



Yukon Parks Strategy

2020 - 2030

**Yukon**

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On the cover: View from the summit of Sheep Mountain of Wind River in the Peel watershed.

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Yukon Parks Strategy sets long-term direction for Yukon's territorial **parks system** from 2020 to 2030. It provides strategic guidance on how to sustainably deliver the benefits of **parks**: healthy land, people and economy.

Strategic opportunities and challenges for the parks system in the next decade include:

- growing use of territorial parks and land;
- a young and growing parks system;
- **reconciliation** and partnerships;
- **biodiversity**, wilderness and Yukon's place in the world; and
- climate change.

The long-term direction for the parks system incorporates four building blocks:

- Protection of ecological and cultural values.
- Reconciliation through collaborative management.
- Public service that is sustainable, efficient and accountable.
- Public benefits including healthy land, people and economy.



You can find definitions of words that **appear like this** in the glossary on pages 31 and 32.

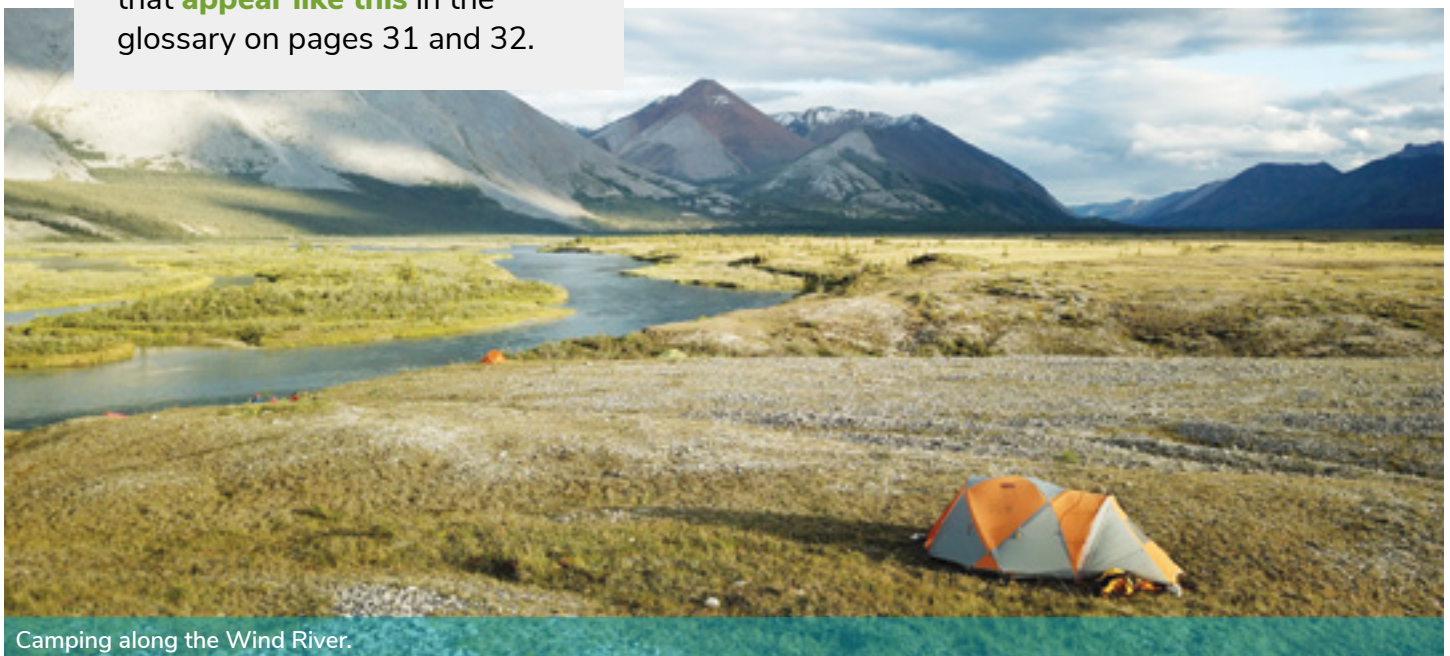
We will focus on 10 priorities for the period from 2020 to 2030

1. Keep doing what's working
2. Develop a parks system plan
3. Welcome year-round park use
4. Enrich and diversify park experiences
5. Make it easier to get a campsite
6. Establish and operate new parks
7. Ensure protection
8. Advance reconciliation
9. Modernize regulations
10. Financially sustain our parks

The strategy commits the Government of Yukon to taking 24 specific strategic actions to advance these priorities.

Implementing this strategy will involve collaboration with First Nations and Inuvialuit, partnerships, opportunities for public participation, and a government-wide approach. Implementation will require new human, financial and capital resources.

We will be accountable by publishing a brief report every three years describing our progress in implementing the strategy and related commitments.



Camping along the Wind River.

2.0 CONTEXT

2.1 About this parks strategy

The purpose of the *Yukon Parks Strategy* is to set long-term direction for Yukon's system of territorial parks and to provide strategic guidance on how to sustainably deliver the environmental, economic, social and health benefits of parks and **campgrounds**. The strategy is organized in the following way:

- context, opportunities and challenges of the decade ahead (part 2);
- long-term direction and priorities (part 3);
- specific actions we will take in the next decade and why (part 4);
- implementation (part 5); and
- glossary of key terms (part 6).

This strategy was developed with the expertise of Parks Branch staff, approaches and lessons from other jurisdictions, and a large amount of input gathered in recent years from the public and partners. Feedback was incorporated from:

- 2019 public engagement on the draft strategy;
- 2018 Talking Yukon Parks public engagement;
- 2016 public survey of campground users;
- hundreds of comment cards collected every year from park users; and
- conversations with First Nations and Inuvialuit park management partners, park users and stakeholders.

The *Yukon Parks Strategy* recognizes Aboriginal and treaty rights, and values the important role of Indigenous people as stewards of the land, traditional knowledge holders and partners in park management.

“Keep your land clean, keep your animal, that’s your friend. You look after them, they look after you. You look after your water, land, trees, you look after it, respect it. That’s our spirituality.”

- Percy Henry, Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Elder

2.2 Yukon's parks system

Yukon's territorial parks play a big role in protecting Yukon's environment, cultural heritage and ongoing traditional use by First Nations and Inuvialuit. Parks protect large **landscapes** to ensure **ecosystems** and natural processes continue unimpaired for future generations. Parks also help protect natural and cultural values by focusing recreational use where it is most appropriate and actively managing its impacts.

Today we have 57 territorial parks classified into four types: **natural environment parks, recreation parks, wilderness preserves** and **ecological reserves**. The types of parks differ in their emphasis on providing recreation opportunities, ecosystem preservation, or a mix of the two. Together, our parks represent a world-class system of recreation and protection encompassing 15,152 km² or 3.1 per cent of Yukon (see Figure 1).

Our parks are also a big part of Yukon's economy through tourism, recreation, local employment and entrepreneurship. Parks are essential to Yukon's wilderness tourism industry, which includes over 100 licensed wilderness tourism operators. Local businesses supply a range of goods and services including firewood, vehicles, fuel, communications equipment and services, and more.

Territorial parks are managed by the Department of Environment's Parks Branch in collaboration with First Nations and Inuvialuit. We work directly with First Nations and Inuvialuit to write park management plans that guide the management of individual parks and we oversee park management together through joint committees.

Yukon territorial parks are legally established and managed according to the *Parks and Land Certainty Act*. Many were established directly by First Nations and Inuvialuit **Final Agreements**.

More than one-quarter of Yukon's population camp in our campgrounds every year. In 2018 we provided over 57,000 nights of camping for over 89,000 people.

For more information about Yukon's territorial parks, visit Yukon.ca/parks.

Yukon territorial parks



Figure 1. Map of Yukon territorial parks

2.3 Strategic opportunities and challenges, 2020–2030

Five key themes emerge as we consider the strategic context, opportunities and challenges of the decade ahead.

2.3.1 Growing use of parks and land

- Use of territorial parks, by both residents and visitors, has grown dramatically in the past decade. From 2008 to 2018:
 - the number of people camping in our campgrounds increased by 80 per cent to more than 89,000 per year (see Figure 2a);



Frances Lake Campground.

