



Dawson Planning Region Issues and Interests Report July 2020



Executive Summary

The Issues and Interests Report is one of the key foundational planning products outlined in the Dawson Regional Planning Commission’s (the Commission) Terms of Reference. The purpose of the report is to summarize information on issues and interests in the Dawson planning region that has been received from the Parties, plan partners, and the public. In accordance with the Terms of Reference signed onto by the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in and Yukon governments for the planning process, the Issues and Interests Report developed by the previous Commission must be reviewed, modified if required, and adopted.

This summary report is neither exhaustive nor reflective of the Commission’s priorities for the development of the regional land use plan. This report is an informational document and does not attempt to assess land use conflicts or offer management strategies for the region.

The Commission and the Parties agree that sustainable development, as defined in the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Final Agreement (THFA), must be a key guiding principle for the regional land use plan. Therefore, key interests in the planning region have been broadly characterized to reflect socio-cultural, ecological, or economic value.

Key planning issues in the region have been summarized to reflect three main themes: sustainable economy; ecological integrity, conservation and stewardship; and culture and heritage. As evidenced through public feedback, there is a strong desire to strike balance within the planning region between sustainable economic development and ecological and socio-cultural preservation.

Theme	Key Planning Issues
Sustainable Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mineral Exploration and Development • Access and Infrastructure • Cumulative Effects • Community Growth and Recreation • Agriculture • Tourism
Ecological Integrity, Conservation and Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish and Wildlife Habitat • Protected and Conserved Areas • Climate Change
Culture and Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage Resources and Sites • Harvesting Rights and Activities

Some of the interests identified by plan partners and the public directly impact the land and resource base, while others are connected to the relationship people have with the land and resource base. Some interests are shared among stakeholders, while others may be in direct conflict with other interests.

The Commission will continue to seek feedback and input on the issues and interests identified in this report from plan partners and the public, and all comments will be considered fully during the development of the Draft Plan.

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1 Introduction

Background

The Dawson Regional Planning Commission (the Commission) was established in 2011, however the planning process was suspended in 2014 until legal proceedings concerning the Peel Watershed planning process were resolved. Following the conclusion of legal proceedings, a new Commission was re-established in early 2019. In accordance with the new Terms of Reference established by the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Government and the Government of Yukon (the Parties) for the planning process, the Commission is tasked with reviewing, modifying (if required), and adopting the Issues and Interests Report prepared by the previous Commission (see Appendix A).

Purpose of the Report

The Issues and Interests Report is one of the key foundational planning products outlined in the Commission's Terms of Reference. The purpose of the report is to synthesize input on issues and interests in the Dawson planning region received from the Parties, plan partners, and the public. Key concepts in this report include the following:

Interest – This term is intended to refer to an ecological, economic or cultural value that is contained in, expressed by, supported by, or inspired by land, water, fish, wildlife, historic and heritage resources in the planning region.

Issue – This term is intended to refer to any aspect of the abundance, status or condition of an interest or value about which people have expressed need, desire, concern or fear. In the context of this report, an "issue" is not used to express a problem resulting from a conflict between or among interests.

The Commission recognizes the challenges presented by such a diverse range of ecological, cultural and economic interests sharing a common resource base. This report will be used to guide further research and to help the Commission in developing goals and objectives for the regional land use plan.

Context

The summary of issues and interests contained in this document includes information from the report prepared by the previous Commission, in addition to updated information received from the Parties, plan partners, and the public through written submissions and targeted engagement sessions held in Dawson City and Whitehorse in the fall of 2019. This summary is neither exhaustive nor reflective of the Commission's priorities for the development of the regional land use plan. This report is an informational document and does not attempt to assess land use conflicts or offer management strategies for the region.

While this report identifies the key planning issues in the region, it is not the only information resource available to the Commission. The report is intended to work together with other key informational documents to provide direction in the development of the Draft Plan (see Figure 1 below). For example, while the Commission's *Vision Statement, Issues and Interests Report*,

Resource Assessment Report, traditional knowledge and public input help to identify “what” is important to consider in the planning process, “where” and “how” issues are addressed will be determined through development of the Draft Plan.

