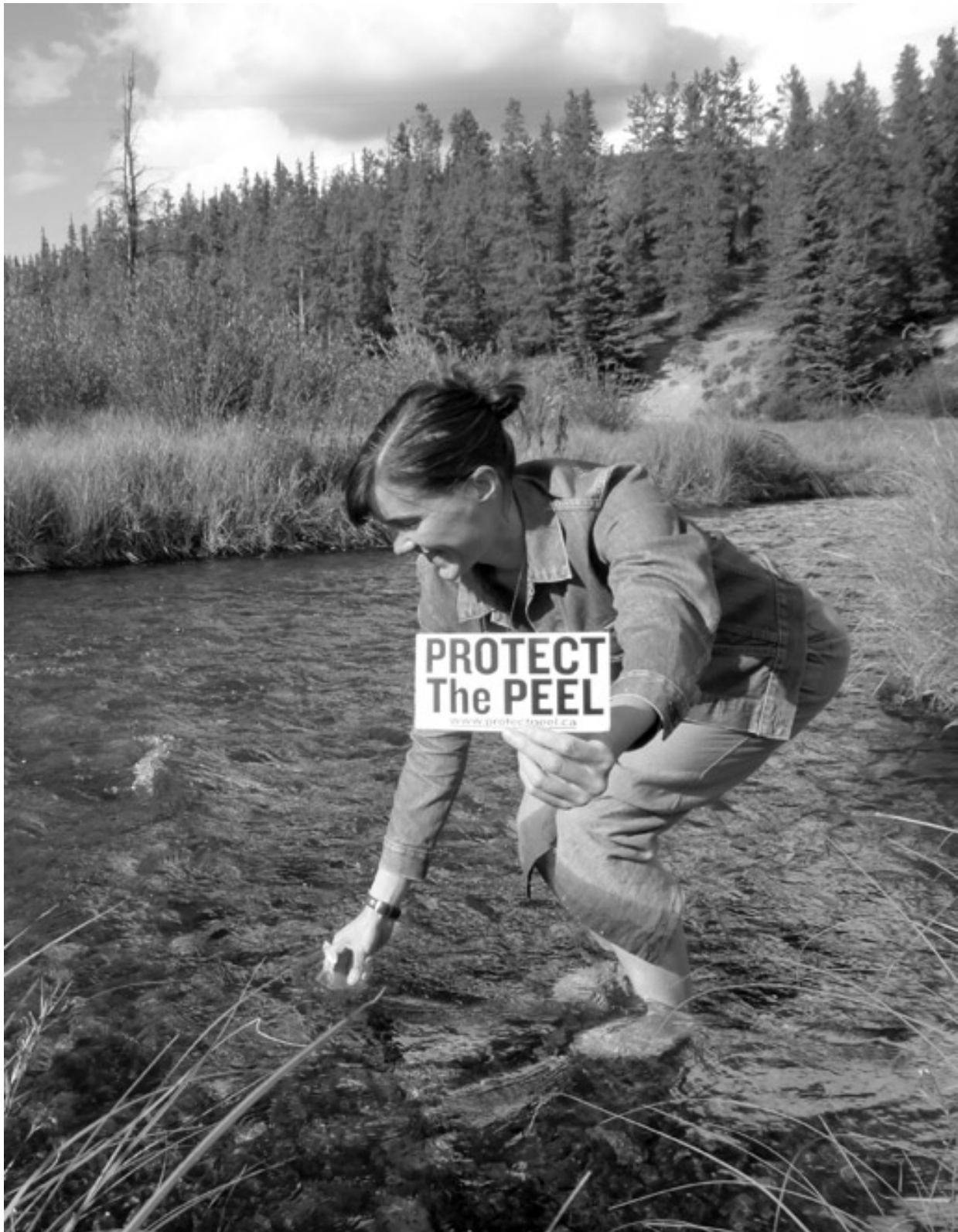


Walk Softly

Newsletter of the
Yukon Conservation Society
Autumn 2015



Inside: • Peel Appeal 101 • BioBlitz • Electric thoughts • Happy Hiking

Our 2015 Legal Intern says Goodbye

From a freakishly warm May, to a jam-packed appeal over the Peel Watershed, I have no idea how the summer flew by so quickly. My term as the legal intern at YCS has been incredibly rewarding, with diverse projects and an incredibly supportive work environment.

