



GUIDELINES FOR COMPLETING A LAND USE AND SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

A METHOD TO INTEGRATE LAND USE AND
SUSTAINABILITY OBJECTIVES INTO
GNWT DECISION PROCESSES

Government of
Northwest Territories

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INTRODUCTION

The Land Use and Sustainability Framework (LUSF) was released in February 2014 and sets out a vision, principles, and land interests that are intended to guide Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) decisions on land use. Although the LUSF set a solid foundation for land and resource management, there are gaps in the LUSF in terms of operational guidance. As a result, there are differing interpretations of how to use and implement the LUSF. Key gaps include:

- specific objectives that reflect which important values should be considered in land and resource management decisions; and
- a consistent means to integrate the LUSF into the GNWT's decision processes.

To address these gaps, the Department of Lands worked collaboratively with other GNWT departments to develop a collective set of nine aspirational GNWT land use and sustainability objectives. The aim of these objectives is to provide consistent guidance to GNWT departments on what is important to consider in decisions on land use.

In addition, the Land Use and Sustainability Appraisal (Sustainability Appraisal) has been developed as a method for integrating the objectives into GNWT decisions and initiatives related to or affecting land use.

These guidelines set out when and how a Sustainability Appraisal should be completed and promote a consistent approach for integrating the nine objectives into GNWT decision processes.

For further information on the LUSF see [*Northern Lands Northern Leadership – The GNWT Land Use and Sustainability Framework*](#).

LAND USE AND SUSTAINABILITY OBJECTIVES

The nine aspirational objectives were developed by an interdepartmental working group and were drawn from a review of 13 GNWT land and resource-related strategies. These strategies were subject to extensive public engagement during their development and reflect the priorities of NWT residents. The strategies used to identify the LUSF objectives are:

- A Greenhouse Gas Strategy for the Northwest Territories (2011-2015)
- A Vision for the NWT Power System Plan (2013-2033)
- Caribou Forever – Our Heritage, Our Responsibility. A Barren-Ground Caribou Management Strategy for the Northwest Territories (2011-2015)
- Connecting Us – Northwest Territories Transportation Strategy (2015-2040)
- Healthy Land, Healthy People - Government of the Northwest Territories Priorities for Advancement of Conservation Network Planning (2016-2021)
- Northwest Territories Economic Opportunities Strategy
- Northwest Territories Energy Action Plan (2013-2016)

- Northwest Territories Mineral Development Strategy
- Northwest Territories Solar Energy Strategy (2012-2017)
- NWT Biomass Energy Strategy (2012-2015)
- NWT Water Stewardship Strategy (2011-2015)
- Strong Cultures, Strong Territory – GNWT Culture and Heritage Strategic Framework (2015-2025)
- Wood Bison Management Strategy for the Northwest Territories (2010-2020)

While there has been no direct engagement with the public on the objectives, they are representative of the strategies from which they were derived. The draft objectives were shared with Economy and Environment Deputy Ministers Committee, and with the Economy and Environment Committee of Cabinet in 2018.

The purpose of using the objectives is to ensure that a complete suite of factors important to NWT residents – as represented by the objectives – have been considered and addressed in decision making when planning a new GNWT initiative. The NWT Land Interests in the LUSF document state that the GNWT has a responsibility to ensure decisions regarding land use and land management reflect the interests and priorities of the residents of the NWT. Use of the objectives in land use and land management decision-making helps to achieve this.

The Land Use and Sustainability Objectives are:

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation - The use of land and resources supports the NWT in adapting to climate change and contributes to meeting territorial, national and global commitments for reducing greenhouse gasses.

Communities - The use of land and resources supports healthy and vibrant communities.

Culture and Heritage - NWT residents have access to land and resources to support their cultures and ways of life, and NWT heritage resources are safeguarded for future generations.

Economy - The management and use of land and resources contributes to a strong and resilient economy and a positive business environment across all regions.

Ecosystems and Biodiversity - Land and resource use is managed to support ecosystems, including the diversity of species and habitats and ecological functions and processes.

GNWT Financial Self-Sufficiency - The use of land and resources supports greater GNWT financial self-sufficiency and generates revenue (such as royalties or taxes) in support of programs and services to NWT residents and communities.

Land, Water, and Air - Land and resource use is managed to minimize impacts to water, land, and air.

