Support for Winter Tourism Climate Change Adaptation
Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism

Zone
4

Natural Resources Canada | Ressources naturelles Canada
Canada
Newfoundland & Labrador
Funded by the Department of Environment and Climate Change

Background

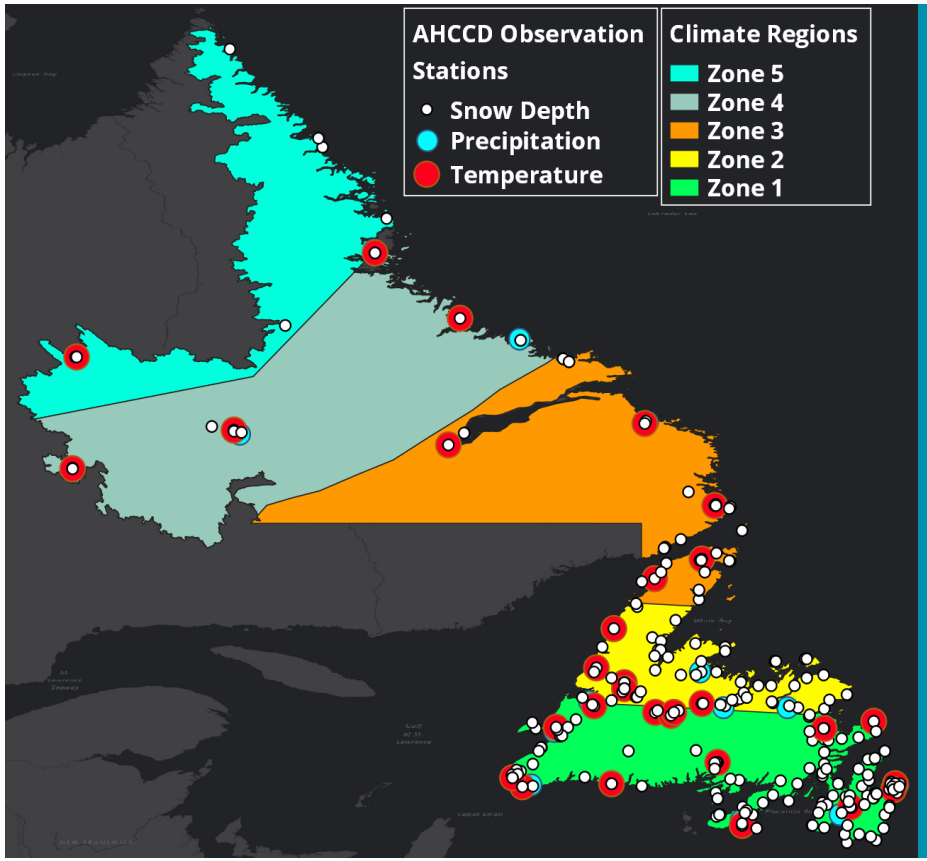
Zone 4

Climate change will impact the Winter Tourism Industry across Newfoundland and Labrador. Operators are encouraged to adopt a proactive approach to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

This study presents climate change projections for key climate indices derived from temperature, precipitation, and snow depth across the province. Through consultation with local operators, the climate parameters were selected as key operating indicators for the industry.

Potential impacts to key operating factors as a result of climate change are presented. Understanding the impacts of climate change will allow the industry and local operators to prepare and adapt to future conditions, unlocking new and innovative ways to successfully operate during the winter season.

Climate Zones



Climate in Newfoundland and Labrador is highly variable based on location. This is due to the size, latitudinal range, proximity to the coast, and varying coastal influences. As a result, climate change is expected to impact regions across the province differently, such as different rates of warming and changes in precipitation types and frequency varying throughout the province. To gain more granularity over this vast region, representative climate zones are used in this study. However, climate can vary at scales much smaller than the selected climate zones, and as such, spatial patterns are presented through maps and appropriate caveats are provided on the interpretation of the calculated climate indices.

Data Sources, Time Horizons, and Seasons

Historical Data Sources

- Adjusted and Homogenized Canadian Climate Data (AHCCD).
- Canadian Historical Daily Snow Depth Database (Brown et al. 2021).
- Historical Time Period: 1981-2010.

Projection Data Source

- Canadian Regional Climate Model (CanRCM4) – Large Ensemble (50 model runs).
- Projected Time Periods: 2030s (2021-2050) and 2050s (2041-2070).

