



What We Heard: Summary of Engagement

NWT Water Stewardship Strategy Action Plan 2021-2025

August | 2021

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English

Si vous voulez ces informations dans une autre langue officielle, contactez-nous.

French

Kĩspin ki nitawih̄tĩn ē nĩhĩyawih̄k ōma ācimōwin, tipwāsinān.

Cree

Tłıchq̄ yatı k'èè. Dı wegodı newq̄ dè, gots'ō gonede.

Tłıchq̄

ʔerih̄tł'ıs Dēne Sųłıné yatı t'a huts'elkēr xa beyáyatı theʔą ʔat'e, nuwe ts'ēn yółtı.

Chipewyan

Edı gondı dehgháh got'ıe zhatıé k'ée edatł'éh enahddhę nıde naxets'é edahıı.

South Slavey

K'áhshó got'ıne xədə k'é hederı ʔedıhtł'é yerııwę nıde dúle.

North Slavey

Jii gwandak izhii ginjik vat'atr'ıjähch'uu zhit yınohthan jı', diıts'at ginohkhii.

Gwich'in

Uvanittuaq ilitchurisukupku Inuvialuktun, ququaqluta.

Inuvialuktun

Ć'đđ ǀǀ^{sb}Δ^c ʌʀLJΔʀ^c Δ^{sb}ǀǀ^c ʀ^{sb}ʀ^cǀǀ^b, ʔ^cǀ^cǀ^c ʔ^{sb}ǀ^cǀ^c ʔ^{sb}ǀ^cǀ^c.

Inuktitut

Hapkua titiqqat pijumagupkit Inuinnaqtun, uvaptinnut hivajarlutit.

Inuinnaqtun

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Introduction

Extensive engagement between December 2020 and July 2021 was essential for drafting the NWT Water Stewardship Strategy Action Plan 2021-2025 (Action Plan). The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) coordinated the development of the Action Plan, working with water partners across the Northwest Territories (NWT). A water partner is anyone that has a role in water stewardship. This includes, but is not limited to, federal, territorial, municipal governments and Indigenous governments and organizations, communities, regulatory boards, non-governmental organizations, academia, and industry. The Action Plan confirms water partners' ongoing commitment to a collaborative partnership-based approach to support and promote water stewardship in the NWT.

The Water Stewardship Strategy Indigenous Steering Committee (formerly the Aboriginal Steering Committee) provided strategic oversight and guidance into the development of the Action Plan. The Indigenous Steering Committee is made up of 12 representatives of Indigenous governments and organizations from across the NWT who help guide the implementation of the Water Strategy. The Indigenous Steering Committee met three times between December 2020 and June 2021. In 2020, a multi-stakeholder Action Plan Development Committee was established to also provide strategic direction into the process. The Action Plan Development Committee was made up of representatives from the territorial government, Indigenous governments and organizations, academia, co-management boards, and non-government organizations. The Action Plan Development Committee met four times between December 2020 and June 2021.

In February 2021, an online survey was sent to a broad distribution of water partners. A total of fifty-six (56) survey responses were received from territorial, federal and local governments, Indigenous governments and organizations, academic organizations, industry, non-government organizations, and co-management boards. Also in February 2021, the public were asked to provide input into the development of the Action Plan through an online survey. Thirty-nine (39) responses were received. Four online focus groups were held in March and included sixty-nine (69) participants, and one day of the annual Water Strategy Implementation Workshop in April 2021 was devoted to seeking input on the Action Plan development. Over sixty (60) people attended this event.

A summary of the input received is reflected under the following 11 themes:

Valuing Indigenous ways of knowing and being and respecting Aboriginal and Treaty rights

Transboundary water management

Institutional capacity to monitor water quality and quantity

Community capacity to monitor local water and environment

Monitoring and managing groundwater

Protecting drinking water

Impacts of climate change

Community-driven water stewardship activities

Local capacity, awareness and opportunities for youth

Integration across Government of the Northwest Territories initiatives

Structure of the Action Plan

Thematic Areas:

Valuing Indigenous ways of knowing and being and respecting Aboriginal and Treaty rights

What we heard:

All water partners, and in particular Indigenous governments and organizations, said that water stewardship in the NWT should be based on collaboration and reciprocity between two knowledge systems – Indigenous knowledge and western science. Indigenous governments and organizations and community representatives told us that outside researchers and government agencies should align projects with local priorities, and communities should be supported and enabled to take the lead on projects, where possible. We also heard that successful water-related research projects require relationships between outside researchers and community members through early and continued community engagement. We heard about the wisdom contained in Indigenous languages, in particular place names, and the importance of intergenerational knowledge transmission. Finally, water partners told us that the Action Plan should clearly recognize and respect Aboriginal and Treaty rights.

