

NORTHERN LANDS NORTHERN LEADERSHIP

The GNWT Land Use and Sustainability Framework





MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER

Land is life. It is the link to our past. Many people draw their spiritual and cultural identity from the land. It has provided food and materials to sustain the people of the Northwest Territories (NWT) for hundreds of years, and it is the key to the future. The abundance of natural features and resources offers the potential for economic development and revenues to support investments in our people, our environment and our economy.

We have long held that decisions that influence our territory's economy and environment are better guided and managed by the people who live here. The devolution of authorities over public lands, water and resources gives the people of our territory that decision-making power.

It is important that NWT land owners and other partners know how the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) will be managing land, water and resources in the public interest. The *Land Use and Sustainability Framework* lays out the GNWT's vision. It will guide our land use decision-making and describes how we will carry out our new roles and responsibilities after devolution.

The North has always been about partnerships. Everyone in the NWT has a stake in making this a healthy, strong and prosperous territory. The framework sets out the principles and interests the GNWT will bring to the table when working with our partners to unlock our natural resources' vast potential and achieve environmental sustainability to create prosperity for our people.

The framework links past policy and incorporates changing realities and new responsibilities. It sets out how the GNWT will deal with the broad issue of land use and the sustainability principles that have always been the cornerstone of this government's approach to resource development and our relationship to the land, the water and resources. We hope that the framework will bring clarity and transparency and make it easier to work with other partners for the benefit of the people of the NWT.





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INTRODUCTION

The residents of the NWT have a long relationship with the land. But the way we use land is changing. There has been a movement away from traditional land use and harvesting activities towards an increasing reliance on the wage economy. Where we are living, what we are doing and global effects of climate change are all having impacts on our land.

The land management and governance context in the NWT is also evolving. Land-claim and self-government agreements are being negotiated and implemented. Legislation governing the NWT regulatory regime is changing. Through devolution, the GNWT is acquiring new authorities and responsibilities for land management.

The GNWT has been working towards a clear vision and framework to support the GNWT's participation in various land-use decision-making processes, whether it be approval of land-use plans, environmental impact assessments, permitting of development projects, establishment of national parks, or protection of land and water for cultural or environmental reasons. In July 2012, the GNWT released *Land is Life: Towards a GNWT Land Use and Sustainability Framework*. This discussion paper proposed the GNWT's vision, principles and interests for land-use and management. Aboriginal and community governments, land and water managers, environmental organizations and industry representatives across the NWT were asked to provide comments and their views on the GNWT's roles and responsibilities in a post-devolution land-management regime.

Based on what we heard, as well as the requirements for implementation of the devolution agreement, the GNWT has finalized the *Land Use and Sustainability Framework*. It will guide us as we assume our responsibilities as the public government responsible for public lands and resources.





J. Charlwood/GNWT

THE FRAMEWORK

The *Land Use and Sustainability Framework* is a vision document that sets out the GNWT's thinking about land use in the Northwest Territories. It lays out where we want to go as we transition to our new role as a land owner and responsible land manager.

The framework does not replace existing land-use planning processes; rather, it is intended to facilitate greater consistency in GNWT decision-making and participation in land management.

VISION

The GNWT's vision to guide its decisions about land use and land management is:

Land is life – it sustains and nourishes us spiritually, culturally, physically, economically and socially. Working together, Northerners will responsibly and sustainably manage the lands, waters and natural resources of the Northwest Territories for the benefit of current and future generations.

This vision embraces the spirit and intent of sustainability and stewardship.

Land use is sustainable if it meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Land use is sustainable if it has a capacity to ensure that current and future economic, social and cultural needs are met. Land use is sustainable if it maintains ecosystem integrity and biological diversity.

The vision states that all Northerners are responsible for the planning and management of land and resources. This concept of stewardship speaks to the need for everyone to take responsibility for lands, water and resources and to work collaboratively to safeguard what is important, whether it is traditional values, environmental conditions or the prosperity of Northerners.

If we achieve this vision, we will see a Northwest Territories with:

- Rich diversity of cultures and ways of life for NWT residents;
- Healthy ecosystems and environment; and
- Responsible and diversified economic development.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The GNWT will adhere to a set of principles to guide its actions concerning land-use and land management in the Northwest Territories. In order to achieve this vision, land-use decisions will be:

BALANCED AND SUSTAINABLE

Land-management decisions consider ecological, social, cultural and economic values to ensure maximum benefits to current and future generations.

RESPONSIBLE AND RESPONSIVE

Land-management decisions are made in the context of sound environmental stewardship, where all of society takes responsibility to maintain a healthy environment and ecological integrity. Precautionary decision-making and best management practices are implemented to protect and conserve the condition, quality, diversity and abundance of land values. Land-management policies and decisions are adaptable to new information and changing environmental, economic and social conditions.

RESPECTFUL

Land-management decision-making recognizes and respects Aboriginal and Treaty rights, as well as third-party land interests and legal rights.