Interpretation of Graphs and Data

Historical Data

- Climate indices from observation stations are averaged across each climate zone and across the historical period to obtain the average historical value per zone.
- Spatial patterns in historical data for selected key indices are presented using maps.
- Average historical values are presented in the form of text, as boxplots showing variability over time or as other plots (e.g., bar plots, line plots).

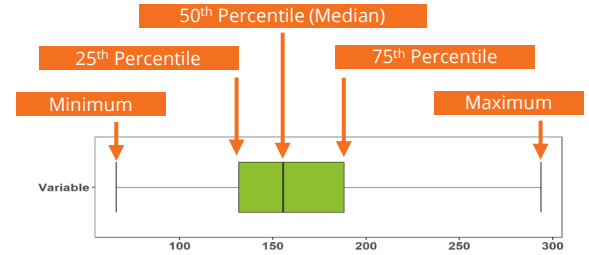
Projections Data

- Climate indices calculated from all climate model run are averaged across each zone and across each projected time horizon to obtain the average projected value per zone.
- Most projection data is shown as boxplots, representing the range of projections across the models.
- Where the range of models is not presented, the projected value always refers to the Median of the model range.

Maps

- In order to present the spatial patterns and highlight climate variability within each climate zone, a few key climate indices are presented in the form of maps.
- The map legend shows a range in the form of (exclusive, inclusive] values.

How to Read a Boxplot

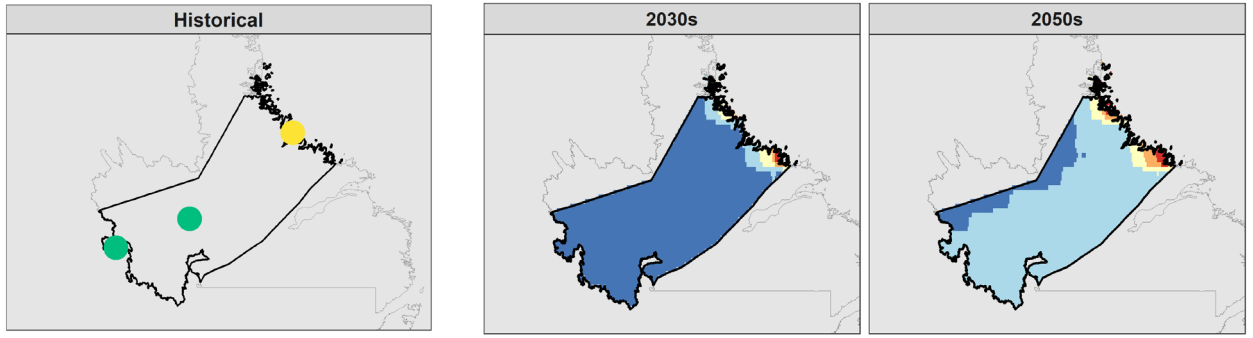


The projected numbers are representative of the regional average conditions (across time, locations, and models). Climate change at the local scale will be more variable, and more extreme values (both high and low) should be expected, irrespective of the average conditions.

Climate Change Across Newfoundland and Labrador

Zone 4

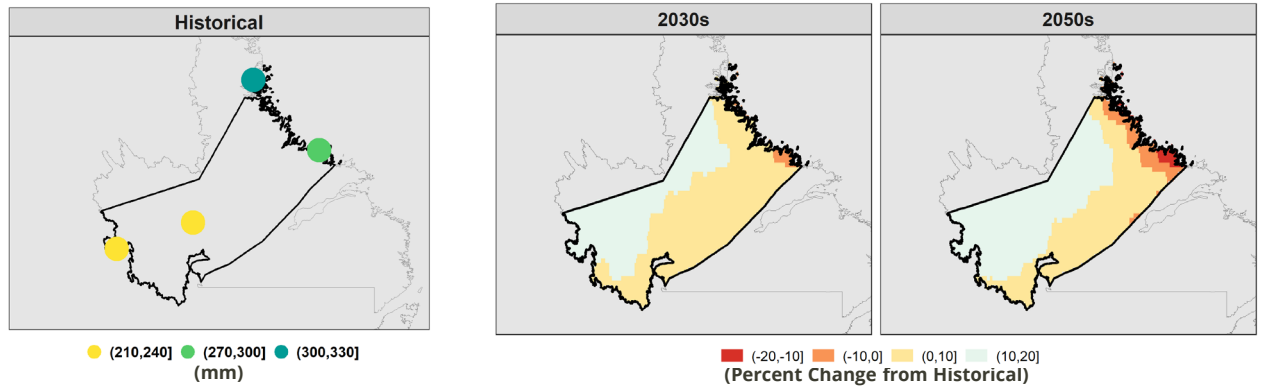
Winter Deep Freeze Events (Daily Minimum Temperature < -10°C)



Although observations are sparse, it is observed that except for a location along the coast of Labrador Sea, the rest of the zone experiences deep freeze events on over 90% of the days in Winter.

