

Evaluation of the NWT  
Water Stewardship Strategy  
Action Plan 2016-2020

Executive Summary



*Northern Voices, Northern Waters*

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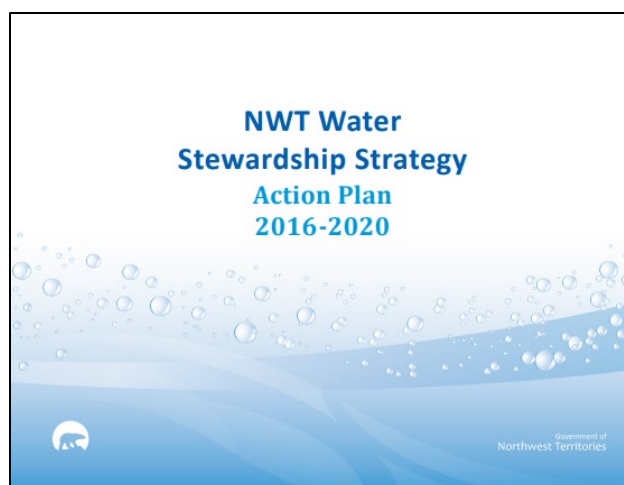
10 September 2020

## Executive Summary

The *Northern Voices, Northern Waters: NWT Water Stewardship Strategy* (Water Strategy) was developed through an extensive collaborative process in 2010.<sup>1</sup> The evaluation of the Water Strategy Action Plan 2016-2020 (WSS-AP) took place between March and July 2020. The evaluation focused on interviews with 51 Water Partners and community members, and reviews of documentation, reports and websites. The objective of the evaluation was to assess work done in advancing the goals of the WSS-AP and making succinct recommendations for the 2021-2025 Action Plan.

No trip to the region was completed due to the COVID 19 pandemic. All interviews were conducted by telephone and followed up with summary notes.

The results based on the evaluation criteria are summarized below:<sup>2</sup>



Evaluation Results from Criteria					
Highly Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	Moderately unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Highly unsatisfactory
<b>Relevance: Satisfactory (S)</b>		The overall implementation and monitoring design of the WSS-AP meets its goals and vision, with minor shortcomings. A high portion (86%-75%) of the Action Items and Keys to Success are clear, reasonable and achievable, and Performance Indicators are SMART. <sup>3</sup>			
<b>Effectiveness: Satisfactory (S)</b>		Level of Keys to Success and Action Items achieved was as expected (90%) and/or there were moderate short comings.			
<b>Efficiency: Highly efficient (HE)</b>		The benefits and advantages of participating in the Water Strategy far outweighed the level of effort and resources spent by the Water Partners.			
<b>Sustainability: Likely (L). There is little or no risks to sustainability,</b>		Less than 5% of Action Items at risk of not being continued or not having benefits post 2020.			

<sup>1</sup> NWT Water Stewardship Strategy (May 2010)

<sup>2</sup> For a full list and explanation of the evaluation criteria see [Annex C](#)

<sup>3</sup> Succinct, Measurable, Appropriate, Relevant, Time Bound

<b>Building Awareness: Unsatisfactory (U)</b>	The Water Strategy is not commonly known among the general public or communities.
<b>Transparency: Satisfactory (S)</b>	The WSS-AP is transparent, with minor shortcomings: a website is fully operational with access to all the data and reports, and is updated on a quarterly basis; Aboriginal Steering Committee meetings are held when they are planned; information is sent out on a scheduled basis; annual reporting is conducted; and decision-making is open and transparent. The WSS transparency of the WSS-AP is delivered as expected.

### Overview:

- The WSS-AP was generally very well received by those interviewed and there is a unanimous sense that water is an important issue demanding greater attention in the future.
 

*“Water is a huge issue. Everything on the land is associated with water, we need a strategy.” (Tim Heron)*
- The WSS-AP has commendable achievements considering the limited financial resources that support it. It has done this through a “collective action approach” - working with a variety of Water Partners (approximately 40) to outline the common set of goals, and helping to align and link their respective activities.
- One of the core functions of the WSS-AP has evolved to provide a communication and network platform between the different Water Partners. This has stimulated new relationships and has resulted in:
  - Enhanced outcomes (for example, the Mackenzie River Basin Board is working on a *State of the Aquatic Ecosystem Report* with input from people connected through the Water Strategy);
  - New activities through collaboration (for example, Environment and Climate Change Canada is now working to develop a CABIN monitoring plan in the NWT);
  - Peer to peer learning (for example, communities and Renewable Resource Boards mentioned that they have met other communities doing similar work and can share experiences and knowledge at a more profound level).
- The Annual Water Strategy Implementation Workshops are respected, providing one of the main ways for Water Partners to update and network within the WSS-AP. In some respect, they are the flagship of the Water Strategy and provide the opportunity to highlight activities to the general public. However, several interviewees noted these could be more focussed with themes, such as the climate change theme in 2019.
- The WSS-AP is very transparent, and in general, information is easy to access on the various websites.

