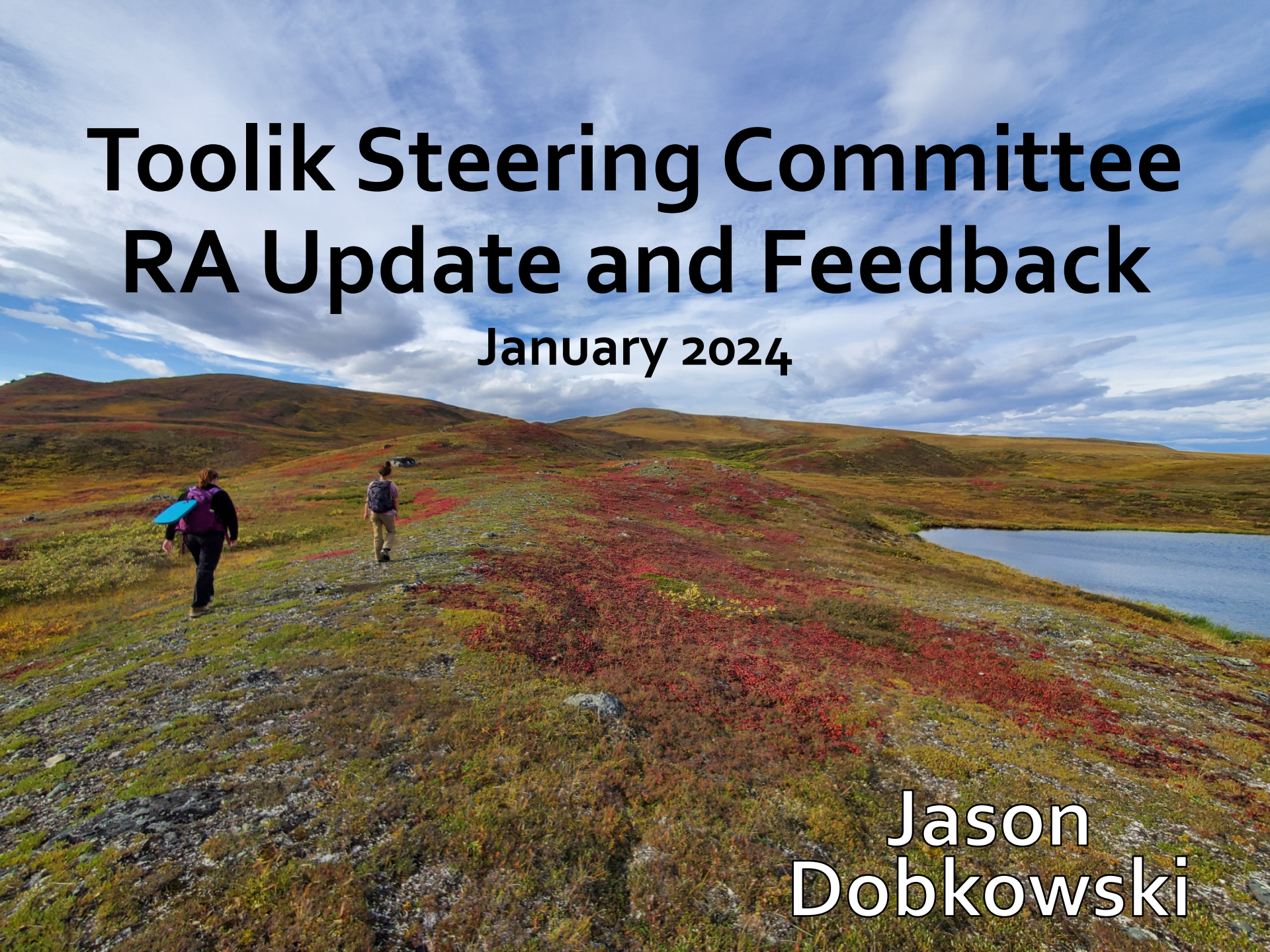


# Toolik Steering Committee RA Update and Feedback

January 2024

Jason  
Dobkowski





# Who are Research Assistants at Toolik?

- Many stay at TFS for full summer, or make several trips
- Usually not students, but often working closely with graduate students or mentoring undergrads
- Often seasonal technicians
- Responsible for research objectives and making project decisions when PIs are not in camp
- This year included those identifying as “Staff Scientists”