Frequency of deep freeze events is projected to remain relatively unchanged in the 2030s, except for a few isolated areas along the coast of Labrador Sea. In the 2050s, majority of the zone is expected to see deep freeze events occur less frequently, with the largest reductions seen along the coastal areas.

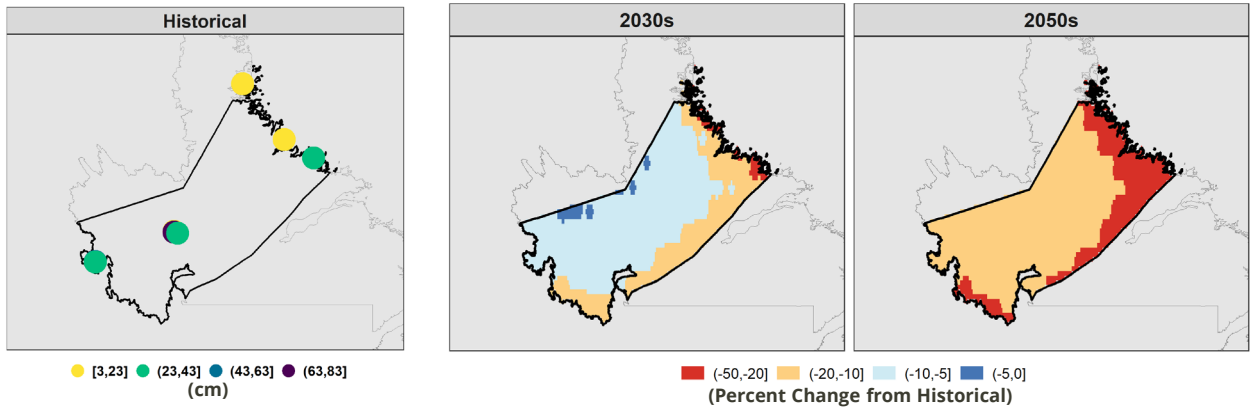
Total Winter Snowfall



Higher winter snowfall is observed along the coastal areas adjoining the Labrador Sea. Labrador City and Churchill Falls are amongst the locations with the lowest winter snowfall total (<240 mm).

Projections show relatively small increases in total winter snowfall throughout the zone, except for a few areas along the coast which show small reductions. The northern areas of the zone will see a larger increase, compared to the rest of the zone.

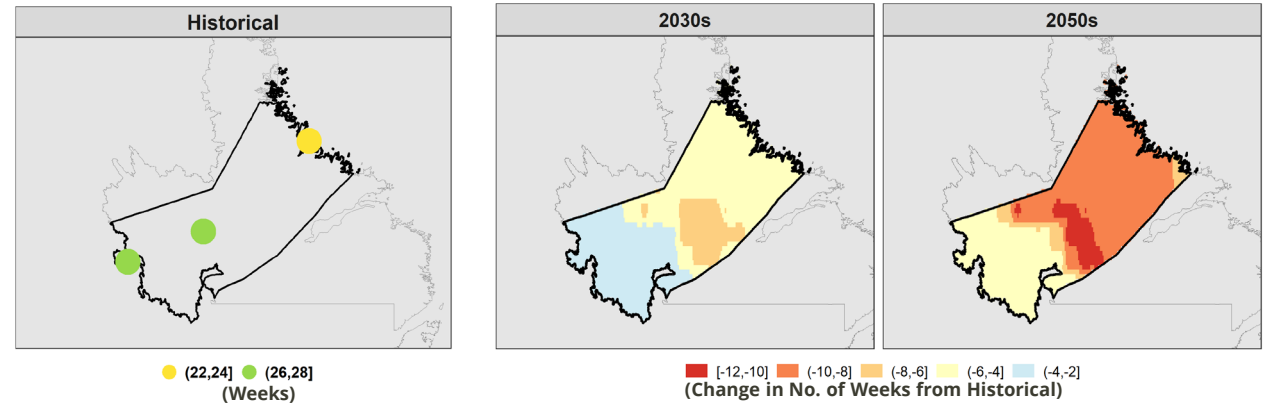
Winter Average Snow Depth



The average snow depth in the zone varies from as low as under 20 cm to as high as over 80 cm between the locations. The lowest average snow depths are observed along the eastern coast.

