

Appendix 6: Integrated Community Sustainability Plan

The Integrated Sustainability Plan (ICSP) for Ross River was developed and written in conjunction with Building on Strength: An Economic Development Strategy for Ross River. The complete ICSP is included here for reference, but it is a stand-alone plan in its own right.

Community Overview

Ross River is located on the south bank of the Pelly River near the confluence of the Ross and Pelly Rivers. The South Canol Road runs through the community with a seasonal ferry providing access to the North Canol during the summer. The community is approximately 10 km from the Campbell Highway.

Ross River is the home community of the Ross River Dena, a Kaska First Nation.

At the end of 2005 the Yukon Bureau of Statistics put the population of Ross River at 354. The 2001 Census found a population of 335, over 80% of whom identified themselves as aboriginal people.

Various levels of government provide the community's economic base. In 2001 the Census found that the First Nation, territorial, and federal governments employed over 40% of the labour force. The most common jobs are in the trades and in the transportation occupational cluster, which includes most construction workers, equipment operators and truck drivers (many of whom are employed by governments). Sales and service occupations are the next most common jobs and include those working in the retail sector, daycare workers, restaurant and hotel workers and others.

Ross River suffers from an unacceptably high level of unemployment and of underemployment. Average incomes are far below the territorial average. Similarly, average levels of education are well below the Yukon average.

A Brief History of Ross River

The confluence of the Ross and Pelly Rivers has long been used as a gathering place for First Nation peoples, particularly in the late summer. The first permanent settlement was established in 1901 when Tom Smith started a small trading post on the north bank of the Pelly and called the spot Smiths Landing. That winter approximately 15 First Nation families over wintered near the post, creating the beginnings of the permanent community of Ross River. By 1903 a second, rival, trading post was set up on the south bank of the Pelly opposite Smiths Landing. The settlement attracted an increasing number of people, mostly the Kaska but including many First Nation people from the Mackenzie River region who would travel over the divide to meet others, trade, and sometimes stay. By 1914 over 1,000 people were gathering at Ross River in the late summer. But a severe influenza epidemic in 1916 hit the community's First Nation people hard, and increasing economic activity and new trading posts

along the Mackenzie River reduced the numbers of people gathering and settling at Ross River.

World War II and the years immediately following brought massive changes to Ross River. The building of the Canol Road and pipeline between 1942 and 1944 brought a massive, but temporary, influx of outsiders to the area and the new road made the community much more accessible. The late 1940s and early 1950s also saw a collapse of fur prices and the permanent closure of most of the region's fur trading posts — including Pelly Banks, Sheldon Lake, Rose Point, Frances Lake and Macmillan River. By 1952 Ross River was designated as a band village and had the only remaining trading post in the region. The Canol Road shifted the commercial centre of the community to the south bank of the Pelly River at the new ferry crossing point and the federal government began pressuring the First Nation to move across the river from the Old Village. By the mid 1960s that pressure resulted in the complete abandonment of the Old Village and the community of Ross River assumed the shape it has today.

Mining exploration increased in the region around Ross River through the 1950s and an exploration and mining boom occurred in the 1960s and 1970s with the discovery and development of the Faro mine. Although Ross River Dena people did work in mining exploration — it was Ross River Dena citizens Arthur John, Jack Ladue, Robert Etzel and Joe Etzel who led Al Kulan to Vangorda Creek where he staked the first claims of what would become the Faro mine — the mining boom did little to benefit most of the First Nation.

The experience of being the indigenous population located in a region undergoing an extended economic boom in the 1960s and 1970s and gaining little economic benefit increased the determination of the Ross River Dena Council to be at the centre of a long-term sustainable regional economy. Most recently, the development of a mining strategy for the community — *The Snow that Eats the Snow* — and *Building on Strength: An Economic Development Strategy for Ross River* reflect that determination.

Values, Vision Statement and Community Goals

Vision Statement

In 20 years the community of Ross River will be a healthy, strong, stable, united community driving a diverse and sustainable regional economy.

