

Dawson Region Draft Plan Public Engagement “Tea Circles” Summary October 12, 2021 at TH Hall

On October 12, the Commission held an afternoon public session at the TH Hall in Dawson City. The format of the session was “tea circles”, where individuals chose any one of 5 tables set up around the room, with DRPC staff and commission members present to listen to perspectives and ideas.

There were about 12 members of the public in attendance for this session.

1 1. LMU Recommendations:

1.1 North (LMU 1)

- Elder – ‘We need to be restrictive up there. It is the last piece of wilderness we have.’
- Manage for wilderness recreation
- ‘No new claims in this area is great! Very supportive.’

1.2 Yukon River (LMU 3)

- What tool is being proposed to manage the corridor?
- The Upper Klondike River is important too
 - Concerns about cyanide from Brewery Creek operations
 - Concerns about leaching from sewage lagoon at km 4 of Dempster Highway

1.3 Klondike Valley (LMU 6)

- Fuelwood along Dempster Highway portion
- Conflicting uses within the LMU
- Could be an ISA 1 if the forestry portion was moved to another LMU.
- North Fork hydro project (Klondike River)
 - Operated from 1911 to 1966
 - Proposal to re-establish
 - Located along Klondike River from km 9 of Dempster to km 4, then continuing downriver.

1.4 Brewery Creek (LMU 7 & 8)

- Road to LMU 7 could go through LMU 8.
- Road access would require crossing of Klondike River.

1.5 Fortymile River (LMU 15)

- Traditional access route
- An old access route can be found on the ridge line to the south of Yukon River around Fanny Creek and Clinton Creek
- There are ancestral camps along the river
 - Should be a larger buffer along Yukon River for camps
 - Camps include: Grandma Cookie's camp on Fifteen Mile and Grandma McLeod's camp on Eight Mile.
- Clinton Creek
 - Needs to be cleaned up; big pits, hazard to wildlife
 - YG should subsidize clean-up and benefit TH citizens
 - We do not want a mess alike Clinton Creek. The dam is ready to bust. The water is contaminated. We drink the water that comes into the river.
 - Clinton Creek – there is so much development there. The wetlands need to be protected; the birds don't even know which direction they are going.

1.6 White (LMU 21)

- Mouth of White River is a traditional gathering place
- White River Hill has to be protected

1.7 Sixtymile (LMU 17)

- Development is “raping the highland areas”

1.8 Upper IRW (LMU 19)

- The placer community is very concerned about the SMA 2 designation. Specifically Australia Creek
- Upper Indian River has huge potential that was unknown even just 5 years ago – extensive drilling and exploration has taken place and a viable gold seam has been discovered
 - There is a brand new deposit on Wounded Moose
 - Thought to be 30 miles of minable ground
 - There are 4 operators at the moment but there's potential for me
 - Current water licenses are not anticipated to be extended based on current Draft Plan

1.9 Scottie Creek (LMU 22)

- Need ability to travel from Scottie Creek to White and Yukon Rivers.
- Heritage branch could identify routes.

2 Tourism and Recreation

- Tombstone facilitates: safe hiking and accessibility is important as we age
- Fishwheel Charters
 - Tourism business
 - TH citizen owned and operated
 - Dog Island in Future Planning Area
 - Likes existing access

3 Fuelwood

- Ensure the Plan considers possible future fuelwood needs

4 Fish & Wildlife

4.1 Fish

- 'I have seen them disappear in my lifetime'
- Salmon spawning protection from jetboats – better signage and awareness and education
- If we did something like this for salmon years ago, we wouldn't be in the mess we are in now.

