



# Yukon parks strategy What we heard

A report on the Talking Yukon Parks public engagement

## Introduction

This past spring and summer the Government of Yukon's Department of Environment, parks branch started discussing the idea of a Yukon parks strategy with the public. The following report presents the results of our public engagement, coined Talking Yukon Parks.

We are sincerely grateful to everyone who contributed their time to participate.

We reached out wherever there was interest in having a conversation about the future of Yukon's system of parks and campgrounds. We heard this early stage of engagement was not for everyone, and some people and organizations preferred to have a draft strategy to comment on. We will provide an opportunity to comment on the draft strategy in the next phase of public engagement, anticipated to begin early 2019.

## What we did

Talking Yukon Parks occurred from April 16 to September 10, 2018. We tried to provide a variety of ways people could take part, connect with us, and pass on their thoughts and ideas. Our outreach activities included:

- information on [EngageYukon.ca](https://engageyukon.ca) and social media;
- interviews with local media;
- a printed and downloadable discussion document;
- direct letters and emails;
- connecting with existing community events; and
- an online and paper survey.

We heard from you through written comments by letter, email, social media, [EngageYukon.ca](https://engageyukon.ca), and the Yukon Tourism Development Strategy public engagement. We gathered your comments from workshops, meetings, and events we hosted in communities, or booths we set up at existing events. Finally, we received 1,328 responses to our online and paper survey.

Responses to the survey included 892 written comments in addition to answering the seven survey questions. The survey ran from July 18 to September 10, 2018. Most people completed the survey online, while others completed it on paper at the Tombstone Interpretive Centre, various public events, and at select campgrounds.

Table 1 summarizes who we heard from throughout the Talking Yukon Parks public engagement.

**We estimate we reached over 6,000 Yukon residents, about 200 non-residents, and 28 Yukon organizations, and received over 2,600 comments and suggestions.**

Table 1. Who we heard from

When	What	Individuals		Organizations	
		reached	commented	reached	commented
<b>Outreach activities</b>					
April	Letter from Minister to First Nations and Inuvialuit leadership			22	
April	News release announcing the engagement process	unknown			
April	Participation at Community Economic Development Conference, Watson Lake	100			
April	Information table at Fraserway RVs open house	40			
April	Letter to municipal leaders			14	
April	Letter to stakeholder organizations (RRCs, Associations, NGOs, etc.)			49	
April	Information table at Paddling Film Festival, Whitehorse	100			
May	Participation at Association of Yukon Communities conference, Dawson City	120			
May	Table at Emergency Preparedness for Backcountry Travelers event	20			
May-Aug	Recurring information booths at Fireweed Market, Canadian Tire, etc.	697			
May-Sept	Information at Cookshack Sessions at UnDiscovered Campgrounds	50			
Aug-Sept	Media interviews promoting the survey	unknown			
	sub-totals Outreach	1,127	0	85	0
<b>Engagement activities</b>					
April 16 - Sep 10	Written comments received by email, letter, and through engageyukon.ca	17	17		7
April	Workshops with Yukon Parks and Visitor Information Centres staff	76	76		
May	Engagement booth at Lions Trade Show	350	120		
May	Meeting with Chief and staff, Acho Dene Koe First Nation				1
May	Engagement booth at Chamber of Commerce Business Connects Conference	100	30		
May	Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in community meeting in Dawson City	12	12		

When	What	Individuals		Organizations	
		reached	commented	reached	commented
May	Public workshop in Dawson City	11	11		
May-June	Initial discussions with staff at various First Nations			5	
May-Sept	Yukon Parks Facebook page	3,030	9		
June	Talking Yukon Parks public event, Whitehorse	40	30		
June	Talking Yukon Parks public event Facebook Live participants (minimum #)	550	4		
June	Talking Yukon Parks stakeholder workshop		11		9
June	Workshop at Renewable Resource Councils annual gathering, Pelly Crossing	60	40		10
June	Meeting with staff, Gwich'in Tribal Council				1
	sub-totals Engagement	4,246	360	5	28
	sub-totals Pre-survey	5,373	360	90	28
<b>Survey</b>					
July 18 - Sep 10	Survey responses collected online at engageyukon.ca and at select campgrounds, Tombstone Interpretive Centre, and public events.	1,328	1,328		
<b>Totals</b>		<b>6,701</b>	<b>1,688</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>28</b>

