

Draft Yukon Water Strategy for Public Review Summary of Comments: Tagish Public Meeting, June 12, 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 Tagish, Yukon on June 12, 2013 at the Tagish Community 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 15 people who attended this event.

YG staff shared information about YG water management programs and the draft Strategy itself, through a presentation, 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 requested by the Tagish Advisory Council and promoted through posters distributed in Tagish, direct communication with key water stakeholders, 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 ran from March 20 through 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 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

- *No comments.*

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

- *The strategy's priorities read as though human needs are above ecosystem needs, with no dedicated area and actions to maintain ecosystem health. Therefore, it suggests that the goals are prioritized and 'Water for People' is the highest. If this is the case, then it should be stated to ensure the public has a clear sense of government's priority with regard to water management.*
- *If YG is going to say that they are not prioritized, then there should be more sound actions to promote 'Water for Nature' and balance the goals. However,*

the goals should be prioritized and 'Water for Nature' should be listed as the highest priority since all life (including people) is incumbent upon healthy ecosystems.

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.

- *Discussion around water licenced and non-licensed activities that may affect water and the requirement to collect baseline data.*
- *More baseline water testing is needed in the territory, not only of groundwater but surface water as well.*
- *More clarity is needed from Yukon government on who is responsible for baseline data collection both in areas of development and areas that are not currently being developed.*
- *Sampling should be taking place before projects are approved.*
- *Stressed importance of testing for all parameters (the results found are only what you look for).*
- *Long-term data gathering is declining in most aspects of environmental management; this is disconcerting as development is rising.*
- *There is concern that the federal omnibus bill has affected Yukon's ability to manage and protect water quality in the large water bodies. Would like to see that monitoring continues and more resources are allocated to cover any deficiencies from those changes.*
- *There is serious concern that no one is monitoring water quality in private wells and that well driller logs are not mandatory to provide for public*

information. Provision of well data from well drillers should be made mandatory.

- *There is a continuum between ground and surface waters, responsible and informed decision-making regarding water provision is vital to proper water management. Surface water management is about ensuring downstream water quality (limiting activities at the headwaters and careful monitoring of upstream users) and groundwater management is about making good land use decisions which protect and do not contaminate groundwater.*
- *There must be difficulties in coordinating many different departmental interests. The concern is that competing mandates makes the task to manage water counterproductive. The desire would be to create a new department or framework.*
- *There is concern regarding hydraulic fracturing and possible contamination to groundwater; would like to see the strategy guide government to put more time and capacity into being educated about this industrial practice.*
- *YG should be taking the baseline and doing the comparison versus the oil and gas company to mitigate concerns regarding the ‘burden of proof’ of contamination.*
- *See a need for independent third party monitoring, perhaps a new independent agency. Provided the example of the Tar Sands where inadequate monitoring and an inability to change course as needed, even as water quality declined, prompted Government of Alberta to create an independent panel of scientists to look at effects.*

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

- *Discussion regarding the California Beach well and flow metering. If there isn't a flow meter, there should be.*
- *Clarity regarding the regulations for different systems is needed.*

Priority C: Promote the sustainable use of water.

- *There is concern that Best Management Practices (BMPs) are not good enough to protect water sources and the environment.*

- *More information needs to be communicated regarding BMPs and should be expanded to include more for the non-industrial user to enhance water conservation. An example could be what is the best practice for a boater when it comes to filling up their tank with fuel?*
- *BMPs are too vague.*
- *The strategy does not have a definition of 'sustainable'. In order to guide objectives, this definition is needed.*
- *Water monitoring can't generate any useful data without baseline information. Baseline data underlies everything so there is no credibility if there is no neutral baseline information.*
- *People should be careful when talking about 'baseline'. Baseline information may not be pristine because conditions change all the time. Baseline changes can occur for a number of reasons (natural conditions, other development, etc.). Generally, our time scales for collecting 'baseline data' are short so we must admit that there are limitations when looking to this data to tell us a story.*
- *The value of intact watersheds and the experience that we have as Yukoners with this resource is rare and for the most part, taken for granted. It is our responsibility to maintain these watersheds and this resource for future generations to experience it in the same way.*

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

- *YG should tap into people who live on the water as an important source of information (integrate local knowledge for better decision-making). An example is a resident who records dates of freeze-up and break-up every year. This is a valuable source.*
- *RRCs can also provide a source of local knowledge – are able to be out on the land in the communities where YG may not be able.*
- *It would be very good to see YG incorporate community-based monitoring into the strategy.*
- *YukonWater is a good tool; however, it is not very user friendly or engaging. A search function would be useful.*

Priority E: Assess and improve government management programs.

- *There is concern regarding the transfer of inspections from Environment to Energy, Mines and Resources. Regardless of whether or not the inspectors are able to carry out their job in good faith and in the public interests and not their department's mandate, it would be more at arm's length if it were not an agency that had conflicting responsibilities.*
- *There is a need to manage river systems and watersheds as a whole. Industry does not operate that way, but YG should be looking at development and activities at the watershed scale.*
- *Despite having other frameworks for assessing projects and licensing activities, the water strategy should affect how YESAB and the Water Board look at projects. So, the strategy should have more teeth and be more specific.*
- *Forestry management is interrelated with water systems management. Land use should be explicit about allocation of land to protect water. This is evident when managing fisheries habitats.*

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

- *An evaluation of the overall legislative framework for adequacy in managing the water regime should be undertaken.*
- *The solutions to climate change are long-term but the changes are immediate and mid-term issues. More needs to be done to respond to climate change.*
- *There needs to be a link to energy and water. How we use water is connected to how we use energy.*

General Comments

- *Hydraulic fracturing is a concern and this needs to be addressed through this water strategy.*
- *Chapter 14 of the UFA contains some of the strongest language and most significance when it comes to water management in Yukon. However, it is glaringly absent from the strategy. A reference or recognition should be included in the strategy.*

NEXT STEPS

The feedback received during the Tagish 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 Tagish Public Meeting held on June 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

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