What we did:

We structured the 2021-2025 Action Plan to focus on partnerships with Indigenous governments and organizations, highlighting this at the front end of the document. There is a renewed commitment to the Indigenous Steering Committee as a key mechanism to guide the implementation of the Action Plan. Based on what we heard through engagement, we developed principles for strengthening Indigenous knowledge, perspectives and values in water stewardship. These principles will inform water stewardship in the NWT on an ongoing basis. The Action Plan recognizes the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)*. The Action Plan contains Action Items to support the development and implementation of community protocols for water research and monitoring, Action Items to guide industry to involve local monitors, including Guardians, in baseline water monitoring, and Action Items to promote and facilitate intergenerational on-the-land education/leadership camps.

Transboundary water management

What we heard:

Representatives from communities closest to the borders expressed concern about what is coming from upstream. In particular, we heard concerns about impacts to the Slave River and the Mackenzie River from the oil sands and farming in Alberta, and impacts from climate-related changes in the Peel River along the Yukon border. The public expressed broad concerns about potential impacts from other jurisdictions to both the quality and quantity of NWT water.

What we did:

The Action Plan includes a renewed commitment to negotiate and implement bilateral transboundary water management agreements with a focus on implementing existing agreements with Alberta and British Columbia and negotiating new or renewed agreements with Yukon, Saskatchewan and Nunavut. ENR will enhance communications about transboundary water management agreement communication strategy to ensure that water partners and the public are kept informed of the negotiation and implementation of agreements and the importance of these activities.

Institutional capacity to monitor water quality and quantity

What we heard:

We heard that capacity (human and financial) continues to be a challenge when monitoring water quality and quantity in the huge geographic areas of the NWT. Establishing and maintaining monitoring sites are expensive. Managing and analyzing water monitoring information are challenging due to limited people and time. Capacity challenges exist within all organizations, including federal, territorial and municipal governments, Indigenous governments and organizations and non-government organizations. Water partners told us that it can be difficult to access water monitoring data, in particular historical industry data. Much work has been done to improve water monitoring data consistency and compatibility but it is still difficult to use data collected for specific purposes to understand long-term trends.

What we did:

Water partners agreed to work together to do a prioritization and needs assessment for existing water quality and quantity monitoring networks in the NWT, with a commitment to maintain long-term sites. There is an Action Item to set up an Information Management Working Group to improve the way water data are collected, stored and shared to contribute to improved long-term trend analysis. The Action Plan includes priority research and monitoring programs that will be a learning tool and later used in other locations and programs across the NWT. These initial projects include Great Slave Lake water quality monitoring, Upper Coppermine pilot project, and fish and other biomonitoring. The Action Plan includes Action Items to increase use of remote sensing and innovative tools to fill data gaps, especially in remote regions.

Community capacity to monitor local water and environment

What we heard:

Communities want to participate in and lead monitoring projects and want to benefit from the information gathered. Communities add to what we know about water in the NWT as they provide Indigenous and local knowledge and perspectives on land and water. Researchers need to collaborate with communities to align project priorities and communities require support for capacity development to do the monitoring and communicate results. Also, other strategic initiatives in which communities participate need to be coordinated so that community members are not overwhelmed. Some examples include protecting drinking water, monitoring the effects of climate change, and continuing to participate in existing water stewardship initiatives (including Community Based Monitoring) and engaging youth (see following themes).

What we did:

The Action Plan describes the growing Guardians network in the NWT and highlights emerging opportunities for collaboration in a stand-alone text box at the front end of the Action Plan. The Action Plan contains a renewed commitment to the NWT-wide Community Based Monitoring Program and there are Action Items to support and promote local and distance learning opportunities such as peer-to-peer learning and Guardian gatherings. Strategic opportunities to coordinate training across the NWT for community-based monitors, including Guardians, are being explored.

Monitoring and managing groundwater

What we heard:

We heard from water partners that there is limited understanding of groundwater in the NWT. Unlined community landfill sites and climate-related changes to permafrost are known potential threats to NWT groundwater quality. We heard that managing groundwater properly is important, and that the existing rules for how it is managed may not be sufficient (for example, additional regulations may be needed to protect groundwater).

What we did:

The Action Plan includes a commitment to an enhanced groundwater monitoring program. ENR will establish an interdepartmental working group, develop a groundwater database, and identify priority regions for groundwater monitoring. Water partners will work together to develop groundwater guidelines.

Protecting drinking water

What we heard:

We heard that the protection of drinking water is a priority and that people are not always confident that their drinking water is safe. People do not know where to go to easily access information about their drinking water. We also heard that the language of 'source water protection' needs to be changed to plain language communications about what people and communities can do to keep their drinking water clean.

