

Editorial: New Frontiers in Northern Economic Development

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The winter of 2025–2026 has been tough across the North American North, with a combination of lengthy periods of extreme cold, disconcerting global geopolitical unrest, U.S. President Donald Trump’s unexpected verbal attacks on Canada and Greenland, and increasing pressure to accelerate resource development in the region.

For northern governments and Arctic peoples, circumpolar political unrest adds to the continuing pressures of climate change, economic marginalization, colonization, challenges to the harvesting economy, cultural loss and revitalization, high costs, and the like. Charting a path forward for the North has become increasingly difficult, particularly as security and defence considerations place growing pressure on northern and national governments to address infrastructure and remilitarization challenges. These are, to put it mildly, difficult times.

CanNor (the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency) plays a vital role in community and regional economic development. Since its establishment in 2009, CanNor has invested millions of dollars annually in personal and business development in the Canadian North. The organization has made impressive contributions to special company initiatives, emerging firms, sectoral initiatives, urgent financial assistance, and other economy-building measures. The *Northern Review* was delighted when CanNor approached the journal to encourage additional dissemination of research on northern economic development. They placed no constraints on the journal and exercised no editorial control or oversight over the special issues. CanNor’s support for free and independent academic inquiry and analysis has been exemplary.

The articles in this issue of the *Northern Review* reflect the diversity of opportunities and challenges for improving economic conditions in the Arctic and Subarctic regions. The collection includes studies of the intersection of climate change and economic development, a fascinating conversation about Indigenous

engagement with critical minerals and nuclear waste in the Provincial North, community engagement with renewable energy development, the impact of modern treaties on economic development, the prospects for deep-sea mining in the Arctic, and the continuing evolution of northern oil and gas development. These papers and dialogue expand the CanNor-inspired debate about the economic future of the Canadian North.

At present, the Canadian North has one of the most government-dependent economies in the world. This applies at the personal and family levels as well as at the regional level, which is highly reliant on government spending, particularly investments on public infrastructure and support for food, transportation, energy, social housing, and the like. The resource sector has long been lauded as a key to regional and national prosperity, but the sector has disappointed more often than not. For every medium-term burst of activity associated with something like the diamond mines in the Northwest Territories, there are numerous examples of commercial failure or unrealized or lost economic potential.

The North, and northern Indigenous communities in particular, are looking for greater economic opportunity and for opportunities to expand the private sector. Success remains sporadic and highly focused, with a few bright spots (like Arctic tourism) offset by numerous areas of underdevelopment (including high technology/innovation, Arctic oil and gas in Canada, and the private sector generally). Northern incubators have had small, individual successes, but no grand victories. Furthermore, the size and dominance of government, offering high wages, excellent benefits, and the ability to routinely “raise” the private sector for skilled workers, may actually impede commercial development in the North.

The articles in this collection highlight clear realities. The regulatory and political environment is in flux, most notably from the re-emergence of Indigenous governance. Much of the North’s resource potential remains unknown and underdeveloped. Emergent fields (like deep-sea mining) will press against the margins of regulation. There is an urgent need to engage constructively with northern communities. The economic landscape of the North is changing very rapidly. The *Northern Review* is determined to remain at the cutting edge of regional conversation about the commercial future of the region, just as CanNor, our excellent partner in producing this issue of the *Northern Review*, continues to be a critical actor in the support and encouragement of business and economic development in the North.

*The views and opinions expressed in this volume are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada or the editors of the *Northern Review*.