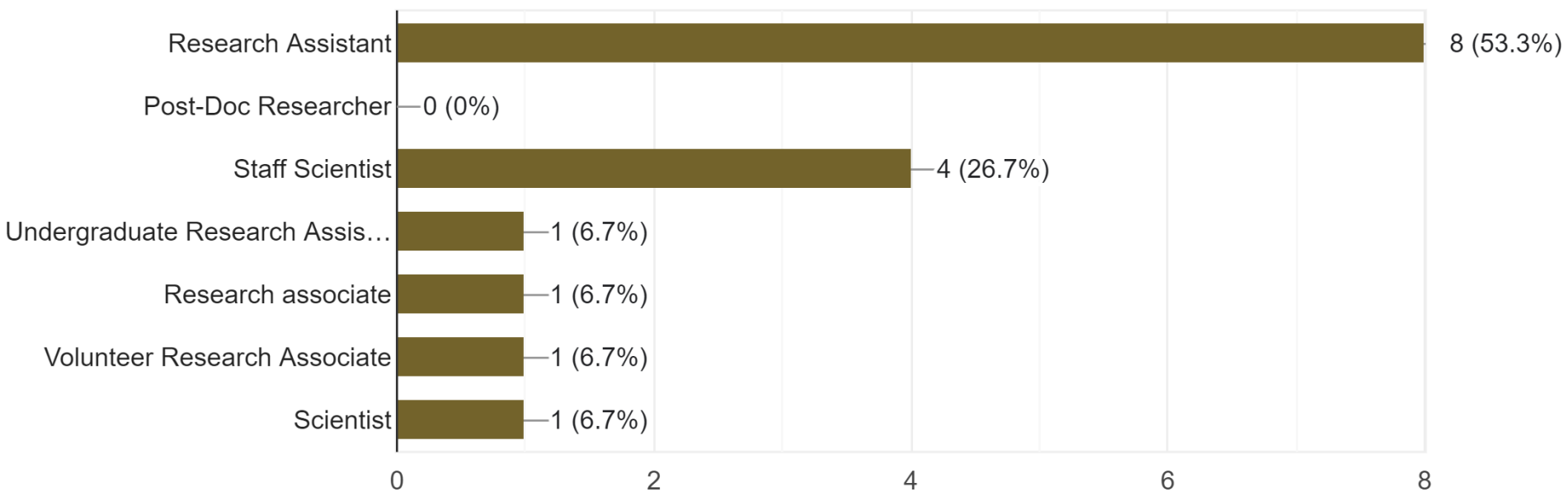


# 2023 Survey

- Anonymous, no required questions
- Feedback sought regarding all aspects of life and work at Toolik. Including these specific areas:
  - Critical issues that prevented research goals from being accomplished
  - Travel to/from Toolik
  - Helicopter vendor and coordinators
  - Housing accommodations and Washateria
  - Prepared meals and food items
  - Shipping to/from Toolik
  - TFS-SEDC, TFS-GIS, and TFS logistics office
  - Equipment requests
  - TFS website, MyToolik, SRS system
  - Community recognition
  - *ANY* other comments or concerns about *any* topic

## What best describes your position at Toolik in 2023?

15 responses



# Critical Issues or Barriers to Completing Research Goals

- No respondents reported any *major* problems or critical failures
- More *minor* issues included:

“BLM slowness”

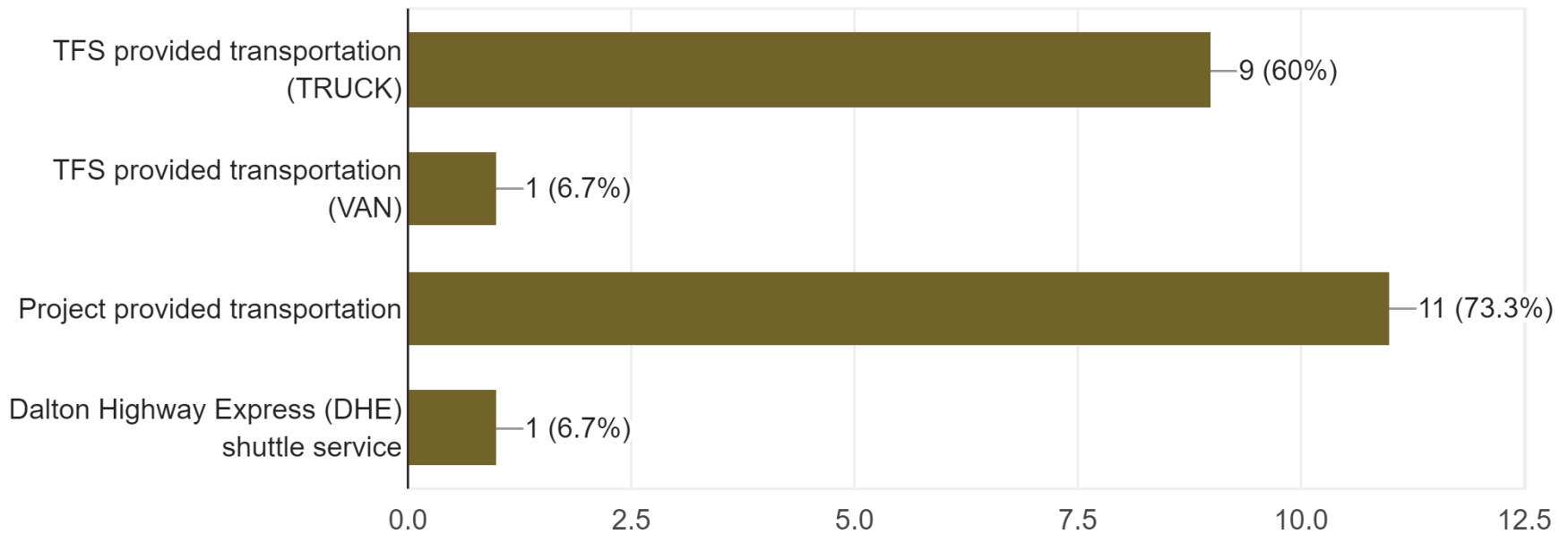
“...the ability to control the weather”

# Traveling through Fairbanks

- “It is always helpful, particularly for newer/younger (undergrad!) staff to have assistance booking accommodations. For first-timers the details of getting to the airport/hotel/UAF can feel overwhelming.”
- “For short trips (like 2-3 night stays) the truck shuttle schedule doesn't work very well. This is probably just an issue for locally (Alaska) based researchers who take short trips and sometimes on short notice. One must stay an entire weekend if they arrive on Thursday and depart on a Tuesday. Or else they have to arrive on a Tuesday and only have one day of work before returning to Fairbanks on a Thursday.”
- “we stayed at the UAF dorms in fairbanks, which was a bit of a mess. after a long day of travel, we arrived between 9 and 10pm, and the doors to the office were locked. it was really difficult to get a hold of someone to help get us our keys and to our rooms.”
- “Hotel costs in Fairbanks have sky-rocketed, leaving few good options for lodging in Fairbanks”
- “...i would have liked my accommodations to have been paid for by UaF (they were my employer) for the night I was in Fairbanks between my plane arriving and leaving for Toolik on the truck.”

