



# Final Report

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## Evaluation of the Northwest Territories Water Stewardship Strategy Action Plan (2021-2025)

Prepared for the Government of the Northwest Territories Department of Environment and Climate Change and the Water Stewardship Strategy Evaluation Committee

August 29, 2025

# Table of Contents

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List of Acronyms and Terms .....	ii
Executive Summary.....	iii
1 Background to the Evaluation .....	1
1.1    The NWT Water Stewardship Strategy.....	1
1.2    Purpose of the Evaluation.....	4
1.3    Approaches Taken for the Evaluation.....	4
1.4    Limitations of the Evaluation.....	9
2 Learnings from the Evaluation.....	10
2.1    Relevance and Strategic Alignment.....	10
2.2    Delivery and Implementation.....	17
2.3    Monitoring and Reporting.....	26
2.4    Results (Realization of Outcomes).....	31
3 Case Study Overviews .....	34
3.1    Case Study #1: Hidden Lake Leadership Camp .....	34
3.2    Case Study #2: Great Slave Lake Monitoring Program.....	37
3.3    Case Study #3: Benthic Macroinvertebrate Monitoring Program .....	40
3.4    Case Study #4: NWT Community-Based Water Quality Monitoring Programs .....	43
4 Recommendations for the 2026-2030 Action Plan .....	46
5 Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire .....	A-1
6 Appendix B: Interview Guide.....	B-1
7 Appendix C: ISC Focus Group Question Guide.....	C-1

## List of Acronyms and Terms

Acronym/Term	
Action Plan (2021-2025)	<i>The Northern Voices, Northern Waters: NWT Water Stewardship Strategy</i> Action Plan (2021-2025)
BMM	The Benthic Macroinvertebrate Monitoring Program
The Camp	The Hidden Lake Leadership Camp
CBM	Community-Based Water Quality Monitoring Program
DUC	Ducks Unlimited Canada
ECC	Environment and Climate Change
Falkirk	Falkirk Environmental Consultants
IAP2	International Association for Public Participation
IGIO	Indigenous Governments and Indigenous Organization
IPCA	Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas
ISC	Indigenous Steering Committee
GNWT	Government of the Northwest Territories
GSL	Great Slave Lake
GSLM Program	Great Slave Lake Monitoring Program
MTRI	Michigan Tech Research Institute
NGO	Non-government Organization
NYL	Northern Youth Leadership
NWT	Northwest Territories
MNP	MNP LLP
WSS	<i>The Northern Voices, Northern Waters: NWT Water Stewardship Strategy</i>
WSSEC	Water Stewardship Strategy Evaluation Committee

# Executive Summary

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## Purpose of the Evaluation

The Government of the Northwest Territories, Department of Environment and Climate Change, Water Monitoring and Stewardship Division contracted MNP LLP and Falkirk Environmental Consultants to carry out an independent evaluation of the Action Plan (2021-2025), under the *Northern Voices, Northern Waters: NWT Water Stewardship Strategy* (the “Water Strategy”). The related aim was to evaluate the relevance, strategic alignment, delivery and implementation, monitoring and reporting, and results of the Action Plan (2021-2025).

This evaluation is also expected to inform, through its recommendations, further engagements by the Government of the Northwest Territories for the next five-year action plan, covering the period of 2026 to 2030.

## Approach to the Evaluation

This evaluation of the Action Plan (2021-2025) drew on primary and secondary sources of information and was founded on the Guiding Evaluation Framework previously prepared by the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Water Stewardship Strategy Evaluation Committee.<sup>1</sup> Building on this earlier planning, an updated evaluation framework was drafted that provided for, in part, an integration of three sets of guiding questions which had been originally grouped as formative, process, and summative in emphasis. In keeping with the refined, integrated set of guiding questions for the evaluation, background documents were then sourced and reviewed. Following this was an online survey, a series of interviews, and facilitated group meetings with water partners (i.e., those with a role in water stewardship, including all levels and types of government, regulatory boards, non-governmental organizations, academia, industry and communities) along with members of an Indigenous Steering Committee that was put in place to guide the Water Strategy.<sup>2</sup>

## Learnings from the Evaluation

Through the interviews, group sessions and survey carried out in support of this evaluation, along with earlier engagement efforts of the Government of the Northwest Territories in 2020 and 2021, water partners raised a range of factors that are currently affecting, and will continue to shape, the water ecosystem in the Northwest Territories. This includes climate change, upstream developments, human activities, and aging infrastructure. These influences on water quality and quantity have in turn affected the health and well-being of communities in the Northwest Territories in different ways.

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<sup>1</sup> The Water Stewardship Strategy Evaluation Committee included: Heather Scott (Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Boards), Tim Heron (NWT Métis Nation), Alex Latta (Wilfred Laurier University), Sally Card (GNWT Environment and Climate Change), and Roxane Poulin (Nature United - Contractor).

<sup>2</sup> Indigenous Steering Committee | NWT Water Stewardship

Steps to address such issues can be found in the most recent Action Plan (2021-2025); for example, by implementing and renegotiating existing transboundary agreements, and by improving collaboration as well as supporting long-term monitoring networks (as seen with a vulnerability assessment on Great Slave Lake and a cumulative impact monitoring pilot project in the Upper Coppermine). Along these lines, two-thirds (64%) of the water partners who responded in the survey agreed or strongly agreed that the Action Plan (2021-2025) helped address the water-related concerns of the Northwest Territories from 2021 to today. Similarly, 78% of those responding to the survey agreed that the Action Plan (2021-2025) was consistent with the priorities of water partners. Most of those interviewed though, expressed that they struggled to connect the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025) to emerging challenges—particularly those related to climate change and fluctuating water levels. Adding to this is the observation that issues of climate change and transboundary agreements are not referenced in a direct or consistent fashion in the action plan progress reviews or the annual implementation workshop.

When it comes to overlapping plans, policies or initiatives, more could be done to foster shared awareness as much as to further coordination in efforts that serve to address the Northwest Territories' water-related needs. While just over half (55%) of the water partners responding in the survey either agreed or strongly agreed that the efforts under the current Action Plan (2021-2025) do not duplicate other water-related plans, policies, or initiatives, another 27% were uncertain and an added 18% disagreed with the statement. Among those disagreeing, it was noted that organizations focusing on water-related research may operate in silos, without awareness of the projects and programs others are implementing. Other related points made by those interviewed were that the current Action Plan (2021-2025) "repackaged" existing and ongoing activities found in the Northwest Territories Climate Change Action Plan, as well as other legislation and regulatory board mandates; or represented a compilation of activities that were already being carried out by other means. The earlier evaluation of the 2016-2020 Action Plan highlighted overlaps with the 2030 Northwest Territories Climate Change Strategic Framework. Both of these plans shared goals and action items focused on monitoring water quality, quantity, and impacts on wildlife and sanitation.

The Action Plan (2021-2025) and the Water Strategy do not specifically reference how such shared interests and efforts are coordinated, and in what capacity, to achieve collective priorities.

Survey participants were also asked to rank their level of agreement with the statement that "the Action Plan (2021-2025) is aligned with the Water Strategy in its aims along with efforts". Among the water partners responding, 78% agreed or strongly agreed that the Action Plan (2021-2025) is aligned with the aims and efforts of the Water Strategy. Yet, the remaining quarter (23%) were unable to comment or disagreed that such alignment existed. During the interviews and focus groups, only some water partners – primarily those internal to the Government of the Northwest Territories and its departments – were able to speak to specific actions, outcomes, the vision and goals, and Keys to Success within the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025). Most water partners external to the Government of the Northwest Territories (though not all), were unaware of or less familiar with these particulars and were unable to speak to these questions directly. Adding to these engagement-driven insights are two document-based logic models of the Water Strategy and the Action Plan (2021-2025). As presented in these logic models, the connections between them are not clear, meaning it is difficult to understand

how the approaches and Keys to Success in the Water Strategy carry over to the actions in the Action Plan (2021-2025); and then how the Keys to Success which are worded more as desired outcomes in the Action Plan (2021-2025) tie back to the goals and vision of the Water Strategy.

Water partners stated that the annual implementation workshops were valuable for knowledge-sharing; building relationships among industries, researchers, community members; and for communicating on the vision of the Water Strategy. Also, just over two-thirds (68%) of those responding to the survey were satisfied or very satisfied with the ways in which they were engaged during the term of the Action Plan (2021-2025). These water partners specified that they are satisfied with the direct communication with the Government of the Northwest Territories, the annual gatherings and strategy workshops, and collaboration with Indigenous communities, and academic personnel, including data sharing in publicly accessible channels.

While the workshops were effective in bringing water partners together for such purposes, the amount of time spent discussing delivery was considered to be insufficient. Water partners also shared that although the in-person annual implementation workshops support the building of important partnerships, challenges remain with working in silos and with limited communication, particularly between partners within and outside of the Government of the Northwest Territories.

Among water partners responding in the survey, less than half (43%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the resources that were put toward the implementation of the Action Plan (2021-2025); and, for those water partners answering the related question, just under two-thirds, 62%, were satisfied or very satisfied with their own abilities to carry out actions under the Action Plan (2021-2025). Most water partners stressed that available funds and other resources were constrained; that engagement with communities, especially those that are more rural and remote, needs added funding and employee capacity; and that there can be a lack of trust among Indigenous communities for collaborating with the Government of the Northwest Territories for water sampling and other activities. Indigenous Steering Committee members pointed to the importance of regular meetings for Indigenous Governments and organizations to continue to work together and to share information with each other along with their communities. To this end, Indigenous Steering Committee members described how the Action Plan (2021-2025) and Water Strategy did enable more direct communication with the Government of the Northwest Territories when it comes to specific issues and concerns, which could then be shared back with their communities.

While most water partners overall appreciated the progress the Government of the Northwest Territories has made on data management in the last five years, there is also a perception of over reporting in relation to the performance indicators and action items in the Action Plan (2021-2025). Water partners frequently raised that the number of performance indicators, the structure of the Action Plan (2021-2025) and the involvement of multiple leads affected reporting efficiencies. Water partners also added they would appreciate more of a balance between quantitative and qualitative performance indicators for monitoring progress with not only the actions in the Action Plan (2021-2025), but also the desired outcomes as articulated in the Water Strategy.

On the whole, water partners noted difficulty in commenting on the status of performance indicators and action items outside their own organizations or department's mandate. The 2016-2020 evaluation

found a similar result, as water partners expressed how they did not have sufficient knowledge about the entirety of the action plan to comment on its success. Rather this was limited to actions tied to their organizations.

Over the past five years, and building on the successes of previous action plans, a number of important achievements have been realized, with three-quarters (75%) of water partners responding to the survey agreeing or strongly agreeing that the Action Plan (2021-2025) was successful overall — particularly with enhancing knowledge building, monitoring and research.

## Recommendations

While it is essential to acknowledge the gained strengths and faced challenges with the Action Plan (2021-2025), it is equally important to consider areas for improvement to augment the future delivery of the Water Strategy and its action plans. The following serve as recommendations in this regard.

### *Step 1: Strengthen the Alignment Between the Water Stewardship Strategy, the Action Plan, and the Priorities for the Future*

***Develop a Positioning Statement in the Water Strategy:*** Include a clear positioning statement in the Water Strategy to highlight distinct and shared areas of focus and authorities, ensuring these complement other plans and directives.

***Clearly State Water Strategy Priorities and Carry These Over to the Action Plan:*** Reposition the "Keys to Success" for each of the four Components in the Water Strategy as priorities to better reflect the current and emerging needs of the NWT. These priorities should then be carried over to the action plan, and with the "Keys to Success" in the plan describing the desired outcomes that can then be aligned back to the vision and goals of the Water Strategy.

***Incorporate Implementation Guidance in the Action Plan:*** The Government of the Northwest Territories should consider reintroducing the appendix from the 2016-2020 Water Stewardship Strategy Action Plan, as a companion document which explicitly states the roles and responsibilities of different departments and relevant authorities, to aid water partners in implementation. This should also be extended to include a broader base of water partners.

### ***Incorporate Best Practice Learnings into the Next Action Plan:***

The Government of the Northwest Territories should conduct a jurisdictional scan of other strategies and plans that:

- focus on water management or water quality and quantity,
- include large-scale collaboration and engagement with the public and Indigenous Governments, organizations and communities, or
- handle large datasets and dissemination of information.

Plans and strategies chosen for a jurisdictional scan would only be required to meet at least one of the qualifiers above, as each point will provide a different perspective and insight that can better inform the alignment of action items, performance indicators, and Keys to Success in future action plans.

## *Step 2: Advance the State of Practice in Collaborative Governance of the Strategy and Action Plan*

**Provide More Forums to Share Experiences and Engage in Dialogues on Implementation of the Action Plan:** Water partners value the annual workshops for discussing progress and sharing experiences. More time for collaboration and specific sessions with selected partners would enhance understanding and implementation of the action plan. Also furthering the state of collaboration would be periodic, and mandate-specific sessions with select water partners.

**Involve Indigenous Governments and Communities in Greater Capacity:** Water partners valued the involvement of the Indigenous Steering Committee in guiding the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025) and suggested expanding their decision-making role. The committee was seen as providing a crucial Indigenous Knowledge perspective for stewardship, which could be complemented by including a group representing regional governments. The community-based monitoring program was also noted as a positive step in this direction and appreciated by the water partners.

**Draw More Extensively on Knowledge-Holders:** Collaboration for water stewardship requires the involvement of knowledge-holders, as individuals along with documented procedures, roles and responsibilities. This ensures continuity and consistency in implementing the action plan and the Water Strategy over the years, despite changes in governance structures and decision-makers.

**Explore Restructuring the Delivery of a Unified Monitoring Program Aligned with the Water Strategy and Action Plan Internally in the Government of the Northwest Territories:** The Government of the Northwest Territories should explore the development of a unified monitoring program. Currently, monitoring programs operate separately from each other, and water partners were concerned that having these silos duplicates work and strains financial capacity, where pooling financial resources and working together would be more efficient.

## *Step 3: Rationalize the Monitoring and Reporting on Results*

**Assess the Meaningfulness, Practicality and Balance of Performance Indicators:** Existing performance indicators should be reassessed by categorizing them as green, yellow and blue. Green means indicators are aligned with the Water Strategy and the action plan plus are practical, and informative; yellow means indicators require adjustment to align with the Water Strategy and action plan as well as to improve how they provide quantitative and qualitative insights; and blue means indicators should be removed. As well, qualitative indicators can enhance the understanding of progress by offering narrative insights into community water stewardship knowledge, beliefs about water, and trust in water sustainability efforts.

**Foster Local Community and Regional Awareness:** Introducing more regional and place-based case studies or trend highlights will strengthen the relevance of reported results for water partners and community members. It will also help facilitate greater local community awareness and engagement.

**Explore Technologies to Assist with Reporting.** To support progress tracking and reporting, there are several options depending on available platforms and internal capacity that will align with the desired level of automation, ranging from low-tech tools to the implementation of a dedicated platform.

#### *Step 4: Adapt Based on Results*

**Formalize an Adaptive Approach to Resourcing and Updating of the Action Plan:** The Government of the Northwest Territories should periodically review and adjust the planning of initiatives in the action plans to align with priorities, funding, available capacity, and the means of monitoring and reporting progress. This involves setting a schedule for regular reviews, reassessing the balance of resourcing, and developing a flexible funding model. These steps will help ensure that the action plans remain adaptable and responsive to organizational and community needs.

**Expand and Strengthen Relationships with Indigenous Communities:** While community-based water monitoring and youth programs foster relationships with Indigenous communities, this should be seen as an ongoing process. Future action plans should continue building on these empowering approaches and efforts. Water partners engaged in monitoring or other water stewardship programs should have access to culturally appropriate and trauma-informed tools and resources. This will enable them to collaborate meaningfully and effectively with Indigenous communities in implementing the action plan. These tools can also be shared through training in Indigenous and cultural awareness.

#### *Step 5: Broaden the Sharing of Experiences and Knowledge from Across the Territories and Beyond*

**Implement Two-Way Communications Methods on the Action Plan:** It is important to know the different audiences for communication and the purpose of engagement as it relates to the action plan. To this end, the IAP2 spectrum of Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower should form the scaffolding of a two-way communications strategy for the action plan.

**Continue to Share Stories on Innovation, Successes and Challenges:** Data Stream has facilitated knowledge-sharing on various territorial issues, such as upstream developments and activities on the Slave River. By making data accessible, it will improve knowledge sharing. Going forward, it is essential to collectively report on success stories and challenges, instead of individual initiatives to highlight the impact of innovations and efforts under the action plan on water ecosystems.

# 1 Background to the Evaluation

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## 1.1 The NWT Water Stewardship Strategy

*Northern Voices, Northern Waters: NWT Water Stewardship Strategy* (the “Water Strategy”) is a made-in-the North strategy developed collaboratively by the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), the Water Strategy Indigenous Steering Committee (ISC), Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations (IGOs), and other water partners. Water partners are those with a role in water stewardship, including all levels and types of government, regulatory boards, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia, industry and communities across the Northwest Territories (NWT).

Since the Water Strategy was released in 2010, three five-year action plans (2011-2015, 2016-2020, 2021-2025) have been developed by water partners with the aim of creating a collaborative, partnership-based approach to enhance and promote water stewardship in the NWT. While looking to ensure that water partners continue to work towards achieving the vision, principles, and goals of the Water Strategy, the action plans are also expected to evolve as progress is made and as new information, interests, and needs of water partners arise. As well, each action plan aims to build on the momentum of the earlier one at the same time as addressing new priorities and emerging issues in concert with empowering water partners to take ownership of water stewardship in the NWT. At the end of every five-year term, an independent evaluation is conducted to assess the period of implementation and help inform development of the next action plan.

The most recent action plan covers the period from 2021 to 2025, with related progress and outcomes having been monitored through annual status updates and dedicated implementation workshops.

### 1.1.1 History of the Water Strategy

The commitment to develop a made-in-the-North Water Strategy to guide the use and management of NWT water resources stemmed from:

- concerns from NWT residents about water resource management,
- increasing water-related pressures from industrial development and transboundary influences,
- climate change, and
- a changing global economy.

In 2008, the GNWT and the Government of Canada started working with representatives from IGOs to develop a water stewardship strategy to address these concerns. Regulatory boards, agencies, environmental organizations, industry, academic institutions and the public have also been involved in the process.

This partnership resulted in the NWT Water Stewardship Strategy, originally released in 2010 and updated in 2018. The Water Strategy lays out a path to bring all levels of government, agencies, and the public together to provide for clean, abundant, and productive waters in the NWT.

After the Water Strategy was released in 2010, three five-year action plans were developed as noted earlier. The current Action Plan (2021-2025) builds on the momentum of the earlier ones (2011-2015 and 2016-2020) and guides the third five-year implementation phase of the Water Strategy.

## 1.1.2 How Has the Water Strategy Evolved Over Time?

Prior to 2010, water governance in the NWT was managed under federal policies, with Indigenous Governments, environmental organizations, and local communities advocating for a more regionally focused approach. Concerns over industrial development, climate change, and Indigenous water rights led to the creation of the Water Strategy, which evolved as follows:

- **2010** – The NWT Water Stewardship Strategy was released, serving as a framework for collaborative water management that emphasized both western scientific research and Indigenous Knowledge.
- **2011-2015** – The first action plan led to the expansion of water monitoring initiatives and the signing of key transboundary water agreements, including the Alberta-NWT agreement in 2015.
- **2016-2020** – The second action plan built upon existing efforts while emphasizing Indigenous leadership, addressing climate change impacts, and improving collaboration across jurisdictions. During this period, advancements were made in expanding community-based monitoring, refining governance structures, and implementing transboundary water agreements.
- **2018** – The Water Strategy was revised to reflect organizational, policy, and program information changes that occurred since 2010 as well as the devolution of water monitoring activities.
- **2021-2025** – The most recent, this action plan continues to guide water stewardship in the NWT, on the foundation of past successes while striving to address new challenges such as improving performance measurement, increasing community engagement, and strengthening partnerships and Indigenous co-management.

