

IRON ORE COMPANY OF CANADA
WABUSH 3 OPEN PIT MINE PROJECT
LAND, WATER AND RESOURCE USE / ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE STUDY

Submitted by:

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Iron Ore Company of Canada (IOC) is planning to construct a new mine pit at the southwest end of existing operations in Labrador City. This pit, the Wabush 3 Project, will allow flexibility in providing iron ore feed and become a source of iron ore to extend the operating life of the Carol Project. To facilitate mine pit planning and design, as well as meet the requirements of the environmental assessment (EA) for Wabush 3, IOC needed to understand the nature and extent of a variety of outdoor recreation and subsistence activities that occur in the Project area and in the Labrador West region.

1.1 Background

Government information partially describes use of land, water and other resources. For instance, domestic wood harvesting areas, fishing zones, and hunting and trapping areas are published but the locations, within these large zones, where activities occur are not well documented. The locations of recreational facilities (e.g. Smokey Mountain Alpine Ski Club, Menihek Nordic Ski Club, White Wolf Snowmobile Club, Labrador Trap & Skeet Club) and are well known. Also, the locations of cabins, parks, snowmobile trails, boat launches and roads are available and known to be the focus of land, water and resource use. While, use of these recreational amenities may themselves be activities (e.g. spending time at a cabin, camping, snowmobiling or boating), they may also provide access for harvesting firewood, fish, game and berries, or participating in a variety of other activities. Thus, further study was required to gain better understanding of how land, water and other resources are used.

1.2 Rationale

The main purpose of this study was to develop a baseline (to augment published information) of land, water and resource use by identifying the locations in Labrador West where people partake in activities. In particular, it was important to gain an understanding of activities that occur within the footprint area of the Wabush 3 Project to determine how the physical infrastructure and operations may potentially affect current use of the land and resources. In addition, information of the locations of food harvesting will be used to study the potential effects of the Project on human health.

The workshops and interviews were to serve other purposes. The facilitators and interviewers encouraged participants to share local knowledge about land, water and other resources and especially to identify trends or changes over time. Participants were also asked to discuss potential areas that could be improved, by IOC, to compensate for fish habitat that would be lost as a result of implementation of the Wabush 3 Project. IOC also provided participants with an opportunity to identify concerns about implementation of the Wabush 3 Project and suggestions for planning and design of the new mine pit. These results of these discussions are included in Sections 3 and 4 of this report.

1.3 Approach and Methods

To facilitate collection of information on undocumented use of land, water and resources, IOC and AMEC Environment & Infrastructure (AMEC) organized interviews and workshops with individuals and groups in Labrador West in January and February 2014. Potential participants were identified through exit surveys at an open house held November 2013 and through community contacts. Land and resource users were also asked to identify others who might be willing to participate. Invitees were informed of the upcoming workshops and interviews where they could share information on land use activities.

Two workshops were held with local residents of Labrador City and Wabush on January 20 and 21, 2014. Separate meetings were held with two members of Menihek Nordic Ski Club and three other individuals. A total of 30 residents participated in the study and a number of these had affiliations to organizations (e.g. Smokey Mountain Alpine Ski Club, Menihek Nordic Ski Club, White Wolf Snowmobile Club and Labrador Trap & Skeet Club).

During the workshops and interviews, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire indicating where they participate in land use activities (i.e. fishing, ice fishing, big game hunting, small game hunting, waterfowl hunting, berry picking, other harvesting, trapping, firewood cutting, boating, off-trail snowmobiling, ATV use, hiking / walking, camping, bird watching, geocaching, off-trail cross-country skiing, off-trail snowshoeing, mountain-biking, cross-country / trail running and other activities). They were also asked to indicate on a set of topographic maps where they participate in these activities.

AMEC compiled the data gathered from the interview and mapping exercises into a Geodatabase where it could be combined to create maps for each type(s) of land, water and resource use. Where participants indicated that they engage in activities along corridors such as snowmobile trails or roads (linearly or in specific locations), buffers were applied to encompass the various locations along that corridor. The buffers differ in size depending on information (lines, dot or polygons) provided by participants. The resulting maps are composites of each individual's contribution combined with others to show the most extensive areas where these activities occur in the local area and throughout the Labrador West region.

1.3.1 Study Areas

The Regional Study Area (RSA) includes landscapes from Fermont, Québec to Churchill Falls, which encompasses the extent of regional snowmobile trails and portions of Route 500 (the Trans Labrador Highway), Route 389 in Québec and the Québec North Shore and Labrador Railway (QNS&L), which are the main routes for accessing the countryside. The Local Study Area (LSA) includes the location of the proposed Wabush 3 Project and areas surrounding the Project and might be affected by construction and operations. These Study Areas contain a number of bodies of water, as well as terrestrial landscape features that local residents use for recreational, subsistence and harvesting.

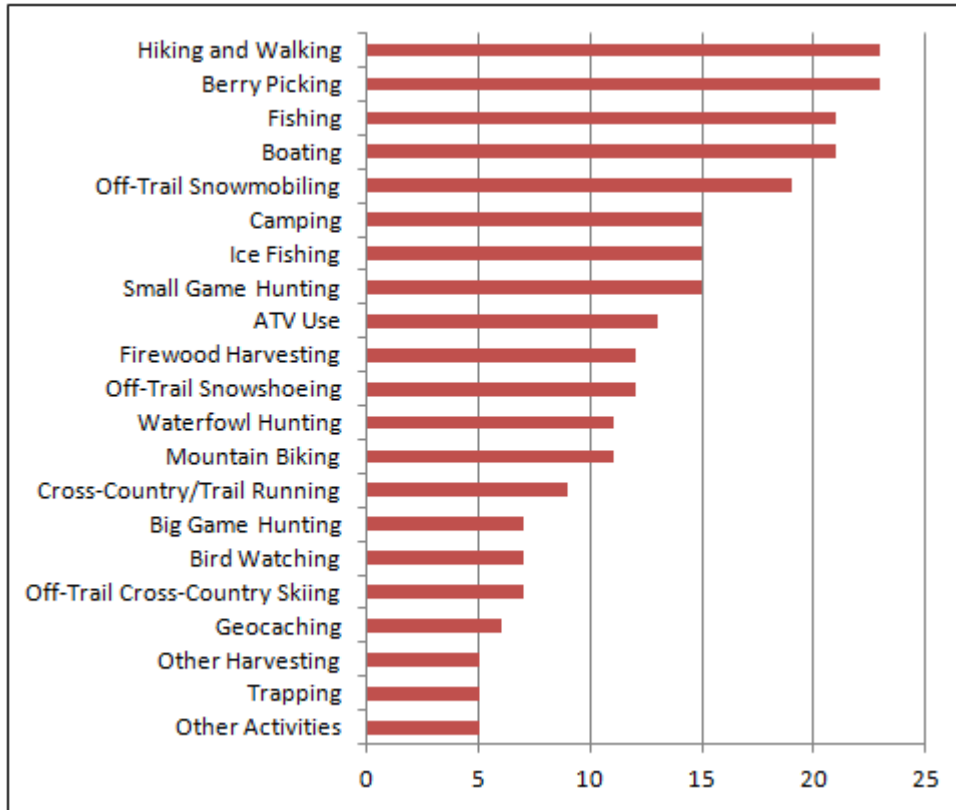
1.3.2 Data Limitations

The study provides an overview of the locations where people take part in land, water and resource use activities within the Labrador West Region and within the Wabush 3 area. As only a portion of the population of Labrador West was surveyed, this data is not a statistical representation of the number of people or percentage of the population that participate in any activity.

2 RESULTS

The most popular activities (i.e. more than half of the participants engaged in them) were hiking and walking, berry picking, fishing, boating and off-trail snowmobiling (Figure 2-1). In addition, half of the participants engage in camping, ice fishing and small game hunting.

Figure 2-1 Participation in Land Use Activities



The following series of maps illustrate the combined areas identified by all participants for each activity or combinations of activities. The Smokey Mountain area was most commonly identified by residents who participate in a number of activities. Almost all activities occur in the Smokey Mountain area, with the exception of particular subsistence activities such as big / small game hunting, waterfowl hunting, and firewood cutting.

2.1 Hiking, Walking and Camping

Participants indicated that hiking and walking are the most common activities in which they engage. Participants identified several areas within the LSA including snowmobile trails, Menihek Nordic ski trails, Smokey Mountain and around Tanya Lake, Beverly Lake and Canning Lake (Figure 2-2). Within the RSA, participants hike and walk mostly around Labrador City and Wabush (Figure 2-3). Several areas from Labrador West to Churchill Falls were also identified.

Participants camp within the LSA, including around the Menihek ski trails, Smokey Mountain and in the vicinity of several lakes (Figure 2-2). Participants indicated that camping occurs at Duley Lake and Grand Hermine where campgrounds are located. Camping occurs around Labrador City and Wabush at Walsh River, Crystal Falls, Julienne Lake, Loon Lake and Elephant Head. Residents also camp to the east of Labrador West at Esker, Shabogamo Lake, Ashuanipi Lake, along the highways, within the RSA (Figure 2-3).

2.2 Berry Picking and Other Harvesting

Residents harvest berries (red berries and blueberries) and mushrooms for consumption. Within the LSA various berry picking locations were identified including an area around Leg Lake, Trout Lake and west along the snowmobile trails. Participants identified other locations near Beverly Lake, Dumbell Lake, Smokey Mountain, Menihek Nordic ski trails and the Town of Labrador City (Figure 2-4). In the RSA, berry picking areas are located near Wabush including Elephant Head, the sand pits and Riordan Lake (Figure 2-5). A number of locations east of Labrador City and Wabush along the snowmobile trails as far as Esker and Emeril Junction were identified. Berry picking occurs along the TLH including a large area about midway between Emeril Junction and Churchill Falls and in various locations along the snowmobile trail between Esker and Churchill Falls. Mushroom harvesting occurs along Menihek ski trails, at Duley Lake and Emerillion Lake.

2.3 Fishing and Ice Fishing

Fishing and ice fishing were identified as popular activities by participants. Both occur in various lakes and ponds in the LSA (i.e. Leg, Trout, White and Dumbell Lakes) as well as other lakes near Labrador City (i.e. Julienne, Emma and Duley Lakes) (Figure 2-6). Trout Lake and Dumbell Lake were most frequently identified as fishing and ice fishing locations. Within the RSA, participants identified a number of areas in and near Labrador City and Wabush and from Fermont to Churchill Falls (Figure 2-7). These were mainly in areas accessible by the Trans Labrador Highway (TLH) and / or snowmobile trails.

2.4 Boating

As boating is often combined with fishing it would be expected that locations for both activities would coincide. This is often the case in the LSA where participants identified Duley, Dumbell, Leg, Tanya, Canning, Harrie, Wabush and Little Wabush Lakes as boating locations (Figure 2-8). However, boating is not as widespread as fishing and ice fishing in western Labrador. Various boating locations were identified within the RSA (Figure 2-9). These were mainly in water bodies to the northeast of Labrador City and Wabush as far as Emeril Junction, as well as northwest of Churchill Falls.

Figure 2-2 Hiking, Walking (23 participants) and Camping (15 participants) in the Local Study Area

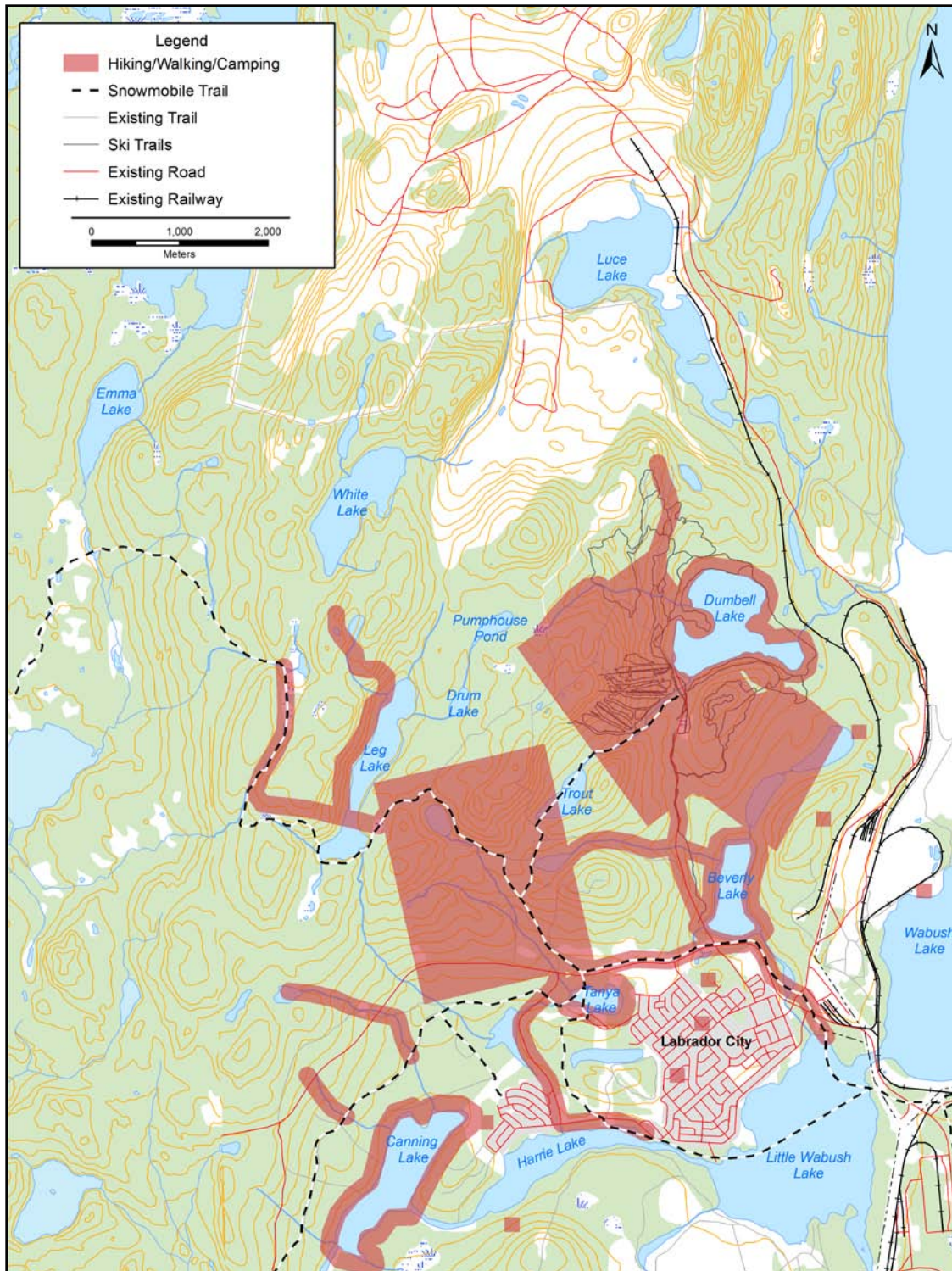


Figure 2-3 Hiking, Walking (23 participants) and Camping (15 participants) in the Regional Study Area