## Key messages from Talking Yukon Parks

We compiled the comments collected from all Talking Yukon Parks activities into one document, organized by the six themes identified in our [discussion document: Shaping the future of Yukon territorial parks and campgrounds](#). This [compiled anonymized comments document](#) is available at [Yukon.ca](http://Yukon.ca).

We read every comment, and carefully considered them as a whole, and will continue to refer to them. We have provided a summary of the comments in this report, by extracting the “key messages” and highlighting the issues raised by many people, to reflect the major trends or diverging views.

The following sections present these key messages and a sampling of related direct quotes from participants.

When considering any of the engagement results it is important to remember that this was a voluntary engagement and not a representative sample. These results reflect the views of those who chose to answer the survey or participate in conversations and not necessarily the broader population.

### Expectations from a parks strategy

People shared what they expected from a strategy for Yukon’s parks system. Key messages were:

- A clear vision, purpose, and direction for the future
- Know what should stay the same and what should change
- Be strategic and bold, and also efficient and practical
- Identify concrete actions, priorities, timelines, and the human and financial resources to implement
- Make the shift from a mostly-campgrounds organization to a modern parks system organization

## 1. Vision for Yukon parks and campgrounds

Some key messages emerged from our conversations about a vision and principles for a Yukon parks strategy. These are:

- Recognize the tension and compliments between the goals of the parks system such as protecting and celebrating ecological and heritage integrity, providing a range of recreation opportunities, honouring indigenous cultures and rights, connecting people with nature, landscape-level conservation, contributing to economic development and diversification.
- Build collaboration and partnerships with First Nations, Inuvialuit and others.
- Reconciliation in what we do, how we do it, and why.
- Expand the parks system to meet both conservation goals and recreation needs, and better integrate parks system goals into regional land-use planning and other relevant processes.

### Six-word stories

We asked participants to summarise their vision for territorial parks in a “six-word story”. Here are some of the 64 stories we collected:

- Place of connection to real nature
- Preserved for all nature, including us
- Co-managed, cultural learning opportunities, biologically diverse
- Clean water, plentiful wildlife, wonderful experiences
- Room to roam and find yourself
- Bigger is better, connected is best
- Ecologically maintained, financially stable, recreational paradise
- Good times, great places, forever wild
- Large intact protected areas for everyone
- Safe, fun, available for all users
- Big, diverse, intact, connected, protected, forever
- Outdoor experience, enjoyment for all
- Welcoming, ecologically intact venues providing recreational opportunities
- Etiquette, Financial stability, Ecological integrity

### Quotes

“Vision: go big! Representation! Tourism! Yukon First Nations! Maintain and enhance these values.”

“Untrammelled wilderness is a significant and diminishing Yukon quality, characteristic, and value that needs protecting.”

“With only 3% of the Yukon’s land base protected through territorial park designations, there is considerable opportunity for the Yukon parks system to grow.”

“Parks are established on the homelands of Indigenous peoples and therefore require consultation in their establishment, cooperation in their development and sharing in their management.”

“Yukon is still relatively intact, so there is the opportunity to be a national conservation leader.”

## 2. Healthy people

### What's working

- Yukon's parks offer opportunities to experience the benefits of outdoor activities.

### Quotes

"Outdoor living provides family time, relaxation time, which in turn gives health benefits, wildlife viewing opportunities."

"We take our community youth to campgrounds for nature based experiential learning."

"Gets you out enjoying places you might not go or get to know about."