Projections show a decrease in average snow depth in all areas. The largest decrease in snow depth is projected in the southern and eastern areas of the zone. By 2050s, a majority of the zone is expected to lose 10 to 20% of snow depth as compared to the historical data.

Snowmaking Season Length (Weeks from First to Last 3 consecutive days with nighttime temperature < -5°C)



The length of snowmaking season varies up to 6 weeks from the shortest season of just over 22 weeks, to the longest at just under 28 weeks between the locations.

Snowmaking season is projected to reduce in both time periods. The reduction in the season length will be larger in the eastern half of the zone, with an average change of 4 – 6 weeks in the 2030s. By the 2050s, reduction of up to 10 weeks is projected in isolated regions, while majority of the zone will see a reduction of 6 – 8 weeks in the length of snowmaking season.

The projected numbers are representative of the regional average conditions (across time, locations, and models). Climate change at the local scale will be more variable, and more extreme values (both high and low) should be expected, irrespective of the average conditions.

Changes in Winter and Spring Temperatures

Zone 4

Shifts in seasonality are expected with climate change.

Increasing temperatures will lead to fewer deep freeze events and more frequent snow melt events. This may impact snowpack conditions and worsen trail conditions.

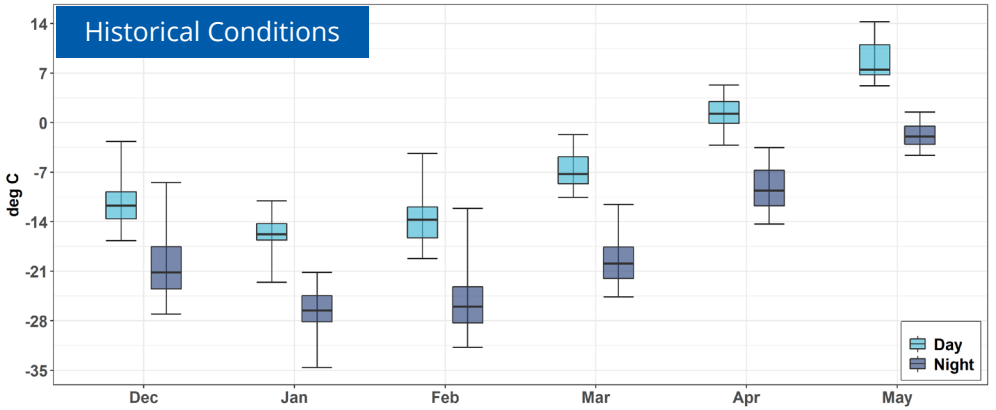
Potential Impacts to Snowpack Conditions from Increasing Temperatures:

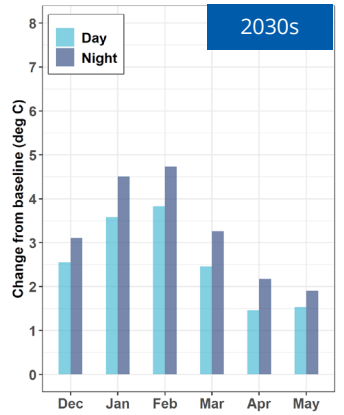
- Increased pooling of water on trails and recreation areas.
- Slushy or icy conditions on trails and recreation areas.
- Thinner snowpacks.
- More frequent melting episodes.
- Decreased snowpack accumulation and retention.
- Increased snowpack density.

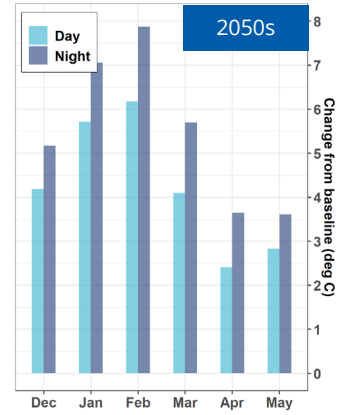
Potential Operational Impacts of Increasing Temperatures

- Increased frequency of temporary closures.
- Increased need for snow making and/or stored snow for maintenance and grooming.