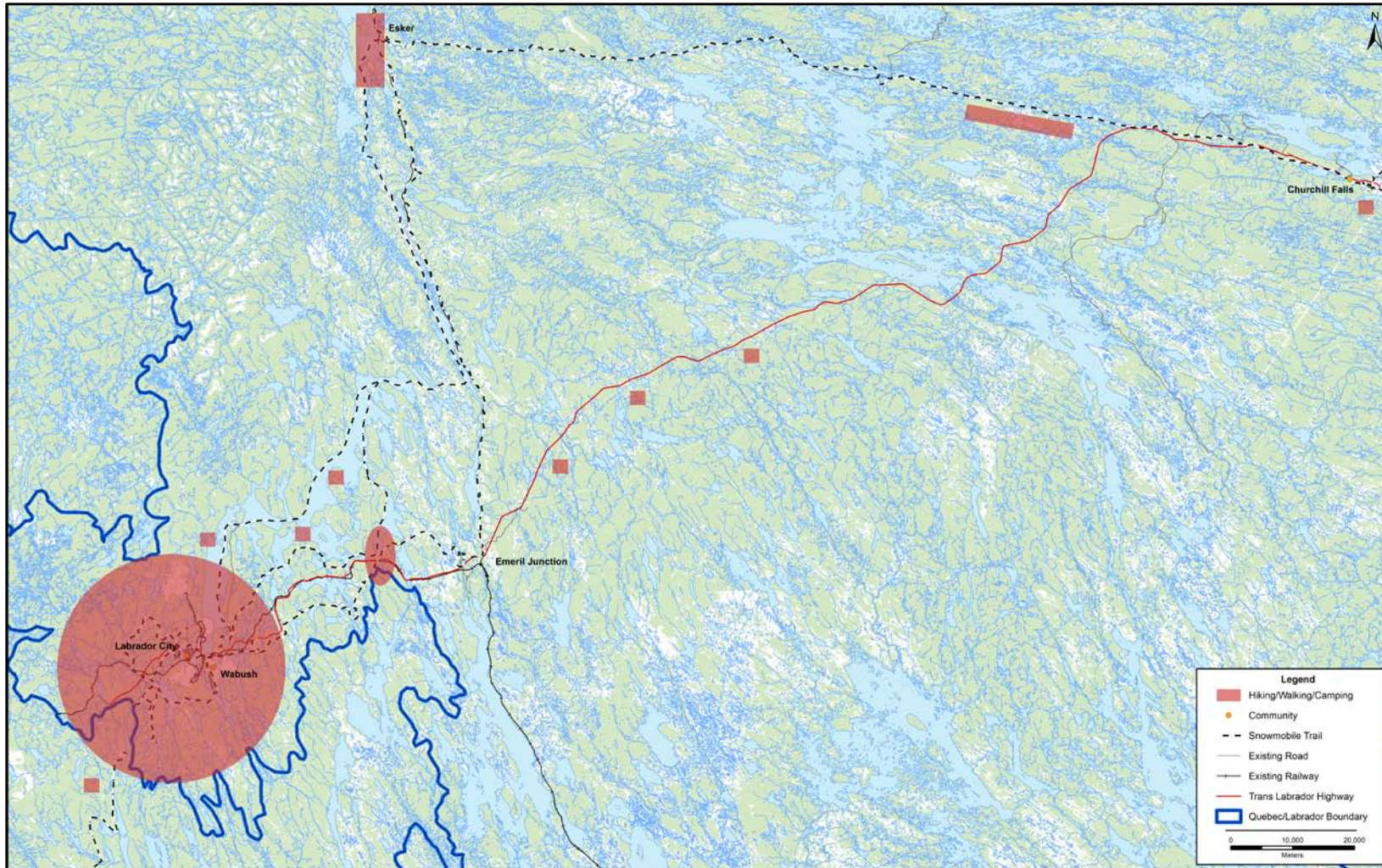


Figure 2-4 Berry Picking (23 participants) and other Harvesting (5 participants) in the Local Study Area

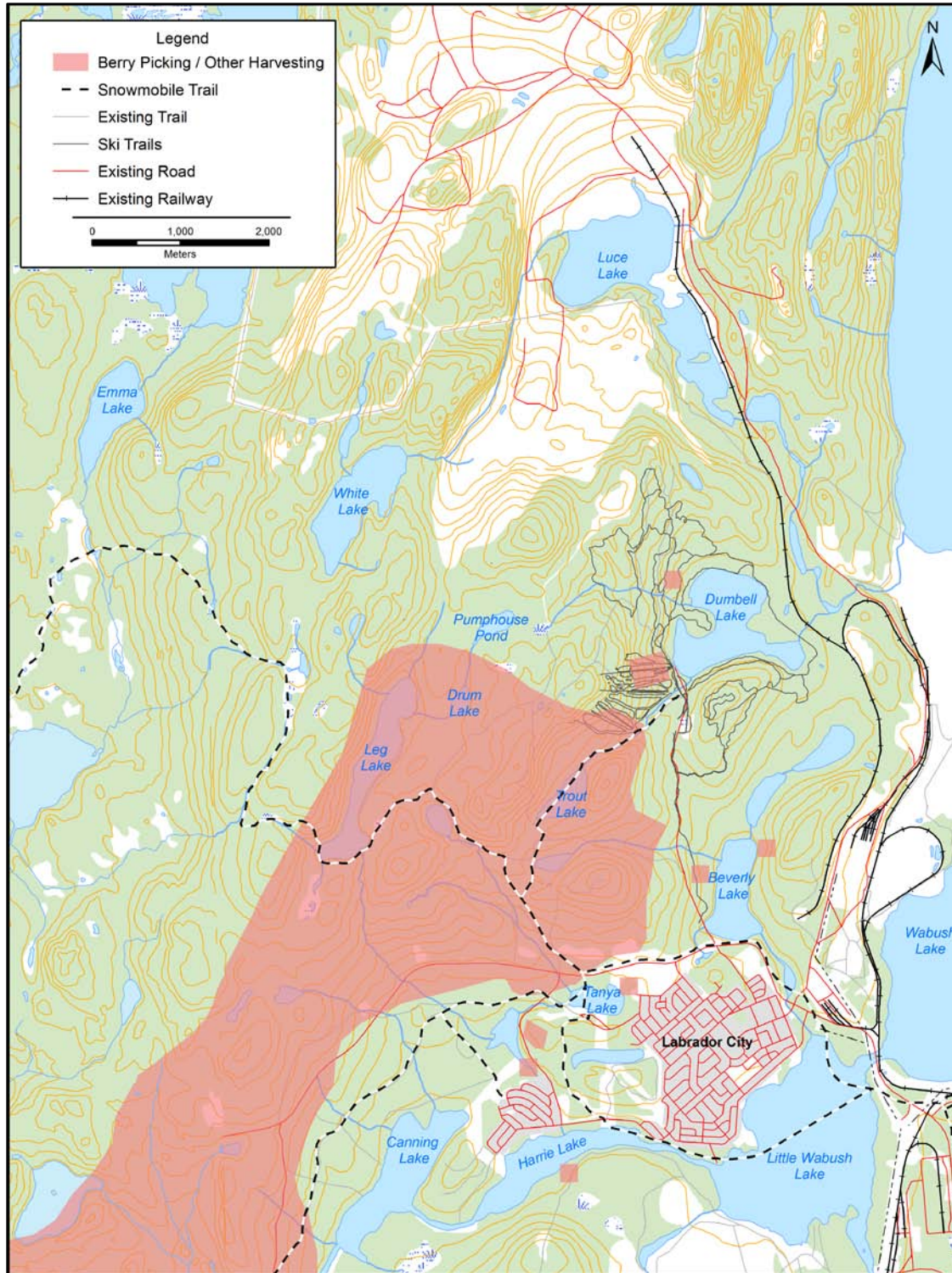


Figure 2-5 Berry Picking (23 participants) and other Harvesting (5 participants) in the Regional Study Area

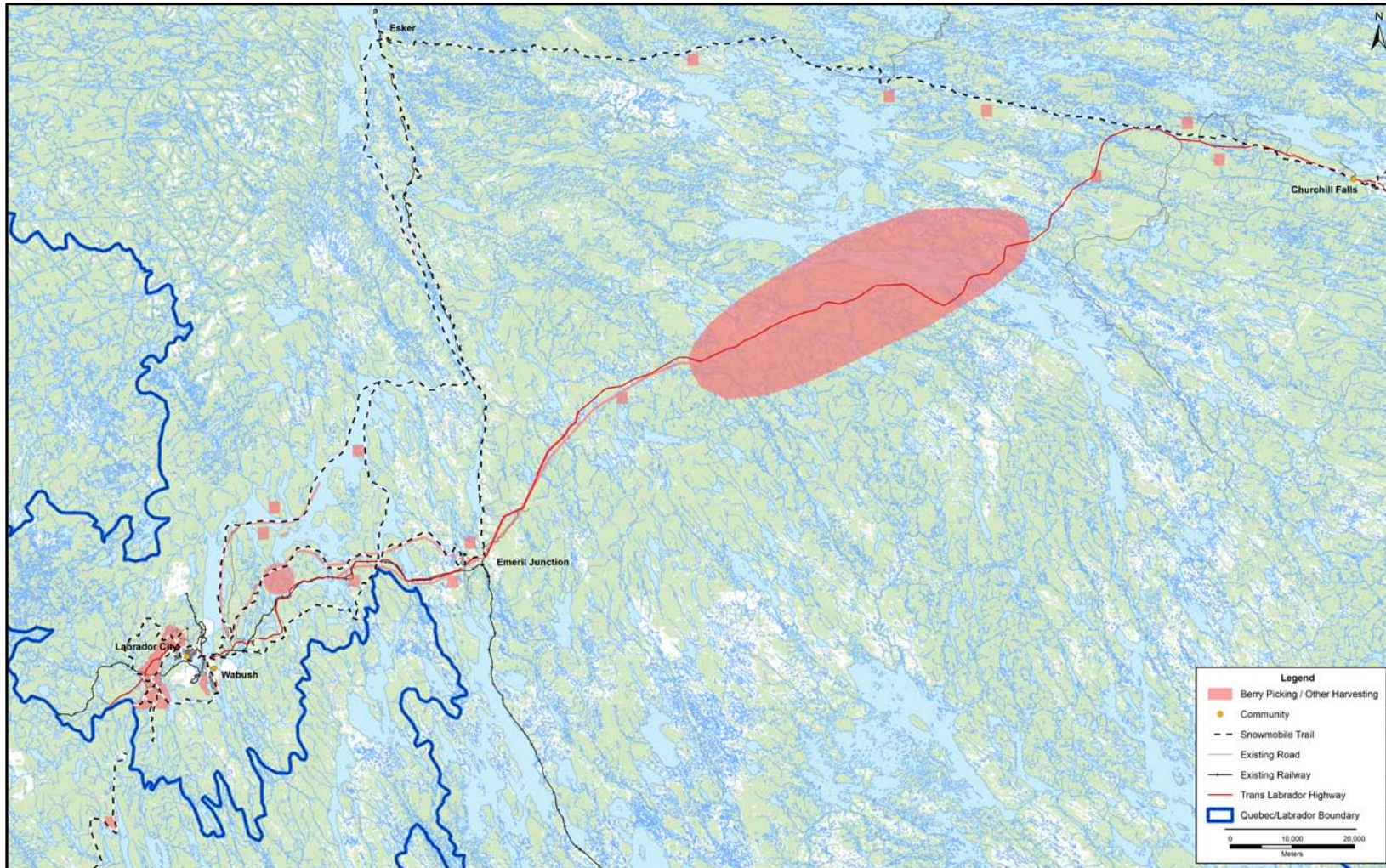


Figure 2-6 Fishing (21 participants) and Ice Fishing (15 participants) in the Local Study Area

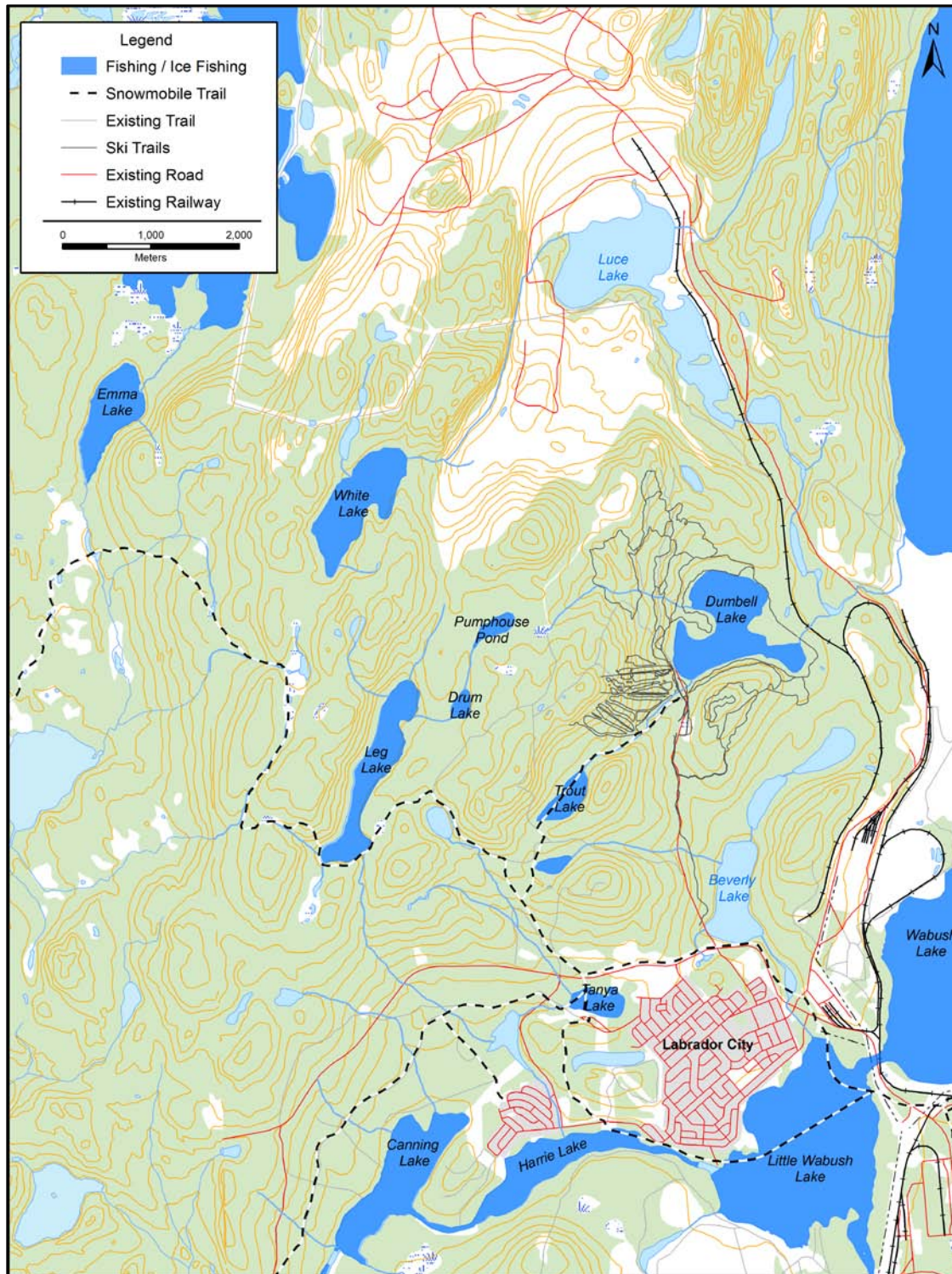


Figure 2-7 Fishing (21 participants) and Ice Fishing (15 participants) in the Regional Study Area

