

What We Heard: Feedback on the Recommended Whitehorse and Southern Lakes Forest Resources Management Plan

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Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council,
Carcross/Tagish First Nation and the Government of Yukon



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Introduction

The Whitehorse and Southern Lakes Forest Resources Management Plan was created over a period of eight years by a Joint Planning Committee made up of delegates from Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and the Government of Yukon, and with help from the Carcross/Tagish and Laberge Renewable Resources Councils.

The planning area is located in the headwaters of the Yukon River. It covers 1.49 million hectares and includes public land and First Nations Settlement Land within the Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council Traditional Territories; and Taku River Tlingit First Nation asserted Traditional Territories. The area includes forests, alpine tundra, subalpine, rivers, lakes, wetlands, rock and communities including the City of Whitehorse and Carcross.

The committee recommended the plan to governments on May 10, 2019. The Government of Yukon, in partnership with Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council initiated consultation on the plan, as per section 8, subsection 4 of the Forest Resources Act. The consultation on the recommended plan was held between June 18, 2019 and October 9, 2019.

The purpose of the consultation was to seek feedback from Yukoners with an interest in forest management in the Whitehorse and Southern Lakes area. This report summarizes the input received.



Consultation process

Online survey

The Yukon Bureau of Statistics hosted an online survey between June 18, 2019 and September 30, 2019. Two hundred thirty six surveys with 462 comments were completed and compiled. The survey was advertised on Facebook and Google for a period of 62 days. Approximately 40 comments were collected from Facebook. The survey was advertised in the Yukon News newspaper on June 28, 2019 and on September 6, 2019.

Open houses and community markets

The consultation was launched at the On the Land Gathering in Tagish on June 7, 2019. Participants at the gathering included Carcross/Tagish and Teslin Renewable Resources Councils, Kwanlin Dun First Nation, Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Taku River Tlingit First Nation, Teslin Tlingit Council, Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, Government of Yukon and Parks Canada.

We held five open houses between August 27, 2019 and October 9, 2019. The open houses were advertised in the Yukon News, and posters were put up in public places in Whitehorse, Carcross, Mt Lorne, and Tagish. We sent e-mails to seventeen stakeholders letting them know about the open houses.

The open houses were at the Tagish Community Hall, the Gunnar Nilsson and Mickey Lammers Research Forest, Marsh Lake Community Centre, Carcross Learning Centre and the Kwanlin Dün Potlatch House. Approximately 30 members of the public attended these meetings, with an average of five members of the public at each meeting. We also set up an information booth at the Mount Lorne Harvest Market on July 16, 2019, and at the Fireweed Community Market on June 20, 2019 and July 4, 2019.

Stakeholder engagement

On June 27, 2019, we sent letters out to 17 stakeholder groups. These groups included mandated boards and councils, tourism groups, local advisory committees, community associations, outfitters and other associations with an interest in forest management planning. The letters asked the stakeholders to provide their views on the plan. Additionally, timber resource licence holders and fuelwood licence holders were contacted to ask for their views on the plan. Stakeholders were contacted again via e-mail in August and September 2019 to invite them to the open houses. We received input via e-mail or letter from six stakeholders.

First Nations consultation

On June 13, 2019, we contacted four First Nations to engage in consultation. Forest Management Branch sent letters to the First Nations whose traditional territory is adjacent to or overlapping with the plan boundary. The letters were sent to Champagne and Aishihik First Nations; Teslin Tlingit Council; and Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. The letters asked if there are any potential impacts to rights that the Joint Planning Committee should be made aware of and should be considered prior to approving the plan. Additionally, a letter was sent to Taku River Tlingit First Nation whose asserted traditional territory overlaps the planning boundary. This letter asked if there are any potential impacts to asserted rights that the Joint Planning Committee should be made aware of.

Renewable resources council consultation

During the consultation period, we contacted representatives from Carcross/Tagish and Laberge Renewable Resource Councils (RRC). The RRCs were asked if there are interests that should be considered prior to making a decision on the plan. A Forest Management Branch representative also attended the Laberge RRC education day on September 7, 2019 to present the plan to RRC members. Both RRCs were engaged in the development of the plan and provided support through the public events.



Public Survey Results

Part 1: Why do we need a forest resources management plan for Whitehorse and Southern Lakes?

The committee identified a variety of reasons why we need a forest management plan for Whitehorse and Southern Lakes.