Changes in Average Daytime and Nighttime Temperatures

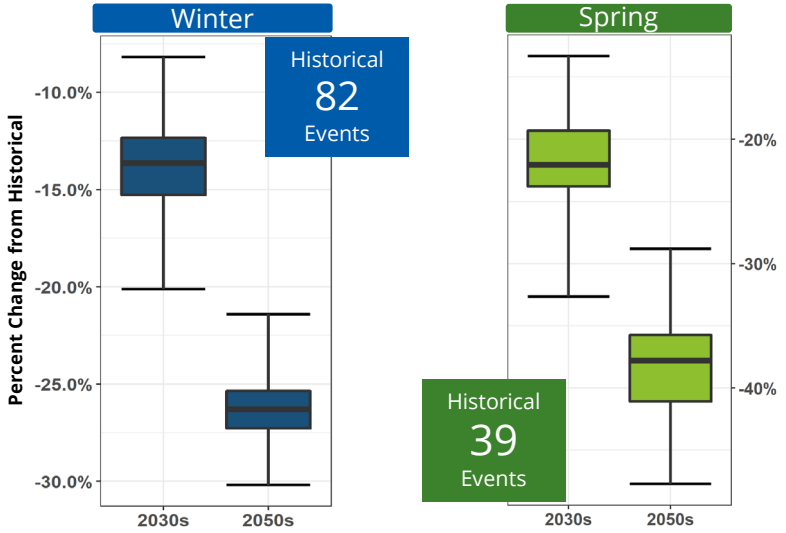






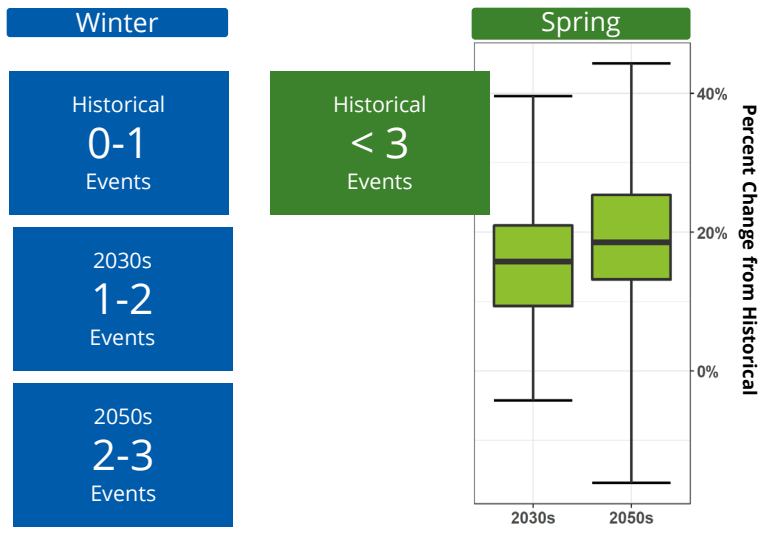
Projections show an average increase of approximately +3°C and +5°C (from historical) in average Winter daytime temperatures by 2030s and 2050s, averaged over the zone. Nighttime temperatures in Winter are projected to increase by a higher magnitude than daytime. The highest relative increase in nighttime temperature is expected to occur in January and February and is projected to be greater than +7°C (from historical) in the 2050s.

Deep Freeze Events (Nighttime Temperature < -10°C)



Projections indicate a decrease in the number of deep freeze events averaged over the zone. The projected decrease is 5-10% higher in Spring, than Winter. The range of projections among the models is equally spread out in Winter and Spring.

Melting Episodes (3 consecutive days with Daily Average Temp. > 0°C)



Historically, winter melting episodes are a rare occurrence in this zone, but the frequency will increase in future. In Spring, projections show a median increase of about 20%, with a higher spread of projection range in the 2050s, from about -15% to +40%.

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Changes in Winter Precipitation (Rain and Snow)

Zone 4

Winter recreation operations typically **close** during days with more than **10mm of rain**.

Increased closures are expected due to **increasing frequency and intensity** of rain events.

Winter Rain events impact trail conditions, recreation area conditions, snowpack and melt conditions, runoff regimes, and operations.

