

Yukon's wildlife: A strategy for developing and promoting viewing opportunities

One-year review of
progress
November 2013-2014

One year after the renewed strategy was released the Wildlife Viewing Technical Committee has summarized the progress that has been made in advancing its goals and objectives.



Yukon's Wildlife: A strategy for developing and promoting viewing opportunities

Progress report after one year: November 2013-2014

PR-XXXXX

This report includes information provided by members of Yukon government's Wildlife Viewing Technical Committee, who have reported on programs and projects happening within their respective sections, as they relate to the goals and objectives of the strategy.

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Executive Summary

In 1990, the departments of Tourism and Renewable Resources (as they were then called) developed a *Strategic Plan for Wildlife Viewing in the Yukon* to increase wildlife viewing opportunities in Yukon and meet the growing interests and demands of Yukon tourists and residents. In 2013, the strategy was updated to build on earlier efforts and reflect the current interests of the Government of Yukon.

In addition to describing the Yukon government's vision and mission in developing and promoting viewing opportunities, the strategy outlines three main goals and their subsequent objectives that can be used to direct our efforts. Though they are not prescribed tasks, the strategic actions under these objectives provide guidance in how the Yukon government and its partners might be able to advance these goals and work towards a common vision.

This report reviews the actions that took place in the first year after the release of the updated strategy from November 2013 to November 2014. It looks at the Yukon government's and its partners' progress in implementing the goals and objectives. This report focuses on the effective release and promotion of the strategy both within and outside of the Yukon government, and how the strategy is involved in planning processes. A brief description of work that is happening is provided under each goal. A detailed list of specific projects and examples of this work is provided in Appendix A.

Key progress made in 2013-2014 includes:

- Recruiting representatives from the Department of Energy, Mines, and Resources, and the Department of Education to the Wildlife Viewing Technical Committee.
- Piloting a [digital newsletter](#) released to organizations and individuals involved in the wildlife viewing sector.
- Increasing accessibility of viewing sites through digital media, reducing physical barriers, and increasing operating hours.
- Completion of the Visitor Activity Services Plan for Tombstone Territorial Park.
- Refreshing dated interpretive sites such as Swan Haven Interpretive Centre.

Strategy release, promotion, and engagement

In August 2013, the updated strategy was released to the public. It was clear and concise so that stakeholders and those interested in learning about the Yukon government's vision for wildlife viewing and appreciation in the territory would find it easy to understand. Hard copies were sent to interested stakeholders and a PDF was [posted online](#) for immediate download if additional copies are needed.

In November 2013, a day-long workshop brought together interested individuals and groups to start discussion around wildlife viewing and appreciation in the territory, and what the strategy might mean to them. More than 50 people from a range of organizations attended, bringing a variety of perspectives and ideas. In the subsequent year (November 2013-November 2014), the Wildlife Viewing Technical Committee shared the updated strategy with other governments, non-profits, community groups, and non-governmental organizations.

The committee has also recruited representatives from the Forest Management Branch at Energy, Mines and Resources and from the Department of Education to join its quarterly meetings and bring their ideas and resources. Committee members continue to share the goals and objectives of the strategy with other organizations in Yukon so that they may work together to promote wildlife viewing opportunities and foster stewardship of our natural resources.

Implementing the strategy using workplans

The actions outlined by the strategy are organised under three main goals. The first goal focuses on Yukoners and meeting resident needs; the second highlights the objectives regarding visitors to Yukon and their impacts; the third goal identifies the role of special places in Yukon that are key to viewing and appreciating wildlife.

With the strategy providing a clear understanding of the Yukon government vision for viewing and appreciating wildlife, partners have begun to identify how existing programs fit under these goals and objectives, as well as explore new opportunities. The following are some examples of projects that support the strategy.

GOAL 1: Promote opportunities for Yukoners to view and appreciate wildlife.

The objectives of this goal are to increase awareness of existing wildlife viewing opportunities, as well as expand these opportunities by partnering with other organizations and supporting each other. Yukon government efforts were focused on promoting wildlife viewing events through mailouts, advertising, and social media. Programs were expanded to reach younger audiences, and new products such as brochures, booklets, and interpretive panels provided information on Yukon's wildlife to the public.