## 1.1.3 Water Strategy Guiding Principles

The Water Strategy has five principles that serve to guide water stewardship in the NWT:

- **Respect:** Water stewardship decisions respect values held, and various lifestyles chosen by NWT residents. These include spiritual, cultural, public health, recreational, economic and ecological values. Water stewardship decisions respect Aboriginal rights or treaties including land, resource and self-government agreements.
- **Sustainability:** Water stewardship decisions sustain healthy and diverse aquatic ecosystems over time. They maintain the ability of current and future generations to choose their way of life.
- **Responsibility:** Water stewardship is a collective responsibility. All NWT residents must make thoughtful decisions about actions that may affect NWT aquatic ecosystems.
- **Knowledge:** Water stewardship decisions are based on accurate and up-to-date traditional, local and western scientific knowledge. As knowledge evolves, stewardship decisions evolve accordingly. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage to aquatic ecosystems, lack of certainty is not used as a reason to postpone effective measures that can avert the potential threat.

- **Accountability:** Water stewardship decisions are made in an informed, transparent and participatory manner. Those who make decisions must be held responsible for the consequences of those decisions.<sup>3</sup>

#### 1.1.4 Aims of the Water Strategy

The Water Strategy sets out a vision that: "the waters of the Northwest Territories will remain clean, abundant, and productive for all time"<sup>4</sup> and aligned with this are six goals, with the intention that:

- 1) Waters that flow into, within or through the NWT are substantially unaltered in quality, quantity and rates of flow
- 2) Residents have access to safe, clean and plentiful drinking water at all times
- 3) Aquatic ecosystems are healthy and diverse
- 4) Residents can rely on their water to sustain their communities and economies
- 5) Residents are involved in and knowledgeable about water stewardship
- 6) All those making water stewardship decisions work together to communicate and share information

Figure 1: Water Strategy Goals

#### 1.1.5 Current Delivery of the Water Strategy

The Water Strategy is currently being implemented through the Action Plan (2021-2025), which outlines collaborative efforts among various water partners to advance the vision and goals as outlined above.

The Water Strategy has four Components that are carried forward in the Action Plan (2021-2025):

- **Work Together:** Strengthening partnerships and collaborative efforts among Indigenous governments, territorial and federal agencies, communities, regulatory boards, non-governmental organizations, industry, and academic institutions.
- **Know and Plan:** Enhancing understanding of the NWT's water resources through research and monitoring, incorporating both scientific data and Indigenous knowledge to inform planning and decision-making.

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<sup>3</sup> "Northern Voices, Northern Waters – NWT Water Stewardship Strategy," Government of Northwest Territories, 2018. PDF p. 17. [https://www.nwtwaterstewardship.ca/sites/water/files/nwt\\_water\\_stewardship\\_strategy\\_updated\\_2018.pdf](https://www.nwtwaterstewardship.ca/sites/water/files/nwt_water_stewardship_strategy_updated_2018.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* PDF p. 18

- **Use Responsibly:** Ensuring sustainable use of water resources by providing water managers with the necessary information to make well-reasoned decisions that balance environmental, social, and economic needs.
- **Check Our Progress:** Regularly reviewing and reporting on the effectiveness of water stewardship activities to ensure accountability and continuous improvement.<sup>5</sup>

The implementation of these components is also guided by the Water Strategy ISC, which supports the integration of Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and values into water stewardship activities.

Added to this are annual progress reports which are published to help ensure an alignment of priorities with water partner expectations and to inform both water partners and future actions.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Evaluation

The GNWT contracted MNP LLP (MNP) and Falkirk Environmental Consultants (Falkirk) to carry out this independent evaluation of the Action Plan (2021-2025), under the Water Strategy. Guiding this evaluative effort were the intentions to:

- understand the effectiveness and success of the Action Plan (2021-2025) implementation,
- identify on-going and emerging challenges in advancing the vision and goals of the Water Strategy, and
- provide recommendations for the next Action Plan (2026-2030).

## 1.3 Approaches Taken for the Evaluation

The methods for evaluating the Action Plan (2021-2025) drew on primary and secondary sources of information and were founded on the Guiding Evaluation Framework previously prepared by the GNWT and the Water Stewardship Strategy Evaluation Committee (WSSEC).<sup>6</sup> Building on this earlier planning, an updated evaluation framework was drafted, with one of the related aims being an integration of three sets of guiding questions which had been grouped separately as formative, process, and summative in emphasis.

### 1.3.1 Guiding Evaluation Matrix

As noted above, a set of guiding questions were originally developed as part of the initial evaluation framework by the GNWT (ECC Water Stewardship Division) and the WSSEC, with distinctions being made in these lines of inquiry based on taking a formative, process or summative orientation. The MNP and Falkirk team then worked with members of the ECC Water Monitoring and Stewardship Division

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* PDF p. 25

<sup>6</sup> The role of the WSSEC was to provide insight based on expertise and experience to MNP and the GNWT throughout this process. The WSSEC included: Heather Scott (Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Boards), Tim Heron (NWT Métis Nation), Alex Latta (Wilfred Laurier University), Sally Card (GNWT Environment and Climate Change), and Roxane Poulin (Nature United - Contractor).

and the WSSEC to further refine these guiding questions, of which there were 34, resulting in a shorter list and with four areas of focus as presented below.

*Table 1: Revised Guiding Evaluation Questions*

Relevance and Strategic Alignment
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the water stewardship needs, today and in looking forward, in the NWT?</li> <li>2. Are the Action Plan (2021-25), and in turn the Water Strategy, aligned with these needs?           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Are there any gaps in terms of unmet needs that should be addressed in the next action plan?</li> <li>b. Have there been any changes in the priorities of water partners as it relates to the Action Plan (2021-25), and which should inform the next action plan?</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Are there plans, policies or initiatives that share a water mandate in the NWT that overlap with the Action Plan (2021-25)?</li> <li>4. How aligned are the:           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Outcomes associated with the Action Plan (2021-25) to the Vision and Goals of the Water Strategy?</li> <li>b. Actions in the Action Plan (2021-25) to the Keys to Success and Approaches in the Water Strategy?</li> <li>c. Actions in the Action Plan (2021-25) to the desired outcomes as described in this plan's Keys to Success?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
Delivery and Implementation
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. How aware are water partners of the Action Plan (2021-25) along with how they contributed?           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How has the Action Plan (2021-25) influenced the ways in which water partners carried out their work?</li> <li>b. Would water partners change anything in terms of their roles in support of the Action Plan (2021-25)?</li> </ol> </li> <li>6. Going forward, what would help when it comes to:           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Meaningfully engaging water partners (are there certain tools or structures that would help with this such as thematic working groups, committees, and the use of technology)?</li> <li>b. Enabling water partners to support the implementation of the next Action Plan (such as ensuring that actions are clear in scope and intent as well as having the resources along with authorities to put actions into practice)?</li> <li>c. Providing for continuity, where needed, between this and the next action plan?</li> </ol> </li> <li>7. Were the actions and related outputs in the Action Plan (2021-25) implemented as expected?           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Were there any actions and related outputs that were not implemented as expected?</li> <li>b. What might have constrained the implementation of these actions?</li> <li>c. What might have contributed to the successful implementation of the actions?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

### Monitoring and Reporting

8. Are the existing performance indicators providing for an understanding of:
  - a. The progress made in implementation of the Action Plan (2021-25)?
  - b. Results (outcomes) of the Action Plan (2021-25)?
9. As it relates to reporting on performance indicators for the Action Plan (2021-25), was the information as presented in these reports:
  1. Easily understood?
  2. Timely?
10. What might be changed, if anything, with:
  - a. The types of performance indicators used for the next action plan?
  - b. How reporting on the next action plan is approached, in both what is being reported and how often?

### Results (Realization of Outcomes)

11. What were the main achievements of the Action Plan (2021-25)?
12. Were there any differences in how these results were experienced, or viewed, by water partners?
13. Have there been any unanticipated results of the Action Plan (2021-25), and if so, what were these?
14. To what extent might the successes, in both action and results, of the Action Plan (2021-25) be sustained into the future?

## 1.3.2 Summary of Engagement

The means for engagement and in keeping with the above guiding questions for the evaluation were designed with provisions for personal anonymity (with permission being sought as appropriate, such as for the case studies); building on background information to the evaluation so as to not duplicate what was known and help make the best use of the time for participants; and being culturally informed.

Taken together, these same engagement activities sought to provide all water partners with an opportunity to share on their views and experiences with, mainly, the Action Plan (2021-2025). The related forms for engagement were an online survey, interviews, facilitated group meetings, and case studies. The MNP and Falkirk team also hosted a series of sessions with members of the ECC Water Monitoring and Stewardship Division and WSSEC to initiate the evaluation, review and finalize the framework, explore the meaning that can be drawn from the findings, and discuss the draft report. A summary of the engagement activities and participation rates are outlined on the following pages.

## 1.3.3 Survey

An online survey was prepared and circulated among water partners as an inclusive means of seeking commentary and experience-driven insights on the Action Plan (2021-2025). The survey was designed based on the set of guiding evaluation questions as presented in Table 1 and then shared with the ECC

Water Monitoring and Stewardship Division for feedback prior to launch. The programmed version of the approved survey (refer to Appendix A) was administered over the period of May 6 to June 6, 2025, to 205 water partners. The response rate was 22%, with 45 water partners either fully or partially completing the survey.

The breakdown of participating organizations is outlined below in Table 2. The largest group that took part in the survey, based on self-identification, was the GNWT, followed by IGIOs, NGOs, and academic and research institutes. The lowest levels of participation were observed from the regulatory boards, followed by community governments and the federal government.

*Table 2: Breakdown of Participant Organizations that Responded to the Survey*

Organization	Percentage of Participants (Rounded)
Indigenous Government or Indigenous Organization	17%
Indigenous Community Member (i.e., you are not representing an entire community or government's perspectives and are instead sharing your own experiences and thoughts)	0
Government of the Northwest Territories	33%
Federal Government	3%
Community Government	6%
Academic or Research Institution	17%
Co-Management/Regulatory Board	8%
Other Non-Government Organization	17%

### 1.3.4 Interviews

Eleven virtual 45 to 60-minute interview sessions were completed with representatives from the GNWT and lead water partners. The purpose of these interviews was to supplement the survey by offering a forum for sharing in-depth understandings of the delivery, achievements, and opportunities for improvement when it comes to the Action Plan (2021-2025). The scheduling and conduct of these interviews were guided by the following factors:

- The list of participants and groupings were provided by the GNWT.
- Interviews were conducted individually or in groups of up to three participants to provide space for in-depth conversations.
- Up to three attempts were made to schedule interviews with identified organizations or partners.

A summary of interview participants by organization is presented on the following page, and the related guide is provided in Appendix B.

*Table 3: Number of Interviews by Organization*

Organization	Number of Group Interviews
Environment and Climate Change (ECC) Water Monitoring and Stewardship	4
ECC Water Regulatory	1
Municipal and Community Affairs and Health and Social Services	1
Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Boards	1
Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board	1
Ecology North	1
Data Stream	1
Mackenzie River Basin Board	1
Dehcho Aboriginal Aquatic Resources and Oceans Management	0

### 1.3.5 Focus Groups

In addition to the interviews, three focus group sessions were conducted with members of the ISC. An introductory session was held on May 16, 2025, during a regularly scheduled ISC meeting (hosted by the GNWT) to introduce and discuss the purpose along with value of the evaluation. This was followed by two virtual one-hour sessions (hosted June 5 and 9, 2025) that were structured in keeping with the guiding evaluation questions while retaining allowances to explore specific topics based on the expertise and interests of the participants. The focus group questions are provided in Appendix C, and a list of focus group participants by IGIO is offered in Table 4 below.

*Table 4: Focus Group Participant Organizations*

Focus Group 1 (Introductory Session) – May 16, 2025	
GNWT ECC Water Monitoring & Stewardship	Nahanni Butte Dene Band
Salt River First Nation	Inuvialuit Regional Corporation
North Slave Métis Alliance	Sahtu Secretariat Inc.
Gwich'in Tribal Council	Northwest Territory Métis Nation
Dehcho First Nation	
Focus Group 2- June 5, 2025	
Gwich'in Tribal Council	Sahtu Secretariat Inc.
Northwest Territory Métis Nation	Dehcho First Nation
Focus Group 3- June 9, 2025	
North Slave Métis Alliance	Inuvialuit Regional Corporation
Kátł'odeeche First Nation	Northwest Territory Métis Nation
Dehcho First Nation	

### 1.3.6 Case Study Interviews

Four virtual case study interviews were held with water partners to showcase innovations together with programs or projects that have contributed to the advancement of the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025). These interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes, based on the level of detail provided by participants. The resulting case studies, which are highlighted in Section 3 of this report, are as follows:

- Hidden Lake Leadership Camp.
- Great Slave Lake Monitoring Program.
- Benthic Macroinvertebrate Monitoring Program.
- NWT Community-Based Water Monitoring Program.

## 1.4 Limitations of the Evaluation

Collecting regional level data was out of scope for the evaluation. As a result, regional differences in opinion and perspectives are not captured in this report. The MNP and Falkirk team recognize that regionally based concerns may exist and can emerge in future engagements.

When it comes to the survey responses, these are not statistically representative of water partners and their work on the Action Plan (2021-2025). Rather, the survey responses serve to illustrate some of the similarities and differences in understanding and experiences with the Action Plan (2021-2025). The surveys results are also being reported alongside the interview and focus group learnings, and findings from the document review, to provide for a more complete understanding of evaluation results.

With the case studies, the initial intent was for participants to self-identify in the survey as being willing to share their experiences with the Action Plan (2021-2025) in a manner that highlights successes and challenges of plan implementation. However, no survey respondents self-identified in this way. Given this, the GNWT, in collaboration with MNP and Falkirk, identified case study participants for this part of the evaluation. As such, the case studies in the evaluation are illustrative and are not a complete representation of actions, programs, projects, or activities carried out under the Action Plan (2021-2025).

Finally, MNP and Falkirk have relied upon the completeness, accuracy, and fair presentation of all information as obtained from those engaged as part of this evaluation. The reliability of the findings and opinions expressed in the report are conditional upon this information underlying them. Also, the findings and opinions expressed are current as of July 2025 and are subject to change without notice.

## 2 Learnings from the Evaluation

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### 2.1 Relevance and Strategic Alignment

This section provides the learnings on the relevance of the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025) in relation to the water stewardship needs of the NWT, as identified by water partners, followed by the strategic alignment of these documents with other strategies and action plans to identify overlaps. This section also sets the stage for further discussion on the delivery and implementation of the Action Plan (2021-2025).

#### 1. What are the water stewardship needs, today and in looking forward, in the NWT?

Water partners raised a range of factors that are currently affecting, and will continue to shape, the water ecosystem in the NWT. This includes climate change, upstream developments, human activities, and aging infrastructure, with reference being made to:

- Decreasing water levels (particularly in the Dehcho Region and Mackenzie Rivers and Great Slave Lake);
- Emergent algae blooms;
- Forest fires;
- Ice quality and permafrost thaw;
- Increased water temperatures;
- Increased flooding in communities;
- Increased turbidity;
- Industrial contaminants around Norman Wells and in the Sahtu Region (tailings water, oil spills);
- Communication gaps with regulators in Alberta around reporting contaminant discharges;
- Site C Dam in British Columbia.

Water partners also explained that aging water treatment plant infrastructure is struggling to keep up with the impacts of climate change, including changes to water turbidity and low water levels. On low water levels, it was noted that access pipes in some areas are now too close to the surface and require different water sources or upgrades to the pipes themselves.

These influences on water quality and quantity have in turn affected the health and well-being of communities in the NWT in different ways. The graphic on the following page summarizes these influences on water quality along with quantity and the impacts to the health and well-being of communities in the NWT, as described by water partners.

The needs and issues raised by water partners as they relate to water systems in the NWT through the survey and interviews were also present in earlier engagements conducted by the GNWT. For example, the engagements carried out in 2020 and 2021 to help inform the Action Plan (2021-2025) identified transboundary water management and the impacts of climate change as important to address.<sup>7</sup> Steps to address some of these issues were built into the most recent action plan, for example, by implementing and renegotiating existing transboundary agreements; and by improving

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<sup>7</sup> GNWT, *What We Heard: Summary of Engagement, NWT Water Stewardship Strategy Action Plan 2021-2025*, August 2021. [what we heard wss action plan 2021-2025 .pdf](https://www2.gov.nt.ca/engagement/what-we-heard-wss-action-plan-2021-2025.pdf)

collaboration as well as maintaining long-term monitoring networks (i.e., vulnerability assessment on Great Slave Lake and a cumulative impact monitoring pilot project in the Upper Coppermine).

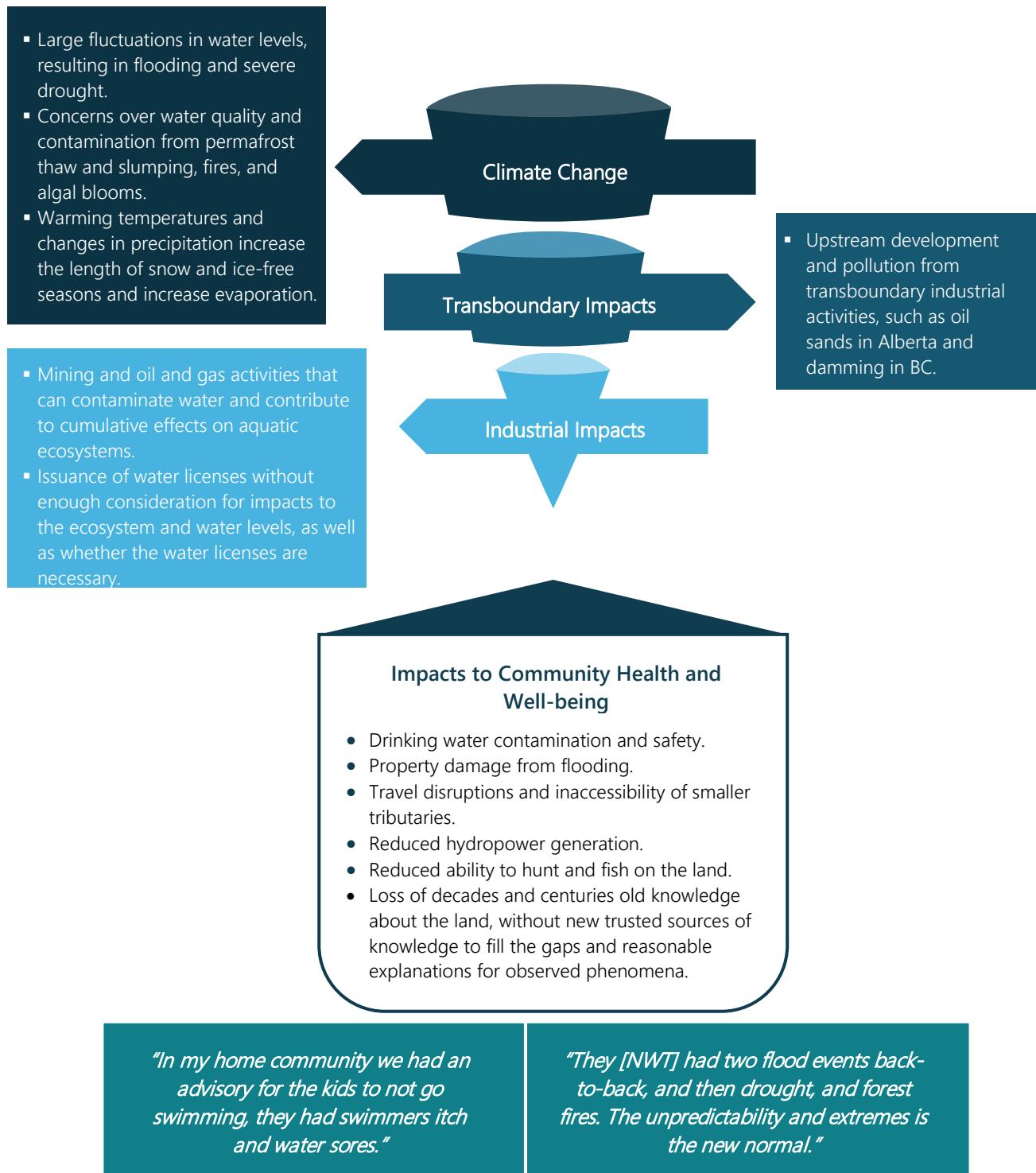


Figure 2: Reported Influences on Water Quality and Quantity Along with Impacts on Community Health and Well-Being

## 2 Are the Action Plan (2021-25), and in turn the Water Strategy, aligned with these needs?

The Action Plan (2021-2025) and Water Strategy aim to improve collaboration among water partners and to address water-related needs of the NWT as profiled in the prior section of this report. Of the 22 water partners who responded to this question in the survey, 64% agreed or strongly agreed that the Action Plan (2021-2025) helped address the water-related concerns of the NWT from 2021 to today. Similarly, 78% of the 22 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Action Plan (2021-2025) was consistent with the priorities of water partners.

