

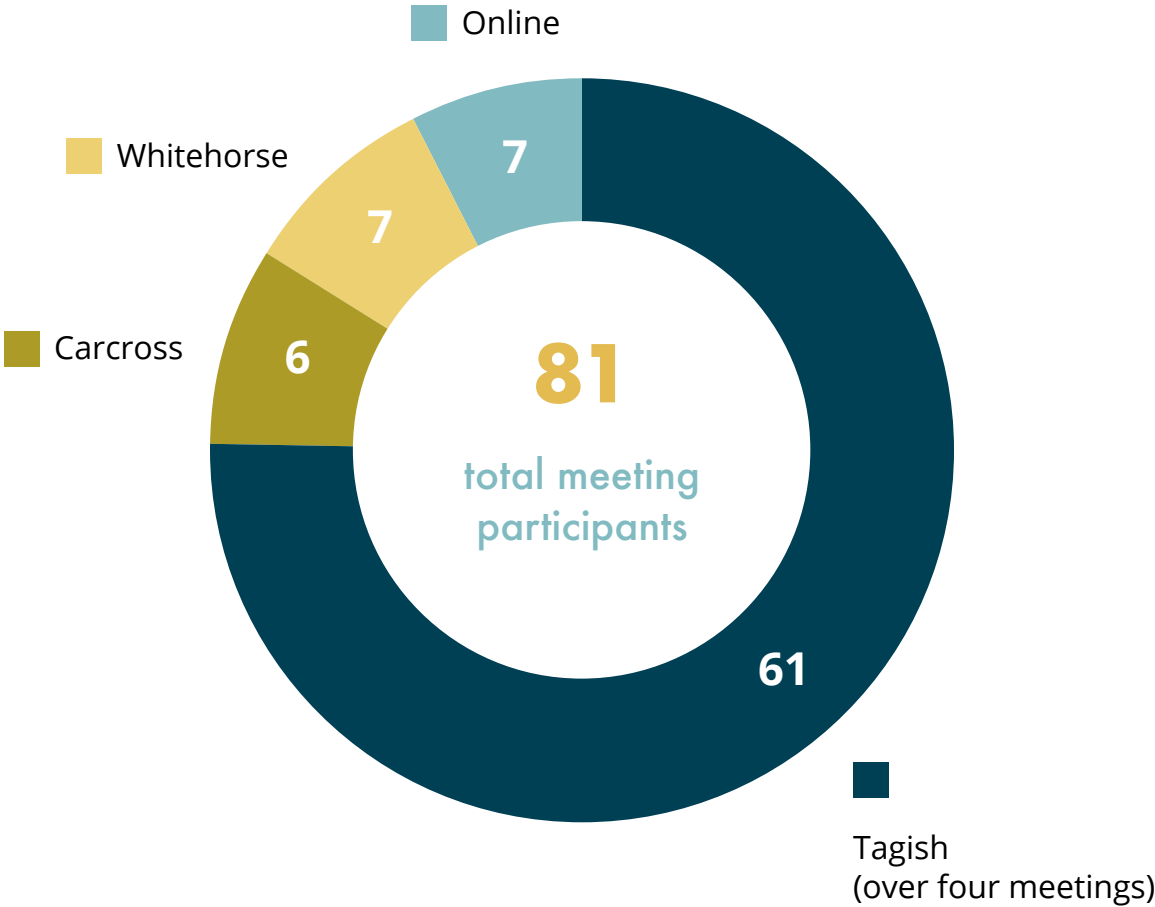
What We Heard Through Public Engagement



Tagish River Habitat Protection Area Draft Recommended Management Plan

Prepared by the Tagish River Habitat Protection Area
Steering Committee

Engagement Numbers



32
email submissions

42
signatures
on a petition



Introduction

Over the month of October 2020, the Tagish River Habitat Protection Area Steering Committee conducted public engagement to collect input on the Draft Tagish River Habitat Protection Area Management Plan.

The engagement process included meetings in Tagish, Carcross, Whitehorse, and online. Online comment submissions were also accepted through tagishriverhpa@gov.yk.ca.

The Steering Committee advertised the engagement through social media posts, community e-newsletters, and on www.tagishriverhpa.com and www.engageyukon.ca.

Waterfront property owners were mailed an invitation to attend a public engagement meeting.

This What We Heard report presents an overview of the feedback received during public engagement and summarizes these comments in each of the draft recommendations categories. This document reflects the broad nature of the comments and does not place emphasis on frequency or relative importance of comments received.

Where COVID-19 altered the ability to do greater interactive engagement, the Steering Committee was able to collect significant feedback at public meetings following social distancing protocols, online facilitated presentations, opportunities for conversation and one-on-one discussions with Committee members and the public.