Environment

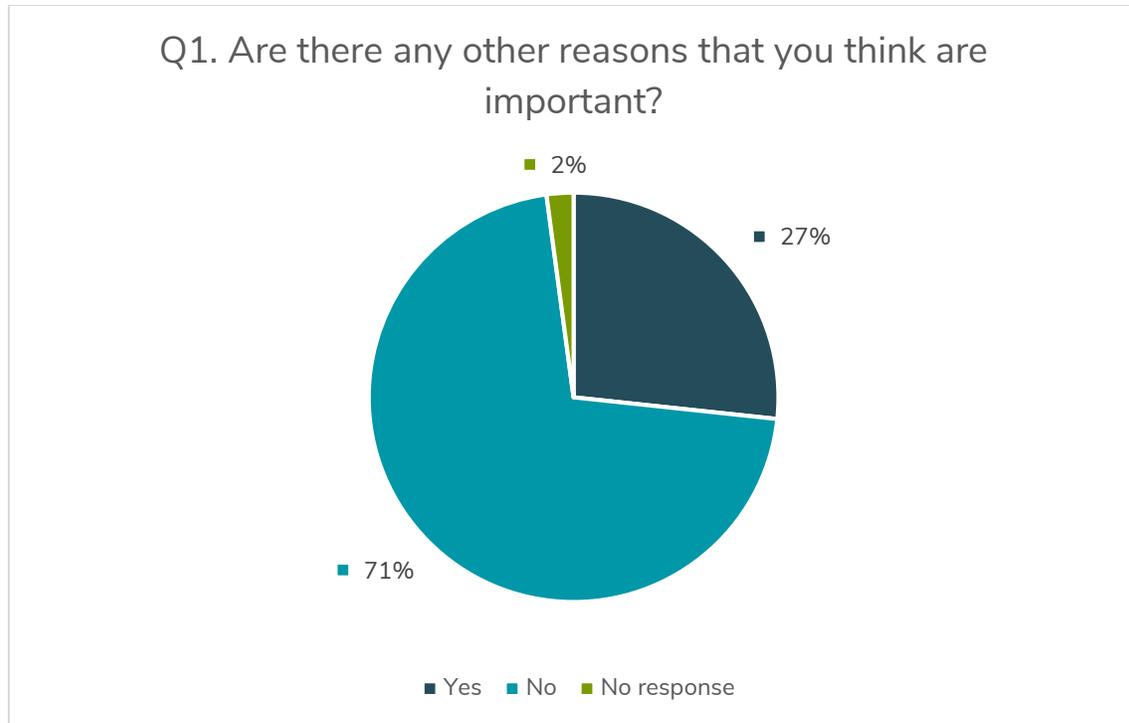
- **Wildfire:** Wildfire is a natural and important ecological process in the region and balancing the potential benefits and risks of fire is a complex task.
- **Wildlife:** We share the area with wildlife and need to protect wetlands and other habitat.
- **Longevity:** Cumulative impacts like increased access and climate change can alter forest ecosystems.

Relationships

- **Traditional knowledge:** Traditional knowledge and values guide forest management in the Southern Lakes area.
- **Governance:** Multiple governments have management responsibilities over forest resources.

Human activity

- **Density:** Most of Yukon's growing population and infrastructure are located in the area.
- **Recreation:** Many people enjoy spending time in the forest for recreation and leisure.
- **Homeowners:** Many people heat their homes with fuelwood and enjoy having access to local wood products.
- **Industry:** Some people make their living harvesting fuel wood, saw logs and other forest products.



Why do we need a forest resources management plan for Whitehorse and Southern Lakes?

There were 61 comments made regarding question one. The survey comments for all the survey questions were reviewed and categorized into themes by Forest Management Branch. Several themes emerged from the comments for each question.

Most of the comments made in this section are reflected in the plan. Three comments were deleted because they were unclear or not related to the question. The five key themes from the comments are listed below.

Wildland fire and fuel abatement (14 comments):

- The potential impacts of wildland fire on public health and safety.
- The importance of fuel abatement around communities.
- The need to educate the public about forest management and wildland fire.

Climate change (8 comments):

- Respondents are concerned about the effects that climate change will have forest ecosystems.
- Respondents recognize the role of the forest in carbon sequestration.



Environment (18 comments):

- Use forest management to maintain ecosystem connectivity and to support habitat conservation.
- Limit opportunities to build new roads or trails into the non-contributing zone.
- Maintain biodiversity.
- Consider water quality in forest planning.
- Monitor forest health.

Human activity (23 comments):

- People want to use the forest as a place for recreation and education.
- Respondents identified the need for accessible commercial and personal use timber harvesting opportunities as a major driver of the plan.
- Protection and access to non-timber forest product harvest opportunities (e.g. berries, medicinal plants, mushrooms, bark and syrup).
- Protection and access to hunting and trapping opportunities.
- Planning for the future growth and development of the Whitehorse and Southern Lakes region.

Collaborative forest management planning (5 comments):

- It is important to consider local knowledge in the plan.
- Considerations of other management plans as they are completed and implemented.
- The importance of collaborative planning between First Nation governments and the Government of Yukon.

Disagrees with the plan (2 comments):

- Two respondents were not in support of any form of timber harvesting activity.
- Two respondents felt that the public consultation during the planning process was inadequate.

