

Fly-in/Fly-out Commuting in Deer Lake

Findings from the research project: *Identifying the Built Space Impacts of Fly-in/Fly-out Employment-Related Geographical Mobility in Deer Lake, NL*

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What is Fly-in/Fly-out?

Fly-in/Fly-out employment-related geographical mobility (also known as FIFO), is a long-distance commuting arrangement often involving work in remote areas. Employees are transported to and from their worksite by airplane and spend fixed periods of time at their worksite and at home in rotation (Storey, 2001).

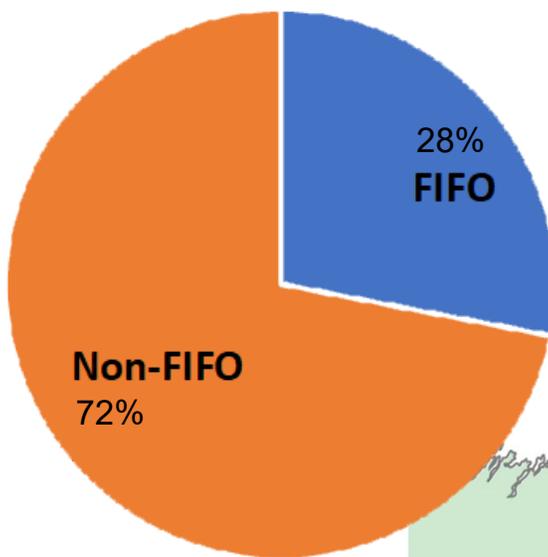
FIFO has been researched extensively in Australia where it has been found to have many impacts on host (or work) communities, source (or home) communities, and hub communities (communities with an airport to move workers between host and source communities).

Less research has been done on the impacts of FIFO on communities in Canada.

This research study sought to determine if Deer Lake is a source-hub community and identify changes in built space that might have occurred in the community because of FIFO in 2000-2016. The project also identified other potential socio-economic impacts of FIFO in the town.

Results of this study are based on findings from a door-to-door survey in Deer Lake of all new homes and homes renovated for more than \$20,000 in 2000-2016 as well as 14 interviews with key stakeholders and residents.

Figure 1: Survey respondents by engagement with FIFO



Deer Lake: A FIFO Source-Hub Community?

A source-hub community is a community that has a resident FIFO workforce and also has FIFO workers from outside communities using their airport to get to and from work.

Deer Lake is a source-hub community. FIFO workers do live in Deer Lake and FIFO workers also live in other communities outside Deer Lake but commute into Deer Lake to fly to and from their place of work. As can be seen in Figure 1, 28% of respondents to our door to door survey in Deer Lake had a FIFO worker living in their home.

Findings also suggest that FIFO workers have moved into Deer Lake from outside communities, often to have easier access to the airport, as can be seen in figure 2; however, some individuals who grew up in Deer Lake also chose to engage with FIFO work. Sometimes these individuals had another family member who also did FIFO work.

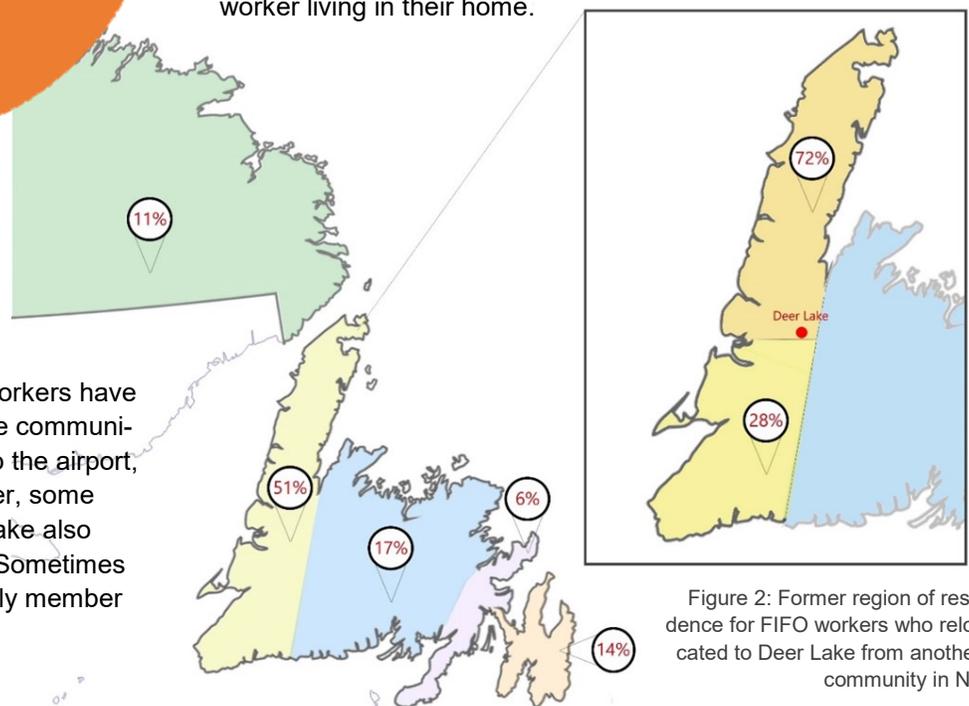


Figure 2: Former region of residence for FIFO workers who relocated to Deer Lake from another community in NL