People - NWT residents enjoy the physical, mental, and spiritual health, and secure livelihoods that come from a healthy environment and access to land and resources.

Priority Species - Land and resource use is managed to support healthy and viable populations of species, particularly those with special ecological, cultural, or social importance.

LAND USE AND SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

The Sustainability Appraisal is one method to assess how new GNWT initiatives related to land use may affect or influence the nine objectives. The initiatives can then be revised to minimize negative influences on the objectives, and to enhance positive ones.

A Sustainability Appraisal is intended to be carried out simultaneously with the planning of a new GNWT initiative, policy, or decision that may affect land use. The stages of the Sustainability Appraisal can be added to, or incorporated, with the existing processes departments use to plan and develop new initiatives. The goal is to have a consistent method for applying the objectives to new GNWT initiatives on land use. The intention is to ensure that existing processes consider the wide range of values represented by the objectives.

Integrating a Sustainability Appraisal early in the planning of a new GNWT initiative will help to ensure that GNWT departments:

- consider the land use and sustainability objectives;
- carry out the planning of the initiative in a way that supports the objectives;
- seek information from other GNWT departments on the objectives;
- assess how the initiative is likely to influence the objectives;
- seek changes to the initiative that will mitigate negative influences and enhance positive influences on the objectives; and
- document any changes made to the initiative due to consideration of the objectives (this information can be used to summarize the Sustainability Appraisal process and outcomes for optional inclusion in briefing notes and decision instruments).

For GNWT proposed land use projects (such as a road or other infrastructure project), completing a Sustainability Appraisal should complement, but not duplicate, the process conducted by regulatory bodies such as the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board or the land and water boards, and better prepare the project for environmental review. The GNWT will not need to complete Sustainability Appraisals for non-GNWT projects that are undergoing environmental review.¹

¹ The Department of Lands is aware that the MVEIRB and other assessment bodies are developing guidance on addressing sustainability in project-specific environmental assessments. The GNWT will provide feedback on the guidance if requested, and will answer sustainability-related information requests as required during environmental assessment proceedings.

Similarly, it is noted that in 2020, the Executive Council Decision Paper templates and processes were updated to include climate change considerations. The process developed by ENR to support the completion of that requirement would not need to be duplicated in the Sustainability Appraisal, rather, the work done under ENR's process could be recorded in the Sustainability Appraisal.

Completing the stages of the Sustainability Appraisal will also help to fulfill the Principles from the LUSF (Appendix 3), which guide GNWT actions concerning land use and land management.

STAGES OF A SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

The Land Use and Sustainability Appraisal process consists of four stages (Figure 1). The process is intended to be iterative and flexible.

