

Draft North Yukon Regional Land Use Plan Summary

NICHIH GWANAŁ'IN • LOOKING FORWARD



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT | PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE | CONSERVATION | ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

NORTH YUKON PLANNING COMMISSION
October 2007

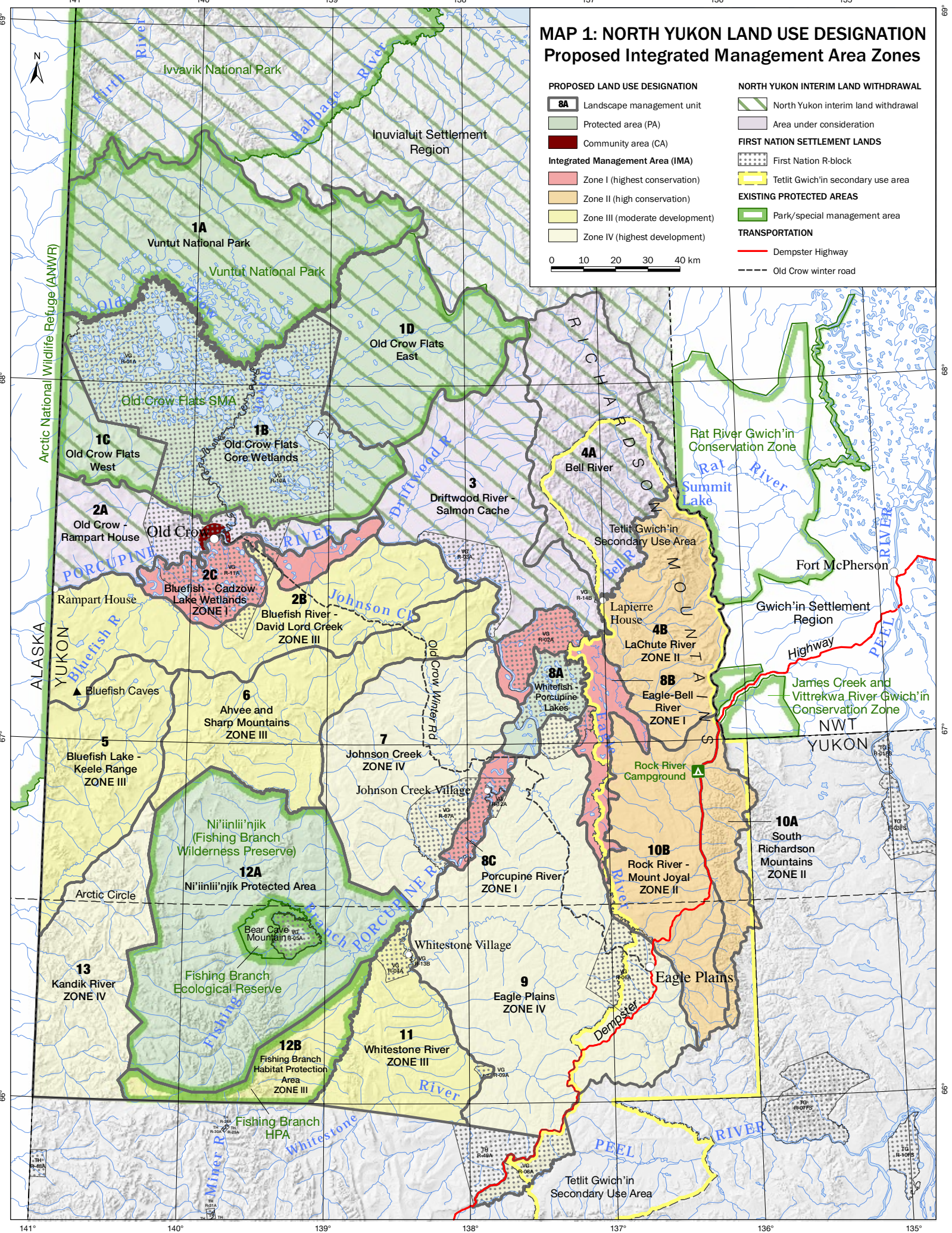


**NORTH YUKON
PLANNING COMMISSION**
NICHIH GWANAŁ'IN • LOOKING FORWARD

MAP 1: NORTH YUKON LAND USE DESIGNATION

Proposed Integrated Management Area Zones

PROPOSED LAND USE DESIGNATION		NORTH YUKON INTERIM LAND WITHDRAWAL	
	Landscape management unit		North Yukon interim land withdrawal
	Protected area (PA)		Area under consideration
	Community area (CA)	FIRST NATION SETTLEMENT LANDS	
Integrated Management Area (IMA)			First Nation R-block
	Zone I (highest conservation)		Tetlit Gwich'in secondary use area
	Zone II (high conservation)	EXISTING PROTECTED AREAS	
	Zone III (moderate development)		Park/special management area
	Zone IV (highest development)	TRANSPORTATION	
0 10 20 30 40 km			Dempster Highway
			Old Crow winter road



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ACRONYMS

ANWR	Arctic National Wildlife Refuge
CA	Community Area
IFA	Inuvialuit Final Agreement
IMA	Integrated Management Area
LMU(s)	Landscape Management Unit(s)
NYPC	North Yukon Planning Commission
PA	Protected Area
SMA	Special Management Area
VGFN	Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation
VGFNFA	Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement
VGG	Vuntut Gwitchin Government
YESAA	Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Act
YESAB	Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Board
YG	Yukon Government



ABOUT OUR LOGO

The logo of the North Yukon Planning Commission depicts the significance of the Porcupine Caribou Herd to the people of North Yukon. The Mother and calf signifies the responsibility of parents and the older generation to their young and to the future. The circle shows how we are all inter-connected and dependant on a healthy environment.

Looking Forward - Nichih Gwanal'in is a value inherent in the Vuntut Gwitchin culture. It is the responsibility of all to work towards a sustainable future for generations to come.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Plan was produced with the assistance of many Plan Partners. Several groups and agencies directly assisted NYPC with information collection and analysis, planning concepts and approaches, and writing/editing of various planning documents.

Major contributors included Yukon Government, Vuntut Gwitchin Government, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service and Northern Ecosystems Initiative), Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Yukon Land Use Planning Council (special thanks to Jeff Hamm and Ron Cruikshank) and the Peel Watershed Planning Commission (special thanks to Brian Johnston).

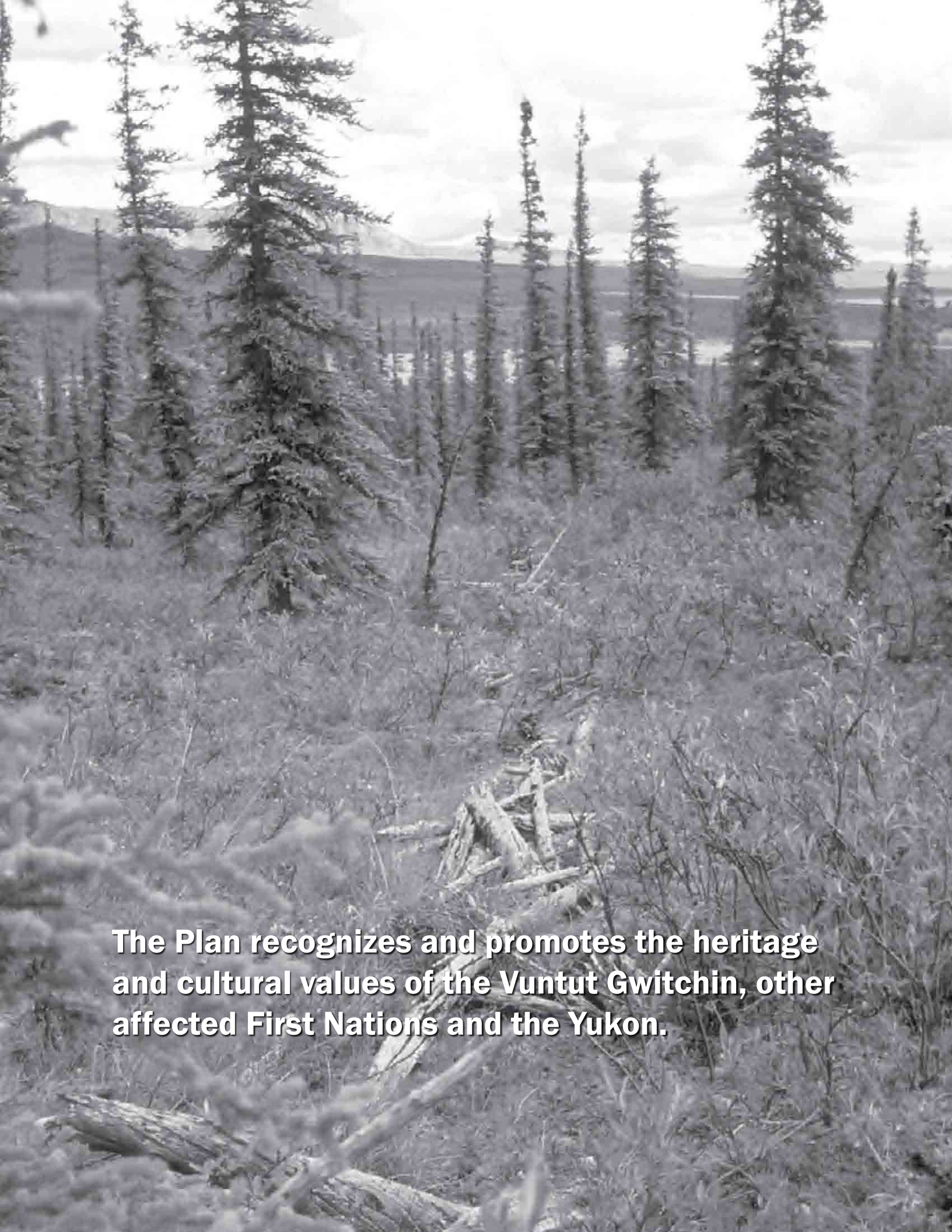
Vuntut Gwitchin Elders shared their traditional knowledge, wisdom and humour during the planning process. Several Elders passed on during production of the Draft Plan but their legacy, spirit and teachings remain. To them, we extend a special Mahsi' Choo (thank you).

Many Old Crow community members and land users made significant contributions to this regional land use plan. Without their knowledge and ongoing participation, this exercise would not have been possible.