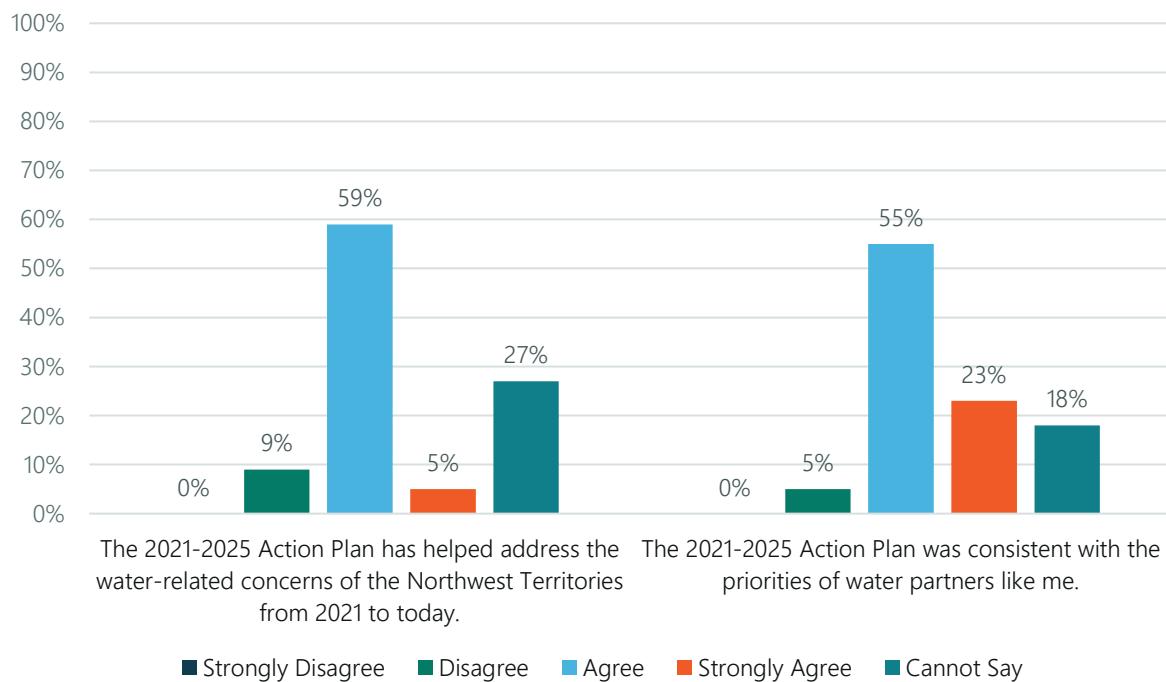


Figure 3: Survey Results: Alignment of the Action Plan (2021-2025) with the needs of water partners and the NWT (N=22)

While survey participants generally stated that the Action Plan (2021-2025) helped addressed water-related concerns and priorities over the period of 2021 to today, most of those interviewed expressed that they struggled to connect the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025) to emerging challenges—particularly those related to climate change and fluctuating water levels.

Contributing to this may be that issues of climate change and transboundary agreements are not commonly reported in the progress reviews or annual implementation workshops. The 2023 Annual Progress Review does make note of some information-sharing and research initiatives under “Partnerships” and “Knowledge and Plan”, including the Wilfrid Laurier University and Tłicho Government collaboration to establish the Tłicho Climate Change Knowledge Center, which addresses climate change and water quality issues for Tłicho communities.<sup>8</sup> The Tłicho Climate Change

<sup>8</sup> 2023 Water Stewardship Strategy Progress Review

Knowledge Center collaboration was reported in the Annual Progress Summary under the Action Plan (2021-2025) Key to Success 2.2.C, and action item 2.2.C.4:

*Key to Success 2.2.C: Results of monitoring and research activities by researchers and water partners are provided to water partners in an understandable way*

*Action Item 2.2.C.4: Technical experts and researchers communicate with communities during projects and present monitoring and research findings tailored to communities (in the appropriate context and plain language) upon completion of a project.<sup>9</sup>*

Similarly, the Annual Progress Summaries make note of initiatives carried out by water partners to address permafrost thaw because of climate change. The 2023 Action Plan Progress Review describes the NWT Métis Nation's receipt of federal funding for scientific analysis related to permafrost thaw and a collaborative partnership between the GNWT and Sahtu communities to map and monitor permafrost.<sup>10</sup> However, these ongoing efforts are implicit only, as reported under Keys to Success 1.1A, action item 1.1.A.3 and Key to Success 1.1B, action item 1.1.B.2, respectively:

*Key to Success 1.1A: Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and values guide Water Strategy activities through oversight provided by an engaged Indigenous Steering Committee.*

*Action Item 1.1.A.3: ISC members report on relevant regional initiatives at ISC meetings*

*Key to Success 1.1B: Water partners strengthen strategic areas for cooperation through leveraging related initiatives.*

*Action Item 1.1.B.2: Identify opportunities for water partners to support water strategy initiatives through collaborative partnerships and available funding opportunities.<sup>11</sup>*

In the same way, although the purpose of the Tłicho Climate Change Knowledge Center collaboration is to address climate change, reporting on the collaboration is connected to the communication of monitoring results in the context of the Action Plan (2021-2025). As well, activities related to the scientific analysis and monitoring of permafrost thaw are connected to Indigenous knowledge and partnerships in progress reporting, rather than the influence of climate change on water in the NWT.

Water partners also shared important topics that should be included in the next action plan to address water-related needs of the NWT, including the need to account for the variability of the environment as well as water quantity in addition to water quality, as recent extreme highs and lows in water levels have presented new challenges for water stewardship in the territory. Water partners noted there is only one action item in the Action Plan (2021-2025) related to hydrological modelling (2.1.A.6), with action items addressing, in a direct fashion, flood forecasting and drought not being found. Water partners would like to see future action plans consider more in the way of initiatives on water quantity. If this data is being captured (i.e., through existing monitoring activities or existing

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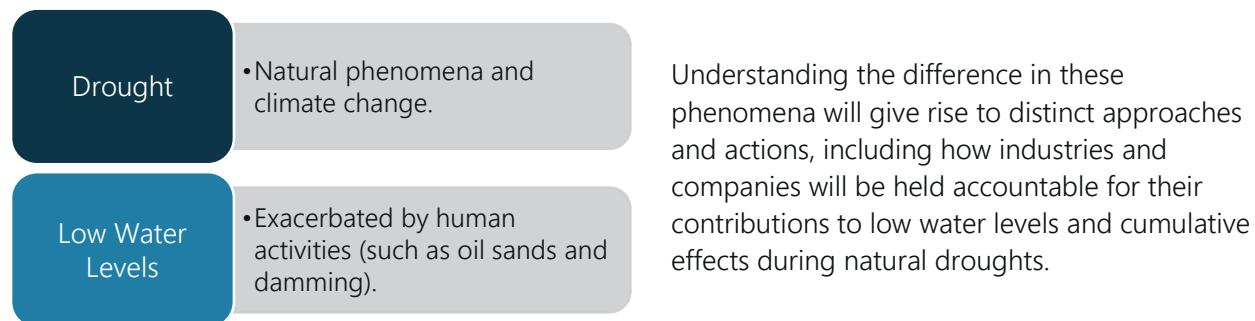
<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

hydrometric stations), then perhaps related activities could be made more prominent in future action plans.

A water partner also stressed the distinction between “low water levels” and “drought” to inform the approaches adopted for developing the action plan.



Other factors shared by water partners for consideration in the next action plan include:

- advanced reporting on groundwater quality data,
- risk assessments for climate adaptation and resilience,
- community impacts of climate change and industrial development, and
- parallel emerging GNWT priorities, based on the New Legislative Assembly, such as emergency preparedness.

Overall, water partners stated they want to see a more holistic and streamlined approach within the next action plan to effectively manage water for future generations. This includes adopting an issues-based approach for reporting which allows water partners to see the progress made on, for example, climate change. In doing so, this will also help measure and compare if the needs of the NWT are being addressed by the action plan more effectively.

### **3. Are there plans, policies or initiatives that share a water mandate in the NWT that overlap with the Action Plan (2021-25)?**

Overall, many water partners internal to the GNWT (“internal water partners”) and some water partners in organizations external to the GNWT (“external water partners”) expressed that much of the necessary foundation and direction for their work is already being provided in other legislation, regulations, and agreements. Some examples provided by the water partners included the *Waters Act*, the *Mackenzie Valley Resources Management Act*, Land Claims, and regulations for water license approvals. Similarly, the Action Plan (2021-2025) acknowledges overlap with other national, regional, and local initiatives such as the NWT Cumulative Impacts Monitoring Program Action Plan, Climate Change Strategic Framework (CCSF) and the Waste Resource Management Strategy and Implementation Plan (WRMS).<sup>12</sup>

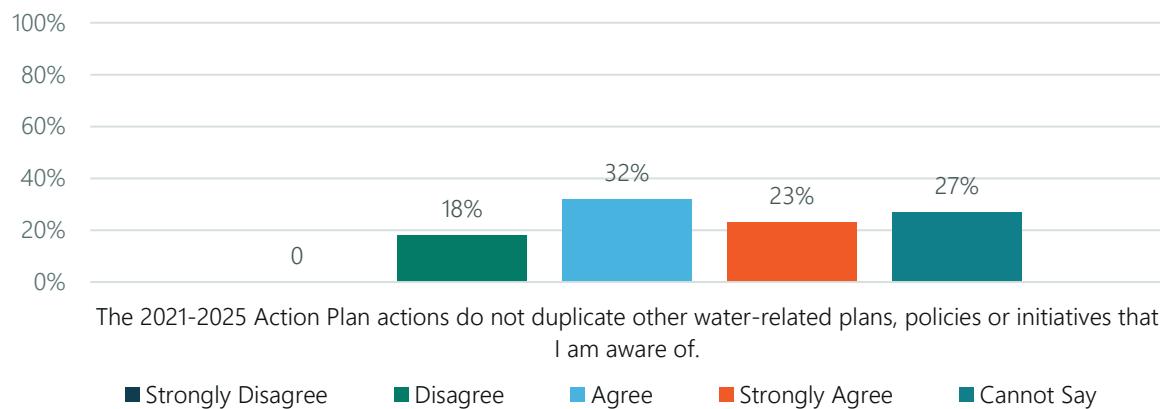
Of the 22 water partners responding to the question in the survey, just over half (55%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the Action Plan (2021-2025) actions do not duplicate other water-related plans, policies, or initiatives. Yet, another 27% were uncertain and an added 18% disagreed with the statement,

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<sup>12</sup> 2021-2025 Action Plan

noting that organizations focused on water-related research tended to operate in silos and without awareness of the projects and programs others are implementing. Similar feedback was provided in interviews with the water partners. Most internal water partners stated that the Action Plan (2021-2025) repackaged existing and ongoing activities presented in the Climate Change Action Plan, as well as other legislation and regulatory board mandates, or represented a compilation of activities that were already being carried out by other means. Further to this, the earlier evaluation of the 2016-2020 Action Plan highlighted overlaps with the 2030 NWT CCSF, as found in shared goals and action items focused on monitoring water quality, quantity, and impacts on wildlife and sanitation.<sup>13</sup>

The Action Plan (2021-2025) and the Water Strategy do not specifically reference how such shared interests and efforts are coordinated, and in what capacity, to achieve collective priorities. Interviewed water partners added that the GNWT and other organizations – including government departments and academic or research institutions – focus on water related research with limited awareness of the work being carried out by others.



*Figure 4: Survey Results: Overlapping Plans, Policies, and Initiatives (N= 22)*

Added to this are situations marked by duplicate reporting requirements. For example, wastewater management in the NWT is guided by the Guidelines for Hazardous Waste Management.<sup>14</sup> Water partners put forward examples of having been required to report twice on their monitoring efforts as carried out under the WRMS and the Action Plan (2021-2025). One of the main purposes of the Action Plan (2021-2025) though, is to identify and coordinate existing resources to meet collective priorities. Water partners expressed that the duplicate reporting requirements are time consuming and divert resources from other competing priorities. They also added that the future action plans should consider this when it comes to resource capacity.

<sup>13</sup> 2016-2020 Evaluation Report

<sup>14</sup> Waste Resource Management Strategy and Implementation Plan

**4. How aligned are the outcomes of the Action Plan (2021-2025) and the visions and goals of the water strategy; the actions in the Action Plan (2021-2025) and the Keys to Success in the Water Strategy; and, the actions in the Action Plan (2021-2025) and the desired outcomes?**

When asked about familiarity with the Water Strategy and the Action Plan (2021-2025), 35 survey participants responded, with 31% self-identifying as somewhat familiar (have heard about the Water Strategy and/or action plan); 60% as familiar (have read the Water Strategy and/or action plan and know the sections or actions relevant to their work); and 9% as very familiar (can speak to what is in the Water Strategy and action plan, as well as the sections or actions relevant to their work).

Survey participants were also asked to rank their level of agreement with the statement that "the Action Plan (2021-2025) is aligned with the Water Strategy in its aims along with efforts". Of the 22 responses, 78% of these water partners agreed or strongly agreed that the Action Plan (2021-2025) is aligned with the aims and efforts of the Water Strategy.

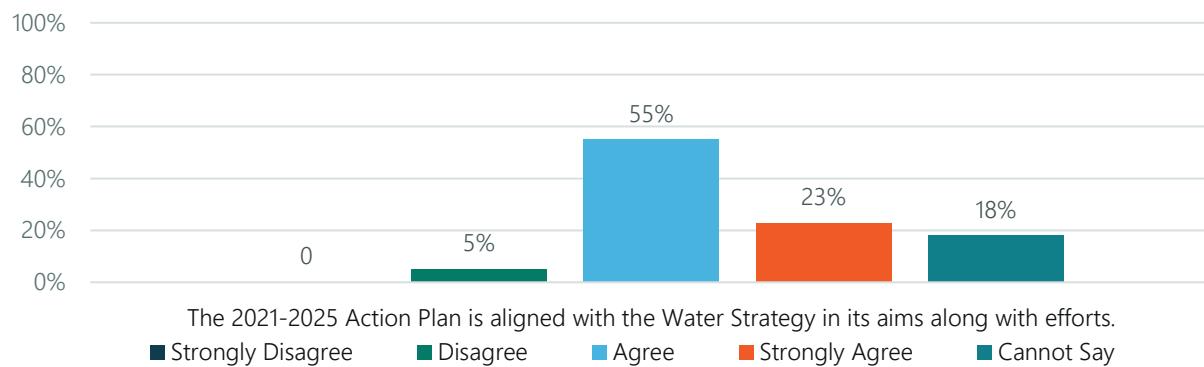


Figure 5: Survey Results: Alignment of Action Plan with Water Strategy aims and efforts (N=22)

The remaining quarter (23%) though, were unable to comment or disagreed that such alignment existed. For those water partners who disagreed, it was raised that future action plans need more focused initiatives and measurable indicators to better align with the Water Strategy.

During the interviews and focus groups, only some water partners – primarily those internal to the GNWT and its departments – were able to speak to specific actions, outcomes, the vision and goals, and Keys to Success within the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025). Most water partners external to the GNWT (though not all), were unaware of or less familiar with these particulars and were unable to speak to these questions directly.

Water partners who were able to speak about the broad alignment of the Water Strategy and the Action Plan (2021-2025) commented that their roles are not driven by the goals, outcomes, and Keys to Success. A consistent theme heard from internal water partners was that the Action Plan (2021-2025) contains many activities that the GNWT have already funded or are being carried out independent of the Water Strategy.

Some internal water partners suggested that before developing a new action plan, the Water Strategy

*"It's [water partner's work] an action that's in the action plan and it's something we're doing and I feel like it's something we would do whether or not it's in the action plan. So that's why I'm struggling to answer [the evaluation question] right now." (Internal water partner)*

should be revisited to enhance alignment with work being carried out under other plans, legislation, and regulations. Along the same lines, it was raised that while the Water Strategy in its current form refers to collaboration between partners as water stewards, for collecting water-related data, and in the sharing of knowledge, it places less emphasis on evaluating the impact of these activities on water-related outcomes.<sup>15</sup>

As an added means of gauging the state of alignment between the existing Water Strategy and the Action Plan (2021-2025), logic models were prepared using available documents (referred to as being desktop-based). As outlined in the GNWT's program evaluation policy, a logic model serves to describe the actions being undertaken, the "outputs" that represent the direct results, and the short to longer term outcomes that are expected. For this evaluation, the desktop-based logic models offer a visual outline of the components of the Water Strategy and the Action Plan (2021-2025), which for the Water Strategy includes six goals and four components with thirteen associated "Keys to Success" that are meant to concentrate and guide the efforts of water partners. The Action Plan (2021-2025) is meant to build on the Water Strategy by outlining actions by the same four components that then lead to specific outputs that will advance desired outcomes, which are also referred to as "Keys to Success".

These logic models are presented on the following pages. From the review of the logic models, the connections between the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025) are complicated by the terminology and structures used.

The connections between the approaches and the "Keys to Success" in the Water Strategy, which take on activity-based wording, to the actions in the Action Plan (2021-2025) are not clear. As well, linking the "Keys to Success" in the Action Plan (2021-2025), which tend to be outcome oriented, back to the goals and vision of the Water Strategy could be clearer. Adding to the potential for confusion in this connection is the use of the same term, "Keys to Success", in both documents, which as noted for the Water Strategy tend to be action oriented, and for the Action Plan (2021-2025) are phrased as desired outcomes.

## 2.2 Delivery and Implementation

Building on the learnings as it relates to relevance and strategic alignment, this section elaborates on how the Action Plan (2021-2025) was implemented. It primarily focuses on water partner contributions to the Action Plan (2021-2025); resources that support engagement with water partners and the ability of water partners to carry out their work; and whether the actions and outputs of the Action Plan (2021-2025) were achieved as intended.