Community Values, Goals, and Measures of Success**A healthy environment.**

Ross River values a healthy environment that helps maintain the health and well-being of all people as well as the plants, animals and fish of the region. It is an ongoing goal of the community to minimize damage to the environment.

A healthy community for all.

The community values the physical, mental, and emotional health of all community members. Clean, high-quality water is a crucial component of health. Substance abuse is a serious problem and its elimination is a long-term goal of the community.

The Kaska language, traditional knowledge and traditional skills.

The community values the Kaska language and traditional knowledge and skills both for their inherent worth and for their social and economic value. The preservation and enhancement the language, knowledge and skills is an ongoing goal of the Ross River Dena Council and its citizens.

A diverse and sustainable regional economy.

The community values the benefits brought by a diverse and sustainable economy. The community of Ross River will do all it can to foster such a regional economy and will work to ensure its benefits flow to the community.

A strong, stable, united community.

The people of Ross River wish to live in a united community, not one with sharp divides between First Nation and non-First Nation people. A goal of the community is to create a form of local government that includes both First Nation and non-First Nation people.

The table below sums up the community goals that are connected with the types of projects currently eligible for the gas tax revenue sharing agreement between Canada and the Yukon. Note that there are other goals and objectives laid out in *Building on Strength: an Economic Development Strategy for Ross River*.

<i>Values</i>	<i>Goals</i>	<i>Measures of Success</i>
A healthy environment	Reduce, and eventually eliminate the contamination of ground and surface water with community sewage.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An approved sewage lagoon with wetlands discharge. 2. A reduction in the number of poorly functioning septic fields that lead to contamination of ground and surface water. 3. An increase in the number of cluster-style sewage tanks with long-term planning to fit into piped sewage system. 4. Long-term goal is a community-wide piped sewage disposal system to the lagoon and wetland discharge.
A healthy community	Ensure that the community water supply is both safe and of high quality.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Install water treatment plant at the existing community well. 2. Provide comprehensive training for those who will operate the treatment plant. 3. Ensure that the plant, training, and any other work on the community water system be compatible with the long-term goal of providing a community-wide piped water system.
A strong, stable, united community.	Creation of a local government that represents all sides of the community.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The creation of a well-functioning Local Advisory Council for Ross River with representation from both the First Nation and the non-First Nation parts of the community. 2. In the longer-term, the evolution of the LAC into a municipal-style government.

Community Inventory and Assessment***Capital Project Infrastructure Inventory and Assessment***

Capital Project/ Infrastructure	Do you have it?		What condition is it in?			Is there enough?		Do you need it?	
	Yes	No	Good	Fair	Poor	Yes	No	Yes	No
First Nation admin buildings	X			X	X		X	X	
Airport	X			X			X	X	
Community Arena	X			X			X	X	
Community Hall	X							X	
Dock facilities		X							?
Community energy systems	X		X			X		X	
Fire station	X		X	X		X		X	
Health clinic	X		X			X		X	
Housing	X			X	X		X	X	
Internet service	X		X	X			X	X	
Library	X		X			X		X	
Police building	X		X			X		X	
Post office		X						X	
Recreation (parks)		X							
Roads	X			X		X		X	
Schools	X			X		X		X	
Sewage collection and disposal		X						X	
Solid waste disposal	X				X		X	X	
Water service		X						X	
Public transportation		X						?	
Active transportation		X						?	
Youth centre	X			X		X		X	
Curling rink		X					X	X	
Other									

Notes and Comments:

1. Ross River Airport is visual flight rules only.
2. Ross River's Community energy system is a backup generator for the community.
3. The school is relatively new but may need major structural repairs due to settling.
4. There is a postal outlet in the Dena store in Ross River, but no separate post office.

Capital Project Infrastructure Inventory and Assessment — Evaluation**Community Energy Systems**

As noted above, the backup generator is the only community energy system in Ross River. The generator does give the community a certain degree of self sufficiency in the event of a protracted grid failure. As the dependence on the steady availability of grid power has grown and deepened, the community backup generator assumes greater importance in the context of community sustainability.