Dangerous **icy conditions** can be caused by freezing rain events resulting in increased **Health and Safety concerns.**

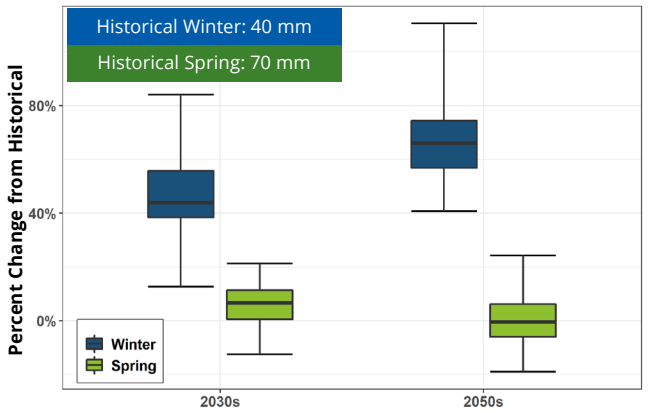
Operational impacts

- Increased frequency and extent of maintenance and grooming requirements.
- Increased frequency and extent of temporary closure of trails and recreation areas.

- Potentially **increased flood conditions** and pooling of water on trails and recreation areas.
- **Increased melting**, thinner snowpack, and **decreased snow retention.**
- Increased frequency of **wet/ slushy or icy conditions** expected following rain events.

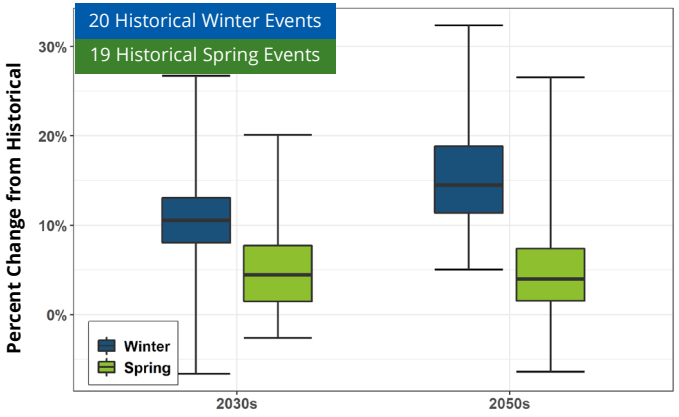
Average rainfall and snowfall totals presented here provide an understanding of the overall climatic conditions regarding precipitation in the future.

However, the averages do not represent occurrence of extreme events which occur at relatively smaller scales. Moreover, climate change is expected to cause an increase in the overall storm activity, which will also affect extreme precipitation.



Total precipitation conditions favorable to freezing rain

Precipitation > 20mm followed by freezing conditions



Model results project an overall increase in events that lead to icy conditions. The occurrence of days with precipitation (>10mm) during conditions favorable to freezing rain is projected to increase, except for a few models which show a possible reduction in Spring. Heavy precipitation events followed by freezing conditions are also projected to increase both Winter and Spring by most of the models.

Some studies have indicated an increase in the frequency of freezing rain could be expected, due to the north/north-east movement of the zero-degree isotherm.

Total Winter Rain and Snow

Historical Rain
10 mm

2x more in 2030s

4.5x more in 2050s

Historical Snowfall
260 mm

9% more in 2030s

9% more in 2050s

Total precipitation is projected to increase in this zone. The increase in rainfall will be relatively high when compared to the historical period. Meanwhile, snowfall is projected to increase by nearly 10% in both future time periods.

Studies have shown that warmer air can carry more moisture than cooler air.

Winter Rain Events

Historical
0-1
Events

2030s
1-2
Events

2050s
2-3
Events

Significant rainfall events (rainfall > 10mm) have been historically a rare occurrence in this region.

With rising temperatures, more precipitation will fall as rain and some areas can be expected to get more frequent rainfall events in the future.

The projected numbers are representative of the regional average conditions (across time, locations, and models). Climate change at the local scale will be more variable, and more extreme values (both high and low) should be expected, irrespective of the average conditions.