- the use of our campground facilities more than doubled. The occupancy of campsites increased 103 per cent to over 57,000 nights;
- **backcountry** camping in the popular backpacking areas of Tombstone Territorial Park increased by 137 per cent; and
- the number of visits to the Tombstone Interpretive Centre increased by 176 per cent to more than 27,000 (see Figure 2b).
- Many First Nations are reporting increased recreational land use in their traditional territories. Parks can be an effective tool to manage recreational use, to protect ecological and cultural values and support ongoing traditional use.
- Growth will continue. Campground use is growing steadily at about 12 per cent annually. If growth continues at the same rate, as compared to 2018, the demand for campsites will double by 2024 and triple by 2028.
- Yukon's population, including park users, is growing, aging and urbanizing. The Yukon Bureau of Statistics reports that our population grew by 21 per cent between 2009 and 2019. During the same period, the population aged 65 and older grew by over 76 per cent. It is estimated that our population will grow by 17 per cent between 2020 and 2030, with most of this growth in Whitehorse and with people 65 and older continuing to make up a growing proportion of Yukon's population (see Figure 2c).
- Tourism in Yukon is growing. It is estimated that overnight visits to Yukon grew by 22 per cent between 2013 and 2017. The *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy* identifies a goal of doubling tourism revenue by 2028 and steps to support this goal including growing wilderness tourism and encouraging residents to travel within the territory in a way that preserves our natural environment for future generations.
- Remote backcountry experiences will be a significant growth area for Yukon's parks system over the next decade. Backcountry use is growing steadily in some parks and we will begin to formally operate a number of parks in the coming years. We will need new tools and capacity as we manage significantly more land and more recreation over the next decade.
- Use of parks outside of the traditional summer season is growing and this trend is expected to continue.

Number of people camping in territorial campgrounds

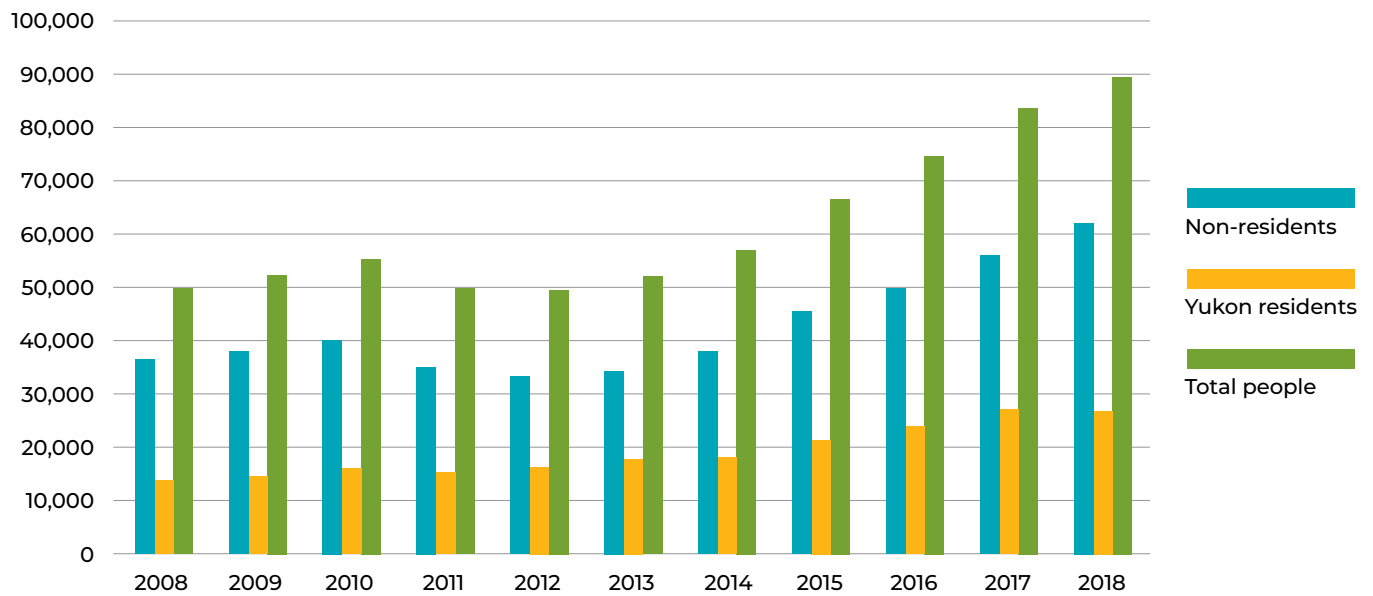


Figure 2a. Number of people camping in territorial park campgrounds each year.

Visits to Tombstone Interpretive Centre

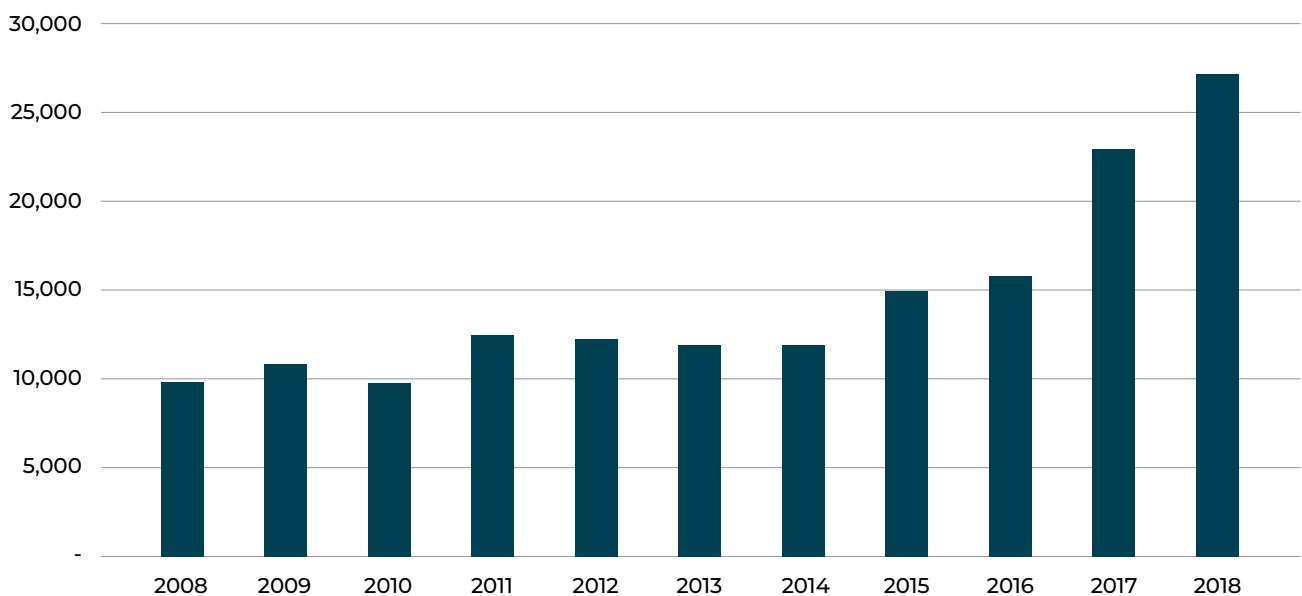


Figure 2b. Visitors to the Tombstone Interpretive Centre each year.