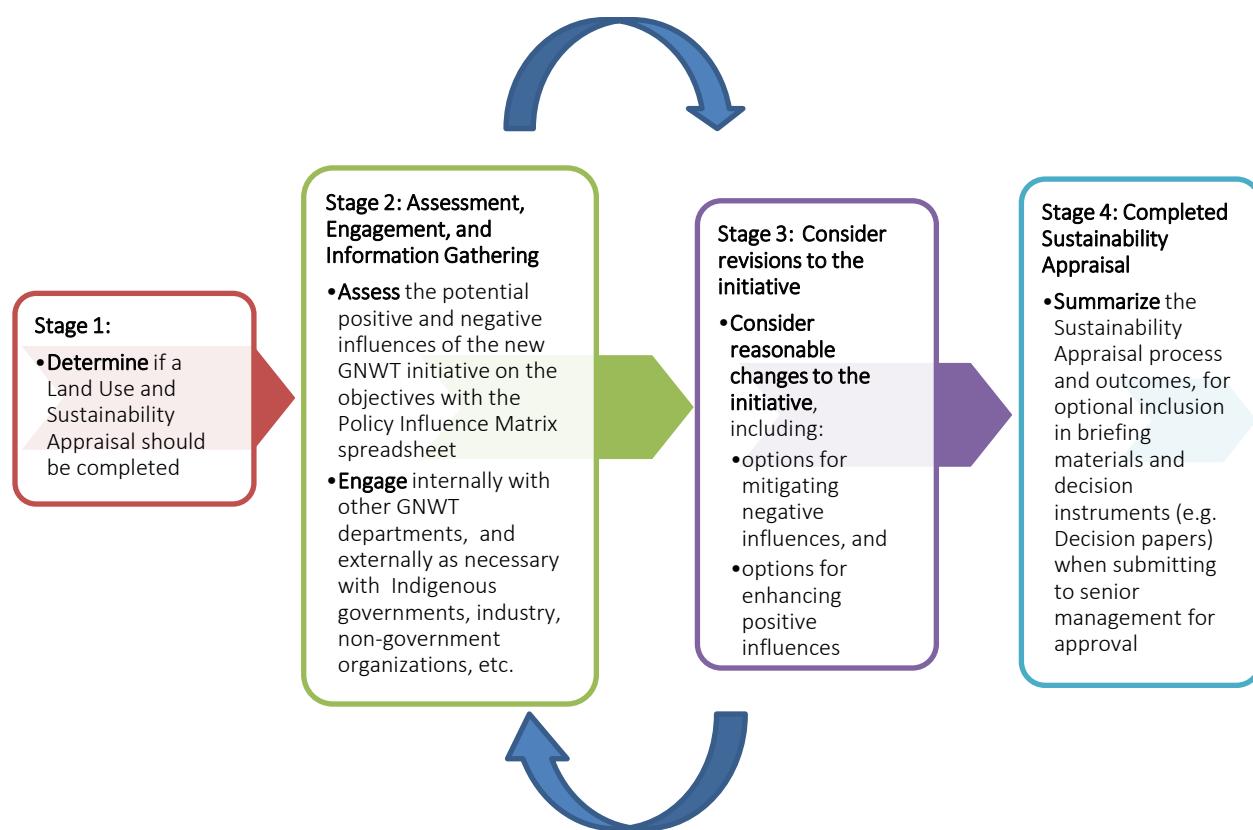


Figure 1. Stages of a Land Use and Sustainability Appraisal

Stage 1: Determine if a Sustainability Appraisal should be completed

A Sustainability Appraisal should be completed when a new major GNWT initiative that may impact land use or land management, is being developed. The Sustainability Appraisal should be started at the

beginning of the planning and development of the new initiative. For clarity, a Sustainability Appraisal is not meant to be completed for existing initiatives or for day-to-day operational activities, for example the issuance of leases or land use authorizations.

A GNWT initiative can be a major new GNWT infrastructure proposal or project, as well as a policy, program, Action Plan, Framework, Implementation Plan, Strategy, or decision that may impact land use or land management and will require deputy minister, Ministerial, or Cabinet approval.

Although completing a Sustainability Appraisal is not a requirement, it is encouraged that any new initiatives that will be brought to a DM committee for discussion will include a completed appraisal, for consideration in senior management discussions and decision making.

Stage 2: Assessment and Engagement

Stages 2 and 3 are iterative and are intended to be revised as the planning of an initiative evolves.

2.1 Assessment

There are two potential ways to conduct an assessment, using a Policy Influence Matrix spreadsheet, or a questions-based approach.

Policy Influence Matrix

The Policy Influence Matrix is a spreadsheet that can be used to record if the new GNWT initiative has considered the objectives and how the planned initiative, as currently proposed, would influence each of the objectives. It requires the user to view the major components of the initiative through the lens of each of the objectives. For example, has the planning of the initiative considered how it would affect ecosystems and biodiversity or culture and heritage?

Figure 2. Policy Influence Matrix

The important steps of filling in the matrix are:

- listing the major components of the initiative in the left-hand column, and
- assessing the potential for positive or negative influences from the components of the initiative on the objectives

The completed matrix should identify at a high level what the positive and negative influences the components of the initiative will likely have on the objectives and, where additional information is necessary. In this way, the matrix can identify where to prioritize efforts to when planning an initiative.

Through further engagement and information gathering, revisions to the initiative can be identified, considered, and included in an updated initiative. The intended result is that negative influences will be mitigated and positive influences enhanced. For more detailed information on completing a Policy Influence Matrix spreadsheet, see Appendix 2.

Questions-Based Assessment

Assessing new GNWT initiatives through the lens of each of the objectives is the main goal when conducting a Sustainability Appraisal. An alternative to using the Policy Influence Matrix is to use a questions-based approach.

Questions to be considered for each objective:

1. How would the initiative positively impact the objective?
2. How could the positive impacts on the objective be enhanced?
3. How would the initiative negatively impact the objective?
4. How could negative impacts to the objective be avoided or mitigated?