A number of years ago planning was begun on a largely self-contained residential area to be built on the site of the Old Village across the Pelly River from the current town. The subdivision plans included a number of green community energy systems to supply the houses with power without grid hook-ups. Although plans for that subdivision are currently on hold, they have not been abandoned. Such a subdivision would be a showcase for all of the sustainability principles underpinning the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan.

Roads

The local road system within the community of Ross River is considered adequate by the community. It is basic public infrastructure that meets needs and is required for any form of economic development.

It should be noted that during the development of the Ross River economic development strategy, there was considerable discussion about the routing and condition of the highways in the area of the community. In particular, the poor overall condition of the Robert Campbell Highway is seen as an impediment to sustainable economic development as it discourages rubber tire tourism. Similarly, improving the condition of both the North and South Canol roads was identified as assisting in the diversification of Ross River's economy and making that economy more sustainable over the long term.

Sewage Collection and Disposal

Sewage collection and disposal — along with the closely related water service issue below — are by far the largest community concern among the eligible project infrastructure categories. This is not a recent concern in Ross River. As noted in *Building on Strength*, the first recommendations that Ross River install a community-wide piped sewage system date back to at least 1974. Similar recommendations re-occur in studies at regular intervals through the decades since.

The lack of adequate sewage collection and disposal infrastructure has a very large negative impact on most of the sustainability principles. In particular, the existing systems have contaminated both ground and surface water around the community, have threatened community health through that contamination, and are a limiting factor in the growth and economic development of the community.

Solid Waste Disposal

Ross River's solid waste disposal site and the techniques used to dispose of waste were both rated poor in the discussions of the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan. Hazardous and special wastes are disposed of haphazardly and often not separated from other waste. As has been the common practice throughout the rural Yukon, household garbage is burned in a pit rather than buried in a landfill. There is some recycling of materials done but to a limited degree.

Obviously, the poor state of solid waste disposal infrastructure and the lack of proper separation and disposal techniques runs counter to the principles of sustainability, and to the community's values. However, because the community views the need for better water and sewage systems as being the top priority, improving solid waste disposal is not currently a priority. A common concern is that putting resources into solid waste improvements will delay or derail efforts to improve the water and sewer systems.

Water Service

Ross River does not have a piped water service. Most of the community residents, and its businesses and institutions rely on water delivery. The water source is a deep well located next to the fire hall in the centre of the community. Water is delivered by a private contractor who uses a truck owned by the Yukon government.

Although the water from the community well is tested regularly and passes the minimum required standards, there is an ongoing concern in Ross River that the water source is highly vulnerable to contamination. The quality of the water is also viewed as being unacceptably poor. As with the state of the sewage collection and disposal infrastructure, concerns over water safety and quality are nothing new in Ross River. Recommendations that the community be provided with a piped water distribution system date back to the mid 1970s.

The lack of adequate water treatment and distribution infrastructure — like that of the sewage infrastructure — has a very large negative impact on most of the sustainability principles. In particular, the existing water system is seen as a potential threat to human health and is a limiting factor in the growth and economic development of the community.

Public Transportation

Public transportation does not exist within the community of Ross River. Given the community's size, this is hardly surprising. However, there is also no scheduled passenger air or bus transportation to the community. Scheduled services are a valuable tool in building a sustainable regional economy.

Active Transportation

There is no designated active transportation infrastructure within Ross River. As with public transport, the lack of such infrastructure is largely a function of the community's small size. However, the suspension footbridge spanning the Pelly River and the Dena Cho trail between Ross River and Faro may be viewed as active transportation infrastructure.