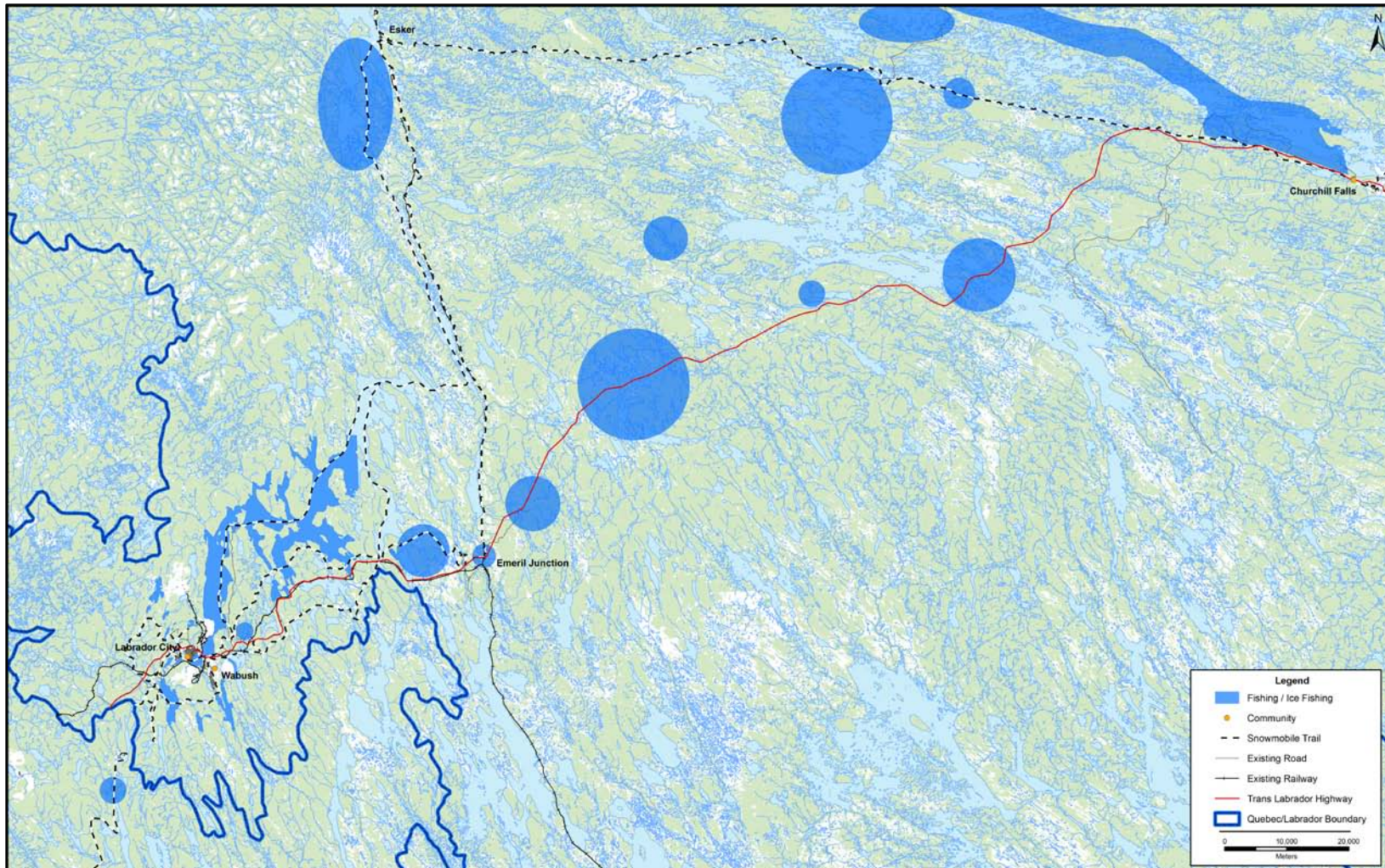


Figure 2-8 Boating (21 participants) in the Local Study Area

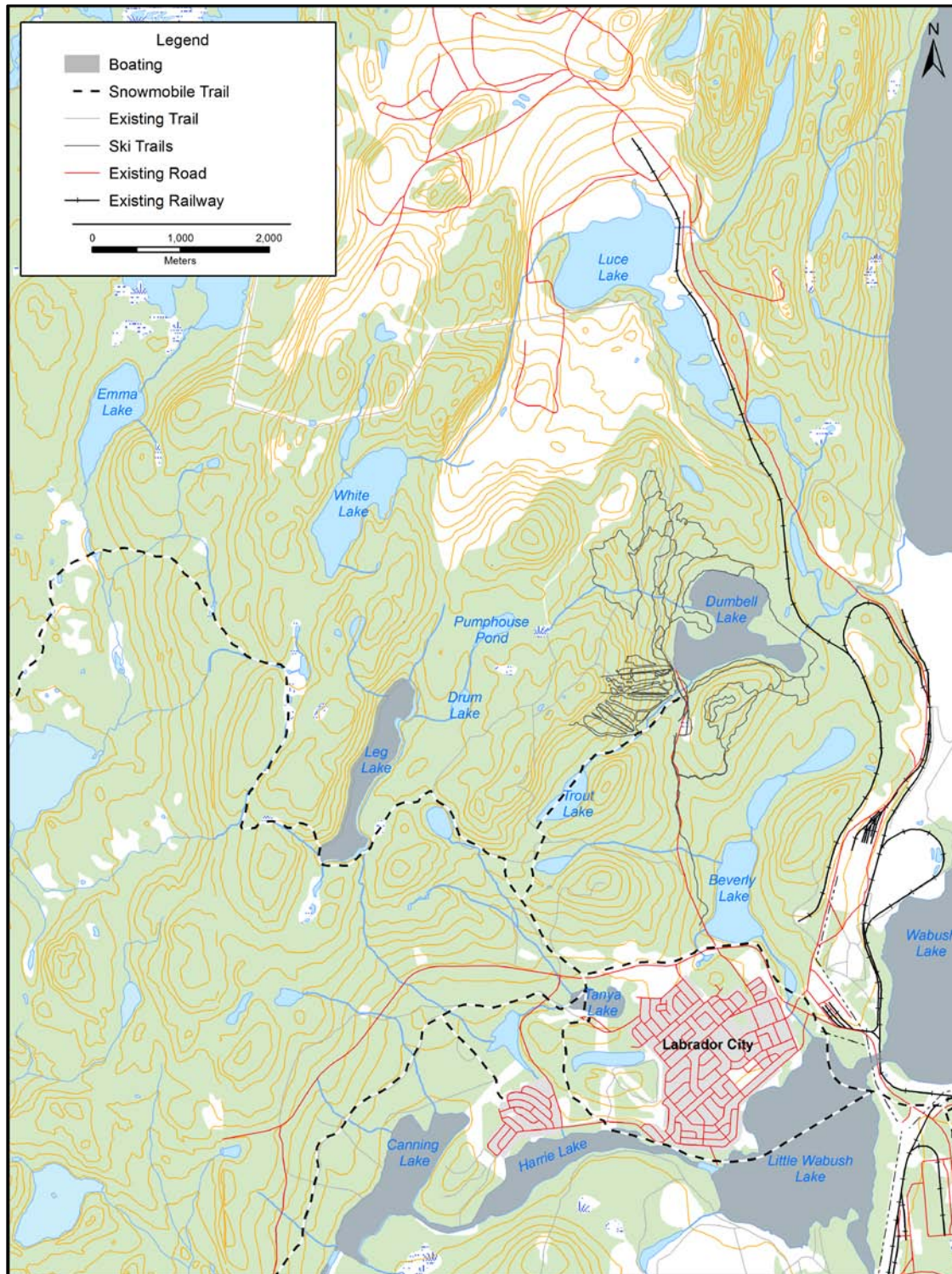
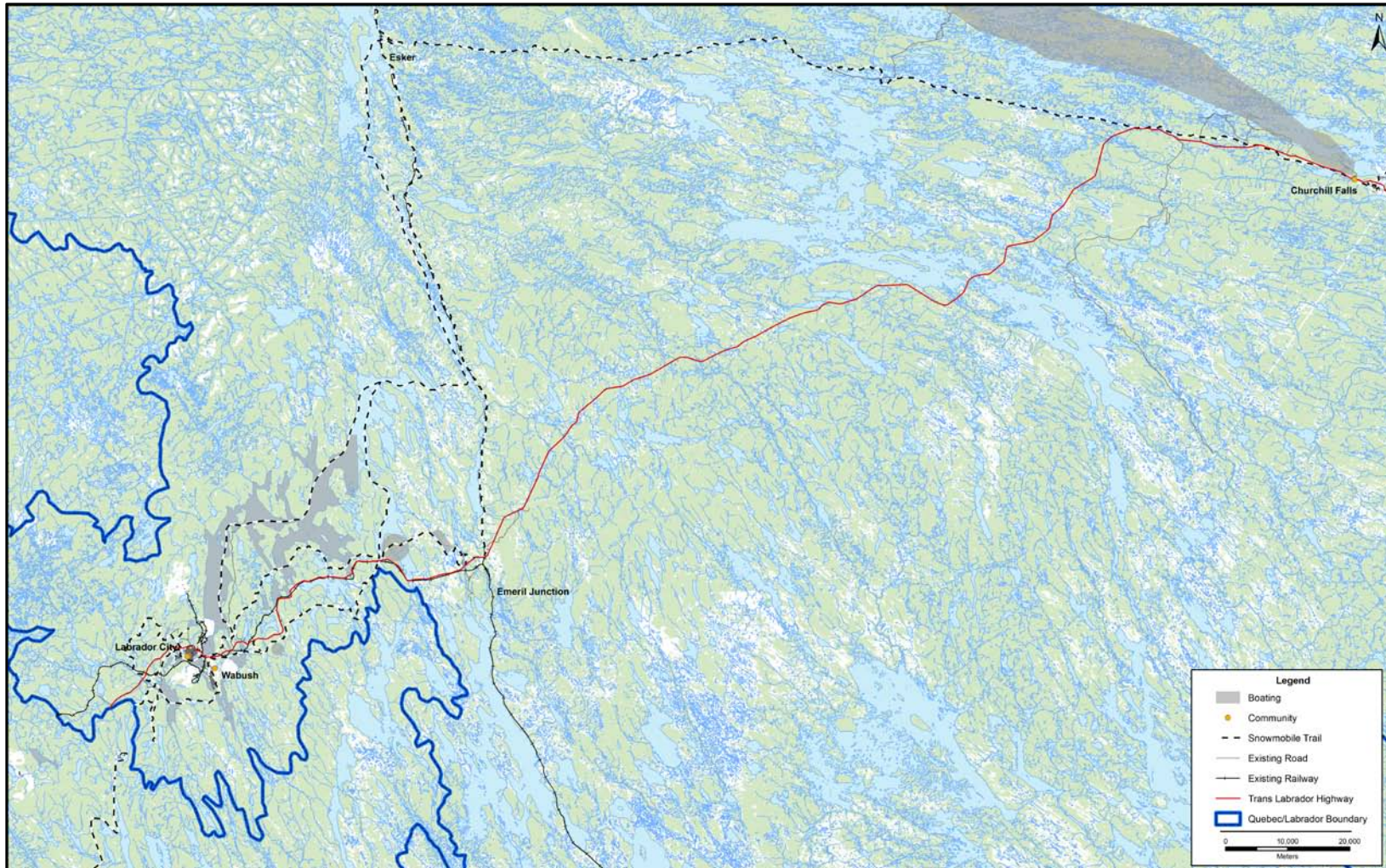


Figure 2-9 Boating (21 participants) in the Regional Study Area



2.5 Off Trail Snowmobiling

Western Labrador has snowmobile trails from Fermont to Churchill Falls. Snowmobiling is a means of winter transportation to access areas for various activities but it is also a recreational activity in its own right. A number of participants (nearly 20) indicated that they also participate in off-trail snowmobiling. In the LSA, participants indicated that they operate snowmobiles off-trail all around the Labrador City area including White Lake, Leg Lake, Dumbell Lake, Trout Lake and Smokey Mountain (Figure 2-10). Within the RSA, off-trail snowmobiling occurs all around Labrador City, Wabush and Fermont as well as off the snowmobile trail west of Churchill Falls (2-11). A common response from those interviewed was that off-trail snowmobiling occurs in the general area all around Labrador West and Fermont.

2.6 Hunting

Small game hunting is more common in Labrador West than waterfowl big or game hunting. In the LSA, participants hunt small game (i.e. hare, porcupine, ptarmigan or grouse) around Leg, White, Dumbell, Beverly, Canning and Wabush Lakes and around Emma Lake to the west (Figure 2-12). Small game hunting in the RSA is focused around both towns and east as far as Churchill Falls (Figure 2-13). Between Labrador West and Churchill Falls, small game, big game and waterfowl hunting all centre around snowmobile trails, the TLH and possibly the rail line (from Emeril Junction to Esker) (Figure 2-14 and Figure 2-15). Participants identified Shabogamo Lake and Esker Road as hunting areas for waterfowl (i.e. ducks, geese and snipe). Big game hunting (i.e. moose) occurs mainly in the RSA in areas such as Lobstick, Orma Lake and Ashuanipi River.

2.7 ATV Use

ATVs are used as transportation along roads and trails outside of the winter season for activities such as hunting, fishing, trapping, accessing remote cabins and wood cutting. Participants indicate that, within the LSA, they use ATVs around Smokey Mountain in an area bounded by White Lake, Leg Lake, Dumbell Lake, Beverly Lake and Tanya Lake as well as around Canning Lake and to some extent along snowmobile trails (2-16). Within the RSA, ATVs are used from Fermont to Emeril Junction including the TLH, rail lines, and other roads (2-17). ATVs are also used along the snowmobile trail between Esker and Churchill Falls.

2.8 Firewood Harvesting

In the LSA, participants identified the Smokey Mountain area and various other locations (near Dumbell, Wabush Tanya, Harrie and Canning Lakes) as being used to cut firewood (2-18). Within the RSA, residents cut firewood in various locations including Julienne, Shabogamo and Grand Hermine Lakes, along the TLH and in a large area off the TLH between Emeril Junction and Churchill Falls (2-19).

2.9 Off-Trail, Cross-Country Skiing and Snowshoeing

Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing take place at the Menihok Nordic Ski Club. Participants indicated that they also cross-country ski or snowshoe off-trail within the LSA. Most of this activity occurs in areas around Smokey Mountain, Dumbell Lake and the Nordic ski trails as well as in various locations around Labrador City (Figure 2-20 and Figure 2-21). A small number of areas were identified in the RSA, mostly off the TLH and snowmobile trails between Labrador West and Churchill Falls.