Key Elements of the Draft Regional Land Use Plan

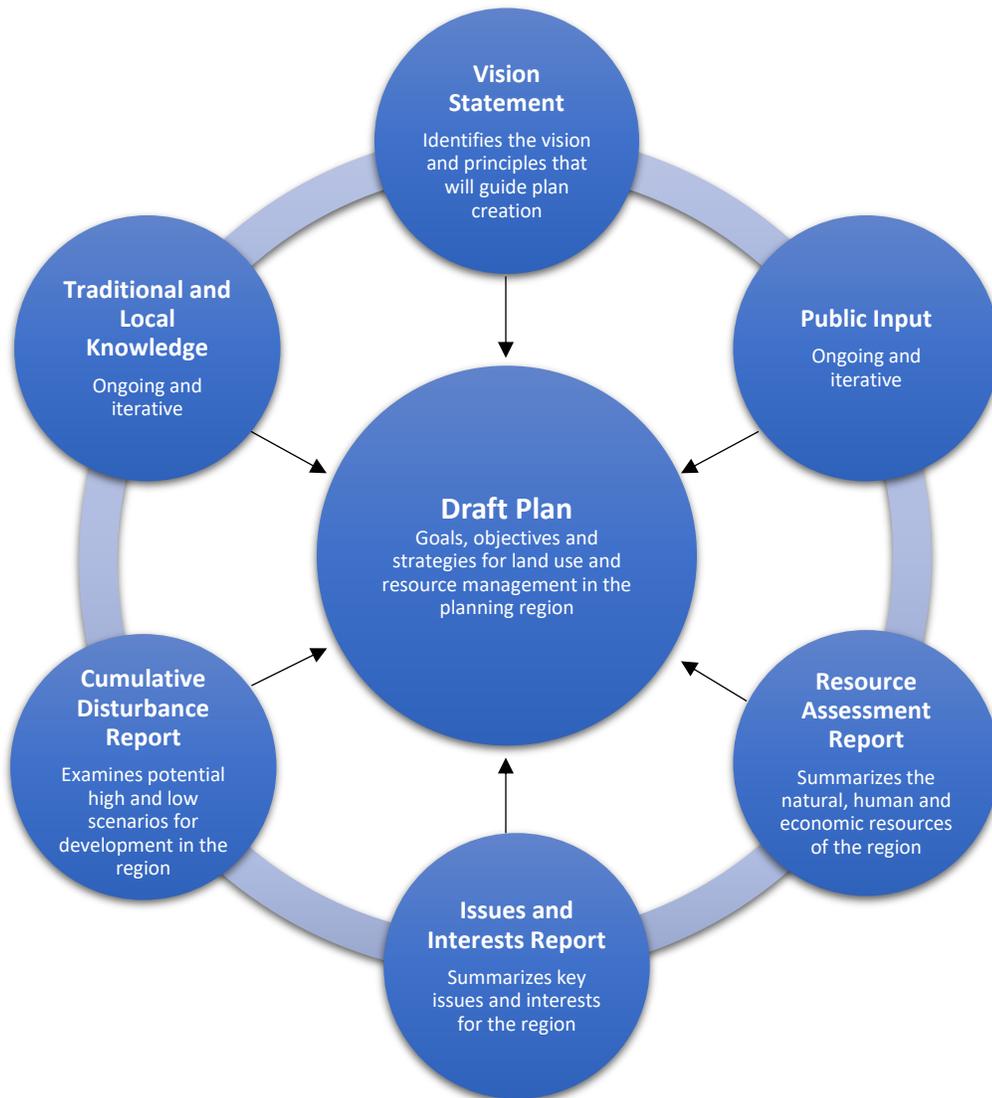


Figure 1: Key Elements of the Draft Regional Land Use Plan

2 Key Interests in the Planning Region

The Commission and the Parties agree that sustainable development, as defined in the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Final Agreement (THFA), must be a key guiding principle for the regional land use plan. The importance of sustainable development was also expressed through comments provided by the public and plan partners, as well as a strong desire to strike balance within the planning region between sustainable economic development and ecological and socio-cultural preservation. Sustainable development is defined in the THFA as **“beneficial socio-economic change that does not undermine the ecological and social systems upon which communities and societies are dependent”**. Following this definition, interests in the planning region have been broadly characterized to reflect socio-cultural, ecological, or economic value.

