
BACKGROUND

Integrated Fish and Wildlife Management Plans are partnership arrangements among governments plus the Renewable Resources Council with management responsibilities in a traditional territory. The plans follow a community-based format in which community concerns about fish and wildlife management are identified through appropriate consultation and solutions are jointly determined at a community workshop. Typically, these plans take almost a year to arrange and conclude. Over the past eight years, many steps have evolved to ensure that there is a clear understanding of commitment and responsibilities among the partners and that clear and candid communication continues throughout the preparation and implementation of the plan.

Each Integrated Fish and Wildlife Management Plan contains a basic format of integrating community concerns under the headings of Population, Harvest, Habitat and Community Education. Each plan, however, takes on a unique character depending on the particular interests of the community. In this case, a separate section was devoted to Old Crow Flats and many other sections were added, including Enforcement, Hunting Practices, Harvest Monitoring and Trapping.

The cooperative arrangement among the partners was more involved than usual due to the variety of special management regimes and agencies involved in this plan. These included: Vuntut National Park (VGFN/Parks Canada), Fishing Branch Ecological Reserve and Wilderness Preserve and Habitat Protection Area (VGFN/Yukon government), and Old Crow Flats Special Management Area (VGFN/Canadian Wildlife Service). Each of these areas, plus the remainder of the traditional territory, are subject to separate planning programs. For the sake of harmony and simplicity it was agreed to have the fish and wildlife plan cover essentially the entire area and for actions in the plan to be referenced (but not duplicated) in the other plans where appropriate. Thus, grizzly bear policies and actions in this plan will be cited in the plans for the Fishing Branch designations.

As a community-based management system, the goal of the integrated plans is to address community concerns based on a balanced presentation of both scientific and traditional knowledge. Generally, the scientific portions are provided by territorial and federal government agencies while traditional knowledge is acquired by the First Nation and the Renewable Resources Council. On October 2/3, 2000, the North Yukon Renewable Resources Council hosted an elders' meeting devoted to their concerns about Vuntut National Park, Old Crow Flats Special Management Area, Fishing Branch and the remainder of the traditional territory. The Renewable Resources Council also produced a community questionnaire based on household interviews and a public meeting. These documents formed the nucleus of the community concerns for the plan to address. VGFN also undertook interviews to provide traditional knowledge for the planning discussions.

Another key feature of this plan was the elder participation in the planning process. Some key examples are:

- a) Recommending that beaver not be introduced into Old Crow Flats at this time (to reduce drying up of lakes).
- b) Providing an account of a muskox being killed in VGFN traditional territory some time in the last 150 years (Charlie Peter Charlie's grandfather's story) plus a Gwitchin name for "muskox." These may be taken as community evidence for the presence of muskoxen in the past (compared to the archaeological assumption that they may not have been in this area for 3000 years).

CWS Canadian Wildlife Service
FWMB Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board
NYRRC North Yukon Renewable Resources Council
PC Parks Canada
VGFN Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation
WMAC (NS) Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope)
YG Yukon government

- c) Providing information on sheep abundance and distribution in the Fishing Branch area which suggests a substantial decline since the 1970s.
- d) Providing information that suggests that White Wing Scoters are more numerous on the Flats, whereas elsewhere, scientific information indicates they are in decline.
- e) Providing insights on how the falling water levels of the Flats affect animals both positively and negatively.
- f) Confirming the long held traditional knowledge that intensive trapping can maintain muskrat populations at high levels and describing declines and recovery rates in the past on Old Crow Flats.

The integrated plan was conducted in two workshops. The first, held in Old Crow on March 5-7, 2001, covered community concerns and presented scientific and community information related to them. This is the phase where the partners and the community come to an agreement about what will be addressed in the plan.

Following the March meeting, the partners reconvened to discuss the most likely actions that will arise from the planning session to determine their capacity to address them and to explore cooperative arrangements for doing so. Each partner then discussed these proposals with their government to determine the degree of support. This avoided the problem of a partner committing to a major project at the planning session and having it subsequently rejected by "headquarters."

The planning workshop was held in Old Crow on April 2-4, 2001, the results of which are presented in this report. Once approved by the partners, the plan will be posted on the Environment Yukon planning website. Each partner also will receive a printed copy of the plan plus a binder of complete background information.

Progress on the plan will be reviewed annually by the partners through reporting on their action assignments and collectively determining whether revisions are required. A full review and revision of the plan is scheduled for 2005.