

Editorial: Number 51

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In 2021, the world is dominated by two intense discussions: environmental sustainability and the COVID-19 pandemic. It is fitting, therefore, that this issue of the *Northern Review* provides a series of perspectives on these topics, ranging from Indigenous engagements with Greenpeace, to the role of the Canadian Rangers in disaster mitigation, to mining pollution and wastewater management. While this issue is not exclusively focused on these themes—papers on affordable northern housing and the Arctic Council continue to broaden the reach of the journal—questions about how the North can create a profitable and successful economy while protecting the environment, and how this vast and thinly populated area can respond to crises, remain front and centre.

For much of the global pandemic, the North has been one of the leading regions in battling the spread of COVID-19. Scandinavia has generally done quite well. Remote communities in Alaska and the Canadian North stopped traffic into their settlements in a calculated attempt to hold back the latest biological threat to their viability. And they did so well. In the early summer of 2021, however, things shifted. The Yukon, with one of the highest vaccination rates in the world and an enviable track record for protecting its citizens, suddenly was hit by the highest infection rates in well over a year. Nunavut, which had locked itself down tightly, with strict quarantine requirements and tight controls on movements into the territory, faced a distressing series of outbreaks.

The pandemic experiences speak to a central theme in northern life: vulnerability. Northerners are always subject to the climatic realities of living in the Arctic and Subarctic, including extreme cold, blizzards, river flooding, and the like. They rely on tenuous lifelines to southern suppliers, previously reliant on seasonal shipping, now supplemented by air travel and, perhaps, with airships in the future. But the North is vulnerable, too, to mining disasters or poorly planned mitigation

efforts. The reclamation of the mines near Faro, Yukon, will cost governments a great deal of money, as will the clean-up from the Yellowknife gold mines. The vulnerability of Indigenous women living with domestic violence is yet another illustration of the urgent need for fast and effective responses and an indication of the difficulty of providing such support in northern communities.

The papers in this issue of the *Northern Review* speak, in a variety of ways, to the North's need for careful and thoughtful planning, the availability of disaster relief teams, appropriate environmental regulations and oversight, and the kind of long-term thinking that is coming out of the Arctic Council. The role of Greenpeace in upsetting the Arctic trapping economy reminds us that vulnerabilities emerge, often with catastrophic consequences, from the activities of outsiders, many of whom honestly believe they are acting in the North's best interests.

The pandemic and climate change are shocking illustrations of the vulnerability of all of humanity. The *Northern Review* remains committed to highlighting the unique challenges of the Circumpolar North, and to providing practical illustrations of the consequences of inaction or bad policy as well as ideas on how to better protect the North from the many climatic, environmental, economic, and policy-induced dangers that face the region.

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