Table 1: Summary of Interests in Planning Region

Theme	Key Interests
Socio-Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and enhance cultural and heritage values of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, other First Nations, and other residents of the planning region • Protection of traditional land use practices and subsistence harvesting • Preservation and collaborative stewardship of heritage and historic resources • Protection of sites and routes of cultural, heritage or historic significance • Continued use of oral history and traditional knowledge, as obligated • Adoption of best practices to reduce impacts from human activity
Ecological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect water resources, including quality, quantity and rates of flow • Maintain healthy and sustainable fish and wildlife populations and required habitats • Ensure protection of rare or endangered species • Establishment of an ecologically representative system of protected and conserved areas • Maintain connectivity between areas of key wildlife habitat • Work towards mitigation and adaptation to the effects of climate change
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and enhance a mixed economy, including monetary-based and traditional¹ (natural based) economic activities, including mineral development, tourism, and agriculture • Sustainable use of renewable and non-renewable resources

¹ Note, the term "traditional" is not synonymous with an old way of doing things, rather it is suggestive of long-established practices which contribute to the modernized economy. As defined by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, a traditional economy is based on the harvest of natural resources, providing direct value such as meat harvested, fuelwood and income from sale of cultural products, and also non-consumptive values such as, for example, the cultural and social well-being of its members and passing on traditional ecological knowledge.

Theme	Key Interests
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support ecologically sound exploration and development of mineral deposits and oil/gas resources • Reduce land use conflicts and increase certainty for land users and regulators on how resources should be used • Support ecologically sound development of hydro, solar and biomass energy resources • Protect and manage access to resources for economic development • Consider/ deliberate new transportation corridors and infrastructure opportunities • Consider future community growth areas outside municipal and local area plans • Protect and enhance tourism and recreational experiences including scenic viewscapes

3 Summary of Planning Issues

The following summary of planning issues was synthesized from a variety of sources including:

- Interests and Issues Report (2011) prepared by the previous Commission including all submissions contained therein (see Appendix A);
- Government of Yukon Issues and Interests Submission (2019) (see Appendix B);
- Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Issues and Interests Submission (2018-2019) (see Appendix C); and
- Feedback from the public and plan partners through in-person engagement sessions, online engagement tools, and written submissions (see Appendix D).

The summary of planning issues described in this section has been organized following the main themes outlined in the revised submissions received from the Parties in 2018-2019. The three themes outlined below are also reflected in the Commission’s vision statement and will help guide development of the Draft Plan.

The Commission recognizes that some planning issues overlap or conflict with one another and may require further analysis as the planning process moves forward. This summary is not intended to be an exhaustive list but rather a summary of common issues identified by the Parties, plan partners and the public. Further details on the planning issues summarized below are included in the appendices of this report.

Sustainable Economy

Sustainable development, as defined in the THFA, is a key guiding principle in the development of the regional land use plan. In order to ensure that development occurs with the intention of providing future generations with the wealth and abundance that the land currently provides, the plan will need to balance multiple land use values within the planning region. A sustainable economy is not only tied to mineral exploration and development but also other industrial drivers

in the planning region, including for example tourism and agriculture. Key planning issues include the following:

Mineral Exploration and Development – Ensuring that an adequate land base is available for mineral exploration and development while maintaining and enhancing other economic sectors (e.g. agriculture, tourism), traditional economic activities, culture and heritage and ecological integrity will be a significant planning issue for the region. Higher levels of resource exploration and development may be appropriate in certain areas of the region, while less activity may be more suitable in other areas.

Access and Infrastructure – New access and infrastructure to support economic development will need to be considered in a manner that maintains fish and wildlife populations, habitat connectivity, and socio-cultural values. While new access corridors or energy infrastructure may be needed in certain areas, restricted or threshold-based management of access may be warranted in other parts of the planning region to protect socio-cultural and/or ecological values.

Cumulative Effects – Cumulative effects are changes to the environment and/or society that result from a land use activity in combination with other past, present and future activities. As resource exploration and development expands in the planning region, the potential for cumulative effects on cultural and ecological values increases. Establishing thresholds that identify acceptable levels of change related to surface and linear disturbance can be an effective regional planning tool to help achieve balance between economic development and conservation.

Community Growth and Recreation – Identification of future community growth areas for residential development outside of existing municipal and local area planning boundaries may be required. Areas with high recreational value for community use should also be acknowledged and maintained. Balancing the need for community growth with other land uses such as agriculture, forestry, traditional harvesting and other uses will require careful consideration. More detailed planning (e.g. sub-regional planning) may be required in places such as the Yukon River corridor, the Dempster Highway corridor and/or throughout the Klondike Valley.

