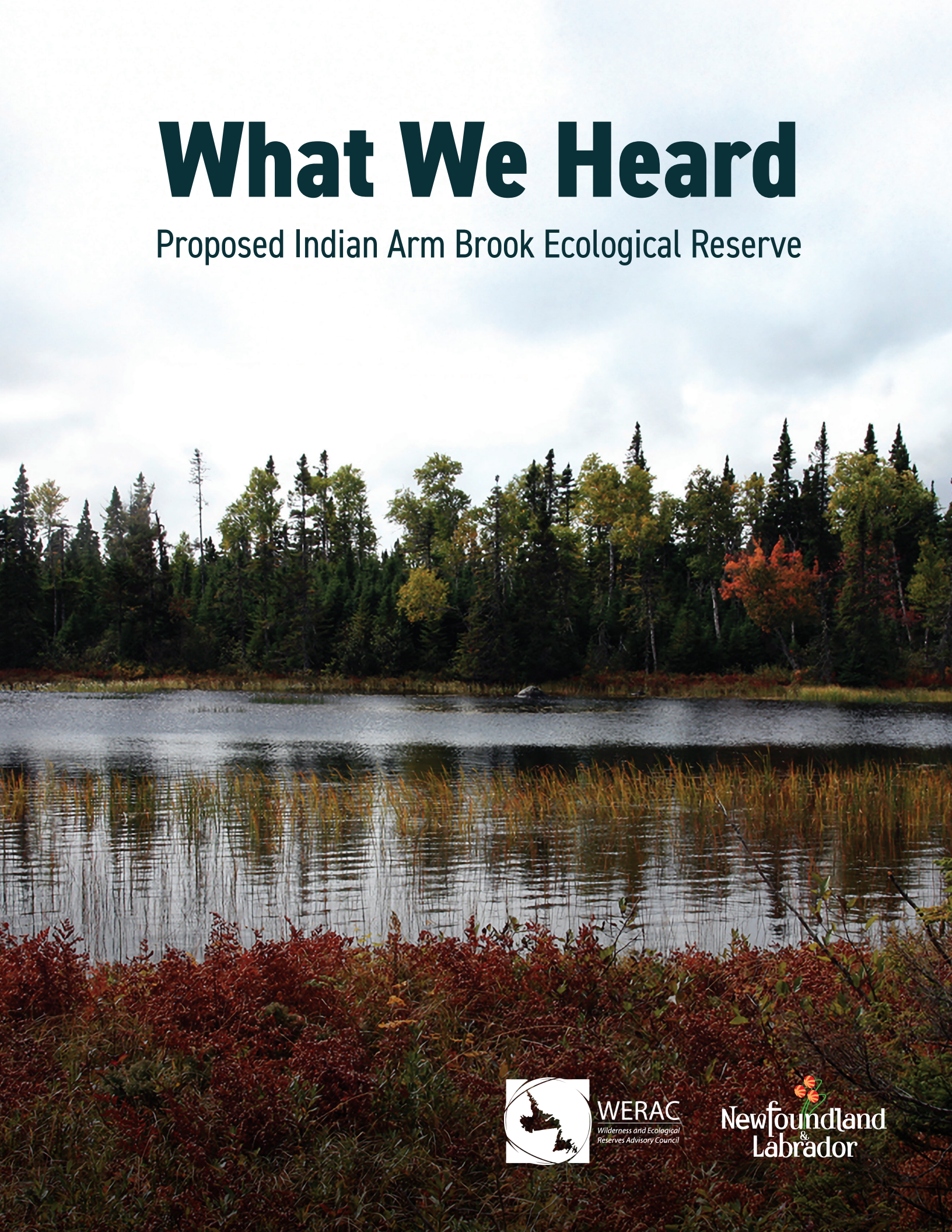
What We Heard

Proposed Indian Arm Brook Ecological Reserve



WERAC
Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council

Newfoundland & Labrador

Introduction

In 2009, part of the Campbellton River/Indian Arm Brook watershed was nominated by the public for protection to the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC) to represent the Central Newfoundland Forest and support recreational activities like hunting, fishing, and snowmobiling (see Figure 1). This nomination fit very well with provincial conservation planning efforts since the Central Newfoundland Forest natural region is underrepresented in protected areas.