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<sup>15</sup> Nature United Paper

	Components and Actions	Keys to Success (Outcomes)		
		Immediate	Intermediate	Longer Term
WORK TOGETHER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support implementation processes for lead/supporting water partners.</li> <li>Develop and implement Indigenous knowledge protocols.</li> <li>Share information on the Water Strategy and Indigenous knowledge (place names).</li> <li>Support community and Indigenous governments and organizations' involvement in the co-design and implementation of research and monitoring initiatives.</li> <li>Support community-based monitoring programs, education and school outreach.</li> <li>Train community-based monitors.</li> <li>Establish a water stewardship youth group.</li> <li>Deliver ongoing annual programs that engage youth in the Water Strategy.</li> <li>Negotiate and advance transboundary water management agreements and establish a Bilateral Management Committee.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaged Indigenous Steering Committee.</li> <li>Water partners leveraged related initiatives.</li> <li>Awareness of water stewardship issues and activities.</li> <li>Engaged NWT youth in water stewardship learning and leadership.</li> <li>Bilateral transboundary water management agreements are in place.</li> <li>NWT residents are kept informed of transboundary water management agreement activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indigenous knowledge, perspectives and values are respected, understood and guide activities.</li> <li>Local water-related knowledge is valued and respected.</li> <li>Strengthened strategic areas for cooperation.</li> <li>Bilateral transboundary water management agreements are successfully implemented.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community knowledge and capacity in water management, aquatic research and monitoring.</li> <li>Protection of NWT waters.</li> </ul>
KNOW AND PLAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share information about emerging science/tools (including Indigenous knowledge).</li> <li>Establish a protocol to predict, detect, address, and monitor cumulative impacts.</li> <li>Develop a research and monitoring program for the Great Slave Lake.</li> <li>Share research data and manage archives through an information management platform.</li> <li>Assess and monitor biological species (benthic invertebrates and fish).</li> <li>Assess wetland inventories, groundwater, and snow water equivalents.</li> <li>Support communications including of findings between researchers and communities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remote sensing imagery and geomatics tools assist in understanding water quality and quantity in the NWT.</li> <li>Data with the potential for trend analysis is collected, stored consistently and accessible to water partners.</li> <li>Water monitoring networks are proactively and collaboratively managed.</li> <li>Results of monitoring and research activities are provided to water partners in an understandable way.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved understanding of NWT's aquatic ecosystems.</li> <li>Groundwater is better understood as part of the structure and function of aquatic ecosystems in the NWT.</li> <li>Maintained and improved long-term water quality and quantity knowledge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Impacts of human activities and climate change on NWT waters are mitigated.</li> <li>Water monitoring gaps and needs are met.</li> </ul>
USE RESPONSIBLY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review existing regulatory guidelines, policies, and legislation to revise or improve.</li> <li>Develop guidance to incorporate cumulative effects in regulatory processes.</li> <li>Share information on how to participate in regulatory processes.</li> <li>Regularly update and maintain a drinking water quality website.</li> <li>Develop and implement educational drinking water plans and materials at the community and individual level to adopt and strengthen best practices.</li> <li>Fund a waste diversion program to eliminate hazardous waste stockpiles.</li> <li>Create opportunities for more community-scale information sharing on industrial activities taking place in community watersheds.</li> <li>Update guidelines to encourage the use of community monitors and Indigenous knowledge in baseline data collection and decision-making.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Municipal public works operators, senior municipal staff, and community leadership are skilled and knowledgeable.</li> <li>Drinking water in communities is protected through a multi-barrier approach to source water protection.</li> <li>Consistency, standardization and guidance for managing community public works facilities are improved.</li> <li>Strengthened opportunities and clarified expectations for community involvement in environmental assessment, regulatory and post-regulatory processes.</li> <li>Management processes for water stewardship are efficient and effective.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Municipal public works operators, senior municipal staff, and community leadership are confident about how to manage community infrastructure.</li> <li>Increased transparency, accessibility and knowledge sharing about water stewardship and drinking water quality.</li> <li>Improved understanding of the relationship of Indigenous people to the land and water and the importance for community wellbeing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved resident confidence in NWT drinking water quality.</li> <li>Protection of the aquatic environment and drinking water quality.</li> </ul>
CHECK OUR PROGRESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish an evaluation plan and conduct an independent evaluation.</li> <li>Share evaluation results.</li> <li>Survey water partners to assess progress under the Action Plan and identify challenges and solutions.</li> <li>Update roles and responsibilities using plain language.</li> <li>Update water partners on implementation activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Water partners maintain steady progress on Action Plan implementation.</li> <li>Water partners benefit from an independent evaluation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enabled incorporation of lessons learned into the next Action Planning cycle.</li> </ul>	
<b>Enablers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Settled land claim and self-government agreements</li> <li>Legislation and regulation</li> <li>Water Partners and staff</li> <li>Community leaders and volunteers</li> <li>Funding</li> <li>Knowledge and research (traditional knowledge, community knowledge, western science)</li> <li>Adaptive management methods</li> <li>Technical resources</li> <li>Researchers</li> <li>Policies and standards</li> </ul>				

Figure 6: 2021-2025 Action Plan Desktop Logic Model

Components		Keys to Success
Work Together	1	Develop a cooperative working environment for water partners.
	2	Implement collaborative planning to address capacity issues.
	3	Use best available knowledge to help inform all water partners.
	4	Continue ongoing communication, awareness and engagement among water partners and with the general public.
	5	Advance transboundary discussions, agreements and obligations.
	6	Collectively develop comprehensive monitoring and research programs to understand ecosystem health and diversity.
	7	Ensure communities have the opportunity to be actively involved and collaborate on research, monitoring and planning initiatives.
	8	Develop consistent approaches to research and monitoring that will increase our ecosystem understanding.
	9	Report research and monitoring results.
	10	Develop and update guidance and policy documents for water partners to ensure consistent, transparent stewardship actions and decisions.
	11	Routinely evaluate current legislation and regulations and amend as required to ensure they effectively achieve their intended purpose.
	12	Ensure water managers have the capacity to fully promote compliance.
	13	Conduct comprehensive evaluations of the Strategy's implementation progress.

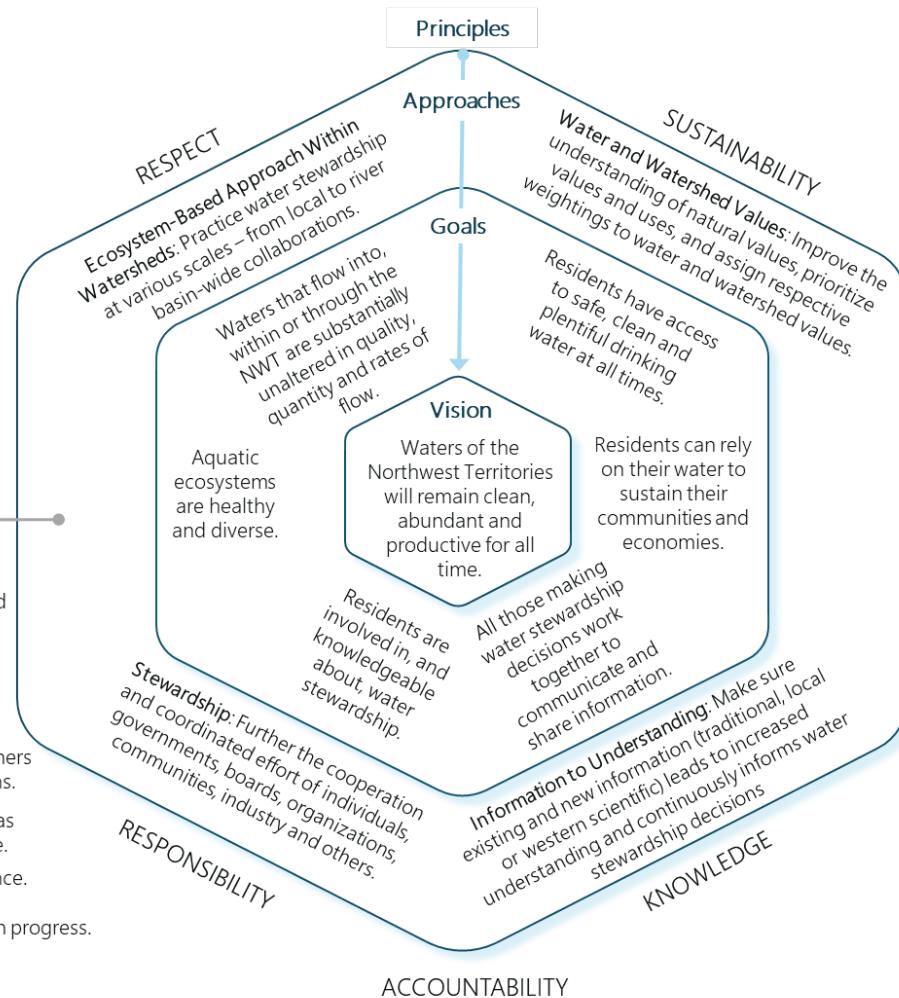


Figure 7: Water Stewardship Strategy Desktop Logic Model

Water partners commented on how the annual implementation workshops were valuable for knowledge-sharing; building relationships among industries, researchers, and community members; and for communicating on the vision of the Water Strategy. While the workshops were effective in bringing water partners together for such purposes, the amount of time spent discussing delivery was described as insufficient. Likewise, water partners recommended organizing more focused meetings that address specific areas of expertise to enhance collaboration during implementation.

Water partners also highlighted challenges related to working in silos, with limited communication, particularly between partners internal and external to the GNWT. While most were able to speak to their own roles and responsibilities around reporting, there was noticeable uncertainty about the activities and progress being made in other areas of the strategy. Further, water partners emphasized that stronger collaboration is required with IGIOs, particularly in areas such as monitoring and reporting on water quality and quantity, as well as participation in decision-making processes related to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Various logistical and situational circumstances impact on the effective delivery of the Action Plan (2021-2025), including funding, time, and community capacity. Most water partners stressed that available funds and other resources were constrained; that engagement with communities, especially those that are more rural and remote, needs added funding and employee capacity; and that there can be a lack of trust among Indigenous communities for collaborating with the GNWT for water sampling and other activities. These and other factors should shape not only the dialogues that take place at the annual implementation workshops, but also more directly how the priorities and initiatives are set out in the action plan and then resourced.

- 5. How aware are water partners of the Action Plan (2021-25) along with how they contributed?**
  - a. How has the Action Plan (2021-25) influenced the ways in which water partners carried out their work?**
  - b. Would water partners change anything in terms of their roles in support of the Action Plan (2021-25)?**

When asked how the Action Plan (2021-2025) influenced the ways in which water partners carried out their work, most of those interviewed spoke to enhanced collaboration and communication. Water partners shared that the in-person annual implementation workshops enable knowledge sharing across different organizations and support the breakdown of siloes to build important partnerships that may not be possible otherwise.

*"We realize there's a concern with oil sands and worry about our quality of water if anything should happen there. Its [the ISC] given us greater awareness and ability to hold people accountable, like AB government with Transboundary Agreement, which I didn't know about before. I've grown in knowledge of things. We are able to make better decisions when we are informed." (ISC member)*

Similarly, the ISC members pointed to the importance of the regular committee meetings for IGIOs to continue to work together and to share information with each other along with their communities.

Currently, the ISC has limited capacity, with some members fulfilling multiple roles. Members meet four times a year, twice in-person and twice virtually. Given this frequency in meetings, the depth and breadth of issues to be explored may not be fully covered although members also spoke to using their time in the most efficient and effective ways. To this end, ISC members described how the Action Plan (2021-2025) and Water Strategy enable more direct communication with the GNWT ECC's Water Monitoring and Stewardship Division when it comes to specific issues and concerns, which ISC members can then share back with their communities. As well, ISC members explained that participation in the committee has helped increase general awareness of the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025).

Enhancing communication and collaboration is a key objective of the Action Plan (2021-2025):

*The Action Plan is a tool that water partners can use to guide their respective planning and priority setting processes to strengthen alignment with other programs and initiatives over the next few years. The Action Plan is meant to support water stewardship in the NWT by coordinating activities and programs, enhancing collaboration, and enabling the development of partnerships, thereby leading to a more efficient use of resources for all involved.<sup>16</sup>*

The fact that water partners have raised communication and collaboration as being important to how they carry out their work affirms these related intentions of the Action Plan (2021-2025). As highlighted in earlier sections of this report, many water partners expressed that their roles would likely remain unchanged regardless of the Water Strategy and the Action Plan (2021-2025). Water partners added that their roles are shaped more by their employment with the GNWT, academic or research institutions, and NGOs, or through their positions in the community; and that these duties and responsibilities are not influenced or driven as much by the Water Strategy or the Action Plan (2021-2025). While the intent of the Water Strategy and the Action Plan (2021-2025) is not to change the roles of water partners, the ways in which the related work is carried out should be enhanced or strengthened by collaborations and partnerships that combine time, resources, and knowledge. Some research and activities that were reportedly bolstered by the Action Plan (2021-2025) include:

- Beaufort Delta Region Research – contributed to improved understanding of past changes in water and communicating these results to communities.
- Field Research on the Great Slave Lake Fisheries Ecosystem – has accumulated a time series of field-based monitoring datasets since 2011, which have been shared with the public through the NWT Discovery Portal and the Mackenzie River Basin.
- Communication and data reporting to the public on groundwater conditions – relevant sections of the Action Plan (2021-2025) supported project work to provide the public with real-time, user-friendly information during flood season where communities were at a high-risk.

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<sup>16</sup> NWT Water Stewardship Strategy Action Plan 2021-2025 p. 4

## 6. Going forward, what would help when it comes to:

- a. Meaningfully engaging water partners (are there certain tools or structures that would help with this such as thematic working groups, committees, and the use of technology)?
- b. Enabling water partners to support the implementation of the next Action Plan (such as ensuring that actions are clear in scope and intent as well as having the resources along with authorities to put actions into practice)?
- c. Providing for continuity, where needed, between this and the next action plan?

Of 19 survey respondents, just over two-thirds (68%) are satisfied or very satisfied with the ways in which they were engaged during the Action Plan (2021-2025). These water partners specified that they are satisfied with the direct communication with the GNWT Water Monitoring and Stewardship Division, the annual gatherings and strategy workshops, and collaboration with the GNWT, Indigenous communities, and academic personnel, including data sharing in publicly accessible channels.

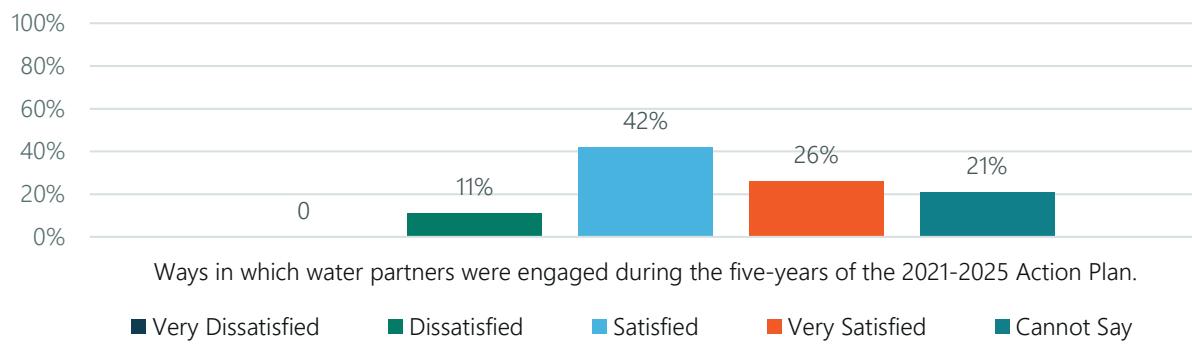


Figure 8: Survey Results: Water Partner Engagement During the 2021-2025 Action Plan Term (N=19)

When asked how water partners can be more meaningfully engaged, the feedback from the surveys, interviews, and group sessions focused on more in-person dialogue and making reports and information more accessible. Specific themes and examples discussed most by water partners are outlined below.

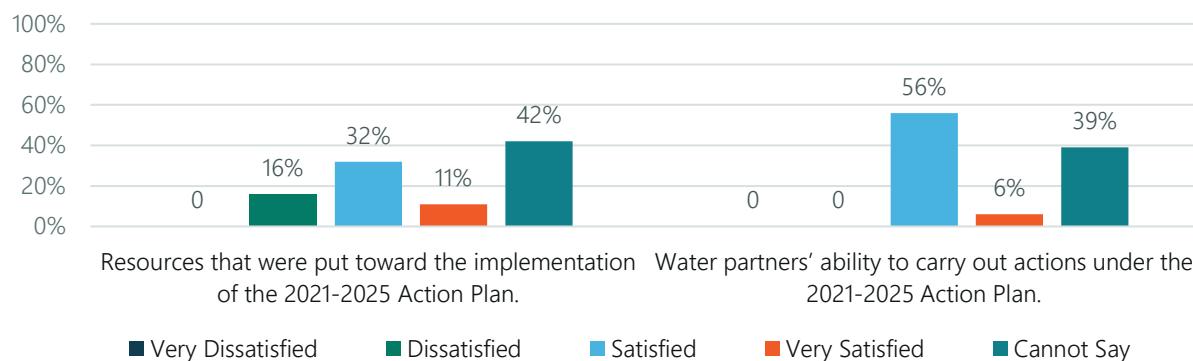
<b>Improve Data Literacy and Accessibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balancing detailed technical information with reporting and knowledge sharing to communities is important. Supporting the accessibility of data and information, as well as community data literacy (or the ability of the public to understand general technical reporting), is key to making shared data useful. Water partners who spoke to data literacy explained that long reports are not effective.</li> <li>• Plain-language executive summaries, newsletters, Facebook posts, or pictures and other multimedia methods are more accessible ways to share knowledge.</li> </ul>
<b>In-Person Dialogue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-person meetings and presentations enable more meaningful dialogue. The annual water strategy implementation workshop is effective and meaningful, though more of these kinds of meetings are necessary to promote collaboration and personal connection.</li> </ul>

- Targeted group discussions with water partners (in addition to the annual implementation workshop) may ensure water partners feel actively engaged by the GNWT. More communication on water programs in general would support meaningful engagement and collaboration.

<p><b>Capacity Funding to IGIOs</b></p>	<p>Providing capacity funding to IGIOs is important to foster relationships and meaningful engagement. While there is funding for the ISC to participate in, and inform, the delivery of the Water Strategy, the same participation supports do not extend to IGIOs to carry out work under the Action Plan (2021-2025). Funding could support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Honoraria to compensate knowledge keepers and elders in Indigenous communities for their time.</li> <li>• Meetings with Chief and Council.</li> <li>• Information sessions in community (e.g., open houses with lunch or dinner).</li> <li>• Opportunity for a designated community member role.</li> <li>• Active and passive engagement, as outlined under performance indicators for Keys to Success No. 1.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Collaboration with IGIOs</b></p>	<p>In addition to capacity funding, the next action plan requires more in the way of opportunities for collaboration with Indigenous communities. Water partners (including the ISC) proposed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenizing the approach in the Water Strategy and next action plan to better balance western science with Indigenous knowledge and spirituality with the lands and waters in the NWT.</li> <li>• IGIOs working together and developing a stronger, more unified voice to share knowledge, express concerns, and propose solutions. More collaborative activities and partnerships between Indigenous governments will support mutual learning and capacity building.</li> <li>• Inclusion of the ISC in bilateral water agreement working groups.</li> <li>• Focusing on Indigenous water stewardship and self determination. Water stewardship enables Indigenous Government and community ownership and governance over water, rather than relying on external partners.</li> </ul>

*"If we're stewarding our own waters there's that self-determination that gives us that control." (ISC member)*

Of 19 water partner respondents, less than half (43%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the resources that were put toward the implementation of the Action Plan (2021-2025). For 18 water partners answering the related question, just under two-thirds, 62%, were satisfied or very satisfied with their own abilities to carry out actions under the Action Plan (2021-2025).