RELEVANT AND INFORMED

Decisions about land and resources within the NWT are made primarily by residents of the NWT. Communities and residents in all regions have the opportunity for meaningful engagement and input into land use decisions. Traditional, local and scientific knowledge are used in the decision-making process.



Dene drummers/GNWT



D. Mulders/GNWT

COORDINATED AND COLLABORATIVE

Land use, planning and management are shared responsibilities. Decisions about land use are made in coordination with relevant GNWT departments and external organizations and agencies that have responsibilities for land-use planning and management decisions. Trans-boundary land-management issues are managed cooperatively within the NWT as well as with neighbouring jurisdictions.

FAIR AND EQUITABLE

Responsibilities for environmental stewardship and creation of revenue opportunities are shared equitably across all regions of the NWT.

TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE

Land-management decision-making processes are clear, transparent, consistent and communicated.

These principles speak to our commitment to approach land use decision-making from a perspective that considers the environment, the economy and the NWT way of life.

These principles will guide the GNWT to approach work from a perspective broader than any one departmental mandate. These principles will provide guidance to the GNWT as it delivers programs, advances positions and makes decisions that impact the land.

NWT Land Interests

The GNWT has the responsibility for ensuring that decisions regarding land use, planning and management reflect the interests and priorities of all residents of the NWT. Building from the vision and principles, the GNWT has articulated a set of NWT land interests.

Balancing these interests will allow Northerners to share the wealth of the resources, the opportunities for employment, and the responsibility for ecological sustainability.

The Land Sustains Us

Land is the foundation of many of our spiritual and cultural values, as well as Aboriginal languages in the NWT. The land is the basis of the traditional economy.

- Land is managed in a manner that supports and respects NWT cultural values, identity and uses;
- Traditional and scientific knowledge is used in managing lands;
- Ecosystem goods and services (including clean air, clean water) are an important source of wealth and benefits to NWT residents;
- Harvesting of resources (including wildlife, fish, forests, and agriculture) is responsibly managed to support the health and well-being of all NWT residents, now and into the future; and
- Water quality, quantity, and flow are maintained in a sustainable manner to support the health and well-being of NWT residents, land and animals.





M. Ehrlich/GNWT

We Support the Sustainability of the Land

Environmental stewardship has guided NWT land decisions for many years. Ecosystem diversity and health are priorities for the GNWT, and this is reflected through its land-management and environmental-stewardship programs.

- The land and its resources are managed in an ecologically sustainable manner over the long term;
- Environmental conditions are known and impacts to the land are prevented, monitored and mitigated to maintain ecological integrity and biodiversity;
- Adaptive cumulative effects management is implemented, monitored and enforced; and
- Protected areas are established to conserve natural and cultural values and ecological representation for current and future generations.

The Land Provides Benefits and Wealth

NWT land holds significant natural resources that offer great potential for economic development. Sustainable development of resources is essential to the long-term economic, environmental, cultural and social well-being of NWT residents. Responsibly developing these resources can result in meaningful jobs for residents, opportunities for businesses, and sources of revenue to support the fiscal health of the GNWT and enable territory-wide public programs and services for NWT residents.

- Land resources are developed in ways that create sustainable economic benefits and prosperity for NWT residents;
- The use of land supports greater NWT self-sufficiency and generates revenues and royalties in support of programs and services to NWT residents;
- The scale and pace of development are managed to maximize opportunities for NWT residents;
- Land and public infrastructure are available to meet community, regional and territorial needs;
- Land is managed to create sustainable business opportunities and employment for current and future generations of NWT residents; and
- The benefits and costs of land use are equitably distributed between communities and regions.
- Each region will have a proportionate and equitable use of land for both conservation and development.

Land Use is Well Governed

All NWT residents have an interest in how the land is managed and how land-based activities are regulated. The management and planning of our use of the land is set through legislation, agreements, regional land-use planning, regulatory review, permitting, and various programs and services.

- Aboriginal, treaty, and other legal rights related to land and resources are recognized and respected;
- Decisions about land are made in a transparent and accountable manner based on meaningful engagement with NWT residents and interested parties and, where applicable, consultation and accommodation with Aboriginal governments and organizations;
- The NWT land management regime is integrated, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
- There are clear, consistent, timely and appropriate regulatory processes; and
- Trans-boundary agreements and processes contribute to effective land management in the NWT.

LINKS WITH OTHER GNWT STRATEGIES

Sustainability of land is much broader than the physical landscape – it must also consider water, wildlife, energy, and renewable and non-renewable resources. The *Mineral Development Strategy*, the *Northwest Territories Energy Action Plan*, the *NWT Water Stewardship Strategy*, the *Protected Areas Strategy*, the *Economic Opportunities Strategy* and emerging infrastructure and transportation strategies all affect how our land and resources are used as they collectively advance the priorities of the 17th Assembly. The Land Use Sustainability Framework builds on the GNWT’s Sustainable Development Policy, provides a foundation for sustainable land use and guides integrated and principled decisions to ensure sustainable land use for the benefit of current and future generations of Northerners.

