



What We Heard

Gentian Lane Lease Area

Agriculture Disposition #2001-0036,
across from Lot 1208, Gentian Lane



Introduction

The Government of Yukon's Agriculture Branch has heard requests from Yukoners to be able to grow food, forage, and fibre for their families, or friends, or even profit. Yukoners want a little bit more land than their garden (if they have one). They would like to experiment and be innovative with the crops and livestock they rear. The Agriculture Branch has heard agricultural land can be hard to find in the Yukon and even when available is expensive, and for smaller projects the minimum lot sizes are simply too large. There is concern that new agricultural land goes to established agricultural interests because they can show experience of farming in the challenging Yukon conditions, but how may new entrants gain the Yukon experience? Additionally, agriculture is expensive to start up, and subject to high risks.

In short, Yukoners want a piece of land to grow food on that doesn't put them in great debt, minimises their financial risk, and allows them to gain agricultural experience. Appropriating and adapting allotment principles from North America and Europe provides this in a planned, managed manner and minimizes the risks to wildlife by appropriately protecting wildlife attractants, whilst providing for fuel abatement and wildfire risk reduction services.

As a result, leasing of land for the production of food, fibre, and forage became enshrined in Cultivating our Future: 2020 Yukon Agriculture Policy. This Agriculture Policy has a target that 25% of all land released for agriculture, be leased. The proposed Gentian Lane lease area is too small to be released to agricultural title, and with plan designation and zoning in place for agriculture, this area is a prime candidate for an allotment leasing program, infilling between existing agricultural lots.

The Agriculture Branch is proposing to offer through its planned land program a system of small horticulture parcels adapted from the garden allotment system found across Europe, and the community gardens of North America.

They will also utilise agroforestry techniques to harness the ecosystem services of mature trees, whilst providing fuel abatement and wildfire risk reduction. Developed by the Agriculture Branch, these allotment parcels will be leased and of varying sizes appropriate for commercial production as well as providing food for family and friends.

The Luxembourg-based *Office International du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux*, representing three million European allotment gardeners since 1926, describes the socio-cultural and economic functions of allotment gardens as offering an improved quality of life, an enjoyable and profitable hobby, relaxation, and contact with nature. For children, gardens offer places to play and to learn about nature, while for the unemployed, they offer a feeling of doing something useful as well as providing low-cost food. For the elderly and disabled, gardens offer an opportunity to meet people, to share in activity with like-minded people, and to experience activities like planting and harvesting.

About Agriculture Seasonal Leasing

Seasonal leased areas allow the lessee access to land on which to grow food fibre and forage ("food") for the time they need it: the growing season. There is no minimum sized area, the lease area is dictated by the square metres required for each proposed food production project. There is no need to occupy, nor pay for, food growing land if it is not in production, nor when (for example) covered in a foot of snow. Therefore, seasonal leases are only available mid/late April to early/mid October, and have a minimum production clause.

Consultation Process

The Gentian Lane lease area was designated for agricultural use under the Golden Horn Local Area Plan (2004, GH LAP) and zoned for Agriculture under the Golden Horn Development Area Regulation (2011, DAR).

The local community and Yukon First Nation consultation was undertaken as part of the Agriculture Application Technical Working Group process in spring 2022.

First Nations comments:

Kwanlin Dün First Nation:

“KDFN generally supports food growing in the Whitehorse area as a contribution to local food security and climate change mitigation (reducing transport use of carbon fuels for shipping food from the south).

We understand that the GH LAP and DAR support this type of land use.

Also, this type of land use is compatible with the lot sizes and land uses residents participate in there, already.”

Ta’an Kwäch’än Council:

“TKC takes the general stance of approving the new way of leasing land for agricultural pursuits as opposed to the disposition of permanent land holdings. This is of course subject to exceptions, and we appreciate the notification with accompanied background and justification emails going forward.”

Local community comments:

Flow of foot and vehicle traffic.

How many leases are there to be as the area is thought to be 15-20 acres?

Is the Government simply going to go ahead whatever the neighbours say?

How will you know the leases are being used properly?

Where will the leaseholders park, as Gentian Lane is a bus route and busy with traffic?

Who will vet the applicants? There is a concern of strangers being in the area affecting local security.

How will the leases address the potential of local dogs interacting with their livestock, produce etc.?

Pilot the project with a one year lease term and then request input from neighbours regarding the project's effect prior to making the project permanent and ongoing.

Closely spaced new growth forest in the area prevents the area being suitable for food production.

The remaining mature forest creates a lack of sunlight making it difficult to grow food in.

Damage to the forest floor and undergrowth due to traffic and activities, what conditions will the lot be left in after the growing season?

There is no soil, water, nor electricity.

Forest fires are a huge concern, what plans will be in place regarding this increased activity?

Unattended gardens and animals will attract predators; no accommodation will mean there will be no one to properly monitor animals and ensure their wellbeing and welfare.

Residents presently rely on their dogs and consistent human presence to ensure exceptional animal husbandry. What plans are there to ensure the welfare of livestock and security of gardens etc. to prevent those becoming attractants?

The driveway access is an unmaintained road, what plans does the Branch have to support maintenance and where is the parking for the leaseholders.

What is the true economic value in the project, considering the drawbacks of carbon footprint of transportation, extra traffic, set up, summer maintenance, take down, clean up, and cost of well-run animal husbandry?

The idea to give people the opportunity to grow local food whilst minimizing the environmental impact should be supported.