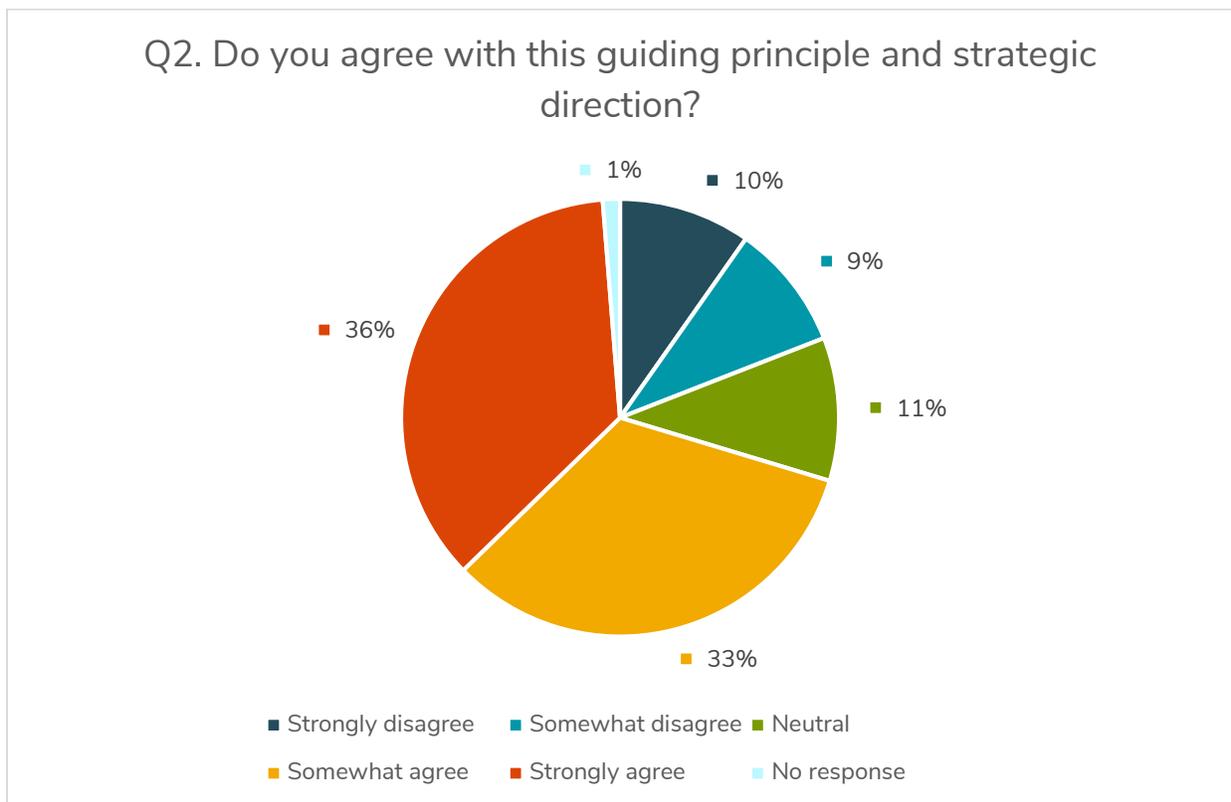
Part 2: Guiding principles and strategic directions

Understanding the forest in a holistic way

The first guiding principle is to use a holistic approach to managing the forest. This means emphasizing the whole system and the connections between the individual parts. We must consider trees, water, other plants and animals (including humans). All these things together contribute to the health of the forest.

The following strategic directions are related to this guiding principle:

- Consider the cumulative effects of timber harvesting.
- Protect and reduce impacts on wildlife habitat.
- Work together to make sure timber harvesters are operating within their authorizations on all lands.
- Protect berry patches, medicinal plants, lichen, water quality and heritage resources.
- Return the landscape to a more natural, mixed-age forest using selective tree cutting and prescribed burning.



What changes would you like to see made for the guiding principle and strategic directions?

There were 100 comments regarding changes that respondents would like to see made to this guiding principle. Ten comments were deleted because they were unclear or not related to the question. Four themes emerged from these comments.

Key Themes:

Comments that state the respondent agrees with the guiding principle (9 comments)

Include fuel abatement and wildfire management in this guiding principle (25 comments):

- Use fuel abatement and prescribed burning to protect communities from wildfire.
- Use timber harvesting as a fuel abatement strategy.
- Consider the implications of human caused wildfire.

Include habitat conservation and forest monitoring in this guiding principle (29 comments):

- Use timber harvest planning to protect habitats and support connectivity.
- Decommission new access into timber harvest areas after use.
- Monitor forest health using long-term studies.

Climate change considerations should be included in this guiding principle (6 comments):

- Consider the impacts of forest management on carbon storage in the forest.
- Consider the implications of major forest disturbances, such as forest fires on climate change.

Forest harvest methods and access to forest products should be included in this guiding principle (17 comments):

- Protect access to non-timber forest products.
- Consider the cumulative impacts of timber harvesting.
- Use forest products as biofuel (biomass).
- Use a variety of timber harvest methods (e.g. selective harvest) and monitor their impacts.
- Ensure the availability of personal use fuelwood.

Disagrees with the principle and with timber harvesting (8 comments):

- Some respondents are concerned that resource management plans result in too much regulation and impinge on the lifestyles of individuals.
- A few respondents are not in support of timber harvesting of any kind for any purpose.
- Some respondents are concerned about environmental degradation due to harvesting forest products from areas disturbed by wildfire or pest outbreaks.
- Respondents are against selective harvesting where only the largest trees are cut down. These respondents are concerned that this method of harvesting will only leave stunted and slow-growing trees on the land base resulting in a less desirable genetic pool.
- Some respondents are adverse to returning the forest to a mixed aged forest and believe the forest should be left alone.

