



WHAT WE HEARD

Renewal of Healthy Land, Healthy People:
Priorities for NWT Conservation Network Planning and Implementation 2023-2028

September | 2023

Government of
Northwest Territories



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Introduction

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) is committed to ensuring the land and water of the Northwest Territories (NWT) continue to support ecosystem health, cultural continuity, and sustainable economic development for current and future generations. Protecting biodiversity through the enhancement and management of a conservation network is a key part of achieving these priorities.

The GNWT’s approach to supporting the conservation network has been guided by *Healthy Land, Healthy People: GNWT’s Priorities for Advancement of Conservation Network Planning 2016-2021*, which set out two overarching priorities:

- 1) finalization of existing candidate areas brought forward under the Protected Areas Strategy, and
- 2) collaboratively developing a renewed strategy for conservation network planning.

Based on input received through a public survey in 2021, the GNWT prepared a draft Healthy Land, Healthy People work plan for the next five years (2023-2028). As part of this process, the Department of Environment and Climate Change (ECC) (formerly Environment and Natural Resources) solicited feedback on the draft work plan from partners and stakeholders between February 2022 and September 2022. The draft work plan was distributed to Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, as well as non-government organizations, industry, and other stakeholders for feedback. ECC received 20 submissions.



Summary of what we heard:

1. Clarifying language

WHAT WE HEARD

Many respondents had suggested revising the language in the document to be clearer and easier to read and changing the headings in the document to be more specific to the contents of each section.

Because of the nature of the work plan, some technical language is used in the document. Respondents suggested that some terms, such as “protected areas”, “conservation areas” “territorial protected areas”, “territorial wildlife conservation areas” and “conservation network” needed consistent, easily understandable definitions. Additionally, while the draft document included a glossary, there were requests for other technical language used in the document to be included, for example, “nature-based climate solutions” and “ecological representation”. It was further requested that terms in the glossary be organized in alphabetical order, rather than order of appearance.

There were also requests to include more detail in the document. Some examples include listing all the groups, like land and water boards, land use planning boards, renewable resources boards, non-governmental organizations, and others, that may be involved with specific objectives, and how the work plan will interact with other land and water stewardship initiatives, such as the NWT Water Stewardship Strategy or *Species at Risk (NWT) Act*.

One respondent requested clarification on what will be posted on the Protected Areas Registry in the document. Another noted that the relationship between conservation network planning and land use planning could be undertaken concurrently.

WHAT WE DID

ECC revised the language in the draft document to be clearer and include less technical language where possible. More details were added to provide greater context to readers on the work done on the conservation network. Some of the headings used in the document have also been edited to better communicate the section’s contents.

The glossary has been alphabetized and expanded to provide definitions of technical language used. All suggested additional terms were added to the document. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) definition for protected areas has been used for consistency.

A new objective pertaining to keeping the Protected Areas Registry up to date has been added and the relationship between conservation network planning and land use planning has been clarified, to an extent, in the nomination section of the work plan.

2. Priority outcomes and objectives

WHAT WE HEARD

Most comments on the draft document focused on changes to the priority outcomes and objectives.

Some respondents recommended general changes to the objectives, such as rewording some to be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and targeted) and numbering the objectives to improve readability. There were also requests to reconsider the wording of the priority outcomes and change the original structure of the sections to improve clarity.

There were many recommendations to add objectives that were not in the original draft document. Multiple respondents suggested separating public education regarding conservation and compliance into two objectives rather than one. There were also multiple recommendations to make the finance objective its own priority outcome, given its importance. One respondent suggested that an approach be included to evaluate the completion of objectives at a midpoint within the 5-year period of Healthy Land, Healthy People. There was a request that a wetland specific objective be included in the work plan, as well as a request an annual territory-wide meeting with all the groups involved in conservation in the NWT.

There were also recommendations to add broader priority outcomes such as “Implement the NWT *Protected Areas Act*” or “Implement the Legal and Relational Obligations of the *Protected Areas Act*”, and objectives such as “how to support the broader conservation network outside of territorial protected areas”. There was a recommendation that a transboundary conservation network working group be formed to meet the priorities identified in the document. Additionally, another suggestion was that the GNWT may want to coordinate a joint publication, such as a protected areas newsletter, between the GNWT protected areas, Parks Canada Agency, the Canadian Wildlife Service, and any Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas that assesses the conservation network.