## How did you travel between Fairbanks (or Prudhoe) and Toolik?

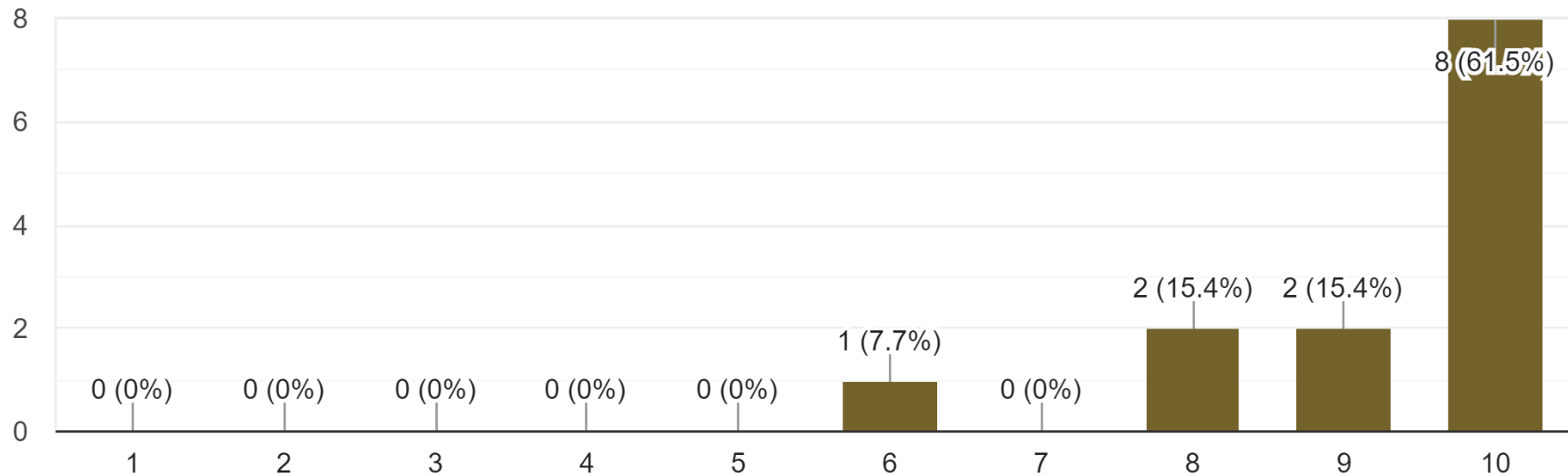
15 responses



# Toolik Logistics Support in Fairbanks

How would you rate any assistance you received from the Toolik logistics office in Fairbanks?

13 responses

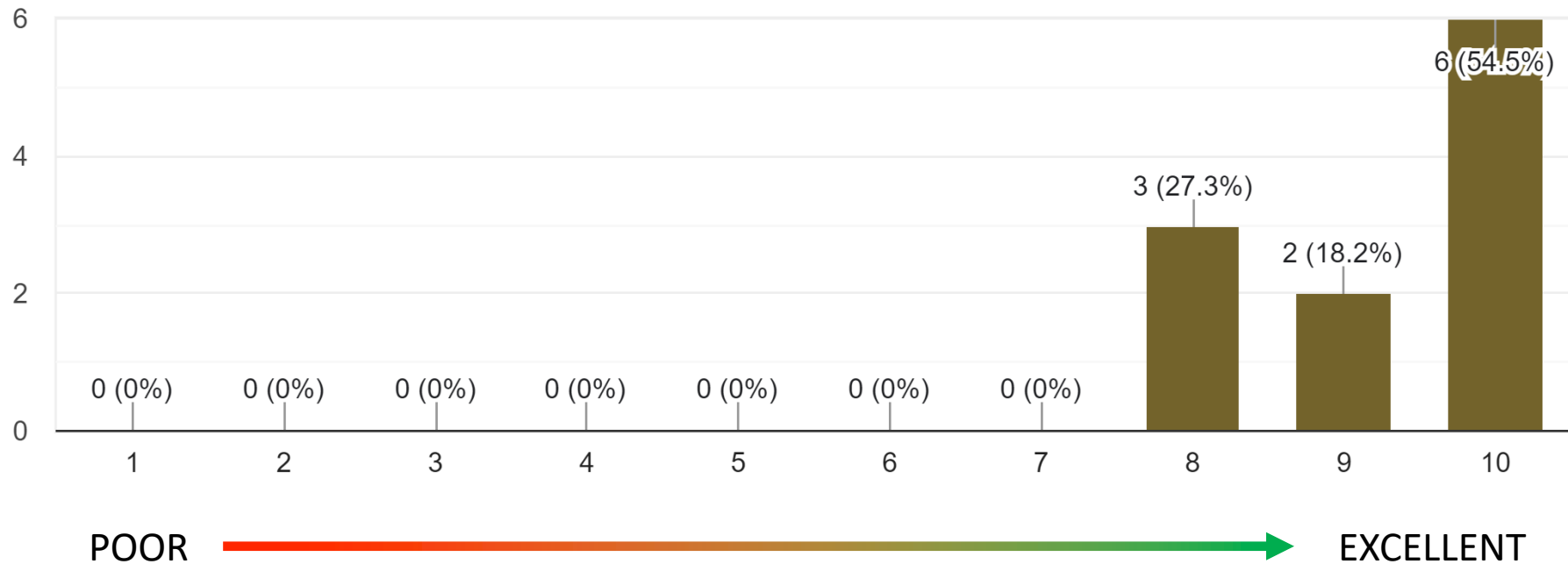




# Toolik Science Trucks

While at Toolik, did you use TFS vehicles? How would you rate access to TFS science trucks?