I spent much of the summer working under the brilliant mind of Lewis, our mining analyst here at YCS. We worked on researching and reporting on shortcomings of our current mining regime, and providing alternatives to the system.

Some Goliaths we tackled were the absurdity of the royalty regime in placer mining, as well as the lack of structure in the free entry system.

Keep your eyes peeled for the Yukon Mineral Development Strategy, which will be opened to the public later in the year for comments on how to improve our mining regime!

Along with mining work, I looked into the legal question of whether there is an absolute duty for a supplier to provide energy to large industries. This becomes important when lofty mining proposals are on the table – which will jack up the cost of public energy and demand infrastructural expansion to support private industry.

I also worked on catching myself up with the Peel Watershed trial, so that I could attend the appeal armed with knowledge. It was very cool to see Berger at work, and to see so many supporters packed into the courtroom to show their support.

During the weekends, I went to as many festivals and outdoor adventures as I could, and really appreciated getting more into rock climbing and alpine hiking this summer. I feel so blessed to have landed at YCS to reaffirm my interest in engaging in the law, and I hope to make Whitehorse my home once I graduate from law school at UVic. Until then, enjoy your winter, as I dream of returning North during the January rainstorms that the island promises.

Andie Britton-Foster

Battling invasive species with YISC

In July, a team of YCS volunteers took the first steps to tackle the invasive plants in our yard. We partnered with the Yukon Invasive Species Council to identify unwanted invaders like oxeye-daisy, clover, and common toadflax. It will be a long haul to eradicate these species and plant them with more welcome native species such as berry bushes. We welcome volunteers with green thumbs – or just shovels! – interested in helping with this venture next year. Thanks to Andrea Altherr and YISC for their help with the weed pull.

Invasive plants reduce biodiversity and can have severe impact on the value of farm lands. For more information about managing invasive species, visit www.yukoninvasives.com, or email info@yukoninvasives.com to set up a meeting with a plant specialist on your property.

The YCS weed-pulling team with six bags of unlucky weeds!



Andie Britton-Foster outside the YCS office with our owl.



LNG: Where do we go from here?

If you missed Anne's letter on LNG, recently published in the local papers, read on below!

Construction of Yukon Energy's \$43 million liquefied natural gas (LNG) storage and electricity generating facility is complete. The Yukon Conservation Society (YCS) maintains our position on this facility: that it was a bad decision and a missed opportunity that threatens to divert the Yukon away from a sustainable energy future.

The Yukon Conservation Society (YCS) opposed this project throughout the Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Board (YESAB) and the Yukon Utilities Board (YUB) review processes. YCS argued that the LNG facility is not appropriate for backup, will not complement efficiency and conservation programs or the addition of renewable energy, LNG requires fracking, and the facility and its operation are more expensive and greenhouse gas intensive than the simple diesel alternative.

YCS recognized that fossil fuel generation is required to provide effective power restoration and emergency backup. We argued that the more responsible investment would have been two new diesel generators located in Yukon Energy's existing diesel plant.

If our government and public utility had made the sensible diesel choice, we would have had at least a \$20 million balance to take critical actions for energy security and sustainability: investments in more demand side management (energy conservation and efficiency) and load management to reduce and shift our winter peaks, and more renewable energy to meet growing demand and electrify currently fossil-fueled sectors like space heating and transportation.

But we're stuck with the LNG facility now. The political agenda that needed the LNG facility to move forward was a slow burn that could not be extinguished by reason and sound argument. The LNG plant will be used for backup when the (hydro) power is out for extended periods and when our electricity demand exceeds our renewable energy supply. If we connect a new mine to the grid, Yukon Energy is expected to burn natural gas in its LNG facility all the time unless renewable energy projects can be developed that compete with the displaced fuel cost of LNG – the new and unreasonable benchmark for proposed energy projects to meet the YUB's narrow criteria for approval.

