

Common Misconceptions Arising from the Public Consultation

The Misconceptions	The Facts
This is WERAC's Plan, developed by WERAC.	This Plan was developed by the provincial government, with comprehensive engagement across departments.
WERAC is a lobby group or Environmental Organization.	WERAC is a volunteer advisory council with membership from around the province. The Council is appointed by government and advises government on establishment and management of wilderness and ecological reserves.
The 2020 public consultation was the only opportunity for the public to have their say on the Plan.	Every single reserve that is established is legally required to go through a local public consultation. The 2020 (Phase 1) consultation was in addition to this process.
The boundaries are finalized.	The proposed boundaries are not finalized. Different boundaries can be proposed during Phase 2 local public consultations on each reserve. WERAC then proposes boundaries to government and government makes the final decision on boundaries.
Traditional activities like hunting and fishing will be prohibited or restricted.	The WER Act allows for the continuation of traditional activities, depending on the activity and the reserve. Some reserves have fishing and hunting and snowmobiling (as well as other activities). However, how a reserve is managed depends on public consultations and the reason for which a reserve is being established. WERAC then proposes management to government and government makes the final decision on how a reserve will be managed.
The Plan doesn't take into consideration economic impacts.	The areas that were chosen are a result of internal government deliberations to ensure that areas of high priority for resource development were not proposed for protection, where alternative sites were possible.

The Misconceptions	The Facts
Once reserves are established, they will take away our rights.	Management (other than staffing changes) or boundaries can not be changed without first undertaking a local public consultation, and WERAC makes recommendations to government based on that consultation.
We have plenty of wilderness on the Island and little development. There's no need for protected areas.	Most of the Island has been impacted by development in some way. There is little intact wilderness left on the Island of Newfoundland. Most intact wilderness is open for industrial development.
Local stewardship or existing legislation (i.e. for hunting, ATVs or cabin development) is sufficient to protect land.	Species and habitats are declining across Canada, including the Island of Newfoundland. Specific protected area legislation is written to ensure protection of species and their habitats. Using legislation created for other reasons doesn't have the same effect. Local stewardship, while important, is not an effective way to protect land from industrial development long-term. This would mean relying on each development engaging local people in a public consultation process and a trust that their comments would influence the outcome.
We are doing well and have enough of the Island protected.	As of 2021, we only have 6.7% of the Island protected, and 6.8% of the province. This is lagging far behind most of Canada, and the world. The area currently protected is not enough to protect our landscapes, habitats and species from current and future threats.
Protected areas should be established where no one uses the land.	Protected areas can be compatible with low-impact uses of the land such as hunting and fishing. There are also not many wild spaces left on the Island that have not been impacted by development in some way, that are not prioritized for development, and where people do not go for recreational purposes, or to carry out traditional activities. Protected areas planning also needs to consider things like habitat for species-at-risk, and how well an area represents a natural region (area with unique climate, species and geography).