

PANDEMIC IMPACTS ON RURAL RECREATION IN THE YUKON TERRITORY



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This research was conducted on the traditional territories of the Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Selkirk First Nation, White River First Nation, and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation by the World Leisure Centre of Excellence at Vancouver Island University in collaboration with the Recreation & Parks Association of the Yukon.



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Executive Summary

Despite the essential role of recreation in the health and well-being of individuals and communities and the rural nature of Canada, rural recreation has received limited attention from researchers. To address this gap and explore the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural communities, researchers from the World Leisure Centre of Excellence at Vancouver Island University and the Recreation & Parks Association of the Yukon investigated pandemic impacts on rural recreation in the Yukon Territory.

This study focused on five rural communities with unique governance structures, recreation delivery approaches, and population characteristics. The purpose was to explore pandemic impacts on residents and recreation delivery and how recreation can assist with pandemic recovery. Using a participatory rural appraisal approach, eight modified world cafes were hosted, and 28 key informants were interviewed.

This research showed that rural Yukoners preferred to be outdoors and that most of their recreation and physical activity involved outdoor recreation, on-the-land activities, and tasks of daily life (e.g., hauling water or firewood). Engagement in these activities also proved to be more resilient in the face of public health mandates and for those who were vaccine-hesitant.

Three strong narratives emerged from the data: (a) recreation funding and programs have been focused on children/youth, (b) physically active recreation has been defined as sports participation, and (c) indoor recreation (e.g., pools and arenas) facilities are necessary infrastructure in all rural communities. In contrast, it was found that (a) most engaged in unstructured outdoor recreation and on-the-land activities, (b) outdoor facilities and infrastructure would meet community needs, (c) communities want programs that promote social connections and wellness, and (d) there is a strong need for physical and social experiences across the lifespan.

Outdoor recreation and on-the-land activities are central to the lives of rural Yukoners. They can also be central to the recovery of individuals and communities if decision-makers and funders consider systems-level changes (e.g., reviewing the Recreation Act) and if stakeholders consider broadening the scope of community recreation. Additionally, supporting residents' capacity to engage in unstructured and self-led recreation across the lifespan would assist with pandemic recovery and developing a more sustainable recreation delivery model in rural Yukon.

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Introduction

Whether conducted by governments or academics, most research on recreation in Canada is focused on southern and urban populations. Academic research on rural recreation has typically focused on physical activity¹, economic shocks², or tourism³. Ultimately, there needs to be more research on recreation in northern Canadian communities in general and rural and remote communities in particular.

The Yukon Territory, except Whitehorse, would be defined as rural and often remote⁴; however, stopping at these labels would ignore the complex context of each community. Proximity to urban centres (e.g., Whitehorse), road conditions and travel links between communities, and the availability of services are all factors impacting residents. Within the Yukon context, the type of governance also needs to be factored into the rural reality.

There are several forms of local governance for rural communities in the Yukon, each impacting the level of local control, funding sources, and how recreation services are delivered. While all communities receive support from the Territorial government, the nature of that support and the ability to raise additional funds depends on whether the community is an incorporated municipality, an unincorporated community, a self-governing First Nation, or a non-self-governing First Nation.

Of the eight incorporated communities in the Yukon, seven are considered rural and have populations of less than 3000 residents. These communities can raise funds for services through property taxes and have more control over spending priorities and services offered within the community. In contrast, unincorporated communities are members of Local Advisory Councils which “advise the Minister [of Community Services] on (a) what works or services are required in the local advisory area and how they should be supplied, and b) the regulations considered desirable for the benefit of the residents.”⁵ These communities can not raise funds through property taxes and have less control over decision-making.