Revitalization and enhancement of Carcross/Tagish First Nation Culture

Recommendations from Draft Plan

1. Create ceremony around seasonal transitions to help develop new or reestablish relationships to the Tagish River HPA.
2. Ensure that communication materials for the Tagish River HPA will be made available in Tagish and Tlingit languages.
3. Use and incorporate traditional Tagish and Tlingit place names and ceremony in communication materials and at events.
4. Continue to recognize and enable the Indigenous right to practice and revitalize culture, traditions and customs. This includes the right to use traditional harvesting techniques and practices within the Tagish River HPA.
5. Develop and distribute educational/outreach material related to traditional heritage values as well as the legal obligations associated with finding and reporting artifacts.

Feedback we heard during public engagement:

- Including information on traditional place names is important.
- Support for focus on ceremony, seasonal transition and relationship building with the river to encourage shifting the use/attitude of the area.
- Support for 'use what you take' approach.
- Support of recognition of traditional harvesting rights within the habitat protection area (HPA).
- The management plan should consider the impact of fish netting on the overall fish population health in the HPA.
- Traditionally whitefish were used for dog food.
- The management plan should consider a heritage/cultural resources assessment along the shoreline.

Recreational Users

Recommendations from Draft Plan

6. Communicate the impacts of climate change to Tagish River HPA users to enhance general knowledge and understanding.
7. Establish a wildlife viewing area, including educational signage and outreach materials on the importance of reducing disturbance to birds along the shoreline, for Carcross/Tagish First Nation traditional practices, boaters, off-road vehicle users, hikers, people taking photos, etc.
8. Develop and distribute educational/outreach materials on respectful interactions with the river, other river users, and wildlife. This may include keeping distance from wildlife, keeping noise levels down, and keeping dogs on leashes.
9. Reduce or eliminate low flying aircraft use (including drones) in the Tagish River HPA during key life stages for migratory birds. This can be achieved by educating aircraft operators to avoid the Tagish HPA during specific times of the year. Evaluate the need to establish a controlled airspace over the Tagish River HPA during key life stages for migratory birds.
10. Create and distribute educational or outreach materials on invasive species and how to avoid introducing them into the Tagish River HPA.

Feedback we heard during public engagement:

- Different recreational uses are associated with different levels of disturbance.
- Visitors to the habitat protection area tend to disturb wildlife more than residents do.
- The management plan should consider requiring HPA users to self-register, possibly using an 'app'.
- Seasonal users and residents of the area have different views about which recreational uses are compatible with the HPA.
- The management plan reads as though it supports an increase in human access, especially in the Waterfront Reserve. This is contradictory to the HPA objectives and will have negative effects on wildlife movement while contributing to erosion.
- Tourism can have unintended negative consequences, including those related to First Nations culture and wildlife populations.
- Hunting in the HPA should be banned for all species to ensure wildlife viewing opportunities are available.

Fishing

Recommendations from Draft Plan

11. Eliminate the use of lead-based materials (lead sinkers/shot) within the Tagish River HPA to reduce contaminate exposure to fish and birds.
12. Educate anglers using the Tagish Bridge about their potential impacts on the lake trout population, and the reasoning behind current regulations.
13. Encourage anglers to target whitefish and other fish species as an alternative to lake trout to reduce fishing pressure on the lake trout population.

Feedback we heard during public engagement:

- The management plan should have more fish content, and more recommendations related to fish conservation.
- The management plan does not address the complex topic of catch and release fishing and the associated polarized views of this management approach.
- More enforcement of current fishing regulations is needed.
- If subsistence harvest practices are reinvigorated, conservation of fish stocks needs to remain the priority.
- The management plan should bring together the public and First Nation perspectives on fisheries management.
- Tagish River is vulnerable to fishing pressure from boats on Marsh and Tagish Lakes, as well as people fishing from the bridge and the shore.
- Allowing hunting and fishing in this area renders the HPA management plan obsolete.
- Fishing from the bridge allows many fish in the slot limit to be caught and kept, especially large females. The bridge fishery should be eliminated to ensure sustainable trout fishing by protecting prime breeding fish.
- Docks create fish habitat and are used as a habitat restoration tool.
- Due to the Tagish River HPA boundaries, the management plan is only relevant to fish, waterfowl, and aquatic furbearers. Terrestrial species will not be affected by the management plan.
- The establishment of the Tagish River HPA under Yukon's Wildlife Act will limit its application and enforcement to wildlife populations and habitats.
- The importance of the Tagish River for fish extends beyond just the fall season because the river is critical spawning, rearing, and migration habitat for many fish species, and contains critical feeding areas for lake trout in multiple seasons.