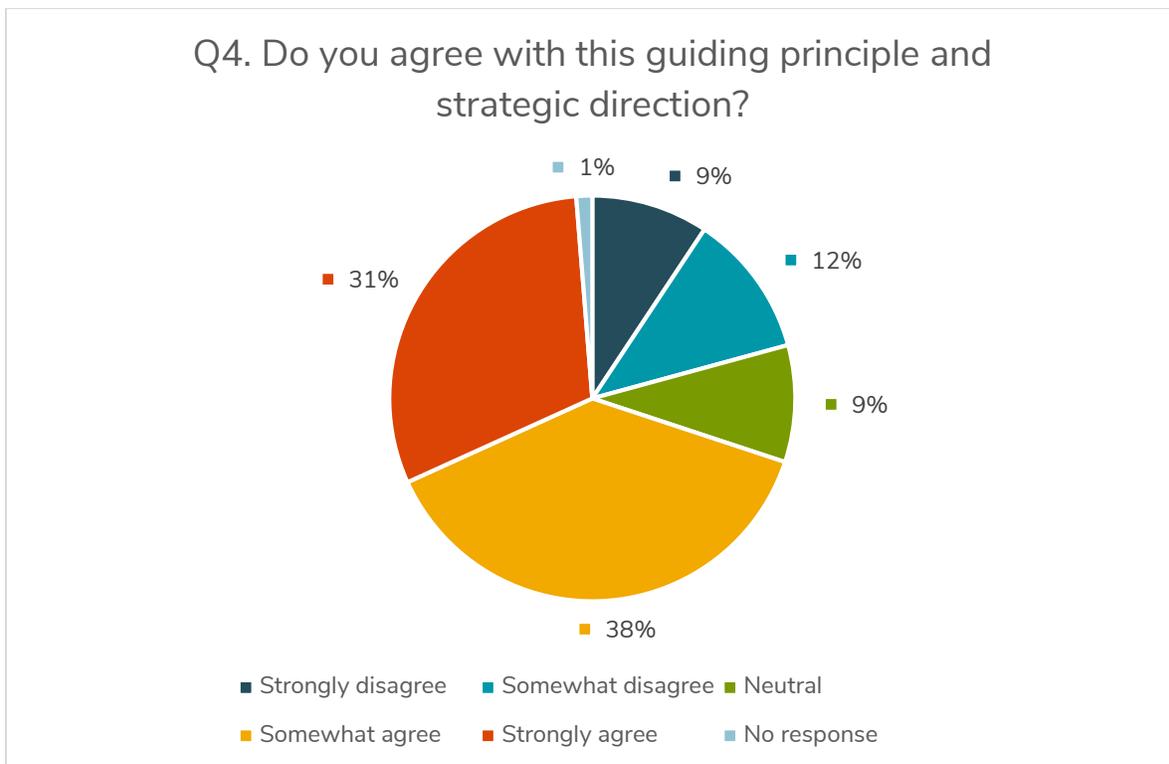


Understanding the forest as a place of learning

The second guiding principle is to respect the forest as a place of learning. We must make sure that we provide opportunities to learn from our work and that we can adapt from the lessons learned.

The following strategic directions related to this guiding principle:

- Review the implementation plan after 10 years.
- Adjust the plan as needed when a regional land use plan is approved.
- Make sure that other activities are consistent with the direction in this plan.
- Educate people about:
 - traditional use of forests and the respectful use of forests;
 - trapping and habitat needs of fish and wildlife, especially caribou and salmon;
 - how wood cutting can impact and benefit wildlife habitat;
 - forest health; and
 - enforcement of forest harvesting rules and regulations across all lands.



What changes would you like to see made for this guiding principle and strategic direction?

There were 76 comments. Twelve comments were deleted because they were unclear or not related to the question. Three themes emerged from these comments.

Agrees with the principle and strategic directions (7 comments)

Plan review (14 comments):

- Some comments suggested that the plan should be reviewed before 10 years.
- Use a holistic and scientific approach to monitoring and implementation.
- Ensure the public is engaged in the plan review.
- Ensure a collaborative approach is used when reviewing the plan.

Include important elements of education in this guiding principle (23 comments):

- Educate youth and children to ensure they have a deep understanding of forest values and ecosystems.
- Education about: the use of forest products as biomass; invasive species; using the forest as a place of solace and healing; climate change; recreational value of the forest; and the impacts and benefits of timber harvesting on wildlife habitat is important to respondents.
- Creation of citizen science opportunities.

Include fuel abatement in this strategic direction (8 comments);

- Ensure the public is aware of FireSmart opportunities on public land and on adjacent private land.
- Educate people about wildfire risks.

Disagrees with the principle (6 comments):

- Concern that regulations will be difficult to enforce.
- Some respondents are not in support of timber harvesting.
- Some respondents are not in support of hunting and trapping.



What changes would you like to see made for the guiding principle and strategic directions?

Respecting and honouring traditional laws

The third guiding principle is to respect and honour traditional laws and customs. We can do this by using, implementing and upholding these traditional laws and customs.