Other assistance was provided by Parks Canada, the North Yukon Renewable Resources Council, Environmental Dynamics Inc., Gartner Lee Limited, the United States Geological Survey – Cooperative Research Units (Alaska), the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (Alaska), Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the Porcupine Caribou Management Board, the Yukon Environmental & Socio-economic Assessment Board, Yukon College, the Yukon Habitat Stewards Program (Yukon Fish & Wildlife Management Board), Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, Devon Canada Corporation and Access Consulting Group.

A list of participants and contributors is provided in the full Draft Plan.

Geoff Bradshaw of the Yukon Geological Survey provided the Commission with an assessment of the region's mineral potential, which greatly assisted the production of this Plan. Geoff died in a tragic helicopter accident in the summer of 2006. His energy, enthusiasm and dedication will be greatly missed.



The Plan recognizes and promotes the heritage and cultural values of the Vuntut Gwitchin, other affected First Nations and the Yukon.



▲ LEFT Vuntut Gwitchin Elder Hannah Netro at a NYPC community workshop in Old Crow (photo: S. Francis); MIDDLE Elder cleaning Chum salmon (photo: K. Sandiford); RIGHT Vuntut Gwitchin community members perform a traditional drum song at the Old Crow community centre (photo: M. Valja)

Draft Plan Highlights

ENGLISH

- The Plan provides a *Sustainable Development* framework for land management in the North Yukon Planning Region.
- The Plan addresses two key issues: 1) oil and gas development in a significant portion of the annual range of the Porcupine Caribou herd; 2) management of development impacts in wetlands outside of Protected Areas.
- The Plan divides the region into 13 Landscape Management Units and designates each unit (see Map 1). Of the total region:
 - 54% is the Integrated Management Area (IMA), and can be considered the “working landscape”. 75% of the IMA has a higher development focus.
 - 32% has long term Protected Area status. The Plan recommends an additional 470 km² (1% of region) Protected Area for central Whitefish Wetlands.
 - 13% is affected by the North Yukon Interim Land Withdrawal.
- The Plan provides land use designation options for future consideration within the North Yukon Interim Land Withdrawal.
- Plan recommendations include:
 - Conservation measures for the entire Whitefish and Bluefish-Cadzow wetland complexes, and the Richardson Mountains.
 - Managing the effects of multiple land use activities (cumulative effects) through the application of land use thresholds.
 - Additional specific recommendations related to achieving social, economic and ecological objectives.

GWICH'IN

- Nits' òo nanh, nin, łuk ts'at gah jidii vit'idaach'uu datthak vik'ahanaatyaa geenjit dineht'leh zhit gwidinithat'loo.
- Neekaii ch'andòo geenjit gwidinithat'loo: 1) Nijin vadzaih nahaaòo gwa'an khaii, khaiits'ò' hèe gwandòo jii nan zhit khaii juuk'a' ts'at chuu juuk'a' haa gwitr'it t'agwaa'in; 2) Van ts'at han gwinjik gwa'an gwitr'it t'agwaa'in ji' duulèh van ts'at han gwinjik gwiizuu gahahtsyaa.
- Nanh vakak gwiinlit gwitr'it t'agwaa'in ji' nits'ò' gwitr'it t'agwahaayaa geenjit gwidinithat'loo.
- Nanh nihlinehch'i' didich'uu nilii aii gwik'iighè' dineht'leh tr'adant'loo.
- Jii geenjit nits'òo gwitr'it t'agwahaayaa, ts'at nits'òo nanh vak'ahanaatyaa datthak:
 - Nanh 54% nan zhit khaii juuk'a' ts'at chuu juuk'a', nan zhit chii, gah nits'òo nan kak gwitr'it t'agwahaayaa geenjit ke'gidiniitin. Whitefish, Bluefish-Cadzow ts'at Richardson Mountain gwa'an ch'andòo gwiinzii gwik'ahanaatyaa.
 - Nanh 33% agwahchii vigwak'anahtyaa. Jii Whitefish gwitèet'an geenjit chan dineht'leh k'eejit gihidinèet'loo, ezhik danh nanh thok nitr'ihe'e'aa ji'.
 - Choodeenjik ee ts'aai khaii juuk'a', chuu juuk'a', nan zhit chii geenjit vigwak'anahtyaa, ezhik gwa'an duuwèh nanh haa nigogwihee'aa. Yeendoo ji' duulèh zhat gwa'an vigwak'anahtyaa kwaa. Yeendoo nits'òo nihlinehch'i' gwizhit gwitr'it t'agwahaayaa tthak geenjit gwidinathat'loo.

ABOUT THIS PLAN

The Draft North Yukon Regional Land Use Plan (the Plan) was produced by the North Yukon Planning Commission (NYPC) as part of the implementation of Chapter 11 of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement (VGFNFA). The Plan aims to balance economic development with protection of Vuntut Gwitchin culture and traditional economy, and the environment upon which we all depend. The Plan is to reflect the vision, values and interests of the Vuntut Gwitchin of Old Crow, and Yukoners as a whole.

When approved, the Plan is not a legal document. First Nation rights, as established by various land claim agreements and constitutional law, are not affected by or addressed in the Plan, including wildlife harvesting.

The Plan does not apply to existing Special Management Areas (Old Crow Flats and Ni'iinlii'njik) or the community of Old Crow. This Plan does, however, consider these areas and their existing management plans in providing regional management direction.

WHERE ARE WE IN THE PROCESS?

We are now at the Draft Land Use Plan stage of the planning process, which means that a land use plan has been developed for public discussion and review. At this stage, NYPC is seeking comments and suggestions from the public and stakeholders. It is vital that everyone, VGFN citizens, other affected First Nations and Yukon residents alike, participate in shaping a management vision for northern Yukon.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The NYPC will be consulting on this Plan in fall 2007. A consultation schedule will be determined with affected communities and stakeholders. Comments will be accepted until **January 15, 2008**.

Following the Draft Land Use Plan consultation period, NYPC will consider comments received from the public, governments and other groups, and make revisions to this Plan. A Recommended Land Use Plan will then be produced for consideration by the approval governments – Yukon and Vuntut Gwitchin.

HOW DO I PROVIDE COMMENTS?

This document summarizes the full Draft Plan. Please review this summary document, or request a copy of the full version, and get back to us with your questions or comments by **January 15, 2008**. Written comments may be submitted by mail, email or fax. NYPC contact information is listed below and on the back page.

HOW DO I GET THE DRAFT LAND USE PLAN?

The full version of the Draft Plan, supporting documents and resource maps can be obtained online at:

www.nypc.planyukon.ca

Printed copies may be obtained by contacting:

North Yukon Planning Commission
307 Jarvis Street, Suite 201, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2H3
tel 867.668.7663 fax 867.667.4624
email: nypc@planyukon.ca



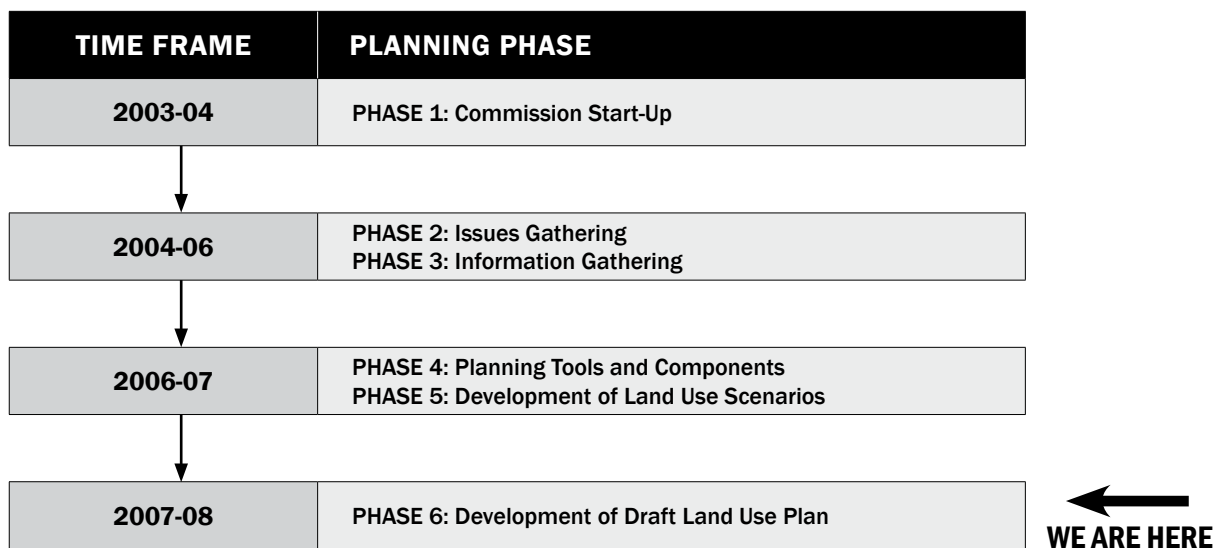
▲ Erika Tizya-Tramm collecting berries near Old Crow. The Plan aims to reflect the vision, values and interests of the Vuntut Gwitchin and Yukoners as a whole (photo: M. Valja)



Addressing potential impacts of future oil and gas activity on the Porcupine Caribou Herd, wetlands and rivers is an important consideration for the Plan.

PLANNING PROCESS

The NYPC started working on the Plan in spring of 2004. Since that time, NYPC, working in partnership with other agencies and groups, has hosted many information workshops and public events in Old Crow and Whitehorse.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Two major technical reports support this Plan – both are available from the NYPC website:

1. North Yukon Planning Region Resource Assessment Report
2. North Yukon Planning Region Land Use Scenarios Report

◀ **Eagle River valley near Whitefish wetlands.**
The Eagle River and Whitefish Wetlands are within the Eagle Plain oil and gas basin (photo: J. Meikle, YG)

Message from the Chair

For thousands of years, the Vuntut Gwitchin and its neighbouring Gwich'in Nations have used and managed the land. Our ancestors were highly educated in land use and the management of all resources. Their land use practices were effective. What we take from the Mother Earth, we give thanks for and use with the utmost respect. Our ancestors taught us the most sacred of teachings...not to use or take more than you need and only what Mother Earth or all of Creation can provide. This teaching ensures a sustainable future for generations to come.

In North Yukon, the Porcupine Caribou hold a special place in Gwich'in culture and life. It has been said that the Gwich'in and the Caribou hold a piece of each other's heart. The Creator gave the Gwich'in the Caribou to feed and sustain the people, and to keep the teachings and responsibilities to our past, current and future generations alive. Like the relationship between the Gwich'in people and the Caribou, the Porcupine herd holds a special place in this land use plan.