Social, Health, and Cultural Services Inventory and Assessment

Resources		Does this exist?		Can it be improved?	
Category	Type of service	Yes	No	Yes	No
Health	Nutrition	X		X	
	Weight loss	X		X	
	Aids prevention	X		X	
	Substance abuse	X		X	
	Family planning	X		X	
	Police protection	X		X	
Public Safety	Fire protection	X		X	
	Emergency response	X		X	
	Search and rescue	X		X	
	Small children	X		X	
Recreation Programs	Teens	X		X	
	Adults		X	X	
	Child care	X		X	
	Domestic violence	X		X	
	Seniors	X		X	
Social Service Programs	Disability services	X		X	
	Counselling — adults	X		X	
	Counselling — teens	X		X	
	Legal services	X		X	
	Suicide prevention	X		X	
Self Government (see Note 3)	Self government status	X			
	Elders group		X		
	Music		X		
	Subsistence food prep		X		
Cultural Programs	Dance group		X		
	Arts and crafts		X		
	Language programs	X		X	
	Culture camps/ Storytelling	X		X	
	Cultural exchanges	X		X	

Notes and Comments:

1. Under police protection, more patrols needed.
2. Recreation programs for both small children and teens are very limited while organized adult programs are nearly non-existent.
3. **The RRDC is not recognized as a self-governing First Nation by the federal government under the UFA, but does see itself as exercising inherent self-government rights over its traditional territory.**

Economic Inventory and Assessment

Typical Job	No. of Jobs	Is it filled by a community person?		Full-time		Seasonal		Wage
		#	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Arts and crafts	35	X			X	X	X	Low
CAO	0							
Accounting officer	2	X		X				??
Environmental specialist	4	3	1	3	1		X	Good
Logger/Forester	1	x				X		???
Health aide/Nurse	3	1	2	3				Good
Heavy equipment operator	20	18	2	X	X	X	X	Fair
Mechanic	2	2		2			X	Good
Construction	15	15		X		X		Fair
Housing manager	3	3		3			X	Good
Public safety officer	3		X	X			X	Good
Fire fighters	7	X			X		X	Poor
Emergency response	3-5	X			X		X	Poor
Business owners	8-10	8	2	X		X	X	Mixed
Counsellor	0							
Water treatment operator	0							
Sewage treatment operator	0							
Landfill operator	0							
Power plant operator	1	X			X			Poor

Environmental Inventory and Assessment

Environmental Assets/needs	Do you have it?		If lacking is there a need for it?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Safe drinking water		X	X	
Adequate supply of water	X			X
Certified water treatment operators		X	X	
Safe sewage disposal and treatment		X	X	
Permitted landfill	X		X	
Recycling program	X		X	
Used oil storage area		X	X	
Lead acid battery collection area	X		X	
Developable land		X	X	
Fuel spill prevention plan		X	X	
Hazardous waste response plan		X	X	
Erosion control	Some		X	
Contaminated sites identified	X			
Healthy subsistence food	X			
Environmental Education programs	X		X	
Healthy wildlife populations				
Hazardous waste collection area		X	X	
Protected watershed plan		X	X	
Environmental impact statement		X	?	

Notes and Comments:

1. Although the regular testing of the water at the community well shows that it meets drinking water standards, it is a strongly held view in the community that the water is not reliably safe for drinking. And the quality of the water is seen as inadequate.
2. The landfill is permitted but there is uncontrolled access and ongoing problems. There is no proper disposal of used oil and battery collection is rudimentary. Recycling is limited.
3. There was no community agreement on whether local wildlife populations are healthy or not.

Capacity Building and Job Training Inventory and Assessment

Capacity building/training and education opportunities		Existing job in the community?		Training or education needed?		Is training available in community?	
<i>Category</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Municipal or First Nation Admin positions	CAO		X				X
	Accounting officer	X		X			X
Education	Principal	X		X			X
	Teachers	X		X			X
	Teachers aides	X		X			X
Environment	Environmental specialist	X		X			X
	Conservation officers	X		X			X
Health	Health aide	X		X			X
	Nurse practitioner	X		X			X
	Doctor		X	X			X
Transportation and utilities	Driver/pilot	X		X			X
	Water treatment operator		X	X			X
	Sewage treatment operator		X	X			X
	Landfill operator		X	X			X
	Power plant operator	X		X			X
Justice	Water delivery service operator	X		X			X
	Court worker	X		X			X
	JP		X	X			X

Notes and Comments:

1. The RRDC is currently conducting an organizational review, including an analysis of capacity development and training needs.
2. The Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board has also provided some training for the community position.