4.2 Moose

- Are benefiting from the mining (population rise) but there is a lot of hunting pressure from the south
- Seems like the moose population declining, should be a wolf culling

4.3 Caribou

- Porcupine Caribou Herd
 - PCH used to come through Bear Creek [but don't anymore]
 - Porcupine Caribou have not been seen along the Dempster in 5-6 years
 - There is more hunting pressure on other wildlife because of the lack of Porcupine Caribou in the region

5 Infrastructure/Access

- Highway maintenance: need to consider climate change in all infrastructure development

- There should be no road access into the north- unless it is with careful consideration (the door is not totally shut)

5.1 Dempster Highway

- There should be protection along the Dempster Highway corridor
 - Impacts the Hart River Caribou Herd
 - Close hunting access to Hart River Caribou from Dempster Highway
- Under new ORV regulations, ATV access is better controlled
- ATVs going through mud holes make them bigger as they try to go around
- Did we speak with the Ft McPherson community?
- We have to maintain the health and vitality of the area. – actually, we need to improve it.
- There is concern about the management up the Dempster Highway (Grizzly Bear and Caribou)

6 Stewardship

- We need to take care of the land for future generations
- Maximize opportunities to re-use and re-purpose material
- Clean up old equipment on the land
 - Incentivize removal and salvage of old D-9 cats

6.1 Land Stewardship Trust

- Private land trust idea:
- Like down south, what about a model to allow private landowners to bequeath parcels to a land trust like the Nature Conservancy of Canada?
- Yukon example: Gunnar Neilsen Demonstration Forest and trails
- Land Stewardship Trust could be an opportunity to develop new reclamation methods
 - Examples of good reclamation and how to achieve it would be good – something KPMA are working on

7 7. Cultural Use

- Medicine: comes from the land, we need it

8 8. Mining & Mineral Development

- High gold prices and reality TV: outsiders just showing up and making a mess
- Misunderstanding of the water license process and impact on water: not destroyed

- Margins are tight; restrictions lead to non-viability
- If area has been historically worked, why not enable into future use like Hunker? And then restrict new areas?
- The doors appear to be closing on the placer industry.
- Sometimes there is conflict between placer and quartz operations, such as when they are both competing during water licensing process.
- Industry support for Plan: build in confidence to deliver predictability
 - KPMA is considering a 25% industry loss in next few years, and if that is it, that would be a success

8.1 Reclamation

- Misconceptions that there is no reclamation
 - Often areas are re-worked
 - Lots of old legacy projects that tarnish the industry (think about the drive into Dawson on the highway)
 - There are a few bad apples who wreck it for everyone
 - There should be a plan for reclamation of legacy mined areas (old dredge tailings)
- Timing is quick for placer, but takes longer for quartz mining
- Should think about what we want the reclaimed area to be - inform reclamation activities
 - 'Swimming hole is great.'
 - Placer legacy projects can create good moose and berry habitat.
- There needs to be a strong vision for reclamation in East LMU
- Mining industry recognizes that there are operators that don't reclaim but organizations like KPMA are trying to change this.
- There needs to be clear expectations from government that says how a site should be left. YG and TH could develop a best practices guide (KPMA did in 2009 but it was never recognized by governments)
 - KPMA developed a best practices document but YG never agreed to it – can't even be used as interim guidance until YG catch up and produce something
 - Margins are typically tight so often smaller miners cannot afford a biologist to determine how much to replant – who determines whether something is reclaimed?
 - There is room for improvement in the mining industry but things are not black and white

- Bond system in Alaska was discussed which operates at both state and federal through the Department of Natural Resources (DNR, state) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM, federal)
 - Each operation is allowed a total % of disturbance over a set period and you get a refund / return once the land is reclaimed to a certain standard
 - Encourages concurrent reclamation and incentivizes cuts to be planned more effectively
 - Typically operates on a 5 year timeline for placer – essentially, you're bonded for 5 year disturbance stages
 - A framework such as this would help industry to be more proactive, and generally the Alaska system is perceived as fair
- When it comes to disturbance, better need communication channels are needed and up-to-date assessments to enable reclaimed areas to be returned to the 'pool'
 - Active mines that are the focus of EMR should be used in the CE framework as relying on satellite data can mean real-time disturbance and reclamation isn't captured and thus the model won't be up-to-date
 - Boots on the ground reporting should be done and suggested that many miners would be happy to do this

8.2 Enforcement

- Legislation is letting industry down and it's felt that industry have to self-police which isn't effective
 - Regulation gap
 - Enforcement gap – hard to police properly.
 - The bar for reclamation is set very low so there is no incentive to go above and beyond
- Placer enforcement weak as often lack of corporate memory amongst inspectors
 - Capacity is a real issue – there are only 4 inspectors in the Dawson area and people who fly between mines (i.e. operators) likely see more than them.
 - Problem is lack of enforcement