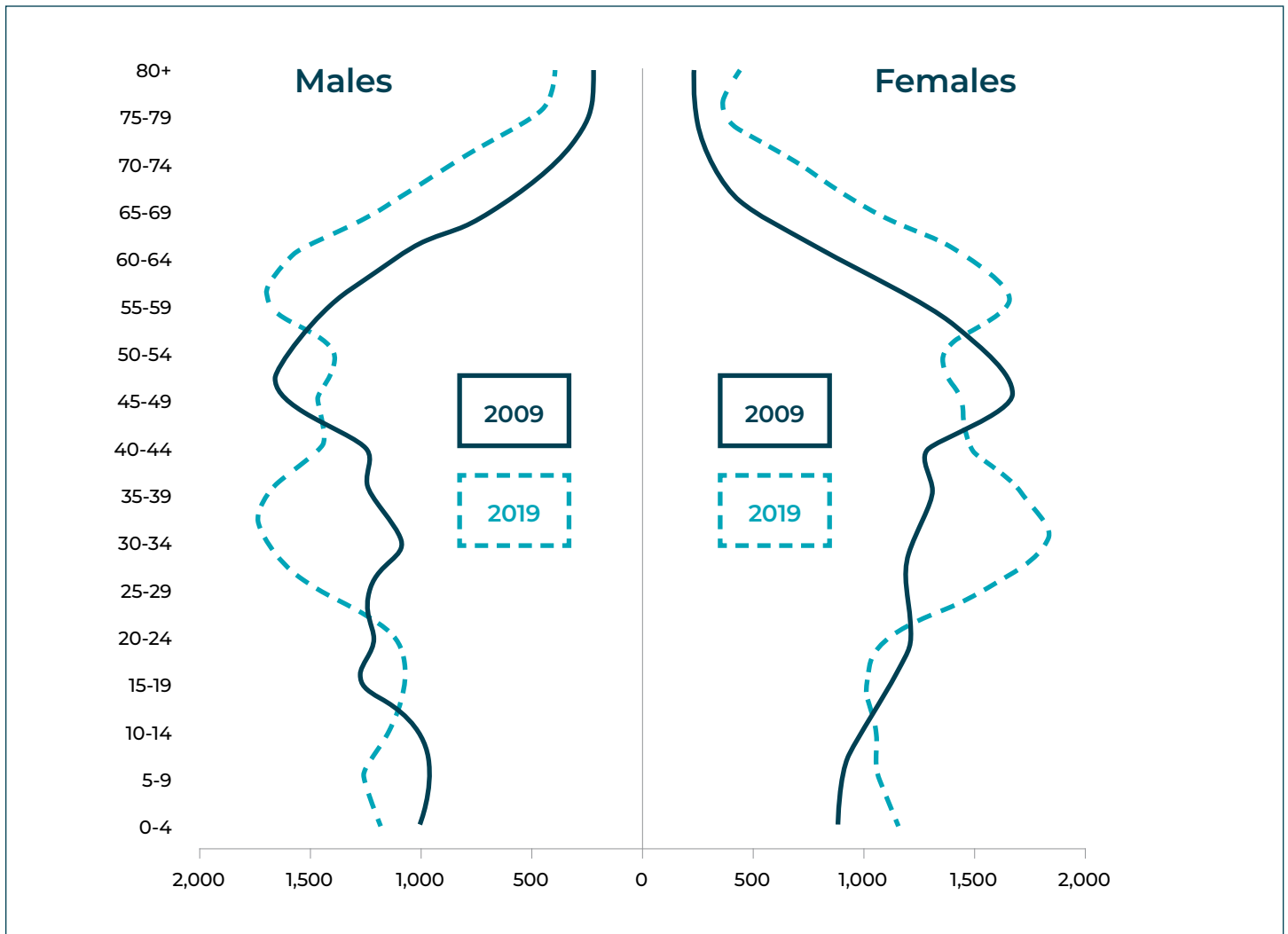


Figure 2c. Yukon population by age group and sex, June 30, 2009 and June 30, 2019.
(Yukon Bureau of Statistics Population Report, Second Quarter, 2019)

2.3.2 A young and growing parks system

- Yukon's parks system is relatively young compared to others in Canada. Our first campgrounds evolved from simple camps built for highway work crews in the 1940s. Several larger territorial parks were established through Final Agreements, beginning in 1987 when Herschel Island – Qikiqtaruk was established as a result of the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*. The Ni'iinlii Njik (Fishing Branch) wilderness preserve was established in 2002 through the *Yukon Protected Areas Strategy* and Tombstone Territorial Park was formally established in 2004.
- Yukon's parks system is growing. Three parks established under Final Agreements are expected to become operational in the coming years: Kusawa, Agay Mene and Asi Keyi. Regional land use planning is now an important mechanism for identifying new parks. For example, Dàadzàii Vàn Territorial Park is being established as a result of the *North Yukon Regional Land Use Plan*. The *Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan*, when implemented, could more than triple the size of the parks system, from 15,000 km² to 52,000 km². Regional land use planning has resumed for the Dawson region and is anticipated in other regions of Yukon in the future.
- Collaboration on parks may form part of discussions between the Government of Yukon and First Nations who have not signed a Final Agreement.

2.3.3 Reconciliation and partnership

- Reconciliation, according to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, means "coming to terms with events of the past in a manner that overcomes conflict and establishes a respectful and healthy relationship among people, going forward. [...] reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country."¹
- Yukon territorial parks are managed by the Government of Yukon in collaboration with the First Nations or Inuvialuit in whose traditional territory each park is located. Joint steering committees develop and review park management plans and park management committees help guide ongoing park management. Many of our parks owe their existence to First Nations' or Inuvialuit Final Agreements.
- From this foundation there is an opportunity to strengthen these relationships and further develop these partnerships. The decade ahead presents more opportunities for Yukon to lead reconciliation in Canada and the world.

2.3.4 Biodiversity, wilderness and Yukon's place in the world

- Yukon is not immune to the global biodiversity crisis. The 2018 *Living Planet Report* indicates that global wildlife populations have fallen by 60 per cent in the last four decades. In Canada, half of all monitored species are on the decline, primarily due to habitat loss and climate change. These 451 species showed population declines of 83 per cent on average.
- The number of species at risk of extinction in Yukon has increased over time to 45 and is expected to continue to increase as more species are assessed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. The Government of Yukon's Conservation Data Centre reports on the level of risk for Yukon wildlife and identifies 92 critically imperilled taxa (species, subspecies or varieties) and a further 780 that are imperilled or vulnerable.
- Biodiversity is part of the cultural connection between people, the land and wildlife.

- Wilderness is becoming scarce around the world. Global research published by the University of Queensland shows that over the last two decades the world lost 3.3 million square kilometres of wilderness – nearly seven times the size of Yukon. There are six major wilderness regions left on Earth: northern Canada and Alaska; northern Russia; the Amazon rainforest in South America; the deserts of central Australia; the Tibetan plateau in central Asia; and northern Africa.
- Wilderness is essential for long-term conservation of biodiversity and also a highly valued destination for sustainable tourism. This makes Yukon's wild landscapes an increasingly precious resource in the global fight to reverse the loss of biodiversity and in the global tourism market.
- Yukon is in a rare position in the world, with the opportunity to be an unmatched global leader in both conservation and wilderness tourism.

2.3.5 Climate change

- Climate change affects parks in several ways.
 - Infrastructure like roads, trails and buildings will face increased climate-related risks such as melting permafrost, flooding and fires.
 - The times of year that people visit our parks are already changing and will continue to do so. Examples include a longer camping season at campgrounds, cruise ships coming later in the season at Herschel Island – Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park and increasing numbers of people coming to Yukon to experience our winter.
- Parks offer natural solutions to climate change.
 - Conserving Yukon's biodiversity in the face of climate change will require conservation planning on a landscape-scale to ensure that **protected areas**, buffers and corridors work together to allow wildlife to adjust their ranges as their habitats change.
 - Protected landscapes play a major role in reducing climate-changing emissions in the atmosphere, estimated at 312 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide globally.

¹ Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015.

3.0 LONG-TERM DIRECTION

3.1 Where we are going

The fundamental purpose of Yukon's territorial parks system, as set out in the *Parks and Land Certainty Act*, is to establish parks to:

- implement obligations under settlement agreements;
- provide for the protection and management of representative areas of territorial significance and other special places in Yukon;
- provide recreational opportunities for Yukoners and visitors; and
- encourage public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of Yukon's natural environment as a legacy for future generations.

Here is the vision for Yukon's parks system from now to 2030 and beyond.

Protection and reconciliation are the foundation for everything we do.

Public service is at the centre of what we do.

Public benefits are our purpose: healthy land, people and economy.



The view from the summit of Sheep Mountain, Peel watershed.