¹ Hudson et al., 2019; Irwin, 2022; Kirby et al., 2007; Pelletier et al., 2020; Pelletier et al., 2021

² Oncescu, 2015; Oncescu, 2016; Oncescu & Giles, 2012),

³ Foster & Main, 2020; MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003; Sharpley & Jepson, 2011; George et al., 2009

⁴ Graham et al., 2021; Subedi et al., 2020

⁵ Yukon Municipal Act, 2002, p. 38

Eleven of 14 First Nations in the Yukon have signed self-governing treaties which transferred decision-making power related to their lands and people to the Nation. The Yukon Government works with these Nations to deliver education, health care, and public works.⁶ The other three Nations remain in treaty negotiations. They are, therefore, still impacted by the Indian Act and the federal ministries of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada and Indigenous Services Canada.⁷

Recreation delivery in the Yukon Territory is governed by the Recreation Act⁸, which stipulates who is responsible for sport and community recreation and how grants are managed. Municipalities are responsible for delivering all recreation services offered within their communities except for competitive sports at the Territorial or National level. Funding for services is provided through the Yukon Government via various granting programs; however, municipalities also raise funds through property taxes and have greater authority over how it is spent.

Unincorporated communities are provided recreation services through Local Authorities that are designated, upon request, by the Yukon Government. Local Authorities can be a First Nation or an organization registered under the Business Corporations Act or Societies Act. They must also have access to an adequate facility to offer services (e.g., school or community hall). Local Authorities have the same responsibilities for service delivery as municipalities; however, their funding is strictly controlled (e.g., amount, use, and reporting requirements) by funders⁹ and do not have access to property taxes.

The research presented in this report aimed to understand how the pandemic impacted the delivery of rural recreation services in the Yukon and explore ways rural recreation can help individuals and communities recover from the pandemic. There were three guiding research questions for this project:

1. How did the pandemic impact Yukoners' participation in recreation?
2. In what ways did recreation providers adapt their service delivery during the pandemic?
3. How can recreation and physical activity assist residents and communities in recovering from the impacts of the pandemic?

⁶ Yukon Government, 2003

⁷ Government of Canada, 2001

⁸ Yukon Recreation Act, 2022

⁹ Yukon Recreation Act, 2022

Methods & Sampling

Using a participatory rural appraisal approach¹⁰ and following the principles of qualitative description¹¹, the research team collected data from five rural communities in the Yukon. Community recreation directors/coordinators were sent invitations to participate in the study, resulting in an initial sample of two communities, of which only Dawson City participated. Dawson City was also the only incorporated community and the only one with an official recreation plan. The remaining four communities were all invited to participate as they were starting or about to develop a community recreation plan. As such, each community received a community-level report for its planning processes. Table 1 includes descriptive details of each community to provide a better contextual understanding.

Table 1: Communities Included in the Study

Community	Pop	Community Governance	Local Authority for Recreation
Beaver Creek	105	Unincorporated & White River First Nation Non-self-governing First Nation	White River First Nation
Carcross	460	Unincorporated & Carcross/Tagish First Nation	Carcross Recreation Board
Dawson City	2342	Incorporated Municipality	City of Dawson Parks & Recreation
Pelly Crossing	371	Selkirk First Nation Self-governing First Nation	Selkirk First Nation
Tagish	381	Unincorporated & Carcross/Tagish First Nation	Tagish Community Association

As part of the research design process, the research team received endorsements from the Selkirk, White River, and Carcross-Tagish First Nations. An information letter was also sent to the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation. However, their science advisor advised the team that as the research did not target Nation Members, permission from the Chief and Council to conduct research within their territory was not needed. Vancouver Island University's Research Ethics Board also reviewed the project, and the team received a Yukon Science and Explorers license.

¹⁰ Chandra, 2010

¹¹ Sandelowski, 2010

Data were collected using two primary methods, modified World Cafés and semi-structured interviews. At the modified World Cafés, residents were asked to write responses to questions on sticky notes and to indicate agreement with any previous answers. Members of the research team addressed questions and assisted anyone with literacy challenges. Free food (e.g., community BBQs or snacks) and giveaways from the Recreation & Parks Association of the Yukon (RPAY) were used to encourage participation. Figure 1 illustrates how the World Cafés were set up, and Table 2 details the number of community engagement events and interviews conducted in each community.

Figure 1: World Café Set-up



Table 2: Number of Community Engagement & Interviews per Community

Community	Modified World Cafes/ Engagement Sessions	Number of People Interviewed
Beaver Creek	1	4
Carcross	1	7
Dawson City	3	8
Pelly Crossing	2	4
Tagish	1	5
Total	8	28

Data from the World Cafés were analyzed by sorting responses into emergent themes within each question before being summarized. Guided by the purpose of the study and using NVivo software, data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed through open coding and theming.