11 responses



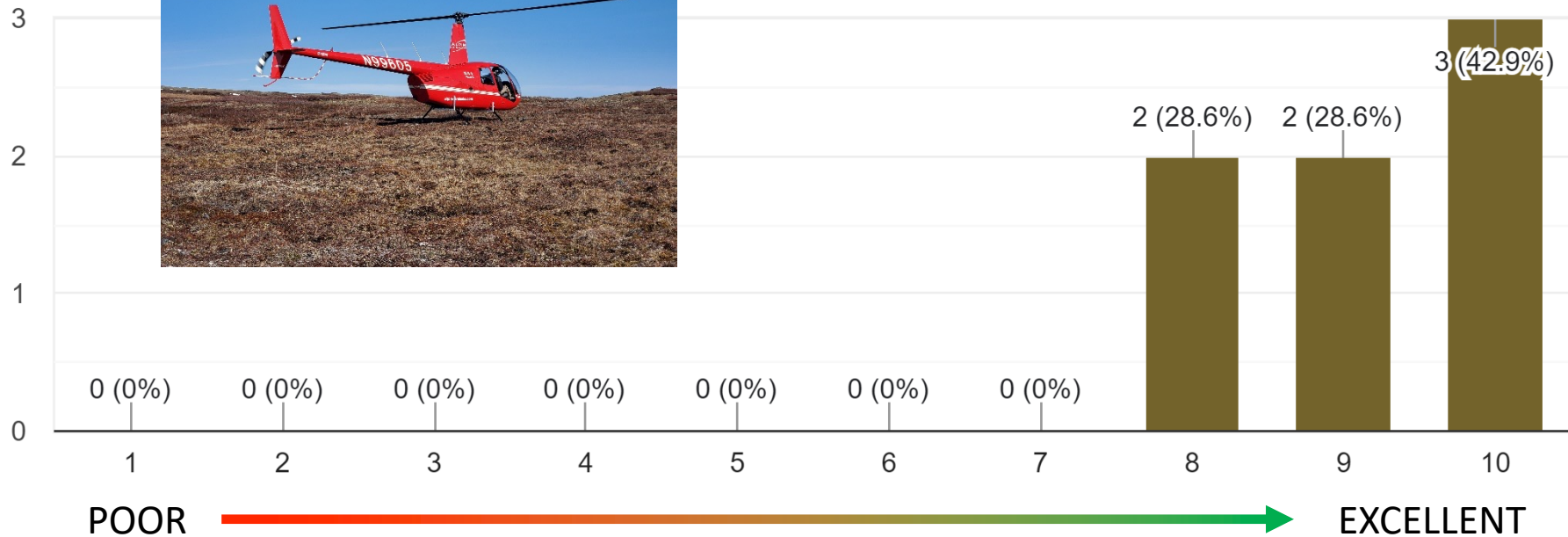
# TFS Trucks

- “In camp, occasionally other groups don't sign out promptly or at all. I'm not sure what can be done about this since it is stressed in orientation and seems to me common courtesy.”
- “we mainly used our project truck for work and tfs vehicles for sunday recreation, and there were always trucks available when we needed them”
- “it was very easy. Sometimes annoying to track someone down to fill up a tank or find a truck with enough gas.”

# Helicopter Vendor

Did you use the helicopter in 2023? If so, how would you rate the helicopter vendor (Alpine Air Alaska)?

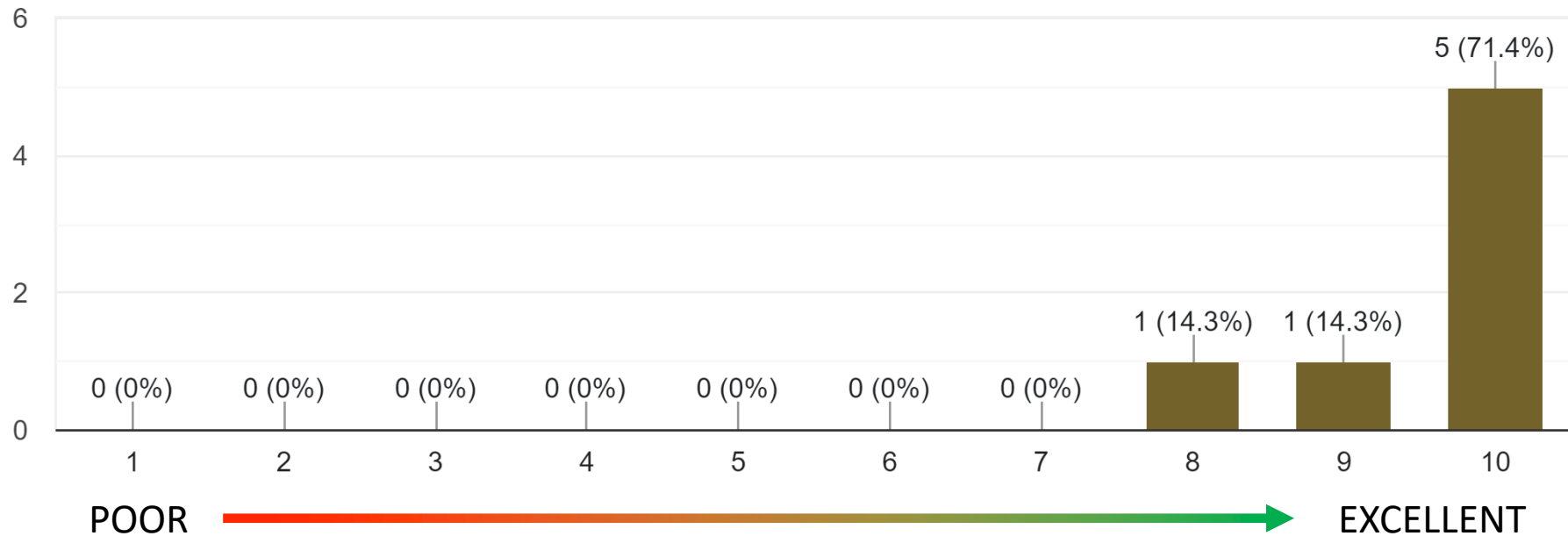
7 responses



# Helicopter Coordinators

Did you use the helicopter in 2023? If so, how would you rate the helicopter coordinators (Mia and Abi)?