What we did:

The Action Plan has a renewed focus on supporting local governments to strengthen their ability to manage water and wastewater systems to protect drinking water sources. There are Action Items to improve communications to increase awareness of NWT drinking water quality, with a focus on information sharing between the Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT), community

governments, and the public, and the GNWT's drinking water quality website. The Interdepartmental Drinking Water and Waste Management Committee has committed to reviewing and updating NWT drinking water sampling and testing requirements as per the Water Supply System Regulations Schedule under the *Public Health Act*. Finally, the Action Plan has been better integrated with waste resource management activities to improve communities' understanding of the connection between individual and community management of waste and the protection of drinking water sources.

Impacts of climate change

What we heard:

Water partners are concerned about changes in the hydrological cycle because of climate change. In particular we heard concern about permafrost thaw, changes to water flow as a result of climate change, changes that affect drinking water (for example, increased Dissolved Organic Carbon (DOC)) and changing ice conditions. We also heard that there is an opportunity for community-based monitors and Guardians to observe and document the changing landscape (see community capacity theme above).

What we did:

The Action Plan includes a focus on cooperation and collaboration among water partners to maintain and improve long-term monitoring networks to increase our understanding of climate trends. Specific Action Items to improve our understanding of climate impacts are a vulnerability assessment on Great Slave Lake and a cumulative impact monitoring pilot project in the Upper Coppermine. The Action Plan includes a renewed commitment to the NWT-wide Community-based Monitoring Program to support more eyes and ears watching and listening to the land and water.

Community-driven water stewardship activities

What we heard:

Water partners, and in particular Indigenous governments and organizations and communities, told us that locally driven water stewardship initiatives are most successful. Southern researchers and governments should look to align projects with local priorities. However, communities are limited in their capacity to participate in new initiatives. Water Strategy objectives can best be achieved when water partners integrate with already existing planning processes. For example, water partners noted community and regional land use planning, and protected areas planning, including strategic planning for Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas as opportunities for integration. We heard that, where possible, water partners should seek opportunities to reduce the burden on Indigenous leaders and representatives.

What we did:

The Action Plan commits water partners to develop and maintain a listing of ongoing water activities and initiatives to help water partners identify opportunities for collaboration. There is an Action Item to promote Water Strategy objectives in regional land use plans, protected areas management plans, and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area management plans as they are updated and developed. There is a renewed commitment to the Indigenous Steering Committee as a key mechanism to communicate and connect Water Strategy objectives with regional and local Indigenous governments and organizations. The Action Plan commits to develop reporting tools to make it easier on Indigenous Steering Committee representatives to communicate between and within communities. There are Action Items to support the way that researchers work with communities to increase local understanding and develop skills related to water stewardship.

Local capacity, awareness and opportunities for youth

What we heard:

We heard that the continued success of the Water Strategy is linked to increased local capacity, awareness and opportunities for youth. Indigenous water partners told us that local communities should be leaders in water stewardship activities, and this starts with awareness and understanding of the Water Strategy. Youth need to be engaged and provided with learning and leadership opportunities related to water stewardship. Intergenerational on-the-land activities support knowledge transfer. Water partners told us that peer-to-peer learning opportunities are desired, particularly amongst community-based monitors and Guardians.

What we did:

Water partners have committed to develop and implement an awareness-building and communications strategy to raise awareness of the objectives of the Water Strategy. There are Action Items to develop learning resources for students to support connections between the curriculum, the context of the NWT, and the relevant teachings of the Dene Kede and Inuuqatigiit curricula. The Action Plan contains several other Action Items to provide engagement and leadership opportunities for youth, including a water stewardship youth group, and a recommitment to the NWT Youth Water Stewardship and Mentorship Grant Program.

Integration across Government of the Northwest Territories initiatives

What we heard:

Water partners told us that there are multiple GNWT strategies and action plans with overlapping areas of action and it is difficult to make sense of how these strategies work together.

What we did:

We included a section in the front end of the Action Plan that describes linkages between the Water Stewardship Strategy Action Plan and other key strategies, for example the *Climate Change Strategic Framework*. We have also identified specific linkages at the Key to Success and Action Item level. We have used specific symbols to assist readers to make connections at a glance.

Structure of the Action Plan

What we heard:

Water partners told us that there was some overlap, duplication and repetition within the 2016-2020 Action Plan. We heard that the next Action Plan should be more targeted.

What we did:

We structured the 2021-2025 Action Plan to link medium-term objectives – the Keys to Success – with the long-term objectives of the Water Stewardship Strategy. We have identified specific outputs – the tangible direct products of the program activities – for each Action Item. Ongoing Action Plan activities are clearly identified, along with new project-based Action Items.

Next Steps

We look forward to working collaboratively with water partners to implement the NWT Water Stewardship Strategy Action Plan 2021-2025, as we strive to achieve the vision of the Water Strategy:

“The waters of the Northwest Territories will remain clean, abundant and productive for all time.”

To learn more about the NWT Water Stewardship Strategy and the NWT Water Stewardship Strategy Action Plan 2021-2025, see nwtwaterstewardship.ca