Agriculture – Identification and preservation of areas suitable for agricultural purposes should be considered. Opportunities for different land uses to co-exist with agriculture in the planning region should also be explored.

Tourism – Opportunities to enhance tourism experiences in the planning region should be explored, in addition to compatibility with other economic and socio-cultural values.

Ecological Integrity, Conservation and Stewardship

Healthy air, water, vegetation and wildlife are critical to sustaining life. Ensuring that ecological systems are maintained is central to the definition of sustainable development. Key planning issues related to ecological integrity, conservation, and stewardship include the following:

Fish and Wildlife Habitat – Maintaining sustainable fish and wildlife populations and their habitats will be a significant planning issue for the region. Key species include, but are not limited to salmon, moose, caribou, sheep, fur-bearing animals, freshwater fish, birds, and

species-at-risk. Cumulative effects on these species will also require further analysis and management. Maintaining healthy terrestrial (e.g. boreal forest, taiga) and riparian (e.g. rivers, creeks, wetlands) ecosystems will require careful consideration through development of the plan.

Protected and Conserved Areas – Identifying areas in the planning region that warrant protection, conservation, and/or special management will need to be addressed in the plan. Through the issues and interests’ submissions, the Parties support identifying and establishing a system of protected/conserved areas to ensure for healthy wildlife populations and ecosystems. Key considerations in this exercise will include, but may not be limited to, maintaining connectivity across the landscape, reducing habitat fragmentation and ensuring for ecological representation and integrity within ecoregions. Balancing the need for both a system of protected/conserved areas and an adequate land base for mineral exploration and development will be a significant planning issue.

Climate Change – Climate change has the potential to significantly affect the biophysical and socio-economic conditions of the planning region. Some of the effects of climate change are already being experienced such as permafrost thaw, increasing risk of wildfires and habitat alteration. While the magnitude and extent of future effects remain uncertain, climate change will need to be considered in the development of the plan. Consideration of potential adaptive and mitigative measures to respond to changing conditions will be necessary.

Culture and Heritage

Maintaining and enhancing cultural and heritage values for all people is a key part of sustainable development. For the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, heritage is not something from the past, but rather a way of life reflected in the beliefs, values, knowledge and practices passed on from generation to generation. The THFA recognizes and protects this way of life which is based on an economic and spiritual relationship between Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in and the land. Other First Nations’ and residents’ perspectives on culture and heritage in the planning region are equally important. Contributions to our understanding and interpretation of historical events (e.g. Klondike Gold Rush) and the overall cultural diversity in the region (e.g. mining, farming, art, music) are equally valuable to quality of life.

Key planning issues related to culture and heritage include the following:

Heritage Resources and Sites – Protection and management of heritage resources will require careful consideration in the development of the plan. As resource exploration and development expands in the planning region, potential impacts to heritage resources increases. First Nations and non-First Nations heritage resources in the planning region include, but are not limited to:

- Harvestable resources (e.g. wildlife, medicines, raw materials);
- Traditional knowledge (e.g. oral histories, place names, songs);
- Trap lines, camps and caches;
- Trails and travel routes;
- Burial and sacred sites;
- Archaeological and paleontological resources; and

- Historic sites.

The Commission will need to ensure that both Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Government of Yukon definitions, perspectives and rules related to heritage resources are incorporated into the plan.

Harvesting Rights and Activities – Protection and management of First Nation and non-First Nation harvesting rights, activities, and areas will need to be addressed in the plan. First Nations and other residents of the region spend a considerable amount of time on the land participating in various harvesting activities. Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in continue to exercise their culture through traditional economic activities including, but not limited to, hunting, fishing, trapping and harvesting plants. Resource harvesting by non-First Nations people in the region is also a key part of their cultural identity. While resource harvesting has an economic component, these activities are also important for maintaining and building connections to the land, as well as a sense of stewardship. The plan will need to respect and consider all types of resource harvesting activities in the planning region.

4 Community Engagement and Feedback

Public participation is a requirement of the planning process, in accordance with Section 11.2.1.8 of the THFA. The Commission is committed to meaningful engagement with plan partners and the public and has developed a public engagement strategy to guide its work.

