



Starting the Conversation: Updating the Traditional Knowledge Guidelines to focus on what matters most

1. Key messages

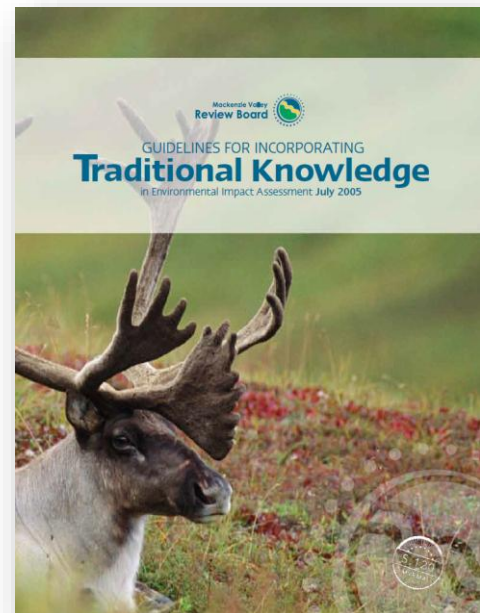
- The Mackenzie Valley Review Board and the Land and Water Boards (the Boards) of the Mackenzie Valley are **working together to update the Guidelines for Incorporating Traditional Knowledge Guidelines in Environmental Impact Assessment**. The Review Board developed the Guideline in 2005, and the Land and Water Boards adopted it in 2021.
- Traditional Knowledge is a legislated and foundational component of resource co-management in the Mackenzie Valley. It helps the Boards understand and address potential environmental, social, and cultural impacts.
- This work is in its early stages. This discussion paper provides context to support a shared understanding of the Guidelines update. The Boards are seeking early input ([via this survey](#)) to help shape the scope, priorities, and approach for the update. Your perspectives are important to ensure the updated Guideline is practical, relevant, and responsive to the needs of those involved in the system.
- There will be **additional opportunities to provide input** as the update progresses. To stay informed and continue contributing to this work, we invite you to email your contact info to policy@reviewboard.ca

2. Introduction

The Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board and the Land and Water Boards of the Mackenzie Valley (the Boards) were established by the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act* (MVRMA). The MVRMA provides for a coordinated and integrated system of land and water assessment and management in the Mackenzie Valley. In carrying out their respective roles, the Boards must consider Traditional Knowledge provided to them.¹ It informs how potential environmental, social and cultural impacts are understood and addressed

3. Traditional Knowledge is central to the integrated resource co-management system

Dene and Métis people throughout the Mackenzie Valley, have served as guardians of the land, water, wildlife and



¹ The MVRMA refers to “Traditional Knowledge” however this term may change in the update to reflect better understanding of the knowledge system.

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natural resources of the area since time immemorial. This co-existence has resulted in the development of holistic and comprehensive ways of knowing, being, and living in community, passed on through generations, which we refer to as Traditional Knowledge.

During the development of modern land claims in the Mackenzie Valley,² Indigenous leaders and negotiators embedded principles of Traditional Knowledge into the Land Claim Agreements. This included the establishment of the MVRMA, which recognizes Traditional Knowledge as an integral component of resource management and decision-making. In this way, the link between Traditional Knowledge and living with and on the land, remains alive and vital in our modern resource co-management system.

When the Review Board developed the Guidelines in the early 2000s, it realized that meaningful and respectful inclusion of Traditional Knowledge in impact assessment could strengthen project design, impact prediction, and mitigation planning. The Guidelines also made clear that the Review Board expects developers to respect local community protocols and policies regarding Traditional Knowledge. Additionally, the original Guidelines was written to:

- contribute to a fair and balanced environmental impact assessment process;
- encourage public participation in the environmental impact assessment process; and
- respect and value the benefits that Traditional Knowledge offers in good environmental decision-making.

4. Assessing the Need for Updates to the Guidelines

The Guidelines was groundbreaking when released in 2005. However, the context in which it operates has changed significantly since then. Environmental assessment practice, Indigenous governance of knowledge systems, terminology, data management, and relevant legislation have all evolved over the past two decades. This raises the need to assess whether the **Guidelines remains culturally grounded, practical, enforceable, and aligned with current expectations and realities for Indigenous Governments, communities, and Traditional Knowledge holders.**

Through several ongoing initiatives, including the NWT Environmental Audits ([2020](#), [2015](#)) and workshops ([2025](#), [2026](#)) focused on Traditional Knowledge in the resource co-management system, the Boards have heard that updates to the Guidelines may be required. Participants in these various initiatives included Indigenous Governments and First Nations, Elders, Traditional Knowledge holders, youth, land users, parties to specific EIA processes, and other co-management partners.

These emerging themes can act as a starting point for considerations about what type of updates to the Guidelines are needed. However, these ideas need to be validated throughout our update process. The Boards also recognize that, as engagement progresses, other potential areas will be identified and explored.

² The Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement, the Sahtu Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement and the Tłıchǫ Land Claims and Self-Government Agreement. We recognize that there are also ongoing negotiations in the Dehcho and Akaitcho regions.

4.1 Key messages to consider for future updates

Through the initiatives mentioned above, the following areas have been identified to explore as updates to the Guidelines:

- better describe and strengthen the role of Traditional Knowledge in Board processes and decision-making;
- modernize the Boards' approach to Indigenous data sovereignty and new and evolving technologies;
- clarify roles and responsibilities with respect to ethical use of Traditional Knowledge, including confidential information, and consider accountability for misuse;
- improve accessibility and communication through plain language, use and promotion of Indigenous languages, and clearer explanations of how knowledge systems complement one another;
- support capacity building, including training, youth–elder knowledge transfer, and other skill development initiatives; and
- broaden our understanding of Traditional Knowledge to include values and way of life, drawing on information that we heard in public workshops.

5. Next steps

The Boards are seeking early input to help shape the scope, priorities, and approach for updating the Guidelines. We invite you to share your perspectives by completing the survey. As the first stage of engagement for the Guidelines update, the survey will help the Boards identify key issues, understand priorities, and inform the next stages of the process.

The survey:

- is available [here](#)
- is open to all interested participants, including those involved in environmental assessment and land and water regulatory processes
- will remain open until **August 6, 2026**
- takes approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete
- allows respondents to save their progress and return to complete the survey before the deadline
- includes an opportunity to sign up for future notifications and updates related to the Guideline review process.

Based on what we hear in this initial engagement period, the Boards will release a “What we heard” report and plan for the rest of the Guidelines update process, including timelines for draft reviews. We will continue engaging with Indigenous Governments and communities, co-management partners, Elders, youth, Traditional Knowledge holders, Indigenous language experts, industry, and regulators. The process will be iterative, grounded in lessons learned from the original Guidelines, and shaped by respectful, early, and informed dialogue.

6. How to get involved or find out more

The Boards respectfully request that First Nations, Indigenous Governments, communities, and federal and territorial governments identify a contact person from their organization and provide their contact information to be added to the distribution list and receive updates throughout the Guideline review process. Please send contact info to policy@reviewboard.ca

For more information on the Guidelines, the progress of the update process, and opportunities to participate, please:

Visit the [project page](https://new.reviewboard.ca/en/updates-traditional-knowledge-guidelines): <https://new.reviewboard.ca/en/updates-traditional-knowledge-guidelines>

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