

Shaping the Future of Yukon Territorial Parks and Campgrounds

A discussion document to support the
development of a Yukon parks strategy

April 2018

**Yukon**



Overview

The Government of Yukon is beginning the development of a Yukon parks strategy to set long-term direction for Yukon's system of territorial parks, including wilderness parks, campgrounds, recreation sites and more. Demands and expectations of this system are evolving. The strategy will provide strategic guidance on how to sustainably deliver the environmental, economic, social, and health benefits of parks and campgrounds. Help us create a Yukon parks strategy!

Yukon's first campgrounds were simple camps for highway work crews built in the 1940s. Since then, our network of campgrounds and parks has grown. Today, we have 57 territorial parks classified into four types (natural environment parks, recreation parks, wilderness preserves, and ecological reserves). Together, they represent a world-class system of recreation and conservation encompassing 15,152 km² or 3.1% of Yukon.*

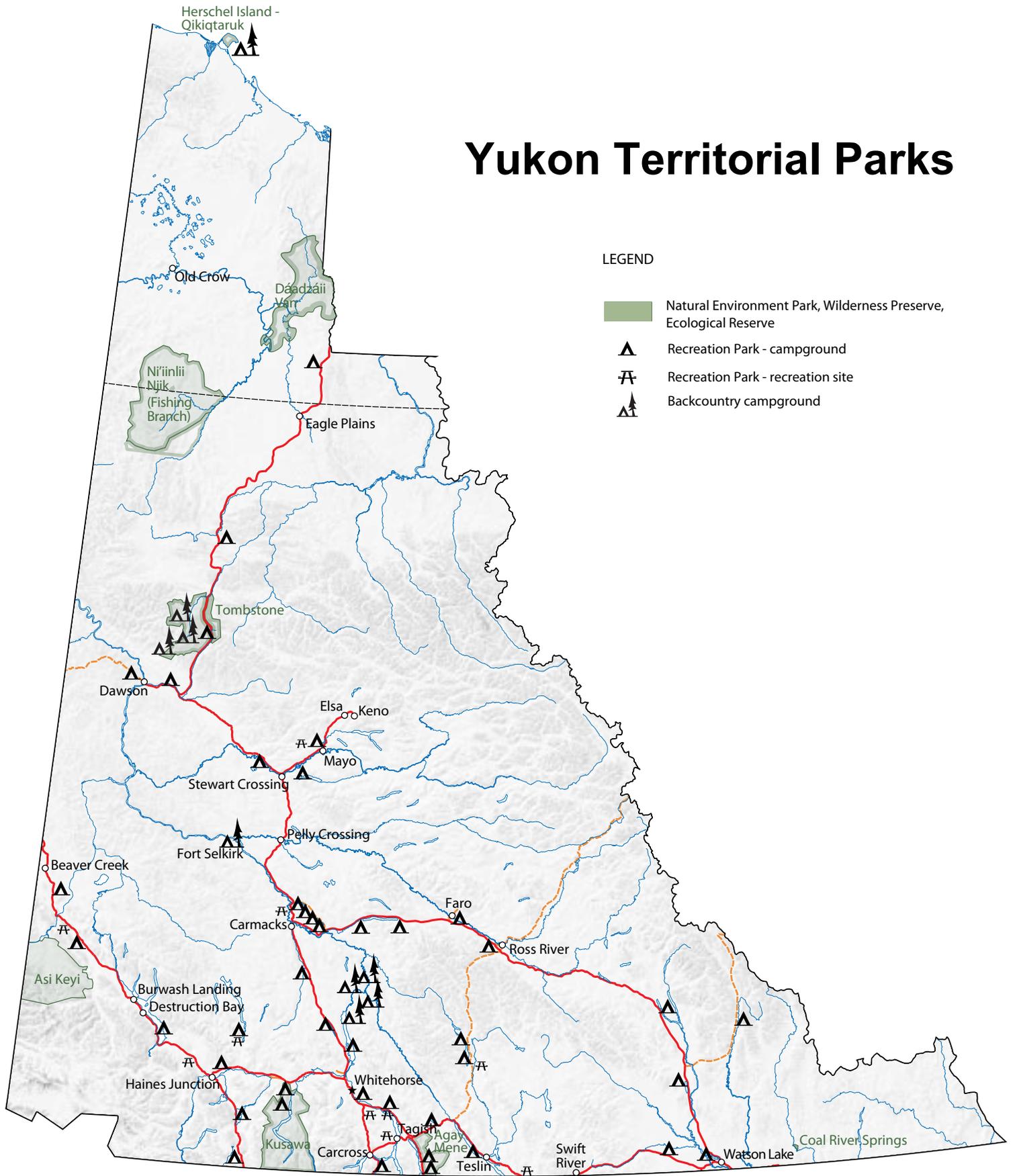
Yukoners have a strong connection and care deeply about their parks. More than one-quarter of Yukoners camp in a Government of Yukon campground every year. In total, about 75,000 Yukoners and visitors camp annually in Yukon parks. In addition to fun and enjoyable experiences, many businesses depend on parks and campgrounds.