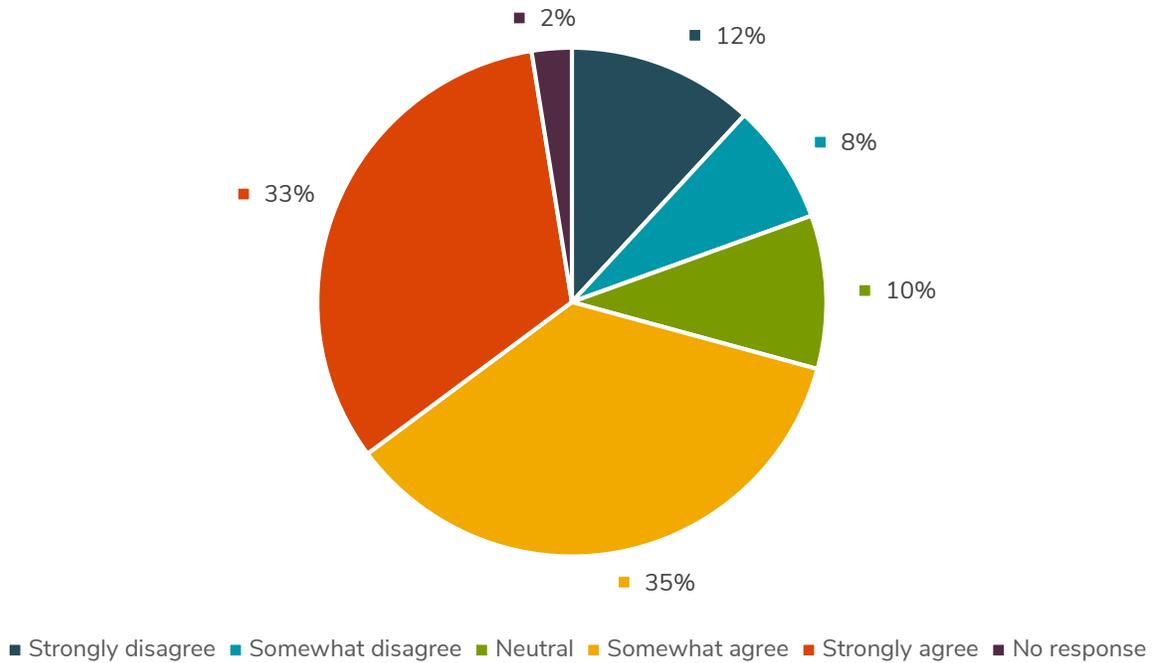
Traditional laws and customary practices include:

- take only what you need;
- give back something for everything you take;
- use everything you take and do not waste;
- communicate and work together to protect the health of the land and water; and
- treat all things with respect.

The following strategic directions are related to this guiding principle:

- Include traditional knowledge in all aspects of forest management planning.
- Establish a working group to plan landscape-level fuel reduction and focus timber harvest near communities to reduce the risk of wildfires.
- Only harvest trees in important caribou winter range if needed to reduce forest fuel, manage forest insects and disease, or for research.
- Use existing access whenever possible and coordinate all new forest resources management access with First Nations, territorial and municipal governments.
- Encourage wood cutters to cut wood locally and disperse personal fuel wood harvest to avoid excess cutting in an area.
- Establish a collaborative team to plan and implement timber supply and harvest, and develop monitoring programs to see how well things are working.
- Improve collaboration on compliance and enforcement challenges and solutions.
- Salvage timber from other land uses such as Fire Smart projects.
- Prioritize harvesting dead wood for fuel wood and opportunities for biomass and small scale wood products.
- Replant trees and monitor growth to give back what we take from the forest.

Q6. Do you agree with this guiding principle and strategic direction?



There were 75 comments about this guiding principle. Twelve comments were deleted because they were unclear or not related to the question. Four major themes emerged from these comments.

Agrees with the guiding principle (8 comments):

- Expressed that this principle is crucial to successful management.
- Voiced the importance of a balanced management approach including scientific methods.

Include access to forest product harvesting and recreational opportunities in this guiding principle (8 comments):

- Ensure access to commercial and personal use timber harvest opportunities.
- Ensuring access to non-timber forest products.
- Protecting recreational opportunities in the forest.
- Use forest products as biofuels.



Include fuel abatement in this guiding principle (8 comments):

- Importance of fuel abatement programs.
- Plant deciduous trees in areas that have been “FireSmarted” or selectively harvested.
- Work with wildland fire to implement fuel abatement strategies.

Include a collaborative planning approach in this guiding principle (5 comments):

- Respondents expressed the importance of involving the public in the planning process.
- Respondents expressed the importance of working with First Nations governments and other Government of Yukon departments.

Concern regarding the language used in this principle (15 comments):

- Some respondents agree with the principle but are unclear on the meaning of some of the language used in this guiding principle regarding Traditional Knowledge.
- Some respondents do not fully understand how the plan can enforce traditional laws.
- Some respondents do not understand how to implement the plan using traditional laws and the scientific method.

Disagrees with the guiding principle (3 comments)

- The plan is too complex to be functional.
- The respondents who disagreed were not in support of timber harvesting of any kind.
- Concern that there is not a large enough wood supply to sustainably feed biomass systems.

Part 3: How are forests in the Southern Lakes zoned for different uses?

The area is divided into three forest management zones. The zones are based on wildfire risk, timber value, current use, access and wildlife habitat.

Interface zone

This zone includes forests around communities and ranked highest priority for forest management and timber harvesting. Timber harvesting will be focused on reducing fuel load around communities to lower wildfire risk and may also include personal fuel wood harvesting, commercial harvesting and research. Timber harvest plans will focus on protecting identified values and will consider direction from other plans in the area.