Figure 2-10 Off-Trail Snowmobiling (19 participants) in the Local Study Area

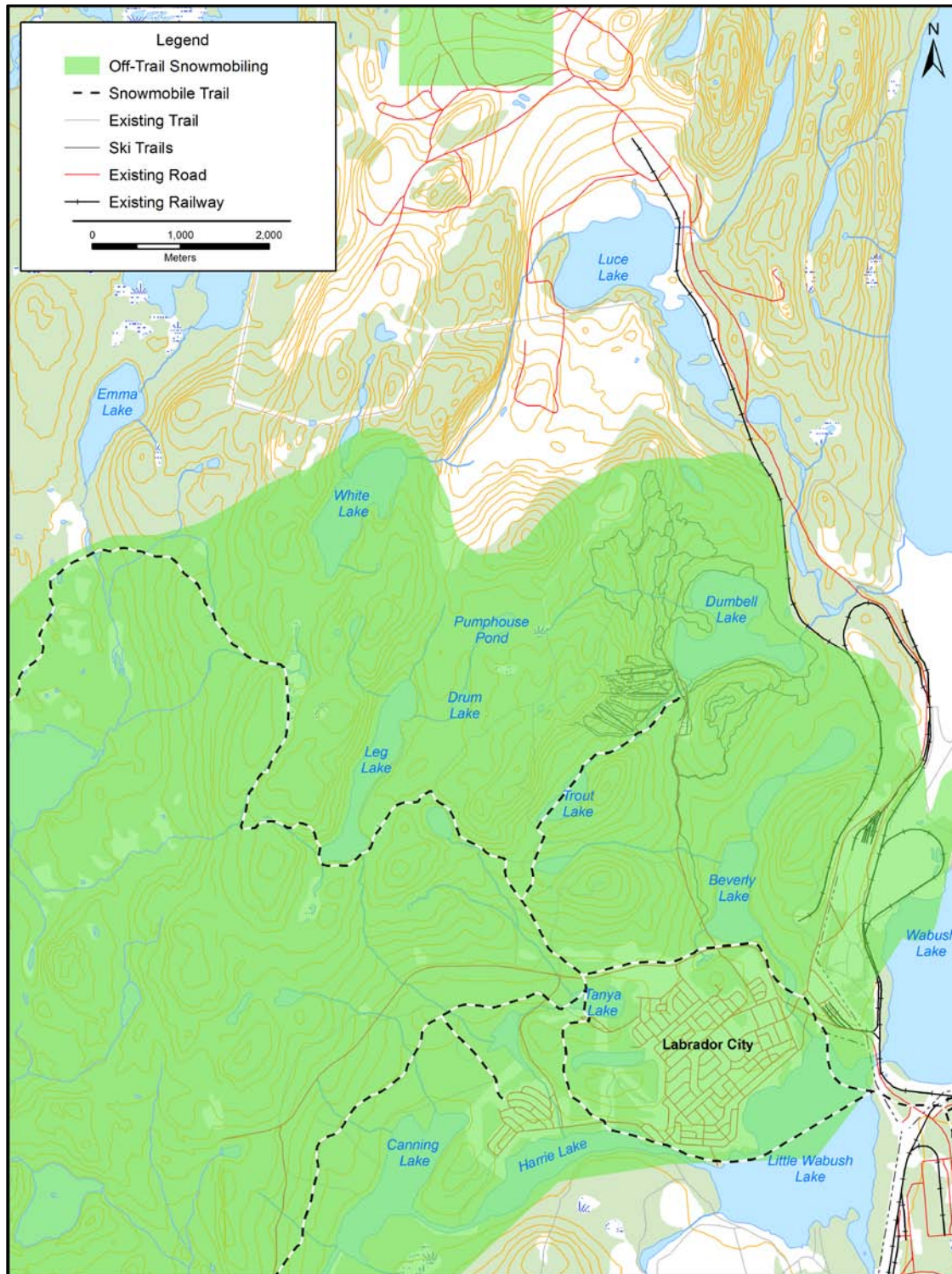


Figure 2-11 Off-Trail Snowmobiling (19 participants) in the Regional Study Area

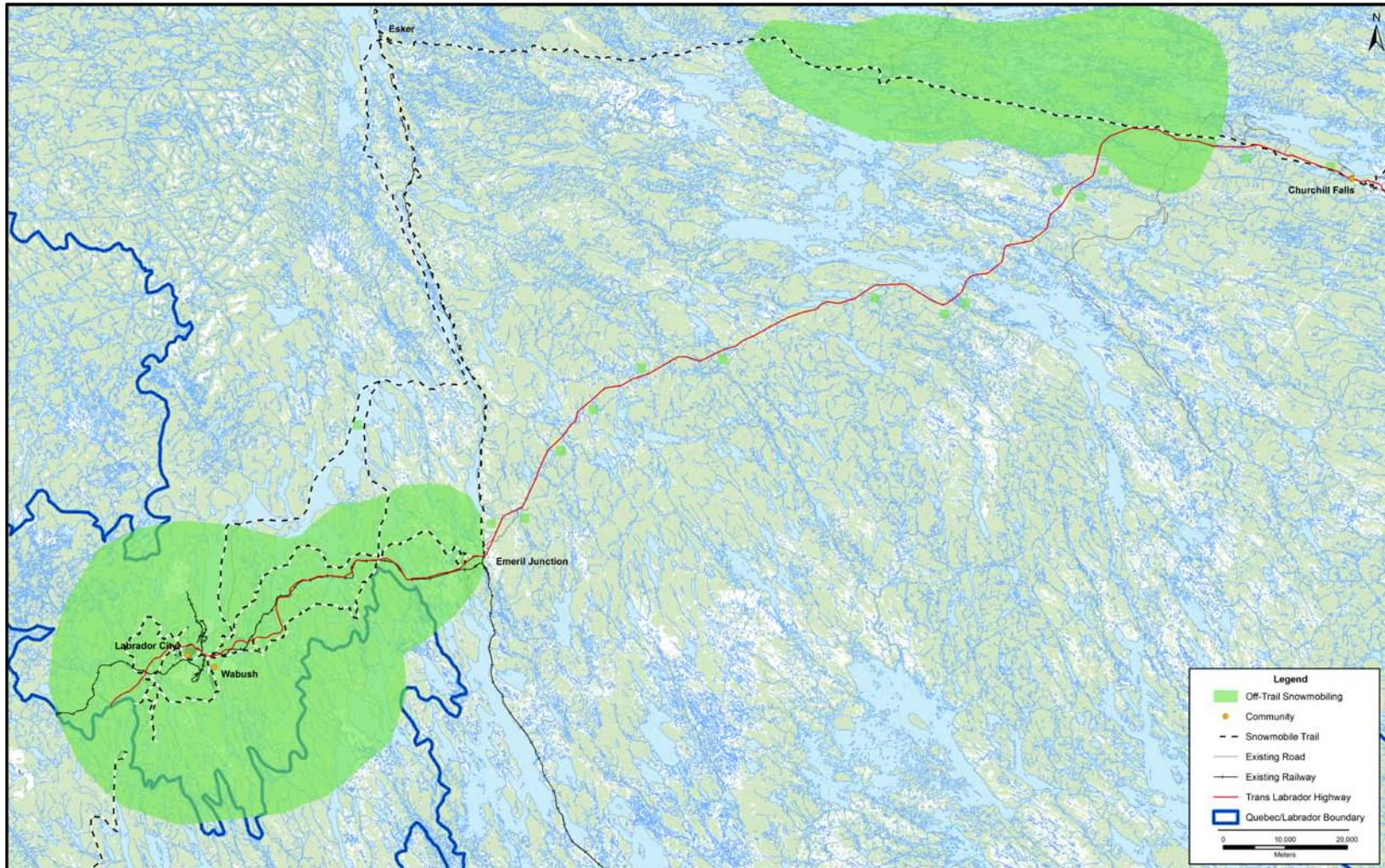


Figure 2-12 Small Game Hunting (15 participants) in the Local Study Area

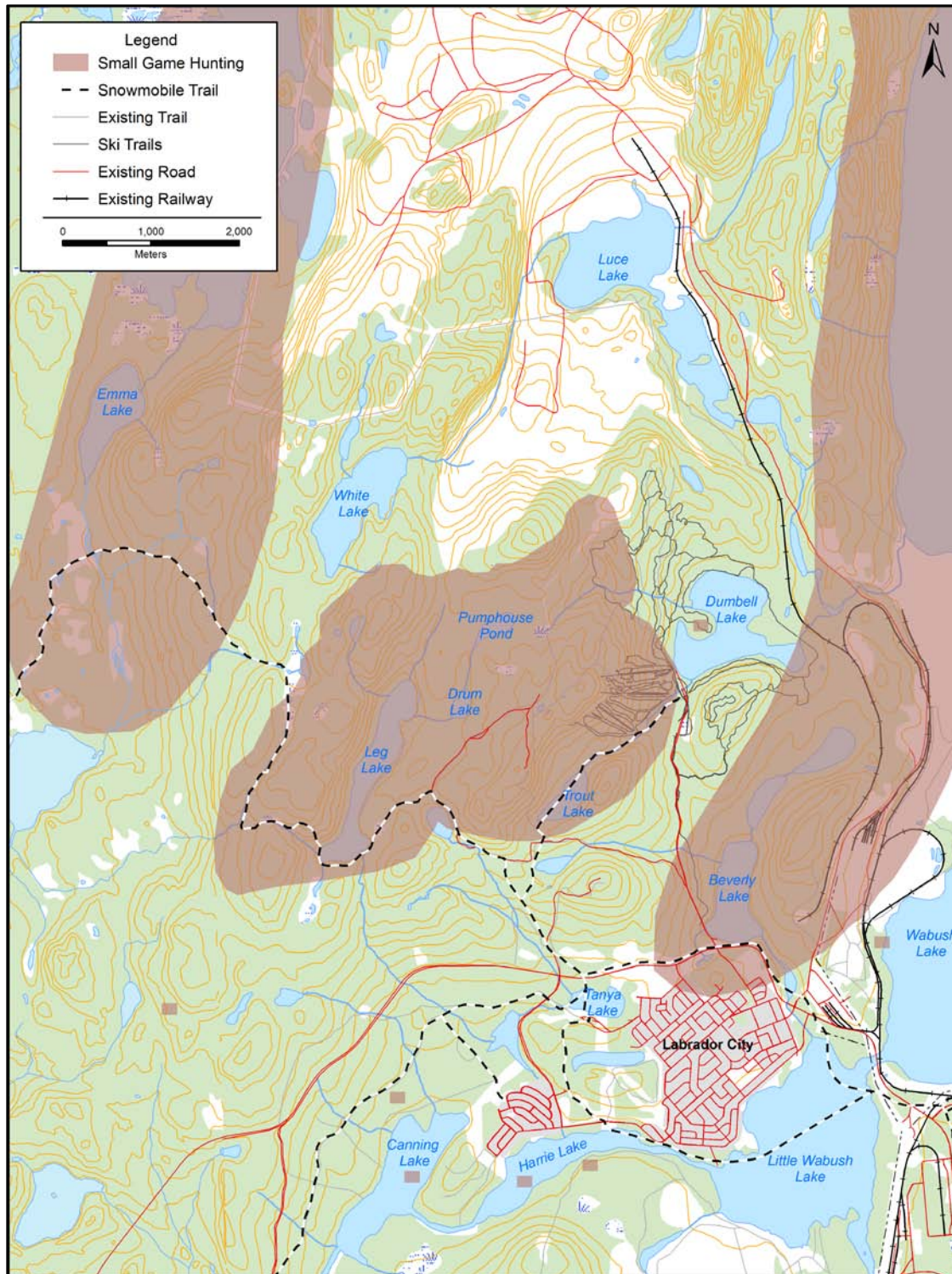


Figure 2-13 Small Game Hunting (15 participants) in the Regional Study Area

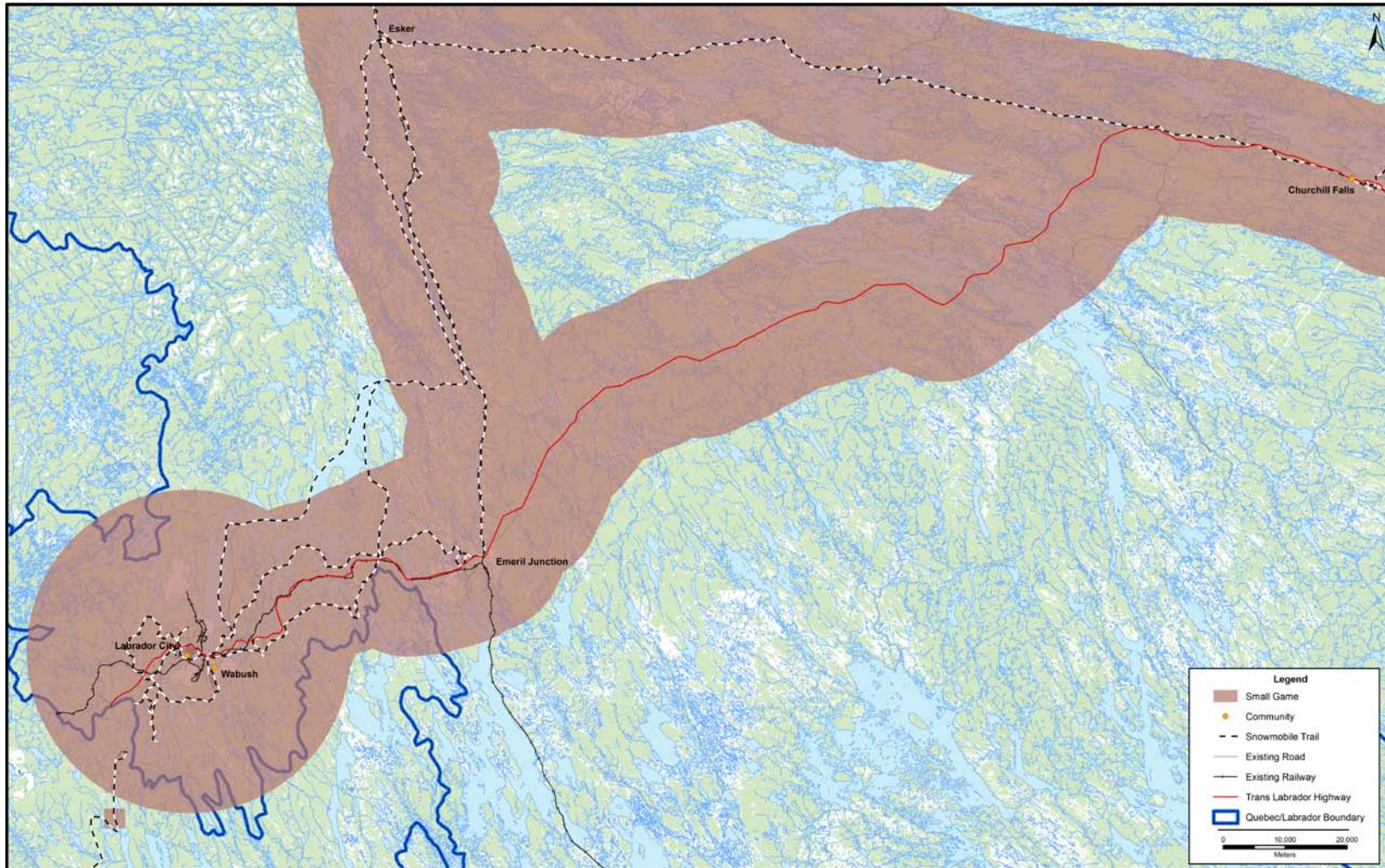


Figure 2-14 Waterfowl Hunting (11 participants) in the Regional Study Area

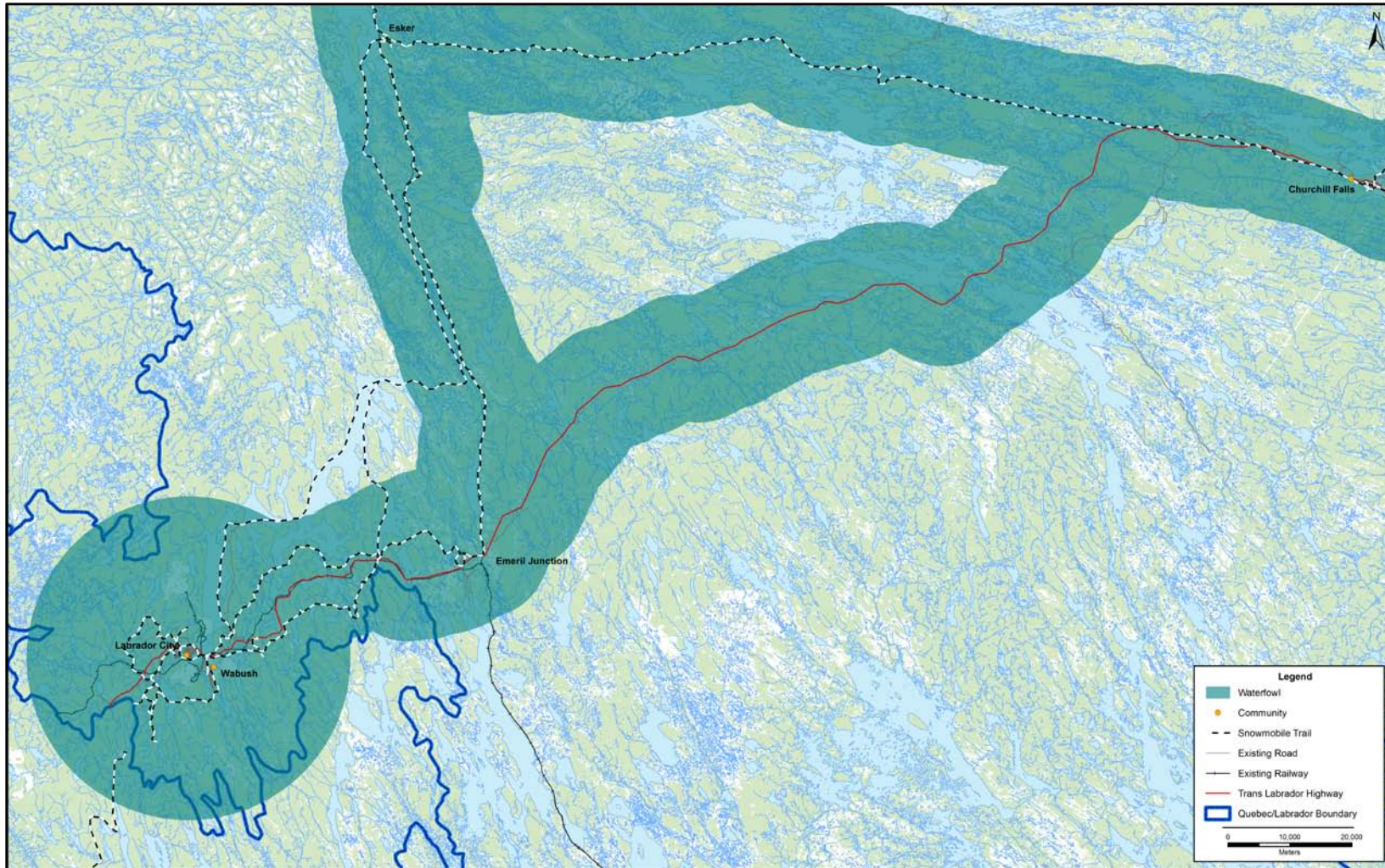