Parks play a big role in protecting Yukon's environment.

What do we want our parks and campgrounds to be for future generations? Join the conversation and help shape the future of Yukon territorial parks!

* A total of 12.7% of Yukon is protected by national parks, territorial parks, habitat protection areas, and First Nation protected lands.

Yukon Territorial Parks



LEGEND

- Natural Environment Park, Wilderness Preserve, Ecological Reserve
- Recreation Park - campground
- Recreation Park - recreation site
- Backcountry campground

Quick facts

Yukon's territorial parks are established and managed through the *Parks and Land Certainty Act*.

Yukon has 57 territorial parks:

- ▶ 48 recreation parks that include most of our 42 campgrounds* and 11 day-use recreation sites like Five Finger Rapids;
- ▶ 3 natural environment parks: Tombstone, Herschel Island – Qikiqtaruk, and Kusawa;
- ▶ 3 natural environment parks are in the process of designation: Asi Keyi, Agay Mene, and Dàadzàii Vàn;
- ▶ 1 wilderness preserve called Ni'iinlii Njik (Fishing Branch); and
- ▶ 2 ecological reserves: Coal River Springs and a portion of Ni'iinlii Njik (Fishing Branch).

The different types of parks have different objectives, ranging from protecting pristine wilderness to providing recreational opportunities.

Within these parks and three Canadian Heritage Rivers, Government of Yukon provides about 1,100 campsites, including nine backcountry camping areas.

* Three of these campgrounds are within Kusawa and Tombstone territorial parks.



1. Vision for Yukon Parks and Campgrounds

Management of Yukon's parks is guided by a number of considerations, including:

- ▶ First Nations and Inuvialuit Final Agreements.
- ▶ *Parks and Land Certainty Act*, regulations, park management plans and policies.
- ▶ Provision of quality public services, like clean safe facilities and memorable experiences.
- ▶ Public accountability and fiscal responsibility.

In addition to these, a multi-year strategy for Yukon parks would be guided by a vision and principles.

Let's develop these together.

2. Healthy People

Generations of traditional knowledge and growing scientific evidence tell us that spending time in nature is good for our mind, body and soul.

Nature is good for us. We rely on nature for fresh air, clean water, and good food. People find natural spaces to rejuvenate, heal, and feel calm. Our brains develop differently with natural experiences.

Many studies have shown that playing in natural environments is essential to our children's development of core skills, including observation, problem-solving and reasoning, categorization, creativity, imagination, risk-identification, along with emotional and intellectual development. Nature gives children a better sense of what they can do and control, makes them happier, and makes learning fun.

Healthy Parks Healthy People is a global movement that harnesses the power of public parks in contributing to a healthy civil society. As we develop our parks strategy, we join the world-wide Healthy Parks Healthy People initiative to harness the power of parks in promoting the health and well-being of our citizens, our communities, our economy, and our environment.

Discussion

What principles, priorities and goals should be considered in a vision for the future of Yukon territorial parks and campgrounds?

In Yukon:

- ▶ One-quarter of Yukoners – families, couples, individuals and groups of friends – camp and have fun in Yukon campgrounds every year.
- ▶ Yukon parks offer world-class backcountry recreational opportunities, as well as road accessible camping, trails, and playgrounds.
- ▶ We continue to improve our campgrounds by developing designated universally accessible campsites, facilities and trails so all people can enjoy nature. Most campgrounds have some barrier-free outhouses, and we are adding barrier-free tables, fire pits, and other amenities.

Discussion

How do Yukon parks and campgrounds support your and your family's healthy lifestyle? Do you have ideas for enhancing the ways our parks and campgrounds promote healthy living?