The Vuntut Gwitchin are a resourceful people and will not shy away from economic opportunities. However, the teachings of our ancestors resonate with each land use issue we are engaged in, and with each decision we must make. Vuntut Gwitchin Elders have been consulted throughout this process to gather, document and map important traditional use, wildlife and fish areas. Their knowledge is represented directly in the North Yukon regional land use plan.

We have been taught to do things in co-operation with others. The Plan Partners concept initiated from the beginning of this exercise embraces this teaching. Our intent has been to develop a regional land use plan for the Vuntut Gwitchin traditional territory with cooperation and engagement of our Plan Partners. The end result is a Plan that reflects the values of residents, is balanced, assists in making informed land use decisions, and can be implemented. A special Mahsi` Choo (thank you) to our Plan Partners.

Our staff worked extremely hard to produce this Plan. Their skills, energy, dedication and commitment throughout this long and challenging planning process was a source of inspiration for the Commission members. Thank you to Shawn Francis, John Ryder, Richard Vladars and Kathleen Zimmer. We could not have done this without you.

The North Yukon regional land use plan embodies the guiding principles of the Vuntut Gwitchin people – *Nichih Gwanal'in, Looking Forward*. We trust this Plan will assist in establishing a framework for sustainable land use in northern Yukon.

Mahsi` Choo,



Shirlee Frost, Chair

North Yukon Planning Commission

Introduction

1



▲ Porcupine caribou seek mosquito relief on a snow patch in northern Yukon (photo: K. Sandiford)

The Draft North Yukon Regional Land Use Plan is the first regional land use plan in Yukon produced under the mandate of a Yukon First Nation land claim agreement. This and future plans will make up the territory's regional planning regime.

Regional land use plans help us to visualize and achieve the kind of future we want to see. They are collective statements about how to manage land and resources within a given area, and provide guidance for land and resource decision-making.

This Plan aims to reflect the vision, values and interests of the Vuntut Gwitchin, and Yukoners as a whole. Old Crow Elders and community members desired a land use plan that would ensure 'respect for the land' while 'allowing for future opportunities'. Governments and industry desired a plan that would ensure 'certainty and flexibility'.

By balancing development of the region's resources with conservation measures for valued cultural and ecological resources, this Plan establishes a Sustainable Development framework for land management in the North Yukon Planning Region.

“I discovered that people in the North have strong feelings about the pipeline and large-scale frontier development. I listened to a brief by northern businessmen in Yellowknife who favour a pipeline through the North. Later, in a native village far away, I heard virtually the whole community express vehement opposition to such a pipeline. Both were talking about the same pipeline; both were talking about the same region - but for one group it is a frontier, for the other a homeland”.

THOMAS BERGER, 1977 – MACKENZIE VALLEY PIPELINE INQUIRY

1.1 CONTEXT

In 1972, the people of Old Crow presented a petition to the Government of Canada concerning oil and gas exploration in Old Crow Flats. In 1977, the Berger Inquiry examined issues and concerns regarding northern oil and gas development, the environment and First Nations. The inquiry recommended two key steps be completed in advance of large-scale development occurring in northwest Canada: 1) settle First Nation land claims, and 2) ensure adequate conservation measures are in place.

In 1993, after nearly 20-years of negotiations, the VGFN settled its land claim and self-government agreements with the governments of Canada and Yukon. The Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement (VGFNFA) is the resulting document. Chapter 11 of the VGFNFA states that a regional planning commission is responsible for developing and recommending a regional land use plan for the Vuntut Gwitchin Traditional Territory. The North Yukon Planning Region is the focus of this Plan.

Since 2004, the North Yukon Planning Commission (NYPC) has been actively involved in producing the Plan. The Yukon and Vuntut Gwitchin governments are responsible for its approval and implementation.

1.2 WHY PLAN NOW?

The level of economic development activity in Canada's North is increasing. Interest in oil and gas and mineral resources is high. Wilderness and cultural-based tourism activities are in demand. A variety of transportation proposals are being advanced. Increasing levels of economic development will bring many benefits to the North, but will not come without impacts.

Northern Yukon is a land rich in wildlife and human history. The Vuntut Gwitchin and other First Nations



Figure 1. North Yukon Planning Region

have utilized the water, wildlife, fish and plant resources of the region for thousands of years. The continuation of Vuntut Gwitchin culture and traditional economy depends on a healthy environment, and people's connection with the land.

This Plan, in addition to the existing Special Management Areas (SMAs) established through the VGFNFA, makes an important contribution towards ensuring regional conservation measures are in place prior to increasing levels of land use activity occurring. Establishing this Plan is one of the last major land-related implementation activities of the VGFNFA.

Planning Region Overview

2

2.1 SETTING

The North Yukon Planning Region covers a large area (55,568 km²), representing about 12% of Yukon (Figure 1). It is the traditional territory of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation. There is one major all-season road, the Dempster Highway. Old Crow is the only permanent community, and the only community in Yukon with no all-season road access.

The planning region is part of the vast Gwich'in homeland of northwest Canada and Alaska. Portions of the Tetlit Gwich'in, Tr'ondek Hwech'in and Na-cho Nyak Dun traditional territories are also present, including the Tetlit Gwich'in Secondary Use Area. The Inuvialuit Settlement Region, on the Yukon North Slope, is located to the north of the planning region.

There are three major landowners and administrators: Yukon Government has 78% of the land base (public land), VGFN has 14%, and Government of Canada (Parks Canada) has the remaining 8%. Most VGFN Settlement Lands are Category A, which means they own both surface and subsurface rights. Land and resource management in the planning region is shared between governments, other agencies and land claim boards.

The region contains three existing Protected Areas: Vuntut National Park, Old Crow Flats SMA and Ni'iinlii'njik (Fishing Branch) Wilderness Preserve, Ecological Reserve and VG R-05A, accounting for 32% of the region

The North Yukon Interim Land Withdrawal, an area that has not been available for land disposition since 1978, affects an additional 13%. Ivvavik National Park and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in Alaska border the northwest portion of the region. The Rat River and James Creek-Vittrekwa River Gwich'in Conservation Zones in NWT are located to the east.



▲ The planning region is part of the vast Gwich'in homeland of northwest Canada and Alaska. Aerial view of Old Crow (photo: E. Tizya-Tramm)

2.2 ENVIRONMENT

The entire region is part of Beringia, an area spanning from Yukon to Siberia that remained free of glaciers for almost two million years, providing a refuge for plants and animals, including the first people of North America. The land, water, people, plants and animals have all been influenced by these ice-free conditions.

The North Yukon Planning Region is one of the most extreme climate regions in Yukon. It is characterized by



▲ **The Planning Region** contains portions of six distinct ecoregions, including Old Crow Flats, Old Crow Basin, Eagle Plains, North Ogilvie Mountains (pictured), British Richardson Mountains and Davidson Mountains (photo: J. Meikle, YG)

sub-Arctic climate and vegetation, and is underlain by continuous permafrost. Low stature spruce forests, shrub and tundra vegetation characterize low-mid elevation areas. High elevation mountain ranges contain extensive areas of rock and sparse vegetation. The region contains portions of six distinct ecoregions, including Old Crow Flats, Old Crow Basin, Eagle Plains, North Ogilvie Mountains, British Richardson Mountains and Davidson Mountains. Elevation ranges from 325 to 1,800 m above sea level. Most of the region is within the Porcupine River Watershed. Rivers experience very low winter flows and dramatic variations in the summer.

The region is occupied seasonally or annually by approximately 40 species of mammals, 150 species of birds and 18 species of fish, including three species of salmon. Four wildlife species in the region are listed as being of national conservation concern—the Grizzly bear, Wolverine, Short-eared owl and Peregrine falcon, but are considered stable in Yukon. Approximately 600 plant species have been documented; 93 are recorded as rare.

2.3 PEOPLE

The total regional population is about 300. All live in Old Crow and almost all (90%) are VGFN beneficiaries. Since 1985, the Old Crow population has remained relatively stable. Population growth trends are currently less than 1%. There are an estimated 800 total VGFN beneficiaries.

2.4 ECONOMY

The regional economy can be considered a ‘mixed economy’ where both traditional subsistence harvesting and wage-based activities co-exist. Subsistence hunting,

gathering and trapping are still very important economic and cultural activities in Old Crow. A single VGFN group trapping license covers the traditional territory.

The region currently has one of the lowest levels of wage-based economic activity in Yukon. The planning and delivery of Government services (health and social services, housing, education, administration and transportation) and government transfer payments are the primary economic inputs. Transportation is currently the largest sector, followed by Dempster Highway-related tourism. Activity levels in all other sectors are currently low, including oil and gas and mining. There is no commercial forestry, guiding and outfitting, or agriculture. At present, interest in developing sources of renewable energy is limited to the community of Old Crow. Major sectors are discussed briefly below.

TRANSPORTATION

The Dempster Highway connects southern Yukon and Canada to the Mackenzie Delta communities of NWT. Regular scheduled air service facilitates the transport of goods and people between Old Crow, Dawson, Inuvik and Whitehorse. Major rivers provide summer and winter travel routes for Old Crow residents and tourists seeking wilderness recreation. Residents use many trails and routes for subsistence harvest, travel between communities, and other cultural activities.

TOURISM

Approximately 7,000 tourists travel the Dempster Highway annually. Outside of the highway corridor, tourism activity is low. Important areas for future tourism activity include Old Crow and adjacent Protected Areas, Níiinlii’njik (Fishing Branch), the Richardson Mountains, and some major rivers (Porcupine, Eagle and Bell rivers).

OIL AND GAS

Oil and gas activity is low but interest is increasing. The region contains a significant portion of Yukon’s total estimated natural gas and oil potential, with the Eagle Plain basin considered most important. The basin contains proven reserves. Eagle Plains received a high level of oil and gas exploration in the 1960s-70s. Current resource assessments suggest substantial natural gas potential (mean estimate 7.9 trillion cubic feet), and moderate oil potential (mean estimate 536 million barrels). Lack of pipeline infrastructure is a major barrier to developing the natural gas resource of northern Yukon. The region contains 14 Oil and Gas Permits; 13 were recently awarded in spring 2007. Two Significant Discovery Licenses date from the 1980s.

MINING

Mineral exploration interest has historically been low but is increasing. Potential mineral resources remain largely unexplored, and there is a limited understanding of regional mineral potential. Based on existing information, a small portion of the region is considered to have high potential for mineral resources. Approximately 350 mineral claims were staked in 2007, for a total of 475 active claims in the region. There are no operating mines.