Figure 2-15 Big Game Hunting (7 participants) in the Regional Study Area

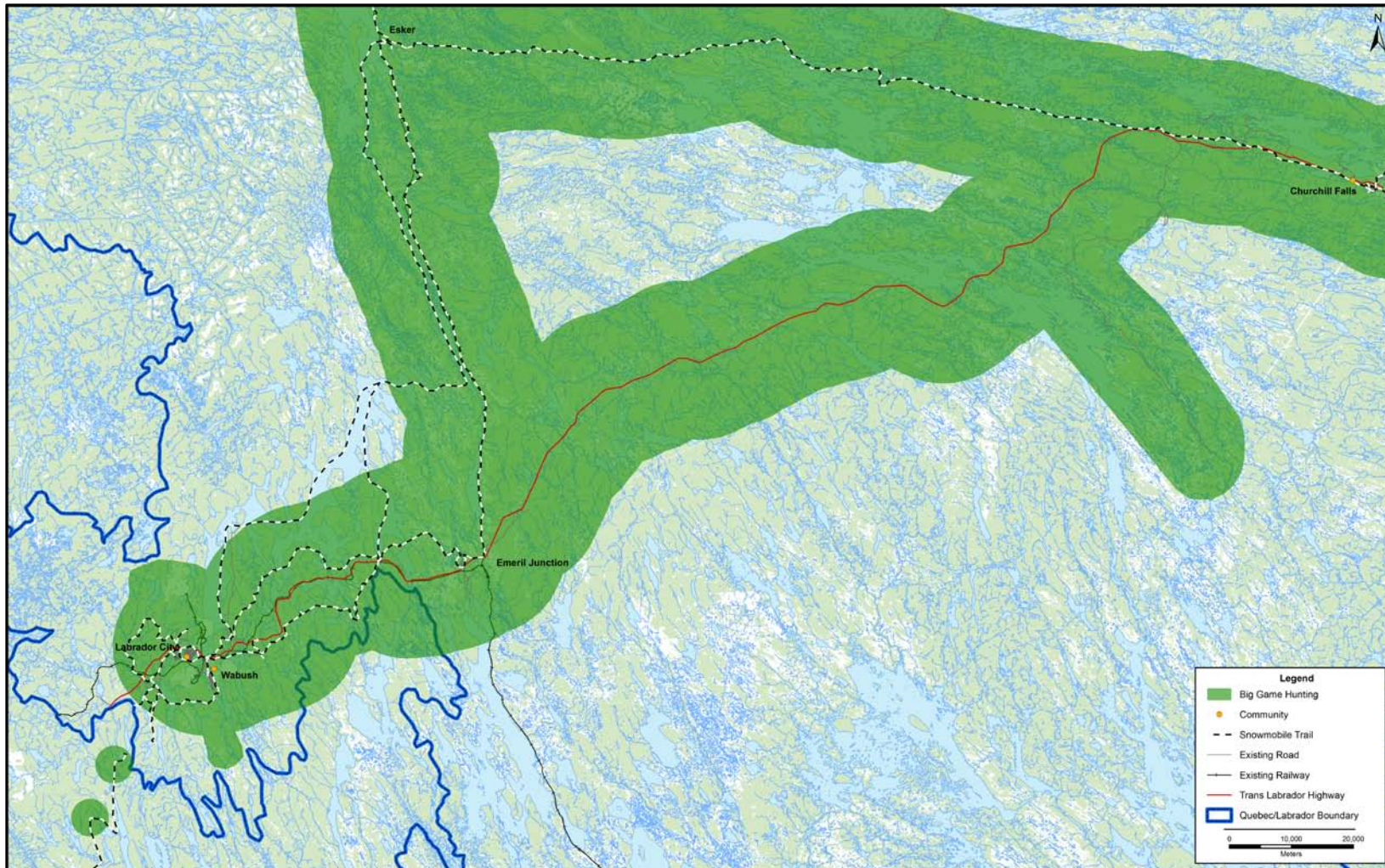


Figure 2-16 ATV Use (13 participants) in the Local Study Area

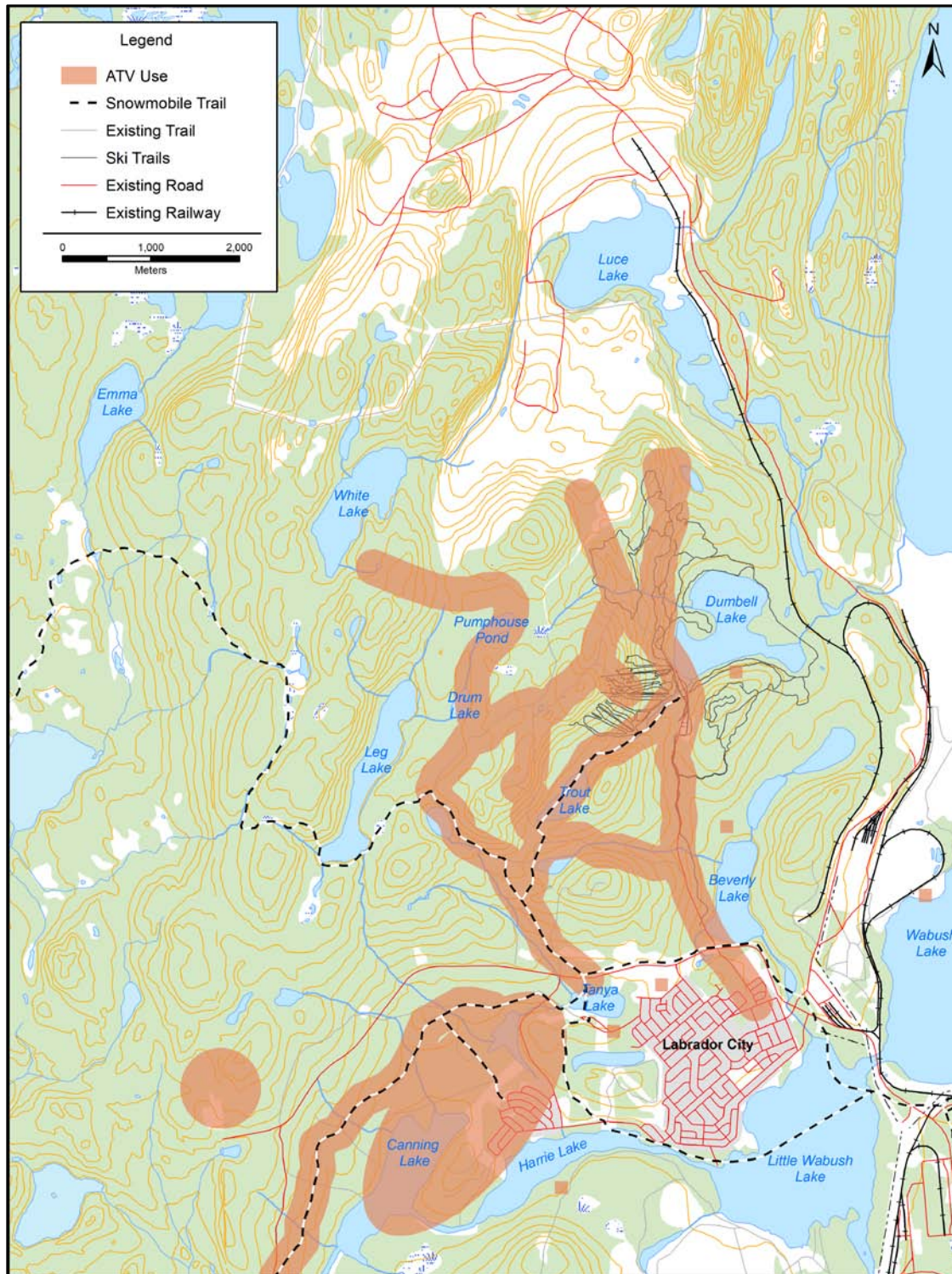


Figure 2-17 ATV Use (13 participants) in the Regional Study Area

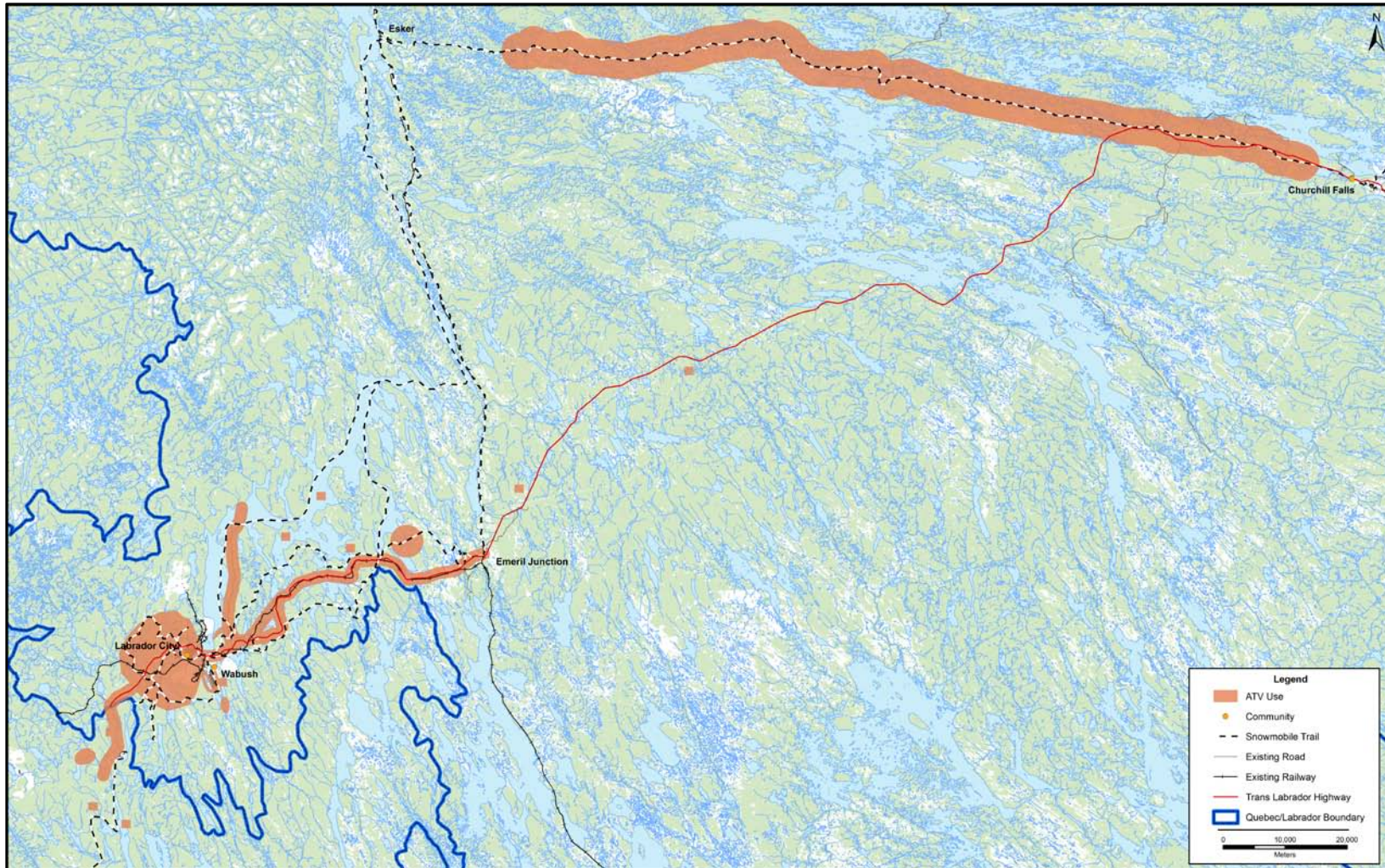


Figure 2-18 Firewood Harvesting (12 participants) in the Local Study Area



Figure 2-19 Firewood Harvesting (12 participants) in the Regional Study Area

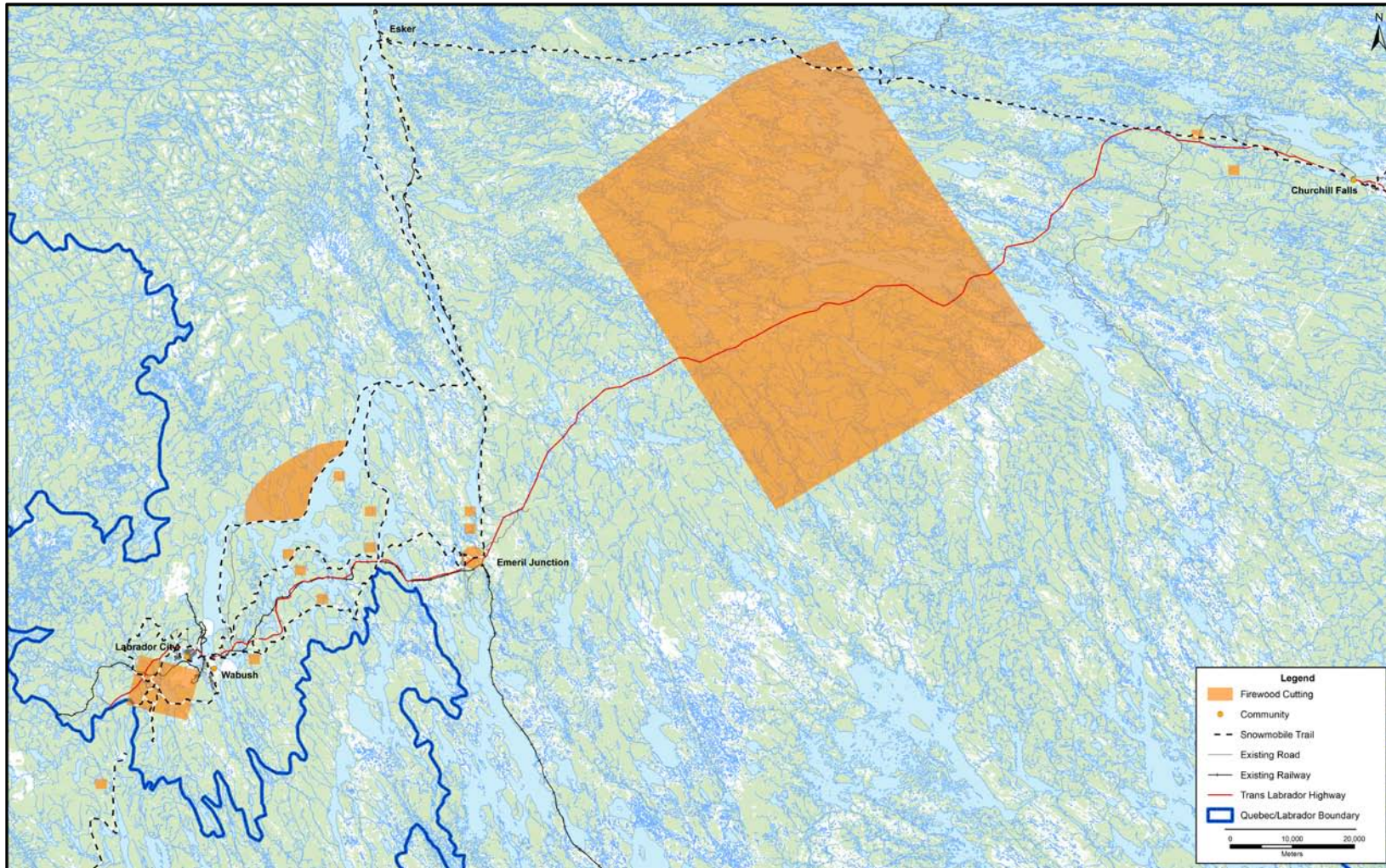


Figure 2-20 Off-Trail Snowshoeing (12 participants) and Cross-Country Skiing (7 participants) in the Local Study Area