7 responses





# Helicopters at Toolik 2023

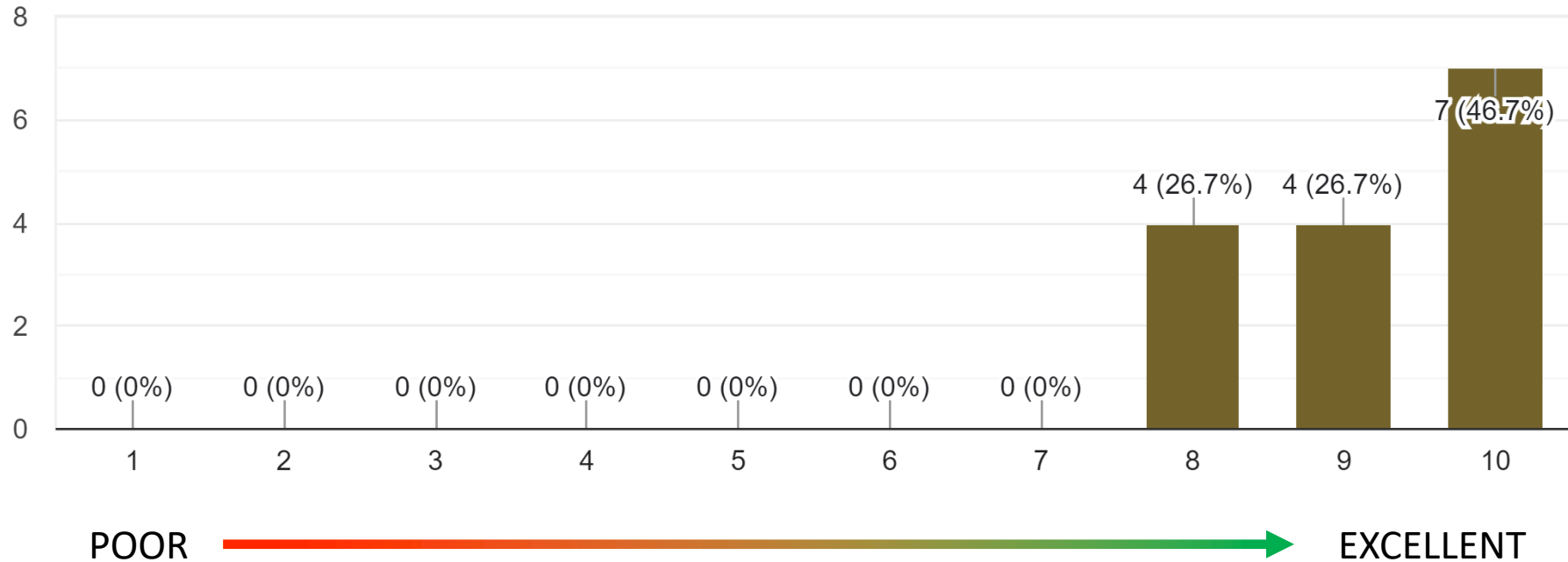
- “the helicopter coordinators and pilots were a huge step up from my experience with people in these roles in the past. the helicopter coordinators were organized and professional. they were very communicative - we would often arrange to meet in person to discuss our flight plan and make sure everything was understood. they were also enthusiastic to discuss back up plans and “what if” scenarios if it looked like weather would be an issue, for example. the helicopter coordinators always seemed to be working non-stop to ensure our work would be able to get done. i also thought that the rotation of pilots was ultimately worked out really well to keep them from getting burnt out.”
- “Their attention to detail and safety briefings were very helpful and reassuring.”
- “We had one issue when the helicopter pilot was out of communication with the helo coordinator for about 1 hour while we were on the ground. This caused confusion which warranted further discussion regarding the incident. Improved protocols for better direct communication between researchers and the helo coordinator while in the field resulted from this follow-up meeting.”



# TFS Housing

How would you rate your housing accommodations at Toolik?

15 responses



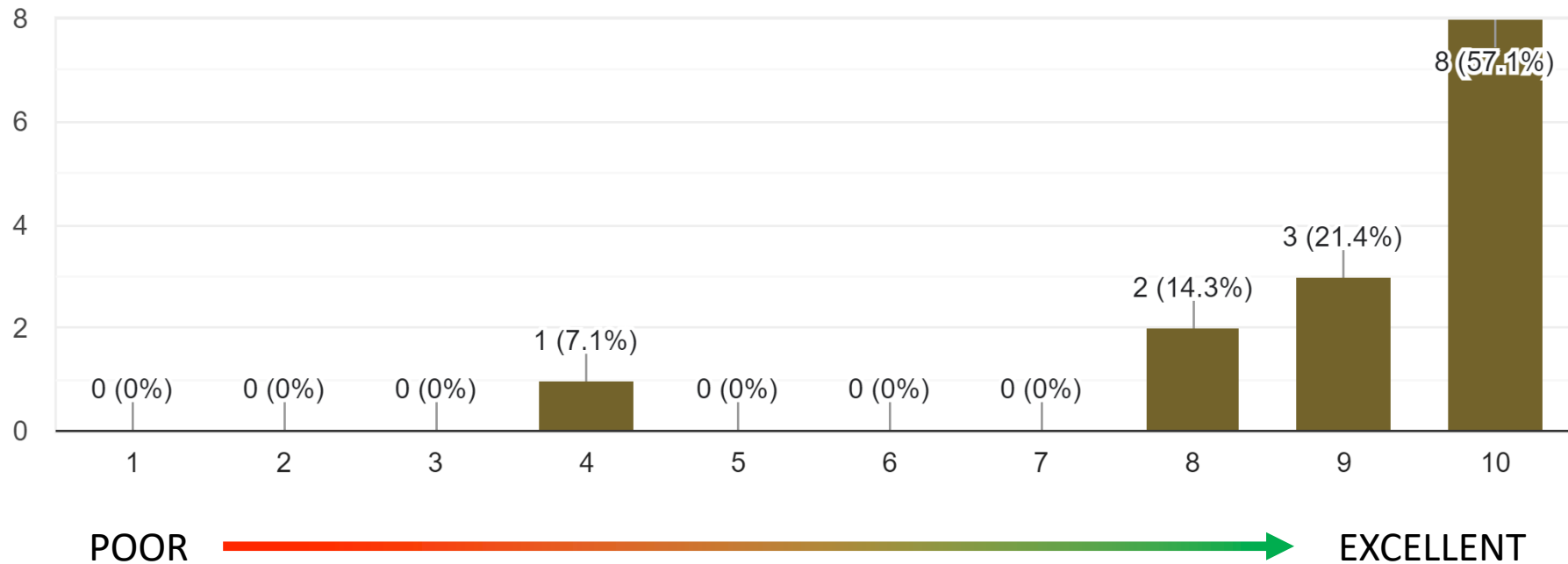
# TFS Housing

- “wood/insulation between "sides" in some of the weatherports make a HUGE difference in feeling that you have some personal space. it would be amazing if more weatherports could have this instead of the tarp.”
- “A little hard getting used to having a roommate compared to previous years.”
- “It's REALLY nice having a single room/weatherport with no roommate.”
- “Some people allowed garbage to accumulate in the dorm trailers.”

