



WERAC

*Wilderness and Ecological
Reserves Advisory Council*

What We Heard Summary:

Public Opinions on the Protected Areas Plan for the
Island of Newfoundland

The Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC) launched Phase 1 of the public consultation for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's Protected Areas Plan for the Island of Newfoundland, titled A Home for Nature on May 28, 2020. The consultation closed on October 1, 2020. This summary presents the more common points of view sent in by the public. For the full What We Heard Report, please visit: gov.nl.ca/ecc/HomeforNature

WERAC received 898 unique written responses, 633 of which were from Newfoundland and Labrador residents, 36 from outside Newfoundland and Labrador, and 229 that did not specify residence. Opinions from the unique responses are described in more detail below.

WERAC received an additional 996 form letters in support of the Plan and moving forward with Phase 2 (local public consultations). A total of 130 form letters were sent in by Newfoundland and Labrador residents, 734 were from outside Newfoundland and Labrador, and 132 didn't specify residence. Government also shared a petition with WERAC that outlined concerns with the proposed Plan. The petition had 4,582 signatures, 1,482 of which were from Newfoundland and Labrador, and 3,100 were from outside Newfoundland and Labrador. The petition expressed concerns about the process to come up with the Plan and recommended inclusive public consultations be conducted in future protected areas planning. The petition also asked for the data used to select areas to be made public. For more information on how areas were selected, please visit: gov.nl.ca/ecc/HomeforNature

How Much Support is There?

Of the 898 unique submissions, the majority (56%) of respondents supported the Plan to some extent: 41.8% supported the Plan as a whole, while 14.2% of supporters had some reservations, or mentioned support only for specific reserves. Of those that did not support the Plan (44%), respondents were either against the Plan generally (24.9%), or against protecting specific proposed reserves or a region (19.1%). In the Great Northern Peninsula-Baie Verte region, support for the proposed Plan was lower, with 68% either against the Plan as a whole, against protecting the region or specific reserves.

The Basics

The majority of respondents support the Plan to some extent. Many want more protected area than is currently proposed, while others think too much area is being proposed.

Some respondents said they believed that existing legal protection or local stewardship is enough to protect the land. Others see the Plan as a way to protect wildlife, or rare or endangered species, and their habitat. Support for the Plan and concerns vary by region.

Many people want to continue traditional activities in the proposed reserves and continue to use and maintain their cabins. The impact of reserves on the future rural economy is viewed as both a concern and an opportunity.

People want to move forward with local public consultations (Phase 2) and provide more education and improved communications in developing boundaries and how reserves are managed.

Regardless of support level for the Plan, respondents communicated a deep love of and respect for the land, and nature.



In some cases, people explained why they did or did not support the Plan. Many people, both for and against the Plan, worry that they might lose the ability to continue traditional activities or access resources necessary for food or heating (17.7%).

Some people also commented that they believed that local stewardship or existing legislation was sufficient to protect the land (10.8%). Equally, people commented that the proposed reserves are a way to protect wildlife, rare or endangered species, and habitats (10.7%).

The following sections describe the most common perspectives received. For a more detailed summary of the various perspectives, please see the What We Heard document.

The Content of the Plan

The greatest advice that people had regarding the content of the proposed Protected Areas Plan was that more land needs to be proposed for protection (18.9%). Some respondents (9.9%) proposed additional areas. Maps of proposed areas are available in the What We Heard document. There were also people (6.9%) who believed that too much area was being proposed in the Plan. Other common recommendations were to protect more remote areas instead, and to consider including more coastal and marine areas.

Reserve Management

For many respondents, it is important that any future reserves allow traditional activities to continue. People wanted fishing, hunting, and trapping to be permitted (31.2%). Snowmobiling, either on trails or generally, was also mentioned as an important activity (17.7%). The ability to use, maintain, access, and sell cabins was a common concern (13.7%).

Other common recommendations were to allow non-motorized activities (such as biking, hiking, and swimming), allow collection of firewood, and allow berry-picking or other foraging. There were conflicting views on how ATVs should be managed.

The Process

The consultation process is in two phases. Phase 1 is the initial consultation that this summary reports on. Once directed by government, Phase 2 will include local public consultations on each proposed reserve. Across all regions, respondents wanted the government and WERAC to undertake a more inclusive public consultation process (15.3%), improve education and communications (9.5%), and implement the Plan as quickly as possible (4.9%). People were also concerned that Indigenous peoples and communities that would be most affected by the proposed reserves were not included in drafting the proposed boundaries. There was also notable support (45%) mentioned for moving forward with local public consultations (through Phase 2). The form letters and the petition also recommended local public consultations and an inclusive public engagement process in general for protected areas planning.

Common Ground

There are differences of opinion regarding the Plan, but also plenty of common ground. Many respondents, both those in support and against the Plan, communicated a deep love of and respect for the land, and nature. Regardless of the extent to which people supported the Plan, many people commented on the importance of supporting local economies, food security, traditional uses, and finding opportunities to support the survival of rural communities.





Bay du Nord Wilderness Reserve
Photo credit: Tina Leonard