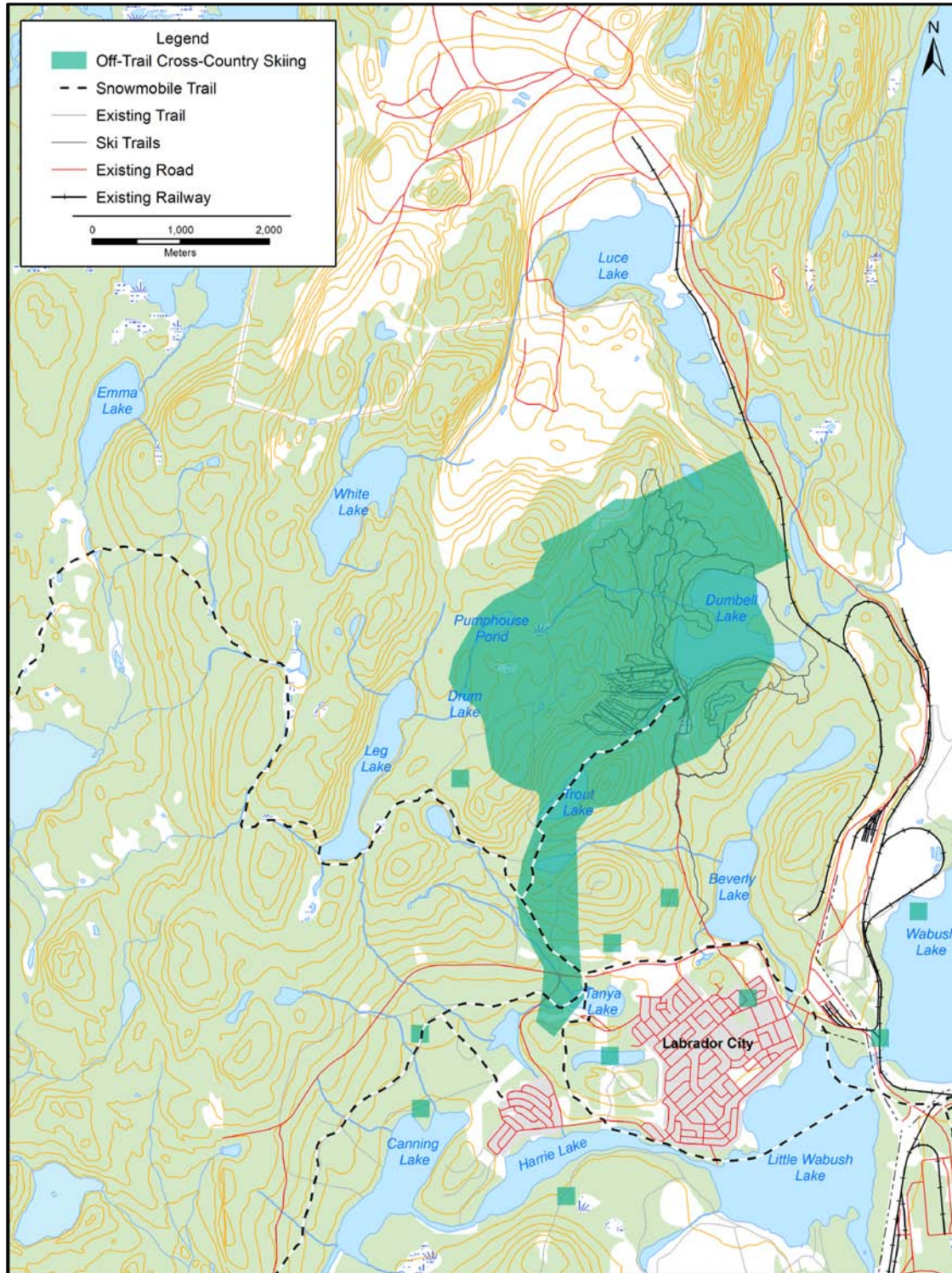
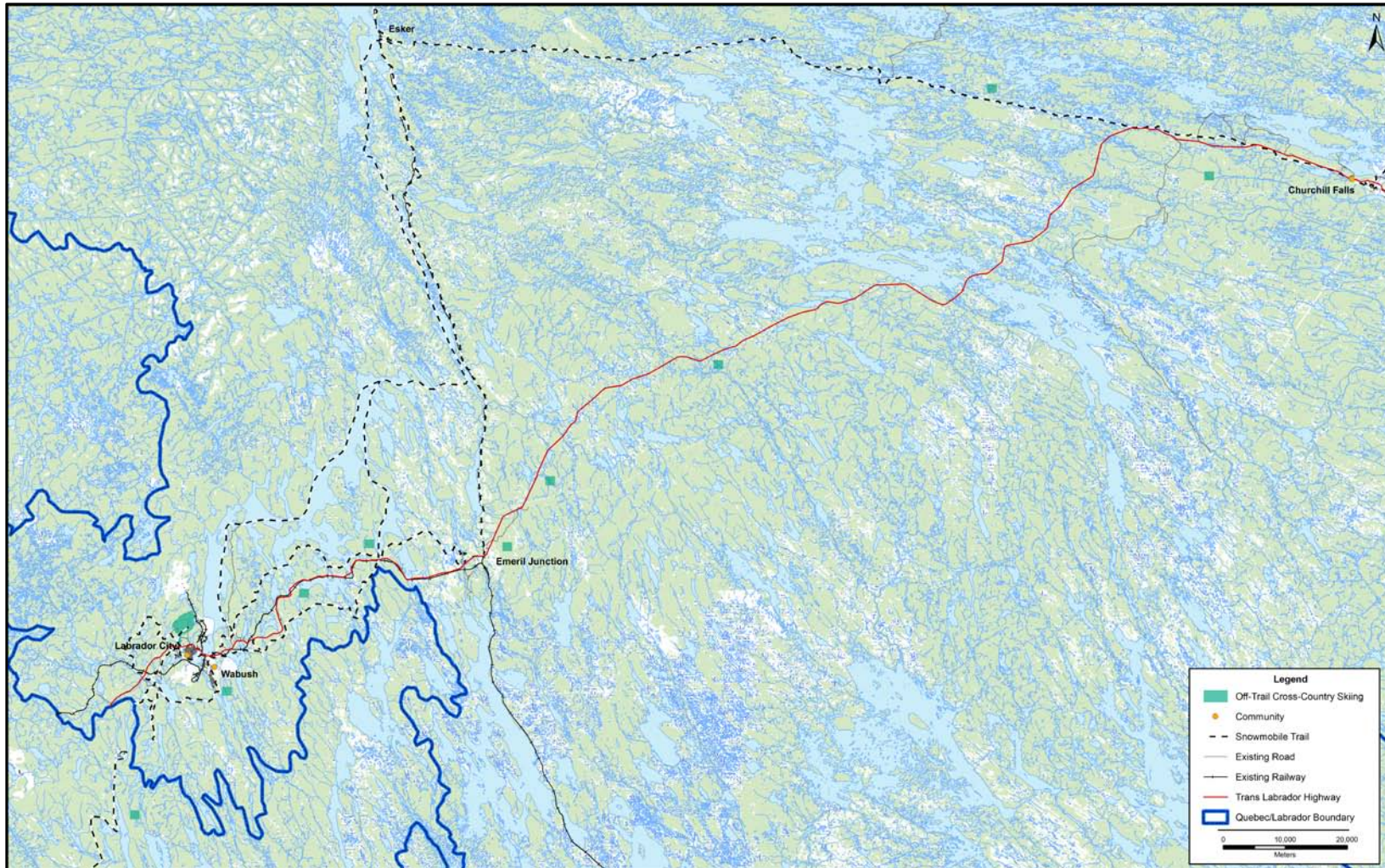


Figure 2-21 Off-Trail Snowshoeing (12 participants) and Cross-Country Skiing (7 participants) in the Regional Study Area



2.10 Mountain Biking

Participants who mountain bike mainly identified areas within the LSA, such as Menihek Nordic ski trails, Smokey Mountain and snowmobile trails (Figure 2-22). Some activity was indicated in the RSA, in the vicinity of both Labrador City and Wabush and in areas off the TLH between Labrador West to Churchill Falls (Figure 2-23).

2.11 Cross-Country / Trail Running

Participants who indicated they engage in cross-country running identified areas within the LSA, such as Menihek Nordic ski trails and Smokey Mountain (Figure 2-24). Cross-country runners identified areas around both towns including Tanya Lake, Tamarack golf course, Crystal Falls, Jean Lake, Wabush Sandpits and Elephant Head.

2.12 Bird Watching

A small number of bird watching areas, such as Smokey Mountain and the Menihek trails, were identified within the LSA (Figure 2-25). Participants more frequently indicated that bird watching occurs within the RSA, along the TLH between Labrador West and Churchill Falls (Figure 2-26).

2.13 Geocaching

Participants identified a number of areas within the LSA where geocaching occurs (Figure 2-27). The majority of these areas are near access such as roads, snowmobile trails and ski trails. For example, a small number of participants indicated that they geocache along the Menihek Nordic ski trails and Smokey Mountain trails. However, geocaching activity, in the RSA, occurs along the TLH between Labrador West and Churchill Falls (Figure 2-28).

2.14 Trapping

Participants were less likely to trap than to hunt as only five identified themselves as trappers. Trapping is both recreational and commercial as pelts may be sold depending on the market. Participants identified trapping areas around White Lake, Leg Lake, Dumbell Lake, Smokey Mountain, Canning Lake and along snowmobile trails in the LSA (2-29). In the larger RSA, trapping occurs around the towns of Labrador City and Wabush as well as along the TLH and snowmobile trails from Labrador West to Churchill Falls (2-30).

2.15 Other Activities

Participants also indicated that they engage in other activities such as swimming at Tanya, Dumbell, Duley, Jean and Grand Hermine Lakes and at cabins. They also water ski at cabins and at Duley Lake and Shabogamo Lake. Residents use the Menihek Nordic ski trails and Smokey Mountain areas for other activities such as nature walks, dry land athletic training and spreading ashes. Regional trails are also used in winter for dog sledding.