Use of the objectives also helps to ensure initiatives meet the LUSF Principles of ‘Balanced and Sustainable’ and ‘Responsible and Responsive’:

Balanced and Sustainable:

“Land management decisions consider ecological, social, cultural, and economic values to ensure maximum benefits to current and future generations.”

Responsible and Responsive

“...Land management policies and decisions are adaptable to new information and changing environmental, economic, and social conditions.”

2.2 Engagement

When proposing a new initiative related to land use, it is likely that multiple GNWT departments will have an interest or mandate and expertise to provide relevant information. Increased internal engagement between the planners of the initiative and GNWT subject matter experts on the objectives will support greater understanding of the objectives, the potential influence of the initiative on the objectives, and

potential changes to the initiative that will positively influence the objectives. This can help to develop an initiative that is representative of the interests of the GNWT as a whole.

The internal engagement should start once the desired outcome of the initiative is identified and should be targeted to relevant GNWT departments. The level of engagement should be appropriate to the scale of the new initiative. It is assumed that departments practice internal and external engagement as a normal part of the process of planning an initiative, and that the engagement required for completing the Sustainability Appraisal would be integrated into those existing processes.

Engaging internal GNWT subject matter experts on the objectives early on can allow for a better understanding of the issues, and changes or additions to the initiative that may not be possible if the initiative was more fully developed (and it is too late to make changes).

In addition, internal engagement should be based on collecting specific information on how major components of the proposed initiative may influence each of the objectives, and how changes to the initiative can be identified and considered, positive impacts can be enhanced and negative impacts mitigated.

The engagement conducted and its results should be documented. This information should be used as part of a summary of the Sustainability Appraisal.

External engagement may be required to better understand interests and potential impacts and to ensure the principles noted below are fully considered. Depending on the type of 'initiative' the SA could require direct engagement to seek information, or, propose how and when such engagement would occur to ensure that information is captured as the initiative advances.

Conducting internal and external engagement helps to meet the LUSF Principles of 'Coordinated and Collaborative', and 'Relevant and Informed':

Coordinated and Collaborative:

"Land use, planning, and management are shared responsibilities. Decisions about land use are made in coordination with relevant GNWT departments and external organizations and agencies that have responsibilities for land use planning and management decisions. ..."; and,

Relevant and Informed:

"Decisions about land and resources within the NWT are made primarily by residents of the NWT. Communities and residents in all regions have the opportunity for meaningful engagement and input into land use decisions. ..."

Stage 3: Considering Options and Revising the Initiative

Once an initial Policy Influence Matrix or questions-based approach has been completed, the results should indicate where the new GNWT initiative will have positive, negative, unknown/uncertain or no influences on the objectives.

The next step is to review the assessment results and make modifications to the initiative to enhance, mitigate or otherwise positively address the influences on the objectives. This step should include further engagement and information gathering as required to confirm assumptions and answer questions or unknowns raised through completing the assessment.

Stages 2 and 3 are iterative and the Policy Influence Matrix (or questions) can be repeated or updated as the initiative develops. The goal is to have as many positive influences as possible, and few or no negative or unknown/uncertain influences. For any remaining known or expected negative influences, having these documented as the project advances provides an ability to actively consider mitigation measures as the initiative advances.

Changes made to the initiative should be documented, to keep track of how the initiative changes over time, in response to potential influences on the objectives.

Stage 4: Complete and Summarize Sustainability Appraisal

The Sustainability Appraisal is a method to support decision making when developing a new GNWT initiative. The main outcomes of a completed Sustainability Appraisal are the changes made to the initiative after considering the influence of the initiative on the objectives.

An output of the process can be to write a brief summary outlining the changes made to the initiative after completing a Sustainability Appraisal, for optional inclusion in briefing notes and decision papers. The summary would also provide a record of having completed a Sustainability Appraisal and will fulfill the LUSF Principle of Transparent and Accountable.