Provisional zone

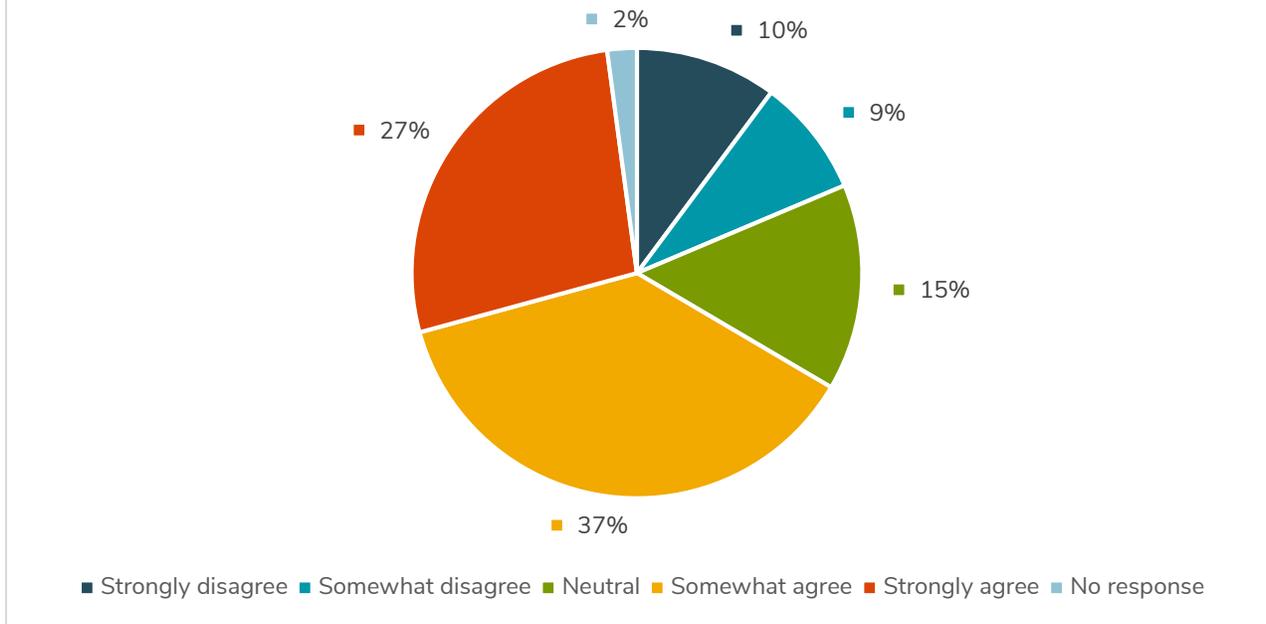
This zone includes semi-remote wilderness with limited access and areas with high wildlife, tourism and cultural values. Here, timber harvesting may happen after natural disturbances such as forest fires, flooding, insect and disease infestations. Timber harvesting can also occur if a mine, road or other land use requires harvesting trees.

Non-contributing zone

This zone is remote wilderness with little or no access, and high wildlife, tourism and cultural values. Forest resource harvesting is only allowed for traditional uses based on aboriginal rights and titles, trapping, commercial lodges, outfitters and personal use. Construction of new forest resources roads is not permitted in this zone.



Q8. Do you agree with these zones?



What changes would you like to see made for these zones?

Comments that agree with the zones (9 comments)

- The three zones are clearly defined and rationalized.

Comments that disagree with the zones (8 comments)

- The current zones are prohibitive to the development of forest resources.
- The non-contributing zone is too big and restrictive.
- Timber harvesting, including fuel abatement activities, should not be allowed in any zones.

Comments regarding habitat conservation and connectivity within the zones (11 comments):

- Concerns regarding harvest in the provisional and interface zone and the impact of timber harvesting on woodland caribou.
- Concerns regarding new access and roads within the provisional and interface zones.
- Respondents want forest management to help maintain ecosystem and habitat connectivity.
- Many respondents suggested the non-contributing zone should be called 'the wilderness zone' or 'hinterland'.
- Some respondents are concerned that increased access to the provisional and interface will positively or negatively affect hunting and trapping opportunities.

Comments regarding fuel abatement (5 comments):

- Timber harvest near communities is especially important.
- Use timber harvest to protect existing values.
- Consider fuel abatement in the non-contributing zone.

Comments on changes regarding the management within each zone (13 comments):

- Concerns that residences in the provisional and non-contributing zone will not be managed as carefully or have as many fuel abatement projects as residences in the interface zone.
- Concern that timber harvested for land conversions will not be salvaged or used.
- Concern that the zones may limit opportunities for commercial forestry.
- Opportunities to cut dead standing and downed wood for personal use should be allowed in any zone.

Several respondents felt that the zones were unclear or ambiguous (6 comments):

- A more detailed map should be made so that readers can see zone boundaries more easily.
- Respondents feel they need more information on how values will be protected in each zone.
- The link to the zone map did not work for several respondents.



Describe any additional changes you would like to see made in the plan.

Eighty-nine comments were made describing additional changes that respondents would like to see made to the plan. Many of the comments are already reflected in the plan. The comments show a clear trend of reasons why the plan is important to Yukoners in the Whitehorse and Southern Lakes area. The comments throughout the plan demonstrate that the public is primarily concerned with fuel abatement, wildfire risk, and environmental conservation.

Themes:

Education (7 comments):

- Education regarding forest ecology for the public.
- Education about biomass.