AGGREGATE (GRAVEL)

Aggregate is an important resource for the community of Old Crow and along the Dempster Highway Corridor. Large amounts of gravel may be required to support future industrial activity.

2.5 SIGNIFICANT ECOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL VALUES

The Planning Region contains a number of features and values of territorial, national and global significance.

HERITAGE RESOURCES

The past and the present are linked in northern Yukon. Through Beringia, the land, people and wildlife share a common past – they have coexisted for several thousand years. The region holds some of the oldest recorded sites of human occupation in North America. Evidence of human occupation in Bluefish Caves, 50 km southwest of Old Crow, is dated to 24,000 years. Sites in the Richardson Mountains are 12,000 years old. Some sites may be as old as 40,000 years. The fossil remains of extinct Ice Age mammals like mammoth, steppe bison and short-faced bear are common in the Old Crow, Bluefish and Bell-Whitefish basins.

The region contains Gwich'in caribou fences, a form of communal caribou hunting technology – these fences are important cultural artefacts. More recent historical sites include Rampart House, Lapierre House, Whitestone and Johnston Creek villages, fur trade era trading posts and seasonal Gwich'in communities. Some heritage trails and routes are still used to travel between communities and to access areas for hunting, trapping and fishing.

WILDLIFE

The barren-ground Porcupine Caribou Herd is the most significant wildlife resource in the North Yukon Planning Region. The entire area is occupied by the migratory herd at various times of year, with highest



▲ **Eagle Plain Lodge on the Dempster Highway.** The Dempster Highway connects southern Yukon and Canada to the Mackenzie Delta communities of NWT. Approximately 7,000 tourists travel the Dempster annually (photo: J. Hawkings, CWS)


use during the winter, spring migration, fall migration and late fall seasons. The herd is a vital cultural and economic resource for the community of Old Crow and neighbouring Gwich'in communities. Vuntut Gwitchin have utilized the herd for thousands of years.

WETLANDS

At 5,000 km², Old Crow Flats is the largest wetland complex in Yukon and of continental significance for migratory waterbirds. Also known as Van Tat, these wetlands are the homeland of the Vuntut Gwitchin and are protected within Vuntut National Park and Old Crow Flats SMA. The region also contains three other large wetland complexes of territorial significance – Whitefish, Bluefish and Cadzow.



▲ **Barrow's Goldeneye.** The Whitefish wetlands is used by many species of migratory waterbirds (photo: C. Eckert, YG)



Ensuring that adequate conservation measures are in place while allowing for future economic opportunities was considered to be the major focus for the Plan.

3

Key Issues

Many of the land use issues affecting the region relate to broader Sustainable Development considerations and future land uses. Ensuring that adequate conservation measures are in place while allowing for future economic opportunities was considered to be the major focus for the Plan. Potential impacts of future oil and gas activity on Porcupine Caribou Herd and wetlands and riparian habitats received special focus.

Regional issues addressed by the Plan include:

- **Oil and gas exploration and development in Eagle Plains** – land use impacts may occur in a portion of the winter range of the Porcupine Caribou Herd.
- **Land management and the Porcupine Caribou Herd** – many important Porcupine Caribou Herd habitats occur outside of existing Protected Areas, with the largest area being the Richardson Mountains. The future of oil and gas development in ANWR, the calving grounds of the Herd, remains uncertain.
- **Future development impacts on water, wetlands and riparian habitat** – four major rivers and the Whitefish Wetlands complex are within the Eagle Plain oil and gas basin.
- **Opportunities to access land and resources** – the region contains a large amount of existing Protected Areas. The North Yukon Interim Land Withdrawal removes other areas from mineral and oil and gas disposition, and prevents exploration. Additional land withdrawals may impact establishment and growth of a natural resource economy.
- **Transportation** – the region contains one all-season road, the Dempster Highway; additional roads will introduce large changes to the region and may have significant impacts on wildlife and heritage values.



◀ LEFT An historic seismic line cuts through the North Yukon landscape. Potential impacts of future oil and gas activity on Porcupine Caribou Herd, wetlands and riparian habitats received special focus in the Plan. (photo: J. Hawkins, CWS);
▲ ABOVE Oil & gas drill rig K-58 (photo: M. Dionne YG);
◀ OPPOSITE PAGE Old Crow Flats wetland (photo: J. Meikle, YG)

- **Climate change** – climate-induced change will have impacts on the land, water, wildlife and fish, and people's use of these resources; climate change impacts may compound with future land use impacts.

Principles and Goals

4

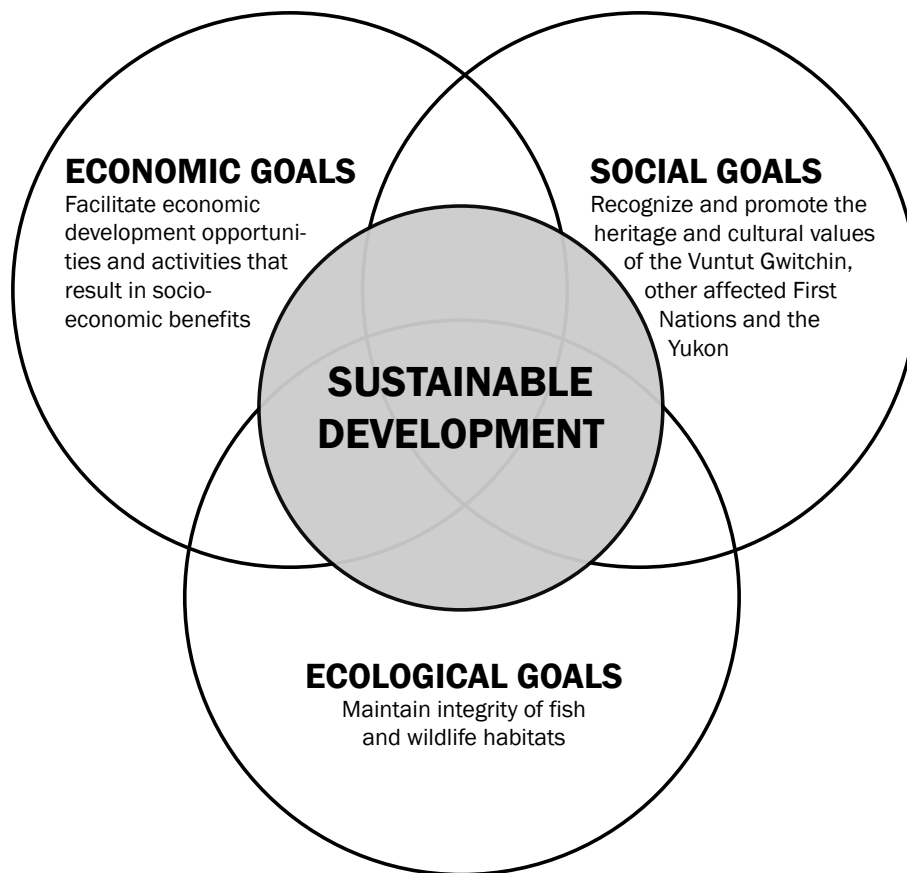


Figure 2. Plan Goals

The VGFNFA provides guidance for developing Plan principles and goals. Sustainable Development is the guiding principle for the Plan.

Principles and Goals guiding the Plan

The VGFNFA provides guidance for developing Plan principles and goals. During the planning process, Vuntut Gwitchin Elders also stressed the importance of “respect for the land” and “conservation of the land and water”, while allowing for future economic opportunities. Governments and industry stressed the need for the Plan to provide “certainty and flexibility” so that land management can adapt to change.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The focus of the Plan is to balance social, economic and environmental considerations through the application of the principle of Sustainable Development. The VGFNFA defines it as:

“Beneficial socio-economic change that does not undermine the ecological and social systems upon which communities and societies are dependent.”

Specific goals flow from the principle of Sustainable Development (Figure 2). The Plan also lists a number of detailed objectives.

PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE

Regional planning should consider potential impacts before making resource decisions. Our limited understanding of land use impacts on other resources in the North makes this especially important. The International Institute for Sustainable Development describes the Precautionary Principle as:

“A lack of conclusive scientific evidence does not justify inaction on managing the environment, particularly when the consequences of inaction may be undesirable or when the costs of action are negligible”.

CONSERVATION

The Plan proposes to manage fish and wildlife habitats using the conservation principle. Conservation, as defined by the VGFNFA is:

“The management of Fish and Wildlife populations and habitats and the regulation of users to ensure the quality, diversity and Long Term Optimum Productivity of Fish and Wildlife populations, with the primary goal of ensuring a sustainable harvest and its proper utilization”

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

The Plan is a ‘living document’; it will be reviewed, monitored and updated in response to changing land use and/or environmental conditions, or as better information becomes available. Adaptive Management means we must ‘Look, learn and adjust as required.’



◀ The Plan is a ‘living document’ that will be reviewed, monitored and updated. LEFT Vuntut Gwitchin spring camp RIGHT Youth participants at spring school camp (photos: T. Kassi, VGFN)

Tools and Concepts

5

The Plan proposes four tools and approaches to communicate and guide land management decisions in the region: Landscape Management Units, a Land Use Designation System, a Results-based Management Framework and General Management Direction. These approaches compliment each other and form part of an integrated land management framework—they are commonly applied in other land use plans.

Plan tools and approaches were selected to meet five important stakeholder expectations:

- Fulfill Sustainable Development requirements and expectations outlined in the VGFNFA;
- Fulfill government and industry request for ‘certainty and flexibility’;
- Fulfill conservation expectations of First Nations, the public, governments and other groups by providing meaningful conservation measures for valued ecological and cultural resources;
- Recommend measures to minimize potential land use conflicts; and,
- Provide ways to monitor and manage cumulative effects.

5.1 LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT UNITS (LMUs)

Different parts of the region require different management direction. Landscape Management Units are distinct areas of land that have similar ecological properties (landforms and vegetation) and contain specific ecological, cultural or economic resource values (Map 1).

Some LMUs are more sensitive (lakes and wetlands on permafrost) and require careful management, while others may not be as sensitive, or have high economic potential. Some LMUs contain sub-units that require special consideration. The borders of the units are usually drawn around rivers, roads, existing SMAs or identifiable features.

5.2 LAND USE DESIGNATION SYSTEM

A land use designation system is used to guide the management of land use activities within the different LMUs. It provides the broadest level of guidance for land and resource decision-making. A land use designation system consists of different land categories that describe either the type or intensity of land uses that are allowed or recommended for each specific LMU. Each LMU is assigned to a land category.

