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PERMAFROST AND INDIGENOUS LAND USE IN THE NORTHERN URALS: KOMI AND NENETS REINDEER HUSBANDRY

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In the light of increased research interest in the effects of climate change on livelihoods in the Arctic, our contribution examines indigenous land use in a climatically sensitive high-latitude region. The case of Komi and Nenets reindeer husbandry on both sides of the Northern Urals is particularly illustrative, since this area comprises continuous, discontinuous and sporadic permafrost. Natural processes related to permafrost degradation (thermokarst processes) influence reindeer herding activity both directly (by making certain areas unsuitable for camping and/or dangerous to herd reindeer on) and indirectly, through their impact on vegetation and landscape. Based on an inventory of indigenous toponyms, landscape classifications and herding practices, we shall portray local views on permafrost degradation, identify adaptative strategies of reindeer herders and assess the mid-term prospects for reindeer herding in northwestern Russia.

Keywords: indigenous peoples, Komi, landscape, Nenets, permafrost, Rangifer, reindeer