Some feedback requested more detail be added to the existing objectives for context and clarity. Multiple comments suggested that objectives should list partners and leads, such as other GNWT departments, Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, federal government partners, academia and other non-government organizations. Additionally, some suggested that descriptions of objectives regarding conservation initiatives, established and candidate territorial protected areas include the group that first identified it for protection and where in the process each initiative is. It was also requested that funding be included in each objective.

We heard from some respondents that certain objectives should have more detail about the timeline of their completion, such as the development of a research plan and reporting on the state of the conservation network.

WHAT WE DID

ECC reviewed the objectives in the document and reworded the objectives for clarity. Details such as partners and milestones have been added to each objective. The objectives have also been numbered to improve readability. The priority outcomes were rearranged into the following broad categories:

- Establishment
- Management
- Inform and educate
- Funding
- Support

The document was revised to include objectives about Indigenous-led conservation initiatives in the NWT, public education and promotion of NWT protected areas and conservation areas, enforcement and monitoring of the network. A funding specific priority outcome was also added.

ECC will evaluate the objectives in Healthy Land, Healthy People to inform the development of the next work plan.

The GNWT recognizes the importance of wetlands as a distinct ecosystem in the territory, but is not focusing specific Healthy Land, Healthy People objectives on wetlands at this time. The completion of a wetland inventory is included as an action item in the GNWT Water Stewardship Strategy Action Plan (2021-2025). Wetlands are considered in conservation network planning and encompassed in the use of the term “land” in the document.

Since most of ECC’s work encompasses “Implementing the NWT *Protected Areas Act*” and “Implementing the Legal and Relational Obligations of the *Protected Areas Act*”, ECC did not include these suggested objectives in the revised document. Instead, multiple objectives contribute to the implementation of both the Act, regulations, and establishment agreements.

In 2020 and 2022, ECC hosted the NWT Conservation Network Gathering - a multi-day conference to share and learn from Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, academics, boards, non-government organizations, and others that are engaged in protected area and conservation area establishment, planning, management, and operations. This forum provides an opportunity for transboundary conservation network collaboration and could include a session for land use planning boards and others attending.

Although an event was not hosted in 2021 due to COVID-19, ECC hopes to host the NWT Conservation Network Gathering on a regular basis as funding allows. While ECC agrees that there would be benefits to a joint newsletter, ECC does not currently have the staff capacity within the next five-year period to take this on. This will be considered as a possible action in the future.

ECC will undertake an evaluation of the objectives outlined in the Healthy Land, Healthy People 2023-2028 to assess progress made towards completing the objectives outlined in the work plan and this work could include an independent review.

3. Inclusion of Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship initiatives and interests

WHAT WE HEARD

There were several requests to address Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship initiatives and interests across the NWT.

The following Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship initiatives and interests were identified by Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations:

- Délı̨nę Got'ı̨nę Government - Sahtú K'aowe Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA)
- Tulít'a IPCA Steering Committee - Willow, Kelly, Lennie and Mahoney Lakes and Wetlands and Nío Nę P'ęné
- Akaitcho Territory Government - interest in completing land use planning and reviewing and planning for protected areas and conservation under the Akaitcho land use planning activities
- Yellowknives Dene First Nation - interest in conducting internal work to identify potential areas for protection and accessing funding for this work
- Inuvialuit Regional Corporation - interest in investigating protected areas or conservation areas
- Deninu Kų́ę First Nation and Fort Resolution Métis Government - interest in investigating an IPCA for the Slave River Delta
- Dehcho First Nations - Ka'a'gee Tu, Łue Túé Sų́łái, Ejíé Túé Ndáde, and Sambaa K'e candidate protected areas
- Nahąą Dehé Dene Band - interest in investigating protecting Ttenaago and Little Butte
- The Inuvialuit Regional Corporation also highlighted interest in biodiversity monitoring
- Multiple Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations - interest in investigating areas of important barren-ground caribou habitat for future protection or conservation

WHAT WE DID

In response to the comments received from various Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations, several objectives were added to the work plan. Specifically, the Sahtú K'aowe IPCA being pursued by the Délı̨nę Got'ı̨nę Government, the IPCA initiative led by the Tulít'a IPCA Steering Committee, and the identification of important areas of barren-ground caribou habitat by the Tı̨łchų Government as identified in the Bathurst Caribou Range Plan, Bathurst Caribou Management Plan, and Taking Care of Caribou processes.