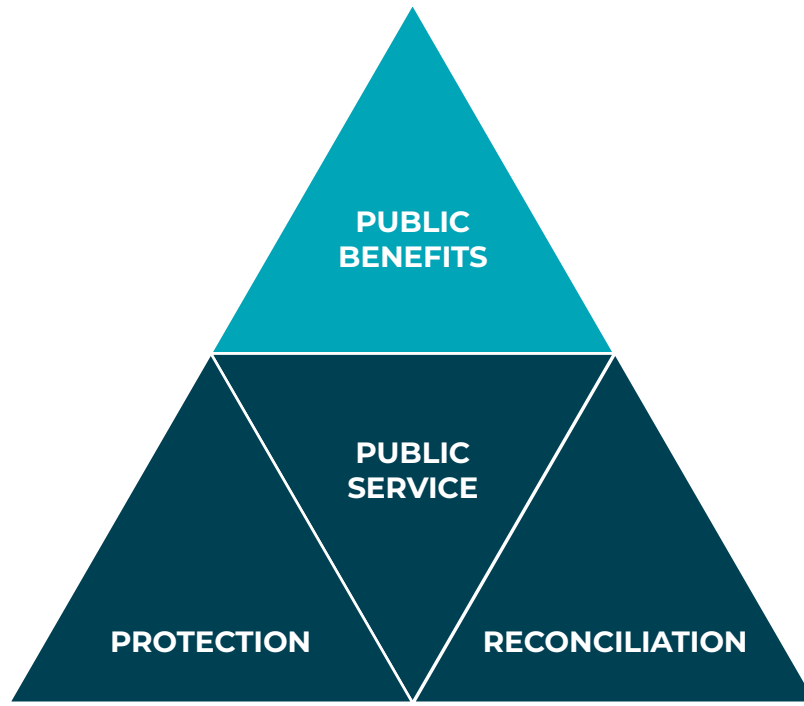


Figure 3. Yukon's parks system from now to 2030 and beyond.

The diagram shows that the services that people enjoy rest on the building blocks of protection, reconciliation and public service (Figure 3). For the Parks Branch, the diagram describes who we are, and will guide what we do, how we do it and why. Our decisions and actions will be guided by the four building blocks, described in more detail below.

<p>PROTECTION</p>	<p>Yukon parks protect for all time some of the most intact natural landscapes on Earth. Cultural values are inseparable from these places. We take a territory-wide approach to conservation network planning and manage uses in parks to protect ecological integrity and cultural continuity.</p>
<p>RECONCILIATION</p>	<p>Yukon parks advance reconciliation through collaborative management with First Nations and Inuvialuit, celebrating Indigenous knowledge and culture, welcoming traditional uses of parks and building meaningful relationships. This is a source of strength for all.</p>
<p>PUBLIC SERVICE</p>	<p>Yukon parks are a sustainable public service and a valued public asset.</p> <p>We manage responsibly, efficiently and accountably, recognizing that the parks system exists to provide the complementary benefits of healthy land, people and economy.</p> <p>We are good partners.</p>
<p>PUBLIC BENEFITS</p>	<p>Communities across Yukon experience the benefits of parks, including:</p> <p>Healthy land: Yukon continues to enjoy wild land, intact ecosystems, thriving wildlife, clean air and water, and resilient biodiversity sustaining all life including us. This has intrinsic value for Yukon and the world.</p> <p>Healthy people: Cultural ties to the land remain strong. People of all abilities, from near and far, have easy access to unforgettable experiences in Yukon parks. Being active and connecting with nature and culture support a healthy body, mind and spirit.</p> <p>Healthy economy: Yukon parks help develop and diversify Yukon's economy. Parks provide local employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, and far-reaching economic benefits through tourism, recreation, public health and quality of life.</p>

3.2 Making a strategic shift

In order to follow our long-term direction in an evolving context, the Parks Branch will gradually make a shift over the coming decade.

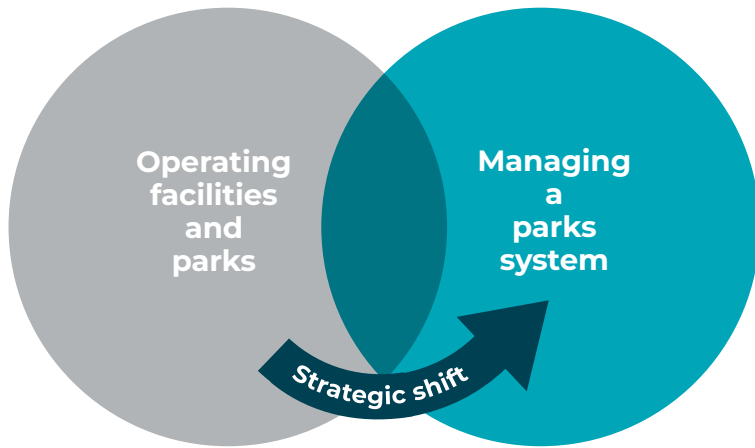


Figure 4. Strategic shift.

To meet new challenges of managing a modern and evolving parks system, the Parks Branch must shift towards a more mature parks organization.

This will be a shift, not a wholesale change. Many things about Yukon territorial parks will remain the same over the coming decade. During public engagement, we heard that people wanted us to make some changes, but also to do more of what we are already doing well.

Here are some examples of things that will evolve as we make this shift:

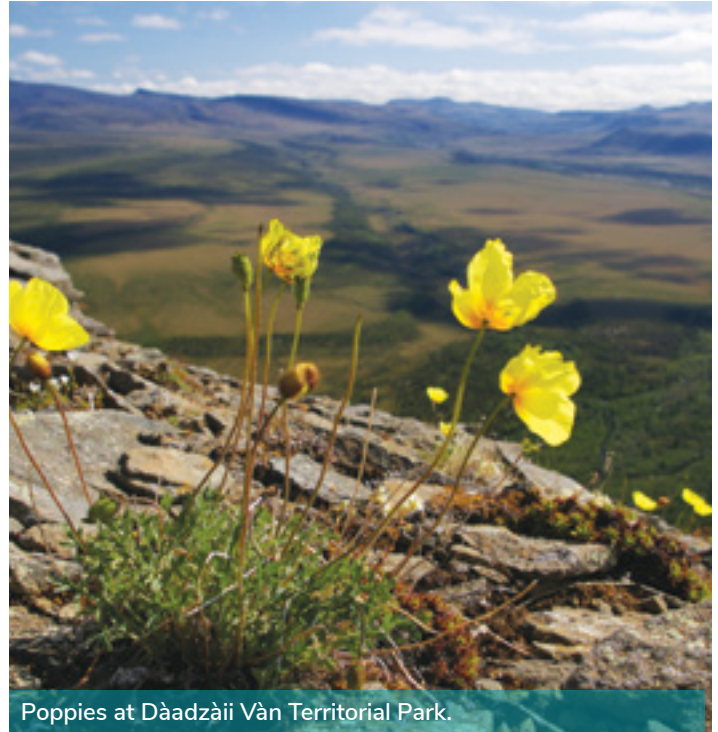
FROM: Operating a collection of campground facilities and protected areas	TO: Managing a cohesive, modern and evolving parks system
Case-by-case artisanal park planning, establishment and management.	Systematic park planning, establishment and management.
Thinking of parks as separate protected places.	Thinking of parks and other protected areas as one conservation network.
Respecting Aboriginal and treaty rights and consultation obligations.	Advancing reconciliation with Indigenous people through collaboration and partnership (as well as respecting Aboriginal and treaty rights and consultation obligations).
Thinking of places as either “campgrounds” or “real parks.”	Thinking about road-accessible frontcountry services and more remote backcountry services across a range of park types.
A few protected areas and many small campgrounds.	A growing number of protected areas and larger campgrounds.
Focused on the recreational needs of RV campers and wilderness backpackers.	Meeting needs of a growing number of people with a range of abilities and interests.
Offering services in the summer, with a seasonal workforce.	Offering appropriate services in all seasons, with the appropriate workforce.
Protected area goals peripheral to land use planning and other relevant processes.	Protected area goals integral to land use planning and other relevant processes.
Reactive management to solve problems.	Proactive management to anticipate and mitigate challenges.

3.3 Our priorities for 2020–2030

In order to make this shift we will focus on 10 priorities

1. Keep doing what's working
2. Develop a parks system plan
3. Welcome year-round park use
4. Enrich and diversify park experiences
5. Make it easier to get a campsite
6. Establish and operate new parks
7. Ensure protection
8. Advance reconciliation
9. Modernize regulations
10. Financially sustain our parks

The following section describes the strategic actions associated with each priority.