# Meals at TFS

Overall, how would you rate the prepared meals at Toolik?

14 responses

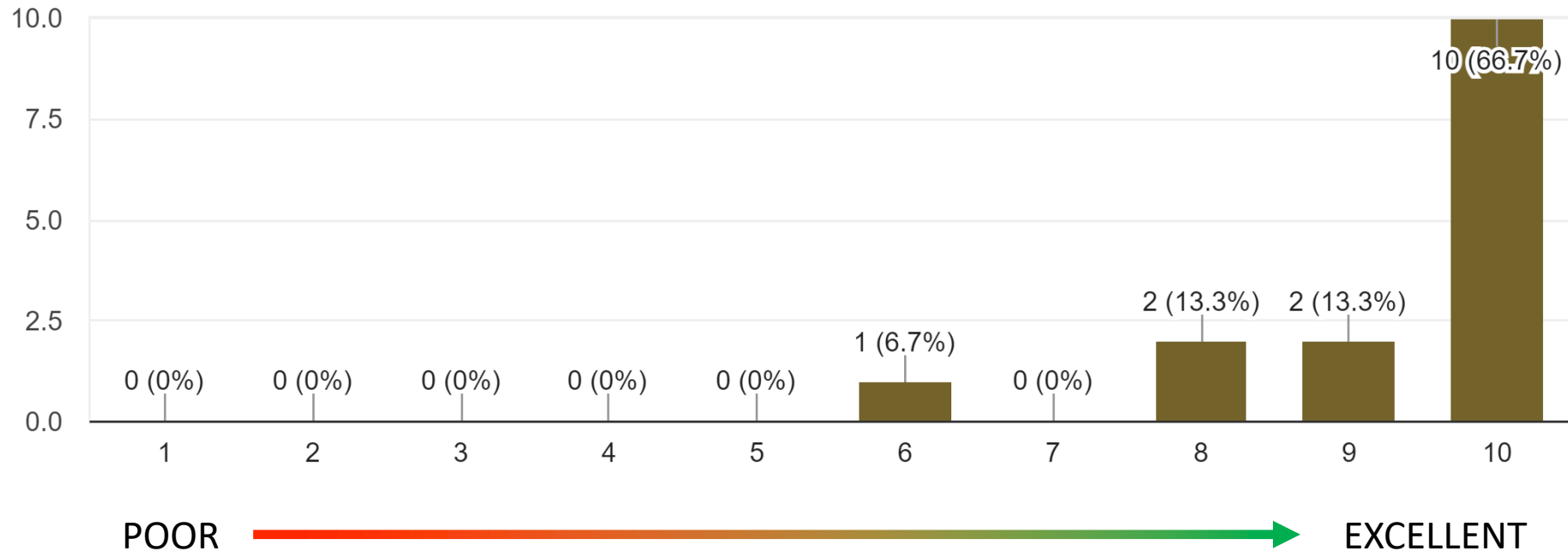




# Sandwiches, Salad, Snacks at TFS

How would you rate the variety of sandwich, salad, and snack items available at Toolik?

15 responses



# Meals at TFS

- “I think Toolik bends over backwards for everyone's individual needs, I'd honestly like to see less items available and less waste from users entitlement to be 101% happy in a remote location”
- “Healthier snack/granola bar options would be great. The treats are fantastic but sometimes portable healthy options are harder to find.”
- “more gluten free options especially sandwich bread and such for people who are gf so that when they can not make it to lunches and are in the field can also make an easy lunch for the day.”
- “There was a real focus on meat-heavy food. I would suggest focusing on more plant-based meals”
- “More prepackaged foods (easy for on the go). Greater diversity in cereal options.”
- “More stir fry dishes :)”
- “More just plain nuts.”



# TFS Washateria

- “More towel hooks both in the shower rooms and in the entryways.”
- “a place to hang towels or clothes when washing would be nice, and faucet handles that let the user control the water flow so I don't have to use so much water to brush teeth.”
- “It is amazing, yet somehow "over-engineered." I hope the heating and ventilation issues are resolved with minimal issue.”
- “I enjoyed its proximity to the dorm rooms.”
- “It's lovely. Hope the temperature issues in the control room have been resolved.”
- “Positive experience with the washateria, nice that it is near the dorms.”



# TFS Washateria continued

- “Big improvement.”
- “I really appreciated having a door that shut to shower. Possibly more room for brushing teeth would be helpful.”
- “when taking a two minute shower, access to HOT water and good water pressure goes a long way. this was a guarantee in the old shmod, but pretty hit or miss in the new washateria. i had a lot of trouble getting the showers up to a good temp. and the lack of water pressure made it really difficult to rinse shampoo/soap off efficiently. new shower heads would definitely help, especially ones that detach from the wall. however, i am immensely pleased to have a single-stall shower option. the upgrade in privacy is really nice and very appreciated.
- the automatic sinks were another frustration. they were clearly not saving but wasting a large amount of water every day. for example if you simply wet your toothbrush, the water would then run for 10x as long as it needed to.
- we need more shower hooks in the entryways or better yet the hallway. it was really frustrating to find other people's wet towels slung over my towel, or to not have a hook to dry my towel at all.”
- “i miss the old washateria but the new one is still good. the heating only worked in the two showers closest to the heating pump, the water faucets should have a manual handle rather than the automatic on/off because it wastes a ton of water by staying on for the full 30seconds or what not, more towel hooks since they ran out at max capacity.”



# TFS Safety, COVID Protocols

- “at the beginning of the summer the communication about covid in camp was often passed through the grapevine instead of being clearly informed by camp management. this was addressed in a town hall, but i wanted to reiterate that it was really helpful to get that information directly from camp management so it was not subject to personal interpretation/extrapolation.”
- “I think Scott and Dennis handled the two covid outbreaks very well”
- “...asked for medical help from the medical staff one day and was told to 'drink more gatorade' to help with my fainting spells. Not ideal.”
- There were also concerns raised about the effectiveness of one of our EMTs and the community's willingness to go to them for medical care.