3. Happy Campers

Yukon’s recreational opportunities are world class. Yukon residents and visitors have fun camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, canoeing, boating and taking part in many activities in our parks and campgrounds. We unwind, get active, relax and make life-long memories. Parks, and our experiences in nature, help form who we are.

Discussion

What do you hope to experience when you go to Yukon parks and campgrounds? What services, programs or activities would you like to see in the future?

What ideas do you have to maintain fair and enjoyable access as our parks become more popular?

In Yukon:

- ▶ Yukon residents and visitors like their campgrounds: in the 2016 campground survey, 84% stated territorial campgrounds meet their expectations always or most of the time.
- ▶ Sometimes it can be hard to find a campsite at campgrounds within two hours of Whitehorse.
- ▶ Well-designed fees can help improve fair access to parks and campgrounds.
- ▶ The Tombstone Park interpretive centre welcomed more than 22,000 visitors in 2017 – 46% more than last year and doubled over the past decade. Tombstone is currently the only territorial park that offers this kind of interpretive programming.



4. Environmental Protection

Parks and protected areas are an effective and cost-efficient tool to conserve biodiversity and lessen the impacts of climate change. They provide large, interconnected ecosystems that are home to many species and allow migration with changing conditions. Parks help our environment by:

- ▶ Purifying air and water, storing carbon, and protecting watersheds.
- ▶ Supporting fisheries and wild foods.
- ▶ Supporting the health and well-being of people living off the land.
- ▶ Supporting cultural practices and traditional lifestyles of indigenous peoples.
- ▶ Providing habitat for species at risk.
- ▶ Reducing risk and impact of natural disasters and climate change.
- ▶ Supporting storm-water and flood management.
- ▶ Protecting nature in the face of changing land uses and climate.

In Yukon:

- ▶ Parks and other protected areas are identified and established in collaboration with First Nations and Inuvialuit through Final Agreements and regional land-use planning processes. Where Final Agreements are not in place, other approaches may be possible.
- ▶ Like other parks systems around the world, one of the goals of Yukon's system of parks is to protect areas within each of Yukon's 20 ecological regions.
- ▶ Parks (except recreation parks) have management plans that are prepared and implemented collaboratively with First Nations and Inuvialuit.
- ▶ Monitoring programs aim to understand what changes in the environment are occurring and what impacts human activities may be having on ecosystems. This information informs the management of our parks.

Discussion

What do you think needs to be considered to make sure Yukon's system of parks is effective at conserving the territory's ecosystems, biodiversity, and wildlife now and for the future?

5. Thriving Communities

Parks and campgrounds support community and business interests, and the economy. Across Canada, parks contribute \$4.6 billion to the economy. Yukon's parks attract visitors from around the world, and encourage Yukoners to spend their vacation dollars at home.

Nature helps our economy by:

- ▶ Providing a natural advantage for Yukon, recognized globally by tourists for its great outdoors.
- ▶ Attracting tourism businesses and investments.
- ▶ Enhancing property values and related tax generation.
- ▶ Being a factor in corporate and residential location decisions.

In Yukon:

- ▶ Yukon's parks encompass some of our most treasured landmarks. Yukon is blessed with nationally and internationally important landmarks, including World Heritage Sites, national parks, and territorial parks.
- ▶ Parks are a key anchor for tourism in many communities.
- ▶ The public-private partnership at Ni'iinlii Njik-Fishing Branch Park between the Vuntut Development Corporation, Bear Cave Mountain Eco-adventures, and the Department of Environment shows the potential for eco-tourism. This environmentally-sensitive and carefully managed tourism development facilitates opportunities for grizzly bear viewing.
- ▶ With financial and regulatory supports, the parks system could be capable of supporting appropriate economic opportunities with the tourism industry, First Nations, and other partners while respecting the priority of conservation.

Discussion

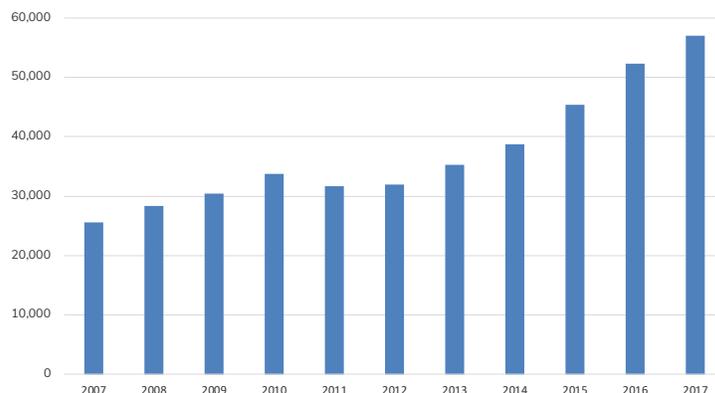
What economic opportunities do you want to see explored and/or supported in Yukon parks and campgrounds?