- The Tagish River HPA will provide no additional protection for fish and fish habitat other than is currently provided under the federal Fisheries Act and the Yukon Territory Fisheries Regulations established under the act.
- The Fisheries Act and regulations have not effectively protected fish and fish habitat in the Tagish River HPA, as evidenced by the proliferation of unpermitted docks and other structures that have adversely effected fish populations and habitat.
- Many people fish for food, not sport or recreation.
- There should be more education and outreach efforts related to respect for fish and best practices for fish handling.
- The management plan should refer to the Community-based Fish and Wildlife Workplan (2020-2025) for the Carcross/Tagish Traditional Territory for more extensive fish and fish habitat recommendations.
- Fishing effort from the bridge should be limited, possibly with timing windows or annual catch limits.
- A Fishing Ethics and Education Course (FEED) should be developed for licensed anglers.
- Anglers should have to report their harvest.
- There is concern that the accessible fishery on the Tagish River is negatively effecting the Southern Lakes lake trout population.

Boating

Recommendations from Draft Plan

14. Develop and share educational and/or outreach tools on best management practices for using fuel near waterbodies.
15. Develop and share educational and/or outreach tools on boat speed and wake impacts on wildlife, habitat and shoreline erosion.
16. Gate the boat launches within the HPA in order to restrict boat access during critical spring staging periods. Closure dates may vary annually based on ice conditions and other factors.
17. Encourage the development and/or use of boat launches outside the Tagish River HPA for access to Tagish and Marsh Lakes in order to decrease boat traffic.
18. Educate boaters on the need to reduce boat speeds due to the impacts on fish and wildlife habitat and the potential to increase bank erosion. Evaluate the need to initiate the process to establish a speed limit for motorized boats during critical life stages to reduce disturbances to wildlife and habitat and to minimize erosion related to boat wake.

Feedback we heard during public engagement

- Residents are concerned about the shoreline erosion due to high-speed boat traffic, large boat traffic and wakes.
- The speed of boat traffic and number of boaters are causing increased human safety concerns. Enforcement is needed to ensure speed limits are being obeyed.
- The management plan should consider including no-wake zones with safety awareness training.
- Fuel spillage can be an issue in the Tagish River.
- Boat launches, parking, garbage and washroom facilities are inadequate for current and future users of the Tagish River HPA. Need to reinvest in boat launches and other infrastructure within the Tagish River HPA. Repairs could help reduce harmful practices.
- Alternative boat launches would alleviate pressure on the HPA but may redirect the problem elsewhere.
- Boaters want access to Tagish Lake and other Southern Lakes, but early access to the Tagish River due to open water is harming the shore, wildlife, and birds.
- There is support for gating boat launch areas to restrict access during critical spring staging periods, provided there is transparency in the process.
- More signage is needed to educate the public about speed limits and wake impacts.
- There is support for educating residents and visitors on interacting with the environment, wildlife, and in the HPA in a good way.
- There is support for the development of boat speed limits to reduce impacts on wildlife, habitat and shoreline erosion.

Off-Road Vehicle Users

Recommendations from Draft Plan

19. Investigate tools to prohibit shoreline use by off-road vehicles and snow machines during spring to decrease disturbance to birds and other wildlife.
20. Develop a multi-use trail plan that directs off-road vehicles away from the shoreline to relieve pressure on the Tagish River HPA.

Feedback we heard during public engagement

- A trail-plan for ORV use away from the Tagish River HPA is supported and would improve safety and reduce disturbance to wildlife and shoreline erosion.
- Educational material related to ORV use in the Tagish River HPA should be widely available, including for campground users, tourists, and Yukoners.
- Concern was expressed that new trails would promote activity in the area and have a greater impact on shoreline erosion, wildlife, and habitat.
- ORV use in the Tagish River HPA contributes to shoreline damage and fish and wildlife disturbance.
- The Tagish River HPA could be an ideal candidate for ORV regulations, when they become available.
- Yukon government should enforce existing laws related to wildlife harassment instead of introducing new regulations.
- Prohibit ORV and snowmobile use year round to reduce disturbance to wildlife and habitat.

Shoreline Development and Use

Recommendations from Draft Plan

21. Minimize disturbance and development along the entire Tagish River shoreline to accommodate wildlife movement and to maintain nesting habitat, shading and shoreline stability.
22. Reduce docks, other shoreline structures and the cumulative impact of shoreline development. Reducing these structures on the Tagish River HPA would facilitate human and wildlife access and movement along the river.
23. Develop and distribute educational/outreach information on existing development restrictions within the Tagish River HPA and adjacent waterfront reserve.
24. Encourage the dialogue around the Tagish River HPA and adjacent lands as a wildlife corridor for east west movement.
25. Update or create best management practices for development activities to effectively address bird conservation needs within the Tagish River HPA, e.g. bridge maintenance, habitat enhancement, Fire Smart and fuel abatement programs.