Support for the Planned Agriculture Lease Allotments near Gention Lane. I am a gardener, and lack access to enough garden space to meet my family's needs

Food producers in the provinces are facing production costs that have never been seen before, and the cost to bring these items to the north will continue to increase the prices for Yukoners to purchase food. These factors are intensified by the insufficient access for residents to grow their own food. Provincial rangeland and farmland leases and tenures are both a regular and required piece of the agricultural sector in Alberta, British Columbia, and many other jurisdictions in North America.

Land that has specific use agreements include terms for the activities that can be carried out and are enforceable by government, thereby holding land users accountable. It is in the agreement holder's best interest to meet permit conditions, which ensures their continued access to the land.

I am very encouraged to see that the Government of Yukon is considering alternative solutions in the Whitehorse area to address local food production, and creating land use agreement opportunities for residents to engage in agricultural activities

Potential overnight light pollution from the leases, and how to ensure this doesn't happen.

A bit of wire doesn't keep out bears. There are lots of predators here.

Discussion

Much of the concern received about the proposed seasonal lease area revolves around the development of new agricultural activities based on a new concept for food production in the Yukon. How is this going to work and the effects managed to prevent negative experiences for neighboring properties?

The existing system of providing land for food production is presently underway at Lot 1208, across the driveway. This has just been released into an agreement for sale for development into a poultry and pig farm, with slaughter/processing ability. That development will involve significant land clearing, burning of brush and non-merchantable timber, construction of permanent agriculture facilities, and a residence. Being released to title, lot 1208 will be developed as per its farm development plan, and once titled may be used in any manner, subject to zoning.

In contrast, the lease area will be retained and managed by the Agriculture Branch. There will be a maximum of five leases of up to one acre made available, for use between the dates of mid-April and mid-October. Potential lessees will submit an application to the Agriculture Branch detailing their farm plan, its economics, and expected production.

If successful, a binding lease will be signed between the Agriculture Branch and the lessee for only that amount of land required for their project, only for the purposes described in the plan, with a minimum production target, for a single growing season. Successful completion of the lease terms will permit the lessee to re-apply for the subsequent growing season.

Managing the leases will need to involve monitoring and inspections by Agriculture Branch regularly to address concerns during the growing season.

Food production by its nature is an attractant to wildlife and domestic animals. All leases will be required to be protected by at least electric fencing, installed by WildWise, or with the assistance of the Agriculture Branch and Conservation Officers. Solar powered battery systems work effectively in the long Yukon summer days. The Agriculture Branch shall also install trail cams at the leases to record which animals approach the area, and inspect the efficacy of the fences on their regular inspections.

The Agriculture Branch will construct access from the driveway to the lease area with the permission of Highways and Public Works, and construct the parking area for 5 vehicles either in the right of way, or the lease area. The inspections will also involve assessing any damage to the driveway as a result of leaseholder's vehicles over the growing season.

Concerns have also highlighted the dense growth of young trees, and the dangers of wildfire, especially with the number of high value assets throughout the Golden Horn area. In collaboration with the Prevention and Mitigation Unit, Wildland Fire Management, Community Services (see attached letter from Wildland Fire Management) the Branch will commence a series of FireSmart initiatives in the lease area. Predominantly involving mulching, these activities will lead to fuel abatement and wildfire risk reduction which the agricultural activities will maintain. The FireSmart activities will not include burning of brush.

The FireSmart principles of tree crown and trunk separation are similar to those of agroforestry. Agroforestry methods maintain mature trees that are left to provide ecosystem services aiding in food production on the ground. Such spaced trees let in sufficient light to grow crops, especially those that prefer light shade and are at risk of bolting in direct sunlight. Growers of Organic Food Yukon support utilizing agroforestry techniques in the Yukon food production.

Specific concerns such as preventing light pollution, garbage management, temporary agricultural storage, domestic dogs on leases, parking, etc. will all be addressed in the specific terms and conditions for each lease.

What's Next?

The Agriculture Branch expects to proceed with this project as a pilot during the 2022 growing season. The Agriculture Branch will collate production results, issues, and feedback from local community, the public, lessees, and Kwanlin Dün First Nation at the end of the growing season into a pilot project review document. This will determine if the project will, or should, continue for the 2023 growing season.

Contact

Government of Yukon
Department of Energy, Mines and Resources
Agriculture Branch
Box 2703 (K320A)
Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A 2C6

Phone: 867-667-5838 or toll free: 1-800-661-0408 (ask to be transferred)

Email: agriculture@yukon.ca

Manager: Jonathan Lucas, phone: (867) 332 3089 and email: jonathan.lucas@yukon.ca.



May 5, 2022

Agriculture Branch, EMR

Re: Planned Agriculture Lease Allotments near Gentian Lane

To whom it may concern,

This letter is to express Wildland Fire Management Branch support for the proposed seasonal food production leasing area project being proposed by the Government of Yukon's Agriculture Branch.

The proposed project would contribute to reducing wildfire hazard within the community of Golden Horn primarily through the fragmentation of forest fuels. This project includes innovative approaches to fire risk mitigation that may help to inform future initiatives throughout the territory. Developing local agriculture opportunities can help improve the resilience of Yukon communities in the face of climate change. Increasing food security can help reduce wildfire hazard and this project should help demonstrate that, particularly where grazing contributes to reducing potential wildfire fuels. Wildland Fire Management's Prevention and Mitigation Unit will work closely with Agriculture Branch to ensure that the project are informed by fuel abatement principles and current research.

We look forward to working with Agriculture Branch to share knowledge and provide complimentary benefits as we transition toward fire-adapted Yukon communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lisa Walker", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lisa Walker
Director, Wildland Fire Management
Community Services
Government of Yukon