Ka'a'gee Tu, Łue Túé Sų́łái, Ejíé Túé Ndáde, and Sambaa K'e have been listed as candidate territorial protected areas under the former Northwest Territories Protected Areas Strategy in the document. These candidates protected areas in the Dehcho region were identified as part of the work done through the former Northwest Territories Protected Areas Strategy, the previous Healthy Land,

Healthy People, and are included in this latest iteration. The other initiatives led by the Délı̄ne Got'ı̄ne Government, Tulı̄t'a IPCA Steering Committee, and Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations whose work already includes engagement with ECC have also been added to the work plan.

New Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship interests brought forward during engagement on the draft Healthy Land, Healthy People and through the Project Finance for Permanence discussions are listed in the work plan. ECC recognizes these Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship interests and understands that these are relatively early in their planning. The GNWT looks forwards to participating in discussions and learning more about these interests as they advance. An internal review process would be required to decide on the GNWT's position and next steps.

4. Clarification of nomination criteria

WHAT WE HEARD

We heard from multiple Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, and others that clarity on how and why an area may be nominated as a candidate protected area under the *Protected Areas Act* should be included in the document. Specifically, the importance of prioritizing cultural and ecological values related to conservation was highlighted. Concerns were also raised that balancing conservation priorities with economic development should be removed from the nomination process and should be addressed at a different part in the process. Alternatively, it was recommended that these discussions happen at a regional or land-use planning level. One respondent suggested that economic development needed to be factored into the document more and that there was not enough consideration for the economic implications of protecting large areas in the territory. Additionally, they were concerned that there was no objective to protect high mineral potential areas for future development or have them screened out as possible protected areas.

There was also a request to include “draft” land use plans or land claim agreements to the nomination criteria to allow for candidate protected areas to be nominated under the *Protected Areas Act* in areas without a final land use plan or land claim agreement.

And finally, we heard a comment to consider habitat protection for species at risk, specifically caribou, as a criterion for nominating an area for protection.

WHAT WE DID

The additional nomination criteria have been revised to clearly describe the importance of areas in the conservation network to balance conservation and other land uses in the region. Additionally, how the area would contribute to ecological representation in the ecoregion, cultural continuity, climate change resilience, and the conservation of areas of importance to biodiversity or critical habitat for species at risk or connectivity between other areas within the existing conservation network, have been added as considerations.

The nomination criteria have been revised to include “draft” land use plans and land claim agreements or land use planning processes, allowing for candidate territorial protected areas to be nominated in areas without a final land use plan or land claim agreement, consistent with the *Protected Areas Act*.

A mineral resources assessment would likely be conducted after the Minister responsible for the *Protected Areas Act* approves a candidate protected area. All established territorial protected areas and all five candidate protected areas in Healthy Land, Healthy People have undergone comprehensive economic assessments. In addition to the practice of conducting a mineral resources assessment, land use plans provide direction by allowing mineral development in general use and special management zones.

Currently, the additional criteria for nominating an area include biodiversity, critical habitat for species, and cultural continuity. These criteria allow for nominating an area for protection of caribou habitat.

5. Guiding principles

WHAT WE HEARD

Some comments received suggested that the document include more about the guiding principles of conservation network planning in the NWT. One respondent suggested that the document be framed from an Indigenous worldview, as they felt the document focused too much on the economic implications of a conservation network. Another requested that Indigenous spirituality be included in the document.

There was also a request to reframe and revise the document to ensure that ethical space, as described in *We Rise Together*¹, is a foundation to the work plan.