Findings

Given the small populations of the five communities and the nature of the data collected, the findings are presented as a summary of the rural experience rather than a reflection of each community. Quotes provided are identified by the person's position within their community (e.g., resident or recreation coordinator) unless explicit permission to name them was granted. The findings of this study are organized into sub-sections that reflect the three guiding questions.

1. How did the pandemic impact Yukoners' participation in recreation?
2. In what ways did recreation providers adapt their service delivery during the pandemic?
3. How can recreation and physical activity assist residents and communities in recovering from the impacts of the pandemic?

Pandemic Impacts on Yukoners' Participation in Recreation

The findings of this study reflected Yukoners' love of the outdoors and adaptability. Most participants of this study identified on-the-land activities (e.g., hunting, fishing, berry picking) and unstructured outdoor activities (e.g., skiing, mountain biking, hiking, and sledding) as the recreation they did for fun. Dawson City was the only community where residents identified organized sports as an essential recreation activity.

This study also revealed that hauling water, cutting firewood, and gardening were everyday activities used for physical activity. Combined with other traditional on-the-land activities like hunting, fishing, and harvesting/berry picking, it becomes clear that physical activity is embedded into daily life for many living in rural communities. There was some concern that during the pandemic, there was less opportunity for these skills to be shared with or passed onto youth; however, there was also a clear interest in increasing those opportunities.

Interviews with recreation staff and volunteers revealed that funding, programming, and facility development had been used to prioritize physical activity and sports programming for youth. It was suggested that this is mainly due to federal and territorial priorities¹². While there was general agreement that youth programming was necessary, it was also noted that there were very few children in some communities. It was also pointed out that there needed to be more funding for recreation programming that targeted older adults or prioritized social interactions.

Programs “are targeting mostly youth. How many youth have we got? We don’t have to focus on that [but] there’s money there” (Recreation Coordinator)

The most profound impact on residents’ recreation was the pandemic health protocols that limited interactions and group sizes. Increased social isolation due to reduced recreation programming was identified in all age groups and all communities. This was incredibly impactful in the smaller communities where concern for Elders and the creation of small ‘social bubbles’ resulted in children not being able to interact with anyone other than siblings.

“At first, I had a hard time telling them they couldn’t go to a kid’s house because they are not part of our social bubble. Their cousin lives right next door to us, and it was hard to tell them that they couldn’t come into the house either”. (Chief Chasse of White River First Nation).

Unvaccinated participants identified strong feelings of social isolation and exclusion, and most linked it to profound reductions in mental health and well-being. These feelings prevail, particularly in the two communities where vaccine mandates were socially divisive.

In What Ways Did Recreation Providers Adapt Their Service Delivery?

Recreation services varied dramatically between the communities depending on who provided the services, the facilities available, and the community composition. Initially, all communities were required to close recreation facilities, but some program offerings could be adapted as restrictions were lifted. This typically included reducing the number of participants or changing how the activity was done. This was challenging in communities that relied on school gymnasiums for programming space as they could only include children already attending the school.

¹² It was noted that some of the territorial funding programs reflected federal priorities as that is where the funds originated from.

The closure of facilities was most impactful in Dawson City, which has the most indoor facilities, and Tagish¹³, where the community centre stayed closed until the vaccine passport mandate was lifted. As a result of these closures, residents identified that they spent more time outdoors and engaging in both summer and winter outdoor activities. Communities with outdoor infrastructure (e.g., outdoor ice rinks, pickleball courts, trails, and fields) witnessed increased use. It also highlighted the need to repair or build outdoor infrastructure in some communities.

The pandemic revealed that outdoor recreation infrastructure is essential to the health and well-being of rural Yukoners and their communities. Trails for mountain biking and hiking, outdoor play areas, and outdoor spaces for social gatherings were all identified as vital for keeping residents active and connected. Efforts to improve trails in Tagish and the building of a disc golf course and skate park in Dawson were identified as essential updates during the pandemic. The significance of this type of development is its ability to promote self-led unstructured recreation participation.

This study showed that outdoor and self-led activities were more resilient in the face of the pandemic. As a result, individuals who had broad leisure repertoires¹⁴ that included diverse outdoor activities were less impacted by facility closures. However, it was noted that existing funding led to programming that did not always promote the development of a broad leisure repertoire or focus on social well-being versus physical activity.

