

New Denver Proposed Community Forest Initial Engagement Survey Report

Executive Summary

The survey received 66 responses. In a community of approximately 590 residents, this represents about 11.2% of the entire population. For an initial public engagement exercise, that is a substantial sample size and provides a meaningful indication of community priorities, concerns, and expectations. The results should still be interpreted carefully because participation was voluntary and therefore may reflect self-selection bias.

The strongest overall finding is that residents support continued exploration of a Community Forest Agreement, but that support is conditional. The survey should not be read as unconditional approval to submit an application or establish a community forest. Rather, it indicates broad support for due diligence, information gathering, and further public discussion.

- Residents are most motivated by wildfire risk reduction, watershed protection, wildlife and habitat protection, and local involvement in forest management.
- Residents are most concerned about drinking water and watersheds, wildfire risk, timber harvesting methods, wildlife and habitat, and governance/accountability.
- The written responses show a clear desire for transparency, continued consultation, and evidence before any formal application decision.
- Opposition is numerically small but detailed and focused on governance, watershed protection, neighbouring jurisdictions, existing tenure holders, and the risk of community division.

1. Engagement Context, Sample Size, and Limitations

With 66 responses from a community of roughly 590 residents, the survey reached about 11.2% of the population. That level of participation is meaningful for a small municipality and should be treated as a substantial engagement response. It is especially useful for identifying repeated themes and public priorities.

At the same time, the survey is not a statistically controlled sample. It may over-represent residents who are highly engaged, strongly supportive, strongly concerned, or more comfortable completing an online form. It also captures views at an early exploration stage, before detailed technical information has been provided. For these reasons, the results are best understood as a strong first-stage signal rather than a final mandate.

2. Overall Support for Continued Exploration

Of the 65 respondents who answered the main support question, 51 selected Yes (78%), 5 selected No (8%), 2 were unsure (3%), and 7 said they need more information (11%).

This is a strong endorsement of continuing to explore the idea. However, the question asked about continued exploration, not about submitting an application or creating a community forest. The appropriate interpretation is that most respondents support further investigation and community discussion, not necessarily immediate implementation.

Response	Count	Percentage of answered responses
Yes	51	78%
No	5	8%
Unsure	2	3%
I need more information	7	11%

3. Most Valued Potential Benefits

The perceived benefits show that respondents are not primarily motivated by revenue. The strongest benefits relate to community protection, environmental stewardship, and local influence over forest management.

Potential benefit	Selections	Share of all benefit selections
Wildfire risk reduction	42	23%
Local jobs and contracts	18	10%
Community revenue	15	8%
Local involvement in forest management	30	16%
Watershed protection	38	21%
Wildlife and habitat protection	30	16%
Recreation and trail access	7	4%
Other typed responses	5	3%

Wildfire risk reduction and watershed protection are the leading benefits. Local involvement and wildlife/habitat protection also rank strongly, while local jobs, community revenue, and recreation are secondary. This suggests that public support is likely strongest if the project is framed around resilience, watershed protection, and stewardship rather than revenue generation.

4. Main Concerns to Address

The top concerns largely mirror the top benefits, which is important. Residents see wildfire and watersheds as reasons to explore a community forest, but also as risks that must be managed carefully.

Concern	Selections	Share of all concern selections
Amount or methods of timber harvesting	37	16%
Drinking water and watersheds	44	19%
Wildlife and habitat	34	15%
Wildfire risk	40	18%
Recreation and trails	16	7%
Financial risk to the Village	13	6%
Governance and accountability	26	12%
Effects on existing land users or tenure holders	9	4%
Other typed responses	7	3%

Drinking water and watersheds are the leading concern, followed closely by wildfire risk, timber harvesting methods, and wildlife/habitat. Governance and accountability also appear as a significant concern. These findings suggest that support could erode quickly if future plans appear to prioritize timber volume or revenue over water protection, ecological values, and transparent decision-making.

5. Information Needed Before Any Application

Respondents are asking for practical decision-making information rather than general promotional material. The strongest information needs relate to the management and harvesting approach, watershed/environmental information, and governance structure.

Information requested	Selections	Share of all information selections
Management and harvesting approach	49	23%
Business and financial analysis	25	12%
Watershed and environmental information	47	22%
Governance structure	37	17%
Risks and liabilities	26	12%
Indigenous engagement	24	11%
Other typed responses	6	3%

This indicates that residents want to understand what would actually change if the Village pursued a Community Forest Agreement: what areas may be managed, how harvesting would be conducted, what safeguards would apply, who would make decisions, and what risks or liabilities the Village would assume.

6. Key Themes from Written Responses

There were 34 typed responses to “What else should Council consider?” and 18 typed responses to “What questions do you have?” The written comments add nuance to the numeric results.

