

# Welcome to Yukon's Largest Territorial Park

Ni'iinlii Njik (Fishing Branch) Territorial Park and adjacent Habitat Protection Area protect a distinct and fascinating ecosystem and an enduring Gwich'in connection to the land. Limestone caves, year-round open water, and early winter salmon runs support Grizzly Bear concentrations rarely seen this far north.

The 6500 km<sup>2</sup> wilderness area is a legacy of the Vuntut Gwitchin Land Claim Agreement and is jointly managed by Yukon Government and Vuntut Gwitchin Government.



## Homeland: Our Sacred Place

"The history of our elders has taught us how to use the resources for the future. We have been told by elders to protect the caribou, the moose and everything in that area. And speak for it."  
- Vuntut Gwitchin member

The unique karst ecosystem, microclimate and nutrient richness that makes the Ecological Reserve so productive is rarely seen this far north. Gray Wolf, Pine Marten, Wolverine, Bald and Golden eagles, Moose, Dall Sheep and Caribou join Grizzly Bear and Chum, Chinook and Coho salmon in this land of plenty. The Gwich'in have lived, trapped, fished, hunted and traded here for generations and continue their strong relationship.

Ni'iinlii Njik karst geology is a complex system of underground

drainage tunnels, pinnacles and caves that formed as seeping groundwaters bored into soluble limestone over time. The dissolving limestone creates calcium-rich waters. Chum Salmon swim more than 2500 km from the Bering Sea to spawn and die here each fall, bringing rich ocean nutrients to this remarkable forest habitat at the Arctic Circle.

The Fishing Branch River is its own curiosity. Sometimes it disappears entirely into the gravels of the streambed, only to re-emerge downstream. Warm summer waters stored underground trickle up into sinkholes, cracks, crevices and caves to eventually resurface into the river. Despite severe cold, the year-round open water ripples with salmon each fall, attracting the largest known congregations of Grizzly Bear at this latitude, at Bear Cave Mountain.



## A Patchwork of Protection

The Ecological Reserve and Settlement Lands are two parcels of land nestled in the heart of the park and form its ecological core. Yukon Parks manages the Ecological Reserve west of the Fishing Branch River while Vuntut

Gwitchin First Nation retains ownership and management of the Settlement Lands east of the river, including Bear Cave Mountain. The surrounding Wilderness Preserve secures protection of the core. The Habitat Protection area buffers the Wilderness Preserve from human development.

## Getting There



Protection of the bears and their habitat is the primary goal of the Ecological Reserve, so access to this isolated site is limited and tightly managed. Access to the Wilderness Preserve and Habitat Protection Area is possible but demands experienced wilderness skills and self-sufficiency.

As the crow flies, Ni'iinlii Njik (Fishing Branch) Territorial Park is halfway between Dawson City and Old Crow and entirely within Vuntut Gwitchin Traditional Territory. Access to the park is by helicopter (2.5 hrs one way). Note that a Park Permit is required to land a helicopter in the park.

## Facilities

There are no staffed facilities in the park. The nearest community is Old Crow which lies 100 km by air to the north. Yukon Parks maintains basic cabin accommodation in partnership with Vuntut Gwitchin Government and Bear Cave Mountain Eco-Adventures. Use of the cabin is strictly managed for bear viewing opportunities.



## Camping and Hiking



Hikers have ample opportunity for peace and reflection in the vast rolling terrain, open tundra landscapes and characteristic rocky ridges of the North Ogilvie Mountains.

A Park Permit is required to access the Ecological Reserve and adjacent Settlement Land. Backcountry camping is permitted in the rest of the park, however there are no facilities or trails. You should bring all the equipment and food needed for independent camping and travel in an arctic environment.

We strongly advise you to leave a trip plan with a reliable friend or the RCMP. Include your planned routes and stops on a map, your expected date of return and when the authorities should be notified if you don't show up. Get a Yukon Smart Travel Plan at [www.hss.gov.yk.ca/travelsmart](http://www.hss.gov.yk.ca/travelsmart).

## Wildlife and You

Learn about bears and how to prevent negative encounters.

Food and garbage are the number one attractants. Never leave food, dishes, garbage, cosmetics or any smelly item where a bear could get it, especially in your tent. Store attractants and waste in bearproof containers away from your camp.

Pick up a copy of *How you can stay safe in bear country* at any Environment Yukon office or Visitor Information Centre. Ask to view the *Staying Safe in Bear Country* video.

## Keep it Wild

**Plan ahead. Prepare to leave no trace**

**Travel and camp on durable surfaces.** Use existing trails and campsites. In pristine areas, spread out on durable ground.

**Dispose of waste properly.** Pack it in, pack it out. When outhouses are not available, cover human waste in a small hole 60 m from water, camp and trails.

**Leave what you find**  
Leave natural, historical and cultural artefacts undisturbed.



**Minimize campfire impacts.** Use stoves or existing fire rings. Keep campfires small.

**Respect wildlife.** Observe from a distance. Never feed them. Keep pets under control.

**Be considerate of others**



## Wildlife Viewing



When viewing and photographing wildlife, **keep your distance.**

Use binoculars, scopes and telephoto lenses. **Specific and strict rules apply** to bear viewing in the Ecological Reserve and Settlement Lands. Visitation is allowed only with a permitted commercial guide and limited to one group of five visitors per day between September 1st to October 31st. Access from November to August is by permit only. Contact Yukon Parks for details. These measures are necessary to maintain the

area's wilderness character and the safety of visitors and residents (as in salmon, bears and their habitats).



## Publications

- People of the Lakes* – Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Et Shirleen Smith  
Available at Environment Yukon offices, Visitor Information Centres or from: [www.env.gov.yk.ca](http://www.env.gov.yk.ca):
- Into the Yukon Wilderness*
- Yukon Wildlife Viewing Guide*
- How you can stay safe in bear country*

## Maps

1:50,000 - 116J02 to 116J15, 116K01, 116K08, 116K09, 116K16  
1:250,000 - *Porcupine River* (sheet 116J)

## Contacts

**Yukon Parks**  
867-667-5648  
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[yukon.parks@gov.yk.ca](mailto:yukon.parks@gov.yk.ca)

**Vuntut Gwitchin Government**  
867-966-3261  
[info@vgfn.net](mailto:info@vgfn.net) | [www.vgfn.ca](http://www.vgfn.ca)

**Bear Cave Mountain Eco-Adventures**  
867-633-2650  
[phil@bearcavemountain.com](mailto:phil@bearcavemountain.com)

**John Tizya Visitor Centre (Old Crow)**  
867-966-3261 ext. 269

**Emergency (RCMP Old Crow)**  
867-966-5555

[www.yukonparks.ca](http://www.yukonparks.ca)

A GUIDE TO

# Ni'iinlii Njik (Fishing Branch) Territorial Park

Ni'iinlii Njik "where fish spawn"



Yukon  
Parks