One's Leisure Repertoire is the 'library' of activities that participants feel competent and comfortable doing (Mobily et al., 1991).

The loss of social connection through recreation had the most significant impact and provided some of the biggest challenges to recreation staff. The need for outdoor spaces designed for social gatherings (e.g., covered areas, seating, and washroom access) and the lack of indoor spaces were identified as barriers to delivering social recreation programs in some communities. This was identified as a gap in service offerings pre-pandemic and post-pandemic and was also an area of concern in all communities.

Finally, recreation services focusing on physical and social well-being were essential in all communities. Whether it was the pancake breakfast in Tagish, darts in Beaver Creek, or hockey in Dawson City, residents felt that recreation services were vital to their

¹³ Enforcing the vaccine passport mandates was very divisive, so the Tagish Community Association decided to keep the facility closed.

¹⁴ Mobily et al., 1991

health and the community's well-being. It was also noted that it was essential to develop a broader perspective of recreation that includes community gatherings with meals, playing card/board games, learning on-the-land skills, and focusing on mental health versus physical activity.

How Can Recreation and Physical Activity Assist with Recovery?

Participants in this study believed strongly that recreation programs are essential to communities and individuals recovering from the impacts of the pandemic. The findings in this section are organized into three sub-sections: (a) recreation as a force for recovery, (b) barriers to and supports needed for recovery, and (c) recreation and economic recovery.

Recreation as a Force for Recovery

Study participants were clear that recreation is central to pandemic recovery for communities and individuals. Central to that recovery is an expanded perspective on recreation, including more than physical activity and programming focused on youth. Participants were asked how they viewed recreation, and for most, they had a broader understanding that more closely aligns with the Nation Framework for Recreation in Canada 2015¹⁵. This distinction is crucial as it would include shifting priorities from primarily physical activity to funding and offering programs that support arts, cultural, intellectual pursuits, and social gatherings.

"Recreation is the experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community well-being"
(CPRA/ISPC, 2015, p. 4)

The dominant role of unstructured self-led outdoor recreation and on-the-land activities is also a significant way that recreation can foster pandemic recovery. Participants

"Recreation is fundamental for happiness, physical activity, a healthy lifestyle, and being able to get back to it is been very, very fundamental in healing" (Recreation Programmer)

noted that they increased their outdoor participation in most outdoor activities during the pandemic. Additionally, some communities adapted to the closure/reduced use of indoor spaces by investing in new outdoor infrastructure, which was highly valued by recreation staff and residents.

¹⁵ CPRA/ISPC, 2015

Programming that meets the needs of people across the lifespan was also identified as vital for recovery. The focus on youth programming fails to ensure that adults and older adults have access to recreation that promotes physical and social well-being. This was expressed as a significant concern in communities that needed gathering spaces or transportation systems that would allow older community members to connect. While there was an indication that indoor spaces were required, it was also noted that accessible outdoor gathering spaces would also be helpful. Additionally, it was pointed out that programming that included healthy meals would help improve older adults' well-being.

The pandemic caused increased feelings of social isolation and exclusion for several reasons; therefore, efforts to (re)build community connections and social capital are vital. Recreation staff and community residents in all communities identified recreation, particularly community events with food, as a means of rebuilding and healing their communities.

"Recreation builds people, and people build community"
(Community Member).

Barriers to and Supports Needed for Recovery

Responsibility for recreation service delivery differed in every community; therefore, the barriers and supports identified in this section may not apply to all communities in the study. For each barrier, a potential solution is offered by study participants. The core barriers identified were: (a) funding challenges, (b) community capacity, and (c) sustainable infrastructure development.

Funding presented a challenge in various ways, but the most commonly identified were; (a) the gaps between community needs and what was being offered and (b) the need for more collaboration between different government departments. As previously noted, it was reported that funding programs tended to focus on youth and physical activity. This was identified as problematic by recreation staff who wanted to offer programs for adults/older adults or focused on social gatherings. For example, a recreation director stated that when seeking funds for a social program with snacks for older adults, it was suggested that they add a walking program to fit funding guidelines. This study revealed that funding programs need to be broader in scope and flexible enough for individual communities to address their own needs.