*Figure 9: Survey Results: Water Partner Satisfaction with Resources (N=19) and Ability to Carry Out Actions (N=18)*

From this and other findings (e.g., out of 21 survey respondents, 48% were unable to comment on their contributions to the implementation of the Action Plan (2021-2025)), water partners faced uncertainties when it came to resourcing of collective and individual efforts under the Water Strategy. Both the 2015 and 2020 independent evaluations further highlighted that awareness around roles and responsibilities may not be clear for water partners. The same results appear consistent in this evaluation, as water partner's responses to the questions on resourcing may be founded on a lack of clarity and definition of roles and responsibilities.

During the 15<sup>th</sup> annual implementation workshop, water partners stressed the importance of communicating in accessible forms across government, IGOs, and academia on transboundary water management efforts, monitoring and reporting activities, and more.<sup>17</sup> Importantly, as described earlier, the workshops, meetings, and engagements carried out under the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025) have created opportunities to share on the work being carried out by water partners. Moving forward, communications should highlight available resources and opportunities to collaborate. When asked what would improve the ability of water partners to implement the next action plan, many water partners pointed to the Action Plan (2021-2025), stating how it should:

- Connect more closely with the Water Strategy and other overlapping strategies (e.g., the Climate Change Strategy and the Waste Management Resource Strategy).
- More clearly state accountabilities for carrying out specific actions (e.g., where actions identify "all" water partners as responsible, there is less of a mechanism for accountability).

Another general theme identified by water partners that would support implementation of the next action plan centered around better collaboration and engagement. Some water partners expressed that

<sup>17</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Implementation Workshop Report

the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025) feel more like an aspirational document due to the lack of implementation support. Specifically, water partners suggested:

- More intentional partnerships with the federal Indigenous Guardian Programs, given the funding that is available through those programs for potential future initiatives.
- The establishment of categorical or discipline-specific meetings (e.g., for groundwater, wastewater, etc.).
- Updates to the annual implementation workshop. Currently, water partners listen to presentations and share knowledge, and the workshop effectively communicates the vision and purpose of the Water Strategy. However, there is reportedly minimal time to discuss and evaluate goals, strategies, and actions including ways by which water partners can work together.

Finally, regional engagement was identified as an approach that would support implementation of future action plans. While the ISC was established to, in part, foster more involvement and open discussion between the GNWT and Indigenous advisors, there is space to create more engagement with IGIOs themselves. This is particularly important because most Indigenous groups in the NWT are self-governing under modern agreements. To treat IGIOs as active partners, future action plans need to be shared directly, inclusive of both leadership and members. Such direct engagement with IGIOs as active partners will help strengthen trust and build relationships.

Some water partners also suggested that presentations of future action plans could take place through community education in schools and to provide more opportunities for Indigenous community members to participate in local initiatives. One water partner identified the Aquatic Guardians Program led by the Nuji Kelo'toqatjik Earth Keeper Network in Nova Scotia as a land-based capacity building initiative that should be explored in the NWT. Under this program funded by Parks Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Aquatics Division of Nuji Kelo'toqatjik focuses on connecting youth to the water by reaffirming Mi'kmaw cultural practices and knowledge. This includes developing curriculum, holding workshops, mentoring, and building capacity among youth.<sup>18</sup> Such a level of engagement in the NWT would require, however, substantial financial capacity, given the Aquatic Guardian Program received \$1 million over two years for the program's scope of work.

7. **Were the actions and related outputs in the Action Plan (2021-25) implemented as expected?**
  - a. **Were there any actions and related outputs that were not implemented as expected?**
  - b. **What might have constrained the implementation of these actions?**
  - c. **What might have contributed to the successful implementation of the actions?**

Water partners were unable to confirm whether actions and outputs were implemented as intended. The responses suggest that this may be due to a lack of clarity in the actions as described in the Action Plan (2021-2025) and their integration with other ongoing initiatives. Along these lines, many water partners seem to regard the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025) primarily as aspirational

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<sup>18</sup> [Government of Canada supports the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq's Aquatic Guardians Program - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/department-of-environment-and-climate-change/programs/aquatic-guardians-program.html)

frameworks, rather than as practical instruments for advancing water stewardship and achieving water-related objectives in the NWT.

Funding was also discussed by almost all water partners as a primary facilitator to implementing the Action Plan (2021-2025). Many water partners commented that broader GNWT budgets and priorities greatly influence the outcomes of the action plan. More access to funding would support, for example, in-person engagement with regional populations to foster relationship building and effective knowledge sharing, as raised earlier in the report. Beyond funding constraints, water partners found the number of indicators and associated reporting to be overwhelming and time-consuming.

In terms of other factors that have contributed to the successful implementation of the Action Plan (2021-2025), many water partners referenced the annual implementation workshops and data management systems applied under the Water Strategy:



*Figure 10: Illustrative Factors Underpinning the Implementation of the Action Plan (2021-2025)*

## 2.3 Monitoring and Reporting

While most water partners overall appreciated the progress the GNWT has made on data management in the last five years, there is also a perception of over reporting in relation to the performance indicators and action items in the Action Plan (2021-2025). Water partners frequently raised that the number of performance indicators, the structure of the action plan and the involvement of multiple leads affected reporting efficiencies. Water partners also added they would appreciate more of a balance between quantitative and qualitative performance indicators for monitoring progress with not only the actions but also the desired outcomes as articulated in the Water Strategy and the Action Plan (2021-2025).

Water partners commonly expressed the view that the Action Plan (2021-2025) is not an accessible or inclusive document, given the perceived use of text-heavy government language and the amount of information contained. Similar sentiments were extended towards the progress reports. Beyond this, water partners raised the need to provide for more cohesive knowledge-sharing between themselves, the GNWT, Indigenous Governments along with regional governments, and local communities, all to better the success in implementation of the action plan and the resulting benefits gained for the NWT.

**8. Are the existing performance indicators providing for an understanding of:**

- a. The progress made in implementation of the Action Plan (2021-25)?**
- b. Results (outcomes) of the Action Plan (2021-25)?**

In the Action Plan (2021-2025), progress is assessed based on performance indicators associated with Keys to Success and action items. The action items are activities the water partners are leading and the performance indicators help measure the outcomes of those activities.<sup>19</sup> Of 20 survey respondents, 68% of these water partners responded that they cannot comment on the use of performance indicators and annual reporting structures for the Action Plan (2021-2025); and only five survey respondents provided input on the meaningfulness of the performance indicators. Water partners stated there was an overabundance of action items and the generalization in delivery made it difficult to comment on the overall impact in keeping with the performance indicators.

Additionally, water partners noted difficulty in commenting on the status of performance indicators and action items outside their own organization or department's scope due to the lack of communication. The 2016-2020 evaluation found a similar result, as water partners expressed they did not have sufficient knowledge about the entirety of the action plan to comment on its success, rather this was limited to actions tied to their organizations.<sup>20</sup> During the interviews, some water partners within government added that performance indicators captured existing roles and responsibilities and did not necessarily drive results.<sup>21</sup> The quality of performance indicators was also raised as an issue in the NWT Water Stewardship Strategy Discussion Paper which reported a lack of consistent rationale for selecting performance indicators across the different Keys to Success.<sup>22</sup>

To ensure that performance indicators adequately support the measurement and reporting of outcomes, it is important to make them **s**pecific, **m**easurable, **a**chievable, **r**elevant and **t**ime bound (SMART); and that this is applied consistently across the different Keys to Success. For example, under Key to Success 2.1 A, the second performance indicator is:

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<sup>19</sup> GNWT, 2021-2025 NWT Water Stewardship Strategy Action Plan. 2023 Progress Review Summary.  
[2023\\_nwt\\_water\\_stewardship\\_strategy\\_progress\\_review.pdf](https://www2.gwnet.nt.ca/2023_nwt_water_stewardship_strategy_progress_review.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> 2016-2020 Evaluation

<sup>21</sup> For more information on regulatory and jurisdictional overlaps, please refer to Question 3 under "Relevance and Strategic Alignment".

<sup>22</sup> Nature United paper by Roxane Poulin

*Use of biological monitoring has increased and protocols refined for NWT as appropriate (# of monitoring projects using biological indicators; desktop survey).<sup>23</sup>*

In this example, the indicator does not have a baseline number of existing monitoring projects using biological indicators, the desired number of monitoring projects using biological indicators, or the timelines for implementing these monitoring programs. Similarly, the third performance indicator under the Keys to Success 2.1.A measures performance based on the number of regions with wetland inventories; however, no baselines are established to measure results. With the absence of a SMART approach, these performance indicators read similar to the action items under the Keys to Success 2.1 A without adding sufficient value. The table below is an excerpt from the Action Plan (2021-2025) which demonstrates this point.

*Table 5: Excerpt of Keys to Success 2.1 A from the Action Plan (2021-2025)*

Performance Indicator	Action Item
Use of biological monitoring has increased and protocols refined for NWT as appropriate (# monitoring projects using biological indicators; desktop survey).	Increase biological monitoring across the NWT (e.g. benthic invertebrates, fish) and use biological indicators, where possible, as part of ongoing aquatic monitoring to provide early warnings of change in the aquatic ecosystem.
A wetland inventory is in place and available for reference by all water partners (# of regions with a wetland inventory; desktop survey).	Complete regional wetland inventories, using remote sensing imagery as a tool for data collection. Inventories are made available to each Partnered Indigenous Government region in alliance with DUC for use in land use planning and land/water management practices.

Moving forward, the number of performance indicators should be reduced, refined, and quantified where possible to reduce duplication and redundancies, and to make reporting more effective and meaningful. The performance indicators should also reflect regional needs and adopt an issues-based approach to increase relevance for the regional audiences.<sup>24</sup> An issues-based approach means, for example, focusing on activities to address oilsands pollution due to industrial development, or floodings and permafrost thaw under climate change. The recommendations that follow in this report address this in further detail. These considerations will support water partners to more clearly understand how future action plans address the water-related needs of the NWT.

<sup>23</sup> NWT Water Stewardship Strategy Action Plan 2021-2025

<sup>24</sup> For more information on suggested changes to performance indicators, please refer to Question 10 on proposed changes to the performance indicators and reporting approaches and Recommendations-Step 3 on rationalizing the monitoring and reporting on results will elaborate further on suggested changes to the performance indicators.

**9. As it relates to reporting on performance indicators for the Action Plan (2021-25), was the information as presented in these reports:**

- a. Easily understood?**
- b. Timely?**

Several water partners expressed that they found the Action Plan (2021-2025) challenging to interpret, recommending the format could be changed to enhance clarity and accessibility, as also discussed earlier in the report. The action items and performance indicators were described as very detailed, technical, and not relevant for all water partners. However, some internal and external water partners added that the document could be valuable for academic researchers or GNWT departments looking for specific information. Similar sentiments were shared in relation to the annual reports and the monthly water monitoring bulletins as published by the GNWT.

Water partners noted that the design and language of the Action Plan (2021-2025) and Water Strategy may not fully support public understanding. They suggested exploring ways to communicate significant environmental events and challenges—such as wildfires and changing water levels—in language that is more relatable and meaningful to regional and local audiences. While some water partners suggested engaging with knowledge sharing experts to improve the communication of progress and results on the performance indicators, others mentioned making the data accessible to community members by going beyond publishing on websites.

As discussed earlier in the report, there is a gap in awareness amongst water partners on the coordination efforts of the Action Plan (2021-2025). During interviews, water partners consistently noted that the Action Plan (2021-2025) is overwhelming in its current form. Several partners shared that the Action Plan (2021-2025) and Water Strategy may not always be practical for on-the-ground implementation and access. Water partners also stated that clearer, more achievable outputs and outcomes could help improve both strategic alignment and success in delivery.

Most water partners expressed a preference for more explicit references to climate change in the next action plan, noting that climate change is an issue that affects various components and considerations. As previously discussed, work done by water partners on climate change under the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025) is less explicit and water partners would like to see the Keys to Success, action items, and performance indicators be more directly connected to these efforts (i.e., rather than current action items and performance indicators that focus explicitly on collaboration and the number of monitoring programs, and so on).

When prompted to comment on the timeliness of reporting, water partners noted that collecting this information was a time and labor-intensive task due to the multiple leads involved in the delivery of the action plan. Overall, out of 18 responding water partners, 61% were satisfied or very satisfied with the state of annual reporting on the Action Plan (2021-2025).

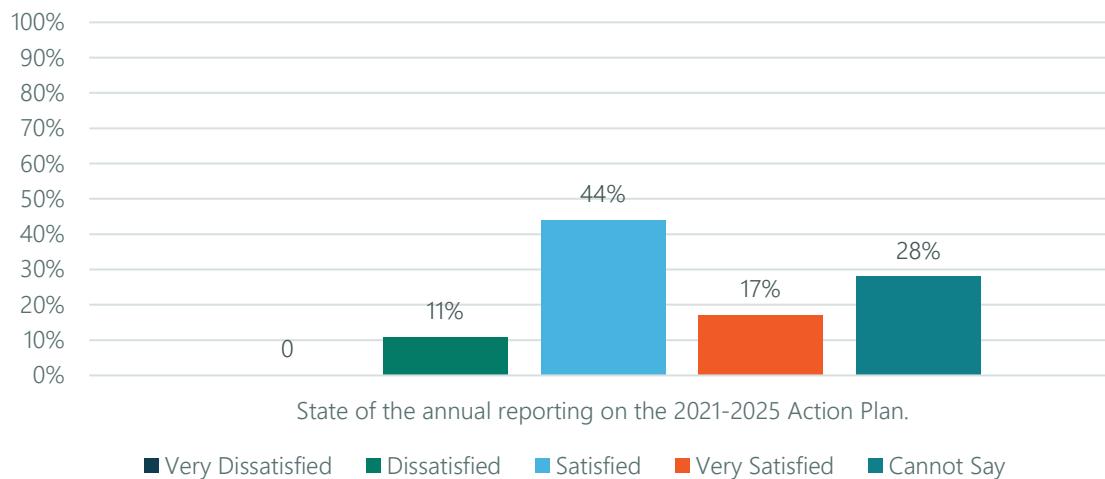


Figure 11: Survey Results: State of Annual Reporting (N= 18)

#### 10. What might be changed, if anything, with:

- The types of performance indicators used for the next action plan?
- How reporting on the next action plan is approached, in both what is being reported and how often?

As previously discussed, water partners generally believe the performance indicators do not effectively communicate the overall progress made on the Action Plan (2021-2025). Water partners recommend including more qualitative performance indicators to improve the communication of impacts made by the Action Plan (2021-2025), as descriptive metrics may tell a more comprehensive story of the implementation success and/or challenges. Examples of qualitative performance indicators recommended by water partners include:

- Community capacity to measure the impact of community monitoring training,
- Levels of water stewardship knowledge and data literacy in communities, and
- Community perceptions around drinking water and the health and diversity of aquatic ecosystems.

Such qualitative performance indicators are an opportunity to add community perspectives and beliefs around the water stewardship initiatives as carried out under the Water Strategy and future action plans. For example, gauging the level of knowledge in communities will help with reporting on what water stewardship means to the community, which includes traditional understandings.

*"What does it all mean? What do the findings mean? How do we make sense of it? How do we bring together the western science and Traditional Knowledge? I think that there's a lot that's been achieved, but people still don't feel that they have an answer to the questions like is the water OK?" (External water partner).*

Water partners also observed that the current performance indicators reflect existing work and activities with sufficient funding, rather than encourage innovation and new actions to advance Water Strategy

goals. Instead, water partners recommended that the next action plan focus on outcomes to guide the work of water partners and water management efforts. Feedback from water partners on potential reporting approaches are presented below. The first is introducing regional strategic goals, given the landmass, environmental challenges, and community needs are different for each region in the NWT. The second is adopting cumulative impact assessment principles which account for environmental variability and temporal continuity across action items and performance indicators.

### Introduce Regional Strategic Goals

- Create an overarching goal to define issues based on a regional trend and align related performance indicators.
- Identify priority action items for the performance indicator(s) and overarching goal.
- Provide tools and resources to fulfil action items.

### Adopt Principles of Cumulative Impact Assessments

- Account for variabilities and externalities such as wildfires, droughts, and floods in the performance indicators and action items.
- Identify interdependencies and temporal continuity in reporting instead of individual cases

Figure 12: Themes in Feedback on Potential Reporting Approaches

## 2.4 Results (Realization of Outcomes)

This section discusses the outcomes of the Action Plan (2021-2025) and how these were perceived or understood by the water partners.

### 11. What were the main achievements of the Action Plan (2021-25)?

Over the past five years, and building on the successes of previous action plans, a number of important achievements have been realized, with three-quarters of survey respondents (16) agreeing or strongly agreeing that the Action Plan (2021-2025) was successful overall — particularly with enhancing knowledge building, monitoring and research as also outlined in Figure 13 below.

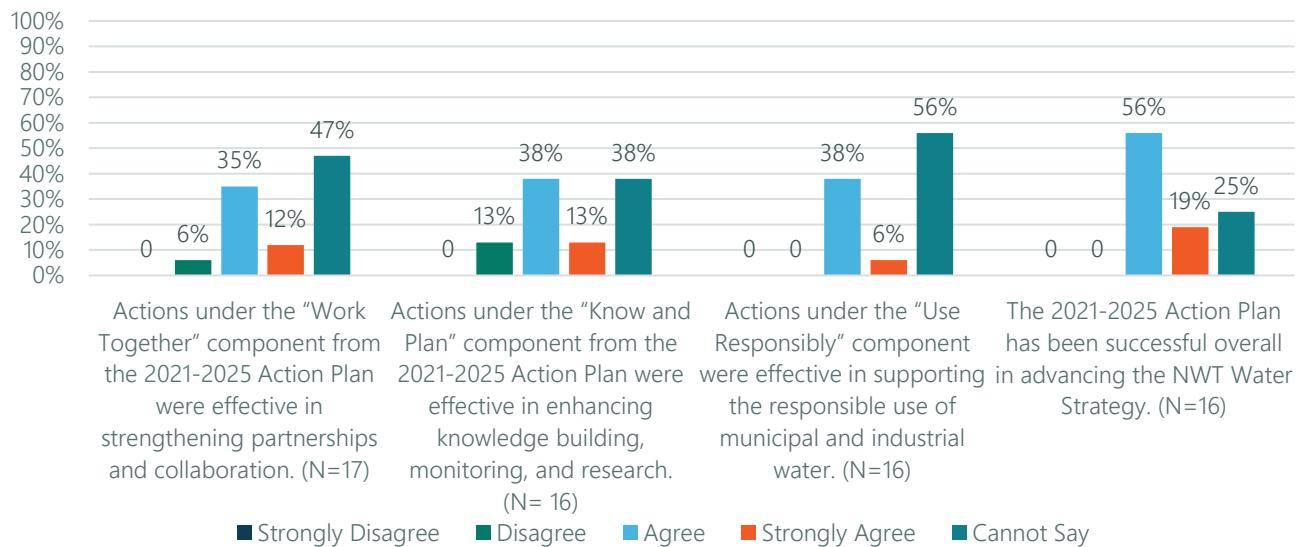


Figure 13 Survey Results: Action Plan (2021-2025) Results and Experience of Water Partners (N values listed above)

One example of this is the Mackenzie DataStream, which was developed collaboratively between the Gordon Foundation and the GNWT to improve access to water quality data and advance water management under the Water Strategy in the NWT.<sup>25</sup> The Mackenzie DataStream has facilitated greater knowledge-sharing and collaboration among water partners. The platform holds a wide range of water quality data including physical, chemical, and biological parameters, which are valuable for evaluating aquatic ecosystem health.<sup>26</sup> The platform has also facilitated data sharing for communities and monitoring groups on the Mackenzie River Basin across Alberta, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, and the Yukon.