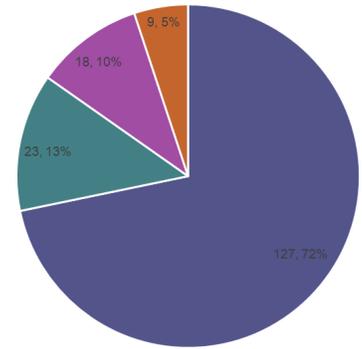
Has FIFO Impacted Built Space in Deer Lake?

Built space, or any landscape changed for human use in accordance with one or more policies, is important with regards to FIFO because housing, infrastructure, service structures, and more may be changed to allow FIFO to happen or as a result of FIFO in host, source and hub communities. This research project was the first study of the built-space impacts of FIFO in a source-hub community in Canada.

Some commercial built space change in Deer Lake from 2000-2016 was linked to FIFO work. For instance, renovations at the Deer Lake Airport, including several long-term parking expansions, were driven, in part, by the demand of FIFO workers.

Some residential built space change in Deer Lake from 2000-2016 was also linked to FIFO work. As can be seen in Figure 3, addresses with a FIFO resident have seen new homes, renovations/general repairs, extensions to existing homes, or new garages built over that time period; however, there was not a significant difference between built space changes in addresses with FIFO residents and addresses without FIFO residents in any of those categories.

Figure 3: Non-FIFO and FIFO built space change
Non-FIFO Permits, 2000-2016



FIFO Permits, 2000-2016

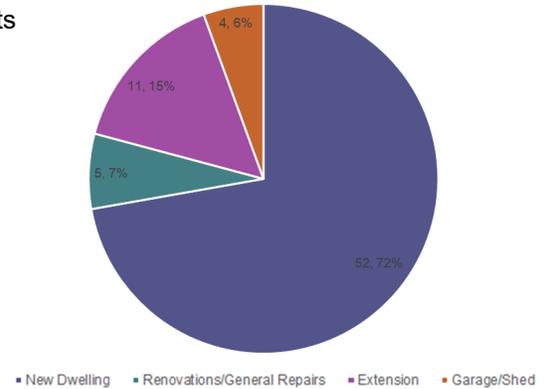
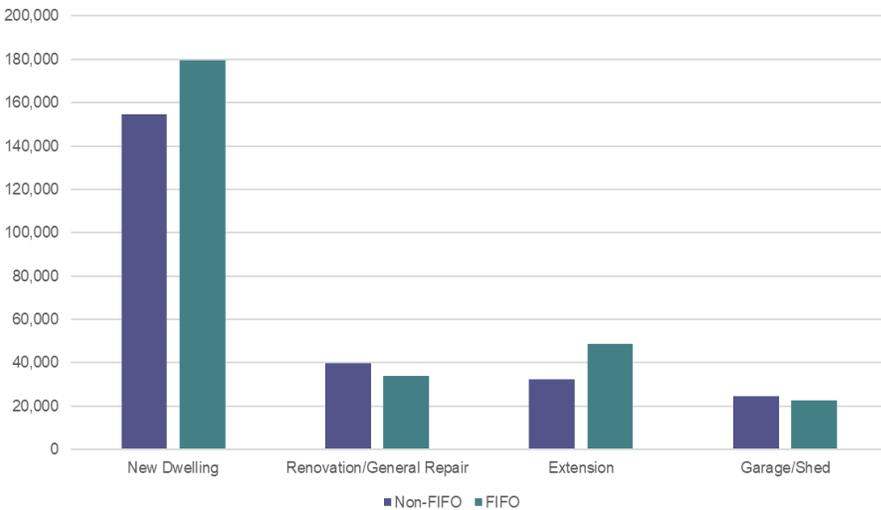
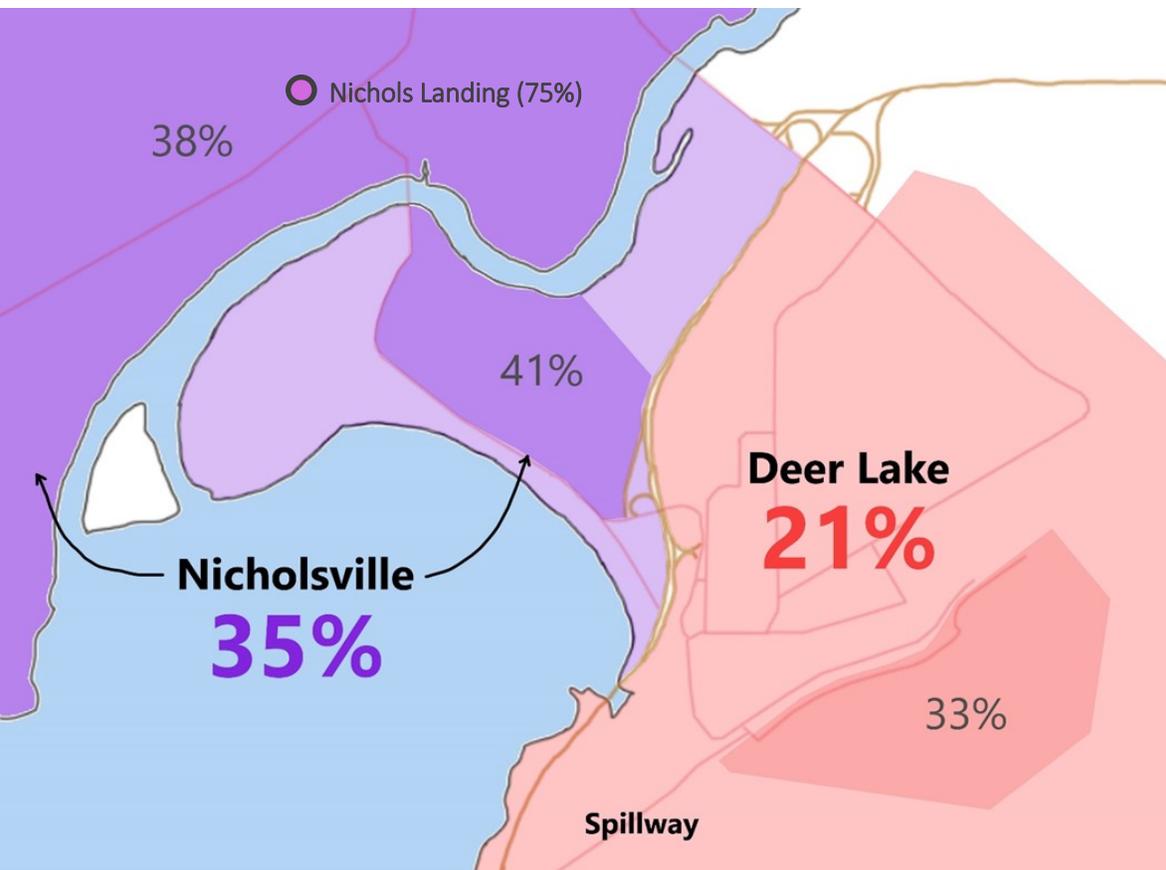