Figure 2-22 Mountain Biking (11 participants) in the Local Study Area

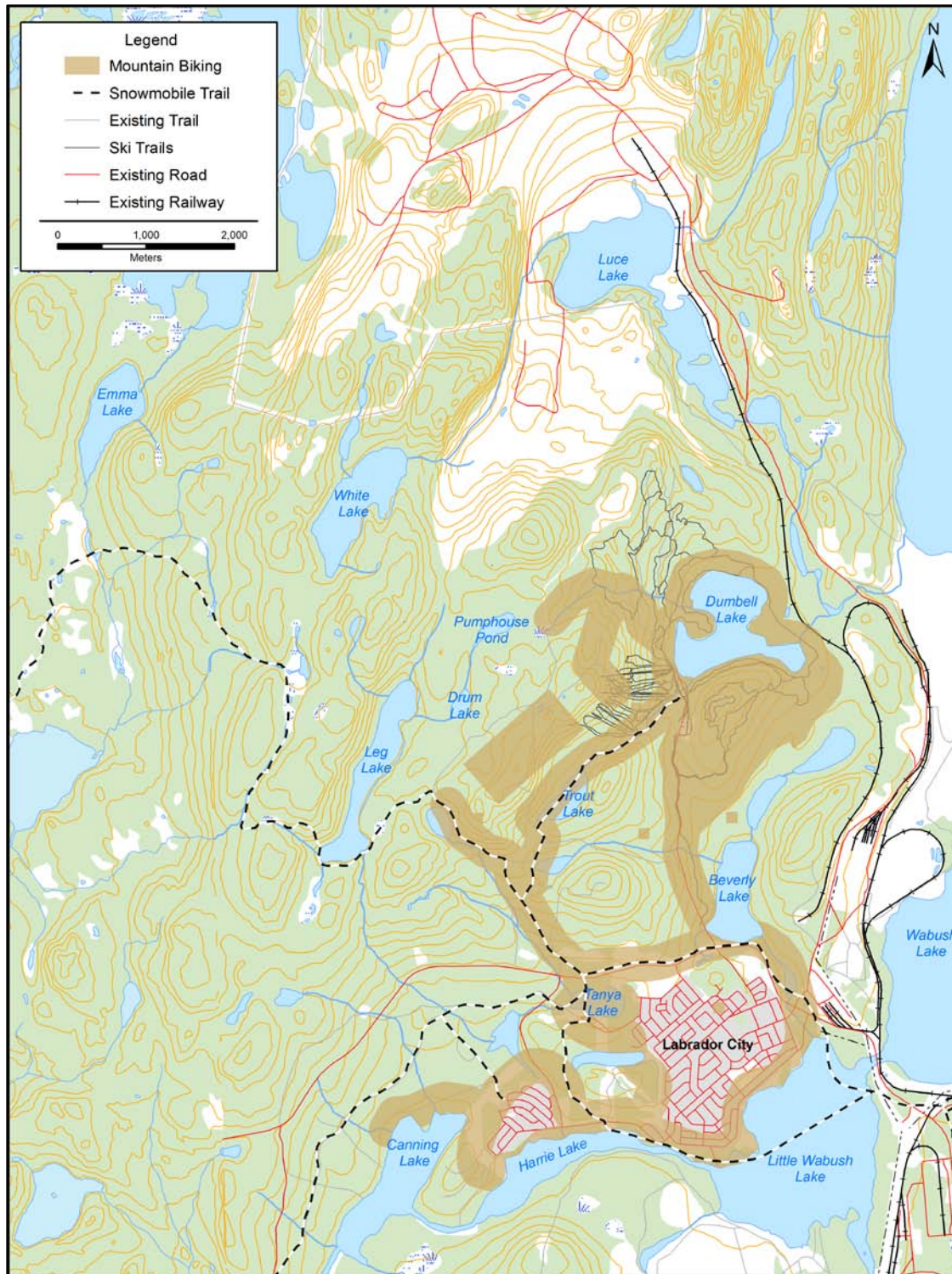


Figure 2-23 Mountain Biking (11 participants) in the Regional Study Area

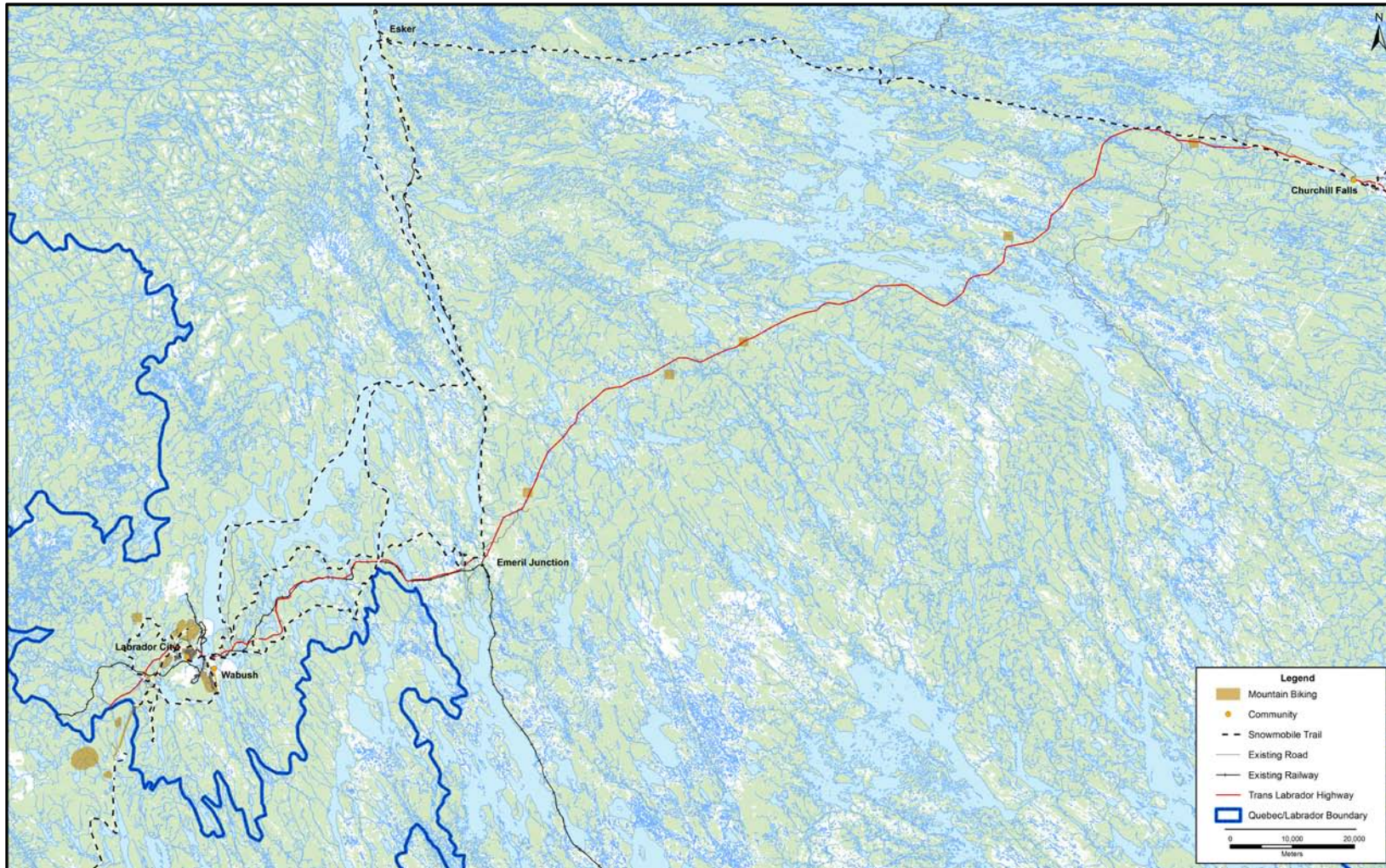


Figure 2-24 Cross-Country / Trail Running (9 participants) in the Local Study Area