WERAC engaged with town councils, held public sessions, and received letters and petitions about protection of the area. In 2016, based on public comments and feedback from an information session, WERAC felt that there was substantial support for protection. In 2017, WERAC requested a pause on commercial logging to allow time for more thorough public input.

At the 2016 session, people asked several questions, and WERAC promised to come back with answers. We understand that this has been a lengthy process, marked by delays, especially due to the pandemic and a public consultation process that WERAC hosted on the Protected Areas Plan for the Island of Newfoundland. Despite these challenges, our commitment to understanding the community's vision for this area remains steadfast.

In 2023, WERAC returned to the local communities to answer questions and reach out to those people most affected by the proposal. The purpose of this 'What We Heard' document is to share the feedback received in 2023 from local residents and interested parties about the proposed protection of the Indian Arm Brook area. Our aim is to present the community's views and outline WERAC's next steps.

Thank you to everyone who participated—you are shaping the future of this area.

Roles: WERAC and Provincial Government

WERAC is an independent, volunteer advisory council established by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Its role is to advise on creating and managing wilderness and ecological reserves by listening to public input and sharing those opinions with government. For this public nomination, WERAC's role was to determine the feasibility of protecting the Indian Arm Brook area as an ecological reserve. The advisory council will make recommendations to provincial government that are guided by the conservation values of the area, input from government departments and the results of initial public consultations.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador reviews WERAC's recommendations and decides if a proposed ecological reserve should receive temporary protection during comprehensive public consultations. If the provincial government decides to establish Indian Arm Brook as a provisional ecological reserve, there will be more detailed public involvement while the area is safeguarded from large-scale developments. Alternatively, if the area is not established as a provisional reserve, it will be reopened for commercial harvest.

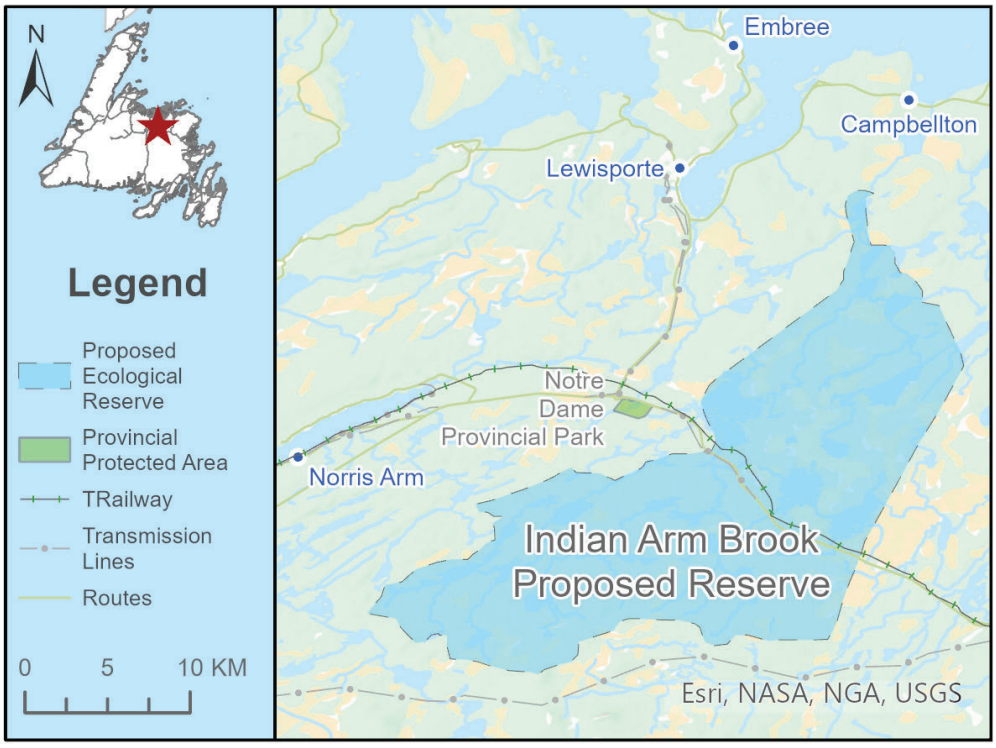


Figure 1. Map of Indian Arm Brook Proposed Ecological Reserve.