4.0 STRATEGIC ACTIONS, 2020–2030

This section identifies the strategic actions we will take in the timeframe from 2020 to 2030.

Strategic actions: key actions that we commit to taking over the next decade that together will make the most difference to implementing our long-term direction.

Strategic actions build on each other to most efficiently and effectively achieve a result that is greater than the sum of the individual actions.

These actions will be implemented in consultation and partnership with First Nations and Inuvialuit and in most cases with opportunities for public input.

4.1 Keep doing what's working

An important strategic action is to recognize that much of what the Parks Branch is doing today is working. Yukon is a leader in Canada in establishing and managing parks collaboratively with Indigenous governments. Frontcountry and backcountry activities are both popular and we have an 84 per cent satisfaction rate among our campground users. This signals that we are already getting many things right. Here are a few highlights of what we will continue to do:



RV at Congdon Creek Campground.

Protection

- Recognize the intrinsic value of natural ecosystems, healthy wildlife, clean air and water.
- Manage parks according to park management plans, jointly developed with Indigenous partners.
- Maintain Yukon's high standard of meeting or exceeding international benchmarks in parks and protected areas design, establishment, protection, operation and management.

Reconciliation

- Identify new parks and protected areas in collaboration with First Nations and Inuvialuit.
- Honour Indigenous rights, languages, harvesting and traditional uses of the land.
- Manage parks collaboratively with First Nations and Inuvialuit partners.

Public service

- Manage parks to ensure visitor safety and quality visitor experiences.
- Engage the public in park planning and management.

Public benefits

- Offer clean, safe and enjoyable campgrounds in beautiful locations featuring:
 - well-spaced campsites with a rustic atmosphere;
 - simple facilities including picnic tables, fire rings, pit toilets (outhouses), bear-proof garbage bins, supplied firewood, and in most cases access to raw untreated water;
 - “no frills” camping – no power, no Wi-Fi, no showers. Yukon's private sector provides camping options with such services; and
 - ongoing improvement to universal accessibility of facilities.
- Offer world-class wilderness experiences, active recreation opportunities, fishing, hunting and interpretation programs and services.
- Support local employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

4.2 Develop a parks system plan

What we will do

- In the short term we will develop a Yukon territorial parks system plan to guide the development of existing and **emerging parks** and the establishment of future parks. The goal of the system plan will be to ensure we have the right types of parks in the right places with the right facilities and services. This will support the Government of Yukon's goals for conservation, reconciliation, quality of life, recreation, tourism and economic diversification.

Why

- A parks system plan will guide our decision making on what parks, facilities, service standards, interpretation and education programs, monitoring, and compliance and enforcement programs are needed across the territory now and in the future.
- A parks system plan will provide a framework to help us implement a number of the other strategic actions in this strategy, so we will develop and implement it early.
- A system plan will provide transparency on how, where and when new parks will be established to help meet Yukon's needs for long-term landscape conservation, recreation, tourism, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Canada and 195 other countries have committed to establish protected areas networks under the Convention on Biological Diversity. Currently 11.7 per cent of Yukon is protected in various kinds of parks and other protected areas (including territorial parks, national parks, habitat protection areas, etc.). Canada has a national goal to protect 17 per cent by 2020, and 25 per cent by 2025. In 2020, nations will adopt new goals and targets for 2030 and beyond. This makes it an ideal time for the Government of Yukon to set out its own goals and a plan to reach them.

4.3 Welcome year-round park use

What we will do

- We will better match the services we provide with the times of year that parks are being used for various activities. This will include the following:
 - expand the full-service season, when staff operate park and campground facilities and services;
 - enhance the level of essential services during the rest of the year where warranted, to address basic issues like road access, waste management and visitor safety; and
 - explore opportunities for partnerships to provide services.

Why

- Territorial parks are not currently accommodating the growing use for recreational activities during the fall, winter and spring seasons in some parts of Yukon. People are increasingly looking to use parks earlier in the spring and later in the fall for activities like camping, hiking, skiing or ice fishing.
- The season when people visit parks and campgrounds is getting longer and more variable due to climate change.
- The full-service season is meant to correspond to the time when park visitors require services. Services during this period include managing garbage, servicing outhouses, supplying firewood, patrolling campgrounds and offering nature interpretation. It is time to adjust the full-service season as more visitors use parks earlier in the spring and later in the fall.
- As growing numbers of people use parks year-round, there is a need for a modest level of service in the off-season to deal with basic management issues like garbage and visitor safety.
- While summer tourism in Yukon is growing at five per cent per year, winter tourism is growing at 20 per cent per year (2012–2017 tourism data). The *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy* aims to promote Yukon as a year-round tourism destination in the coming decade.

4.4 Enrich and diversify park experiences

Generations of traditional knowledge and growing scientific evidence tells us that spending time in nature is good for our mind, body and soul. This includes both road-accessible frontcountry activities and more remote backcountry activities. Below are the strategic actions we will take between 2020 and 2030 to advance this priority.

4.4.1 Develop recreation destinations

What we will do

- Guided by our parks system plan, we will offer a broader range of active recreation opportunities at parks in several regions of Yukon. We will do this by adding recreation infrastructure to enhance existing parks and/or when establishing new parks. Examples of active recreation opportunities include:
 - frontcountry day-hike **trails** and accessible trails;
 - backcountry land and water **routes** and trails; and
 - paddle-in and hike-in camping sites.

Why

- Public benefits related to healthy people, communities and economy all rely on safe access to quality frontcountry and backcountry recreation.
- There is demand for a wider range of opportunities for active recreation. People want active things to do when they are staying in our campgrounds and a range of options for people of all abilities. People especially asked for more walking and hiking trails.
- Wilderness paddling routes will be growing in importance as a recreational resource as the parks system incorporates lake and river destinations in the Peel watershed, Agay Mene and Dàadzàii Vàn.
- Some of our existing recreation parks have a lot of potential with nearby spectacular places to walk, hike, bike or paddle.

4.4.2 Accommodate a range of activities

What we will do

- Guided by our parks system plan and individual park management plans, we will work to accommodate a range of activities in ways that maintain ecological integrity, cultural continuity, public safety and park experiences.
- We will improve regulations and where necessary actively manage uses in parks to reduce conflicts that can arise when people try to do different activities in the same place at the same time. (See section 4.9 Modernize regulations for related details.) This could include the following:
 - identifying appropriate zones for specific activities;
 - restricting where or when some activities can occur; and
 - sharing information with tourism operators, outfitters and large groups to allow them to choose low-conflict itineraries.

Why

- As more people use our parks, it becomes more important to proactively manage uses to reduce ecological impacts and conflicting uses. Historically, there was little need for proactive management due to the small number of users spread out over the landscape. This has changed with growing use and will continue to change in the decade ahead.
- Uses of our parks are also becoming more diverse. For example, some park visitors value a good night's sleep while others want to be up in the night to experience the northern lights; harvesters want to know where and when to avoid crowds so they can hunt safely; and larger groups need information on when and where group facilities are available.

4.4.3 Offer a good night's sleep

What we will do

- We will update campground designs for new or expanded campgrounds to better manage noise and create quiet zones. For example, users could choose between a zone where generators are allowed and a quiet zone with no generators. Other design features will include separate areas for tenting, walk-in tenting areas, and sufficient space and vegetation between campsites.
- Where feasible, we will implement these quiet-friendly design elements at existing campgrounds (for example, campgrounds with two or more loop roads).
- We will update regulations regarding generators and quiet hours. (See section 4.9 Modernize regulations for related details.)

Why

- It can be challenging to get a good night's sleep under the midnight sun. Growing use of parks requires more active management of noise.
- Noise is one of the most common complaints from campground users, and most noise complaints are about generators and parties.
- Quiet zones and quiet times are common in other jurisdictions and expected by many users.

4.4.4 Repair and maintain park roads, docks and boat launches

What we will do

- We will identify short- and long-term priorities for improving and maintaining access roads to parks, park roads, boat launches and docks in parks.

Why

- Maintaining and improving access roads that lead to parks as well as boat launches and docks in parks is important to park users.



Frenchman Lake Campground.



