

## *Draft Yukon Water Strategy for Public Review*

### Summary of Comments: Dawson City Open House, April 12, 2013

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

This document is a summary of what the Government of Yukon team members heard regarding the *Draft Yukon Water Strategy for Public Review* during the open house held in Dawson City, Yukon on April 12, 2013, at the Klondike Institute of Art & Culture. It is intended to provide a record for both those who attended the event and those who did not and is consistent with the government's commitment to an open and transparent public review process. The comments below were gathered from nine people who attended this event.

The open house shared information about the Yukon government's water management programs through panel displays and discussion. Our purpose was to collect comments on the vision, principles and goals proposed in the draft strategy as well as six priorities and the short- and long-term actions for achieving them. The event was promoted through posters in Dawson City, direct communication with key water stakeholders, advertising on the Environment Yukon and YukonWater websites, updates on the draft water strategy's Facebook page and through Twitter.

The public review period for the *Draft Yukon Water Strategy for Public Review* runs from March 20 through May 31, 2013. For more information or to comment on the draft water strategy, please visit [www.env.gov.yk.ca/draftwaterstrategy](http://www.env.gov.yk.ca/draftwaterstrategy), call 667-3171 or 1-800-661-0405 X3171 or email [water.resources@gov.yk.ca](mailto:water.resources@gov.yk.ca).

Please note the comments below are organized by the vision, goals, principles and priorities in the draft strategy rather than by the person commenting. They are not intended to be verbatim but rather to capture the main message/theme. These comments will be compiled with other comments received during the public review to form an overall engagement summary. If there are any inaccuracies in the document, please do not hesitate to contact us. Our contact information is provided at the end of this document.

Comments are presented in bulleted italic blue font under the topic area addressed.

## SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

### Vision

Yukoners have access to safe and sufficient water to meet their needs in ways that also preserve ecosystem health now and into the future.

- *No comments made.*

### Principles

- *The precautionary principle should be included.*
- *Overall, we do not appreciate/realize what we have (some of the only areas that are untouched in the world). Whatever needs to be done to protect it should be paramount recognizing that industry will adapt and do what it takes to meet their objectives.*

Sustainability: Undertake actions that are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable.

Forward-looking: Anticipate future changes in water quality, quantity and needs due to factors such as cumulative effects, climate change and population growth.

Adaptability: Promote and develop adaptive management strategies to cope with uncertainty and change.

Security: Seek to maintain affordable, adequate, equitable and reliable water quality and quantity for all Yukoners.

Stewardship: Ensure Yukon's watersheds remain intact and healthy, based on both individual and shared responsibilities.

- *Need to figure out how to engage people in remote locations and water users (not just water managers) and encourage them to be water stewards.*

Cooperation: Develop and promote partnerships and collaboration as appropriate in light of shared responsibilities.

Respect: Demonstrate respect for the intrinsic value of water and the values and interests of all Yukoners.

## Goals

Water for People: Ensure accessible, safe and sufficient water for drinking and other purposes, including industrial, recreational, heritage, cultural and spiritual uses and values. Promote sustainable and valuable use of water for communities and economies for key business sectors.

Water for Nature: Preserve water quality and quantity for aquatic health and ecosystem services while respecting the intrinsic value of water.

Water Monitoring, Knowledge and Management: Strengthen understanding, knowledge and overall management of water.

- *No comments made.*

## Priorities

Priority A: Better understand and manage Yukon's groundwater regime.

- *Regarding hydraulic fracturing, is there a way to do this activity so it that will not affect groundwater? If so, then why not? However, understanding more about groundwater resources is the key to ensure potential effects are understood.*
- *In priority areas (areas where resource development has potential to overlap with drinking water values present and future), we should map groundwater so that proponents and government know what is adequate monitoring and where monitoring wells need to be placed.*
- *Proponents should have knowledge of the groundwater parameters to be measured/monitored for the purpose of developing baseline conditions.*
- *The Population Health and Oil and Gas Activities Report was provided for consideration in relation to this priority.*

Priority B: Maintain/improve access to safe drinking water for all Yukoners.

- *Elders in Dawson take blue jugs down the Dempster Highway to Wolf Creek to get drinking water. Have heard that the elders think the water tastes better, like it more than town water (dislike chlorine), and perceive it to be more clear and clean. Sampling has taken place in those creeks in response.*

Priority C: Promote the sustainable use of water.