Strong focus was placed on seeking out new partnerships between government departments or with other organizations. In November 2014, the committee piloted an e-newsletter designed to facilitate

knowledge sharing between wildlife viewing stakeholders and share resources. Other partnerships have begun between Yukon government departments and organizations such as Renewable Resources Councils, First Nations, community clubs, municipalities, and education institutions.

Another way in which the Yukon government is supporting wildlife viewing and nature appreciation efforts is through training and development opportunities. In the department of Environment, the Environmental Education and Youth Programs unit has released curriculum updates to educational materials on caribou and wolves, as well as hosted an extensive teacher training course focusing on environmental education. Several organizations including parks interpreters and museum staff were able to take part in Interpretation Canada's online seminars in November 2014. Interpretation training has been a focus of the Heritage Branch and discussion has begun on partnering with Yukon College and Selkirk First Nation to offer interpreter training.

GOAL 2: Inspire visitors to come to Yukon to view and experience wildlife.

Wildlife viewing is one of the Yukon government's six tourism marketing pillars and is featured in many advertising campaigns. Tourism is a major player in Yukon's economy and wildlife viewing is the most sought after experience for our visitors (Yukon Visitor Tracking Program 2012). Actions under this goal strive to increase awareness of wildlife viewing opportunities amongst visitors, expand opportunities for visitors to be engaged in wildlife experiences, and support regional economic development.

With its ease of accessibility from anywhere in the world, the internet is an important method of communication with our visitors. Information on viewing sites, wildlife, tours, and events were posted to the web and thus available to people planning their trip to Yukon. Additionally, new products such as guides, maps, and tours, are being developed with communities to increase visitor participation and access to viewing locations.

Yukon government programs have also focused on making viewing locations and wildlife information more accessible to visitors by offering handheld digital applications, reducing mobility challenges, and extending visitor services hours.

In order to best serve our visitors, partnerships between departments and associations are developing. The Department of Highways and Public Works is leading a project to develop a plan for tourism oriented directional signs, with the support of the Departments of Environment and Tourism & Culture. The Wilderness Tourism Association of Yukon utilises funding agreements from the Department of Tourism & Culture to feature adventure products focusing on wildlife viewing.

GOAL 3: Identify, value, interpret and promote Yukon's special places for viewing wildlife.

The actions under this goal focus on special places in Yukon that have value for wildlife. There is a need to collect and share information about these places in order assist with management decisions and cooperation between land users. National and territorial parks, recreation areas, interpretive centres, trail networks, habitat protection areas, municipal parks, greenbelts, and significant wildlife areas can all benefit from a coordinated approach to wildlife viewing.

Since November 2013, some core wildlife viewing projects have benefitted from on-going maintenance and improvements. The Tombstone Interpretive Centre hosts thousands of visitors each season and the park's new *Visitor Activities Services Plan* (2015) includes actions that help implement this strategy. After 20 years of service, the Swan Haven Interpretive Centre received a much needed overhaul of interpretive materials. Talks have also begun with the community of Keno to update the Alpine Interpretive Centre.

Yukon Parks places significant emphasis on quality wildlife viewing experiences, setting aside special areas for this purpose and ensuring that visitors have access to these opportunities. Interpretive planning and updates are on-going, providing the latest information and direction to park visitors. Managing Yukon's natural spaces for multiple stakeholders and user groups is an ongoing challenge. The strategy provides us with some direction on how we can ensure that the non-consumptive uses of wildlife are also considered in management decisions. Wildlife viewing considerations are being included in YESAA reviews, community-based wildlife plans, and conservation area plans.

Preliminary analysis of gaps to address in future projects

The updated strategy for developing and promoting viewing opportunities identifies three principle areas under which strategic actions are focused. As Yukon government departments and their partners begin to move forward on projects in these areas, new ideas, suggestions, and areas of improvement have been identified that further the goals and objectives of the strategy.

