

## Fishing Branch Ni'inlii Njik Park - Nature



Rugged mountains, gentle slopes, floodplains and karst geology (including caves) are typical of the North Ogilvie Mountains Ecoregion and Fishing Branch Park. Surface features - lichens, coniferous forests, bare soil and rock, heather and herbs - are also representative of the ecoregion, as is the pattern of fires and floods in the past.

Isolated from roads, exploration and development, the Fishing Branch area has high natural values. The relatively

undisturbed area provides opportunities to study and monitor natural systems characteristic of the region but unique to the northwestern part of the North American continent.

The Fishing Branch River is the jewel in the crown of the northern chum salmon fishery. Salmon travel thousands of kilometres from the Bering Sea to spawn and die here, cycling rich nutrients from the sea. These nutrients feed a very diverse ecosystem not often found in northern interior regions. Calcium-enriched waters, created from dissolving limestone, enhance this nutrient-rich ecosystem. This dissolving action creates karst formations like the underground caverns through which Fishing Branch River flows.

Thermal energy from summer waters is stored in the underground reservoirs, and waters resurface and flow year-round, in spite of severe winter conditions. These warm waters seep through forest floors, causing unique permafrost-free conditions and an island of temperate forest around Bear Cave Mountain and along tributaries of the Fishing Branch River.

Fishing Branch supports the highest known seasonal density of grizzly bears at this latitude. The bears congregate each fall to feed on spawning salmon. The area includes a spring migration route of the Porcupine caribou herd. In deep snow years, the caribou use high mountain ridges to migrate. In low snow years, they pass through valley bottoms where food sources are richer. The area is also home to sheep, moose, raptors, and a wide variety of other wildlife.