- The NWT-Wide Community-Based Water Quality Monitoring (CBM) Program (run through ENR) was seen as a fundamental element of the WSS, and there was a strong desire to see it expand. Likewise, there is strong support for enhancing community based capacity in monitoring and information development through other partnerships including academia.
- The approach underlying the WSS-AP - to incorporate traditional and local knowledge, as well as improve decision-making through the Aboriginal Steering Committee - was well regarded by all those who commented on it during the interviews. Concerted efforts have been made to enhance the input of traditional and local knowledge, including:
  - Developing research on Traditional Knowledge inclusion and the Aboriginal Steering Committee providing guidance for researchers, communities and resource boards;
  - Including traditional and local water-related knowledge in existing school curriculums and science fairs;
  - Supporting intergenerational on-the-land camps;
  - Greater opportunities for incorporation in the review process for licensing and aquatic ecosystem monitoring programs (AEMP);
  - Capacity building through the CBM Program and other related projects.
- Community members emphasized the importance of advancing not only traditional and local knowledge into decision-making, but also in enhancing governance aspects of communities over their water resources. While there are aspects of this addressed in regulatory processes and hearings, a desire was expressed to be more pro-active. The idea of developing local and/or regional WSS was seen as an initial step.
- It was noted by several interviewees that the WSS-AP can be seen as a model of action planning incorporating Traditional Knowledge that can be replicated in the South. It is a true **“Made in the North”** model. However, despite advances in promoting Traditional Knowledge more work is needed to improve its use, particularly in terms of decision-making (see recommendation 7).

Clearly, the Action Plan 2021-2025 for the Water Strategy should continue with the successes that it has achieved in many areas, such as communications and networking, as well as CBM. The following recommendations are focused on advancing the next five-year Action Plan (2021-2025) to be more effective at achieving the overarching goals of the Water Strategy.

### Recommendations for consideration in the 2021-2025 Action Plan:

- **Structure and focus in achieving the goals of the Water Strategy:**
  - The updated 2018 Water Strategy noted *“all Water Partners, including all water users, are encouraged to embrace the Strategy as a starting point for future actions.”* This was supported by at least 30% of those interviewed, primarily from agencies, academia and LWBs. It was strongly felt that the next Action Plan should provide more direction for agencies and organizations by identifying priorities or areas of

direction in the water sector, to balance its role as a reporting and networking platform. For example, it could identify upcoming issues such as climate change causing more dissolved organic carbon in the drinking water requiring higher levels of treatment. Moreover, the 2021-2025 Action Plan should help inform specific activities such as the *Waters Act* Review, not only keep track of which reviews and updates are being made.

**Recommendation  
1**

*Develop the Water Strategy Action Plan 2021-2025 to be a forward-looking plan that emphasizes direction to agencies, LWBs, RRBs, and academics.*

- There are several other programs and initiatives, both within and outside the GNWT which need to be considered and incorporated in the developing the 2021-2025 Action Plan. This will improve its support and potential for collaboration with other initiatives.

**Recommendation  
2**

*Improve linkages developed with other initiatives including the NWT CIMP (which is currently developing its 2021-2025 Action Plan – consider a NWT CIMP person involved in the development of the Water Strategy 2021-2025 Action Plan and vice versa), the 2030 NWT Climate Change Strategic Framework and its 2019-2023 Action Plan, and GNWT Land Use Sustainability Framework, amongst others.*

- The Aboriginal Steering Committee was viewed as a highly effective mechanism for helping to manage and provide direction during the implementation of the 2016 – 2020 Action Plan. Similarly, the development of a Water Partnership Advisory Committee should be considered (though with less meetings than the Aboriginal Steering Committee to save costs/ or have virtual meetings).

**Recommendation  
3**

*Create a Water Partner Advisory Committee (with TORs) alongside the Aboriginal Steering Committee to provide ongoing guidance and revision during the course of the implementation of the 2021-2025 Action Plan.*

- There are a number of outstanding issues which require support and input from a variety of Water Partners and would benefit from a taskforce approach to addressing the issues over a set time frame.