The Plan proposes three general land use categories: Protected Area (PA), Integrated Management Area (IMA), and Community Area (CA). Four distinct zones further describe the IMA category, each referring to a relative level of conservation or development focus. A description of the land use categories and zones is provided in Table 1.



▲ North Yukon Planning Commission discuss land use designation system at a workshop in Old Crow (L-R) Dave Brekke, Jane Montgomery, Dennis Frost, Shirlee Frost, Marvin Frost, Shawn Francis (Senior Planner) and Doug Brownlee (photo: R. Vladars)

LAND USE CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	
Protected Area (PA)	Refers to legally designated land areas withdrawn from surface and subsurface rights issuance. Oil and gas, mining and other industrial land uses are not permitted. Examples include Vuntut National Park and Ni'iinlii'njik (Fishing Branch) Wilderness Preserve.	
Integrated Management Area (IMA)	The 'working landscape'—areas where oil and gas, mining, and other land uses are allowed, subject to approved recommendations of the Plan and the YESAA review process.	
	Each LMU within this category is further described by one of the following zones, in consideration of the values in the unit and the sensitivity of the land:	
	IMA ZONE	MANAGEMENT INTENT
	Zone I	Highest conservation
	Zone II	High conservation
	Zone III	Moderate development
	Zone IV	Highest development
Community Area (CA)	Areas around communities or municipalities where local planning is undertaken. This would apply to the community of Old Crow	

TABLE 1: Proposed land use designation system for North Yukon Planning Region

5.3 RESULTS-BASED MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Plan does not determine 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' land uses for different LMUs. Acceptable land use activities are those that meet the criteria established by the Plan and existing regulatory processes. This type of land use plan can be considered a 'flexible management plan,' but requires ways to measure success at achieving goals and objectives.

A results-based management framework is a structured

way to determine if Plan goals and objectives are being met. It is a way to link general, higher-level objectives with more detailed, operational decisions. An example of a results-based management framework and its various components is provided in Figure 3. The framework applies to the 'working landscape,' the IMA, where a variety of land uses are allowed to occur, and also to the individual LMUs within the working landscape.

The monitoring of indicators is required to determine if the goals and objectives are being met. The condition of the indicators would be tracked and reported for each LMU.

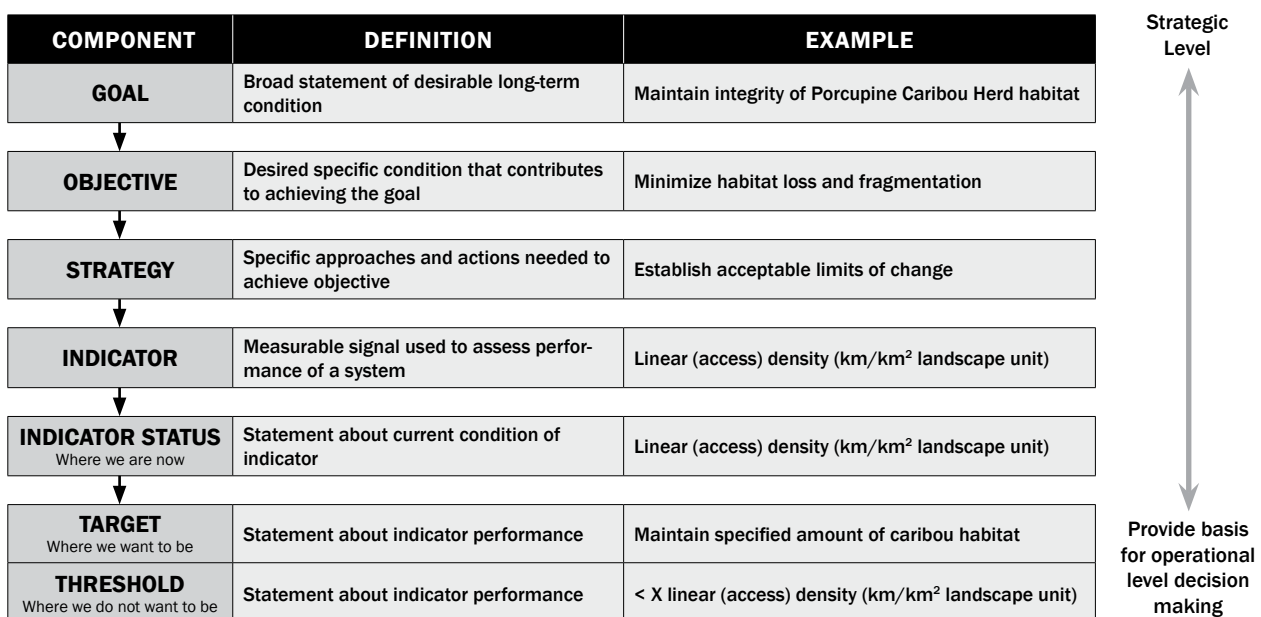


FIGURE 3. Components of a results-based management framework. The purpose and guiding principles of the Plan provide strategic direction for setting plan goals and objectives.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS MANAGEMENT

Managing cumulative effects is best accomplished by applying a suite of integrated and coordinated actions to land management. Assessment, mitigation, government policy and planning all play a role. In combination with these coordinated actions, the management of cumulative effects can be an important outcome of applying a results-based management framework to land management. The Plan recommends acceptable levels of change for two cumulative effects indicators:

- **Direct Surface Disturbance:** the amount of area physically disturbed by human activities. Structures, roads, gravel quarries, seismic lines, access trails and similar features create physical ‘footprints’ on the land, resulting in direct habitat impacts.
- **Linear (access) Density:** the number of human-caused linear features (roads, seismic lines, access trails and similar features) in a given area. Linear density is an indicator of fragmentation - when larger areas of habitat are divided into smaller areas. Increasing levels of access may result in increasing harvest of wildlife and fish, higher predation rates, and a change in how people and wildlife use the land. This is an important indicator of cumulative effects, especially for species like caribou and moose.

LAND USE THRESHOLDS

Through land use thresholds, the Plan establishes acceptable levels of human-caused disturbance (direct surface disturbance and linear density) for different

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS are changes to the environment and/or society that result from a land use activity in combination with other past, present and future activities. Cumulative effects may be positive or negative. Negative effects are called cumulative impacts. An example of negative effects is the increased harvest and displacement of caribou that can result from road construction and new access routes.

This definition recognizes that while one activity may have only a small impact, the combined effect of a number of activities may have a significant impact. Sustainable Development cannot be achieved without managing cumulative impacts.

LMUs, as expressed through the IMA zone designation. When thresholds are reached or exceeded, undesirable impacts to ecological and cultural resources may result. Thresholds determine the point between acceptable and unacceptable conditions. Recommended threshold levels for IMA zones are shown in Table 2.

Thresholds provide guidance for resource managers to improve their decision-making abilities and to promote integrated land management. Thresholds do not necessarily have to represent a single point at which undesirable effects may result. The Plan proposes cautionary thresholds as the point where indicators may be close to reaching undesired levels—providing an early warning signal and allowing for pro-active management actions to be taken. Critical thresholds represent the point where stated indicators have reached or surpassed acceptable levels.

IMA ZONE	MANAGEMENT INTENT	INDICATORS	CAUTIONARY THRESHOLDS ⁽¹⁾	CRITICAL THRESHOLDS
ZONE I	Highest Conservation	Surface disturbance	N/A	No functional disturbance ⁽²⁾
		Linear (access) density	N/A	No functional disturbance ⁽²⁾
ZONE II	High Conservation	Surface disturbance	0.15%	0.2%
		Linear (access) density	0.15 km/km ²	0.2 km/km ²
ZONE III	Moderate Development Focus	Surface disturbance	0.375%	0.5%
		Linear (access) density	0.375 km/km ²	0.5 km/km ²
ZONE IV	Highest Development Focus	Surface disturbance	0.75%	1.0%
		Linear (access) density	0.75 km/km ²	1.0 km/km ²

TABLE 2. Recommended Thresholds for IMA Land Use Zones

(1) Cautionary threshold is established as 75% of the upper, or critical threshold

(2) Functional disturbance: Physical land use disturbances that result in disruption of soil or hydrology, or that require the cutting of trees and woody vegetation. Activities that are considered exempt from functional disturbance creation are: 1) new linear features (seismic lines, trails, survey lines, etc.) ≤ 1.5 m in width; 2) land use activities that occur on frozen water-bodies; 3) winter work that is undertaken with no required clearing of vegetation (e.g., non-forested landscape types); 4) winter work that utilizes existing un-reclaimed disturbances and linear features from previous activities.



CUMULATIVE EFFECTS of Oil and Gas Development in Eagle Plains

Based on available information, NYPC estimates the linear (access) density for central Eagle Plains oil and gas basin to be 0.44 km/km². Levels of surface disturbance are 0.41%. Most human-caused disturbances are from historical seismic lines. Results of the land use scenarios suggest that future oil and gas activity in Eagle Plains, if conducted responsibly, will not create unacceptable levels of habitat disturbance and will remain below recommended threshold levels.

- ◀ Old Crow winter road in the Eagle Plains basin (photo: J. Meikle, YG)
- ▼ Eagle Plain Lodge on the Dempster Highway (photo: J. Meikle, YG)

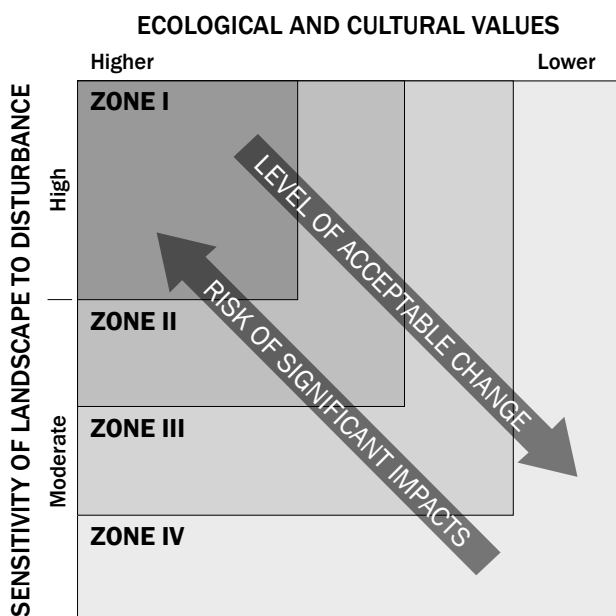


FIGURE 4. Zoning considerations for Integrated Management Area

An important concept for these indicators is that as their levels increase, so does the risk of damage to valued ecological and cultural resources. The relationship between IMA zones and levels of risk and acceptable change is shown in Figure 4. Through the use of thresholds, the Plan attempts to balance potential risks to ecological and cultural resources with the requirement for, and potential impacts of, economic development.