### Future thinking

- More diversity of opportunities for active recreation for people of all abilities
  - Greater diversity of hiking trails and backcountry camping areas
  - More walking/hiking trails at campgrounds
  - Improve trail marking
  - Opportunities to hike, fish, boat, paddle
  - Playgrounds
  - More designated paddling routes
  - Engage with users to keep up to date on emerging outdoor recreation activities
- Facilities and services meeting the needs of a spectrum of abilities
  - Supports multi-generational family camping
- Affordable access to parks is good public health policy
- Keep connecting people with nature

## Quotes

“Access to backcountry, low impact camping on established campsites, allow place to camp to explore areas nearby.”

“Keep it affordable.”

“Yukon parks must increase its efforts to design, build and/or provide amenities that meet the needs of people of all abilities.”

## 3. Recreational uses

We had many conversations about recreation in territorial parks. Some input was specifically about front-country uses, such as camping or picnicking at road-accessible campgrounds or recreation sites. Some input was specifically about remote back-country uses, such as backpacking or boating in large wilderness parks. For clarity, we present that input below in two sub-sections: front-country recreation and back-country recreation.

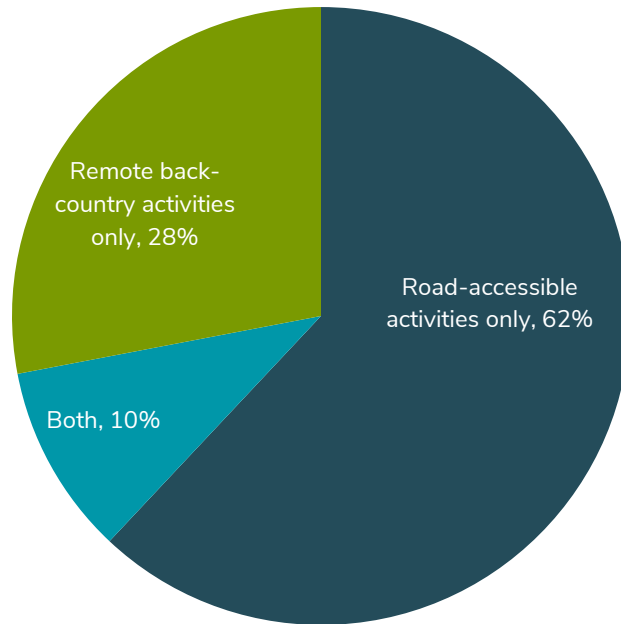
We asked

We used our survey to better understand how people use our parks. As shown in Figure 1, survey respondents primarily identified themselves as either front-country users (62%) or back-country users (28%). Only 10% of respondents reported doing both front- and back-country activities in the past 5 years.



**Figure 1. What did you do in the parks?**

Per cent among respondents who said they had been to a Yukon territorial park in the past 5 years.



## Front-country recreation

### *What's working*

- Beautiful campgrounds in superb settings
- Good facilities and clean outhouses
- New 24-hour rule to limit holding of unused campsites

## Quotes

“Thank you for making our campgrounds available and well kept-much appreciated.”

“I appreciate the clean outhouses, stocked with TP.”

“The campground behaviour has improved since officers patrol on the weekends-money well spent.”

### *Future thinking*

- Need to better manage noise in campgrounds, especially generators and parties
  - Campground design suggestions
    - Separate camping areas for RVs and for tents
    - More space between campsites
    - Designated quiet areas in campgrounds (no generators)
    - Designated quiet campgrounds
  - Rules & etiquette suggestions
    - Better enforcement of quiet hours and generator limits
    - Expand the no-generators time beyond the current quiet hours (11 pm – 7 am)
    - Campground host
- More trails at campgrounds, well-marked and maintained
- Improve meeting the specific needs of different campground users
  - Tenters want to camp on sand or soil, not gravel
  - Larger RVs want larger sites, some want drive-through sites
  - More and improved playgrounds