Feedback we heard during public engagement

- Property owners value their docks for many reasons. They enjoy time spent with friends and family and have created many memories on their docks.
- Property owners have invested money and time into the construction and maintenance of their docks. They expressed concern about the value of their property, and transferring the dock to future owners when they sell their property.
- Docks promote stewardship of the river, and have minimal to no negative impact on wildlife or wildlife habitat.
- Dock owners described the benefits of docks on the river, as they absorb boat wakes, slow erosion, and provide habitat for fish and birds.
- Dock owners often see fish, waterfowl and other animals swimming past their docks, and they told stories of seeing wildlife use the Tagish River HPA, including their property.
- For many years, the properties at the south end of the Tagish River were accessed by boat only in the spring, summer and fall, and the current year-round road is not a government road.
- Dock owners felt there is insufficient evidence to target docks as a negative impact on the river and wildlife. There were requests for more information and data on the impact of docks.

- An inventory of docks and their condition should be completed.
- Concern that removing docks would increase traffic and use of the shoreline and lead to an increase in erosion. Other activities along the river, such as boat wakes and ORV use, should be addressed.
- Docks contribute to safety, as they provide egress in case of forest fires, allow debris to be removed from the river, and enable people to help boaters in distress.
- Support for standards or guidelines for dock development and maintenance, voluntary use of communal docks, and regulating of docks that are not safe.
- Petition requested that draft recommendation #21 consider property owners with water access, and stated that draft recommendation #22 is not supported by residents.
- Petition suggested that each lot owner have the right to a dock, while requirements/guidelines should be created for safe installation and maintenance of docks while preserving the river banks and habitat.
- Eleven respondents submitted a common response that included proposed wording for draft recommendations #21 and #22, and suggestions for implementation. Suggestions included allowing existing property owners to have a dock, a fee to Carcross/Tagish First Nation for docks, developing standards for docks, and removing docks that do not meet the standards.

Stewardship, Research and Monitoring

Recommendations from Draft Plan

21. Determine key research and monitoring questions within the Tagish River HPA to be addressed by the parties, researchers or industry. These studies will involve local input at all stages and will incorporate local and Traditional Knowledge.
22. Establish an environmental monitoring and reporting program, enabling the collection and sharing of scientific data, Traditional Knowledge and local knowledge.
23. Review and evaluate the current and past water data collection regimes and determine information needs and gaps and take steps to fill these gaps.
24. Incorporate climate change adaptation in the development and delivery of local programs and projects at a local scale. Report on key indicators of climate change in the Tagish River HPA.
25. Collect inventory information on species of interest including species at risk in the Tagish River HPA.

Feedback we heard during public engagement

- Residents have a lot of valuable wildlife viewing observation data.
- The management plan should address impacts of fencing on wildlife movement.
- The management plan should consider the idea of a fish hatchery for the Southern Lakes.
- Support for assessing the feasibility of a salmon project within the Tagish River HPA.
- There is a lack of scientific data from before the dam was created.
- The management plan should identify wildlife corridors and sensitive areas.

Implementation

Feedback we heard during public engagement

- Tagish residents repeatedly expressed an interest to be involved with implementation of the management plan.
- The Steering Committee was asked to respect the wishes of dock owners.
- Management of the Tagish River HPA needs to consider the implications of the management plan on local businesses.
- Development should be clustered into development nodes to minimize impacts to wildlife.
- Install a receptacle at the Tagish Bridge Recreation Site for discarded fishing line, similar to the project underway by F. H. Collins students.
- Concern that water management for hydro-electric purposes will undermine any habitat protection efforts.
- If docks are to be removed, details about their removal need to be provided, including associated costs for labour and disposal.
- Details about the implementation of communal docks need to be provided, including their location, associated parking needs, and liability considerations.
- Work with Yukon Government, Carcross/Tagish First Nation government and Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council to explore designating the Tagish River HPA as an Ecological Significant Area under a new (2019) provision of the federal Fisheries Act to provide additional protection for fish populations and their habitats in the Tagish River HPA.
- Implementation timelines need to be established for each recommendation.
- Yukon Energy should be involved in HPA management planning discussions due to their ability to manipulate water levels.
- There should be a box at the boat launch where anglers can report their catch/harvest.
- Implementation of the Tagish River HPA recommendations should tie in with work undertaken as part of the Community-based Fish and Wildlife Workplan (2020-2025) for the Carcross/Tagish Traditional Territory.
- Suggestion that a location for the wildlife viewing platform should be established.

Next Steps

The input provided on the draft management plan is being reviewed by the Tagish River Habitat Protection Area Steering Committee. All comments, submissions and meeting notes are being considered as the recommended management plan for the Tagish River Habitat Protection Area is being finalized.

Information and updates on the planning process can be found at www.tagishriverhpa.com, and questions to the Steering Committee can be sent to tagishriverhpa@gov.yk.ca.

Gunalchéesh/Soga senla/Thank you to everyone who took the time to participate in the public engagement.