Multiple respondents requested that ECC be more specific about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) articles that currently apply to GNWT’s work, for example, collaboratively developing the *Protected Areas Act*, which has already been done. While one comment requested more information about how Healthy Land, Healthy People will fit into the GNWT’s UN Declaration implementation, another suggested that the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act and co-management is more progressive than the UN Declaration.

WHAT WE DID

The document has been revised to incorporate Indigenous spirituality, Indigenous worldview and ethical space as defined in the *We Rise Together*² report. Additionally, how ECC is working towards creating ethical space and examples have been highlighted, such as the development of the *Protected Areas Act* and the creation and work of the management boards.

¹ *We Rise Together: Achieving Pathway to Canada Target 1 through the creation of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas in the spirit and practice of reconciliation. The Indigenous Circle of Experts Report and Recommendations, March 2018*

² *We Rise Together: Achieving Pathway to Canada Target 1 through the creation of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas in the spirit and practice of reconciliation. The Indigenous Circle of Experts Report and Recommendations, March 2018*

The UN Declaration has been adopted as the framework for reconciliation for the GNWT. The GNWT is committed to working on a government-to-government basis to implement the principles set out in the UN Declaration.

6. Conservation targets

WHAT WE HEARD

We received multiple comments requesting that the reference to Canada Target 1 be updated. One respondent was concerned that the new federal targets of protecting 25% of Canada’s land and 25% of Canada’s oceans by 2025, and work towards 30% of each by 2030³ was unachievable and should not be a goal for the north due to economic concerns. Other respondents, however, felt that Healthy Land, Healthy People should include the federal targets in the work plan.

WHAT WE DID

The GNWT will continue to engage in national discussions about targets; however, decisions in the NWT will continue to be made in collaboration with Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, industry, and other stakeholders’ input. This work may contribute to, but is not based on, federal targets.

What are the next steps?

Edits have been made to the draft Healthy Land, Healthy People document based on the feedback received during the engagement period and follow up conversations related to the PFP Framework Agreement. The GNWT looks forward to working with Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, community governments, federal partners, community organizations, industry, non-government organizations, other stakeholders and the public in implementing *Healthy Land, Healthy People 2023-2028*.

³ A Healthy Environment and a Healthy Economy. Government of Canada 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/weather/climatechange/climate-plan/climate-plan-overview/healthy-environment-healthy-economy.html#tc8>

Attachment A – Distribution List

Acho Dene Koe First Nation	Nahanni River Adventures
Alternatives North	Narwhal Northern Adventures
Black Feather	Nature United
Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers	Norman Wells Land Corporation
Canoe North	North Slave Métis Alliance
Canoe North Adventures	North Star Adventures
CPAWS	Northwest Territory Métis Nation
Deh Gáh Got'ie First Nation	NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines
Dehcho First Nations	NWT Association of Communities
Déłıne Got'ıne Government	NWT Chamber of Commerce
Denınu Kúé First Nation	NWT Recreation and Parks
Ducks Unlimited	NWT Tourism
Ecology North	Pehdzéh Kı First Nation
Ehdiitat Gwich'in Council	Red Mountain Adventures
Fort Good Hope (Kasho Got'ine) Dene Band	Sahtu Adventures
Fort Providence Métis Council	Salt River First Nation #195
Gwich'in Tribal Council	Shehtah Adventure
Gwichya Gwich'in Band	Tah-Chay Adventures
Gwichya Gwich'in Council	Teel'it Gwich'in Band
Inuvialuit Regional Corporation	Tetlit Gwich'in Council
JackPine Paddle	The Métis Association Local 52 – Fort Simpson NWT
Kát'odeeche First Nation	Tłegòhı Got'ıne Government
łııdlı Kúé First Nation	Tłıchq Government
Local Government Administrators of the NWT	Tthets'éhk'édélı First Nation
łutsel K'e Dene First Nation	Tuktoyaktuk Community Corporation
Make Way	Tulita Dene Band
Nahanni Butte Dene Band	Yellowknives Dene First Nation (Dettah)
	Yellowknives Dene First Nation (Ndııq)