Figure 4: Non-FIFO and FIFO Building Permits, average cost (\$CAN)



In terms of cost, addresses with FIFO workers had more expensive extensions to existing homes and more expensive new homes built than addresses without FIFO workers on average; however, addresses without FIFO workers had more expensive renovations and garages built. This can be seen in Figure 4.



FIFO addresses were also more concentrated in particular areas of Deer Lake. Figure 5 shows the highest concentrations of FIFO respondent addresses in the areas surveyed. The highest overall concentration of FIFO workers was found in Nicholville north of Nicholville Rd (41%). The next highest was in the Goose Arm Rd area (38%) followed by the area up above the old railway tracks in Deer Lake (33%).

It was noted by many study participants that several FIFO workers lived in Nichols Landing subdivision. This appears to be true as 75% of our survey respondents in Nichols Landing had a FIFO worker living in their home.

Figure 5: Concentration of FIFO addresses by zones surveyed.



Figure 6: Newer homes in Deer Lake, April 2017

Economic

Participants felt that FIFO workers contributed economically to the Town through local spending, taxes, and the purchasing of large-ticket items (e.g. homes, ski-doods, trucks). Some local businesses in Deer Lake have adapted their businesses to accommodate a mobile workforce. The overall economic contribution of FIFO, however, was suggested as placing a burden on some residents as a result of increased property taxes and other financial pressures. Fears were also expressed about the spending habits of young FIFO workers—it was suggested that while older FIFO workers save and invest their money, younger FIFO workers spend more recklessly. Some participants worried these younger workers would suffer in the event of a downturn or job loss and that more education in financial planning would benefit them in the long-term.

Housing

Changes in the affordability and aesthetic of homes was also raised. It was felt that homes had become more expensive in Deer Lake due to demand for homes by FIFO workers and their families. It was also suggested that the style of homes being built by FIFO workers were different than what is usually seen in Deer Lake—they were perceived to build larger homes with more garages and often aesthetically more “lavish” and “extravagant”.

