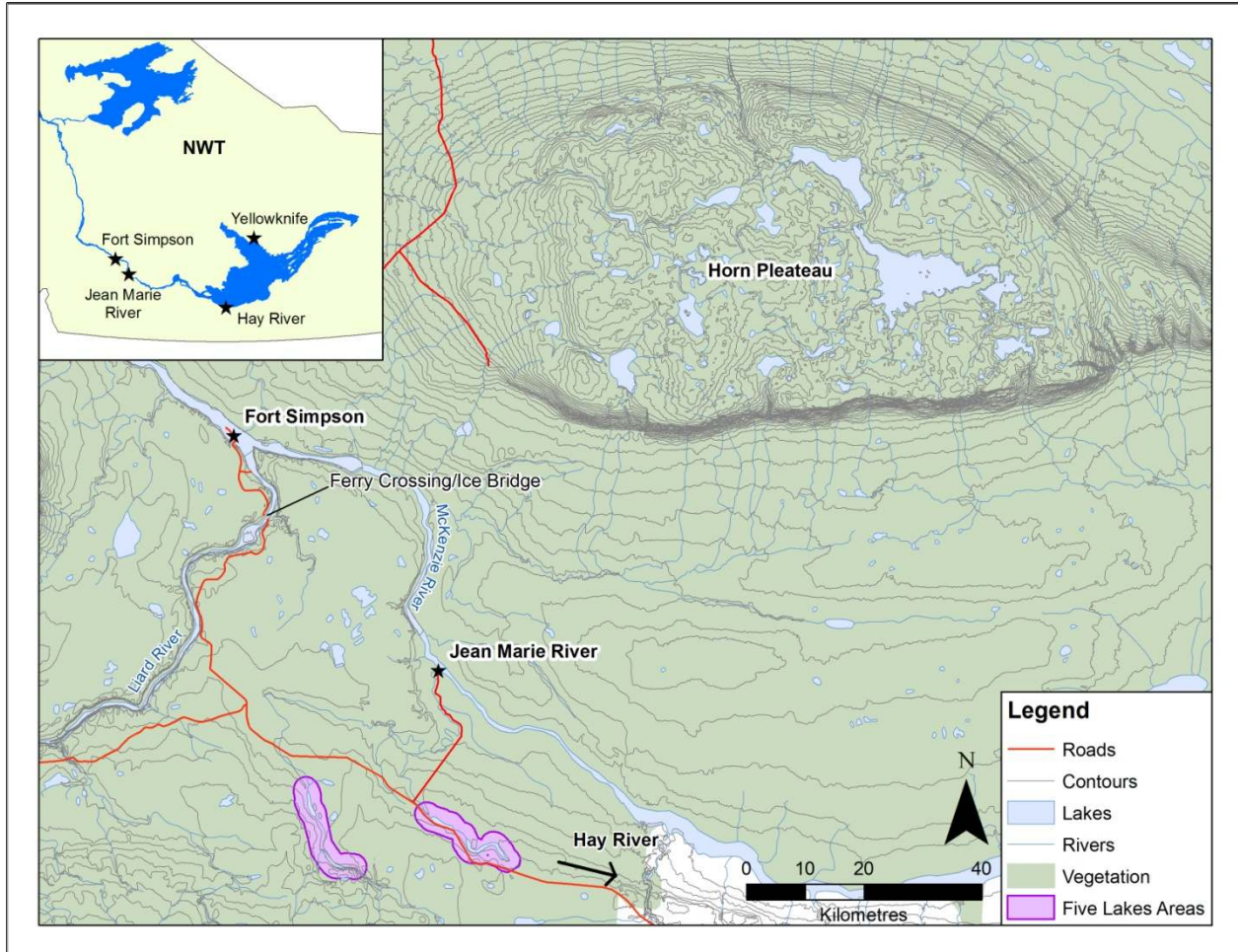


## 2. Community Background

### General Information

The settlement of Jean Marie River is situated at the confluence of the Jean Marie and Mackenzie Rivers, at approximately 61° 31' North Latitude and 120° 38' West Longitude. It is 127 kilometers East of Fort Simpson and about 360 kilometers West of Hay River (see Map 1). It is located in the Great Slave Plain eco-region, which consists of low rolling marsh lands and willows; and dense spruce, pine, and poplar forests.

Map 1: Jean Marie River and Surrounding Area



Data source: Geogatis, Environment Canada

### Development of the Settlement

Traditionally, the *Tthets'éhk'e Délî got'ine* (the people who traditionally occupied the Jean Marie River area) lived and traveled over a very wide area within what is now called the Dehcho region of the Northwest Territories. For countless generations, people pursued a traditional lifestyle: hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering plants and craft materials; moving with the seasons and resources throughout our traditional territory. The *Tthets'éhk'e Délî got'ine* had major family camps along the Mackenzie River from Mills Lake to Fort Simpson, in the Horn Plateau, at McGill Lake, at a traditional area called Selero, and at the 'three lakes': Ekali Lake, Sanguéz Lake, and Gargan Lake. No camps were permanent and people moved according to the seasons, often returning to the same general areas year after year.