- Upgrade boat launches, more dock space at popular lakes
- Programming (e.g. Cookshack sessions) and interpretation (e.g. talks, trails, signs, app)
- Group sites and site groupings that encourage socializing for some, and private isolated sites for others
- More sites on the water for boaters/paddlers
- Longer camping season
  - Extend season earlier in spring and later in fall
  - Have some year-round campgrounds and recreation sites
- Availability of campsites remains an issue
  - Build more campgrounds
  - Larger campgrounds near Whitehorse
  - Campgrounds near attractions
- Consider a campground reservation system
  - An overwhelming majority of people expressed a desire to be able to make reservations at Yukon campgrounds
  - Some concerns included ensuring good availability of sites without a reservation, and avoiding problems seen elsewhere with low availability of sites due to mass-reserving
  - Consider a hybrid system where some sites can be reserved and some can not
- There are problems with the resident annual permit
  - Encourages unnecessary holding of unused sites
  - While some suggested eliminating the annual permit many appreciate the convenience and value
  - Consider limiting where and when the permit applies
- Continue improvements like recycling, universal accessibility
- Opportunities for partnership with First Nations, activity-based groups, and others

## Quotes

“We have really gorgeous territorial campgrounds.”

“More access to backcountry from campgrounds.”

“Open sites earlier and close later.”

“Year round use: we are active in winter too.”

“[A reservation system] Would give me certainty with my limited time off.”

“Our summers are short. I hate driving and not knowing; it adds stress. I would trade spontaneity for certainty.”

“Yukon has lots of Parks and could start to meet visitor specific needs.”

“Raise the camping fees please. \$50/year is ridiculously cheap.”

“I look forward to retirement so I can use the campgrounds Monday-Thursday and avoid the weekend crowds.”

“Besides sleeping there are minimal front country opportunities.”

## We asked

Based on the input above we asked two survey questions about uses of campgrounds.

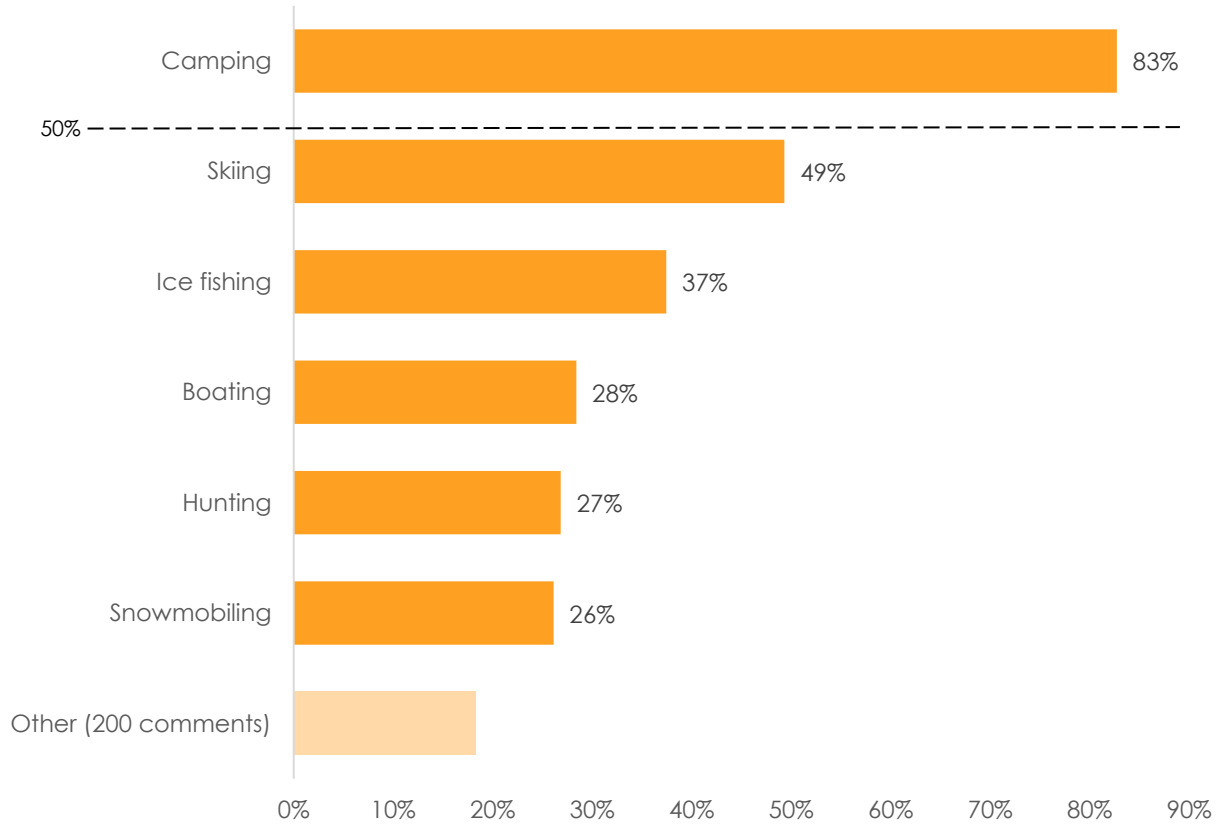
As shown in Figure 2, when asked which times of year they would be likely to use a territorial campground, 87% of respondents said they would be likely to use a campground during the summer season, 77% said they would likely use a campground later in September, after the Labour Day weekend, and 45% said they would likely use a campground in October. While there was less appetite for camping during the winter months, interest began to rise again in March (27%), April (42%) and early May (67%; Figure 4).