Theme	What respondents are saying
Governance and accountability	Questions about who makes decisions, what role Council would play, how accountability would work, and whether the Village should be a partner, facilitator, or operator.
Watershed and environmental protection	Repeated emphasis on drinking water, watersheds, old growth, wildlife, habitat, carbon, ecological forestry, and avoiding clearcutting.
Wildfire mitigation	Support for fire-smarting, fuel reduction, selective thinning, controlled burning, and clear explanation of where, when, why, and how mitigation would occur.
Regional impacts and relationships	Concerns about effects on Silverton, RDCK Area H, neighbouring watersheds, existing tenure holders, private landowners, and First Nations.
Financial risk and liability	Requests for financial analysis, tax implications, liabilities, and clarification of whether revenue objectives could create conflicts of interest.
Public engagement and transparency	Calls for public meetings, publication of survey results, timelines, future engagement, and opportunities for questions before any application is submitted.

The written comments show that skepticism is generally grounded in risk management rather than simple opposition to forest stewardship. Even critical comments often focus on ensuring that watersheds, governance, public process, and regional relationships are handled responsibly.

7. Interpretation: Conditional Support

The survey indicates meaningful support for continued exploration. However, the support is conditional and should be treated as permission to investigate further, not as authorization to proceed directly to an application. Several respondents explicitly asked for more information, and the information-request questions show that residents want a clearer understanding of management practices, governance, risks, and environmental safeguards.

The distinction matters politically and procedurally. Moving too quickly could undermine trust, particularly among residents who support exploration but expect another round of public information and discussion before Council makes a formal decision.

8. Governance Implications

Governance is likely to be one of the decisive issues in the next phase. Residents are asking not only what forest practices would be used, but who would decide, who would benefit, who would be accountable, and how conflicts of interest would be avoided.

- Council should clarify whether the Village would act as an applicant, partner, facilitator, shareholder, or operating manager.
- A governance model should include transparent reporting, community representation, conflict-of-interest safeguards, and clear separation between political oversight and operational forestry decisions.

- The governance discussion should address neighbouring communities and rights holders, especially Silverton, RDCK Area H, First Nations, private landowners, and existing tenure holders.

9. Public Engagement Implications

The next stage should be more deliberative than the initial survey. Respondents asked for meetings, timelines, public reporting, and more information before any application is submitted. A town-hall style format, supported by a written information bulletin, would directly respond to the feedback.

- Publish the survey results and explain how Council will use them.
- Hold at least one public information session before considering an application decision.
- Provide a plain-language overview of what a Community Forest Agreement is and what responsibilities it would create.
- Invite questions in advance and publish responses afterward to build public confidence.

10. Key Risks and Opportunities

Risk	Why it matters	Mitigation
Moving too quickly	The survey supports exploration, not immediate application.	Commit to another public information phase before any application decision.
Watershed concerns	Watersheds are both a top concern and a top desired benefit.	Make watershed protection a core objective and publish technical information.
Governance ambiguity	Unclear roles could reduce trust and fuel opposition.	Develop and publish a governance framework before proceeding.
Regional tension	Several comments raise concerns about Silverton, Area H, tenure holders, and neighbouring watersheds.	Engage affected communities and rights holders early.
Expectations gap	Residents may expect ecological restoration while a formal agreement may involve timber obligations.	Clearly explain AAC, harvesting obligations, and limits of local control.

The main opportunity is to build a community forest concept around wildfire resilience, watershed protection, local stewardship, and transparent governance. These themes have broad resonance across both supportive and cautious respondents.

11. Recommendations for Council

1. **Publish a Community Forest information bulletin before any application decision.** The bulletin should explain the proposed objectives, possible governance models, expected roles for the Village, watershed considerations, harvesting principles, financial implications, and risks/liabilities.
2. **Hold a public information session with a structured Q&A.** The session should present survey findings, explain what a Community Forest Agreement is, and allow residents to ask questions before Council considers next steps.
3. **Make wildfire resilience and watershed protection the core public objectives.** These are the strongest themes in both the benefits and concerns. Council should avoid framing the proposal primarily around revenue.
4. **Prepare a governance framework before proceeding further.** The framework should address decision-making authority, community representation, public reporting, conflict-of-interest management, and the role of professional forestry expertise.
5. **Conduct regional engagement beyond New Denver.** Engagement should include Silverton, RDCK Area H, First Nations, existing tenure holders, private landowners, and residents in potentially affected watersheds.
6. **Provide a financial and liability assessment.** Residents want to know whether the Village could face financial exposure, tax implications, administrative costs, or operational risk.

Overall Conclusion

The survey is a strong first-stage engagement result. In a community of about 590 residents, 66 responses represent substantial participation. The results show that residents generally support continued exploration of a Community Forest Agreement, especially when the idea is linked to wildfire resilience, watershed protection, habitat protection, and local stewardship.

However, the results also show that support is conditional. Residents want credible information, transparent governance, technical due diligence, and continued opportunities to participate before Council makes any application decision. Council can maintain public trust by treating this survey as a mandate for further investigation and engagement, not as a mandate for immediate implementation.