- *Would really like to see more emphasis placed on promoting long term sustainable use and sustainability rather than allowing access to users. Consider what's important to Yukoners (us) and focus on value added sectors and those which create opportunity for longer term use.*
- *Ensuring industry and new proponents are familiar with Waters Act and Regulation and the final Yukon Water Strategy goals so that everyone is working towards a common vision for Yukon's waters.*
- *Culture and identity are linked to water (salmon, water fowl, berries, moose). We must use it appropriately so there are no adverse effect on culture, identity, water traditions and heritage.*
- *Interest in Water Forum idea, as a way to build on knowledge base and share information among stakeholders.*
- *Traditional knowledge is good to incorporate into policies and plans. There are a lot of areas in Yukon that have not been studied and traditional knowledge is useful in those areas.*

Priority D: Improve the generation and use of water information.

- *Determine government's role in generating baseline data. It takes a long time for mining projects to reach the active resource extraction phase. Government should prepare the proponent for the expectations around baseline data. Should government play a role in generating this data in areas where projects will be located? (Regarding both groundwater and surface water parameters).*
- *It is important to get data online. Proponents need to have timely access to this data in order to conduct baseline studies.*
- *We need to increase communication on water studies by having a central location for information and data.*

Priority E: Assess and improve government management programs.

- *Would like to have e-mail updates; perhaps be able to create a profile for water data/information (specifically for other governments).*
- *Not just about access, should also be about delivery of data to stakeholders and other governments.*
- *Coordinating regional information gathered so that it benefits organizations.*

- *Would like to see work towards standardizing water quality monitoring procedures.*

**Priority F: Plan for water needs now and in the future.**

- *Prepare for different, (potential) new (and old) resource and economic sectors.*
- *When weighing options for balance between mineral resource development and water quality, remember traditional sectors like tourism and wildlife viewing that may be longer lived and based on protecting the natural resources.*
- *Regarding the last long term action in the strategy; do not use example. Remove “petroleum” because it makes it seem that fracking is a given.*
- *Use hydraulic fracturing as the example as opposed to “petroleum” in the last long term action identified (contrary to above).*
- *Observations of climate change: ice bridge later in seasons, break-up dates different and earlier, more variation (less water in creek, more water in creek), quality of ice, have to wait longer to do activities (ice fishing for example), more deoxygenated water entering systems (testing that on the Klondike), mudslides, road and highway changes, permafrost degradation.*
- *A number of First Nations have reports and resources to share with regard to climate change.*
- *Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council has an “Active Layer Program” (permafrost grids).*
- *We have no control over climate change. Massive changes would be required to stop it.*
- *Long term goals of First Nations must be considered; some planning efforts are looking far into the future, for example, restoring fish (salmon) habitat and numbers to return to past levels.*
- *First Nation governments are open to future housing developments in traditional territory areas; access to clean drinking water is simply a given and should be considered when authorizing development anywhere.*
- *Would like to see earlier consultation over large developments where mining development is near settlement land, rather than waiting for the intervention; opportunity for collaboration in advance can save a lot of time and money (can make some things easier and more probable). A good example from the*

*past has been Brewery Creek. It is recommended and important that governments work together before water licence interventions.*

## **General Comments**

- *Yukon government should meet with the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council.*
- *First Nation governments have overlapping responsibility in relation to making water management decisions.*
- *Clarify roles and responsibilities in areas of overlap when First Nation Settlement Land is involved.*
- *Ensure rights under Chapter 14 of the Umbrella Final Agreement are considered pro-actively to reduce potential for litigation years later.*
- *What about baseline data – do proponents know in advance that they should have 2-3 years of data; how can we improve this? Is it a requirement to have x number of years of baseline?*
- *Regarding fracking, there needs to be baseline data.*
- *First Nations would like to see further engagement in the development of action and implementation plans related to the Water Strategy.*
- *Regarding the Strategic Water Initiatives Group, First Nations expressed interest in seeing terms of reference for these working groups and exploring if they can be engaged early on in the process.*
- *How do climate change issues compare to industrial effects on water? Why would this be a priority when other issues are not addressed?*
- *Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council; a lot of relevant work has been completed that should be considered as it highlights many of the First Nations' values to be protected.*
- *Why is Bulk Water not included in the strategy?*
- *Noted that Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP) has been used as a tool by some corporations in other jurisdictions to enable unwelcome development.*

## **NEXT STEPS**

The feedback received during the Dawson City engagement session will help inform the Yukon government in the development of the final Yukon water strategy. Once this is completed, further work will be needed to prepare an action plan to describe how the short- and long-term actions will be addressed. This includes identifying departmental leads and partners as well as options, costs and timing for implementation activities.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Yukon government would like to thank the participants in the public review of the *Draft Yukon Water Strategy* at the Dawson City Open House held on April 12, 2013. Your feedback was extremely valuable and will help guide the continued development of a comprehensive, thoughtful and innovative water strategy for Yukon.

## **CONTACT**

This document was prepared by Environment Yukon on behalf of the Strategic Water Initiatives Group on April 30, 2013.

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