Utilizing the forest for recreation (4 comments):

- The importance of protecting viewscapes.
- Maintenance of recreational activities that occur in the forest.

Fuel abatement and wildfire (22 comments):

- Address the health and public safety risks associated with wildfire.
- Utilize prescribed burning and FireSmart techniques.
- Encourage private property owners to complete fuel abatement activities on their own properties.

Environmental conservation (24 comments):

- Concern that timber harvest will negatively impact wildlife.
- Importance of forest management in light of a changing climate.
- Utilizing forest management to maintain habitat corridors.

Commercial and personal use timber harvest opportunities (13 comments):

- Implementation of silviculture practices after commercial timber harvest operations.
- Need additional development of commercial and personal use timber areas.
- Implement effective enforcement in commercial timber harvest areas.

The importance of planning (11 comments):

- Respondents express the importance of public consultation throughout plan implementation and monitoring.
- The plan should be reviewed in less than 10 years.
- Ensure First Nations are considered throughout the monitoring and planning process.
- Make management and planning decisions using a scientific method.
- Consider local area plans and community plans as they are developed.

General agreement (7 comments):

- No additions need to be made to the plan.

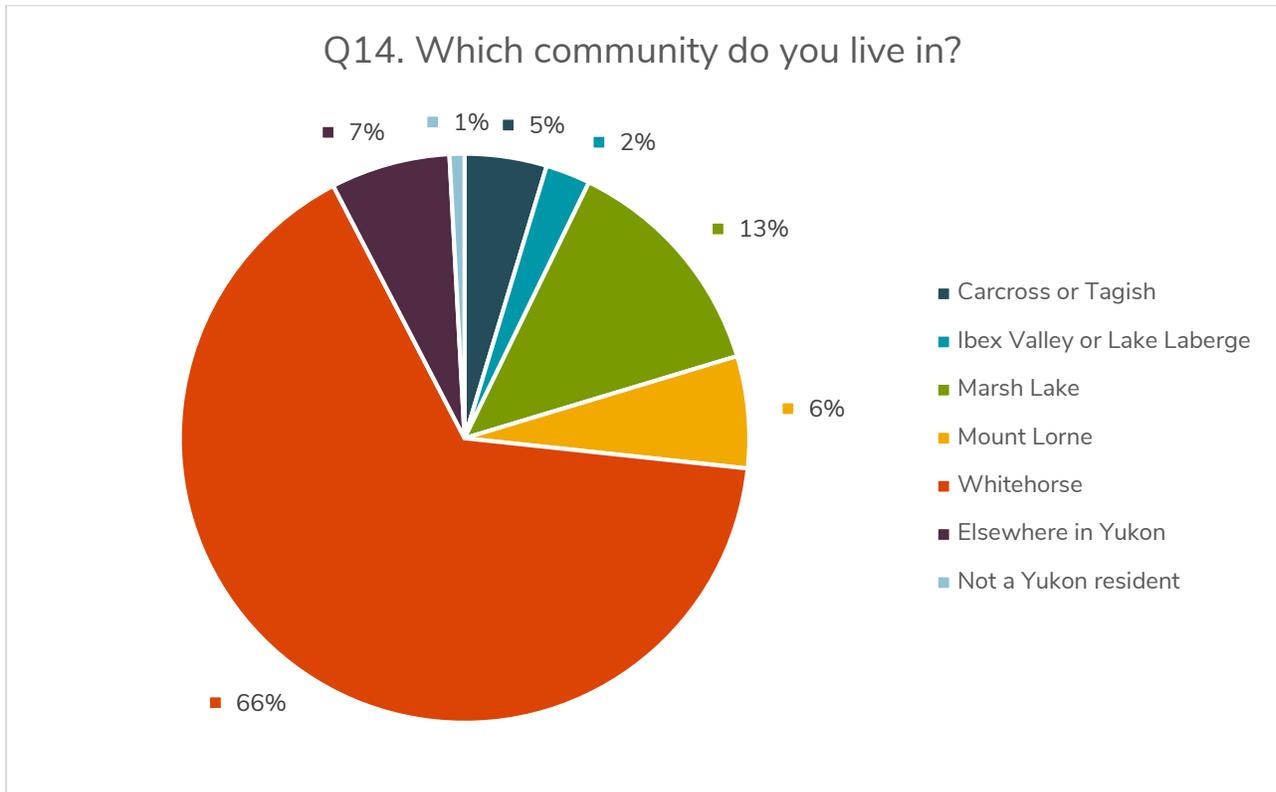
Disagrees with the plan (5 comments):

- Too many values are identified in the plan to effectively manage.
- The direction of the plan is unclear.
- The plan is too vague.
- The language used in the plan is inaccessible.



Respondent Demographics:

99% of respondents were individuals. 1% of responses were from a First Nation; municipal government; or business/corporation.



Observation and Error:

Survey:

- The survey comments that we received were compiled in a single document. It is not possible to read survey responses individually. Some respondents refer to their own comments in their responses. These comments have no context and have been redacted. In the future, it would be beneficial to let survey respondents know that all comments are compiled and we cannot read individual surveys.
- We believe many survey respondents did not read the plan or the summary of the plan. Many of the questions or comments from the survey results are addressed in the plan. In future surveys, it is important to communicate that respondents should read the summary document prior to completing a survey. Creating a concise and short summary document could help improve the public survey results.
- The link to the zone map did not work for some survey respondents making it challenging for those respondents to make meaningful comments about the zones.