Transparent and Accountable: *'Land management decision-making processes are clear, transparent, consistent and communicated'.*

To help complete a written summary of the Sustainability Appraisal process and outcomes, it will be important to document and track the Sustainability Appraisal process and any changes made to the initiative as it is developed.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Sustainability Appraisal Summary Outline

Name of Initiative

Provide a brief summary of the initiative and describe how it may impact land use or land management

Summarize the engagement conducted

Describe the internal departments and experts contacted, and any external groups engaged

Provide a summary of the final results of the assessment (how the initiative may influence each objective), and changes made to the initiative to address any influences, for each of the objectives

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Communities

Culture and Heritage

Economy

Ecosystems and Biodiversity

GNWT Financial Self-Sufficiency

Land, Water, and Air

People

Priority Species

Appendix 2: Completing the Policy Influence Matrix Spreadsheet

Some points to consider when filling out a Policy Influence Matrix spreadsheet:

- The first step in using the matrix is to define and write out the individual components of the new initiative, and add them to the left-hand column of the matrix. These components of the initiative can be revised, removed and added to as an initiative develops.
- The level of detail of the components of the initiative reflects the level of output of the matrix. The more general the components, the more general the level of the assessment and the outcome of the assessment. The more detailed the components, the more detailed the results.
- Filling out the matrix is done by assessing the influence of each component of the initiative (left hand column) on each of the nine objectives (top row). The influence can be positive, negative, uncertain/unknown or no influence.
- When filling out the matrix, make your assessment for each box based on the intersection of the specific component and a specific objective.
- A spreadsheet template has been developed to make it simpler to fill out the matrix.
- If you are using the spreadsheet template, you can use the drop-down menu to select:
 - 1 – Positive influence = Green
 - 2 – Uncertain/unknown influence = Yellow
 - 3 – Negative influence = Red
 - No influence = Blank
- To clear a cell, right click and select ‘Clear contents’.
- For each objective there is a drop-down menu to rate the influence, and a box for brief notes.
- It is possible that some components of the initiative will not have any influence or an insignificant influence over one or more of the objectives, and the matrix can account for that by leaving the drop-down menu blank, and writing ‘no influence’ in the notes box.
- If there are other factors about the initiative that would impact your rating that are not in the list of components, revise the component or add a new one.
- It can be useful to make brief notes in the spreadsheet about the reasons for your assessments. There is room for interpretation when considering the objectives, and it can be useful to keep track of the specific aspects you focused on in the assessment.
- The matrix can be completed multiple times as the initiative develops.
- Any aspect of the initiative that would impact the objectives should be included as a component.
- Every person, department, and organization brings their own experience, assumptions, expertise, and interests when completing a matrix, so there is no ‘right’ answer for the matrix.
- The matrix can be completed individually or as a group. Completing it as a group can identify differences in perspective and can trigger discussions that result in new or revised assessments of the influence on the objectives, and changes to the initiative.
- It will be important to document any influences that are identified, so they can be considered and addressed as the initiative develops.

- Disagreement between parties on what the influences may be is an opportunity for discussion, clarification, and to consider revising an initiative.
- The earlier the matrix is first completed in the planning and development of an initiative, the more opportunity there will be for considering changes to the initiative and adding enhancements or mitigations.
- Each proposed initiative will be unique, so the level of detail considered for the matrix should be adapted and will be unique as well.

Appendix 3: LUSF Principles

Balanced and Sustainable - *Land management decisions consider ecological, social, cultural, and economic values to ensure maximum benefits to current and future generations.*

Responsible and Responsive - *Land management decisions are made in the context of sound environmental stewardship, where all of society takes responsibility to maintain a healthy environment, and ecological integrity. Precautionary decision-making and best management practices are implemented to protect and conserve the condition, quality, diversity, and abundance of land values. Land management policies and decisions are adaptable to new information and changing environmental, economic, and social conditions.*

Respectful – *Land management decision-making recognizes and respects Aboriginal and Treaty rights, as well as third-party interests and legal rights.*

Relevant and Informed – *Decisions about land and resources within the NWT are made primarily by residents of the NWT. Communities and residents in all regions have the opportunity for meaningful engagement and input into land use decisions. Traditional, local and scientific knowledge are used in the decision-making process.*

Coordinated and Collaborative - *Land use, planning and management are shared responsibilities. Decisions about land use are made in coordination with relevant GNWT departments and external organizations and agencies that have responsibilities for land use planning and management decisions. Trans-boundary land management issues are managed cooperatively within the NWT as well as with neighboring jurisdictions.*

Fair and Equitable – *Responsibilities for environmental stewardship and creation of revenue opportunities are shared equitably across all regions of the NWT.*

Transparent and Accountable - *Land management decision-making processes are clear, transparent, consistent, and communicated.*