**Recommendation  
4**

*Use the structure of creating taskforce groups (ad-hoc or as needed) to tackle certain issues, based on the technical Inter Departmental Committee on Drinking Water.*

- There are a number of areas where on-going work is reflected in the WSS-AP Action Items (e.g. regulatory work) and would be best placed in an initial description section which outlines the overall activities in the water sector. For example, much of the work of LWBs is reflected in the WSS-AP and consequently they are reporting multiple times on the same issue. This is similar with drinking water and waste, licensing, and cumulative effects, amongst others. Moreover, interviewees noted the importance to reduce and simplify reporting for the WSS-AP.

**Recommendation  
5**

*The 2021-2025 Action Plan should be simplified by identifying ongoing activities, such as regulatory activities, and outline how they link to the goals of the WSS. Meta performance measures should be reported on, such as “% of communities in compliance with licenses”. Detailed and specific Keys to Success and Action Items should be elaborated that are only addressed under the 2021-2025 Action Plan.*

**Recommendation  
6**

*Conduct a review of annual reporting requirements of Water Partners (WPs) (data, timing, etc.) and assess how to streamline reporting for the 2021-2025 Action Plan.*

- Performance Indicators should be more focused on key information. The Performance Indicators do not have targets, and are heavy on data such as “number of monitoring stations”, but limited on “information”. Moreover, with new technology on the ground stations for certain parameters may not be needed. Moreover the # of stations or # of gaps filled tells little about the % of coverage which is the key interest. For example, it would be more meaningful to have “% of coverage with a target of 75% coverage by 2025”.

**Recommendation  
7**

*A thorough review of Performance Indicators should be done to ensure they are more meaningful, and targets should be developed. Action Items should be reviewed to have specified deliverables associated with them.*

➤ **Advancing Traditional Knowledge and decision making**

- Advances have been made to include Traditional Knowledge and promote its acknowledgement and use (See [Section 7](#)). Interviews indicated that continued work is needed to promote traditional and local knowledge in decision making, and communities expressed the need for a greater sense of ownership over the strategy and its work.

**Recommendation  
8**

*Create a taskforce to produce a White Paper by 2021 on enhancing the use of Traditional Knowledge (TK) in decision-making and research. Examine: if people are using the tools, is there a lack of communication and reporting? What other issues can be advanced?*

The taskforce should include a broad range of Water Partners to ensure a range of perspectives are considered including governments, academia and public agencies, amongst others. Additionally, it should examine other examples of guidelines regarding the incorporation of Traditional Knowledge in research and management of water.

- One of the key issues raised by communities was that “knowledge” was not always flowing in both directions. Often communities would not understand research being proposed due to the language used; not receive results from studies conducted in their communities; or when they did receive the results, they would simply be in the form of data which has little to no intrinsic meaning. A series of pH values for instance does not tell people if the aquatic ecosystem is good for fish, or drinking. While a great deal of good work has been done to bridge the gap between Traditional Knowledge and Western science, the 2021— 2025 Action Plan needs to further advance this goal.

**Recommendation  
9**

*Make mandatory the presentation (in-person, video or phone) of monitoring results for any research or development related studies using either local guidelines (if available) or templates developed by ARI - a simple “Findings Description” that could be read on the radio or at meetings.*

- The CBM program was strongly viewed as a very important element of the Water Strategy and its Action Plan. Interviewees indicated that there is a desire to expand the program in scope to include other parameters (there is interest in expanding CABIN at the community level) as well as expanding it to other communities. However, this will require additional financing. Moreover, there was a sense that as more communities engage or expand their expertise and take greater ownership of data gathering and information generation that the experience of communities or organizations, such as the Dehcho with the AAROM and Guardian programs, could provide a focus for peer to peer learning and training between communities. It was forwarded that this could provide opportunities for expansion even with limited resources (keeping costs down in terms of travel and personnel) and often may be easier for communities to learn through.

**Recommendation  
10**

*Create a taskforce to develop a strategy to encourage/promote peer to peer learning between communities. This could include activities/initiatives such as: explore the option of opening up the Dehcho Guardian training course to other organisations; build local*

*capacity to conduct training, not only in sampling but also in applying guidelines for research; and promote local sustainability and awareness, amongst others.*

- Community members emphasized the importance of advancing not only traditional and local knowledge into decision making, but also in enhancing governance aspects of communities over their water resources. While there are aspects of this addressed in regulatory processes and hearing, amongst others, a desire was expressed to be more pro-active. The ideas of developing local or sub-regional Water Strategy and action Plan was seen as an initial step

**Recommendation  
11**

*Encourage local and/or regional water stewardship strategies that help inform the territory wide strategy to help advance awareness and input at the local and regional level.*

➤ **Improving the collective nature of the Water Strategy and awareness of its activities**

- Many interviewees, particularly at the local level, expressed concern that the Water Strategy and its Action Plan was very much set by policy in the GNWT. Many did not understand the role of the Aboriginal Steering Committee, for example, in advancing issues surrounding water from the community perspectives. In short, the WSS-AP is not seen as a collective initiative despite the networking of its various Water Partners. Consideration should be given to developing options to increase community involvement and attitude towards the Water Strategy and its Action Plan.