As well, DataStream has facilitated knowledge sharing on technical subject matters such as data formatting, national water quality guidelines, and training materials for community monitoring programs. The platform also shares success stories and profiles on diverse NWT initiatives. They publish educational materials in the form of short video series, one-pagers, print and online illustrations to increase accessibility. Overall, water partners have found the platform to be an invaluable resource, and it is important to continue contributing to the database as they progress their work.

Indigenous engagement and consultation efforts have also improved to enhance the delivery of the Water Strategy. The Youth Water Stewardship and Mentorship Grant Program has provided support to NWT youth in implementing water stewardship project ideas and developing skills, leadership, and community engagement throughout the territory.<sup>27</sup> The projects funded through this grant range from one-day community events to more in-depth initiatives that help advance the goals of the strategy.

Finally, the Community-Based Water Monitoring Program builds community capacity for monitoring the health and quantity of water in the region. The program combines western and Indigenous knowledge systems to assess the health of the waters.<sup>28</sup> Water partners commented that the Water Strategy and future action plans should continue to facilitate such knowledge sharing and capacity building.

## **12. Were there any differences in how these results were experienced, or viewed, by water partners?**

Water partners expressed a diverse set of opinions around the successes of the Action Plan (2021-2025) and Water Strategy. For example, of 16 survey respondents, 56% and 19% agreed and strongly agreed, respectively, that the Action Plan (2021-2025) had been successful in advancing the NWT Water Strategy. In contrast many water partners were unable to comment on the progress made by each component of the Action Plan (2021-2025). For example, of 16 survey respondents, 56% were unable to comment whether the “Use Responsibly” component supported responsible use of municipal and industrial water. Similarly, of 17 survey respondents, 47% were unable to comment on whether the

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<sup>25</sup> Mackenzie DataStream. Retrieved from: About.

<sup>26</sup> Mackenzie DataStream. Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved from: FAQ

<sup>27</sup> GNWT, NWT Water Stewardship. Youth Water Stewardship and Mentorship Grant. Retrieved from: Youth Water Stewardship and Mentorship Grant: 2025-2026 Projects Announced! | NWT Water Stewardship

<sup>28</sup> GNWT, Community-Base Water Monitoring. Retrieved from: factsheet\_cbm\_program\_oct2022\_1.pdf

"Work Together" component from the Action Plan (2021-2025) was effective in strengthening partnerships and collaboration.

Although surveyed water partners found it difficult to rate and provide detailed comments on progress and results of the Action Plan (2021-2025) under specific components, across all the engagement activities there were noted achievements with:

- Data management and reporting under the "Know and Plan" component,
- Youth programs introduced to build community capacity under "Work Together",
- Facilitating communication of complex scientific data in accessible language, which supports actions under the "Work Together", and
- Initiatives such as the Great Slave Lake Project for monitoring water quality and how community-based water quality monitoring helped build community capacity in the Dehcho region (i.e., an internal water partner also noted that the adoption of an approach to water management that accounts not only for the natural ecosystem, but also anthropogenic activities had been helpful for making sense of water resources through an integrative lens).

Some internal water partners further noted that the Action Plan (2021-2025) included items believed to be reasonably achievable in the face of uncertainties with resourcing and capacity. They pointed out that this cautious approach avoided aspirational actions that might not be accomplished.

**13. Have there been any unanticipated results of the Action Plan (2021-25), and if so, what were these?**

Broadly, water partners could not speak to unanticipated results of the Action Plan (2021-2025). As reported earlier, part of the context for this finding may be that most water partners do not feel as engaged with the outcomes and performance indicators in the Action Plan (2021-2025).

**14. To what extent might the successes, in both action and results, of the Action Plan (2021-25) be sustained into the future?**

Over the past decade, water partners observed that the Water Strategy and its associated action plans have made meaningful progress across several areas. Looking ahead, future action plans will need to strategically prioritize limited funding and human resources. Suggested focus areas included climate change, water conservation, flood forecasting and mitigation, monitoring, and the treatment of contaminated water. Internal water partners emphasized the importance of setting outcomes that are both aspirational and achievable to help guide and prioritize their efforts. While all water partners recognized the positive intent behind the current action plan, some expressed uncertainty about its relevance to day-to-day work. There was broad agreement on the opportunity to strengthen engagement and collaboration around the priorities of both the action plan and the broader Water Strategy.

## 3 Case Study Overviews

The following case studies were conducted after the survey and interviews to collect “most significant change” stories that are helpful in illustrating innovations and impacts related to the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025). These stories are meant to add a layer of depth of understanding and evidence from water partners directly involved in the associated actions and initiatives under the current Action Plan.<sup>29</sup>

### 3.1 Case Study #1: Hidden Lake Leadership Camp

#### 3.1.1 Program Background

The Hidden Lake Leadership Camp (the “camp”) was a collaborative initiative run by Ecology North partnered with Northern Youth Leadership (NYL), Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), Michigan Tech Research Institute (MTRI), and NASA. This partnership and program were developed as a result of the 2023 Water Strategy Implementation Workshop, where MTRI connected with NYL and Ecology North after giving a presentation on wetland mapping and monitoring in the Peace-Athabasca and Slave River Delta.

The camp ran for eight days in August 2024, taking 11 students (ages 14-18) to an on-the-land site at Hidden Lake, NWT, where participants learned canoeing skills, portaging, wetland species identification, and remote sensing resources and concepts. High-level objectives of the camp were to foster land-based leadership and environmental education, as well as a sense of self-growth, community, and land stewardship.

#### 3.1.2 Strengths of the Program

Over the eight-day program, students received 10 high school credits, which amounted to half of a school year. Ecology North worked with school principals in the region to review the program learning objectives and approve equivalent curriculum credit, meaning youth participation in the camp was

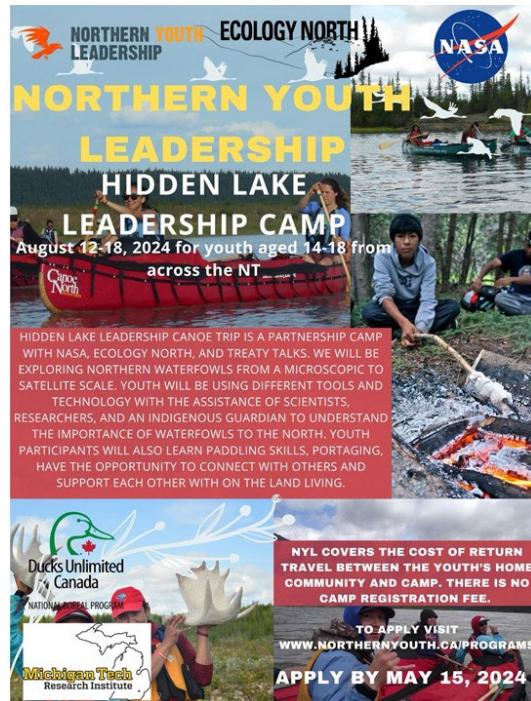


Figure 14: Hidden Lake Youth Camp Program Poster

<sup>29</sup> The case studies were recommended by the GNWT, in collaboration with MNP and Falkirk based on the availability of participants for an interview. For more information on the selection process please refer to Section 1.3 Approaches Taken for the Evaluation.

recognized as learnings in school. The 10 credits were split between special projects, physical education, outdoor education, and introduction to environmental stewardship.

*"They [youth] are strong leaders looking for opportunities to share [their input and knowledge]."* (Case study interviewee)

Ecology North emphasized the importance of bringing youth together to foster self-growth and leadership skills. For example, during the camp, Ecology North led an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCA)

boundary creation workshop, where participants played different roles in a town council debate. Participants dressed up for their various roles (e.g., recreational outfitters, youth, miners, land guardians, etc.) and prepared proposals for hypothetical IPCA boundaries for discussion. In an online blog about the camp, an MTRI partner explained:

*"This workshop highlighted the learnings of passion and politics involved in land-based negotiations, offering valuable insights into the decision-making process. Ultimately, this activity taught the youth to analyze map data and develop informed ideas and opinions that have practical real-world implications."*<sup>30</sup>

Finally, other important and thoughtful details were also attributed to the overarching success of the program, including:

- Trained mental health first responders present to help youth experiencing eco-anxiety, mental health, and intergenerational trauma.
- Day packs provided to participants that included program swag, a species identification guide, remote sensing pamphlets, and 19 maps of the Hidden Lake Territorial Park. Ecology North explained that the day packs help set youth up with resources to be out on the land and to learn survival skills.

### 3.1.3 Challenges and Lessons Learned

The water partner who leads this initiative raised that a lack of adequate funding created barriers to successfully carrying out the initiative and being able to support youth participation in the camp. While some program partners have their own funding sources, Ecology North and NYL pooled funding from eight sources to adequately fund the program. Available funding is allocated to employee time, and camp equipment and gear. Further, to remove financial barriers for youth participants, the program covered participant travel fees, which can be as high as \$3,000 to \$4,000 for youth in remote communities. Such costs create concern about maintaining the longevity of the program, and whether adequate funding will be available to continue to engage youth, the goal being to create continuity between implementation of the camp program and continued youth leadership in matters related to water and the environment.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/blogs/fromthefield/>

### 3.1.4 Key Takeaways and Hopes for the Future

The 2024 camp successfully achieved its objectives of encouraging youth leadership skills and emotional resilience, as well as transferring skills such as species identification, paddling, living on the land, and remote sensing concepts.

Going forward, it will be important to continue to build off the success and momentum of the camp for sustainable engagement with youth and northern communities. The Hidden Lake Leadership Camp is a successful program that introduces youth to important concepts and life skills over the course of a week; however, continued engagement and involvement in these programs could be supported by added programming or more opportunities for youth participation (e.g., employing youth participants as program employees in future camps). Recognizing that the camp's success is dependent on the availability of funding and resources, Ecology North pointed to the importance of collaboration and partnerships. The Water Strategy Implementation Workshop and the opportunity to connect and collaborate with MTRI was attributed as a key part of the program's creation. Continued and enhanced opportunities to collaborate can support continuity in youth engagement and leadership development.

*"Non-profits are already stretched thin, so partnerships are invaluable...without that meeting [the Water Strategy Implementation Workshop] the camp wouldn't have happened." (Case study interviewee)*

#### Connections to the Action Plan (2021-2025)

The Hidden Lake Leadership Camp contributed to the advancement of the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025) by working directly with youth to share and foster knowledge about water stewardship, wetland species identification, and field study techniques. Building capacity in youth helps to advance Water Strategy goals under the "Work Together" (specifically, action item 1.3.A.2 and 1.3.B.2), as youth are given the tools to exercise leadership and to participate collaboratively in discussions around water management and stewardship that may affect them and their communities.

Figure 15 Photo from "Notes from the Field"



## 3.2 Case Study #2: Great Slave Lake Monitoring Program

### 3.2.1 Project Background

The Great Slave Lake (GSL) Monitoring Program (the “GSLM Program”) was proposed by the GNWT ECC Water Monitoring and Stewardship Division to be a collaborative, long-term program meant to reduce duplicative monitoring efforts and identify common issues along with concerns among GSL communities. Community engagement began in 2022 with three virtual workshops to understand ongoing monitoring efforts, priorities, knowledge gaps and barriers. The virtual workshops were followed by a survey, coordinated by participating communities, to understand the long-term changes observed on Great Slave Lake, research and monitoring priorities, preferred methods of community engagement, building successful partnerships and effective communication strategies. This collaborative survey effort between the GNWT and GSL communities yielded responses from 94 land and water users from six communities and provided integral information to guide the continued program development and implementation. Finally, a two-day in-person workshop was completed in October 2022 to develop a Research and Monitoring Program Plan for GSL. Workshop participants included communities situated on the shores of the GSL, academic researchers, and federal and territorial governments.

### 3.2.2 Strengths of the Project



The GNWT pointed to the influence of engagement on program development and execution. The engagement activities provided a good foundation for relationship-building, and it was stated that the virtual engagement sessions and community survey responses provided important context and understanding that was carried forward into future engagement and program development. For example, during the October 2022 workshop an Elders Panel was convened as a direct result of recommendations made in previous engagement initiatives to provide space and inclusion opportunities for Elders knowledge and experiences.

*Figure 16: Elder Panel at the GSL Research and Monitoring Program Development Workshop*

Also, as a direct result of the GSLM program development and engagement, the GNWT was able to work with the North Slave Métis Alliance to launch a mooring monitoring program, installing year-round continuous measurement monitoring equipment below the water surface in Yellowknife Bay, GSL.

Since this project is the first of its kind in the region, it created an opportunity for strong relationship and capacity building for mutual growth between the GNWT and the North Slave Métis Alliance. The monitoring equipment can collect a continuous dataset of temperature and dissolved oxygen, with no planned end-date for the data record. This technique offers the ability to monitor long-term climate change impacts in ways not previously done by the GNWT and to share the data publicly.

### 3.2.3 Challenges and Lessons Learned

The GNWT identified two primary challenges for the program: those related to resources, including capacity limitations, and communications. Over time, the cost of monitoring (engagement, training, etc.) has increased but resources, including monitoring budgets and employee capacity remain the same. As part of a solution for this challenge, the GNWT worked with communities to deliver the survey, providing equal lump-sum funding to cover costs associated with carrying out the survey, which are unique to each participating community. For example, some communities chose to hire a survey coordinator and/or provide translation services. In all instances, survey participants were compensated for their time to complete the survey at a rate specified by their community. Using this flexible funding model, communities would decide which members took part in engagement activities and how funds are allocated depending on their specific needs, including capacity support. The GNWT applied this solution because of the 2022 engagement, where communities identified this as a preferred means to handle funds.

Another challenge found was communication, which the GNWT identified as primarily related to data and knowledge sharing. Water quality data generated by the program is uploaded to the publicly accessible Mackenzie DataStream platform. However, the moorings yield a large amount of data collected at multiple water depths that DataStream cannot yet support. This data is still publicly available by request. All engagement reports, including the virtual engagement report, the workshop report and the survey report, are available on the GNWT's website. The GNWT also makes an effort to attend and share knowledge at numerous community engagement and knowledge sharing initiatives, including the annual Water Stewardship Strategy Implementation Workshop, community events and conferences. Despite these efforts, it can still be a challenge to share knowledge widely. As a result, many community members do not always feel informed about water quality monitoring. Ongoing objectives for the program related to these challenges are to understand how to better communicate monitoring results, incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into reporting and to display monitoring results in an accessible and acceptable way for the communities.

The program currently has good engagement with community Elders; however, more participation from youth is seen as an opportunity to help the transfer of knowledge from Elders to youth and support the development of youth leadership skills. Earlier in-person engagement has covered the cost of travel for participants, but a recommendation was made for each Elder to be accompanied by a youth from the community. The GNWT explained that this model was successfully applied to other projects and would add value to this program. Additionally, the GNWT would like to invite the same participants (Elders and youth) to future GSLM Program events and engagement activities as a means of fostering capacity building over time. Sessions made up of only new participants create continuity disruptions to the transfer of knowledge and to the strengthened capabilities of community members over time.

### 3.2.4 Key Takeaways and Hopes for the Future

Challenges for ongoing communication and engagement are a reality that will continue for the GSLM Program. According to internal interviewees, budgets and resources to host in-person engagement activities are not available at the level necessary to facilitate regular GSL-specific workshops. Given this

context, it is important to leverage resources and opportunities made available by the Water Strategy to find overlap and engage with GSLM Program partners. For example, the GSLM Program workshop took place during and immediately following the 2022 Water Strategy Implementation Workshop, which provided a suitable venue and resources for hosting engagement activities.

According to internal interviewees, the GNWT also hopes to practice more collaboration across departments and organizations in the future for this program. Many organizations can operate in silos and coordinating logistics between departments presents challenges for effective collaboration and partnerships. It was also noted that collaboration is understood to increase capacity in terms of available resources, methods, and ideas to apply to existing programming.

### Connections to the Action Plan (2021-2025)

The GSLMP initiatives and outcomes are directly connected to the Water Strategy “Work Together” action item 1.1.C.2 and an output/action item listed in the Action Plan (2021-2025) under “Know and Plan” action item 2.1.A.1. The monitoring activities under the GSLMP support data collection to understand the aquatic ecosystems in the NWT and contribute to the Mackenzie DataStream, while the program’s collaboration with Indigenous communities fosters a mutual capacity-building between water partners, effectively progressing the goals of the Water Strategy.

## 3.3 Case Study #3: Benthic Macroinvertebrate Monitoring Program

### 3.3.1 Program Background

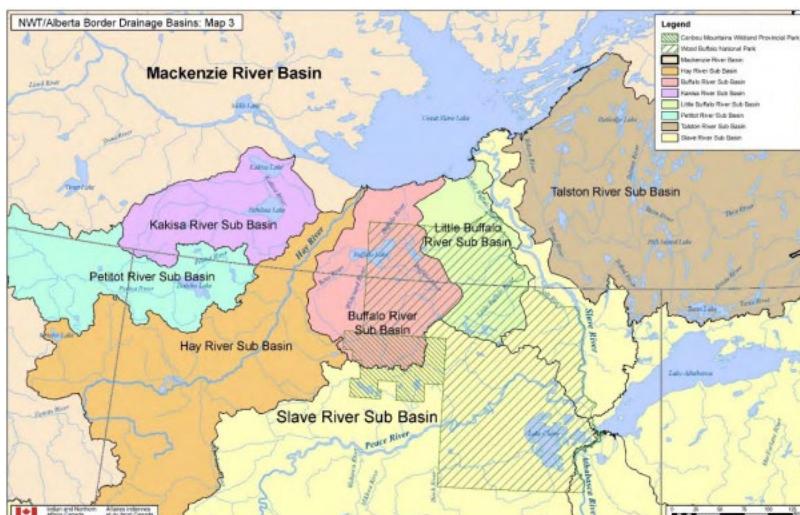


Figure 17: Drainage Basins at the NWT/Alberta border. From the Benthic Macroinvertebrate Monitoring Plan for Large Transboundary Rivers in the Alberta-NWT Region

program was established to collect and analyze samples of aquatic invertebrates as indicators for water quality in the transboundary rivers.

Sampling is conducted with the support of Indigenous collaborators, including the Tthebatthie Dénésułiné Nation, Katl'odeeche First Nation, and Fort Smith Métis Council. The team experimented with various sampling methods and successfully identified suitable aquatic invertebrate habitats for monitoring (i.e., areas with gravel and rock vs sand, etc.). The samples and results collected are sent to contractors for analysis, which typically takes up to two years from collection to interpretation. The analytical work is contracted and jointly funded by Alberta and the GNWT. Due to capacity constraints, the GNWT assumed responsibility for field operations. Within the Tthebatthie Dénésułiné Nation Lands Department, a community-based monitoring lead coordinates onboarding and training for new students and employees.

### 3.3.2 Strengths of the Program

One of the strengths identified by program participants is the collaboration involved in monitoring and sampling activities. Community involvement and relationship-building is a cornerstone to the program, where Indigenous community members feel actively engaged in data collection and interpretation, which has strengthened community understanding of water health and reinforced understandings from Traditional Knowledge and land stewardship.

The Benthic Macroinvertebrate Monitoring (BMM) program was a result of the aquatic ecosystem monitoring requirements that came out of the transboundary agreement negotiated between the NWT and Alberta. The NWT and Alberta share major river systems such as the Hay River and Slave River, both of which flow from northern Alberta towards the Great Slave Lake in the NWT. The transboundary agreement established biological indicators and monitoring programs with the goal of maintaining aquatic ecosystem integrity, and the BMM

A community member noted that the program is part of a broader collaboration with the GNWT that



facilitated the expansion of the Lands Division, to increase internal program delivery capacity by hiring program coordinators. This growth has empowered communities to better understand and engage with environmental monitoring.

