

Draft Yukon Water Strategy for Public Review Summary of Comments: Haines Junction Open House, May 8, 2013

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 Haines Junction, Yukon on May 8, 2013, at the Da Kų Cultural Centre. 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 approximately 15 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. 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 promoted through posters and household flyers distributed to Haines Junction, direct communication with key water stakeholders, advertising on the Environment Yukon and YukonWater websites, and 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 June 30, 2013. For more information or to comment on the draft water strategy, 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 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 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

- *The vision and strategic framework is actually quite strong. However, will the results of the strategy (i.e. implementation of the priorities and actions) actually achieve these?*

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

- *There should a principle on humility with the acknowledgement that we need to stay humble about water. In other words, we don't know everything about water.*

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.

- *Respect is the key and it is great to see it in the strategy.*
- *Make it clear that "and the values and interests of all Yukoners..." is specific to water.*

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.

Priorities

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

- *Should have mandatory well drilling logs so that the public can access information on wells, including parameters such as flow rate and soil characteristics.*
- *Government should drill more wells for monitoring.*
- *More water monitoring wells are needed.*
- *Need better well data. It is important to know the structure of the ground around a well (e.g., lay or gravel) which would affect the speed at which a pollutant from the surface could enter the aquifer. The weigh scale is located very close to one of the Village's water wells. Better knowledge of the dates that wells were dug, water chemistry, biological content, and temperatures. Logs should tell as much as can be known about the geology that they uncover. The data should be accessible to the public.*
- *Public and private sector roles with respect to water quality (water lab needed in the Yukon to facilitate water quality testing).*
- *Geothermal heating systems are becoming more popular (may need a regulatory regime).*
- *There is an obligation to protect ground water quality in deep aquifers.*

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

- *There has been serious water well and water quality issues in this area.*

- *This should also involve looking at private water systems such as RV parks.*

Priority C: Promote the sustainable use of water.

- *Renewable Resource Councils may be a good partner for education and outreach activities.*
- *The strategy should identify threats to the water systems and to water users (everything in the ecosystem).*

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

- *There should be a commitment to the education and outreach component sharing water information. The example of getting into schools for Canada Water Week is an example of what this could entail.*

Priority E: Assess and improve government management programs.

- *Forums often become political and get dropped but they are very beneficial. The Yukon government needs to ensure this action is achieved*
- *There should be a short-term action to assess the feasibility and benefits of metering water use.*
- *There is a lot of talk to improve communication with First Nations, however, we need to see a commitment to build partnerships and collaborate. While the Yukon government may do this already, it should be affirmed in the strategy. This is a principle so it needs to be reflected in the actions.*

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

- *Monitoring networks need to be expanded and increased. This is priority and it is given no mention. "Review and adjust" is not adequate, especially given the increase in development.*
- *There is a concern with bulk water export. If this takes place, it should not be free.*
- *The long-term action to employ available tools and governance mechanisms for Integrated Water Management is too vague. There should be an addition*

of what this might entail, for example that we are working with other jurisdictions on cumulative effects management.

General Comments

- *Fracking has to be mentioned in this strategy, and needs to acknowledge that the Yukon government's water managers are being proactive despite there not being a decision on the topic.*
- *There needs to be a reference and acknowledgement of Chapter 14 of the Umbrella Final Agreement with regard to Water Management. It is crucial to recognize that there is another political document that provides for water rights in Yukon.*
- *Yukon needs a water lab (certified for testing for metals). There could be funding opportunities for this and we should seek those. Currently, there are a lot of water samples that need to get shipped to out of territory labs. This is not efficient or cost-effective. Another benefit of opening a lab in Yukon would include economic development (increasing jobs and career opportunities for people with these skills).*
- *The strategy contains so many motherhood statements. What is really going to happen and what is going to be done?*
- *The strategic framework seems promising however, it is unclear that all of these can be achieved with the priorities and actions as they currently stand. It would be beneficial to look at each item in the moving forward section and identify the proposed actions that would contribute to achieving the strategic framework. Once this exercise is completed, the language should be enhanced and strengthened to make a more solid commitment to implement a strategy that fulfills its own goals.*
- *Biodiversity should be mentioned in the strategy.*

NEXT STEPS

The feedback received during the Haines Junction 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 Haines Junction Open House held on May 8, 2013. Your feedback was extremely valuable and will help guide the continued development of a comprehensive, thoughtful and innovative water strategy for Yukon.

CONTACT

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