In the early 1920s, the transition from a nomadic lifestyle to living in a more permanent settlement began on the recommendation of the Elder Norwegian. He recommended people settle at the mouth of the Jean Marie River (*Tthets' éhk'e Déli*), a traditional gathering and fishing spot. A permanent settlement slowly grew over the years, but people still pursued a traditional lifestyle for decades, traveling out from the settlement on a seasonal basis to camps spread out over our traditional territory. Some families remained at outlying lakes for years, only traveling into Jean Marie River and Fort Simpson for special occasions and supplies. The 5 Lakes Areas displayed in Map 1 were particularly important places for families in the JMR area during their seasonal rounds. These two areas are still important and are used today and the JMRFN is in the process of designating these areas as a protected area under the NWT PAS.

The JMRFN began as an independent band under the Indian Act in 1992. Prior to that, it was considered a sub-band of the Fort Simpson's *Lídlî Køç* First Nation, even though it has been functioning as an independent settlement for over 80 years (JMRFN, 2005:10).

### **Early Economic Development**

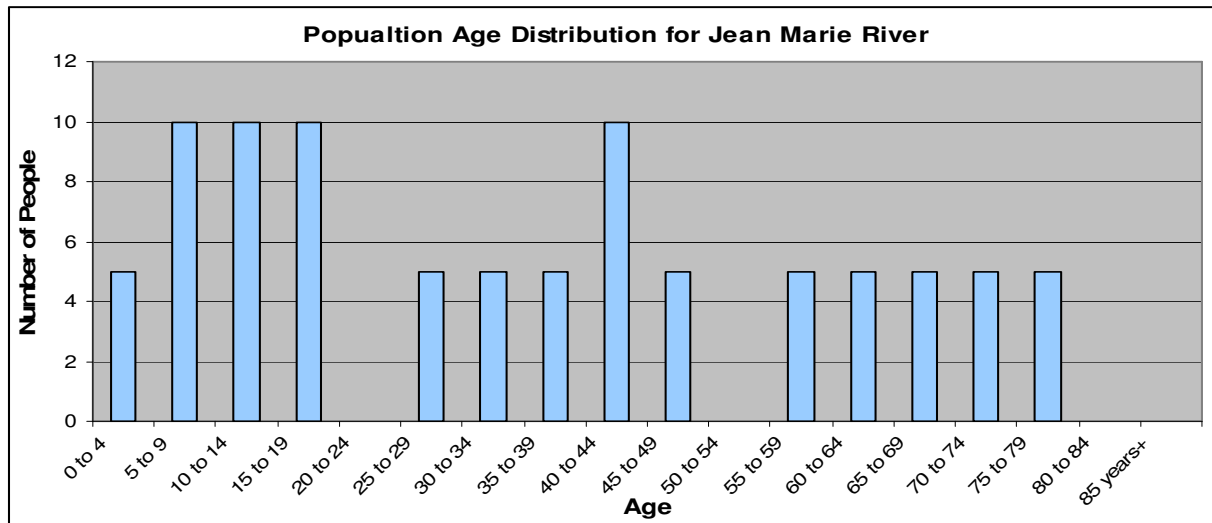
By the 1950s, the settlement of Jean Marie River had begun to develop a non-traditional economy based around river transportation and logging. Collectively, the community members bought and operated a small tug boat for fishing trips to Beaver Lake, hauling firewood, installing channel buoys and hauling fuel (operating from the 1950s to 1980s); and a portable sawmill to produce lumber for local use and for export to other communities along the Mackenzie River. A sawmill is still in operation today. They also managed a community garden, producing cabbages, carrots, and even tomatoes for local consumption. This garden is no longer being planted.

These economic activities complemented the traditional economy and provided a balance between a subsistence and entrepreneurial / wage economy for many years. Today, the JMRFN and the community are looking toward building greater economic sustainability through the development of greater self-sufficiency, a goal that climate change challenges, but also provides some new opportunities for economic development that will be discussed in subsequent sections (JMRFN, 2005:12-14).

### **Population**

The current population of the community is approximately 81, with the JMRFN having a total membership of 122. The majority of the community's population, approximately 93%, identify themselves as indigenous. Approximately 75% of the population of the community is over the age of 15 with a median age of 33.5 years. With a total labour force of 40 people, people are employed in such fields as social sciences, government, education, sales, service, trades, and as transportation and equipment operators.

Figure 1: Population Age Distribution for Jean Marie River



The employment rate is approximately 58% and the unemployment rate is approximately 22%. Unfortunately, because of the small size of the community and issues surrounding privacy, income details are not readily available. The mobility rate for residents of Jean Marie River is low with 87.5% of the population having lived at the same address for at least one year and 75% having lived at the same address for the last 5 years (JMRFN, 2005).

### Key Concerns

Our Community's key concerns regarding climate change are:

- Food security/safety;
- Access to Safe Drinking Water and Traditional Medicines;
- Travel Safety;
- Extreme Weather Events;
- Increased exposure to UV-B rays and new diseases associated with climatic and environmental changes, and;
- Negative impacts to the health of plants and animals.

### Relevance of this Project to the Dehcho Region

The health related impacts of climate change happening in our community are similar to many of the impacts that other Dene communities are experiencing (Guyot et al, 2006; Paci et al, 2005). Thus, the results of this project could also be used to work with other Dene communities to develop their own climate change policies and adaptation strategies in the Dehcho region; and strengthen our relations with these communities by working together to possibly explore, develop, and implement adaptation strategies such as regional environmental monitoring initiatives, food-sharing networks, and economic development.