As shown in Figure 3, the most popular activities for respondents who said they would likely use campgrounds outside of the current summer season were camping (83%) and skiing (49%). Respondents also expressed a desire to have a campfire during winter day use activities like skiing, snowshoeing etc.

**Figure 2. In a typical year would you be likely to use a territorial campground if it was open during each of the following times of year?**



**Figure 3. Which activities would you be likely to pursue in campgrounds outside of the summer season?**



## Backcountry recreation

### *What's working*

- Protecting ecosystems and heritage and facilitating people's enjoyment of the parks

### **Quotes**

"Love my Yukon, protect it and show it off."

"Natural surroundings, Good facilities, Good reputation."

### *Future thinking*

- More hiking and backpacking trails and routes
- More winter actives
- Need to manage visitor use to
  - prevent/reduce impacts on natural environment and wildlife
  - Need to manage visitor uses to reduce conflict between different types of users in the same place at the same time
  - Ensure public safety, such as discharge of firearms in areas of concentrated recreation use like trailheads, visitor facilities
- Opportunities for partnership with First Nations
- There are concerns about managing the impacts of outdoor recreation and commercial tourism on public land, not just in designated parks.

## Quotes

“Important to have a range of opportunities so that a range of people can enjoy parks; more activities, routes etc.”

“As our population and visitation rises, we need to expand our park and campground network.”

“Keep the wilderness wild.”

“A successful parks strategy will need to account for increasing numbers of visitors to territorial parks. Concepts such as: Social, physical and biological carrying capacities, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, Visitor Impact Management and Limits of Acceptable Change, should be revisited by Yukon Parks staff with an eye to their applicability in a modern treaty context.”

“People come to the Yukon to get away from society. Simplicity goes along way.”

“Clean up along the popular wilderness campsites on the Yukon River and maintain more of the wilderness campsites since the river is so popular.”

## We asked

Based on the input above, we asked survey respondents to rate the importance of various attributes of large wilderness parks. The most highly rated were:

- Clean safe facilities (rated as important by 90% of respondents)
- Knowing it is protected for future generations (90%)
- Peace and quiet (86%)
- Wilderness experience/solitude (82%)
- Day-hiking trails (80%)
- Enforcement of park regulations (78%)

See Figure 4 for more.



#### Figure 4. How important to you is each of the following services/amenities when you use this kind of park?

Per cent of respondents who gave each item a score of 4 or 5 on a 5 point scale, where 1=not important and 5=very important.



## 4. Environmental protection

### What's working

- Parks are recognized as one of the best tools we have to protect biodiversity and keep Yukon sustainable for future generations

### Quotes

"I think that is being taken care of now and continuing is VERY important."

"Parks are one of the few tools that can be deployed to maintain ecological function. In many instances, large protected areas are the best way to maintain ecological functions such as predator-prey dynamics, fire, and hydrological cycles."