Public Consultation:

- The language used in planning should be accessible to any member of the public.
- It can be challenging to get members of the public out to public meetings and events. Different advertising and promotional efforts should be used prior to public engagement sessions in the future.

Responses from the public meetings and online feedback:

With the exception of the meeting in Tagish, there was low turnout at the public meetings. However, the participants who attended the meetings were engaged and interested in discussing the plan and the issues. Several major themes emerged from the public meetings and online feedback.

Feedback from public meetings:

- The participants were concerned about potential impacts to property and the environment due to wildfires. The public wants to be informed and know what fuel abatement projects will look like. Public engagement regarding fuel abatement will be important throughout plan implementation.
- The participants want to ensure that there is access to nearby commercial and personal use timber harvesting opportunities.
- Attendees expressed the importance of habitat conservation and connectivity, especially in regards to the woodland caribou population.
- It is important that there are educational opportunities for the public regarding forest management and wildland fire.

Social Media comments & E-mails from the public:

- Forest harvesting should be allowed in areas where there have been major disturbances such as insect outbreaks or wildfire.
- Tree planting should occur after harvesting and after some major natural or human caused disturbances such as wildfire, timber harvesting or insect/disease outbreaks.
- The public is concerned about wildfire. People who sent e-mails and commented on social media are supportive of fuel abatement and commercial harvesting to reduce wildland fire risk.
- Some people are concerned that we do not have the capacity to effectively employ fuel abatement projects in Yukon.
- Forest management and timber harvesting helps keep the forest safe and healthy.



Responses from Stakeholders:

We received six letters from stakeholders regarding the plan. Below are the themes regarding changes or additions that stakeholders suggested. Some of the comments from stakeholders have already been reflected in the plan.

Commercial and Personal Use Forest Activity:

- Yukon based commercial forestry opportunities for the private sector are important.
- Harvested timber from land conversion activities has commercial value as biomass or other timber or fuelwood product.

Conservation and Climate Change:

- Include the conservation of wetlands in each landscape unit as an indicator of successful plan implementation.
- The plan addresses the importance of establishing a connected system of protected areas within the planning area.
- The sections on climate change and cumulative effects are well thought out and comprehensive. Include a more comprehensive climate change adaptation plan in the next iteration of the plan.
- There is some concern regarding potential harvesting in the provisional zone due to insects and diseases. The feedback indicated that not all disturbed areas should be harvested. Insect and disease are part of natural processes that help establish a forest mosaic. These disturbed areas provide winter habitat to caribou.
- The non-contributing zone should be renamed to reflect the holistic intent of the plan.
- The plan proposes a holistic approach to managing forest ecosystems using traditional and scientific knowledge.
- The plan aims to recognize and accommodate numerous interests and values in the region.
- Some stakeholders suggested that the identified values of the planning region could be more clear, drawing links between values, guiding principles, strategic directions, goals and indicators.
- Greater attention should be given to the natural processes that drive boreal ecosystems and shape forest condition, patterns and biodiversity. There are gaps in quantitative and spatial information on fire regimes and forest age-class distribution.

Fuel Abatement and Wildfire:

- The plan is comprehensive and reflects the urgent need to mitigate the risk of wildfire in the interface zone.
- Concern that the zone boundaries will create a piecemeal approach to fuel abatement strategies.
- Timber harvesting opportunities, both commercial and personal, can have a major impact on fuel abatement in the area.

Planning

- More strategic direction for monitoring and managing cumulative effects of human activity in the region is needed.
- The plan sets a target of 5 years after implementation to complete a timber supply analysis, compile data on indicators, and develop and monitoring framework. More progress should have been made on these activities during the initial planning process.

Consultation with First Nations:

We received a letter from Champagne and Aishihik First Nations regarding the consultation. Champagne and Aishihik First Nations is supportive of the plan and pleased that a holistic approach to planning has been used.

A few suggestions were included in their response:

- Include the Umbrella Final Agreements in the list of documents on page 12 that have directed the planning process.
- The Game Mother story and Asuya and Crow story on page 14 and 21 should have the story tellers referenced.
- It is great that traditional place names are in the plan. Southern Tutchone, Tagish, and Tlingit place names are used in the plan. When traditional names are used, the language that the name is in should be listed.
- Champagne and Aishihik First Nations have settlement land within the planning area. It is important to recognize that Champagne and Aishihik First Nations has jurisdiction over their Settlement Land.



Discussion:

Overall, there appears to be support for the plan from members of the public, First Nations governments, and stakeholders. The feedback that we have received has four clear themes:

- Wildland fire management and fuel abatement is important in the Whitehorse and Southern Lakes area.
- Considerations regarding habitat conservation and connectivity are necessary when implementing the forest management plan. Woodland caribou must be considered.
- The public is interested in educational opportunities surrounding forestry and opportunities to utilize the forest for recreation.
- Personal and commercial forest product availability is important.

What's next?

Following public consultation, the Government of Yukon, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and Carcross/Tagish First Nation will review the input received and will work together to update the recommended plan. Then, each government will make a decision on whether to approve the plan as it applies to their lands.