Snowfall, Snow Depth and Snowfall Timing

Zone 4

Changes in Winter Snow Depth

Historical Average
35 cm

- 9% Decrease in 2030s
- 18% Decrease in 2050s

Historical Maximum
45 cm

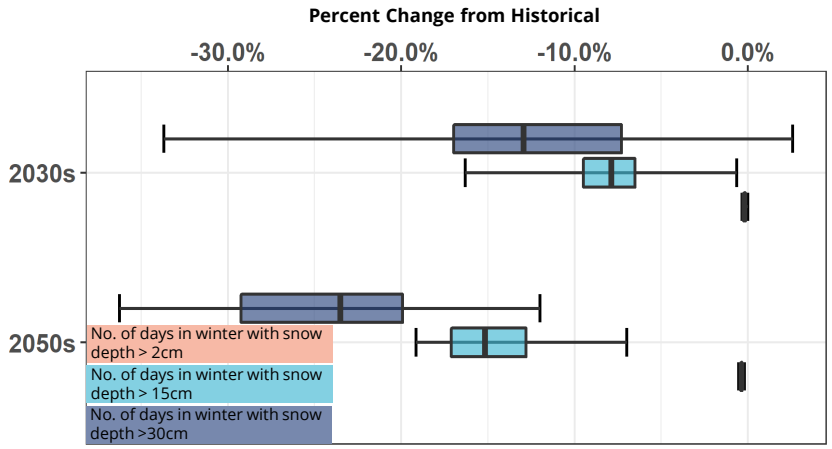
- <1% Decrease in 2030s
- 6% Decrease In 2050s

- Average and maximum snow depths are projected to decrease over time. Maximum snow depth projected to decrease at a slower rate.
- The average reduction in snow depth is dominated by higher losses projected along the coast adjoining the Labrador Sea, while the rest of the zone will see relatively smaller reduction in snow depth.

- Winter sport and recreation activities require different minimum snow depths.
- Activities requiring larger snow depths (e.g., 30 cm) are expected to experience greater reduction in operable days than those which require shallower snow depths.
- Thinner snowpacks indicate increased snowmaking capacity required to achieve operability.

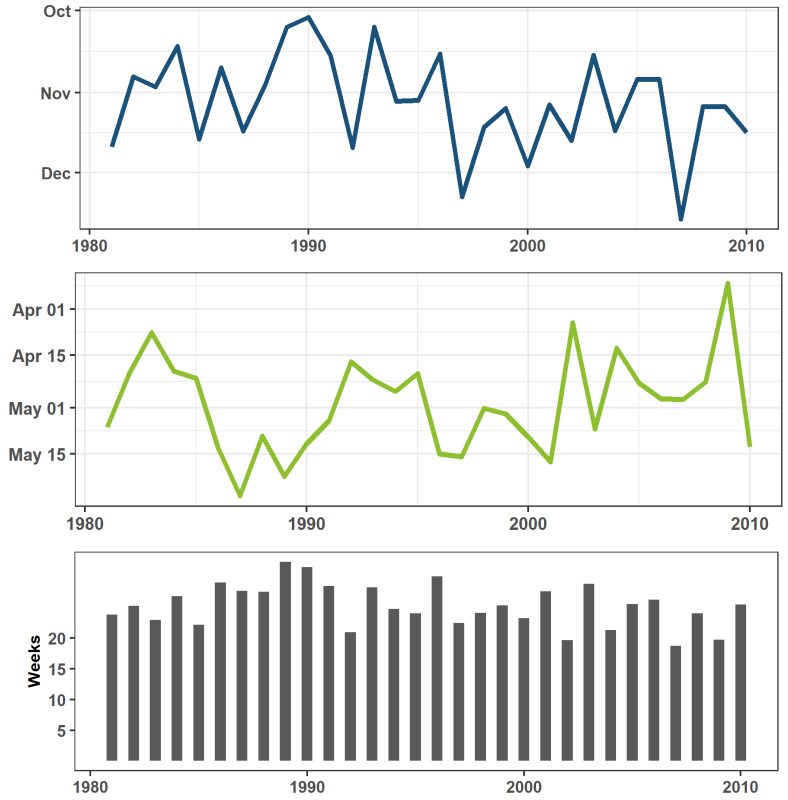
Historical Conditions

No. of days in winter with snow depth > 2cm	35
No. of days in winter with snow depth > 15cm	23
No. of days in winter with snow depth > 30cm	18



- The number of days with greater snow depths (e.g., 30cm) occur **much less frequently** than shallower snow depths (e.g., 2cm).
- Projections show that no change is anticipated in the occurrence of days with shallow snow depths, but a change of around 10 – 30% could be seen for deeper snowpacks.

Snowfall Timing



First Snowfall

2030s	2050s
10 Days Later	16 Days Later

Last Snowfall

2030s	2050s
6 Days Early	13 Days Early

Snowfall Duration

2030s	2050s
> 2 Weeks Shorter	> 4 Weeks Shorter

- On an average, the timing of the first snowfall is projected to shift from the middle of the month to the end of the month of November by the 2050s.
- On an average, the timing of the last snowfall is projected to shift from the beginning of May to the middle of April by the 2050s.
- On an average, the duration from first to last day of snowfall is projected to reduce by over 2 weeks by 2030s, and by over 4 weeks by 2050s, as compared to the historical period.