LAND USE THRESHOLDS are not intended to be an absolute cap on activities. Thresholds are intended to provide a concise statement regarding the level of environmental change considered acceptable within a specific LMU. When used in a results-based management context, thresholds are designed to promote pro-active and integrated land management. They also assist in the YESAA process.

ESTABLISHING LAND USE THRESHOLDS

Threshold values were established by: 1) examining future land use scenarios and their estimated potential cumulative impacts on wildlife habitat, with emphasis on Porcupine caribou winter habitat, moose late fall habitat and wetlands, and 2) considering the levels of development impacts residents of the region consider socially acceptable. Potential climate change impacts were also considered. The ALCES® computer landscape simulation model assisted in this effort.



LEVELS OF DISTURBANCE

In a previous Yukon study, the level of direct surface disturbance in the Whitehorse periphery – Carcross – Marsh Lake area was determined to be about 2%. The study area was 5,800 km², and is the most intensively developed rural area of Yukon.

5.4 GENERAL MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

In addition to the three management approaches described above, general management direction is provided in the form of recommendations. These include specific strategies, guidelines and best management practices to assist in achieving Plan goals and objectives. Some of the general management direction recommendations are required by the VGFNFA. A summary of the recommendations is provided in Section 6.3.

PLAN TOOLS AND CONCEPTS PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

In the Plan, each LMU and sub-unit has a full description of land ownership and status, biophysical setting, the ecological, heritage and cultural, and economic values, land use designation, and detailed management recommendations (Figure 5).



▲ Fisheries workshop in Old Crow. (L-R) Shawn Francis, Marvin Frost, Peter Tizya and Stanley Njootli Sr. (photo: NYPC)

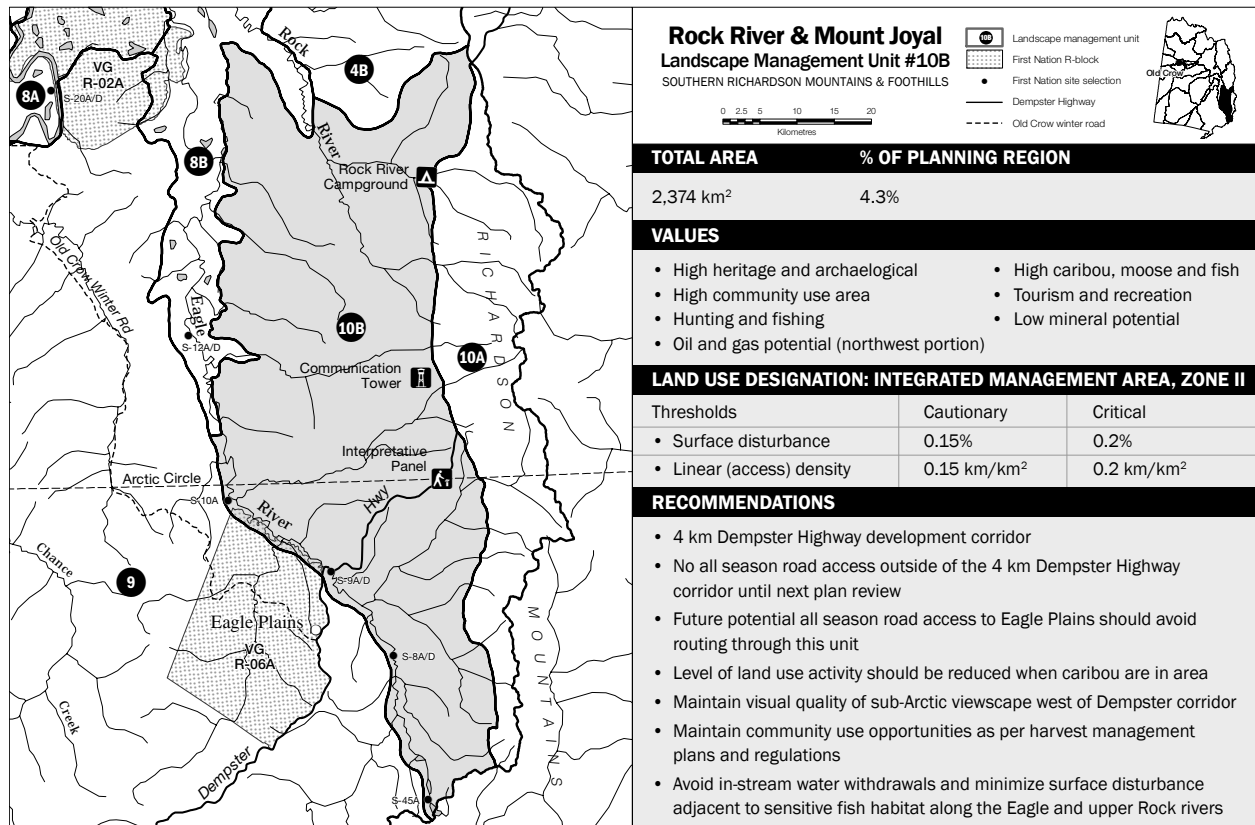


FIGURE 5. Example LMU description in Draft Land Use Plan (LMU sub-unit #10B, Rock River and Mount Joyal)

Recommendations

6



▲ **Whitefish Wetlands.** The Plan recommends an additional 470 km² Protected Area for central Whitefish Wetlands (photo: C. Eckert, YG)

6.1 LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT UNITS

Map 1 provides an overview of the existing or proposed LMUs for the planning region. Thirteen distinct units are proposed (Table 4). Five LMUs are identified by existing Protected Areas and SMAs. Some LMUs contain sub-units, shown by a letter following the number. In the Integrated Management Area (IMA), each LMU has been assigned to a specific land use zone (Zones I-IV).

6.2 LAND USE DESIGNATION

The proposed area of each land use designation category and zone is summarized in Table 3.

6.2.1 INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT AREA

Fifty-four percent of the region is within the IMA or 'working landscape', where industrial land uses and other activities are permitted. 75% of the IMA has a higher development focus (Zone III or IV), including areas with some of the highest potential for significant oil and gas

and mineral resources. As stated in its existing management plan, the Fishing Branch HPA is not withdrawn from land disposition, and is therefore proposed to be included in the IMA. General management direction for the IMA, as recommended by this Plan, is described in Section 6.3.

6.2.2 PROTECTED AREA

Existing Protected Areas

Thirty-two percent of the region is within an existing Protected Area designation (Old Crow Flats SMA, including Vuntut National Park, and Ni'inlii'njik (Fishing Branch) Wilderness Preserve and Ecological Reserve). These areas, LMUs #1 and #12A, have existing management plans and are not available for industrial land uses.

New Recommended Protected Areas

This Plan recommends an additional 470 km² (1% of the region) Protected Area for the central Whitefish Wetlands

LAND USE CATEGORY	AREA (km ²)	AREA (%)
Protected Area		
Old Crow Flats	12,122	22
Ni'inlii'njik (Fishing Branch)	5,524	10
Whitefish Wetlands*	468	1
Total	18,114	33
Integrated Management Area		
Zone I	2,406	4
Zone II	5,221	9
Zone III	10,582	19
Zone IV	11,911	22
Total	30,120	54
North Yukon Interim Land Withdrawal**	7,334	13

Table 3. Land Use Designation Summary. Area (%) represents the area that a land use category contributes to the planning region.

* Proposed new Protected Area

** 6,556 km² (12% of region) excluding VGFN settlement lands

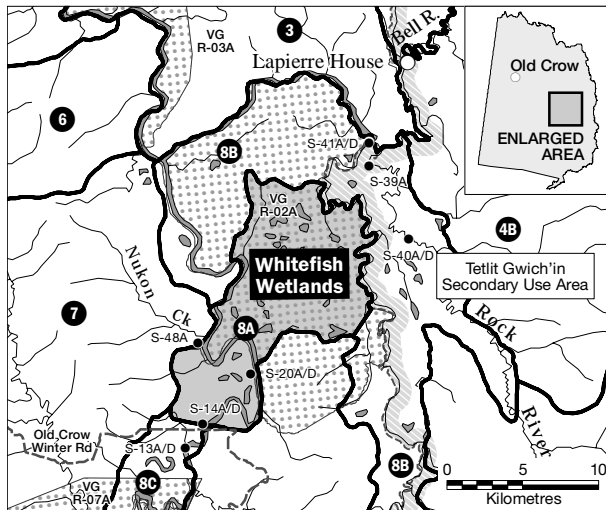


Figure 6. Proposed Whitefish Wetlands Protected Area (LMU #8A)

complex (LMU #8A) (Figure 6). Outside of Old Crow Flats SMA, Whitefish contains some of the highest ecological and cultural values in the region, within a sensitive biophysical setting. Most of the area recommended for protection is within an existing VGFN land selection (VG R-02A, stippled area). The remainder of Whitefish Wetlands (LMU #8) is recommended for IMA Zone I designation.

NYPC considered a number of Protected Area options for Whitefish Wetlands; this option was considered to provide an adequate level of ecological protection while allowing for a limited amount of carefully managed industrial land use activity in adjacent Zone I areas. Appendix 4 of the full Draft Plan contains a detailed discussion of Whitefish Wetland Protected Area options considered by NYPC.

