

“What We Heard”

Public Open House

Location: Pelican Rapids Inn Blue Room – Fort Smith, NT

Date: February 23, 2015

Time: 7:00pm to 9:45pm

The session was attended by seventeen (17) members of the public and began with an introduction by the Regional Superintendent of Lands. A representative from the GNWT – Department of Lands then gave a short presentation on the Recreational Land Management Framework explaining “where are we, how we got here, where we are going and how you can help”. After the presentation the facilitator led a group discussion through five (5) questions to help draw out local issues and ideas. Feedback from the session is organized by question.

The Future – In 10 years what should recreational cabin development/use look like?

- In the last ten years there have been a lot more cabins – it’s good to see more people out of the land, and there is a growing demand – there are both traditional cabins and recreational cabins
- Cabins are spread out as people are looking for peace and quiet – the understanding is that existing rules separate cabins with a 500m separation between lease boundaries
- There should be a limit to the number of people on each lake to protect the environment – water, fish
- The use of motorized boats should also be limited to reduce pollution, and noise
- Some lakes can take a bit more use than others – especially if there is an inlet/outlet where water flows through
- Need to avoid conflicts with registered traplines, and people with registered traplines should have a say in where cabin leases are allowed
- The corners of leased lots should be marked and mapped so that people can know where they are

New Areas for Cabin Development – What should be considered when planning new areas?

- When leases are applied for, other people who know the area should be asked about whether the location is good, or if there are other uses in the area that should be considered
- Talking to the Band and Métis about potential new leases should also be required with adequate time for review and commenting – as much as a couple of months
- The environmental impacts should be considered:
 - Watersheds
 - Wastewater

- Sensitive/rare plant species
- Fuel storage
- Nesting areas (for example Whooping Crane)
- The landscape needs to be considered when siting cabins
 - In more level areas a 500m separation can be maintained between cabins
 - clusters of cabins might be an option where there is rocky sloping terrain and limited area in which to build
- Should be both road access and fly-in/skidoo in access leases available
- All cabins need to be near the water, but set back 30 meters (100 ft) from water
- Fluctuating water levels and erosion need to be considered near rivers in particular
- There should not be any cabin leases where they will interfere with or block traditional trails – and access to traditional use areas needs to be maintained, with no gates or road blocks allowed
- Existing users in the area need to be considered, and no new cabin areas should be in the area of registered traplines

New Lease Allocation – What is the fairest way?

- NWT residents should have priority, or should even be the only people who can hold recreational leases
- People from other places take away limited opportunities
- Some existing commercial recreational uses could be grandfathered (i.e. fishing, hunting, or eco lodges)
- People should be allowed to select cabin locations – following one of two optional processes:
 - One would be to have people select a location, or find an existing possibly un-used cabin, and check to make sure it is acceptable (see previous comments under “New areas”)
 - The second option would be to find out what is available – this would involve the GNWT identifying sites and pre-determining suitability
- Leases holders need to stay in ‘good standing’
- Renewing leases every ten years is good, and if cabins are not being used, they should be made available to others
- The same allocation processes should apply across the NWT
- There should be no limits placed on the number of cabins used on traplines, but a limit of 3 might be good for recreational cabin leases (could need different cabins for hunting vs. fishing locations)
- Would not be fair for one person to have four leases on one lake, multiple leases would need to be in defined location
- After getting a lease you now need to build within 2 years, with options for extensions as long as there are signs of progress – should consider extending to 3 year period and consider the time of year the lease was issued (so that the building season/schedule is reasonable)

Rules and Responsibilities – What kind of rules and responsibilities should be established?

- The most important thing about rules is enforcement
- Need follow up on the rules included in leases – for example, making sure that cabins are actually located where they are supposed to be
- Government departments need to work together, especially Environment and Natural Resources and Lands because they are both out doing inspections
- Inspection frequency of every 3 years is good for cabins, as long as there are no major issues – if there are problems frequency of inspections should be increased
- There should be better communication from the Department
 - Lands should have all email addresses, and mailing addresses of lessees to be able to contact people when anything is being discussed
 - Other means of communication should include posters for community bulletin boards (and possibly a GNWT only notice board so that posters don't get lost among all the others), notices sent to Band and Métis offices, newsletters, Facebook, radio, websites
- Other departments with mandates for land based activities such as Environment and Natural Resources should be attending meetings related to cabins
- Leaseholders need to be responsible for keeping sites clean – not accumulating junk (like some of the cabins on Highway 3 between Behchoko and Yellowknife)
- Any abandoned sites need to be cleaned up by the GNWT
- Other land users should be responsible for reporting problems – but it needs to be clear who to call – and to know something will be done
- Definition of 'squatters' is needed – it is okay to have a tent frame as long as there are no permanent walls, and it is only for temporary use
- People also want to know that temporary uses are being monitored for other permits (hunting, fishing), and people who leave boats and stuff behind should be considered 'squatting'
- There needs to be fines – if you are going to have rules, they need to be enforced
- Definitions of 'recreational cabin', 'traditional cabin' and 'hunting cabin' are needed, and what difference it makes needs to be clear
 - Is it the use or the user that makes a difference? (i.e. are traditional cabins only Aboriginal owned?)
 - Are the rules the same?
 - Are the fees the same?
- No lease is currently required for general hunting licence holders, but the same protection from fire is expected from Environment and Natural Resources, and cabin owners have similar responsibilities (as other types of cabins)
- Environment and Natural Resources knows where all cabins are and there could be some kind of lease with no fees to improve coordination with Lands
- Suggested that the Métis should be doing some advance planning to consider what will be allowed once land claims are settled, as it hard to 'straighten things out' to fix it later

Future Lease Fees – Should all cabin lots be priced the same or should it vary? What should be considered?

- Discussed the difference between fees and taxes
- In this area/region it was felt that fees should be the same regardless of whether cabin leases have road access or not
- There should be some regional differentiation of lease fees, they should not all be based on Yellowknife rates
- One suggestion was to consider market rates when setting fees, but then there was discussion that this wasn't very feasible in areas where there was no real market
- Cabins occupied year round with road access should be paying higher fees than seasonal users
- Paying for services is more related to taxes – and in some cases services are being provided by the Town to road accessible cabins
- The length of occupancy (i.e. if someone has had a lease for 25 years) should also be considered when setting any new fees
- Preference is to maintain the current system of an application fee, and an annual \$150 lease fee
- Cabin owners currently deal with at least 3 different departments for various charges and would like to see some coordination:
 - Municipal and Community Affairs for property taxes
 - Lands for lease fees
 - Environment and Natural Resources for various licenses and permits
 - Sometimes Transportation (for road access) or Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations

Other Comments

Participants are interested in providing more input when Recreational Land Management Framework is drafted, and would like to know that other departments are involved. Having adequate time to complete reviews is important, and it was suggested that people need time to talk among themselves, and that a couple of months might be needed – don't rush – this is important. It was also suggested that a meeting with the Regional Superintendent could be set up to go over draft documents when they are ready for distribution.

Meeting ended at approximately 9:45pm.