Children hiking at Tombstone Territorial Park.

4.5 Make it easier to get a campsite

4.5.1 Build a bigger and better campground near Whitehorse

What we will do

- In the medium-to-long term, we will develop at least one recreation park within two hours of Whitehorse. A precise location remains to be determined and will be considered in consultation with local First Nations and the public.
- We envision the following features:
 - a larger campground with up to 150 campsites;
 - a rustic atmosphere with well-spaced campsites;
 - a quiet zone; and
 - active recreation opportunities like hiking trails and access to a water body.

Why

- The current network of campgrounds evolved mostly as highway stops, rather than as recreation destinations for the resident Yukon population. The current pattern of small disparate campgrounds is inefficient to service, maintain, operate and monitor. It is not well suited to meet the needs of our increasingly urban population.
- Demand for camping is highest within approximately two hours driving distance of Whitehorse, where approximately 87 per cent of Yukon's population lives, and where we currently offer just over 400 campsites. Our estimates indicate there could be a demand for approximately 800 additional campsites in the Whitehorse area by 2030.
- Building a substantial number of new campsites is one element of our response to this growing demand. Other elements aim to improve the availability of campsites, including a regulation change to prevent the “holding” of unoccupied sites implemented in 2018, marketing to encourage people to choose less-used campgrounds, and considering campground reservations for some sites in the future.



Nunatak Campground.

- Adding new campsites in a few larger campgrounds is a much more efficient way to meet the needs of Yukoners in our most populated region. With a few larger campgrounds (over 100 sites), economies of scale make it feasible to design and operate campgrounds that offer enhanced experiences such as segregated quiet areas, maintained trails, improved accessibility, site reservations, interpretive programs, campground hosts, and spaces for different kinds of users and events.
- Updating campground design and scale also offers the opportunity to address other requests we heard during public engagement, such as improvements to tent sites, large RV sites, trails and playgrounds.
- Yukon's parks system currently includes one campground with more than 100 campsites, at Yukon River Campground across from Dawson City, which is well used and operates efficiently. Campgrounds within two hours of Whitehorse are all smaller, ranging from nine to 59 sites.

4.5.2 Add campsites to some existing campgrounds

What we will do

- We will continue to add campsites to existing campgrounds where there are opportunities to do so while maintaining a rustic atmosphere with well-spaced campsites.

Why

- We have had consistent success adding campsites to existing campgrounds in recent years, cumulatively increasing the number of campsites within two hours of Whitehorse by over 20 per cent.



Pitching a tent alongside Bonnet Plume River.



Twin Lakes Campground.



Squanga Lake Campground.

4.5.3 Test campground reservations

What we will do

- We will test online reservation options to improve fair access to some campsites in some road-accessible campgrounds. We will begin by doing a pilot project to test a system for people to reserve some campsites at a few busy campgrounds at the busiest times of the summer. In the longer term we may establish an online reservation system as an ongoing service, shaped by lessons learned from the pilot project.

Why

- An online reservation system is currently in place for three hike-in campgrounds in Tombstone Territorial Park. This has proven to be a useful tool to manage the availability of tent sites that are in high demand.
- Some people want to be able to make online campsite reservations for road-accessible frontcountry campgrounds as well. This is common in other parks systems around the world. Users value the certainty of knowing they will have a campsite when they arrive.
- To meet the needs of users who prefer certainty and those who prefer spontaneity, our intention is to offer some campsites for online reservations and others to be available on a first come, first served basis.
- A full-time reservation system across all territorial park campgrounds is not needed. It would also be prohibitively expensive because of the on-site personnel required, especially with our current network of small campgrounds spread out over large distances. We will use the pilot project approach to learn how to make reservations work efficiently as our parks system evolves.



Paddling on the Wind River.

4.6 Establish and operate new parks

4.6.1 Operationalize emerging parks

What we will do

- We will begin to formally operate a number of emerging parks that have been established in Yukon First Nations Final Agreements or identified in regional land use plans. When we assign human and financial resources to manage each new park, we will do it in a way that builds a sustainable organizational model for the long-term management of our parks system as a whole.

Why

- Emerging parks are those that have been established in Yukon First Nations Final Agreements or identified in regional land use plans, but require some additional steps in order to become operational parks.
- Additional steps for a park to become operational typically include legal designation under the *Parks and Land Certainty Act*, a park management plan and staffing. No services are offered until a park becomes operational.
- We anticipate the following emerging parks will become operational during 2020–2030.
 - Kusawa Territorial Park was established in Final Agreements and was designated under the *Parks and Land Certainty Act* in 2017. Formal park operation will begin with the approval of a park management plan.
 - Dàadzàii Vàn Territorial Park was identified through the *North Yukon Regional Land Use Plan*, and has not yet been legally designated. A park management plan is under development, which will guide formal park management.
 - Protected areas identified in the *Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan* may be designated as territorial parks. Management planning, legal designation and operation are planned as part of land use plan implementation.
 - Agay Mene Territorial Park was established by the Carcross/Tagish First Nation Final Agreement, but has not yet been designated under the *Parks and Land Certainty Act*. Legal designation and development of a park management plan will enable formal protection and park operation to begin.

- Asi Keyi Territorial Park was established by the Kluane First Nation Final Agreement but has not yet been designated under the *Parks and Land Certainty Act*. Legal designation and development of a park management plan will enable formal protection and park operation to begin.

4.6.2 Establish new parks through land use planning and other discussions

What we will do

- The Government of Yukon will clearly identify landscape-level conservation and park establishment objectives among Yukon's interests and objectives for each land use planning process.
- Where the Government of Yukon is in discussions with First Nations that have not signed a Final Agreement, those discussions may include collaboration on parks.

Why

- In addition to the emerging parks noted above, other new territorial parks may be established as a result of the *Dawson Regional Land Use Plan* and other future land use plans.
- The Government of Yukon will focus on incorporating parks and protected areas objectives, along with other objectives, into its collaborative approach to regional land use planning.
- The Government of Yukon has taken a new approach with the resumption of work on the Peel watershed and Dawson regional land use plans, with the Minister of Energy Mines and Resources and the Minister of Environment jointly representing the Government of Yukon's interests.
- Forethought and preparation through parks system planning will support better and timelier park-related land use decisions when they arise through processes like regional land use planning or other discussions with First Nations.



Collared Pika.



Butterfly at Dàadzàii Vàn Territorial Park.

4.7 Ensure protection

The following actions will help ensure the continued protection of ecological integrity and cultural continuity in our parks.

4.7.1 Prioritize ecological integrity and cultural continuity

What we will do

- We will consider ecological integrity and cultural continuity first and foremost when making park management decisions.
- We will better analyze emerging park management challenges to better direct monitoring and active management.

Why

- This is fundamental to the purpose of managing parks as a public good for present and future generations. It is what enables us to offer all the other benefits of parks now and in the future in the face of climate change and other pressures.

4.7.2 Manage consistently

What we will do

- We will develop guiding policies to support a more consistent and effective approach to park management.
- We will apply a more formal park management planning approach to recreation parks.

Why

- Park management plans are developed for individual parks in collaboration with First Nations and Inuvialuit. Joint committees tasked with these plans often need guidance on management plan tools and techniques and need to balance visitor needs and expectations with local circumstances and customs.
- Park users, both residents and visitors, expect uniformly predictable rules and procedures when they visit different territorial parks in Yukon.

4.7.3 Apply evidence-based planning and management

What we will do

- We will continue to apply landscape conservation science to build a network of protected areas and other lands that allow native species to move, adapt and survive in the face of climate change. This will include using well-established international standards and concepts such as traditional knowledge, protected area design, ecological buffers, climate change resilience and landscape connectivity.
- We will use multiple knowledge systems including traditional knowledge, natural sciences and social sciences to inform parks management and planning.
- We will work with partners to make better use of available local biodiversity data to ensure that parks help conserve species at risk, rare species and endemic Yukon species found nowhere else on Earth.
- Planning for new territorial parks will take into account other conservation lands such as national parks, habitat protection areas, Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, Canadian heritage rivers as well as other current and potential land uses.