### Future thinking

- Implement system planning for parks and protected areas across Yukon
  - Grow the system to represent Yukon's ecoregions
  - Make parks large enough to provide biodiversity, social, economic, health, and climate benefits
  - Design new parks on a watershed basis, include all ecosystem types and critical habitat of species at risk
  - Keep them connected to enable climate change adaptation
  - Integrate landscape-level conservation planning into regional land use planning pursuant to the Umbrella Final Agreement, and into working with First Nations outside the UFA
  - Integrate planning for territorial parks with other protected areas including Indigenous protected or conserved areas, national parks, wilderness management areas, special management areas, and habitat protection areas
- Manage use of parks to make sure they protect ecological and cultural integrity. For example
  - Educate park users on no trace camping, responsible wildlife viewing, etc.
  - Limit use where necessary
  - Prevent human-wildlife conflicts
  - Monitoring, enforcement, and maintenance

- Opportunities for collaboration with First Nations governments, indigenous guardian programs, RRCs, federal government, and other Yukon government departments
- Ensure sufficient human and financial resources
  - Required expertise includes social sciences, natural sciences, and traditional knowledge

## Quotes

“Parks are the world’s best way to protect biodiversity if the park/park system is well funded and managed.”

“We need to plan nodes of connectivity while we can. We don’t want a Yellowstone situation in 100 years.”

“When will we see a new (large) park?”

“It is fine to say that one of the goals is to protect areas w/in each of the Yukon’s 20 ecozones but i see no action leading toward that protection.”

“Eco-system representation and protection of unique sensitive ecological niches requires a sufficient land-base and porous regulatory boundaries to ensure protection from destructive impacts without compromising sensitive ways of appreciating place.”

“Future parks should strive towards ensuring all ecosystem types are included in the park system. This may need to include a concerted effort to incorporate valley bottoms into the park system.”

“Animals move with climate change, if they can't they go extinct.”

“The utmost goal should be for no bear in Yukon Parks and Campgrounds to be destroyed or relocated due to human negligence.”

“Access to parks and campgrounds by visitors, Yukoners, hunters (where now legal) fishers and other folk needs to be maintained.”

“Connect the parks so they don’t become genetic islands.”

“Park system is an obvious strategy to achieve conservation goals.”

“Parks can play a vital role in Yukon’s sustainability.”

“A commitment to identify large, ecological representative protected areas should be included in the terms of reference for each forthcoming regional plan, including the Dawson Regional Plan.”

“Yukon is still relatively intact, so there is the opportunity to be a national conservation leader.”

## 5. Thriving communities

### What's working

- Parks and wild land are a main reason Yukon attracts visitors
- Parks provide local employment and contracting opportunities in communities

### Quotes

“Campgrounds are an important part of tourism infrastructure, and visitors love them”

### Future thinking

- Economic opportunities, within reason and not at the expense of park protection
  - Opportunities to support more local employment and entrepreneurship in communities
  - Look at what is being done elsewhere in the world
  - Leverage communities, cultural centres, visitor information centres as gateways to/for parks
- Support thriving communities in other ways than just economic
  - Closer connection/integration between communities and nearby parks
  - Celebrate culture, heritage, language
- Opportunities for collaboration with First Nations Development Corporations, Guardian programs, businesses, local communities, etc. For example
  - Nature-based sustainable tourism
  - Authentic cultural experiences
  - Special events
  - “glamping” options for visitors without their own camping gear
  - Interpretive walks on traditional trails and routes
  - Work with commercial tourism operators to meet mutual needs
  - Collaborate among YG departments including Environment, Tourism & Culture, Economic Development , Highways & Public Works

## Quotes

“I believe that our parks (federal and territorial) could play a bigger role than they do now.”

“Let’s make sure our visitors can experience the Yukon in a positive way.”

“Yukon should play to our unique strengths: real wilderness and real winter.”

“Supporting community development of Indigenous Guardians programs, where Indigenous citizens monitor ecological health, maintain cultural sites and protect sensitive areas and species.”