The need for better collaboration across government departments was identified by recreation staff. The need to submit multiple grant applications, often for small pots of money, to fund a single program was identified as a challenge. It was suggested that

greater collaboration within the Yukon Government (and the NGOs they support), combined with greater flexibility on funding timelines and how funds are used, would be beneficial. This was a particular challenge for unincorporated communities that rely more on grants for program funding.

The lack of collaboration in funding was also problematic from a capacity perspective. Applying and reporting to multiple agencies/departments is a significant time burden as the smaller unincorporated communities often rely on part-time staff and volunteers. Therefore, reducing the number of grant applications and reports required to offer the same amount or more community programming would be supportive.

The lack of time and role overload were challenging for several recreation staff and recreation board members. While recreation staff are generally known for working long hours, it is particularly challenging in rural communities with fewer residents to share the service burden. This is increasingly problematic in communities where the recreation director has several jobs and sits on multiple committees. It was identified that many of the recreation staff and volunteers are burning out, and if anyone does exist to replace them, they will likely need more training. Remote training that is accessible and contextualized to rural communities and incentivizing (e.g., stipends, improved wages, or youth employment) community members to engage in recreation leadership would help address this challenge.

While many community and recreation staff members identified the need for multi-purpose recreation facilities, there was greater recognition and concern over the lack of maintenance of existing facilities. Each community visited had facilities that were already or nearly condemned, needing immediate repair, or did not meet community needs. There was agreement that recreation infrastructure was necessary for recovery. Still, communities did not always want new facilities for which they would need to source the resources to operate or maintain. For example, two communities identified wanting repairs and renovations to their outdoor ice rinks as that would promote self-led recreation and provide a multi-use, multi-season community recreation space. Ultimately, any new facility construction should include a cost-benefit analysis and a fully costed construction, operation, and maintenance plan to ensure the sustainability of the infrastructure.

“They’re [YG] willing to build you the 9-10 million dollar facility, but then there’s zero money for maintenance and operation” (Recreation Staff).

Recreation and Economic Recovery

Outdoor recreation and tourism have long been used for economic development through tourism and amenity migration. Participants in this study indicated that capitalizing on infrastructure like trails for mountain biking, hiking, and skiing could help attract more visitors. It was also noted that outdoor sporting facilities, like baseball fields, can be used for sports tourism. However, the expansion of tourism in rural communities should be done with consultation and care, as several participants identified that increased outdoor recreation during the pandemic has already led to ecological damage, cultural friction, and social strain. There was also evidence that some residents wanted to reduce the number of visitors.

Often overlooked economic benefits of recreation are the cost-savings associated with improved health, well-being, and reduced engagement in harmful activities. Participants in this study all linked participation in recreation to improved physical and mental health and community well-being—several identified recreation as an essential service in helping to address issues like substance abuse and self-harm. To achieve these cost-saving economic benefits, greater collaboration between ministries responsible for health, community services, and recreation is necessary, as these initiatives are beyond the scope of recreation service providers.

Conclusions

This study aimed to explore the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural recreation. Focusing on the lived experiences of residents and recreation service providers in five unique communities showed that rural communities were most profoundly impacted by social isolation, reduced mental health, and in some cases, community divisions. However, it was also found that rural residents enjoyed the extra time with family and staying active through outdoor recreation, on-the-land activities, and daily life (e.g., hauling water and chopping firewood).

Pandemic public health mandates and restrictions significantly impacted access to indoor recreation by closing facilities and lower capacity levels. Vaccine mandates and passports in some rural communities and for some residents also led to isolation, exclusion, and community division. Recreation service providers often bore the brunt of enforcing vaccine passports and denying residents access, which led to confusion related to who (i.e., public health versus community recreation) was responsible for the mandates.

The complexity of the community governance and recreation delivery system in the Yukon resulted in several challenges for residents and recreation service providers, including; (a) confusion over responsibility for services, (b) duplication of services, (c) burdensome funding application and reporting process, and (d) a disconnection between rural community needs and support/funding programs. Another result of the current system is the narrative that recreation should be centred on physical activity and facility development.

