

North

## Researchers ask if Starlink could be a risk to northern communities. A Canadian company disagrees

The space tech tycoon has reached 400,000 subscribers in Canada as of 2024

[Jocelyn Shepel](#) · CBC News · Posted: Dec 31, 2024 10:58 AM MST | Last Updated: December 31, 2024



The long-exposure image of a trail of a SpaceX's Starlink satellites passing over Uruguay on Feb. 7, 2021. (Mariana Suarez/AFP/Getty Images)

A new report on media communications in Canada asks if Starlink could pose a threat to northern communities.

Dwayne Winseck, professor at the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University and director of the Global Media and Internet Concentration Project released [a report on the subject](#) this month.

This year, Winseck said he began looking deeper into Starlink's fast growing presence in Canada and where it stands within the overall communications landscape, with focus on its rapid expansion into remote, rural and Indigenous communities.

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While the Wi-Fi may be faster, Winseck doesn't believe Canada should be putting so much trust into SpaceX's CEO, Elon Musk.

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"I think that Starlink has proven to be a decent option for Canadians. But the more that we see of Musk, the more serious red flags are waving around him as an individual and his business enterprises," said Winseck.

Having Musk at the helm of Starlink also raises concerns for Winseck.

"I find this deeply concerning, especially given the significance of these LEO satellite constellations to end users here in Canada, it is all about communication and access to information," said Winseck.

LEO stands for low earth orbit. As the name implies they are relatively close to earth, at least in comparison to other satellites.

As for communication and access, Winseck said one issue could be Musk deciding or needing to throttle back on capacity for Canadian users to meet the demands of his priority customers within the U.S. Department of Defense.

"What happens, for instance, if the man with the on/off switch and control over the LEO technology stack were to object to, for instance, CRTC regulations with respect to contributions to the universal broadband fund, information disclosure, and the need to consult with Indigenous communities?" the report states.



Starlink Wi-Fi is now available on Highway 5 about 100 kilometres from Fort Smith. This new hotspot is an initiative by Parks Canada and the N.W.T. Department of Infrastructure. (Carla Ulrich/CBC)

As of 2024, Starlink has around 400,000 subscribers. According to the report, Starlink surpassed Xplornet as the leading satellite-based provider of rural and remote internet

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## 'That's absolute rubbish'

Jeff Philipp is the CEO of SSi Canada, an internet provider that focuses on rural areas. He said he likes what SpaceX has been doing, especially in respect to remote communities and isn't worried about Starlink's increasing presence.

"I think that's absolute rubbish ... I would look at it completely differently," said Philipp.

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Philipp, who grew up in Fort Providence, N.W.T., said the importance of a reliable internet connection can't be overstated.

"I've spent 30 years trying to close the digital divide and working with people at all levels of government to try to make this problem go away. And the solutions are there, but we run into these discussions that take away from the real challenges," said Philipp.

Philipp said Starlink is absolutely a business risk to every carrier out there, but that's a good problem to have right now.

"It means we can bring services, we can bring health care, education, literacy, job opportunities, art, culture. We can export it south and we can bring it North," said Philipp.

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SSi was one of the first in Canada to start collaborating with SpaceX, Philipp added. He said they worked to connect their company's cellular infrastructure to SpaceX's satellite backbone system.

Philipp said they are now in the final stages of a project with SpaceX on emergency communication shelters for the North and highways without service.

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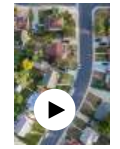
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