More salmon appeared in fishermen's nets along the Mackenzie River earlier this summer than previously recorded, says a PhD student studying the fish.

Karen Dunnall, a University of Manitoba student, has been researching salmon in the Mackenzie River and its tributaries since 2011.

"Chum salmon specifically have always been caught in the Northwest Territories, so the fact they're getting caught is not new, it's that they're getting caught in greater numbers and in more places," she said.

She said a salmon was caught near Deline at the end of August and another was found in Great Bear Lake the second week of September.

"I would never expect people to be catching salmon as far up as Great Bear Lake at the beginning of September."

Dunnall partners with Fisheries and Oceans Canada to perform the project, which relies on subsistence fishing to supply researchers with salmon through an exchange program. People who catch salmon can drop the entire fish or just its head to their local hunters and trappers association or other community office to receive either a $50 or $25 gift card for the Northern store.

"Without the salmon from communities, this project wouldn't happen," Dunnall said.

The fish are frozen and shipped to a Fisheries and Oceans research facility in Winnipeg.

Michelle Gruben, resource person for the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee, said while the exchange program has existed for years, it was improved when Dunnall's project began.

Instead of waiting for gift cards to arrive from Inuvik, offices in communities collecting fish now have the cards on hand.

"They'll be the ones to say who's right or wrong," said Balloille.

More salmon are occurring predominantly in the ocean or in the Mackenzie.

"I would never expect people to be catching salmon as far up as Great Bear Lake at the beginning of September."

Dunnall said climate change could be responsible for the warmer water that allows the eggs to survive in greater numbers.

"It is possible and that's something I've heard in many communities," she said. "It's unusual, but now it's becoming almost like a common thing."