# Camp Life and Recreation Requests

- “Equipment for climbers would be really exciting! Additionally, writing the date you leave with your name on the cubbies in the fitness center (like the washateria) would be very helpful, as they tend to fill up with forgotten shoes.”
- “maybe more crafting supplies in general.”
- “More bikes for on the pad, yoga mats”
- “I believe another few kayaks would be well received.”
- “One of the canoes had a leak in the back and probably shouldn't be used for more than 20 minutes at a time without bailing out.”
- “How about a spinning wheel! Would love to be able to spin qiviut yarn while at Toolik. ; )”



# Lab Space at TFS

- 6 out of 11 respondents reported “No issues.”
- “As much as possible, clear communication about which lab spaces are available and when is always helpful, particularly with several groups rotating throughout the season.”
- “The equipment we borrowed was not charged and we had some issues”
- “Lights would not always work in lab space”
- “Yes. The balance in Lab 1 was malfunctioning and we needed it to measure tiny fish with high precision. In the past, this work was conducted out of Lab 3 with a balance I have been using for over 30 years (Gads!). I would appreciate continuing to have access to the Lab 3 balance. Additionally, I have lots of very heavy equipment, much of which is located closer to Lab3 than Lab1. Lugging this gear back and forth used additional time that I had not accounted for, which made accomplishing my goals over my short 2023 stay quite challenging. In the future I will request space in Lab3, and if that isn't possible will take these issues into consideration when setting field season goals.”
- “Lab 6 could use some increased ventilation.”

# Shipping from TFS

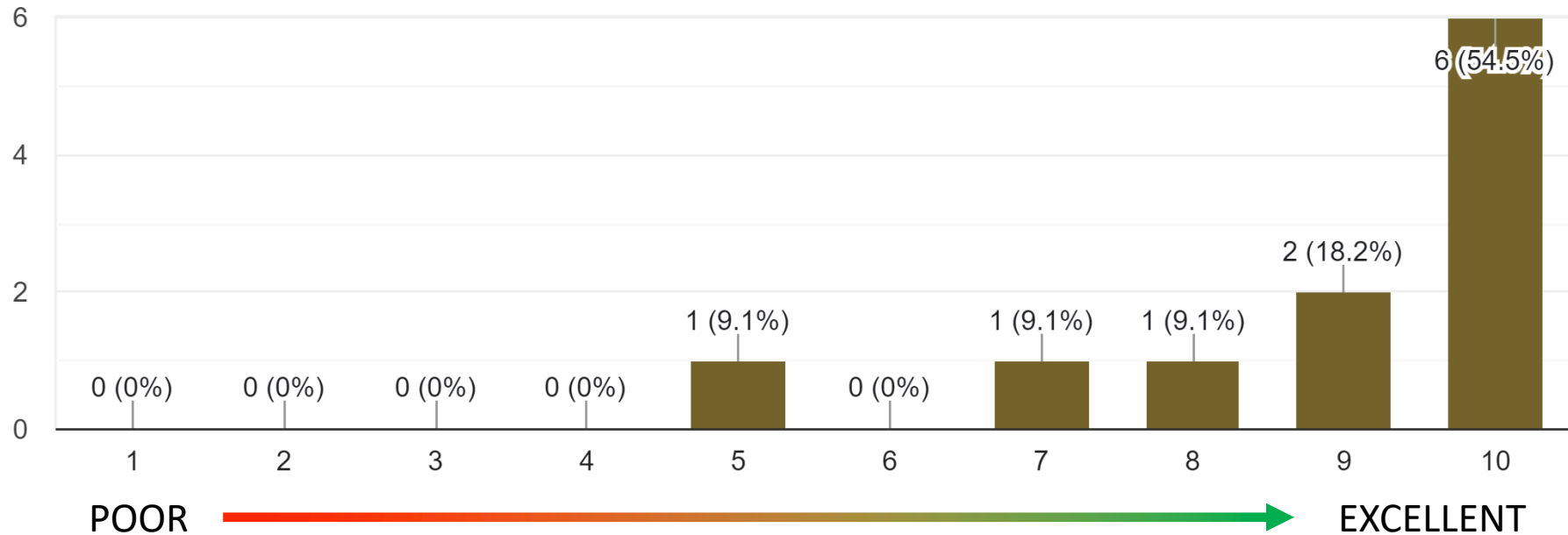
- 6 out of 10 respondents reported “No issues.”
- “for trucks going south with items to be shipped, it would helpful to have a clear departure time posted and/or time to have your items ready at the dining hall to be loaded. also sometimes the person in charge of truck departure would switch depending on the week/day, and it would be difficult to know who to track down. there was one instance where a truck left very early in the morning, and many shipments that were supposed to go out that day did not make it on because no one had been informed that the truck was leaving that early.”
- “It was difficult to locate a scale for weighing large trucks. Usually there is one in the shipping and receiving tent, but it was missing when I needed it.”
- Shipping to and from TFS was excellent last year. Had a very positive experience with the Tuesday/Thursday North and Southbound schedule. I really appreciate TFS staff accommodating this, it was very helpful.”



# TFS SEDC Support

How would you rate any field assistance or remote access assistance you received from TFS-ENVIRONMENTAL DATA CENTER?