The GNWT will continue to be involved in internal and collaborative initiatives and activities that support environmental, economic, social and cultural sustainability. The framework does not replace any of these commitments or actions; it is recognized that they are needed to achieve the framework’s vision. Instead, it provides a lens for the GNWT’s participation. Our government will work with other parties to build on existing and create new strategies or initiatives that support the vision set out in this Framework.





NWT Woman skiing/istock

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR THE GNWT

The framework's vision, principles and land interests provide structure and consistency for the GNWT in undertaking its land management responsibilities and participating in collaborative land-management processes. The framework sets the foundation for action. The GNWT has identified several areas where it will focus efforts in the short term to improve land management in the NWT.

ORGANIZING OURSELVES

The highest priority for the GNWT has been preparing for the transfer of land, water and resource management functions from the federal government. The GNWT will take on its new responsibilities while continuing to deliver existing programs and services. An organized, strategic and consistent approach to land-management activities is critical to demonstrate leadership through this time of transition and into the future.

Organizational Design

The organizational design will support the GNWT in carrying out its new authorities and responsibilities. This organizational structure merges new and existing functions. As well, efforts have been made to transfer as many federal employees as possible and to recruit the necessary expertise to effectively manage public lands and resources.

Internal Governance

A governance structure for GNWT decision-making about land-related issues will facilitate coordination across GNWT departments that have a mandate for land management, to establish direction when required, to confirm priorities for GNWT land management, and to resolve any conflicts among GNWT agencies with regard to land-management issues.

WORKING WITH OUR PARTNERS

The responsibility for the management of NWT land is shared among a number of parties – Aboriginal governments, Government of Canada, NWT communities, resource-management and land-use planning boards, and private land owners. Roles and responsibilities are defined and guided by legislation and agreements. The framework informs other parties of the position and interests that the GNWT will bring to the table and consider in making responsible decisions.

Intergovernmental Council on Lands and Resources Management

The Devolution Agreement establishes an Intergovernmental Council on Lands and Resources Management. Through this council, the GNWT and Aboriginal governments in the NWT will cooperate and collaborate on areas of respective jurisdiction. The council's first priority will be to assess the land and resource management systems in the NWT to identify priority areas for potential changes and approaches and develop a work plan to address them.

NORTHERN TOOLS TO ADVANCE LAND INTERESTS AND ACHIEVE NORTHERN PRIORITIES

A tool is a means to achieve an objective. The framework lays out where we want to go as we transition to our new role as a land owner and responsible land manager. The tools available to the GNWT include legislative and regulatory instruments, policy, strategies, frameworks, action plans, formalized decision-making processes, and models. The GNWT already has many tools in its tool kit, and will inherit additional tools through devolution. Devolution is part of the political development of the NWT. In order for devolution to have meaning in the long term, it will be important for NWT residents to assert their own ideas about how territorial land should be managed.





Setting Legislative and Policy Foundations

In order to ensure a smooth transition during the devolution process, the GNWT has committed to mirroring existing federal legislation. This does not mean that land management will never change. The GNWT's new leadership role includes considering what new legislation and policies may be required for the future.

Land-Use Planning

The GNWT considers regional land-use plans to be the primary instrument to define where certain activities can take place. The GNWT recognizes that the purpose of regional land-use planning in settled claim areas in the Mackenzie Valley is to protect and promote the existing and future well-being of the residents and the communities of the settlement areas, having regard to the interests of all Canadians. Territorial land interest must take community and regional aspirations into account. It is a GNWT priority to promote and support effective land-use planning in all regions in the NWT.

Ecological Representation Network Planning

Ecological representation is a conservation-planning approach to identify core areas for protection that are representative of a region's biodiversity. The GNWT is developing a plan to identify, prioritize and fill gaps in ecological representation. Decisions about the use of land will be informed by this planning.

Information Management

Territorial land interests can be better advanced if land managers have information about how territorial land is currently being used and can reasonably forecast future uses. Enhanced information-management capacity will assist in evidence-based decision-making and in communicating with all parties.

ACHIEVING THE VISION

Completing the GNWT's *Land Use and Sustainability Framework* is both an end and a beginning.

The framework will evolve over time. We will continue to define priorities with our partners and to refine our territorial land interests. We must work with all land owners to responsibly and sustainably manage the lands, waters and natural resources of the NWT for the benefit of current and future generations.

The framework will provide guidance to the GNWT as it delivers its programs, advances its positions, and makes decisions.

The framework acknowledges the interrelationship between social, cultural, environmental and economic interests and that progress is needed in all areas in order to truly achieve sustainability. Land use decisions are challenging in that many diverse and sometimes conflicting interests must be taken into account. Whenever decisions relating to land use are made, trade-offs and compromises occur. The framework is about balance: making sure one of these elements is not achieved at the expense of another. By applying the principles, and balancing land interests, the GNWT will promote cultural diversity, environmental stewardship and sustainable economic development.





For information on the GNWT Land Use and
Sustainability Framework, please contact:

Department of Lands
Government of the Northwest Territories
PO Box 1320 Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9
lusfinfo@gov.nt.ca



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