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Wednesday, May 6, 2026

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Canada's Arctic is warming faster than anywhere else with lasting consequences

The federal government has emphasized the need to build more, and build faster. Integrating climate considerations into these investments will help ensure communities are prepared for what's ahead.



Climate change is not only an environmental issue. It is a humanitarian, economic, and national security concern, writes Kandis Jameson. *Pexels photograph by Fahad AlAni*

OPINION | BY KANDIS JAMESON | May 6, 2026



Canada's North and Arctic are already living the realities of climate change. As Mayor of Hay River in the Northwest Territories, I have seen firsthand how quickly these impacts can disrupt lives and livelihoods. During the 2023 wildfire season, nearly 70 per cent of the territory's population was forced to evacuate. In my own community and the neighbouring Enterprise and K'atl'odeeche First Nation Reserve, that was an evacuation of 4,000 people alone.

That experience is becoming less exceptional. The North is warming three times faster than the global average, increasing the risks communities face from wildfires, flooding, erosion, and infrastructure failure.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities' (FCM) new *Future of Northern and Arctic Canada* report documents this reality clearly. For northerners, the impacts aren't lines on paper; they are part of daily life.

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The report brings together input from local leaders and community officials across Northern and Arctic Canada. It sets out practical priorities for strong federal-local partnership, anchored in the diverse reality of northern communities.

Warmer temperatures are changing the land and sea. Ice no longer freezes as predictably, or as safely, as it once did, limiting travel and hunting that are essential sources of food and cultural continuity for Indigenous communities. Permafrost thaw is cracking roads and runways. Coastal erosion threatens homes, graveyards, and key infrastructure. Wildfires are becoming more frequent and intense. And ongoing reliance on diesel drives up energy costs.



Kandis Jameson is mayor of Hay River, N.W.T. *Handout photograph*

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Canada's Arctic moment: climate reality, Indigenous leadership, and global responsibility

Climate change is not only an environmental issue. It is a humanitarian, economic, and national security concern. It accelerates infrastructure deterioration, threatens Indigenous ways of life, and tests Canada's sovereignty in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape.

A good example of these intersecting risks is melting in the Northwest Passage. Melting sea ice is leaving communities with severe infrastructure deficits at risk, especially with increased maritime traffic traversing this region. Risks are up close and personal for communities like Nunavut's Clyde River and Cambridge Bay, or Ulukhaktok, N.W.T., who have limited emergency management capacities but will absorb the impacts of a disaster. Our communities want to partner with the federal government to assert Canada's sovereignty in the Northwest Passage and bolster our capacity.

FCM's report outlines practical solutions grounded in local realities to address these issues. Clean energy is central to building resilience in the North and Arctic, alongside sustained collaboration with the federal government to decarbonize energy systems and connect communities to adjacent electric grids.

Communities such as Old Crow, Yukon, and Paulatuk, N.W.T., are investing in solar, wind, and battery storage to reduce diesel use, lower costs, and improve energy security. Indigenous-led programs like Wah-ila-toos have shown that when funding models align with northern realities, transformative change is possible.

At FCM, we are calling for ambition to meet the scale of the challenge: increased investment in climate adaptation, better climate data and mapping for the North and Arctic, accelerated efforts to eliminate diesel dependence, and partnerships that respect Indigenous leadership and local expertise.

These are not abstract recommendations. They are grounded in lived experience. By acting decisively now, we can protect communities, strengthen Canada's North, and secure a liveable future for generations to come.

Hay River, N.W.T., Mayor Kandis Jameson is president of the Northwest Territories Association of Communities, and member of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Northern and Remote Forum.

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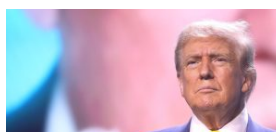
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