- A) Improve information sharing and networking opportunities between wildlife viewing service providers and potential partners. To date, the strategy and accompanying reports focus heavily on Yukon government programs and services. Efforts should be made to collect and share information about other organizations offering wildlife viewing and nature appreciation programs so that we may support each other. Furthermore, services could be improved by gathering program feedback and tracking visitor behaviours and demands. Sharing this information across a network of Yukon-based wildlife organizations could potentially open opportunities and improve services.
- B) Continue to expand opportunities for Yukoners and visitors to learn about Yukon's wildlife. This could include such things as offering more off-season viewing opportunities (outside of the summer visitor season) or developing digital media to allow for self-guided viewing and non-personal interpretation. Though there are already many opportunities for people to learn about Yukon's wildlife, there is still a need to provide them with opportunities to become engaged in environmental stewardship and get involved in wildlife conservation. This could be addressed through the development of a Yukon-wide interpretive plan that would look at messaging delivered across the territory to ensure that it is clear and consistent throughout.
- C) In order to expand and increase program capacity, more training and educational opportunities are needed, particularly for front line staff. Yukon government can play a role in supporting the service industry by assisting with staff training and improving access to resources that will allow front line staff to properly address questions from the public.

- D) The committee has identified a need to explore available research regarding visitor segments in the wildlife viewing sector. There is a need to obtain Yukon-specific data that could help provide a better understanding of the social behaviours achieved by the viewing wildlife or the impacts this has on wildlife behaviours and patterns. Investigating these areas can also help us to minimize the negative impacts of viewing, by improving Leave No Trace communication and policy needs. Efforts should be focused on collecting existing literature and making wildlife viewing organizations aware of it. Literature reviews could also provide insight into models of conducting qualitative program analysis. Additionally, data collection and reporting could provide industry with a better understanding of the economic value of wildlife viewing.

Plans to move forward

The Wildlife Viewing Technical Committee meets quarterly to report on related programs and projects from our respective areas. In addition to representatives from the departments of Environment, Tourism & Culture, Energy, Mines and Resources, and Education, we hope to include representatives from Community Services and Highways and Public Works. Having members from these areas allows us to share the vision of the strategy across the Yukon government and increases our knowledge and awareness of programs happening in other areas. There are a variety of organizations that might participate in wildlife viewing and nature appreciation through tourism, economic development, education, social services, or industry. Including more views and perspectives at the discussion table allows us to look further and create new partnerships.

While the strategy will continue to be shared with a variety of stakeholders, the focus is now to ensure that individual organizations have a clear understanding of how they could contribute to the strategy and how they can use it to direct their efforts in terms of wildlife viewing and nature appreciation. Emphasis will be placed on providing guidance in developing wildlife-related programs and products, capacity-building and promoting local resources.

In the coming months the committee will continue to look for new opportunities to guide residents and visitors to view and appreciate wildlife. Projects will be focused on increasing training capacity in Yukon to further develop our industry internally, improving partnerships in order to expand capacity, and conducting evaluations of program effectiveness.

Appendix A: List of specific programs or projects

GOAL 1: Promote opportunities for Yukoners to view and appreciate wildlife.

Examples of the programs and products that promote and provide opportunities for Yukoners to view and learn more about wildlife:

- Wild Discoveries interpretive series (Fish and Wildlife Branch)
- Promotion and funding for school programs at Yukon Wildlife Preserve (Yukon Education)
- Conservation Action Team (CAT) (Conservation Officers Services Branch)
- Yukon Youth Conservation Corps (Y2C2) (Conservation Officers Services Branch)
- Knee High Nature children's series (Fish and Wildlife Branch)
- Ed-ventures for Kids and Free guided hikes (Yukon Conservation Society)
- Common Yukon Mushroom guide (Forest Management and Fish and Wildlife branches)
- Development and delivery of Off-Site Experiential Learning Trips for schools (Yukon Education)
- On-going maintenance of publications including: (Fish and Wildlife Branch)
 - o Common Yukon Roadside Wildflowers, Yukon Fishes, Yukon Amphibians, Yukon Butterflies, Yukon's Wildlife Viewing Guide (English, French, German)
 - o Naturally Carcross, Wildlife in Whitehorse (English, French, German)
- Social media resources: Facebook (Wildlife Viewing, Yukon Parks, Conservation Officers Services, Yukon Water, Travel Yukon); Twitter (Environment Yukon, Tourism Yukon)
- In Yukon promotion of wildlife viewing events including:
 - o Calendar of events mailed to all Yukon households
 - o Posting of events in online calendar
 - o Providing reminders and updates in real time via social media.
 - o Newspaper and radio ads to encourage Yukoners to look for calendar.
 - o Calendar made available at VICs, government offices, and public facilities such as libraries, gas stations, museums, restaurants, and stores.
 - o Community posters in popular locations for each event.

