House and Blubber House circa 1893 to service their operations in the Beaufort Sea. Along with the two other buildings the Bone House is an integral part of this group of buildings. It has throughout its life been a support building for the Community House. Originally it was used to store whale baleen, and it likely held church services for a short time. The most notable event associated with the Bone House was the murder trial and subsequent hanging of two Inuit men in 1924.

Current Situation

The Bone House remains on grade and is under significant flooding risk. During high water events water is present in the side bays and the floor of the centre bay is within centimetres of being overtopped. It is currently safe from erosion.

Use

Despite the flood risk, the Bone House is fully utilized: The central bay is used for artifact storage; the western bay is used to store lumber; and the eastern bay houses freezers and other items such as fire fighting equipment.



RCMP Dog Kennels

History and Value

After the Second World War the RCMP returned to Qikiqtaruk and developed a dog breeding program to assist with their arctic operations. This program did not have a lasting impact once dogs were no longer necessary for winter travel.

Use

The dog kennel is unused.

Current Situation

This building is stabilized but it is nearly always flooded. It is not susceptible to erosion.



Signal House

History and Value

Built as a transmitter station by the Canadian Corp of Signals in 1930, the Signal House was used for just eight years. It is associated with the new radio communication technology which connected Qikiqtaruk with the rest of Canada. It was then taken over by the RCMP who used it to lodge the RCMP special constable (normally an Inuvialuit person). Once the park was created the building was used by park rangers. It is unique for being the only building built by the Canadian government on Qikiqtaruk.

Use

The Signal House is used for lodging researchers and other visitors to the island.

Current Situation

The Signal House was built with a slightly raised foundation. It is currently protected from flooding although there is water under parts of the building during highwater events. The building is in good condition, and issues are addressed as they arise.



Blubber House

History and Value

The PSWCo built the Blubber House on or shortly after 1893 to service their operations in the Beaufort Sea. The Blubber House likely housed industrial functions of the Pacific Steam Whaling Company, possibly the processing of whale fat. The PSWCo buildings passed through ownership by the Anglican Church and RCMP. The Blubber House provides context for the other buildings and has some architectural values.

Use

The Blubber House currently functions as a workshop and storage space.

Current Situation

The Blubber House remains on grade and during highwater events water touches the north and east walls. The interior currently appears dry. It is not susceptible to erosion and is in fair condition.



Ikagin House

History and Value

The Ikagin House was built before 1894. Possibly built for the use of whaling Captain James McKenna while overwintering on the island. Ikagin (Rosa Cockney Kisoun) was born in this house and it was also used by other Inuvialuit families through the years.

The Ikagin House is noted for its association with early whaling, good craftsmanship and relationship to Inuvialuit families.

Use

Yukon Parks used the Ikagin House for storage. It is currently used for overflow storage due to the poor condition of the Community House and Customs Warehouse.

Current Situation

The Ikagin House was lifted in 2023. During high water events there is water beneath one half of the building. It is not susceptible to erosion. It is in good condition.



Meyook House

History and Value

The Meyook House was built before 1900 and its original occupants are unknown. Graffiti in the building suggests a relationship to the whaling vessel Karluk. In the 1950s it was home to the Meyook family who lived there until the 1970s. The Meyook House is noted for its age, connection to early whaling and use by the Meyook family. According to the Qikiqtaruk Cultural Study this house was also the home of Anglican Minister Thomas Umauq.

Use

This building received funding from the Alfred Wegener Institute for renovation as a research lab and storage. It is currently used by Alfred Wegener Institute and other researchers.

Current Situation

This building was lifted onto cribbing in 2019. During high water events water reaches the south wall but does not significantly reach under the building. It is not in danger of erosion.



Kayotuk House

History and Value

The Kayotuk House was built before 1900. It is linked to the early whaling period, carries a strong association to the Kayotuk family and exhibits noteworthy Carpenter's Gothic architectural details.

Current Situation

The Kayotuk House remains on grade. During highwater events water reaches the south wall and almost touches the northeast corner. The interior is often damp although it is not susceptible to erosion.

Use

Currently the Kayotuk House is used in a limited capacity for storage.



Anglican Mission House

History and Value

Archdeacon Charles Whittaker, Minister William Fry and a group of Gwitchin from Fort MacPherson built the Anglican Mission House in 1916. It functioned as a rectory, church, and school until the mission closed in the 1930s. It along with the Community House relate the story of the Anglican Church on Qikiqtaruk. It is the only building built for a religious purpose on the island. It is the only multi-story building remaining on the island.

Use

The building is stabilized as a ruined feature but otherwise unused. A colony of Black Guillemots formerly nested in the building but has recently declined.

Current Situation

The Mission House remains on grade and is often surrounded by water. During high water the floor is wet.



Archaeological and Paleontological Monitoring

Yukon Archaeology and Paleontology visited Qikiqtaruk from August 17 to 20th in order to overlap with the community culture camp. This year's field plan only involved monitoring cemeteries, intact archaeological features related to Inuvialuit history, as well as conducting daily beach monitoring to collect artifacts and fossils. Observations were as follows:

An inspection of the heritage site at Avadlek Spit indicates no notable changes in shorelines near heritage features. However, the north end of the spit has recently separated from the island and the breach has widened into two distinct openings changing the shape of the northern end of the spit.

Shoreline erosion at Lopez Point has advanced a further 2 m towards the last intact building at the site. Note: one building washed into the bay during the summer of 2025.

Yukon Archaeology brought a collection of Inuvialuit tools to the Culture Camp that were recovered from excavations of eroded heritage sites at Simpson Point. These were left on display for two days for participants to discuss.

In advance of planned maintenance of the Bone House (Simpson Point), Yukon Archaeology removed a number of artifacts from storage in the building for safe

keeping until better storage location is identified. Yukon Archaeology will have these examined by a conservator and repackaged for a return to the island or move to an agreed upon storage location. Artifacts removed include:

- A collection of field recording books that require conservation in dry conditions.
- Paper artifacts.
- Wooden Inuvialuit household wares.
- Bone implements.
- Several colonial era decorative artifacts.

At Simpson Point, no intact Inuvialuit heritage features were impacted by shoreline erosion during the summer of 2026. Although features were not identified as being immediately imperilled, land loss east of the Mission House continues to progress towards archaeological sod houses.

Two traditional Inuvialuit implements were discovered in eroded context during beach walks. One is a 25 cm long bone needle. The Second is a carved wedge of whale bone with a hole drilled through it; the function of the piece has not been determined as of yet.

The field where the 18th and 19th century Inuvialuit sod house settlement is located has become increasingly filled with driftwood from storm surge flooding. This flooding does not appear to have damaged the features other than creating an aesthetic impact.

Yukon Paleontology recovered approximately 100-130 paleontological specimens while on site. Twenty of those were shipped to Whitehorse for closer examination.





**To share your thoughts or for more
information, please contact:**

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