

Draft Yukon Water Strategy for Public Review

Summary of Comments: Fort McPherson Public Meeting, June 24, 2013

INTRODUCTION

This document is a summary of what the Government of Yukon (YG) team members heard regarding the Draft Yukon Water Strategy for Public Review during the public meeting held in Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories on June 24, 2013. 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 the 24 people who attended this event.

YG staff shared information about YG water management programs and the draft Strategy itself, through presentations and discussions. 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. Attendees were also requested to "dot" the two most important items that they would like to see come out in the final strategy. The event was requested by the Gwich'in Tribal Council and promoted through posters distributed in Fort McPherson, through a local radio announcement, advertising on the Environment Yukon and Yukon Water 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 was held between March 20 and June 30, 2013. For more information on the draft water strategy and the recent summaries of other community engagement sessions, please visit www.env.gov.yk.ca/draftwaterstrategy, call 667-3171 or 1-800-661-0405 X3171 or email water.resources@gov.yk.ca.

Please note the comments below are organized by order of the presentations. 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 font under the topic area addressed. The results of the "dotmocracy" exercise are not presented in this document but will be considered as we develop the final strategy and subsequent action plan.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

Vision

- *Regarding the reference to “Yukoners”, it was felt that the vision should include others (such as transboundary users of Yukon’s water).*

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

Principles

- *No comments.*

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.

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

- *No comments.*

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.

Priorities

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

- *No comments.*

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

- *No comments.*

Priority C: Promote the sustainable use of water.

- *There was concern about potential flooding (as recently seen in Alberta) and how a similar event could put Yukon waters at risk; specifically the Yukon River. There was discussion about current mining activities along the Yukon River and mitigations in place that minimize the risk from tailings ponds such as the design of dams to withstand a "1 in 500" year flood.*
- *Transboundary issue for the Gwich'in Tribal Council; water flows from Yukon to NWT.*

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

- *Note that a presentation was provided on the yukonwater.ca website and the new WATERLINE website as well as the provision of printed materials on both in order to explain how to find data, information and how to look up projects undergoing water licensing.*

Priority E: Assess and improve government management programs.

- *There was interest in having involvement in a Yukon Water Forum.*

- *Discussion about how Yukon government has communicated/engaged with Yukon First Nations on the Draft Yukon Water Strategy.*

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

- *There was general discussion regarding the Yukon government's responsibility for monitoring; specific request to have "full spectrum" monitoring in the Peel (including chemical analysis).*
- *Concern that Northern Cross is getting closer to the Hart River*
- *Tetlit Gwich'in have a large traditional territory and feel they could make an important contribution to any sampling that is done in the Peel watershed region.*

General Comments

- *There was discussion regarding the mining land use permits issued between 2000 and 2008; specifically that those activities have been grandfathered. While there is currently a moratorium on staking in the Peel River watershed, permits that were already issued are allowed to carry out the activities they were permitted for.*
- *There were concerns raised that there is currently no "notification" mechanism that lets the Tetlit Gwich'in know that activity is happening (i.e. for those activities that do not require a permit or license, but that still must notify the government of work being carried out). There is an interest in employment opportunities for the community that could result from those activities.*
- *There was discussion about current activities in Eagle Plains and a request to see the watershed stay as it is.*
- *Within the principles and goals, would like to see the Peel Watershed always protected.*

NEXT STEPS

The feedback received during the Fort McPherson 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 Fort McPherson Public Meeting held on June 24, 2013. We were pleased with the strong turn out and will take the valuable input provided to us into consideration as we continue in the 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 July 2, 2013.

For more information, please contact:

Heather Jirousek
Program Advisor
867-667-3121
heather.jirousek@gov.yk.ca

Miranda Allison
Water Strategy Development Officer
867-667-3171
miranda.allison@gov.yk.ca