“I don’t see the need for economic opportunities in the park except to maintain the park itself. The economics of tourism in an area are far reaching anyways.”

“Long-distance trail or route opens up many direct and indirect business opportunities.”

“Work with FN dev. corps to develop economic strategies for parks and CGs. Include heritage, language and FN culture.”

“Culture incorporated into parks.”

“Don’t get stuck on government as the vehicle; first the objective, and then the vehicle and ‘who’ is best. Sometimes it is government, and sometimes it is not, and that is ok. It is about the objective.”

## 6. Financial sustainability

### What's working

- Yukon parks have a strong positive reputation, leading to growing visitation and use.

### Quotes

“We have incredible natural capital, which is why people come.”

“I think that the parks and campgrounds in Yukon are real treasures that will benefit Yukon, the people and the wildlife for many, many years.”

“Great reputation with respect to cost, cleanliness and care.”

### Future thinking

- Territorial parks are an important public service that needs to be funded by government, with a reasonable amount of cost recovery from park users.
  - Territorial parks are a public good and Yukon government should invest in the parks system
  - Those who use facilities and services should pay some, but not all, of the cost. Need to balance the user-pay principle with fair public access. In other words, don't aim for full cost recovery.
  - All types of users should pay their fair share: residents, non-residents, commercial enterprises.
- Current fees are outdated and should be reviewed.
  - While some participants expressed appreciation for Yukon's low camping fees, many more volunteered that Yukon's camping fees are much lower than neighbouring jurisdictions and that they could and should be higher.
  - Reasons given for increasing fees included offsetting costs, the user-pay principle (more of the cost should be borne by the user rather than the taxpayers), managing demand, and improving fairness of competition with private campgrounds.
  - Daily camping fees (\$12) and especially the price of annual permit (\$50 per year, \$0 for seniors) were seen as unreasonably low.
  - People generally called for a modest increase to fees, i.e. that we could raise fees and still be cheaper than neighbouring jurisdictions. BC fees were often cited as unreasonably high.
  - Ensure there is an affordable option for low income residents.

- Several forms of differential pricing or other details were suggested, such as higher fees for non-residents than residents, higher fees for RVs than for tents, higher fees for higher-serviced parks, higher fees at busier campgrounds, and charging per campsite rather than per accommodation unit.
- Keep it simple
  - People favoured maintaining the current basic amenities of campgrounds in order to keep costs down. (Rather than adding things like showers and power hook-ups which would increase the cost.)
  - While some people suggested charging for firewood separately in campgrounds, most prefer to keep firewood included in one simple camping fee.
  - Keep costs reasonable through efficiency, within reason.

## Quotes

“A strategy and plans are all for naught without funds sufficient to support capital projects and operations.”

“Camping in the Yukon is a birthright. That said there does need to be some user commitment to ensure the provision of services and maintenance of facilities.”

“Charge the appropriate amount. Current fees outdated.”

“Charge more, but not too much more.”

“Bring in a Visitor pass (e.g. 30 days or 60 days), or prepaid card, coupons. Visitors have bank cards and can't get cash. No ATMS. And when there are they only get large bills, not change.”

“\$12 is annoying. Allow credit card option or make it \$10 or \$15, or even \$20. Especially for visitors.”

“It should be affordable recreation for Yukoners - a place for them to go on the weekend or on vacation.”

“Resources (people, money) need to be allocated to meet increasing demands, so that the use of parks is SUSTAINABLE.”

“Keep fees reasonable. One all-inclusive fee.”

“Fees should recoup the cost of providing a personal benefit versus a public good and reflect public support.”