Each of the rural communities visited had one or more recreation facilities that were condemned, beyond repair, in need of renovation or repair, or which did not meet the needs of residents. This study revealed a strong narrative around the necessity of indoor recreation facilities (i.e., pools and ice arenas); however, there was little indication that residents understood the actual cost of operating and maintaining the facilities or the exact number of users. There appears to be a belief that all communities should have facilities like those offered in Whitehorse or larger urban centres. Clarity about the actual costs of operating and maintaining these facilities may be needed to ensure that residents are more realistic about what a rural community can sustainably offer.

The focus on indoor recreation facilities only sometimes aligns with the expressed needs of communities. This can be particularly problematic for communities that are governed under Local Advisory Councils and where a Local Authority delivers recreation as their voices are not always heard and their priorities do not align with current territorial or federal programs. In each community, outdoor recreation facilities and infrastructure were identified as highly popular, valued, and resilient during the pandemic. This type of development also tends to have lower construction and maintenance costs, requires fewer resources for operation, and can be used for unstructured self-led recreation.

Physical activity in rural communities was more closely aligned with outdoor recreation, on-the-land activities, and daily life, suggesting a need to change the sport-centric and facility-centric narrative. In addition, there was a tendency to equate recreation with physical activity and to focus on youth programming. Ultimately, it was suggested that funders and recreation providers prioritized programs offered for youth and sport/physical activity, which is detrimental to residents' health and social well-being across the lifespan.

Recreation services and access to outdoor recreation infrastructure were essential to rural residents' physical health and well-being during the pandemic. The Yukon provides incredible opportunities to engage in diverse outdoor recreation activities that were not

only accessible during the pandemic but also provide opportunities for physical and social health and wellness. Yukoners living in rural communities strongly preferred outdoor and on-the-land activities as sources of enjoyment and wellness throughout the year. Capitalizing on these assets can provide rural communities sustainable and resilient access to self- and community-led recreation.

Recommendations

The recommendations shared are grounded in the findings of this study and linked to best practices in recreation service delivery from northern Canada and other jurisdictions. They have been reviewed to fit the Yukon context and the current recreation governance and delivery systems. They are provided for both decision-makers and service providers and are organized into four categories; (a) policy, (b) places, (c) people, and (c) programs (Table 3).

Table 3: Recommendations for the Sustainable Delivery of Rural Recreation

Decision-Makers (First Nation, municipal, and territorial governments)	<p>Policy</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduce the complexity of recreation service delivery within the Yukon Government. 2. Align government support and funding with rural community priorities. 3. Recognize the essential nature of recreation to the health and well-being of Yukoners and rural communities. 	<p>People</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Promote the engagement of Yukoners in recreation leadership and volunteering. 7. Reduce the complexity of applying for and reporting on funding for recreation. 8. Enhance access to self-led recreation through education, training, equipment access, and appropriate infrastructure development. 	Service Providers (NGOs, community groups, recreation departments)
	<p>Places</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Promote sustainable recreation infrastructure development in rural communities. 5. Develop Territorial plans for the development of rural outdoor facilities and infrastructure. 	<p>Programs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Capitalize on outdoor recreation and on-the-land activities to promote active recreation across the lifespan. 10. Prioritize recreation programming that encourages social connections and reduces isolation. 	

Policy Recommendations

1. Reduce the complexity of recreation service delivery within the Yukon Government.
 - 1.1. Review the Yukon Recreation Act with a focus on the following:
 - 1.1.1. The definition and scope of community recreation.
 - 1.1.2. How local authorities are designated.
 - 1.1.3. Whether the responsibilities of unincorporated communities should be the same as municipalities.
 - 1.1.4. The mandated need for a recreation facility.
 - 1.2. Promote intragovernmental collaboration and reduce service duplication and funding complexity.
2. Align government support and funding with rural community priorities.
 - 2.1. Review funding programs for a better fit with rural communities and the needs of residents.
 - 2.2. Review funding programs to promote a balance between recreation programs that promote social connection and those focused on physical activity.
 - 2.3. Review funding programs to ensure access to rural recreation services across the lifespan.
 - 2.4. Require official recreation plans from communities to ensure funding applications and grants align with identified needs.
3. Recognize the essential nature of recreation to the health and well-being of Yukoners and rural communities.
 - 3.1. Promote leisure education to increase competence in self-led and unstructured recreation participation.
 - 3.2. Promote the connections between all forms of recreation and leisure to individual and community health and well-being.
 - 3.3. Fund programs that use recreation (structured and unstructured) to promote health, well-being, and harm reduction.
 - 3.4. Foster intersectoral approaches using recreation and leisure in dealing with complex social issues.