LMU	LMU SUB-UNIT	AREA (km ²) ⁽¹⁾	LAND USE CATEGORY ⁽²⁾	IMA ZONE
1. Old Crow Flats SMA	1A – Vuntut National Park	4,374 (8%)	PA	N/A
	1B – Old Crow Flats ‘Core Wetlands’	4,504 (8%)	PA	N/A
	1C – Old Crow Flats West	726 (1%)	PA	N/A
	1D – Old Crow Flats East	2,518 (5%)	PA	N/A
	LMU Total	12,122 (22%)		
2. Lower Porcupine River	2A – Old Crow – Rampart House	1,525 (3%)	**	N/A
	2B – Bluefish River – David Lord Creek	3,083 (6%)	IMA	Zone III
	2C – Bluefish – Cadzow Lake Wetlands	980 (2%)	IMA	Zone I
LMU Total	5,558 (11%)			
3. Driftwood River – Salmon Cache	none	2,941 (5%)	**	N/A
4. Northern Richardson Mountains and Foothills	4A – Bell River	2,869 (5%)	**	N/A
	4B – LaChute River	2,048 (4%)	IMA	Zone II
LMU Total		4,917 (9%)		
5. Bluefish Lake – Keele Range	none	2,066 (4%)	IMA	Zone III
6. Ahvee and Sharp Mountains	none	2,714 (5%)	IMA	Zone III
7. Johnson Creek	none	3,230 (6%)	IMA	Zone IV
8. Whitefish Wetlands	8A – Whitefish – Porcupine Lakes	468 (1%)	PA ⁽³⁾	N/A
	8B – Eagle – Bell River	1,124 (2%)	IMA	Zone I
	8C – Porcupine River	302 (1%)	IMA	Zone I
	LMU Total	1,894 (4%)		
9. Eagle Plains	none	6,415 (12%)	IMA	Zone IV
10. Southern Richardson Mountains and Foothills	10A – Southern Richardson Mountains	799 (1%)	IMA	Zone II
	10B – Rock River – Mount Joyal	2,374 (4%)	IMA	Zone II
LMU Total		3,173 (5%)		
11. Whitestone River	none	1,740 (3%)	IMA	Zone III
12. Ni’iinlii’njik (Fishing Branch) SMA	12A – Ni’iinlii’njik Protected Area	5,524 (10%)	PA	N/A
	12B – Fishing Branch HPA	980 (2%)	IMA	Zone III
LMU Total		6,504 (12%)		
13. Kandik River	none	2,266 (4%)	IMA	Zone IV

Table 4. Landscape Management Unit Summary

(1) Percentage of regional area occupied by each LMU or sub-unit is shown in brackets; (2) Land Use Category: PA = Protected Area (existing or proposed), IMA = Integrated Management Area; (3) The Plan proposes PA designation for Whitefish Wetlands core area (LMU #8A);

** LMUs affected by North Yukon Interim Land Withdrawal (see Section 6.2.4)

LMU	LAND USE DESIGNATION	DISCUSSION
LMU #2A OLD CROW- RAMPART HOUSE	OPTION A Integrated Management Area with Zone II designation	IMA Zone II designation provides opportunities for carefully managed resource exploration and development activities around Old Crow. Conservative land use thresholds (0.2% and 0.2km/km ²) would minimize potential long-term impacts of industrial activities.
	OPTION B Integrated Management Area with Zone III designation	IMA Zone III designation provides opportunities for carefully managed resource exploration and development activities around Old Crow. Moderately conservative land use thresholds (0.5% and 0.5km/km ²) would minimize long-term impacts of industrial activities but pose potentially higher risks to focal species and cultural activities than Zone II designation.
LMU #3 DRIFTWOOD RIVER	Integrated Management Area with Zone II designation	IMA Zone II designation provides opportunities for carefully managed resource exploration and development activities. Conservative land use thresholds (0.2% and 0.2km/km ²) would minimize potential long-term impacts of industrial activities. Special consideration should be given to the protection of cultural and heritage resources (e.g. caribou fences).
LMU #4A BELL RIVER Concept: creation of a protected area-conservation corridor extending from the NWT border at Rat Pass - Summit Lake, southwest along the Bell River, linking with Whitefish Wetlands (LMU #8)	OPTION A Protected Area centered on Summit Lake, with Bell River corridor as Integrated Management Area Zone I designation. Integrated Management Area Zone II designation for remainder of unit.	This option is shown in Figure 7. The Summit Lake area should be considered for Protected Area designation, consistent with adjacent Rat River Gwich'in Conservation Zone. Protected Area designation would ensure long-term protection for important Porcupine Caribou Herd use area, and establish an anchor to support wilderness and cultural tourism activities. Zone I designation along Bell River corridor would provide opportunities for a limited amount of carefully managed resource exploration activities and winter access. IMA Zone II designation for the remainder of the unit provides opportunities for carefully managed resource exploration and development activities. Conservative land use thresholds (0.2% and 0.2km/km ²) would minimize potential long-term impacts of industrial activities.
	OPTION B Summit Lake-Bell River Protected Area, with Integrated Management Area Zone II designation for remainder of unit	This option is shown in Figure 8. It is similar to 'Option A' with the exception that the entire Summit Lake - Bell River corridor would receive Protected Area designation. Establishing Protected Area designation for the entire corridor ensures long-term protection of both the Summit Lake and Bell River landscapes.

Table 5. North Yukon Interim Land Withdrawal land use designation options currently being considered by NYPC.

6.2.3 COMMUNITY AREA

A 5 km area around the Community of Old Crow, between the Porcupine River and Old Crow Flats SMA, is prioritized for community development requirements. This small area is not a major land use category, and is not represented in Table 3.

6.2.4 NORTH YUKON INTERIM LAND WITHDRAWAL

As part of the planning process, the Yukon and Vuntut Gwichin governments requested that NYPC examine potential land use designation options for those areas in the planning region affected by the North Yukon Interim Land Withdrawal. The area under consideration includes three LMUs: Old Crow-Rampart House (#2A), Driftwood River (#3) and Bell River (#4A).

Background

The North Yukon Interim Land Withdrawal was established in 1978 as part of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA). It applies to all lands north of the Porcupine and Bell rivers, including the Yukon North Slope. The interim withdrawal was established to secure lands required for conservation planning, and at this time has no expiry date. The withdrawal order removes this area from mineral and oil and gas disposition, and prevents exploration activities. The area being examined covers 7,334 km² (13% of the North Yukon Planning Region) and includes both VGFN settlement and Yukon public lands.

Values

In addition to the major wetland complexes, the interim land withdrawal contains some of the highest wildlife, fish and cultural/heritage values in the planning region. These areas are of significance to the Porcupine Caribou

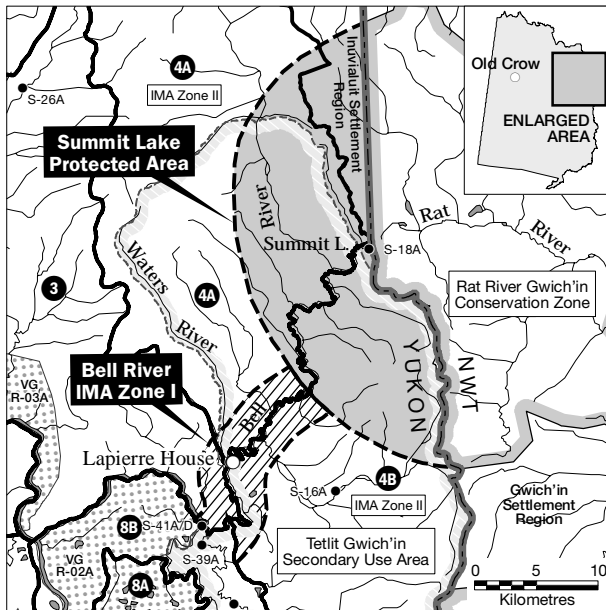


Figure 7. Land use designation concept for LMU #4A, Summit Lake-Bell River corridor (Option A - Protected Area and IMA Zone I)

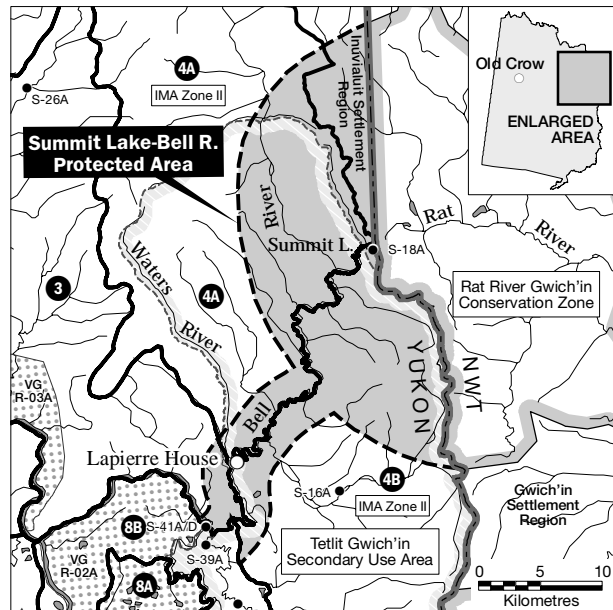


Figure 8. Land use designation concept for LMU #4A, Summit Lake-Bell River corridor (Option B - Protected Area)

Herd; caribou use these areas in all seasons, including occasional spring calving. VGFN caribou fences and other archaeological sites are also known. The Summit Lake-Bell River area of the Northern Richardson Mountains has been the focus of previous conservation proposals and is considered an area of high wilderness tourism and recreation interest. The Northern Richardson Mountains contains the highest diversity of large mammals in the region. There is currently limited knowledge of non-renewable resource potential. Based on existing information there appears to be relatively low potential for oil and gas resources, with some potential for mineral resources.



▲ **The Summit Lake-Bell River area of the Northern Richardson Mountains has been the focus of previous conservation proposals and is considered an area of high wilderness tourism and recreation interest (photo: V. Loewen, YG)**

Land Use Designation Options

Land use designation options currently being considered by NYPC for the interim land withdrawal are summarized in Table 5. All options have a high or moderate level of conservation focus. Each option was developed using the same criteria and approaches applied to other areas of the planning region.

These options do not represent a recommendation by the Commission to lift the interim withdrawal. Rather, they offer land use designations for consideration should the applicable authorities make the decision to lift the interim withdrawal at a future date. Appendix 5 of the full Draft Plan contains a detailed discussion of the land use designation options currently being considered by NYPC.

6.3 GENERAL MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

The Plan provides general management recommendations to address issues in the IMA. The Plan attempts to balance development of the region's resources with conservation measures for valued cultural and ecological resources. Plan recommendations focus on the following four themes:

- Sustainable Development, including Cumulative Effects Management
- Conservation of Heritage, Social and Cultural Resources
- Maintaining Economic Development opportunities
- Conservation of valued Ecological Resources



▲ Porcupine Caribou Herd is a vital cultural and ecological resource for the VGFN (photo: J. Meikle, YG)

THEME 1: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Addressing various recommendations to support Sustainable Development requires consideration of economic, social and ecological consequences of land

use decisions. Managing lands and resources in an integrated and coordinated manner, and minimizing and managing potential cumulative impacts of multiple land use activities, are important objectives towards achieving Sustainable Development.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	RECOMMENDATION
CUMULATIVE EFFECTS MANAGEMENT	As a general guideline for land users and decision makers, the amount of functional and unreclaimed surface disturbance in a given landscape management unit should be maintained at levels below the threshold values for the cumulative effects indicators proposed in the Plan.
RECLAMATION AND RE-VEGETATION	Reclamation trajectories and rates* for previously disturbed sites should be determined to verify when footprints are functionally removed from the landscape. This activity is required to develop accurate estimates of current indicator status for reporting and evaluation purposes.
CLIMATE CHANGE	In the North Yukon Planning Region, potential climate change impacts should be considered in all land management decisions, with special emphasis on land management decisions affecting the habitat of the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

* Reclamation trajectories and rates: the process and length of time that disturbed sites take to recover back to an 'undisturbed' condition.