**Recommendation  
12**

*Improve the web site to reflect the variety of the partners and perspectives to give it a more collective feel and less of a government feel. For example, while improving the content, also the colours and font should be changed.*

**Recommendation  
13**

*Consider moving some of the meetings of the Aboriginal Steering Committee around the NWT to provide exposure in smaller communities, based on logistics and financing.*

- Interviews indicated that there is likely a very low appreciation and understanding of Water Strategy by the public and at the community level.
- Of the 24 websites referenced in this evaluation, only 6 linked to the Water Strategy webpage.



**Recommendation  
14**

*Create a taskforce to produce a simple “awareness building strategy” for Water Strategy and water issues to the public which considers, for example:*

*-Create anchor points for media reporting each year (Water Week – March, Annual Conference –November, and develop one for the summer);*

*-Encourage Water Partners to put links to the Water Strategy on their sites;*

*-Provide simple “Findings Descriptions” that are ready to be broadcast on the community radio or read at meetings.*

*-Approach partners to write a short article each month for newspapers or for CBC or Cabin radio (contact media agencies to discuss the possibility).*

*- Use the transboundary work to galvanize public interest.*

- The Aboriginal Steering Committee emphasized the importance of gaining the perspectives and opinions of the communities during the 2021-2025 Action Plan.

**Recommendation  
15**

*Ensure that during the last year of the 2021-2025 Action Plan community members (public) are consulted regarding their perspectives on and the opinion of the Water Strategy Action Plan.*

➤ **Priorities and areas of focus**

- It is acknowledged that many issues are linked. For example, climate impacts and warming are likely to affect dissolved organic carbon in water which in turn can impact drinking water quality and treatment. In discussions with interviewees, climate change and water quality were typically the areas of primary focus. This is in keeping with a survey conducted in 2017.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, virtually everyone interviewed highlighted climate change impacts as being of critical importance in terms of erosion, changing freezing and melting times, releasing pollution, affects to the permafrost, amongst others.

**Recommendation  
16**

*The introduction to the 2021-2025 Action Plan should emphasize the importance of climate change concerns which should be an underlying thread weaved throughout the Action Plan.*

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<sup>44</sup> GNWT (2017) [NWT Water Strategy Research Priorities](#): Summary of Survey Results and 2017 NWT Water Strategy Implementation Workshop Discussion

- Key water quality issues included concerns related to upstream activities in Alberta and BC; localized activities like leachate from landfills and industry discharge, oil and gas etc.; and lack of trust in drinking water (consequently spending money on expensive bottled water that impacts local economies).

**Recommendation  
17**

*Drinking water is important to communities and information should be easily accessed from a variety of websites (including WSS). Create a **single page** accessed by HSS and MACA with all relevant information and eventually have updated data, maps, and explanations allowing easy access of “information” for the public.*

**Recommendation  
18**

*For the 2021-2025 Action Plan, conduct a review of community concerns for providing direction for research and activities. Areas of concern and research topics should be reviewed annually by the Aboriginal Steering Committee (and new WP Advisory Committee). Maintain a discussion session at the Annual Workshop to ensure continued appropriateness.*

➤ **Sustaining activities and financing**

- Many interviewees indicated concern over future resources for continuing programs like the CBM program. Maintaining activities, particularly those sponsored under a private company, academia or NGO is not guaranteed as funding priorities and research interests may change. Nevertheless, part of the strength of the Water Strategy and its Action Plan is that it is collective in nature and being implemented by a variety of partners. The Gordon’s Foundation for example has expressed an ongoing interest to support the Makenzie DataStream and is creating other ones.

**Recommendation  
19**

*Assess the commitments of partner organizations in terms of their projected activities and timelines for inclusion in the 2021-2025 Action Plan.*

**Conclusions:**

The Water Strategy has been a cornerstone in helping to solidify and coalesce water initiatives in the NWT. As such it has provided a strong platform for communication, networking, and synergy building between the various Water Partners, agencies and communities. The underlying approach to integrate and promote traditional and local knowledge is impressive and worthy of recognition. This approach should be continued and emphasized in the 2021-2025 Action Plan. With some managerial and structural adjustments, the 2021-2025 Action Plan could be even more successful at advancing the goals of the Water Strategy than its predecessor.