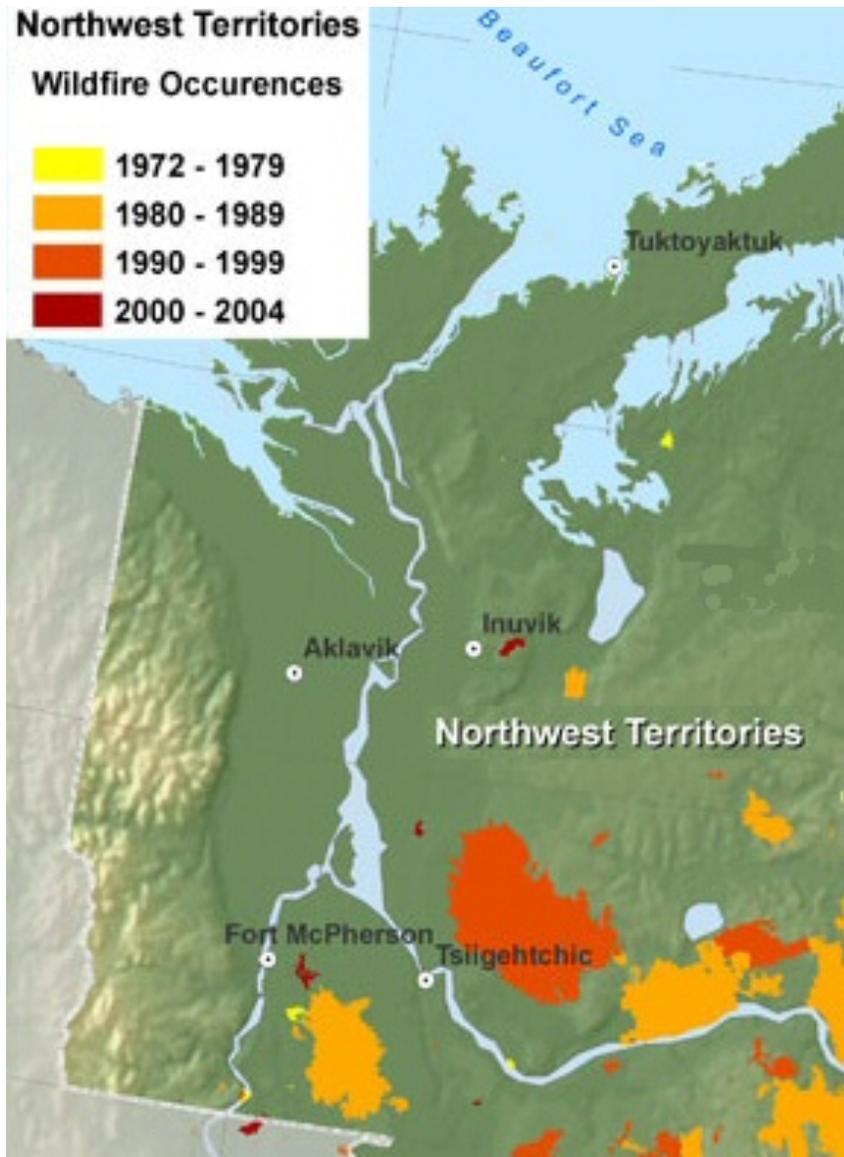


Forest Fires in the NWT



What is happening?

- This map shows the location and extent of forest fires in the western NWT dating back to 1972. The colour of the fire block reflects the age of the fire.
- Most of the burns shown on this map occurred in areas of coniferous forest. Mountainous areas near the Yukon border, tundra areas north of Inuvik and deciduous forests in the Mackenzie River delta rarely experience wild fire.

Why is it happening?

- Wild fire is a natural force in boreal forests. In wilderness area few fires are caused by humans and most fires are started by lightning. In years when moisture levels are low fires may continue burning for long periods and cover large areas of forest.
- Tundra areas seldom burn because there is little accumulation of dry vegetation above ground and fires do not spread easily. Fires in tundra areas do not seem to get hot enough to seriously damage the vegetation and areas often recover within a few years.

Why is it important?

- Lichens are important winter foods for caribou and fire may have an effect on the amount of preferred lichens growing in an area. Recently burned areas as well as very old forests tend to have fewer lichens. Caribou can benefit from the effects of wild fires when the land is turned into a patchwork of plant communities with different ages. Caribou can then take advantage of good winter foraging spots where there are lots of lichens or easy snow to dig feeding craters.
- Some plants and animals rely on older forest stands so an increase in the rate of forest fires could make these older habitats rare.

Technical Notes

- These data were obtained from the Forest Management Division, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Government of the Northwest Territories.

Links

- Forest fires in Northern Yukon
- Forest fires in Northern Alaska

Data added: March 8, 2006.