

Nunavut Land Use Plan Regional Final Hearings



WWF-Canada

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World Wildlife Fund Canada (WWF-Canada) has a permanent office in Iqaluit, and we work on a variety of environmental issues in partnership with local, territorial and federal organizations across the North. Our work includes supporting the development of local inshore fisheries, advocating for cleaner fuel and practices in the Arctic shipping industry, intervening where appropriate in regulatory processes, and supporting Inuit-led protected and conserved area initiatives.

As an organization, we have been actively engaged in the development of the Nunavut Land Use Plan for many years, providing expert reports, data sets, geographic information layers, specific recommendations and comments, attending numerous technical and procedural meetings, and supporting the participation of other groups at their request.

We work directly with local communities and are always open to receiving requests from community groups and Hunters and Trappers Associations to support their participation in this or any environmental process in Nunavut.

The need for a land use plan in Nunavut

An immense amount of work by all parties has been put in to get the NLUP to this stage, and we applaud the NPC on the release of the 2021 DNLUP along with the subsequent resumption of public hearings. But the Plan remains in draft form allowing for mineral claims to be issued in areas that have clearly been identified for years as eventual Limited Use designations.

The issuance of these claims serves no one, simultaneously threatening the integrity of the biological/cultural feature that Plan is designed to conserve while creating lengthy Environmental Impact Assessment processes. Areas important to communities are being claimed by interests that they do not agree with without their input.

The NLUP is a living document that will be frequently updated not only through regular reviews every 10 years but also through amendment processes and ministerial exemptions.

Caribou habitat

Reference - Page 17, Section 2.2.1 Caribou calving areas, Page 18 2.2.2 Caribou post-calving areas, 2.2.3 Caribou key access corridors, 2.2.4 Caribou freshwater crossings

Recommendation - Although some refinement through intervenor submissions and input received during the hearing process will be necessary, we recommend maintaining the Limited Use designation and associated year-round prohibitions on incompatible uses for caribou calving areas, caribou post-calving areas, caribou key access corridors and caribou freshwater crossings.

Caribou habitat - Rationale

At the time of release of the 2016 Draft Nunavut Land Use Plan, most herds of caribou across Nunavut were in decline. Today, many herds are still declining or hitting plateaus, though there are some encouraging signs of recovery on Baffin Island.

Total allowable harvests are in place for many herds yet there is still no Land Use Plan. Communities continue to shoulder the burden of management restrictions while mineral exploration continues even on the core calving areas of herds that are in decline.

The decisions made on caribou habitat land use will have longstanding impacts on the recovery and sustainability of caribou herds in Nunavut.

The Options and Recommendations document makes it clear that there is widespread evidence and community support that caribou calving areas, caribou post-calving areas, caribou key access corridors and caribou freshwater crossings should be designated as Limited Use areas with clear year-round prohibitions on incompatible uses.

Caribou habitat - Rationale (continued)

Mobile protections are not an appropriate land use mechanism for caribou calving areas, caribou post-calving areas, caribou key access corridors and caribou freshwater crossings.

Mobile measures do not protect caribou habitat.

There is insufficient evidence that mobile measures could be effectively used as a land use planning tool. These measures remain unproven, prohibitively costly, and short-sighted.

Land use designations and the associated assessment of project applications by the NPC are also the only mechanism by which to properly assess and prevent the negative aspects of cumulative impacts of multiple sources of disturbance across caribou habitat.

Caribou sea ice crossings

Reference - Page 19 Section 2.2.5 Caribou sea ice crossings

Recommendation - We are supportive of the Conditional Use designation and associated seasonal restrictions in the 2021 DNLUP for caribou sea ice crossings.

Caribou sea ice crossings - Rationale

There is widespread community support to seasonally prevent icebreaking during critical times for Dolphin and Union, Peary caribou and Baffin caribou migration across sea ice in specific locations.

We recognize the complex jurisdictional nature of these areas but continue to advocate for the designation of these areas as Conditional Use with associated seasonal prohibitions on ice breaking in the NLUP.

At a minimum, there must be clearly stated restrictions on domestic projects operating within Canada to not include any sort of icebreaking activities during the time of seasonal restrictions.

Proponents must be aware of these restrictions when developing projects in the region and a legal, non-voluntary mechanism should be in place to prevent icebreaking activities.

Walrus haul-outs

Reference - Page 20 Section 2.4 Walrus terrestrial haul-outs

Recommendation - We are supportive of the Limited Use designation for terrestrial walrus haul-outs as indicated in the 2021 DNLUP. We are also supportive of the specific requirements for non-research vessels. We recommend the abandoned haul-outs be listed as a Valued Ecosystems Components with notice to proponents to voluntarily avoid these areas.

Walrus haul-outs - Rationale

There is widespread agreement that designating walrus haul-outs as areas of Limited Use is appropriate given the high sensitivity of walrus at haul-outs, the high cultural importance of walrus to Nunavummiut, the small geographic coverage of these areas and the limited existing regulatory protections for walrus and their haul-outs.

The 2021 DNLUP provides clear guidance to proponents that will allow for voyage planning with very minor impacts on ship routing while avoiding potentially significant disturbance to walrus at their haul-outs.

We note that research suggests that walrus may return to abandoned haul-outs in the future and thus recommend these sites be identified as Valued Ecosystems Components with voluntary measures to avoid these areas.

Important watersheds and fishing areas

In consultations with communities across Nunavut, we have noted many concerns around the protection of important watersheds and fishing areas to ensure clean drinking water and healthy fish.

We have heard directly of the importance of ensuring no disturbance or discharge is allowed upstream of these areas to ensure their pristine nature.

In either this, or future iterations of the plan, we recommend the consideration of these watershed areas as identified by communities as off limits to exploration and mining development to ensure the health of the lakes, rivers and fish important to each community.

This will also allow for the exploration of local fisheries as alternative economic development opportunities as well as continued exercising of the constitutionally protected right of Inuit to fish for their food.

Concluding Remarks

The NLUP is an incredible tool that will facilitate the territory-wide conservation of environmental features of importance to Nunavummiut, while also providing greater certainty for industrial development proponents on areas that are open for development.

We would like to thank the communities for their openness and willingness to share their areas of importance in this process.

We appreciate the opportunity to be intervenors in this process and wish the NPC and all parties successful hearings moving forward.