- **Operational Impacts:** Decreased operating length for winter recreation and snow sports, leading to a potential loss of revenue and higher cost of upkeep and maintenance in order to sustain winter activities for longer periods.

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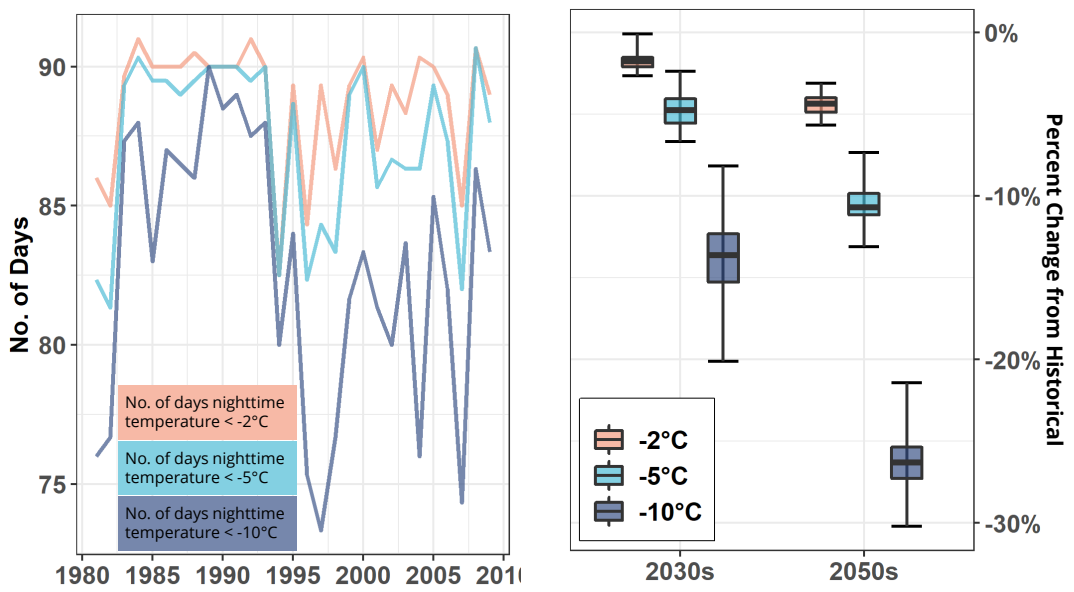
Changes in snow-making conditions

Zone 4

Number of Days Temperatures below -2°C, -5 °C, and -10 °C



- Historical data shows generally decreasing trends since 1990s.
- The number of days below minimum snowmaking temperatures are projected to decrease significantly over time. Frequency of nighttime temperatures above -2°C is projected to decrease at a slower rate than the frequency of nighttime temperatures above -10°C.
- Days with temperatures below -5 °C are projected to decrease approximately 5% by the 2030s and 10% by the 2050s.

Colder temperatures will be experienced on a **significantly less frequent** basis throughout the season.

Snowmaking operations requiring lower operating temperatures will be **more impacted** by climate change than those with higher operating temperatures.

Snowmaking equipment with lower operating temperatures will be able to produce snow on a less frequent and less reliable basis compared to equipment able to operate at higher temperatures.

Timing of Snowmaking Season

Typically, snowmaking equipment requires at least 3 consecutive days below the minimum operating temperature to begin producing snow.

The start of the snowmaking season depends on the minimum operable temperature of the snowmaking equipment.

Humidity

Negligible changes in average winter humidity are projected.

Important for determining good snow-making conditions.

Start of Season				End of Season		
Historical	**2030s**	**2050s**	**Minimum Operating Temperature**	**2050s**	**2030s**	**Historical**
Oct. 18	11 days later	19 days later	**-2°C**	17 days early	8 days early	May 18
Oct. 30	12 days later	20 days later	**-5°C**	15 days early	8 days early	May 05
Nov. 16	12 days later	20 days later	**-10°C**	17 days early	9 days early	Apr. 19

Climate Change
=
Season Shifts
+
Shorter Winters & Earlier Springs

The onset of colder temperatures is expected to occur later in the season, thus impacting the start of the snowmaking season and achievable opening dates.

- Snowmaking operations are expected to **shut down earlier** in the year due to the earlier onset of warmer temperatures.
- Snow making equipment able to operate at higher temperatures will experience a **longer operable season** than those which require lower temperatures.
- Higher operating thresholds may allow for an **extended operating season** due to snow availability.

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