6. Sustainable Future

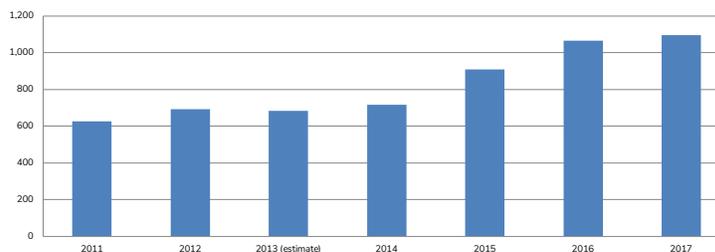
Financial sustainability is a key issue for our territorial parks and campgrounds. The sustainability of the current system is declining due to increasing use and rising costs.

In Yukon:

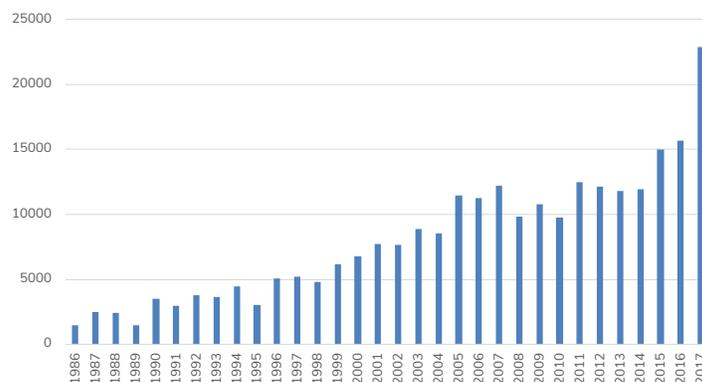
- ▶ Use of territorial campgrounds has doubled in the past 10 years. With use growing steadily at 12% annually, in 10 years it will be three times what it is today.
- ▶ There is growing backcountry use in our parks system. Backcountry camping in Tombstone has reached the limit of the current infrastructure.
- ▶ Infrastructure in parks and campgrounds is aging, and requires investment to update or renew.
- ▶ The costs of operations and services continue to increase due to changing public safety standards, growing transportation and communication needs, facility and technology requirements, as well as operational requirements like sufficient staffing.
- ▶ The Government of Yukon recovers about 9% of parks operating costs from camping fees. Some Canadian parks agencies recover up to 90%, while Yukon government overall recovers about 5% of its budget from fees and fines.
- ▶ According to the Yukon Financial Advisory Panel, one option to improve Yukon's finances is to "Raise user fees, fines, and related policies to better reflect costs of providing goods and services."
- ▶ Yukon has among the lowest camping fees in Canada at \$12/unit/night or \$50/season for Yukon residents.



Occupancy at 42 Government of Yukon campgrounds



Occupancy at backcountry camping areas of Tombstone Territorial Park



Visitors to Tombstone Interpretive Centre

- ▶ Current regulations do not allow us to collect fees for specific services, such as a day use at the ecologically sensitive Herschel Island-Qikiqtaruk Park, or access for large commercial film projects. Costs to provide these services can have significant impacts on operating budgets.
- ▶ Firewood is currently provided free of charge. Growing use of campgrounds and increasing costs to buy firewood have led to a dramatic increase in the cost of providing free firewood. Today, government spends over \$200,000 per year on firewood and this cost is growing at about 7% annually.

Discussion

What ideas do you have to make Yukon parks and campgrounds more financially sustainable? What are your thoughts on increasing fees and/or charging for services currently offered for free?

Share your views!

We are very interested in your views and ideas as we develop a path forward. There will be a number of opportunities to participate starting in Spring 2018.

Check www.engageyukon.ca for more information.

Or contact us at yukon.parks@gov.yk.ca, or **867-667-5648**.

Following this phase of public engagement, a draft strategy and any potential regulation changes will be presented to the public, partners, and stakeholders for feedback.

Thank you for your interest in Yukon parks and campgrounds!



Yukon