Partnerships and networking efforts between YG and other organizations that have expanded opportunities for wildlife viewing and appreciation.

- Launch of the Strategy through a day-long workshop on November 15, 2013 bringing together stakeholders and focusing discussion on wildlife viewing opportunities.
- Developed the Wildlife Viewing and Appreciation e-newsletter (YG Tourism Culture, Environment, Energy, Mines and Resources, Education) available to multiple stakeholders and providers of wildlife viewing activities. November 2014. Final approvals and released in December 2014
- Working with Renewable Resources Councils to promote the strategy and plan new projects:
 - o Mayo District RRC: Fall Fair, updates to Keno Alpine Interpretive Centre
 - o Dan Keyi RRC: community initiative to refresh rest stop.
 - o Contribute to the YFWMB wildlife calendar with significant wildlife viewing dates and information.
- Cooperative promotion of events with Yukon Science Institute, Yukon Bird Club, and Yukon Conservation Society.
- Providing support to municipalities in developing recreation plans and products (Fish & Wildlife Branch):
 - o Dawson City Trails Strategic Plan
 - o Watson Lake recreation trails planning

- Destruction Bay interpretive kiosk renewal.
- Partnership between Wildlife Viewing Program and Forest Management Branch to deliver educational materials and resources regarding forest health and wildlife.
- Partnering with the Yukon Research Centre Programs Coordinator regarding a new interpretive panel on results of the Northern Climate Exchange 3 year permafrost project along the Alaska Highway. (Heritage Branch)
- On-the-ground projects supported by Yukon Youth Conservation Corps (Y2C2) crews:
 - Construction of the Minto Bridge trail
 - Community ecological monitoring programs
 - Swan Haven repairs and maintenance
 - Campground clean up
- Contribute to Environment Yukon's monthly e-newsletter with updates on programs and publications.
- Delivery of in-class school programs and hosting field trips (Fish and Wildlife Branch, Conservation Officers Services Branch, Forest Management Branch)

Training opportunities between YG departments and other organizations to sharing information and resources with staff, as well as teaching and interpretation skills.

- Teacher training and resource development: (Conservation Officers Services Branch)
 - Project Caribou update
 - Wolves: a Yukon Learning Resource updates
 - Coyote Mentoring workshop
- Interpreter training:
 - Participated in Interpretation Canada online seminar and conference. November 2014.
 - Assisted with training Yukon Conservation Society trails interpreters when requested.
 - Delivered a day-long seminar on interpretation to the Yukon College Heritage and Culture Program Field School. (June 2014) (Heritage Branch)
 - Delivered one-day training on personal interpretation to Fort Selkirk interpretive staff (August 2014). (Heritage Branch)
- Working with Selkirk First Nation and Yukon College on setting up an Interpretive Training Course for Pelly Crossing Community Campus.

GOAL 2: Inspire visitors to come to Yukon to view and experience wildlife.

Programs and projects that specifically target visitors and facilitate positive wildlife viewing experiences.

- Updated and modernized information on mammals on YG websites. (Fish and Wildlife Branch)
- Updated and maintain Sites & Sights web pages: <http://www.sightsandsites.ca/> (Heritage Branch)
- Current publications available online in PDF friendly format for immediate access. (Fish and Wildlife Branch, Parks Branch, Heritage Branch)
- Developed a Carcross walking tour App. This app focuses on historical buildings but includes information on walking trails and viewing locations in the Carcross area. (Heritage Branch)

Improvements to services that relate to wildlife viewing increasing accessibility and usability.

- Extended the hours of the Visitor Information Centres in to the shoulder season. (Yukon Tourism)
- Extended season for 10 campgrounds by one month (Parks Branch)

- Wi-Fi available at all Visitor Information Centres. (Yukon Tourism)
- Update roadside pullouts and rest stops to increase accessibility/usability (eg. wheelchair-accessible outhouses) (Heritage Branch, Highways and Public Works)
- Provide online order form for Wildlife Viewing Guide to distribute to visitor before they arrive in Yukon, allowing them to better plan their wildlife viewing opportunities. (Fish and Wildlife Branch)

Examples of partnerships between YG departments and others to provide wildlife viewing opportunities and services for visitors.