The program has also achieved a great deal with limited resources. Despite the absence of a unified funding source and varying levels of readiness across communities, the initiative has continued to grow. Community pride and interest in the work remain high. While environmental concerns persist—such as low

*Figure 18 Benthic Macroinvertebrate Sampling in the Slave River. From the 2017-2020 Biomonitoring of AB-NWT Transboundary Rivers Using Invertebrates Program Summary*

water levels and industry—community members value the opportunity to engage with and protect their traditional territories.

### 3.3.3 Challenges and Lessons Learned

The program has faced several challenges, including limited human resources and seasonal work constraints. Despite these barriers, the team has managed to expand the scope and variety of its activities.

Efforts to incorporate Indigenous knowledge are ongoing. The GNWT has initiated an Elders Circle to ensure that Traditional Knowledge is integrated respectfully and meaningfully into program processes and reporting. This process is still evolving and requires careful, deliberate implementation.

Working with Alberta has revealed the importance of multiple jurisdictions partnering together to conduct water monitoring. According to the interviewees, the key to sustaining this work is the availability of long-term funding, which can be uncertain given other regional and national competing priorities.

### 3.3.4 Key Takeaways and Hopes for the Future

Looking ahead, the goal is to sustain a monitoring program that is relevant to the Indigenous community priorities—not just meeting minimum requirements but embedding environmental monitoring as a staple. This includes consistent employment opportunities and the generation of meaningful, actionable data.

An example of the program's impact is found with sucker fish in the Salt River. Sucker fish swim over 50 km from Great Slave Lake and through the Slave River and into the Salt River, eventually reaching gravel pit spawning grounds in what is known as the Snake Pit area. The Snake Pit area is part of the Dene Nation's reserves and has been used by the Nation for thousands of years. There is even a historical trail from Fitzgerald, Alberta to the Salt River, which has been used for generations.

For several years, low water levels and beaver dams between the Salt and Slave rivers prevented sucker fish from reaching their spawning grounds near the Snake Pits. This prompted a new program to study the sucker fish and explore potential interventions such as a fish hatchery to help restore the sucker spawning run in the area again.

This initiative represents the incorporation of Traditional Knowledge and scientific inquiry. The Salt River has been a vital fishing ground for generations, and the program's findings have sparked new collaborations with institutions like the local college's Natural Resources Technology Program (NRTP). In addition to understanding water quality and fish populations, the Salt River Sucker Fish project aims to support sustainable food sources and deepen community engagement in environmental stewardship.

### Connections to the Action Plan (2021-2025)

Similar to the GSLMP, the BMM is a direct output of the Action Plan (2021-2025), contributing to the "Know and Plan" Component of the Water Strategy by increasing biological monitoring in the NWT using biological indicators for aquatic ecosystem health (action item 2.1.A.2). The BMM also advances outcomes under the "Work Together" Component by fostering relationship building and collaboration with IGIOS (action item 1.1.C.1), which Indigenous partners in the BMM program have described as empowering.

## 3.4 Case Study #4: NWT Community-Based Water Quality Monitoring Programs

### 3.4.1 Project Background

The Community-Based Water Quality Monitoring Program (CBM) was initiated in 2012 as a direct result of the implementation of the Water Strategy to involve Indigenous communities in water monitoring. Since CBM implementation, communities have worked with technical employees from the GNWT ECC to monitor changes in water quality in the long-term across the NWT. Under the CBM model, communities carry out monitoring activities, choosing what locations to monitor near their communities, and the GNWT provides training and assistance with analyzing and reporting on data collected by the communities.

Since 2012, a total of 62 sites have been monitored under the CBM program. Over time, the number has been refined to 36 sites (including 10 sites on the Mackenzie River, 19 tributary sites, and seven lake sites), due to accessibility issues, safety concerns, and capacity issues. Today, monitoring occurs around the Great Slave Lake and Tributary sites, the headwaters of the Mackenzie River, Sambaa K'e, the Liard River Confluence, Tulita Sites, Norman Well Sites, Sans Sault Rapids and Fort Good Hope, and Mackenzie Delta and Peel River Sites during open water season.

Data is collected on the levels of different metals, ions, nutrients, bacteria, chlorophyll, dissolved oxygen, pH, conductivity, turbidity, hydrocarbons, hardness, and temperature. Samples are collected either by surface water grabs for a snapshot of water quality, or by data sondes and polyethylene membrane devices left in the water to collect data continuously over time.

### 3.4.2 Strengths of the Project

CBM water partners highlighted the importance of the program in working with communities to advance the goals and objectives of the Water Strategy. Community members were described as the main contributors to the program; the long-term monitoring stations and data collection continues because of community investment in trends and understanding data alongside their real-world experiences and traditional knowledge. By collaborating with the GNWT to analyze and report on water quality trends, community members gain access to monitoring data that supports their firsthand



Figure 19: Ka'a'gee Tu First Nation community monitor and ECC Staff retrieve monitoring equipment. From the NWT Community-based water monitoring 10-Year Summary Report.

observations and experiences. According to the GNWT, this approach fosters a shared understanding of water quality and the overall health of the ecosystem.

The program's capacity to collect long-term data (which has resulted to-date in a 12-year data set) highlighted important trends in water quality over time, making important contributions to advancing the goals and objectives of the Water Strategy. For example, program and data reviews were completed for both the 2012-2016 (5-year) and 2012-2021 (10-year) periods. The CBM's long-term monitoring activities identified trends during the 10-year review that were not apparent in the five-year review. Findings from the 10-year review indicated that, within the NWT portion of the Mackenzie River Basin, human landscape disturbance and industrial activity have less influence on water quality compared to factors such as water location (e.g., lakes, tributaries, mainstem), the geology of tributaries that feed waterbodies, and permafrost thaw and slumping.

The CBM program has been able to attribute changes in water quality to impacts from climate change. For example, CBM data trends found that more changes in water chemistry occur in areas near permafrost thaw that has been accelerated due to climate change. Observing these trends is only possible with long-term data provided by programs such as the CBM.

### **3.4.3 Challenges and Lessons Learned**

As described in previous case studies, capacity remains an ongoing challenge for the CBM program. There is frequent turnover among community monitors, resulting in GNWT employees sometimes working with different individuals each year. When this turnover occurs, the GNWT must allocate resources to retrain new monitors. While this turnover can indicate growing community engagement with water stewardship and water quality sampling techniques, it may also lead to periods where communities lack active monitors and are unable to conduct sampling, as GNWT employees are not intended to fulfill this role within the CBM program.

Additionally, while the CBM program supports community-led water sampling, the GNWT still supports monitoring activities by carrying out the data analysis and providing reports back to the communities. Under the objectives within the Water Strategy, the GNWT tries to remove barriers around data transparency and accessibility monitoring reports; however, more work is required to bridge the western science perspective in monitoring reports with community traditional knowledge.

The GNWT also explained that more Elder and youth input into the program is required, though this can be difficult to navigate in the context of water monitoring. For example, the GNWT currently has a large presence at camps and in schools to share information about the Water Strategy and the CBM, even sharing information about water techniques to children in schools. However, there are safety barriers and concerns surrounding actual water monitoring activities themselves, limiting the involvement of youth and school students in this sense. Accordingly, the GNWT is currently trying to understand how to involve youth in a way that meets community expectations but also aligns with safety needs.

### 3.4.4 Key Takeaways and Hopes for the Future

Overall, the results indicate that the CBM program is functioning effectively and producing reliable data thanks to the dedicated efforts of GNWT technicians, scientists, and community monitors who provide valuable insights into water quality.<sup>31</sup>

The CBM program has entered its 13th field season, representing 13 years of data on water quality trends in the NWT. As the data collection expands, exploring a reduction in the number of monitoring sites to focus on those demonstrating significant changes is a suggested strategy. Currently, many monitoring sites are in proximity and yield similar trends and results. By homing in on “core” stations that demonstrate notable differences, the program may optimize its monitoring efforts while reducing the load on capacity. Emphasis is placed on stations near the Alberta border and Norman Wells project sites, as these areas are impacted by industry and mining activities.

Going forward, it was also suggested that consideration be given to a network inventory to identify overlaps between monitoring programs in the NWT, such as the GSL monitoring and transboundary programs. This would ensure that efforts are not duplicated, and resources are used efficiently. A network inventory would also support breaking down silos and having a coordinated, comprehensive aquatic water monitoring program in the NWT.

#### Connections to the Action Plan (2021-2025)

The CBM program is most directly connected to the “Work Together” Component of the Water Strategy, and advances initiatives in the Action Plan (2021-2025) meant to support Indigenous governments in designing and implementing research and monitoring programs (action item 1.1.C.2). The successful long-term implementation of the CBM program has also resulted in significant advancement in the “Know and Plan” Component (action items 2.1.A.6, 2.1.D.2, and 2.2.B.3), as the monitoring data and results from the program have contributed to the Mackenzie DataStream and provided important information about long-term changes to water in the NWT, including information around climate change.

<sup>31</sup> NWT Community-Based Water Monitoring 10-Year Summary Report. Government of the Northwest Territories. 2025. p. 46 [https://www.nwtwaterstewardship.ca/sites/water/files/resources/community-based\\_monitoring\\_10-year\\_summary\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.nwtwaterstewardship.ca/sites/water/files/resources/community-based_monitoring_10-year_summary_report_final.pdf)

## 4 Recommendations for the 2026-2030 Action Plan

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Under the Action Plan (2021-2025), water partners have made significant achievements. For instance, the community-based water monitoring programs and youth camps are a testament to the commitment to involve local communities and youth in water stewardship. Also, the use and management of data has improved, enhancing the quality of reporting activities. While it is essential to acknowledge these accomplishments, it is equally important to consider areas for improvement to augment the future delivery of the Water Strategy and its action plans.

### 4.1 Step 1: Strengthen the Alignment Between the Water Stewardship Strategy, the Action Plan, and the Priorities for the Future

Strengthening the alignment between the Water Strategy, the current and future action plans, and the emerging priorities of the NWT will provide meaningful guidance to water partners, improve the collective understanding of what is to be achieved, and enhance the delivery of related initiatives along with efforts. The Water Strategy establishes a strong vision to maintain the well-being of the water ecosystem and seeks to facilitate change through the Action Plan (2021-2025). Yet, the "if...then..." logic between the Action Plan (2021-2025) and the Water Strategy is not clear. Similarly, it is not clear to all water partners how the Water Strategy and action plans complement (rather than duplicate) other plans and directives in the GNWT.

#### Associated Evaluation Findings

Water partners flagged a combination of factors that are impacting and will continue to affect the water ecosystem and ecosystem health in the NWT, including:

- climate change,
- phenomena that have an effect on water quality and quantity (either those that are or are not attributed to climate change, such as drought versus low water, sediment composition and erosion),
- upstream and transboundary developments,
- anthropogenic activities, and
- aging infrastructure.

It was also raised that the Action Plan (2021-2025) addressed these emerging priorities of the NWT sporadically across the four Components and not as wholistic prominent themes. Added to this is the belief among most water partners that the Water Strategy does not necessarily guide their work; and, that the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025) overlap with *the Waters Act, Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, Land Use Regulations* and ongoing work. Overall, the Strategy and Action

Plan (2021-2025) were described as needing more clarity and pragmatism plus support toward implementation.

From the review of the desktop-based logic models, as outlined earlier, the connections between the Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025) are further complicated by the terminology along with structures used. The Water Strategy includes thirteen Keys to Success that are action-oriented and aligned to four Components. The Action Plan (2021-2025) sets out actions according to the four Components, but the Keys to Success are arguably outcome oriented. Rather than having clear connections and consistency among, for example, the Keys to Success, the elements of the Action Plan (2021-2025) and Water Strategy are interwoven in ways that are difficult to understand.

## Next Steps for Consideration

### Develop a Positioning Statement in the Water Strategy

As noted earlier, there are perceived overlaps between the Water Strategy, other plans, and legislative and regulatory directives that are guiding the work of water partners. An illustration of this can be found with the 2030 Climate Change Strategic Framework and related questioning over how the Water Strategy complements, rather than duplicates, the directions taken when it comes to research, education, assessing climate change impacts on water, and community-based monitoring among other initiatives. From this context, the Water Strategy should include a positioning statement, which clearly sets out distinct and shared areas of focus and authorities. The positioning statement should highlight the Water Strategy as a collaborative tool that represents how water partners will work together towards a common vision for water stewardship. Then, as mentioned earlier in the report, the Water Strategy would benefit from a facilitated session to align its objectives and goals with the water-related needs of the NWT, as understood and experienced by water partners, as well as work being carried out under existing plans, legislation, and regulations.

Also, the Water Strategy should be reaffirmed as setting the directions for water stewardship in the NWT. In this case, the Water Strategy would be the prime reference document of what the NWT wants to achieve as outcomes over the more immediate and longer term, culminating in the aspirational vision of "waters of the Northwest Territories will remain clean, abundant and productive for all time".

### Clearly State Water Strategy Priorities and Carry These Over to the Action Plan

The Keys to Success as found for each of the Components in the Water Strategy could be retitled and reworded as priorities that reflect the current and emerging needs of the NWT, such as addressing the impacts of climate change on water levels and quality. These same priorities can then be carried forward into the action plan, from which actions under each of the same Components can be derived. In addition to strengthening the "if...then..." connection between the Water Strategy and action plans, this approach creates space for adaptability and to shift focus based on the prominent challenges in the NWT.

The Keys to Success in future action plans can then be retained as desired outcomes that also follow the "SMART" philosophy:

S: Specific Wording (with the described outcomes being clearly linked with actions and outputs).

- M: Measurable (using relevant performance indicators).
- A: Achievable (with the distinction being made between short to medium and longer term outcomes, and by accounting for both capacity and funding in realization).
- R: Relevant (with the outcome-oriented Keys to Success in the action plan being cross-referenced back to the goals and vision of the Water Strategy).
- T: Time-Bound (with the shorter to medium term Keys to Success being framed as occurring within the five-year period of the action plan).

### **Incorporate Implementation Guidance in the Action Plan**

With the Water Strategy outlining the guiding vision and goals, the next step is to support water partners in implementation. To this end, the GNWT should consider reintroducing as a companion document the Appendix in the 2016-2020 Water Stewardship Strategy Action Plan which explicitly stated the roles and responsibilities of different departments along with relevant authorities, with this then being extended to the broader base of water partners.

Given the number of water partners and complexities around role and responsibilities amidst multiple intersecting statutes, regulations, and plans, it is also valuable to consider providing more context at the beginning of future action plans around the water stewardship management landscape in the NWT, such as the relevant regulations and mandates. A visual graphic may also further improve accessibility of this communication.

### **Incorporate Best Practice Learnings into the Next Action Plan**

The GNWT should conduct a jurisdictional scan of other strategies and plans that:

- focus on water management or water quality and quantity,
- include large-scale collaboration and engagement with the public and IGIOS or Indigenous communities, or
- handle large datasets and dissemination of information.

Plans and strategies chosen for a jurisdictional scan would only be required to meet at least one of the qualifiers above, as each point will provide a different perspective and insight that can better inform the alignment of action items, performance indicators, and Keys to Success in future action plans.

## **4.2 Step 2: Improve How Water Partners Work Together to Guide and Implement the Water Strategy and Action Plan**

After aligning the Water Strategy, action plan, and NWT's needs, the next step is to strengthen collaborative governance. Being strategic in engagement is key for enhancing collaborative governance and can be achieved through a combination of means, such as adopting the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) spectrum of approaches.<sup>32</sup> Adding to existing engagement with knowledge-holders in meaningful and sustainable ways will improve the continuity and delivery of the

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<sup>32</sup> The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation is to Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, or Empower based on the interest and roles of water partners, organizations, GNWT divisions, etc. See: <https://www.iap2.org/page/pillars>

Water Strategy and the action plan. Put another way, this is about breaking organizational and functional silos, broadening the involvement of regional and Indigenous Governments and communities, supporting networks, and promoting shared accountabilities for collaborative governance.

### Associated Evaluation Findings

Water partners commented on how the annual implementation workshops were extremely valuable for knowledge-sharing, building relationships with industries, researchers, community members, and communicating on the vision of the Water Strategy. While the workshops were effective in bringing water partners together for such purposes, the amount of time spent on discussing delivery of the Water Strategy and actions in the action plan was insufficient. Similarly, more targeted gatherings based on areas of specialization and to improve collaboration for implementation were proposed by those engaged.

Water partners also raised circumstances of operating in silos with limited communication, especially between partners internal and external to the GNWT. While able to comment on their roles and responsibilities for reporting, water partners expressed uncertainty about the efforts and progress made under other components. Added to this, water partners highlighted the importance of greater involvement from Indigenous Governments and communities in such areas as monitoring and reporting for water quality along with quantity and in decision-making for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

### Next Steps for Consideration

#### Provide More Forums to Share Experiences and Engage in Dialogues on Implementation of the Action Plan

While the annual implementation workshops offer space for water partners to discuss the outstanding items and progress made towards the action plan, allotting more time for collectively sharing experiences and ways to better delivery of initiatives would be valued. As the annual implementation workshops bring all water partners together in-person, it should provide better opportunities to discuss the successes and barriers with implementing the action plan in greater depth. This could then be complemented by more periodic, mandate-specific sessions with select water partners to further strengthen collaboration and communication.

#### Involve Indigenous Governments and Communities in Greater Capacity

Water partners appreciated the involvement of the Indigenous Steering Committee for guiding the Strategy along with the action plan and encouraged expanding their decision-making capacity. Also, the committee was seen as providing a critically important Indigenous lens for stewardship which could then be complemented by having a group that shares the views of IGIOs. As reported earlier, while the ISC provides invaluable feedback and perspective on the Action Plan (2021-2025), they do not represent regional governments and organizations. Engaging with IGIOs through regional forums – including IGIO leadership and community members – can further support the establishment of a regional issues-based

approach. The community-based monitoring program was highlighted as a positive step in this direction and was appreciated by the water partners.

### **Draw More Extensively on Knowledge-Holders**

Given the multi-jurisdictional and cross-sectoral nature of collaboration for water stewardship, the importance of knowledge-holders was raised in relation to sustaining the momentum of implementation of the action plan and more broadly the Water Strategy. As governance structures and decision-makers can change over time, supporting knowledge-holders and integrating knowledge-keeping within procedures, and documented roles and responsibilities, can help create continuity as much as consistency over the span of multiple years.

### **Explore Restructuring the Delivery of a Unified Monitoring Program Aligned with the Water Strategy and Action Plan Internally in the GNWT**

Instead of maintaining separate initiatives, the GNWT should explore the development of a unified monitoring program. Currently, monitoring programs such as the Great Slave Aquatic Quality Monitoring Program, the NWT Community-based Water Quality Monitoring Program, and Benthic Macroinvertebrate Monitoring Program, operate separately from each other in collaboration with Indigenous communities. Alone, the monitoring programs contribute greatly to relationship and capacity building with Indigenous communities; however, a lack of funding remains a prevalent issue across all programs. There was concern from water partners that operating these separately duplicates work and further strains financial capacity, when it may be more efficient to pool financial resources and work together (as was learned in the Case Study for the Hidden Lake Leadership Camp). Removing program silos and operating under a more integrated structure enables a more comprehensive approach to aquatic monitoring systems in the NWT.

An integrated monitoring program can also create space for addressing regional-specific water quality concerns. For example, if the GNWT had an overarching “Aquatic Monitoring Program”, regional “sub-programs” could be nested within the overarching initiative. In this case, consistency in reporting and monitoring opportunities is essential across all “sub-programs” to maintain trust and transparency with Indigenous communities. The process of community engagement should also be standardized, ensuring that everyone follows the same procedures for involving, paying, and engaging community members, as well as for conducting meetings, sharing findings, promoting data literacy, and reporting. Increased consistency in these processes will enhance collaboration and reduce the isolation that programs currently experience, which will result in more efficiencies and alignment in the work done by water partners in carrying out the objectives of the Water Strategy.