Why

- Parks and protected area networks are recognized as one of the best tools we have to conserve wildlife and the ecosystems they rely on in the face of climate change.
- Conservation science makes it clear that we can no longer think of parks as “islands of conservation.” To meet conservation goals, we need to think about parks, protected areas and conserved lands working together as a network across the landscape.
- Like other parks systems across Canada and around the world, one of the goals of Yukon’s parks system is to reflect unique landscape diversity by protecting areas within each of our ecological regions. Landscape-level conservation planning will inform the thoughtful selection of future parks as we work toward this goal.
- Integrating conservation science and traditional knowledge is essential to managing Yukon’s parks.

4.7.4 Green park operations

What we will do

- We will ensure that our park operations meet high standards of environmental stewardship and protection. For example, we will build on our work to date in the following areas:
 - design and develop facilities in ways that avoid impacts to sensitive species and habitats, nesting birds, heritage resources and other values;
 - explore how our facilities and services can better support park users to keep recyclable and organic wastes out of landfills;
 - follow appropriate policies and practices including the Government of Yukon's social and sustainable procurement policy;
 - reduce risks related to invasive species and wildlife attractants; and
 - consider and where possible reduce the greenhouse gas footprint of park operations.

Why

- Park management and operations involve significant investments and potential environmental impacts.
- We can demonstrate leadership in green park operations and learn from others to lessen the carbon footprint and other impacts of our facilities, services, operations, access and visitor activities.
- Greener park operations will enhance visitor experience by being better aligned with the values that are being protected and enjoyed in parks and campgrounds.



Big Creek Campground.

4.8 Advance reconciliation

We will focus on the following actions to advance reconciliation through collaborative management with First Nations and Inuvialuit, celebrating Indigenous knowledge and culture, welcoming traditional uses of parks and building meaningful relationships.

4.8.1 Co-develop a collaborative management framework

What we will do

- We will develop a collaborative park management framework jointly with interested First Nations and Inuvialuit. The framework will formalize and guide how we manage parks together, recognizing that the nature and extent of joint management may vary depending on the interest and context of each Indigenous government.

Why

- This action (and those below) will allow us to strengthen relationships and address matters of mutual interest such as supporting traditional uses of the land, incorporating traditional knowledge into park management, promoting Indigenous languages and place names, celebrating Indigenous cultures and using facilities for events. Other shared interests may include research, monitoring, conservation, operations, interpretative programming, training, employment and economic opportunities.



Rafting on the Wind River.

- Improved joint management of territorial parks with Indigenous governments is a high priority.
- Where Final Agreements are in place, establishing and managing parks and protected areas have been key elements of implementation.
- We want to continue to work together to uphold the spirit and intent of modern **treaties**. We also recognize the importance of collaborative management of parks that are not part of treaties.
- Working together on parks is an effective way to protect the land and Indigenous rights by managing activities on the land.

4.8.2 Partner with Indigenous guardians

What we will do

- We will build partnerships with Indigenous guardian programs to meet shared goals.

Why

- Collaboration and partnership allow us to strengthen relationships in the spirit and practice of reconciliation with both treaty and non-treaty First Nations and the Inuvialuit.
- There is opportunity to meet shared goals and interests by involving Indigenous guardians in park management and operations.

4.8.3 Explore Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas

What we will do

- We will engage in discussions with Indigenous partners to explore how the idea of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas may apply in Yukon.

Why

- Some Indigenous governments have expressed an interest in Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, a term coined by an Indigenous Circle of Experts as part of Canada's national efforts to meet international commitments to establish protected areas.
- Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas may represent an opportunity to meet shared goals in the spirit and practice of reconciliation.

4.9 Modernize regulations

What we will do

- In the short term we will:
 - update the fees and categories of fees under the *Parks and Land Certainty Act*;
 - significantly update regulations under the *Parks and Land Certainty Act* to support implementation of this strategy.
- In the long term, we will consider whether other legislative actions may be required to support implementation of the parks strategy such as amendments to the *Parks and Land Certainty Act* itself or regulations under the *Wilderness Tourism Licensing Act*.

Why

- Current park regulations consist of outdated campground regulations. Regulations to manage larger wilderness parks and activities outside of campgrounds are largely absent.
- The Government of Yukon now has park management responsibilities that apply throughout all territorial parks, like other park jurisdictions.
- Parks and facilities are being used more intensively, so we need to manage them more proactively to protect the environment and the quality of the visitor experience.
- Regulations help manage issues that affect enjoyment of parks, including:
 - noise;
 - firewood;
 - liquor, cannabis and smoking;
 - domestic animals;
 - park zoning;
 - on-road and off-road vehicles;
 - discharge of firearms;
 - use of drones;
 - administrative matters;
 - park fees; and
 - offences and fines.
- Future review of the *Parks and Land Certainty Act* and regulations under the *Wilderness Tourism Licensing Act* may be considered in the future.



Climbing Sheep Mountain, Peel watershed.



Rancheria Falls.

4.10 Financially sustain our parks

We need to shift to a more financially sustainable parks system in order to deliver on our core mission of protection, reconciliation and public benefits. Strategic actions to accomplish this address the four elements of financial sustainability of a public service: revenue from park fees, appropriate core budget, responsible asset management and efficient operational excellence.

4.10.1 Update park fees

What we will do

- We will introduce new payment options and modest increases to fees for camping at territorial park campgrounds in 2022. These updated fees will better sustain park services, improve convenience and efficiency and maintain affordable access by offering some of the lowest camping fees in Canada. The following fees (including GST) will take effect beginning in the 2022 camping season.
 - A night of camping will cost \$20 per campsite if paid by cash on site. A new payment option will enable campers to pre-pay for camping online at a reduced cost of \$18 per night. Both are options for paying camping fees and do not create a campsite reservation.
- A season of camping with the Yukon resident annual camping permit will cost \$100 in 2022 and \$200 in 2023, respectively equivalent to 5 and 10 nights of camping. This annual camping permit will continue to be available only to Yukon residents.
- A Yukon senior's discount of 50 per cent off all camping fees will apply to Yukon residents aged 65 and over. This is a change from Yukon seniors being exempt from camping fees.
- There will be no fees for firewood, day use, parking, vehicle access, boat launch use or interpretive programs.
- Camping fees will apply during the serviced camping season (May to October). There will be no fee for unserviced camping opportunities that may be available in some campgrounds during the rest of the year.
- Camping at backcountry campgrounds like Grizzly, Divide and Talus lakes in Tombstone Territorial Park will cost \$20 per tent pad per night plus \$10 per reservation.
- We will introduce a permit application fee of \$40 in 2022 for park use permits, such as commercial activity and special event permits. This fee will not apply to daily or annual camping permits.



Bond Creek confluence, Wind River.

Why

- An updated park fee structure will better sustain parks as a public service and help manage parks by:
 - encouraging fair, efficient and responsible use of **park facilities** and services to improve their availability;
 - offering convenient ways to pay fees;
 - maintaining affordable access to parks;
 - better cost recovery of providing services from those who use the services; and
 - offering and encouraging the use of more non-cash payment options, to reduce the volume of cash collected and the associated processing costs.
- As part of the government's response to the Yukon Financial Advisory Panel report, the Department of Finance conducted a review of all fees and fines across the Government of Yukon. It was found that we are below the national average in most areas including campground fees.
- The Government of Yukon is developing a principled approach for the setting and collecting of fees, fines and charges across government. Our goal is to ensure government fees reflect society's shared values, individual and collective benefits, sustainable program management, cost recovery, a clear connection from fee to service, simplicity and predictability.
- Park user fees help governments around the world finance parks operations. The Government of Yukon currently recovers 10.6 per cent of the costs of operating the parks system through camping fees. User fees need to better reflect the costs of providing services.
- Until now, park fees have been limited to camping fees and have not enabled the government to recover costs of providing services for other permitted activities such as commercial filming and land use.
- People expect to pay a fair share of the cost when they use facilities and services, but also expect basic park management to be publicly and adequately funded.
- New payment options are needed because receiving cash payments at remote locations across Yukon incurs significant logistical costs to securely collect, transport, count and deposit cash. In 2019, we handled over \$435,000 in cash payments, including over 42,000 bills and 87,000 coins.



Flowers by the Bonnet Plume River.