Your Voice Matters

This “What We Heard” document summarizes the public input gathered from October 1 to December 8, 2023. During that time, WERAC listened and documented your comments, ideas, and concerns to better understand your views on protecting the Indian Arm Brook area.

WERAC reached out to town councils, Indigenous organizations, and interested individuals to participate in this public engagement process. We made a particular effort to reach property owners within the proposed reserve. Through letters, phone calls, emails, and the provincial online public engagement site, we extended invitations to join us in discussions. We hosted various virtual and in-person public involvement opportunities including:

- **An online public engagement forum** ‘engageNL.ca,’ with detailed information, a questionnaire, interactive map, and sign-up for updates;
- **An online information session** on October 18, 2023;
- **A facilitated public engagement session** in Lewisporte on November 22, 2023;
- **An open house** in Norris Arm on November 23, 2023;
- **Meetings and phone calls** with interested parties; and
- Frequent email and **social media posts** to provide information and contact numbers, including informational videos on activities in reserves and the establishment process.

WERAC has heard from hundreds of people who provided input about what is important to them about the Indian Arm Brook area. Each question or perspective expressed from an engagement session, email, phone call, and survey response, was reviewed and considered by WERAC.

WERAC received:

- 92 responses to questionnaires on the EngageNL.ca platform;
- 6 responses to questionnaires handed out at the in-person sessions on November 22-23, 2023; and
- 38 email letters (28 were copies of the same letter, sent by different people).

During engagement sessions, WERAC met with and heard from:

- 10 participants in the virtual information session;
- 220 participants at the Lewisporte session; and
- 20 participants at the Norris Arm open house.

Representation of Submissions

The public responses WERAC collected gives us a general idea of public opinion. This outreach was not a poll of the general population. Since we didn't collect personal information with each submission, we can't know if one person contacted WERAC in several different ways (like attending an open house, filling out an in-person questionnaire, and sending an email).

WERAC assumes, based on conversations at the in-person sessions, that the Lewisporte and Norris Arm open houses were mostly attended by local participants. We don't have location data for email submissions. In the questionnaires, people were asked if they were local or non-local, and whether they owned a cabin in the area.

Table 1 below shows the distribution of questionnaire submissions, distinguishing between local submissions, non-local cabin owners, and local cabin owners. At least 53% of the questionnaire respondents were local, and 65% of those local people said they own cabins.

Overall, the data reflects views from Lewisporte and Norris Arm residents, with cabin owners being very well-represented.

Table 1. Local, non-local and cabin-owner questionnaire submissions for Indian Arm Brook. Questionnaires include online and printed submissions.

Total Questionnaires received (online and printed)	Local Submissions	Self-identified as non-local cabin owners	Self-identified as local cabin owners
98	52	10	34

What We Heard – Key Findings

Overall

The comments received through the engagement process focused on the future of activities in the Indian Arm Brook area and recommendations for management. Key issues included:

1. Traditional and Recreational Activities: People do not want restrictions placed on traditional or recreational activities. Many were worried a reserve might restrict hunting, fishing, berry picking, firewood cutting, ATV and snowmobile use, cabin access, camping, outfitting and eco-tourism.

2. Need for More Information: Participants want more information. Participants sought clear explanations about the reserve's purpose, boundaries, regulations, and enforcement mechanisms. People were not clear on how protection might impact cabin owners, access, and recreational activities.

3. Trust in the Process: There was a notable lack of trust in the establishment and consultation process, in the provincial government, as well as a general unfamiliarity and lack of trust in WERAC.