Crime

Some participants were concerned that increased wealth in the community because of FIFO had contributed to increased drug and alcohol abuse. It was also felt that not enough support is available in town for individuals suffering with addictions.

Community Dynamics

Because FIFO has attracted new residents to Deer Lake, it was suggested by participants that the integration of these new residents into the community was sometimes difficult and that this affected community dynamics. It was thought that this might be the result of culture shock, especially for individuals moving in from outport communities. Despite this, there was much positivity expressed about the presence of new people in the town. It was felt that new people have brought new ideas to the town and could, in turn, help develop or inspire innovative businesses or programs.

The presence of new, and often FIFO, residents in neighbourhoods was felt to contribute to a growing sense of “not knowing your neighbours” in the Town. It was also suggested that neighbourhoods with high concentrations of FIFO workers sometimes feel like they are completely inhabited by women and children because the men are all away at work. While more stress may be placed on women in this re-

Has FIFO had other social and economic impacts in Deer Lake?

Study participants noticed several social and economic changes in Deer Lake that they believed were related to the presence of FIFO. It was beyond the scope of this research study to confirm these impacts; however, they are relevant as areas of potential future study and are noted here for that purpose.

“You get money into a community and, with a lot of individuals, the more money you make, the more money you spend. And then all of a sudden recreation becomes a big part of your lifestyle. And people with boats and cars and snowmobiles and ATVs, they need a trailer to tow it around in...”

(5 December 2016).

“I bought [a house] in 2007 and I bought at what they wouldn’t even give a house away for now.”

(8 November 2016)

Where Dad Works



Mark with an X where Dad or Mom work.

Figure 6: A page from the children's activity book for *Home Again, Gone Again* at the Treehouse Family Resource Centre

gard, some participants felt this unique dynamic was positive in fostering a sense of community among these women, who often help each other look after children and complete chores, like mowing the lawn.

Community Involvement

Participants felt that FIFO workers were often not involved in community activities in Deer Lake. Some suggested new resident FIFO workers might be less inclined to get involved than native Deer Lakers. Other suggested that the unpredictable schedules of FIFO workers did not afford them time to be involved. Whether the spouses and children of mobile workers were involved in community activities was believed to depend family by family.

Family

It was suggested that being away for long periods of time could be stressful for FIFO workers, especially if they have to miss important family milestones for work. For spouses of mobile workers, it was suggested that FIFO can disrupt family dynamics by leaving mothers as virtual single parents. Some participants felt that kids were most impacted by FIFO in the family setting. The kids of a FIFO parent may have more responsibilities placed on

“There are times I get upset that my husband isn't there to help out with certain things, especially when something breaks and I need him to fix it. I get sad when I see other families doing things together that I wish we could be doing.”

(10 May 2017)

them in the absence of their parent and they may develop anxiety or fears about what might happen to their parent while they are away.

Thought to be unique to the province, a support program exists for the families of mobile workers at the Treehouse Family Resource Centre. *Home Again, Gone Again* emerged from a perceived need for social programming servicing the resident FIFO population in Deer Lake. The program is run in Deer Lake and Pasadena and in the spring of 2016 had 12-13 families registered at each location. Figure 6 is a page from a children's activity book developed for the program. The activity book is free and available online at: www.treehouserresourcecentre.com.

Environmental

Some environmental concerns were voiced by participants related to development near and recreational use of the river. The removal of trees for new housing developments, particularly in flood plains, was a concern. The development of wharves along the river which required the assessment of landowners only, were also raised as a concern. Fears were also expressed about future development of zoned agricultural land; however, stakeholders felt agricultural land was too important an asset to the community and region to be developed.

Community Sustainability

Many participants expressed optimism about the future sustainability of Deer Lake in the continued presence of FIFO. For example, if economic benefits from FIFO result in investments into efforts to diversify the local economy, this could help with the overall sustainability of the town. Some felt the downturn in 2016 was a significant challenge for the town, particularly it's FIFO population, while others felt the impact of the downturn was often overstated and that it was a 'hiccup' from which the town would recover. It was felt by most participants that Deer Lake would continue to grow by attracting residents from rural and outport communities for services and employment, FIFO workers included.

The research project *Identifying the Built Space Impacts of Fly-in/Fly-out Employment-related Geographical Mobility* was conducted by researchers from Grenfell Campus, Memorial University in 2016-2017. Research findings were compiled into a Master's Thesis of the same name by Leanna Butters, student of the Environmental Policy Institute.

Data was collected via a door-to-door survey of homes in Deer Lake as well as semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders and residents. This project was approved by the Grenfell Campus Re-

search Ethics Board.

This project is part of a 7-year Social Science and Humanities Research Council and RDC-funded research project, the *On the Move Partnership*. www.onthemovepartnership.ca

Thank you to those who participated in and supported this project, including the Town of Deer Lake.

This report was completed in January 2018.

on the move
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