Places

4. Promote sustainable recreation infrastructure development in rural communities.
 - 4.1. Assess how many residents (unique users) use recreation facilities and the frequency of their use as part of a cost-benefit analysis.
 - 4.2. Conduct a cost-benefit analysis for all proposed recreation facilities and infrastructure.

- 4.3. Prepare and share a fully costed proposal for recreation facilities and infrastructure, including maintenance and operations.
 - 4.4. Base facility and infrastructure development on needs identified in community recreation plans.
5. Develop Territorial plans for the development of rural outdoor facilities and infrastructure.
 - 5.1. Develop a rural Yukon Trails Plan with First Nations, municipalities, and rural communities.
 - 5.2. Prioritize the development of outdoor recreation infrastructure for social and active recreation (e.g., picnic sites, outdoor rinks/courts, and trails).
 - 5.3. Prioritize the funding and development of facilities and infrastructure that facilitate unstructured self-led recreation.
 - 5.4. Base facility and infrastructure development on needs identified in community recreation plans.

People

6. Promote the engagement of Yukoners in recreation leadership and volunteering.
 - 6.1. Provide adequate funding to support recreation coordination within communities.
 - 6.2. Encourage recreation participation across the lifespan.
 - 6.3. Engage retirees and Elders in skills sharing and recreation leadership.
 - 6.4. Enhance programs encouraging residents to use their skills and knowledge to lead recreation programming.
 - 6.5. Enhance remote learning opportunities for rural residents to gain recreation programming and risk management training.
7. Reduce the complexity of applying for and reporting on funding for recreation.
 - 7.1. Reduce overlap and streamline funding programs and support services.
 - 7.2. Provide adequate support to rural community leaders applying for and reporting on funding.
8. Enhance access to self-led recreation through education, training, equipment access, and appropriate infrastructure development.
 - 8.1. Continue to invest in youth access to outdoor recreation skill training in public schools.
 - 8.2. Invest in Leisure Education training for service providers and programming for Yukoners across the lifespan.

- 8.3. Ensure affordable access to outdoor recreation equipment through lending programs, rentals, and bulk purchasing opportunities.

Programs

9. Capitalize on outdoor recreation and on-the-land activities to promote active recreation across the lifespan.
 - 9.1. Invest in youths' skill development in diverse outdoor recreation and on-the-land activities.
 - 9.2. Develop programming in schools to promote teen participation in recreation leadership.
 - 9.3. Engage teens, adults, and Elders in knowledge sharing and skill development.
 - 9.4. Fund programs that enhance access to equipment and training necessary for self-led participation.
 - 9.5. Promote infrastructure development that facilitates low- to no-cost participation.
10. Prioritize recreation programming that encourages social connections and reduces isolation.
 - 10.1. Fund programs that promote social connectivity and rebuild social capital.
 - 10.2. Ensure access to facilities and infrastructure that facilitate community gatherings (e.g., covered areas, kitchens, picnic sites).
 - 10.3. Promote infrastructure development that is accessible and promotes low- to no-cost participation.

Future Research

This study provided an in-depth exploration of the lived experience of residents and recreation service providers in five rural communities in the Yukon. Like most research, this study revealed additional questions and issues needing further investigation. The most pressing issues based on the findings of this study are:

1. Measuring the short- and long-term costs and benefits of building indoor recreation facilities (e.g., pools and arenas) in rural communities.
2. Measuring the short- and long-term costs and benefits of building outdoor recreation facilities and infrastructure in rural communities.
3. Identifying the type(s) of facility and infrastructure developments best for promoting physical health and social well-being across the lifespan.
4. Exploring how leisure education can promote participation in structured and unstructured rural recreation across the lifespan.

5. Determining if the increased participation in outdoor recreation during the pandemic continues post-pandemic.
6. Exploring the ways that participation in traditional on-the-land activities contributes to reconciliation efforts.

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