THEME 2: HERITAGE, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

The protection and awareness of significant heritage and cultural resources are important goals and objectives of the Plan. Documented cultural areas and heritage resources were key considerations during the development of land use designation and general management recommendations. Maintaining opportunities for traditional

economic activities (hunting, fishing and trapping) is an important social and cultural consideration.

Two Plan recommendations relate to maintenance of current use areas to support these traditional economic activities. The pursuit and enjoyment of traditional activities is vital for the well-being of residents, particularly the First Nation residents of the region.

HERITAGE, SOCIAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES	RECOMMENDATION
HERITAGE RESOURCES	Historic camps/cabins, historical fish trap locations, archaeological sites and other heritage resources should be identified prior to exploration and development activities, and protected from disturbance. Management recommendations for identified routes and sites should be developed jointly by VGFN and YG.
COMMUNITY USE AREAS	In identified current Community Use Areas, exploration and construction activities should be minimized or mitigated during subsistence harvesting or other periods of seasonal cultural activities. Work camps associated with resource exploration and development activity should be sited near areas of resource production, away from current Community Use Areas.

THEME 3: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Plan is intended to facilitate economic development opportunities and activities that result in socio-economic benefits to the community of Old Crow, other affected First Nations and the Yukon as a whole. Supporting opportunities to participate in traditional economic activities is addressed through maintaining community use areas.

Given current levels of activity in tourism and recreation, oil and gas, and mining, specific recommendations for each sector are not required at this time. The general tools and approaches recommended by the Plan provide adequate direction for these sectors, by addressing the following:

- Maintain opportunities to access, explore for, and possibly develop economic resources within the IMA
- Maintain areas with wilderness and cultural tourism interests in a suitable condition to support those activities
- Provide measures to mitigate and/or minimize adverse impacts of industrial land uses on valued heritage, cultural and ecological resources



▲ Winter access road construction. Construction of new access roads is an important regional issue (photo: S. Francis)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	RECOMMENDATION
OLD CROW COMMUNITY AREA	To support maintenance and growth of Old Crow, a 5 km Community Area (CA) should be recognized around the community. The CA applies on the north bank of the Porcupine River, out to a distance of 5 km from the community boundary, not including the Old Crow Flats SMA. The CA within 5 km of the community of Old Crow should be exempt from surface disturbance and linear (access) density indicator monitoring. Work camps associated with resource exploration and development activity should be sited near areas of resource production, away from the CA.
TRANSPORTATION	In recognition of the strategic importance of the Dempster Highway and its designation as a Northern and Remote Route under the National Highway System, surface disturbance and linear (access) density indicator monitoring are exempt within a distance of 2 km on each side of the highway center line (4 km total corridor width). An all-season access road to Old Crow is not required at this time. Periodic construction of a winter road is adequate to meet existing transportation needs. The creation of new access roads and trails should be minimized and existing routes utilized where possible. Where new access roads and/or trails are required, these should be designed, constructed, and used in a manner that minimizes direct and indirect impacts to fish and wildlife, their habitats and human viewscapes.
ACCESS MANAGEMENT	A detailed management plan for the region's road and trail network is not required at present. However, in advance of significant levels of energy sector activity, an access management plan should be developed for the Eagle Plain oil and gas basin.
GRAVEL (AGGREGATE)	In advance of industrial development, the identification and mapping of potential sources of aggregate should be made a regional priority.
FORESTS	A future Old Crow Forest Management Plan should maintain community fuelwood and forest harvesting opportunities within the identified fuelwood and forest harvesting area.
RENEWABLE ENERGY	Renewable energy options for the community of Old Crow should continue to be actively researched and promoted.

THEME 4: ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Establishing adequate conservation measures for wildlife, fish and their habitats in advance of large-scale development is a central focus for the Plan, and a primary concern for residents of the region. Sustaining regional wildlife and fish populations requires the maintenance of suitable habitat conditions, with special consideration for management of habitats that are used frequently and/or intensively, are sensitive to disturbance, or are needed for critical life functions. Porcupine caribou were a focus of the recommendations.



▲ Establishing adequate conservation measures for wildlife, fish and their habitats in advance of large-scale development is a central focus for the Plan (photo: M. Shandro)

Moose, marten, sheep and a range of other wildlife species were also considered in the habitat conservation recommendations in the Plan. In combination with existing and proposed protected areas, the general recommendations, strategies and best management practices relating to management of: 1) cumulative effects, and 2) wetlands and Major River Corridors, are considered adequate to support conservation of significant habitats for these species, at present.

Other plans in preparation (North Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Plan, North Richardson Sheep Management Plan, Porcupine Caribou Harvest Management Strategy) will provide additional management guidance and recommendations for specific species.

ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES	RECOMMENDATION
PORCUPINE CARIBOU HERD	To minimize potential human caused land use impacts, maintain a higher level of conservation focus in areas that receive a consistently higher level or intensity of caribou use.
WETLANDS AND MAJOR RIVER CORRIDORS	<p>All-season infrastructure should be discouraged in key wetland complexes (Old Crow Flats, Bluefish-Cadzow and Whitefish).</p> <p>Where required, surface disturbance within and adjacent to wetlands, lakes and rivers should not result in diminished water quality or quantity.</p> <p>To maintain the visual quality and aesthetics of Major River Corridors*, all-season infrastructure should be discouraged within 1 km of Major Rivers.</p> <p>Avoid construction of new permanent river crossing structures and routing new all season access roads through Major River Corridors, where possible.</p> <p>Where new access roads and/or trails cross Major River Corridors, these should be designed, constructed, and used in a manner that minimizes direct and indirect impacts to fish, wildlife and their habitats.</p> <p>Surface disturbance and land use activities within and adjacent to Major River Corridors should not result in diminished water quality or quantity.</p>
FISH	<p>To minimize potential impacts to regional fish populations, in-stream and lake water withdrawals should be prohibited during the winter period in identified fish over-wintering areas</p> <p>Aggregate (gravel) mining should be prohibited in identified fish spawning areas.</p>

* Major River Corridors are the Porcupine, Bell, Whitestone, Miner, Fishing Branch, Old Crow and Eagle rivers

Plan Implementation

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▲ Confluence of the Porcupine and Bluefish rivers (photo: J.Meikle, YG)

Implementation of the Plan occurs within the existing resource management structure of the Yukon. Implementation responsibilities are expected to involve the following governments and groups:

- Yukon and Vuntut Gwitchin governments
- Government of Canada
- Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board (YESAB)
- North Yukon Planning Commission (NYPC)

A detailed implementation plan will be developed following Plan approval.

Changing the Plan

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The Plan is intended to be a ‘living document’, and the VGFNFA provides opportunities for subsequent revisions once it is approved. Changes to the Plan may be required when:

- New land management concepts emerge;
- New land and resource information becomes available;
- Knowledge about land use impacts is advanced;
- Land management values that the Plan is based upon change; or,
- Demand for land and resources in the region changes.

There are three ways to allow land uses that vary from the Plan, as identified by VGFNFA:

- **Plan Variance:** small, authorized projects and or uses that do not conform to the Plan;
- **Plan Amendments:** alterations to the management strategies presented in the Plan; and,
- **Plan Review:** revisiting and updating the Plan on an agreed-upon schedule, or whenever the Yukon and Vuntut Gwitchin governments agree a Plan review is required.

A set of conditions and detailed methods for changing the Plan will be developed during Plan Implementation.



▲ The Demspter Highway winds its way through the Richardson Mountains (photo: M. Shandro)

◀ Heritage workshop in Old Crow (L-R) Donald Frost, Peter Tizya, Hannah Netro, Irwin Linklater, Joel Peter and Megan Williams (photo: S. Francis)

Next Steps

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▲ **Craig Hart** of the Yukon Geological Survey conducts a mineral assessment of the North Yukon (photo: G. Bradshaw, YG)

During the Draft Plan public review period, NYPC will gather the perspectives of governments, local land users, other stakeholders and the public on all elements of the Draft Plan. Land use designation options currently being considered for the North Yukon Interim Land Withdrawal, as well as other designation concepts that may be brought forward, will be discussed.

NYPC will then consider the comments received during the Draft Plan public review period, and revise the Draft Land Use Plan. Public input will be used to determine recommended land use designations for the North Yukon Interim Land Withdrawal, as well as all other aspects of the Draft Plan. A Recommended Land Use Plan will then be produced for consideration by the approval governments, Yukon and Vuntut Gwitchin.

NORTH YUKON PLANNING COMMISSION

COMMISSION MEMBERS



Shirlee Frost
Chair



Dave Brekke



Dennis Frost Sr.



Marvin Frost Sr.



Jane Montgomery



Doug Brownlee
Past member

PLANNING STAFF

Shawn Francis
Coordinator and Senior Land Use Planner

John Ryder
Land Use Planner

Richard Vladars
GIS Specialist and Graphic Designer

Kathleen Zimmer
Administrator

OFFICE

For more information or to submit review comments,
please contact:

North Yukon Planning Commission
307 Jarvis Street, Suite 201
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2H3
tel 867.668.7663
fax 867.667.4624
email: nypc@planyukon.ca
www.nypc.planyukon.ca

ABOUT THE NORTH YUKON PLANNING COMMISSION

The North Yukon Planning Commission is an arms length public planning body made up of six people nominated by the Yukon and Vuntut Gwitchin governments. This document summarizes the full version of the Draft Plan. Please review this summary document and get back to us with your questions or comments by January 15, 2008. Written comments may be submitted by mail, email or fax. The full Draft Plan, supporting documents and resource maps can be downloaded from our website at:

www.nypc.planyukon.ca



**NORTH YUKON
PLANNING COMMISSION**
NICHIH GWANAŁ'IN • LOOKING FORWARD

307 Jarvis Street, Suite 201, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2H3
tel 867.668.7663 toll free 866.414.3468 fax 867.667.4624
email: nypc@planyukon.ca www.nypc.planyukon.ca