Service Agreements***Existing Service Agreements***

Service provided via agreement	Service provider	Current end date	Cost of service	Rate service (good, fair, bad)	Will it be renewed ?
Road maintenance in all parts of Ross River	YTG Highways				
Water delivery	Private contractor using YTG truck				
Sewage truck	RRDC provides service to own housing				
	Private contractor provides service to Yukon Housing and others				
Garbage disposal	RRDC provides weekly pickup for its citizens				
	Yukon Housing uses private contractor to provide service				
Day care	Private non-profit leases space in community centre				

Priority Setting and Infrastructure Priorities

A very broad range of community goals and objectives were developed throughout the consultation process for both the economic strategy and the integrated community sustainability plan. The table below lists the #1 priority projects. Top priority projects were defined as those the Ross River Dena Council and/or the community as a whole should begin immediately.

Category	Project Name	Potential Resources or Cost Sharing	Related Projects or Programs	Value in Advancing Sustainability Principles
Infrastructure	Build a Cultural centre/Visitor reception centre	Federal & territorial governments	Traditional knowledge, & regional tourism development	Enhances community's cultural identity and creates economic opportunity.
Infrastructure	Build administration building	Federal & territorial governments, LAC, other agencies		Infrastructure that meets basic needs and creates economic opportunity.
Infrastructure	Build sufficient housing	Federal government	Community health	Infrastructure that meets basic needs and creates economic opportunity.
Capacity building	Create a local Ross River government	Territorial government	Community spirit & economic development	Assists in building a self-reliant, united community.
Infrastructure	Install a community-wide water and sewer system	Federal & territorial governments	Community, environmental health, & economic development	Infrastructure that meets basic needs and creates economic opportunity. Also reduces negative environmental impacts and reduces health risks.
Capacity building	Work toward a high level of education for RRDC citizens Develop a better community spirit	Territorial government	Long-term economic development Overall community development	Single most important component of successful long-term sustainable economic development. Assists in building a self-reliant, united community.
Health services	Eliminate substance abuse	Federal & territorial governments	Community spirit & economic	Enhances individual and community health.

Cultural services	Preserve and enhance traditional values and knowledge	Federal & territorial governments	development Cultural centre, artist development	Enhances community's cultural identity
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Cooperation between Governments

Currently, there is only one level of government in Ross River — the Ross River Dena Council. However, there is an active effort underway to form a local government for the community that will represent the interests of all members of the community. It is envisioned that this local government will begin as a Local Advisory Council with guaranteed representation from both the First Nation community and the non-First Nation community. The RRDC is actively supporting this effort and is committed to working closely with the Local Advisory Council once it is formed.

Consultation Process

The consultation process for developing the Ross River Dena Council Integrated Community Sustainability Plan included 5 community meetings:

- ◆ November 23, 2005 in Whitehorse (initial discussion with RRDC staff and councillors)
- ◆ December 12, 2005 in Ross River
- ◆ January 16, 2006 in Ross River
- ◆ March 13, 2006 in Ross River
- ◆ March 14, 2006 in Ross River

All of these meetings also involved discussions and community input on the economic development strategy for Ross River that was being developed simultaneously with the ICSP, however, the March 13th and March 14th meetings were advertised as being specifically related to the development of the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan.

All of the public meetings (except November 23, 2005) were advertised in Ross River through posters on all public notice boards and by an active word-of-mouth effort.

The series of meetings allowed for community members to provide feedback at each meeting as the planning process progressed. In addition, paper copies of all presentations and background material were made available at each meeting and written responses or feedback was requested.

In addition to the public meetings noted above, a number of meetings of Chief and Council were held to discuss both the economic development strategy and the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan.

A number of Ross River business owner/operators took an active part in the consultation process including:

1. Clifford McLeod
2. Brian Hemsley
3. Blake MacDonald

Overall, the level of response to the community consultation was good. Most of those participating did so throughout the process and provided ongoing feedback.