- Wildlife Viewing Program working with Watson Lake VIC staff to develop viewing guide to that area answering most common wildlife FAQs. (Fish and Wildlife Branch)
- PR Services using Wildlife Viewing Program information to highlight wildlife viewing sites in free RV newspaper. (Fish and Wildlife Branch)
- Tourism Orientated Directional signs plan to reduce signage pollution. (Highways and Public Works)
- Partnering between Yukon Environment and Yukon Tourism social media platforms to reach a larger audience.
- Tourism Yukon supports the Wilderness Tourism Association of Yukon with annual funding of the Yukon Wild Marketing consortium. The tour operator members feature adventure products where wildlife viewing is an ever-present activity in the majority of experiences being delivered.
- Maintenance of YG/FN/private partnership for bear viewing tourism at Ni'iinlii Njik (Fishing Branch) Territorial Park (Parks Branch)
- Supported cruise ship visits and advanced related policy for Herschel Island Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park
- Film and Photography Policy for territorial parks (still in progress).

GOAL 3: Identify, value, interpret, and promote Yukon's special places for viewing wildlife.

Core projects and sites that highlight wildlife viewing.

- Major overhaul of interpretation at Swan Haven to modernise and attract new audiences. Includes hands-on displays, digital microscope, aquarium replica of Marsh Lake, tactile exhibits and costumes. (Fish and Wildlife Branch)
- Keno Alpine Interpretive Centre interpretation update including new interpretive panels and updated trail information (Fish and Wildlife Branch)
- Completion of Tombstone Territorial Park Visitor Activity Services Plan (Parks Branch)
- On-going maintenance and improvement of interpretive panels at recreation sites, campgrounds, and rest areas. (Parks Branch, Fish and Wildlife Branch, Heritage Branch, and partners)
- Trail upgrades and interpretive resources provided at Gunnar Nielsen/Mickey Lammers Research Forest (Forest Management Branch)

Improvements to data and information sharing to consider the multiple stakeholders and interests in specially managed areas.

- Continue to update the Access database with maintenance needs, damage, replacement status for interpretive sites and rest areas. (Parks Branch, Highways and Public Works, Heritage Branch, Fish and Wildlife Branch)

- Attending Fish and Wildlife species and regional technical meetings to include discussions about the non-consumptive consideration of wildlife. (Fish and Wildlife Branch)

Participation in environmental and land use planning processes to recognise the value of wildlife viewing opportunities and sites.

- Reviewing Yukon Socio-Economic Assessment Act proposals to consider the wildlife viewing and tourism needs in the affected area. (Yukon Tourism, Yukon Parks, Fish and Wildlife Branch)
- Contribute to the development of parks, regional, and community-based fish and wildlife plans.
 - o Wildlife viewing and nature interpretation components are outlined in:
 - Yukon Wolf Conservation and management Plan (2012)
 - Management Plan for Elk in Yukon (2010)
 - Management Plan for Yukon Amphibians (2013)
 - Community-based Fish and Wildlife Work Plan for Little Salmon/Carmacks 2012-2017
 - Community-based Fish and Wildlife Work Plan for Na-cho Nyäk Dun 2014-2019
 - Management plan for the Chisana Caribou Herd 2010-2015
 - Tombstone Territorial Park Visitor Activity Services Plan (2015) (Parks Branch)
 - North Yukon Regional Land Use Plan (2009)
 - Dawson and Peel Watershed regional land-use planning.
- Herschel Island – Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park Interpretive Strategy (Parks Branch)
- Tourism Yukon and Environment Yukon continue to participate in government land planning processes and assessments advocating for wildlife viewing attributes and opportunities.

Consideration of wildlife viewing and appreciation activities within our protected areas.

- Conservation of areas for wildlife and nature appreciation:
 - o Development to of management plans for Kusawa, Agay Mene, Asi Keyi, Summit Lake/Bell River territorial parks
 - o Development of Conrad Campground
- Promoting wildlife viewing and nature appreciation is a key theme in parks communications, social media, events, programs, and publications.
- Working with commercial tour companies to facilitate wildlife viewing in parks, recreation sites
- Managing parks, recreation sites and heritage rivers for wildlife and wilderness appreciation.