## We asked

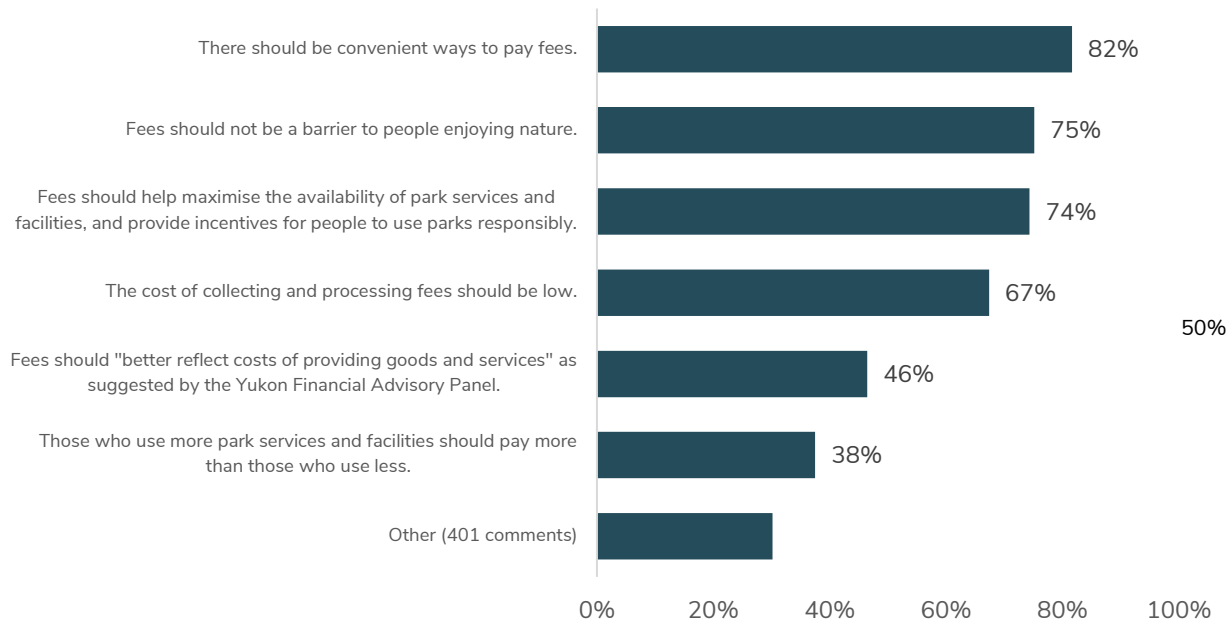
Based on the input above, we asked a survey question to get feedback on some proposed objectives to guide a review of park fees. Respondents were asked whether they agree that a review of park fees should be guided by a set of listed objectives. While all objectives received more support than opposition, respondents were most likely to agree that:

- There should be convenient ways to pay fees (82%),
- Fees should not be a barrier to people enjoying nature (75%)
- Fees should help maximize the availability of park services and facilities and provide incentives for people to use parks responsibly (74%)
- The cost of collecting and processing fees should be low (67%)

See Figure 5 for more.

### Figure 5. Do you agree that the review of park fees should be guided by each of the following objectives?

Percent of respondents who gave each item a score of 4 or 5 on a 5 point scale, where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree.





## What's next

Our next step is to develop a draft Yukon Parks Strategy to set long-term direction for Yukon's system of territorial parks, including wilderness parks, campgrounds, recreation sites and more. We will use the input gathered from Talking Yukon Parks to guide us in this step.

The draft strategy will provide guidance on how to sustainably deliver the environmental, economic, social, and health benefits of our parks. Modernized regulations will be an important tool to achieve this, so we will also develop draft regulations to complement the strategy.

We will provide opportunities for public input on the draft strategy and regulation proposals and we anticipate these opportunities will occur during 2019. We will post updates and current information on [EngageYukon.ca](https://engageyukon.ca) once available.

## Related documents

There are a number of related documents with more detailed information on our work so far in developing a draft Yukon parks strategy. The following documents are available at [Yukon.ca](https://yukon.ca):

- [Talking Yukon Parks public engagement compilation of all comments](#)
- [Talking Yukon Parks public engagement survey 2018 summary report](#)
- [Discussion document: Shaping the Future of Yukon territorial Parks and Campgrounds](#)
- [Talking Yukon Parks – Engagement process infographic](#)