4.10.2 Update core budget

What we will do

- We will continue to maintain a fair balance between core public funding of parks as a public service and reasonable cost recovery from fees.

Why

- Parks are an important public service that needs to be funded by the government with a reasonable amount of cost recovery from park users. People expect to pay a fair share of the cost when they use facilities and services, but also expect basic park management to be publicly and adequately funded.
- Use of territorial parks by both residents and visitors has grown by 103 per cent in the past 10 years (see section 2.3.1). This growth, combined with changing visitor expectations, has resulted in significant increases in the cost of operating parks. Some examples of these costs include staff time, vehicles and fuel, training, supplies and firewood.

4.10.3 Modernize capital asset management

What we will do

- We will modernize our asset management, capital planning and capital budgeting. This will include:
 - implementing a new asset management system, to better monitor the condition of facilities like campgrounds, buildings, playgrounds and outhouses, to more accurately forecast repair and replacement needs, and to maintain a high standard of clean, safe and enjoyable facilities;
 - ongoing implementation of the recapitalization project that began in 2018 to replace and upgrade park infrastructure, add campsites to existing campgrounds and replace aging playgrounds; and
 - managing the risk of damage or degradation to capital assets due to changing climate and its effects, including changes to permafrost and water levels.



Tombstone Territorial Park.

Why

- Responsible public service requires a modern approach to asset management, capital planning and capital budgeting. This can provide operational efficiencies, reduce costs and prevent costly liabilities due to asset degradation.
- Parks need to better meet the specific needs of a range of users. For example:
 - larger campsites and drive-through sites to accommodate larger RVs;
 - tent-friendly campsites with a sand or soil surface rather than packed gravel;
 - more and improved playgrounds; and
 - upgraded boat launches and more dock space at popular lakes.
- Operationalizing emerging parks will require some new capital investments.



Black Bear at Kusawa Territorial Park.

4.10.4 Pursue efficient operational excellence

What we will do

- We will take a critical look at how we do things and make the changes that can most significantly improve service, reduce costs or allow staff to focus on higher priority tasks. As part of this we will pursue opportunities to:
 - modernize and streamline some of our administrative systems such as how we process and issue permits and licences;
 - modernize software tools, particularly databases that we use for monitoring, compliance and enforcement; and
 - offer more online information resources and e-services, such as purchasing camping permits, campsite reservations, permit applications and reporting.
- We will continue to collaborate across Government of Yukon departments, pursue opportunities to share costs and pool resources with other governments and explore partnerships to help deliver services.

Why

- Operations and administration must be effective and efficient to manage costs.
- As Yukon's parks system grows, this creates opportunities for efficiencies through economies of scale.
- Collaboration and partnerships can lead to more effective use of resources, cost sharing and objectives being met. Potential partners could include First Nations, Indigenous guardian programs, youth programs, volunteer organizations, private sector businesses, visitor information centres and cultural centres, researchers or others.

5.0 IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Government-wide approach

This strategy will be implemented primarily by the Department of Environment's Parks Branch. Several measures, however, will be a shared responsibility with other government departments as shown in the table below.

Strategic action	Shared responsibility
4.4.4 Repair and maintain park roads and boat launches	Environment Community Services Highways and Public Works
4.6.2 Establish new parks through land use planning and other discussions	Environment Energy, Mines, and Resources Executive Council Office
4.7.4 Greening park operations: recycling and organics	Environment Community Services Highways and Public Works
4.8 Advance reconciliation	Environment Executive Council Office
4.9 Modernize regulations	Environment Justice
4.10.1 Update park fees: online payment process	Environment Highways and Public Works

5.2 Partnership and collaboration

We will actively seek out project partners to participate in implementing various actions from this strategy. Partners could include Indigenous governments, development corporations, local communities, businesses, non-profit organizations and other levels of government.

We will implement this strategy in partnership with First Nations and Inuvialuit. As we implement various strategic actions over time there will be a need for more detailed engagement and collaboration.

5.3 Public accountability

There will be opportunities for public engagement as we implement various actions from this strategy over time. We will continue to collect comment cards at parks and campgrounds, which will help us evaluate actions taken.

We will publish a brief progress report every three years to report progress in implementing the Yukon Parks Strategy and related commitments. We will share the report and seek feedback from First Nations, Inuvialuit, partners, stakeholders and the public.

Before 2030, we will review this strategy and determine what updates are required.

6.0 APPENDICES

6.1 Glossary – definitions of key terms

Biodiversity: the variety of species and ecosystems in a park and the ecological processes of which they are a part. (*Parks and Land Certainty Act*.)

Backcountry: backcountry areas and activities are those that are not accessible by road. They typically require access by aircraft, boat, or a considerable distance of walking, hiking, skiing or cycling.

Campground: a facility built and maintained to facilitate overnight camping. Frontcountry campgrounds are road accessible and can accommodate tents, trailers and recreational vehicles. Backcountry campgrounds provide basic tenting facilities at popular wilderness camping locations that are accessible by foot or boat.

Cultural continuity: the transmission from one generation to another of the heritage and values characteristic of a culture, including language, traditions, stories, history and places. In the Yukon context, Indigenous cultures are inseparable from the land.

Ecological integrity: ecosystems have integrity when they have their native components intact, including abiotic components (the physical elements like water and rocks), biodiversity and ecosystem processes (the engines that make ecosystem work, like fire, flooding and predation).

Ecoregion: a section of the landscape characterized by relatively uniform and distinctive physiography and ecological responses to climate as expressed by the development of vegetation, soil, water, fauna, etc. (*Ecoregions of the Yukon Territory*.)

Ecosystem: a biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment.

Emerging parks: territorial parks that have been established in First Nations Final Agreements or identified in regional land use plans, but require some additional steps in order to become operational parks. Additional steps typically include legal designation under the *Parks and Land Certainty Act*, a park management plan and staffing. No services are offered until a park becomes operational.

Final Agreements / Treaties: Final Agreements are constitutionally protected modern treaties that outline Indigenous peoples' rights within their traditional territories. In this document, the term treaty or treaties may refer to any or all of the modern treaties that apply in Yukon, including the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*, the *Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement* (specifically the *Yukon Transboundary Agreement*), and the 11 Yukon First Nations Final Agreements.

Frontcountry: frontcountry areas and activities are those that are accessible by road or a very short distance from a parking area.

Landscape: includes the land, air, water and all forms of life.

Park: in this document the word park(s) refers to territorial parks established and managed pursuant to the *Parks and Land Certainty Act*. There are four types of territorial parks:

Ecological reserve: a park established to protect an area of unique natural significance, unique ecological characteristics or importance for a population of rare or endangered flora or fauna which is intended to remain in its natural state (example: Coal River Springs).

Natural environment park: a park established to protect a representative or unique landscape that displays ecological characteristics or features of one or more of Yukon's ecoregions (example: Tombstone).

Recreation park: a park established to provide outdoor recreation or environmental education opportunities for the public (example: campgrounds like Wolf Creek and recreation sites like Five Finger Rapids).

Wilderness preserve: a park established with a view to protecting an ecological unit or representative core area by conserving biodiversity and ecological viability (example: Ni'iinlii Njik).

Park facilities: include campgrounds, picnic sites, buildings, visitor centres, roads and trails.

Parks system: the whole of all our territorial parks and the way they are managed together. While individual parks differ in their specific objectives, degree of protection, facilities and services, a well-managed parks system holistically meets many objectives across Yukon. A parks system is more than the sum of its parts.

Protected area: a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values. (IUCN.)

Reconciliation: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission approached reconciliation as "coming to terms with events of the past in a manner that overcomes conflict and establishes a respectful and healthy relationship among people, going forward. To the Commission, reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour."

Recreation site: a road-accessible facility built and maintained to accommodate day use recreation such as picnics, swimming and boating.

Trails and routes: Trails and routes are two different tools to support and manage recreation in parks. Trails are easily visible on the ground, often cleared and marked, and easy to follow. Routes are invisible on the ground and are suggested itineraries for independent wilderness travellers with more advanced orientation and route-finding skills. Both are tools to reduce environmental impacts depending on the context: trails concentrate visitor use where it is most appropriate while routes disperse visitor use to reduce impacts.



Beneath Sheep Mountain, Peel watershed.