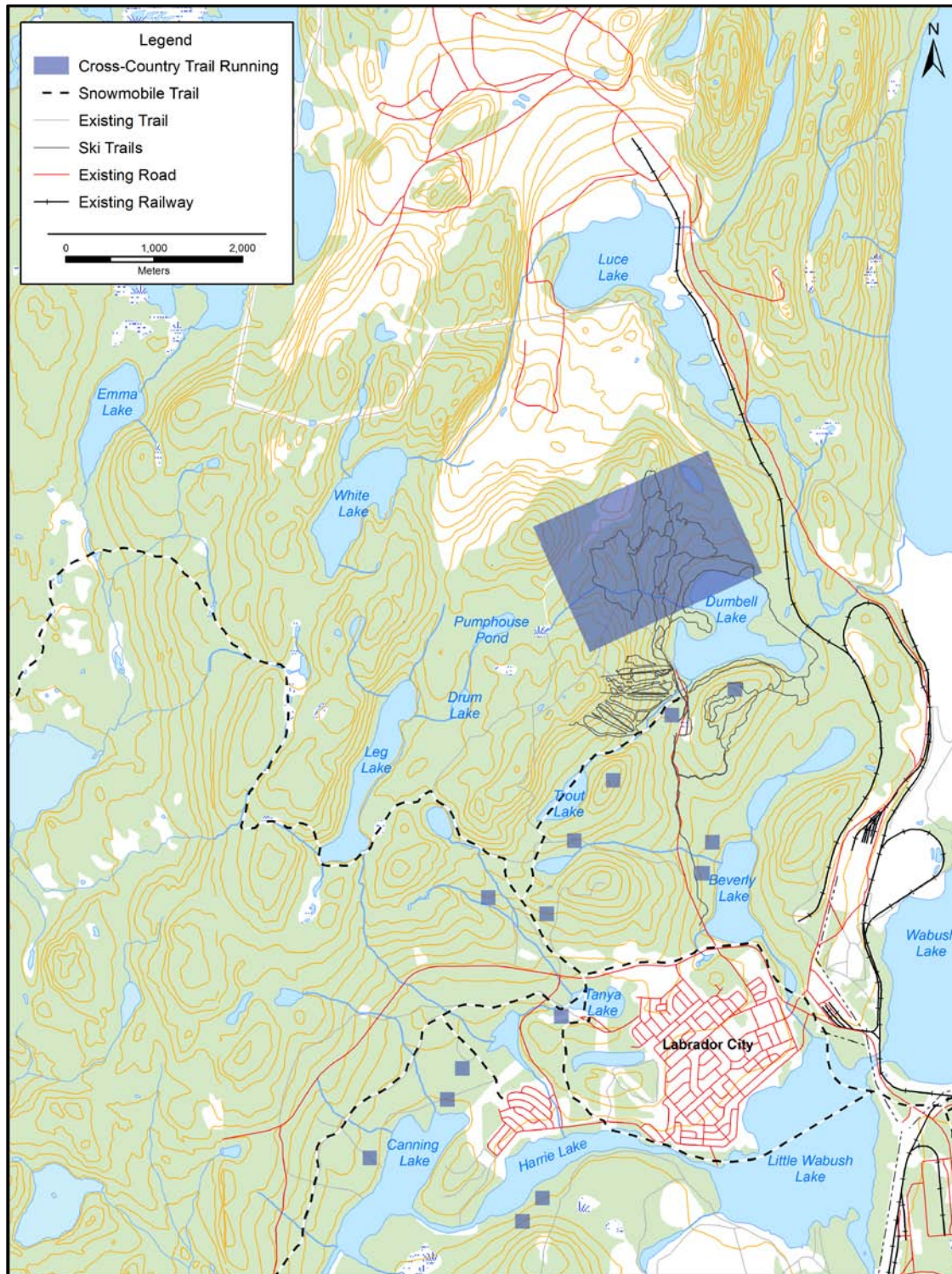


Figure 2-25 Bird Watching (7 participants) in the Local Study Area

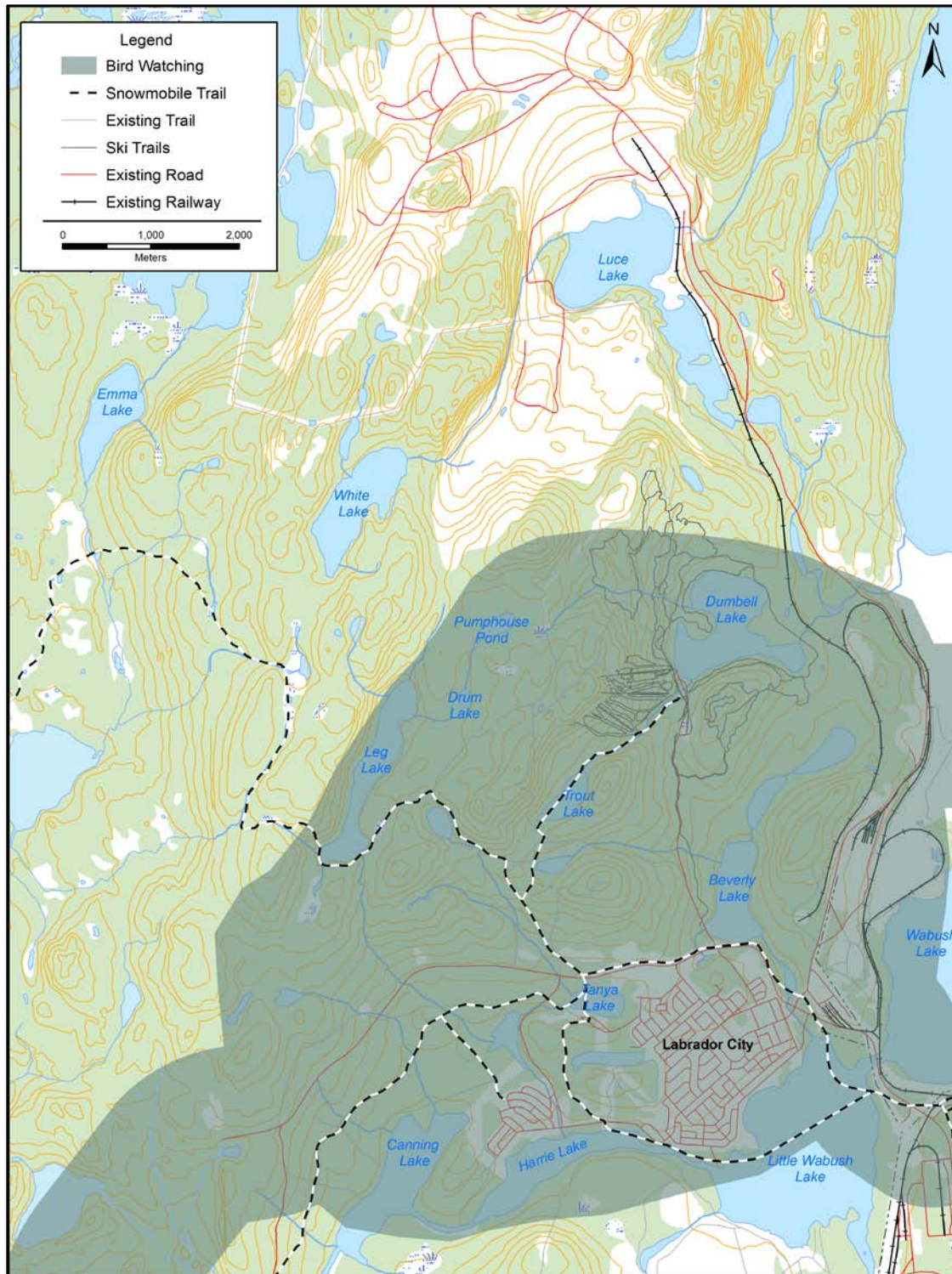


Figure 2-26 Bird Watching (7 participants) in the Regional Study Area

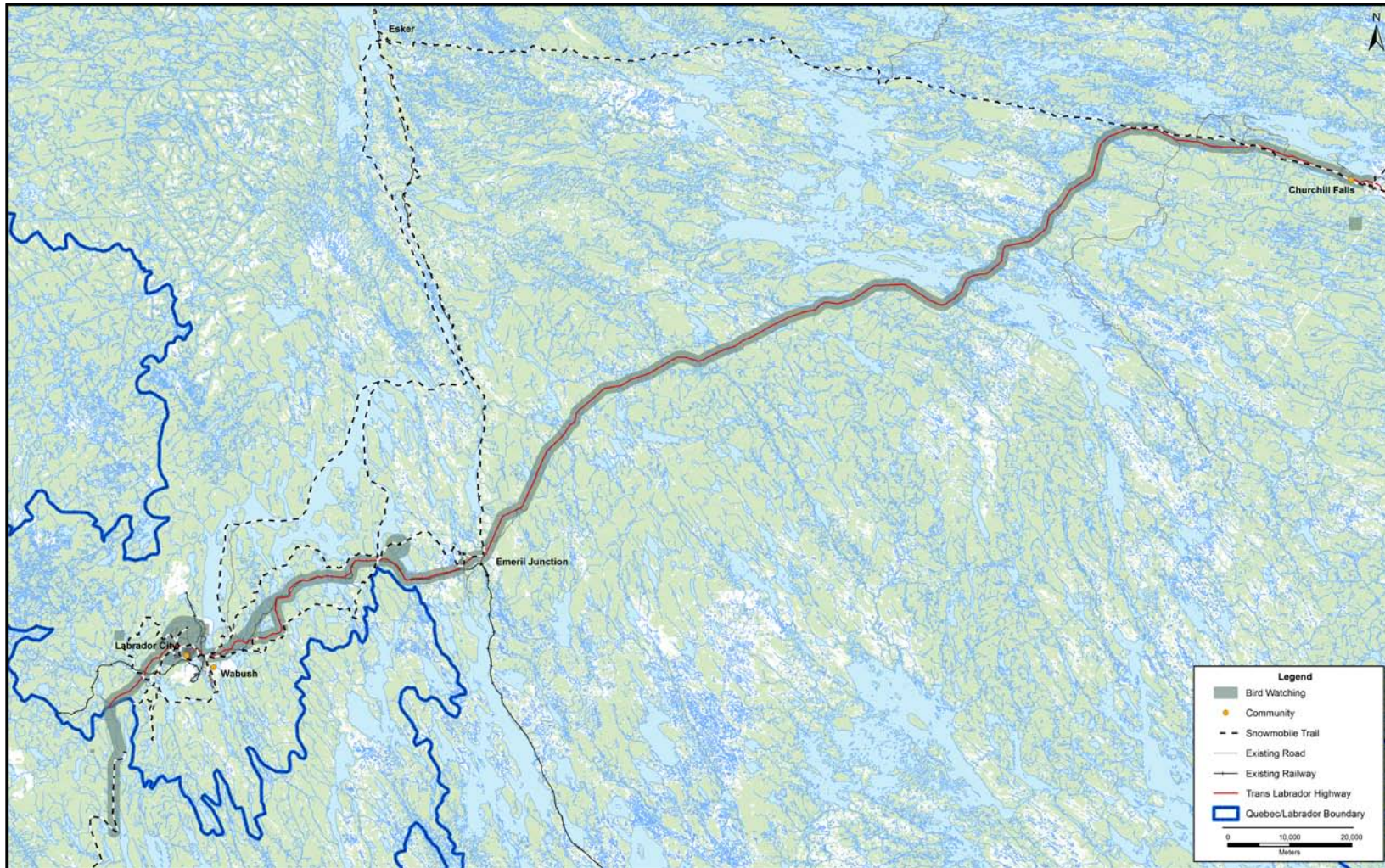


Figure 2-27 Geocaching (6 participants) in the Local Study Area

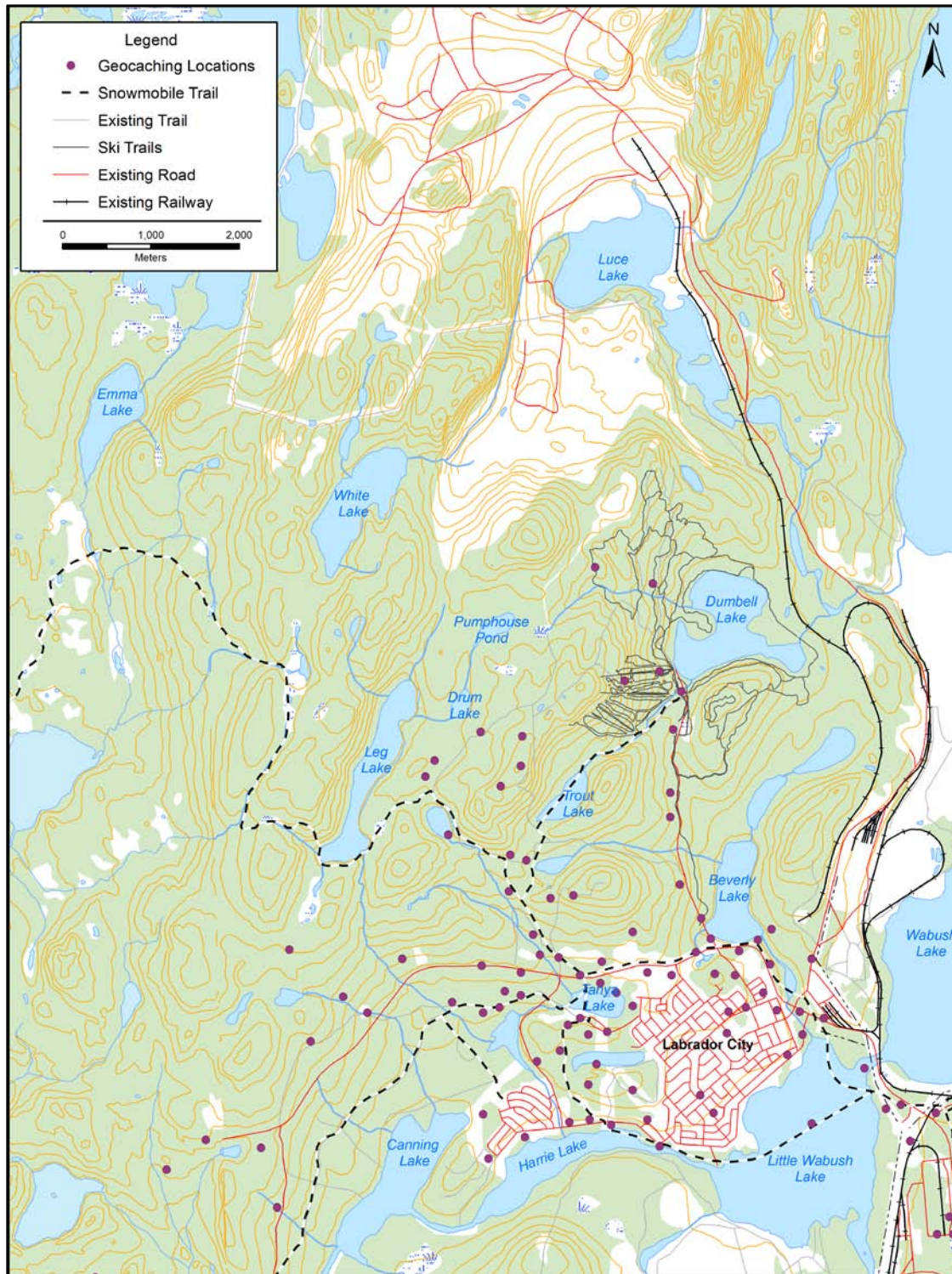


Figure 2-28 Geocaching (6 participants) in the Regional Study Area

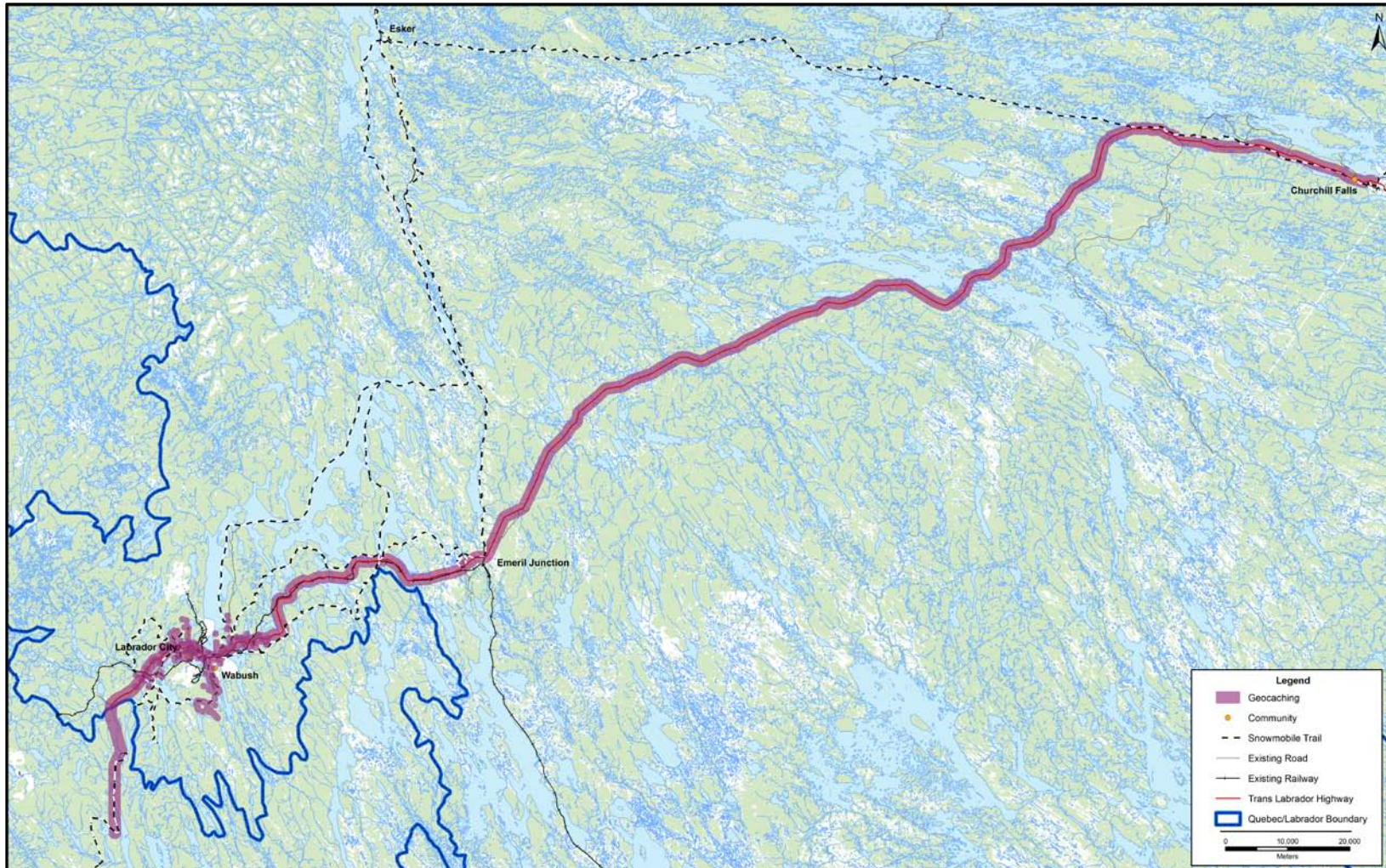


Figure 2-29 Trapping (5 participants) in the Local Study Area

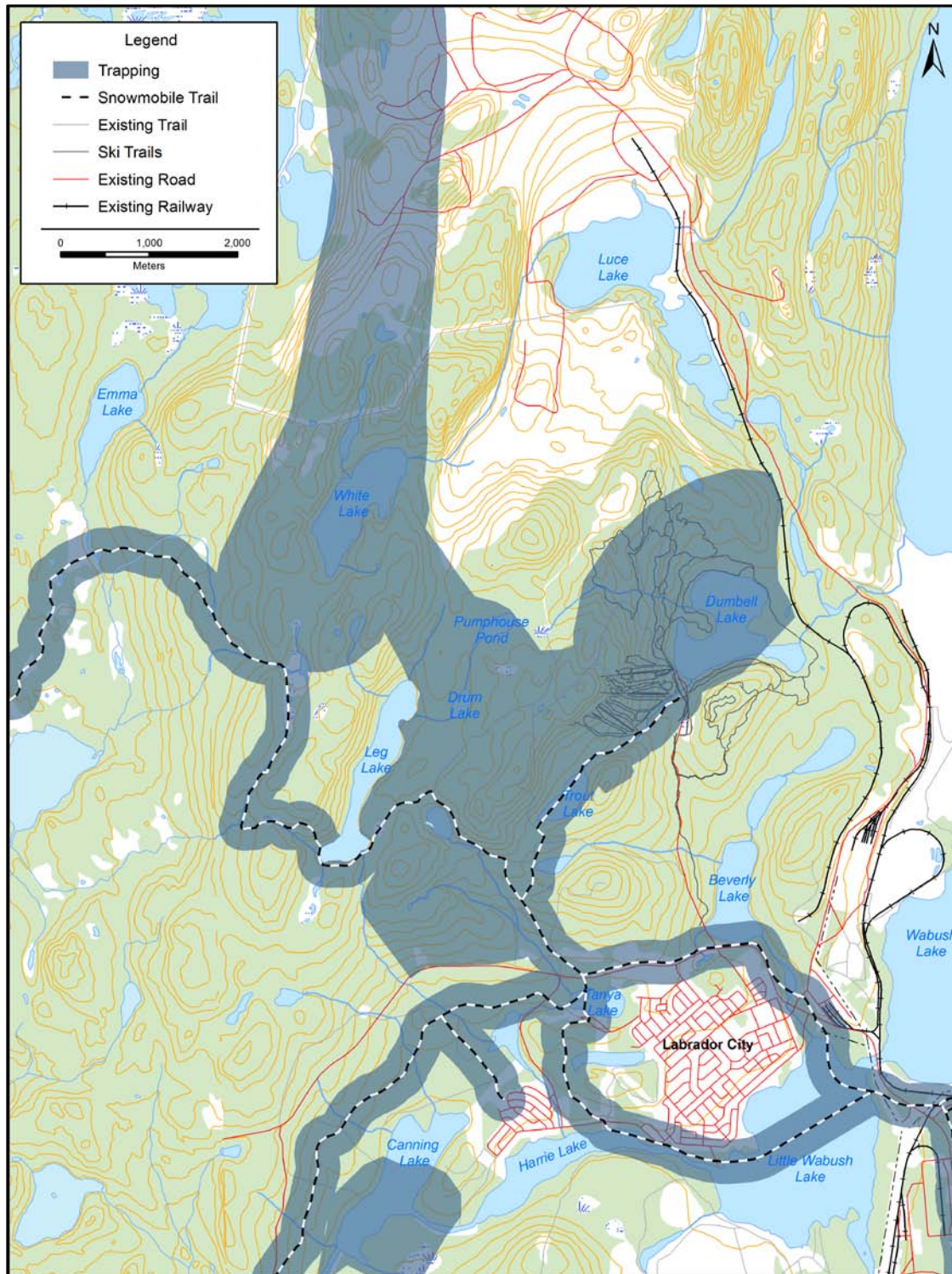


Figure 2-30 Trapping (5 participants) in the Regional Study Area



3 LOCAL KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

During the land, water and resource use workshops and interviews, participants were asked to share local knowledge about land, water and other natural resources in western Labrador. Workshop and interview participants indicated that Wabush Lake appears to be closing off at Wabush Mountain and that it is dangerous to boat in Wabush Lake as water levels change quickly. Participants noted that the fish population and size seems to be diminishing in the area in general including Trout Lake and the lakes around Blueberry Hills. This is felt to be a result of increased pressure by anglers (including use of technology such as GPS) rather than habitat changes. Participants have noted a different colour of skin in lake trout.

Participants reported that more songbirds are nesting in winter, migratory bird sightings and the presence of plovers on high ground as well as songbirds and raptors. Participants see few large game and no noticeable tracks in the Smokey Mountain area. The George River caribou herd population has diminished greatly, small game fluctuates cyclically and the moose population is increasing. It was also noted that the 2013 forest fires have changed habitats in the region.

Those who shared information indicated that the hills to the west of Labrador City are the best blueberry picking areas. In the past, bakeapples used to grow at Yukon Peak but are not longer seen there. The burnt over area on the TLH is regenerating with fewer berries but it is anticipated that the area affected by the 2013 forest fire will produce new berry crops.

From an air quality perspective, workshop and interview participants indicated that Labrador West has more dust in summertime, air quality is poor near the town limits, and snow and ice appear dirty. Vibrations and dust from blasting are felt in Wabush. Some felt that the climate seems to be colder and that the ice remains for longer periods.

4 WABUSH 3 PROJECT DISCUSSION

IOC also provided participants with an opportunity to identify concerns about implementation of the Wabush 3 Project and to offer suggestions for planning and design of the new mine pit.

4.1 Questions and Concerns about the Wabush 3 Project

Most participants seemed concerned with how recreational activities in and around the Wabush 3 Project area would be affected. The most commonly mentioned area of concern was Smokey Mountain as it is not only a skiing and snowboarding destination but a popular area for participation in other land use activities (see Figures). Participants posed questions regarding use of the land with focus on the loss of access and asked if it would be unavailable for periods of time. One participant stated that the Project will mean loss of the “best view in town” from Smokey Mountain.

Some of these residents were concerned about noise, dust, vibrations, chemical fallout and fly rock from Wabush 3. Concerns were expressed regarding the possibility that waste rock dumps from Wabush 3 would potentially act to increase noise from blasting. Participants were concerned that there will be an increase in dust from northwest winds. Participants were also concerned about how dust affects the quality of snow and asked about dust control practices to help maintain clean snow. Concerns were expressed about the impact of fly rock on existing infrastructure.

A participant expressed concern about effects on the community and health and felt that there is a lack of reliable studies on best practices and the appropriate proximity of a mine to communities. Concerns were expressed about effects on the Town of Labrador City’s water supply. Participants asked about the volume of wastewater that will be deposited into Harrie Lake. Some participants stated that it is also important to maintain the economic well being of the community which is one of the reasons people choose to live in Labrador West.

One workshop attendee noted that mitigation is challenging but protective measures need to be implemented. It was acknowledged that any large scale project will affect habitats that have been used for generations.

4.2 Suggestions for Managing the Effects of the Wabush 3 Project

Workshop and interview participants offered suggestions as to how potential effects of the Project can be managed and the mining footprint limited. They explained the importance of communication with special interest groups, and some indicated that IOC is doing a good job of communicating with them. It was recommended that IOC continue to maintain open communication throughout Project construction and operations phases.

Attendees suggested that overlap between mining and recreational land be carried out in a way that will eliminate lost time for recreational activities. They also suggested that multi-use facilities be built to replace those lost at Smokey Mountain. Participants were concerned about the loss of aged, well-beaten mountain biking trails and suggested new trails will need proper drainage to ensure they are suitable for biking, running and hiking.

It was recommended that IOC meet with both Towns to develop comprehensive urban planning including a comprehensive snowmobile strategy. Suggestions were also made regarding an exchange of land for loss of use compensation.

Participants were concerned about health effects. They suggested that mining blasts be limited to smaller blasts and based on wind direction. They asked that silica particles be monitored and the health impacts be monitored.

Some of the activities in the Wabush 3 Project area might not be obvious and participants are keen to have them protected. It was suggested that wood duck boxes, some of which have installed in the Project area, be relocated to other areas. Geocachers asked if they can be notified of impending changes so that caches would no longer be placed in affected areas.

4.3 Fish Habitat Compensation for the Wabush 3 Project

A number of water bodies exist within the Wabush 3 Project area, and in surrounding areas. Two water bodies will be affected by the Wabush 3 Project and fish habitat compensation will be required. Participants were asked to discuss potential areas that could be improved, by IOC, to compensate for fish habitat that would be lost as a result of the Project.

Participants suggested that relocating fish from affected water bodies would reduce pressure that could potentially be received by IOC from the public. Some suggestions for relocation include: introducing fish in areas that are easily accessible by residents (e.g. Blueberry Hill streams, Cowboy Creek); and stocking or moving fish to Tanya, Quartzite and Harrie Lakes, or the Gully. Participants also suggested that Big Wabush Lake be dyked with a spillway to help fish move downstream, and that the stream from Beverly Lake to Little Wabush Lake be enhanced.

Participants agreed that education / programming is the best benefit that can be offered by potential effects on fish habitats and populations. The importance of providing educational programming to children was also mentioned as this will result in a well informed public. A suggestion for a partially funded aquaculture program in Labrador West was also made.