4. Desire for Stability: Many people wanted reassurance that their current access and activities would remain unchanged.

5. Protection of habitat and traditional activities: Of the participants who expressed support for protection, their reasons included: to protect wildlife, to keep the area from being developed, to maintain cultural and recreational activities, and to ensure that this landscape type (natural region) has some level of protection.

6. Development Considerations: Some participants also wanted to ensure that those with mineral claims in the area either be permitted to continue exploration or receive compensation for their investments. There are also a few participants who would like to see commercial forest harvesting continue. In some conversations, allowing commercial harvest was linked to maintenance of access roads and provision of berry picking areas through time.

Detailed comments

All the comments were tabulated separately by topic for the sake of reporting on key issues. For example, a respondant who wrote about cabin use, hunting, fishing, and ATV use was considered to have submitted four comments. The total number of responses/respondents was 303, and number of comments for each topic is in brackets.

The most common comments received were focused on activities that people envisioned for the future in the Indian Arm Brook area (1,297 comments), and recommendations regarding management (327 comments). There were numerous questions from respondents, which indicated information gaps (321 comments) about the proposal, especially regarding the specifics of what was being proposed and the reasons for selecting this particular area for protection.

Activity-specific Feedback

In the questionnaires, participants were presented with a list of activities and were invited to select those activities which are important to them in the context of the proposed Indian Arm Brook protected area. In addition, The top ten activities participants selected were:

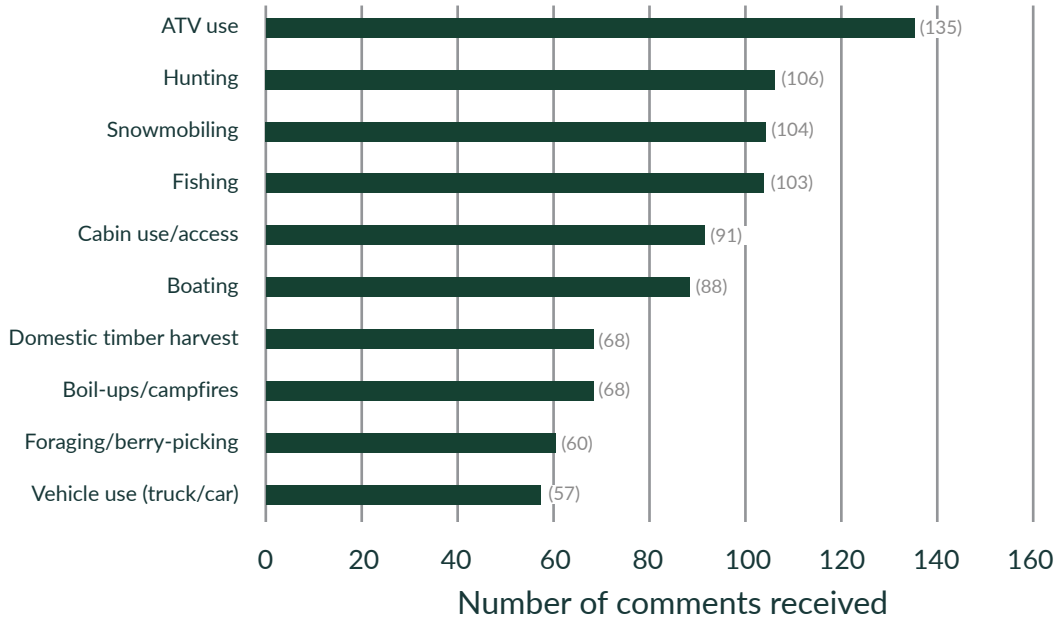


Figure 2. Respondents to public engagement on the proposed Indian Arm Brook ecological reserve identified the above top ten activities as being important activities that they enjoy in the proposed area.

Management Recommendations

Participants were not directly asked for management recommendations if the area was ever to be designated as an ecological reserve. However, from all the comments received, suggestions were made about future management of the area. These comments were about access for motorized and off-road vehicles (170), industry and the economy (81), and cabins (47).