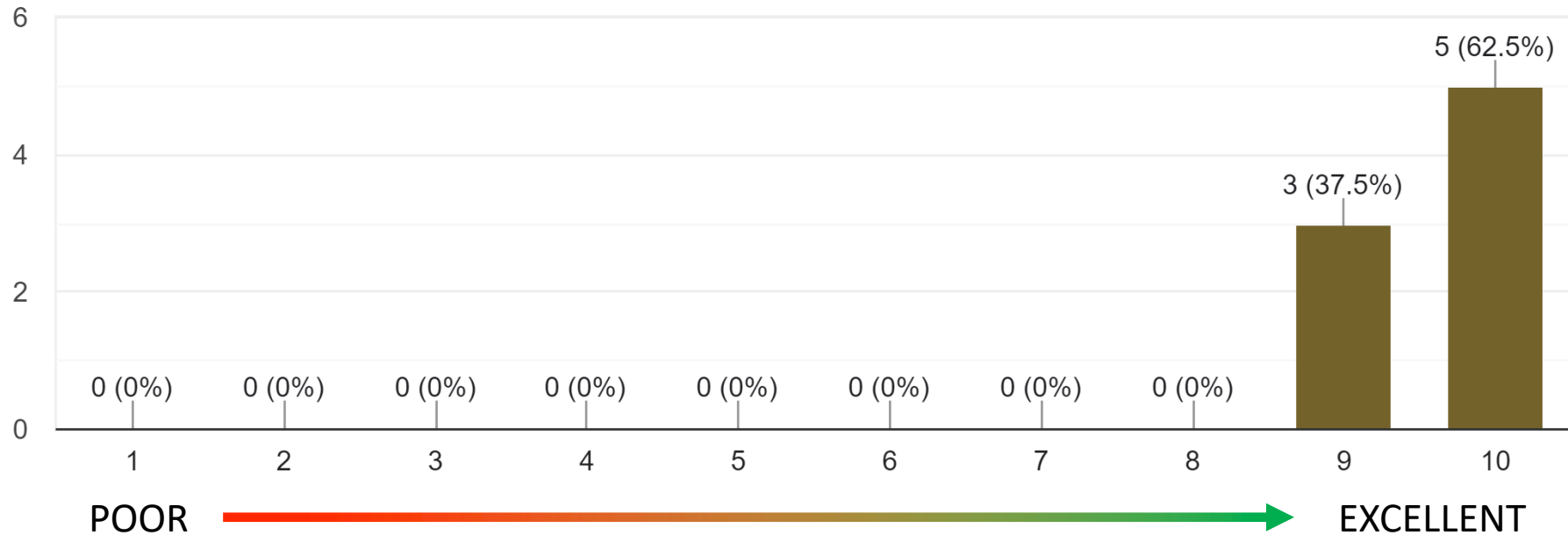
11 responses



# TFS-GIS and Remote Sensing

How would you rate any field assistance or remote access assistance you received from TFS-GIS and REMOTE SENSING?

8 responses



# SEDC and GIS Support

- “keep up the good work, you are much appreciated!”
- “I worked with the EDC more and found the entire crew to be incredibly helpful and knowledgeable.”
- “Thank you for your wonderful service!”

# TFS Shared Equipment Requests

- “I was not made aware the walk-in fridge (in the community center) was not holding temperature, so some of my samples were stored much warmer than I needed them. Having a sign indicating the faulty temp would've been helpful.”
- “more scales. they got pretty over-run during the pluck and found it hard to find one to use”
- “It would be fabulous to have a number of external computer monitors available for use, perhaps as signout-in-advance items on the SEDC website, to ensure one is available during stays at Toolik.”
- “Possibly a spare Toughbook available for checkout (with Loggernet, DevConfig, HOBO software, and other commonly used software) and possibly a few extra Toughbook and Campbell Scientific accessories (like charging cable, spare serial cables, tiny screwdrivers, and a keypad?), all for checkout / temporary use only, coordinated through EDC staff?”
- “Also, a 50' fish tape on hand for running cable through conduit”
- “Field pH probe”

# TFS Website, SRS System

- “Toolik website is hard to use and hard to update profiles/data.”
- “I would like to see that all Toolik staff utilize the SRS system to prevent having multiple places to sign up equipment. It’s easier for me than needing to reserve EDC help via SRS, equipment via email/sign out sheet, and the boat by talking to the EMS.”
- “For a few weeks there were numerous conflicts/confusions about using Smooth Ride for work purposes.”
- “At times, the website has been a bit buggy, possibly depending on the web browser used (i.e. no submit button after typing in a bunch of data). Or something is missing in the entered data and it is difficult to figure out what is incorrect or missing before being able to continue on or press submit. This doesn't happen all the time so it might be browser dependent..”
- “Regarding the SRS system it would be good if the entire station used 1 system for work/Equipment management. Whether that is SRS or another system is less important.”

# Other Comments and Future Directions

- “Increasing the pressure on researchers/students to (1) maintain clean space outside of labs (lots of styrofoam, other plastics polluting the watershed); (2) consider opportunities to share equipment, etc. to reduce carbon footprint.”
- “I would like to see more 'lead by example' from the big research groups working at Toolik. Sometimes it feels like 'do as I say not as I do' with logistics and planning at TFS and in Fairbanks as well.”
- “Toolik staff does a great job but I would love to see a better culture of accountability fostered. Issues of inappropriate behavior are allowed to continue far too long. With minimal intervention at earlier stages, these situations can progress until real harm is done. Given the isolating nature of such a remote field station, people's comfort and safety with their coworkers should be a top priority.”
- “I was a bit disappointed by how exclusive and exclusionary the Toolik staff was. I have done a number of these field campaigns and the staff at Toolik was more clique-y than any I have encountered (including in Antractica, lol).”



# Community recognition

- “Justin Johnson should be applauded for his many years of warm, personable, kind and professional leadership. His personality and skills are a huge asset to camp.”
- “Amanda Young- great communicator and organizer, does so much to help camp run smoothly!”
- “This was my first season at Toolik, and honestly I couldn't have asked for a better time. The staff were flexible, helpful, and available when I needed something... ...Specific shouts out to Marvin for friendliness in addition to helping with whatever I needed.”
- “Everyone is fantastic.”
- “Marvin for being an exceptional FOA”
- “Big thanks to Jason Dobkowski and Ali Malik for all their help this past season and to Mayra Melendez Gonzalez for help at Green Cabin Lake... ...Also, thanks to TFS staff for continuing to provide exceptional and friendly service.
- “The entire Toolik staff (logistics, camp managers, mechanics/maintenance/operations support staff, EDC/GIS); but there are too many people to list. Again, this year our project is very grateful for the support of the Toolik staff coming out to shovel at the weir prior to spring breakup. Thanks to Jason Dobkowski for serving as a staff representative and also being a valuable resource for the various questions/concerns that pop up.”
- “I interact mostly with onsite Toolik staff and logistics office staff. I love working with all of these people and think you all do an excellent job.”

Questions or comments?