## **4.3 Step 3: Streamline and Enhance Monitoring and Reporting**

The need to streamline and enhance the efficiency of monitoring and reporting activities related to the Action Plan (2021-2025) was consistently identified as a priority. As the alignment between the Water Strategy, Action Plan (2021-2025), and priorities for the NWT is strengthened, it will facilitate the rationalization of monitoring and reporting.

## Associated Evaluation Findings

While most water partners appreciated the progress the GNWT has made on data management and the quality of reporting in the last five years, there is a perception of over reporting in relation to the Action Plan (2021-2025). Water partners frequently raised that the number of performance indicators affected the efficiency of delivery as much as their ability to know and act on the results. Water partners also added they would appreciate more of a balance between quantitative and qualitative performance indicators for monitoring progress with not only the initiatives in the Action Plan (2021-2025), but also as it relates to achievements in relation to the desired outcomes as articulated in the Water Strategy.

## Next Steps for Consideration

### Assess the Meaningfulness, Practicality, and Balance of Performance Indicators

Given the learnings when it comes to the number of performance indicators and the varying degrees of perceived relevance to the short, medium, and long-term aims of the Water Strategy, a structured assessment of these same indicators should be carried out. This assessment would essentially categorize the indicators as:

**Green:** Indicators that are still meaningful in that they are aligned with a goal(s) of the Water Strategy and/or a Keys to Success within the action plan; are practical when it comes to sourcing, interpreting and reporting on the associated data; and suitable for informing decisions.

**Yellow:** These indicators require some rework in alignment to the Water Strategy and/or action plan, or in how they either quantitatively or qualitatively provide for an understanding of progress along with results.

**Blue:** These indicators should be dropped from the portfolio and for future use.

In terms of qualitative indicators, these can deepen the understanding of the progress made towards the intentions of the Water Strategy, by the very nature of being more narrative. For example, such indicators would likely better suit reporting on the state of:

- Water stewardship knowledge and data literacy in communities,
- Community beliefs about drinking water and aquatic health, and
- The degree of trust when it comes to how water can sustain communities and economies.

### Foster Local Community and Regional Awareness

Introducing more regional and place-based case studies or data highlights will strengthen the relevance of reported results for water partners and community members. It will also help facilitate greater local community awareness and engagement.

### Explore Technologies to Assist with Reporting

To support progress tracking and reporting, the following options may be considered depending on available platforms, internal capacity, and desired level of automation:

- **Option 1: Low-Tech Tools**

Use of simple solutions like Excel or Google Sheets with pre-built templates for tracking

progress. Scheduled email reminders can prompt water partners to update their action items regularly. This approach requires minimal technical support and can be implemented quickly.

- **Option 2: Leverage Existing Platforms**

If internal systems such as SharePoint, Teams, or other platforms are already in use, consider adding a portal or form-based interface for the submission of updates. This can streamline data collection and reporting while minimizing the need for new infrastructure.

- **Option 3: Implement a Dedicated Platform**

Explore more robust solutions such as a Salesforce portal, Power BI dashboard, or a custom web-based reporting tool. These platforms can automate data collection, reminders, and visualization, offering scalability and long-term value—but would require greater technical support and investment.

## 4.4 Step 4: Adapt Action Items Based on Results

Adapting how actions are framed and put into practice based on results from previous years will bolster the success of the action plan and the Water Strategy. This will introduce adaptability to the existing realities the GNWT and local communities operate in, and through the collaborative governance structures and processes described earlier.

### Associated Evaluation Findings

Various logistical and situational circumstances may impact effective delivery of future action plans, including funding, time, and community capacity. Most water partners stressed that:

- available funds and other resources were constrained,
- engagement with communities, especially those that are more rural and remote, needs added funding and employee capacity, and
- there can be a lack of trust among Indigenous communities for collaborating with the GNWT for water sampling and other activities.

These and other factors should be shaping not only the dialogue that takes place at the annual implementation workshops, but also how the priorities and initiatives are set out in the action plan and then resourced.

### Next Steps for Consideration

#### Formalize an Adaptive Approach to Resourcing and Updating of the Action Plan

The GNWT should revisit how different initiatives are coordinated and funded, as relevant, under the Action Plan (2021-2025), in support of the stated priorities and the Water Strategy. This includes considerations for practicalities of funding and available capacity, and the means of monitoring and reporting on progress as well as results.

A starting point would be to renew the planning cadence in the sense of having a schedule for periodic reviews of the action plan to assess progress. These periodic reviews would be based on the degree of

completion of activities and associated issues. The purpose of the reporting exercise would be separate from annual reporting, as the aim would be to affirm and identify new priorities based on the “tactical” progress made under the action plan, rather than reporting in a comprehensive, strategic way on the annual results being realized. This approach will satisfy both progress and outcome-oriented reporting needs while also making the action plans more adaptable to changing circumstances.

Another key aspect of this approach would be to identify the resources and funding available to all water partners and other funding avenues that can be leveraged to deliver the action plan. Revisiting the balance of resourcing for the various actions can be founded on an engagement-driven process of prioritization with water partners, academic research, and using reported results. Representatives from other divisions, and water partners external to the GNWT, responsible for delivering relevant and connected plans and strategies should also be part of this review process to identify duplicative actions. Going forward, the development of a more flexible funding model should be explored by the GNWT, so that the action plan stays adaptable. Added to this would be accounting for organizational and community capabilities plus capacity in the form of people, material, and technology.

### **Expand and Strengthen Relationships with Indigenous Communities**

While the community-based water monitoring and youth programs support relationship building with Indigenous communities, it is important to treat this as a continuous and ongoing process. The action plan should continue to build on these empowering tools. Water partners taking part in monitoring programs or other water stewardship-related programs should be equipped with the necessary culturally appropriate and trauma informed tools and resources to enable them to collaborate meaningfully and effectively with Indigenous communities in delivery of the action plan. Such tools can be shared through Indigenous awareness and cultural awareness training.

## **4.5 Step 5: Broaden Experience and Knowledge Sharing from Across the Territories and Beyond**

Broadening the sharing of experiences and knowledge from across the NWT such that the Water Strategy and future action plans are inclusive and founded on results was another area of learning from this evaluation. In addition to the findings on strategic alignment, governance, monitoring and reporting, and adaptation of the action plan, an overall sharing of experience and knowledge across all steps will reinforce collaboration between water partners, as well as the ability to sustain progress in delivery of the action plan. Improving access to knowledge will also enable water partners with their informed decision-making and advocacy for the needs of their communities and on the land.

### **Associated Evaluation Findings**

Water partners commonly expressed the view that the Action Plan (2021-2025) in its current form is not an accessible or inclusive document, given the perceived use of text heavy government language and the amount of information contained. Similar sentiments were extended towards the progress reports. Beyond this, water partners raised the need to provide for more cohesive knowledge-sharing between

themselves, the GNWT, Indigenous along with regional governments, and local communities, all to better the success in implementation of the action plan and the resulting benefits gained for the NWT.

## Next Steps for Consideration

### **Implement Two-Way Communications Methods on the Action Plan**

It is important to know the different audiences for communication and the purpose of engagement as it relates to the action plan. To this end, and in keeping with an earlier recommendation, the IAP2 spectrum of Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower should form the scaffolding of a two-way communications strategy for the action plan.

### **Continue to Share Stories on Innovation, Successes and Challenges**

Mackenzie Data Stream has helped with knowledge-sharing on many issues and initiatives related to the GNWT such as upstream developments and monitoring activities on the Slave River. Their goal to make data accessible is an important step towards improving knowledge sharing. Moving forward, it would be beneficial to explore how the different success stories and challenges can be reported collectively to share key narratives on the well-being of water ecosystems, and how this is being influenced through the innovations and efforts that take place under the action plan.

## 5 Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

1. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. If you choose to take part in it, you may withdraw at any time. Do you agree to participate in this survey?

- Agree
- Disagree (redirect to question 13)

2. Please select the organization that best represents your work related to water stewardship.

- Indigenous Government or Indigenous Organization
- Indigenous Community Member (i.e., you are not representing an entire community or government's perspectives and are instead sharing your own experiences and thoughts)
- Government of the Northwest Territories
- Federal Government
- Community Government
- Academic or Research Institution
- Co-Management/Regulatory Board
- Other Non-Government Organization
- Other, Please identify:

3. Please rate your overall familiarity with the NWT Water Strategy along with the Action Plan (2021-2025).

1 <b>Not at All Familiar</b> (I did not know the Strategy and Action Plan existed)	2 <b>Somewhat Familiar</b> (I have heard about the Strategy and/or the Action Plan)	3 <b>Familiar</b> (I have read the Strategy and/or Action Plan and know the sections/actions that are relevant to my work)	4 <b>Very Familiar</b> (I can speak to what is in the Strategy and the Action Plan, as well as the sections/actions relevant to my work)
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If - 4 Very Familiar (I can speak to what is in the Strategy and the Action Plan, as well as the sections/actions relevant to my work) then redirect to Question 9

If - 2 Somewhat Familiar (I have heard about the Strategy and/or the Action Plan) then redirect to Question 4

If - 3 Familiar (I have read the Strategy and/or Action Plan and know the sections/actions that are relevant to my work) then redirect to Question 9

4. What does water stewardship mean to you?

5. How would you describe the water-related concerns of the Northwest Territories as they exist today, in terms of the state of water, the uses and management of water, or the role of water in ecosystems?

6. How would you describe the water-related concerns of the Northwest Territories when looking to the future?
7. What types of water-related plans, policies or initiatives in the Northwest Territories are you most familiar with?
8. What would you recommend be considered when preparing the next action plan under the Water Strategy for the Northwest Territories?

[SUBMIT] Thank you for your interest in the survey.

9. What does water stewardship mean to you?
10. How would you describe the water-related concerns of the Northwest Territories as they exist today, in terms of the state of water, the uses and management of water, or the role of water in ecosystems?
11. How would you describe the water-related concerns of the Northwest Territories when looking to the future?
12. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of "1" to "4", where "1" is "Strongly Disagree" and "4" is "Strongly Agree".

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
Over the last 5 years, the Action Plan (2021-2025) has helped address the water-related concerns of the Northwest Territories.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What should the next action plan do differently to address the water-related concerns of today, and going forward, for the Northwest Territories?

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
The Action Plan (2021-2025) was consistent with the priorities of water partners like me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

In what ways is the Action Plan (2021-2025) out of step with your priorities or that of your organization?

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
The Action Plan (2021-2025) is aligned with the Water Strategy in its aims along with efforts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Why do you feel there is a lack of alignment between the Action Plan (2021-2025) and the Water Strategy?

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
The actions identified in the Action Plan do not duplicate other water-related plans, policies or initiatives that I am aware of.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What water-related plans, policies or initiatives are duplicated by the Action Plan (2021-2025)?

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
The Action Plan (2021-2025) was clear in how it described what was required with the actions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What would you suggest as changes in how the next action plan is prepared (to more clearly describe the actions and their intent)?

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
As a water partner, I have contributed to the implementation of the Action Plan (2021-2025).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*If Disagree or Strongly Disagree:* What could have been done differently when it comes to your role or how you were supported by the GNWT in helping advance the Action Plan (2021-2025)?

*If Agree or Strongly Agree:* Please tell us more about the support you received to make your contributions possible.

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
The Action Plan (2021-2025) was implemented in ways that were expected.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*If Disagree or Strongly Disagree:* What stands out as actions that were not implemented as expected?

*If Agree or Strongly Agree:* What stands out as actions that were implemented as planned?

13. Please rate your level of satisfaction with the following aspects of the Action Plan (2021-2025) on a scale of "1" to "4", where "1" is "Very Dissatisfied" and "4" is "Very Satisfied".

	1 Very Dissatisfied	2 Dissatisfied	3 Satisfied	4 Very Satisfied	Cannot Say
Ways in which water partners were engaged during the five-years of the Action Plan (2021-2025).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*If Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied:* What tools (e.g., technology) or structures (e.g., committees, working groups) will be more engaging for water partners as part of the next action plan?

*If Satisfied or Very Satisfied:* What made you feel engaged?

	1 Very Dissatisfied	2 Dissatisfied	3 Satisfied	4 Very Satisfied	Cannot Say
Resources that were put toward the implementation of the Action Plan (2021-2025).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What would you suggest as changes when it comes to resourcing the next action plan?

	1 Very Dissatisfied	2 Dissatisfied	3 Satisfied	4 Very Satisfied	Cannot Say
Water partners' ability to carry out actions under the Action Plan (2021-2025).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What changes would you suggest when it comes to having the necessary abilities as part of the next action plan?

	1 Very Dissatisfied	2 Dissatisfied	3 Satisfied	4 Very Satisfied	Cannot Say
Continuity between the Action Plan (2021-2025) and earlier action plans.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What would you suggest is needed to provide for better continuity between the Action Plan (2021-2025) and the future action plan?

	1 Very Dissatisfied	2 Dissatisfied	3 Satisfied	4 Very Satisfied	Cannot Say
State of the annual reporting on the Action Plan (2021-2025).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How can annual reporting be improved for future action plans?

14. Would you mind commenting further on the use of performance indicators and annual reporting structures in support of the Action Plan (2021-2025)?

- Yes, I can provide more comments on the use of performance indicators and annual reporting structures.
- No, this is not something I can comment on. (redirect to Question 17)

15. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of "1" to "4", where "1" is "Strongly Disagree" and "4" is "Strongly Agree".

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
The Action Plan (2021-2025) performance indicators are meaningful for tracking the progress made in implementation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What does this mean for the next action plan in terms of the use of performance indicators on progress?

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
The Action Plan (2021-2025) performance indicators are meaningful for tracking the realized results (outcomes).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What does this mean for the next action plan in terms of the use of performance indicators on results (outcomes)? What other performance indicators would you find useful?

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
The annual reporting for the Action Plan (2021-2025) is easy to understand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What can be done to help make such reporting easier to understand (clearer)?

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
The annual reporting helped with understanding the overall performance of the Action Plan (2021-2025).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What can be changed, added, or removed to make the annual report more meaningful?

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
The annual reporting for the Action Plan (2021-2025) is timely.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What would you suggest when it comes to the timeliness of such reporting?

16. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of "1" to "4", where "1" is "Strongly Disagree" and "4" is "Strongly Agree".

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
The Actions identified under the "Work Together" component were effective in strengthening partnerships and collaboration.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*If Disagree or Strongly Disagree:* What improvements would you suggest to better support partnerships and collaboration?

*If Agree or Strongly Agree:* What do you see as major achievements over the past five years in advancing partnerships and collaboration?

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
The Actions identified under the 'Know and Plan' component were effective in enhancing knowledge building, monitoring, and research.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*If Disagree or Strongly Disagree:* What improvements would you suggest to better enhance knowledge building, monitoring, and research?

*If Agree or Strongly Agree:* What do you see as major achievements over the past five years in advancing knowledge, monitoring, and research?

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
The Actions identified under the 'Use Responsibly' component were effective in supporting the responsible use of municipal and industrial water.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*If Disagree or Strongly Disagree:* What improvements would you suggest to better support the responsible use of municipal and industrial water?

*If Agree or Strongly Agree:* What do you see as major achievements over the past five years in supporting the responsible use of municipal and industrial water?

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Cannot Say
The Action Plan (2021-2025) has been successful overall in advancing the NWT Water Strategy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*If Disagree or Strongly Disagree:* What got in the way of the overall success of the Action Plan (2021-2025) in advancing the NWT Water Strategy?

*If Agree or Strongly Agree:* What comes to mind when you think of the overall success of the Action Plan (2021-2025) in advancing the NWT Water Strategy?

17. Would you like to share more on what you experienced as innovations along with impacts as they relate to the NWT Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025) in a 30-minute virtual "case study" interview? Please select "Yes" if you would like to be contacted by MNP for scheduling a 30-minute virtual interview.

- Yes
- No

*If Yes:* Please provide the following contact information that we could use purely for the purposes of scheduling the interview.

Name

Email Address

Phone number

18. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share as it relates to the NWT Water Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025)?

[SUBMIT] Thank you for your interest in the survey.

## 6 Appendix B: Interview Guide

### Consent

Would you allow us to use any quotes for this evaluation, in a way that does not identify you?

Yes  No

Can we record this interview, purely to confirm what we take as our notes and once this is done, with the recording then being deleted?

Yes  No

### Questions

1. To start, how would you describe your familiarity with the:

- a. 2021-25 Action Plan?
- b. NWT Water Stewardship Strategy?

2. How would you describe the water-related concerns of the Northwest Territories over the past five years, up to today?

3. Would you say the 2021-25 Action Plan has helped to address these same water-related concerns you just shared?

4. Have there been any other important changes that should also inform the priorities for the next action plan, and in turn the Water Stewardship Strategy, when it comes to:

- a. Government legislation or policy directions?
- b. The state of partnerships with governments, with businesses or non-government organizations, or with communities?
- c. Trends with the economy and population of the Northwest Territories?

5. The 2021-25 Action Plan was meant to bring all the water partners together so they can work toward shared priorities.

Building on what has been discussed to this point, what do you think should be the areas of focus for the next action plan when it comes to supporting water partners?

6. Based on what you are aware of when it comes to other water-related initiatives, plans or policies in the Northwest Territories, is there any overlap with the 2021-25 Action Plan?

7. If you put the 2021-25 Action Plan next to the Water Stewardship Strategy, would you say the two documents are consistent (aligned) with each other?

8. As a water partner, how do you understand your role(s) and responsibilities as they relate to the 2021-25 Action Plan?

9. Given this, how would you describe the ways in which as a water partner you (your organization, your community) have contributed to the implementation of the Action Plan (2021-2025)?

10. How can the next action plan better reflect your role as a water partner?

11. How could future action plans also ensure that you (your organization, your community) are meaningfully involved in implementation?

12. Were you, or your organization (community), identified as a leader for the implementation of any specific actions in the Action Plan (2021-2025)?

- *If yes, what actions were you (your organization, community) responsible for? [Go to Question 13.](#)*
- *If no, go to Question 14.*

13. Would you say that the 2021-25 Action Plan was implemented in ways that were expected, in terms of the actions and time that was taken?

14. Do you mind speaking about the use of performance indicators with the 2021-25 Action Plan?

- Yes, I can speak to the use of performance indicators. [Go to Question 15.](#)
- No, this is not something I can speak to. [Go to Question 17.](#)

15. From what you have experienced or heard about, are the performance indicators in use today providing a complete story of:

- The progress made with putting the 2021-25 Action Plan into practice?
- What is resulting from (the outcomes of) the 2021-25 Action Plan?

16. How about the way this information is being gathered and presented, is there anything you would change to make sure the reporting is:

- Helpful (easily understood)?
- Practical (in terms of effort and making best use of available data)?
- Timely?

17. Stepping back, would you say that the 2021-25 Action Plan was successful overall?

18. Was there anything that resulted from the 2021-25 Action Plan that caught you by surprise (was unexpected)?

19. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share as it relates to the 2021-25 Action Plan, and more broadly the Water Stewardship Strategy?

*Thank you for the time and your insight, it is genuinely appreciated.*

## 7 Appendix C: ISC Focus Group Question Guide

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1. What does water stewardship mean to you?
2. Would you say the Action Plan (2021-2025) has helped to address the water-related concerns in the NWT?
3. Have there been any other importance changes that should also inform the priorities for the next Action Plan and the Water Stewardship Strategy?
4. What do you think should be the areas of focus for the next Action Plan?
5. How could future action plans ensure that you (your organization, your community) are meaningfully involved in implementation?
6. From what you have experienced so far, what types of indicators of success/progress and reporting structures should be explored in the new Action Plan?
7. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share as it relates to the Action Plan (2021-2025), and more broadly, the Water Stewardship Strategy?



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