The previous Commission conducted community meetings to solicit feedback from the public on issues and interests in 2011. Meetings were held in Dawson City (May 27, 2011), Whitehorse (June 8, 2011) and Old Crow (June 20, 2011). In total, about 30 people attended these sessions which included an overview of the Commission and the planning process in addition to a question and answer period with the planning team.

The current Commission welcomed public input on the issues and interests identified in this report in 2019. Public engagement sessions were held in both Dawson City and Whitehorse in the fall of 2019 in order to present the draft report and to collect public input and comments. In addition to in-person engagement sessions, the Commission launched an online engagement campaign in order to reach a broader audience and also invited individuals and/or groups to submit written comments. In total, the Commission and staff hosted over 90 participants at their in-person engagement sessions, received over 320 online survey responses, and 18 formal written submissions.

Public Feedback on Issues and Interests

A summary of public engagement efforts and main themes was developed in July 2020, entitled *In Your Words – Summary Report of Public Engagement October 2019 – June 2020*. This report is available on the Commission's website for public viewing and attached as Appendix D to this report. While this summary document contains information pertaining to all feedback received, input specifically pertaining to the issues and interests report has been summarized below.

As part of the online engagement, participants were asked a series of survey questions pertaining to the issues and interests identified within the draft version of this report.

Respondents were asked to choose their top three planning issues and interests. According to survey responses, the majority of issues and interests in the region pertain to a sustainable economy as well as ecological integrity, conservation, and stewardship. Specifically, the top three choices were:

- Mineral exploration and development
- Protected and conserved areas
- Access and infrastructure

There were no qualifiers attached to the identification of each topic. Rather, respondents were asked to explain their reasoning for their selections.

In general, the majority of respondents who selected mineral exploration and development in their top three did so because they believe the industry is an important economic activity for the region with strong ties to community growth and prosperity. However, some respondents who selected mineral exploration and development indicated that they did so because of the potential and actual effects the industry can have on ecological and socio-cultural values in the planning region. For protected and conserved areas, the majority of respondents who identified this interest did so because they are in favour of the identification of protected and conserved areas in the planning region in order to preserve areas of ecological and cultural significance. Similar to mineral exploration and development, the vast majority of respondents who selected access and infrastructure indicated that access roads and trails are necessary for industrial prosperity, whereas a few responses highlighted that roads and trails can represent major threats to wildlife populations.

It is important to note that these themes are consistent with the overall key themes identified throughout the engagement process as a whole, which consisted of: mining/mineral development, access, and conservation/fish and wildlife.

Respondents also provided their own ideas for issues and interests in the region they felt were not expressed within the compiled list. In no particular order of how many times the item was identified, these generally included:

- Health and Wellness
- Recreation
- Tourism
- Agriculture
- Water Resources

The identified issues and interests described above have been included in Section 2.0 and Section 3.0 of this report where applicable to do so. While some of the above topics are covered more implicitly within broader subjects, others have been added to express an explicit issue or interest. For example, the topics of health and wellness and recreation fit within the defined scope of community growth and recreation, whereas economic interests in agriculture and tourism have been explicitly listed under sustainable economy. Water resources is listed as a key ecological interest in Table 1, Section 2.0.

5 Summary and Next Steps

This report summarizes input on issues and interests in the Dawson planning region received from the Parties, from work completed by the previous Commission, as well as submissions from the public and plan partners. Key ‘Issues and Interests’ have been summarized into three main themes as follows:

Theme	Key Planning Issues
Sustainable Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mineral Exploration and Development • Access and Infrastructure • Cumulative Effects • Community Growth and Recreation • Agriculture • Tourism
Ecological Integrity, Conservation and Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish and Wildlife Habitat • Protected and Conserved Areas • Climate Change
Culture and Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage Resources and Sites • Harvesting Rights and Activities

The Commission’s *Vision Statement*, *Issues and Interests Report* and *Resource Assessment Report* are key foundational documents of the regional land use planning process and help guide the Commission’s future work. Following the adoption of these reports, the Commission will work to develop a Draft Plan for review by the Parties, plan partners and the public. The Commission will continue to receive feedback from the Parties, plan partners and the public as the planning process moves forward.

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Dawson Regional Land Use Plan Interests and Issues Report (2011)

Appendix B – Government of Yukon Issues and Interests Submission (2019)

Appendix C – Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Issues and Interests Submission (2018-2019)

Appendix D – In Your Words: Summary Report of Public Engagement October 2019 – June 2020