

Brief – Land Use Plans (LUP)

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Purpose of Land Use Planning

Land use planning processes are undertaken to develop a formal framework (a Land Use Plan - LUP) that will guide decisions about future land allocation, use, management, and protection. Traditional lands are of value for the ecosystem services they provide, the cultural and traditional activities they support, and the economic benefits that they yield, or may yield in the future. A Land Use Plan is also intended to formally articulate and verify those values.

What are Land Use Plans and Land Use Planning?

Land Use Plans (LUP) are the documents and products that result from the process of Land Use Planning (sometimes also called lands planning or lands management planning).

LUPs are comprised of historic and current environmental, economic, and social/cultural information (maps, text, photographs) that pertain to a specific, defined area and the people who reside within those lands. LUPs are more than just an assembly of information; this information is the context within which the community's vision and objectives is developed. LUPs also contain very specific information guided by more general planning objectives; for instance LUP can include information about –

- activities and land uses that will or will not be permitted in certain areas
- identification of locations of cultural and historic significance
- rules and laws that apply to community members and/or visitors on the lands
- a description of future economic and social development options
- environmental management practices
- future research projects
- financial needs, objectives, strategy.

This is where clearly defining the purpose, objectives, priorities and basis for decision-making becomes important. Land use plans can help to ensure that development activities fit sustainably within ecological limits and that conservation objectives guide land-use decisions. However, this can only be accomplished if the vision and set of objectives are the result of an inclusive, open process (see below for characteristics of a land use planning process) and are respectful of the lands' ecological capacity.

There is a risk that land use planning can become development planning if clarity of purpose is lacking and a solid ecological basis for decision-making is not well-defined at the start of the process.

Characteristics of a Land Use Planning Process

Some characteristics of land use planning that is respectful of the ecological capacity of the planning area:

- Clear context or terms of reference: everyone needs to know the purpose, goals of the LUP (ideally this is arrived at through consensus) – see above for the importance of this step!
- Ecological basis: acknowledges sustaining ecological structures and functions and biodiversity as a first or main goal
- Scope includes geographical area that encompasses rather than divides watersheds and other natural systems (natural region, eco-region, or large ecosystems)
- Timeframes: plan is for the long term and process allows for ample time to develop the plan
- Sound technical and scientific base: a comprehensive data collection effort that draws upon science and traditional knowledge is important; a LUP is only as good as the information it is based upon. For Aboriginal and First Nations communities, completed traditional use studies (TUS) are an important foundation for land use plans.
- Meets a variety of societal, environmental and cultural objectives and values and is not driven by single use, or by short-term economic gain
- Inclusive and participatory, not government or industry driven
- Information access: information about plans is public and available, public/community has multiple opportunities to provide input throughout process to develop the land use plan
- Adequately staffed and supported: land use planning costs money!

Benefits of Land Use Planning

Ultimately, a Land Use Plan will enable a community to plan for its long-term future cultural, ecological and economic stability and viability, and to manage and steward traditional lands. It also allows for the negotiation of economic/social/environmental partnerships and initiatives. Decisions based on land use planning have greater potential to ensure the ongoing health of traditional lands and waters as well as the health of the community and culture that are sustained by these lands.

Some specific benefits:

Ecological Benefits

- improved understanding of historical baseline ecological conditions
- documentation of history of land use, and natural resource extraction
- identification of important waterways
- identification of natural resources
- documentation of fire and burn history for region
- greater understanding of ecological services
- identification of ‘new’ sacred sites, environmentally sensitive areas – e.g. wildlife breeding areas
- identification of areas to establish for protection from development

Socio-cultural and Political Benefits

- increased participation by community members in decision-making in the community

- participation of community members in research, education and sharing.
- facilitates acquisition of documents, maps, reports, studies, photos, research
- results in improved organization and access to existing Band held historical resources & resources located and acquired through research efforts
- documentation of important archeological and sacred sites
- improved historical context for community history and traditional land use
- GIS maps allow for the visual representation of community traditional knowledge, for knowledge to be augmented or added to, for knowledge to be viewed and shared knowledge amongst generations
- GIS maps provide public information concerning the traditional territory, including about tenure, permits, licenses, roads etc.
- the land use plan makes use of Elders information, is a demonstration of the community's respect for Elders' knowledge and the process confirms traditional
- establishes public record of historical land use and occupancy
- LUP can be basis for negotiations with industry, economic proponents and other levels of government

Economic Benefits

- facilitates community control over land use decisions and decision-making about economic development –
 - through the planning process, the community has already determined what kinds of development are appropriate, desirable and which areas within the traditional territory will allow development of various sorts
 - any proposal for development of land and resources within traditional territory is subject to community decision-making according to the community lands management plan
 - an economic opportunity is either in keeping with the LUP, or it is not – that plan provides guidance so that future economic development will respect traditions, support beliefs and protect and enhance cultural, historical and natural resources
 - based on its LUP, a community has the tools to actively pursue economic development that will benefit community members now and for generations to come