Motorized and off-road vehicle Access

Respondents emphasized the importaince of maintaining road and trail access for ATV and other motorized vehicles. The recommendations were:

- ATV-related recommendations (78):
  - A majority recommended that ATVs be allowed on existing roads and trails.
  - Many of these comments (42%) recommended allowing ATVs to go off trail for moose collection.
  - A minority recommended no additional restrictions on ATV use (ie. other than current ATV regulations).
- Snowmobile-related recommendations (49):
  - 96% supported general snowmobiling access.
  - 4% recommended limiting snowmobiles to trails only.

Respondents highlighted the significance of maintaining ATV and snowmobile access for activities such as outfitting, recreation, and cabin access. There were suggestions to establish designated travel paths within the reserve to regulate access and minimize environmental impact.

Industry and Economy

Of the 81 recommendations related to the economy and commercial use of the proposed area:

- 26% of comments recommended permitting ecotourism and outfitting.
- 22% wanted to continue prospecting and mineral development.
- 20% suggested creating a process for compensating existing mineral land claims in the area.

Cabins

Regarding comments received about management of cabins (41 comments):

- A key concern and recommendation was retaining the ability to use, maintain, and sell existing cabins.
- A number of comments (40%) recommended allowing new cabins or creating a cottage development area in the Indian Arm Brook area.

Information Gaps

Common questions and requests for more information included:

- Reasons for selecting Indian Arm Brook (94 questions)
- Management intentions if protected (52 questions)
- Trail and road access and use (32 questions)
- Enforcement capacity (25 questions)
- Need for more information/clarity (24 questions)

Cultural Values

We asked participants (primarily through the questionnaires), what cultural values they held for the Indian Arm Brook area. Participants valued:

- Natural beauty (50)
- Protection of wildlife and plants (47)
- Personal history and connection to area (45)

Boundary Recommendations

Of the (67) comments which recommended changes to the proposed protected area boundary:

- 63% suggested increasing its size to include the entire Cambellton River watershed.
- 16% recommended decreasing the size to exclude high-use areas.

  15% proposed moving the boundary to lower-conflict areas.

Recommendations also included incorporating key features like Mount Peyton, balancing the needs of residents and existing infrastructure, and adjusting the boundary to enhance connectivity with other candidate protected areas. It should be noted that a significant number of people responded to the questions about boundary with a “no boundary” response, as a means to indicate lack of support for the proposal.

Levels of Support and Why

In total, we received data from 296 participants regarding the support or lack of support for the proposed reserve. Here’s the breakdown of how respondents expressed their views:

- Yes: 77 respondents (26% of total responses)
- Yes with changes: 14 respondents (5% of total responses)
- No: 188 respondents (63% of total responses)
- Neutral or Unsure: 17 respondents (6% of total responses)

Some participants shared their reasons for and against protecting the area. The main reasons **for protection** were to protect wildlife, keep the area as it is, maintain cultural and recreational activities, and represent a portion of the central newfoundland forest.

The main reasons **against protection** were concerns about potential impacts on local life. The top five concerns were that protection might be too restrictive, rules might change after it is established, a lack of trust in the government, not enough communication and information, and potential negative impacts on economic development. The results of the 2023 public outreach differ somewhat from previous input to WERAC and the feedback, in general, is less supportive. Previous town councils had sent letters of support to WERAC and there was a petition with 178 signatures also supporting establishment of the Indian Arm Brook area as a potential ecological reserve. In 2023, we made a concerted effort to reach out to people who would be most directly affected by a reserve, and this is likely reflected in the reduced level of support for establishment.

What's Next?

The next step in the process is for WERAC to submit a Recommendation Report to provincial government regarding the Indian Arm Brook proposal that reflects the perspectives outlined in this What We Heard report.

That said, we do want to extend an invitation to you to continue the conversation about possible conservation areas in central Newfoundland. We believe that, through ongoing discussions with residents, most concerns could be addressed. If you have suggestions for a different area to be conserved or would like to meet, please reach out to us. WERAC would like to find a way to work with you to protect some of the Central Newfoundland Forest. We thank you for and respect your feedback.

More Information or Contact Us

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