8.3 Innovation

- Leverage Yukon University Center for Northern Innovation in Mining
- There are opportunities for industry to work differently and become more efficient
 - Small fraction of claims are actually minable and typically on their permit applications Placer miners ask for more than they need because they don't actually know what's there

- With more targeted exploration and drilling, overall ground disturbance could be hugely reduced. Don't discount innovation, e.g. Shawn Ryan got rid of exploration roads by using helicopters.
- With drilling, specific quantifiable data can be produced; could identify deposits, wetlands and reclamation plans could be more easily produced
- Reduced disturbance is in alignment with overall desire of miners: the less ground disturbed, the greater return on investment
- However, this kind of mining would push out a lot of the smaller operators because 10 year forecasting isn't really feasible for them
- Felt there is a willingness by industry to adapt and change, but they need to know what is required of them so they can work towards this.
- Placer operations:
 - Think about the future of the industry
 - What will think look like 20 years from now?
 - What needs to be managed for access?
 - Miners need opportunities to explore – especially low impact exploration
 - Drill instead of dig.
 - Badger holes have big impacts
- Optimize benefit by thinking multi-use
 - Could we connect natural resource development projects? Start with forestry, move to placer mining, then on to agriculture?

9 Thresholds

- Thresholds are too restrictive: need to be reasonable and not shut down businesses. There is perception that Plan thresholds are the 'thin edge of the wedge' to shut down the industry; need to build confidence so that the goal posts don't change.
- Thresholds require solid baseline. Baseline needs to be clear about what was already disturbed and what was not. If baseline isn't clear, industry will lose confidence in the Plan
 - KPMA are on the ground and they are very concerned that the limits within the Draft Plan have already been met. Data accuracy is an issue and there needs to be CONFIDENCE in the system that's eventually put in place
 - Example of LMU 19 – Upper Indian River. This is a small isolated parcel and a % based disturbance might be difficult to work with given the scale of activity

- Question asked: can reclaimed land go back into the pool? Unclear if this is the intention within the Draft Plan.
 - Reclaimed vs undisturbed land – when ground is reclaimed there doesn't seem to be any method or framework to 'return it' to the pool

10 Maps

- Make the legend easier to read – e.g. Low Development, High Development
- Casino - Should show proposed mine site on maps
- Needs a map that shows overlay of designations and claims

11 SMAs

- Need to link to UFA/THFNFA Chapter 10 (Special Management Areas)
- SMA 2 should show on map with “doughnuts” where claims exist.
- Need to be clear whether or not miners can access SMA 2s.
- SMA 2s – what are we trying to protect these areas from? Look at what the threats are and react to them accordingly

12 Co-Management Approach to Mining

- Successor mining legislation
- Mineral Development Strategy
- Parties engagement on Recommended Plan should be timed with new mining legislation engagement

13 Settlement Lands

- Should be a buffer around settlement parcels to protect them

14 Implementation

- Commission lasting into Plan implementation
 - Like the idea as distrust of both governments
- Successful implementation requires clarity
 - Peel Plan uses language like “adequate”; that is not helpful
- Appropriate funding is needed for First Nations and Commissions to implement. First Nations need to be given responsibility for managing budgets.

15 Oil and Gas Exploration

- There is a real concern about an oil and gas 'play' in the region. It needs to be restricted. The North LMU 1 and Eagle Plains LMU are the two areas where there is some interest
- No oil and gas exploration on our land (Elder)

16 Wetlands

- Wetlands are very important.
- Wetlands are my main concern
- The people who come up to strike it 'rich' don't realize the importance of the wetlands and the land

17 Advice to the Commission

- The Commission has to make smart decisions that do not have unintended consequences (neg) to the mining industry
- The FA must be respected and guide us
- Development cannot undermine TH's rights
- Do a good job and stand your ground.
- Listen to our voice
- More wetland protection
- Don't leave a mess & work together
- Have ongoing commission to adapt to changes in future