The LNG fuel is trucked from BC's lower mainland with gas sourced from northern BC's fracking fields. Because we know the devastating environmental impacts of natural gas extraction and because we know the climate impacts of methane (a greenhouse gas 86 times more potent than CO₂), we need to ensure the LNG facility does not become the default baseload energy option regardless of the end use of that electricity.

It is also imperative that the LNG facility does not become fuel storage for natural gas distribution in the territory, or the justification to develop a fracking industry in the Yukon, or the reason that the Yukon does not or cannot invest in renewable energy projects.

Notwithstanding the LNG facility, YCS has hope for a sustainable energy future. We are confident there are smarter ways to strengthen our grid and meet our energy needs that reduce the environmental and climate harms resulting from our energy use, not make them worse.



To that end, YCS is working with energy stakeholders to find common ground and identify diverse and complementary renewable energy options that maximize local economic development opportunities without associated environmental sacrifices.

YCS looks forward to hosting a hydro alternatives workshop at the end of September to showcase responsibly developed hydroelectricity projects in our region, and share information about pumped hydro and seasonal storage potential that will support other renewable energy sources like wind and solar to provide firm energy in winter when we need it most.

We urge collaboration between governments, utilities, the regulator, energy stakeholders and the public to ensure that the LNG facility does not become the reason we missed out on a future of smart, responsible renewable energy.

*Anne Middler,
Energy Analyst*

Walk Softly

is published by the Yukon Conservation Society for members and subscribers. Memberships and information about the Society can be obtained by contacting the YCS office.

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Editorial

by Christina Macdonald

Letter from Cape Breton

I'm currently visiting my parents who live on the northern tip of Cape Breton Island. 7000km across the country you'd think I'd be far removed from Yukon talk – wrong. On the eve of a federal election it's good to be reminded of the connections across our country and how the Yukon affects and is affected by events outside the territory's borders.

Before I had even put my bags down, my dad triumphantly produced a 1973 record he'd found in the basement (that my grandpa must have bought) called "Yukon & Other Songs of the Klondike". Ballads referring to 'sourdoughs' and 'OP rum at Rendezvous' were soon ringing out through the house.

Saturday morning at the Cape North Farmers' Market I started chatting with a fisherman to find he'd just returned from Whitehorse where he'd attended a reunion of Faro Mine workers. He and his son had worked in the mine in the late 70s. While gently poking fun at my work as a conservationist, he shook his head in dismay at the \$1 billion dollars (and counting) price tag on the mine cleanup measures.

Later that week at a BBQ hosted by friends of my parents, I struck up a conversation with a 'come-from-away' who lives most of the year in North Carolina. When I mentioned I lived in the Yukon, he told me about a National Geographic article he'd read that reflected on the issue of balancing protection and development in the Canadian north. This was the article that was published in 2014, written by Tom Clynes, about the Peel Watershed and the court case.

Since the piece by Tom Clynes was published, the Yukon government has appealed the Yukon Supreme Court ruling and the case was just heard at the Yukon Court of Appeal on August 20 and 21.

To learn of the far reach of this case (thank you journalists!) and the interest it holds for people who don't live in the Yukon is always revitalizing. It's a reminder that people from all over are watching and care about what is at stake. How the courts interpret and enforce the land use planning process laid out in the Yukon First Nations Final Agreements will have implications for the Peel Watershed, the rest of the Yukon (only one land use plan has been successfully completed to date), and our nation.

Relevant here is John Ralston Saul's reflection on the relationship between Canadian Aboriginal people, non-Aboriginal people and the federal government is his 2014 work *The Comeback*. The title refers to Saul's conviction that Aboriginal people are returning to "a position of power, influence and civilizational creativity in the territory we call Canada."

Saul questions whether we continue to perpetuate the colonial mentality that treats the "commodities belt" – the northern two-thirds of Canada – as a place from which wealth can be extracted, or whether we change the narrative and embrace the north as an integral part of Canada where people live.

First Nations Final Agreements and the land-use planning process contained within allow all affected parties – First Nations governments, communities and Yukon government – to work together to shape how this land we love is used. How it is protected, developed and sustained. The reconciliation this process fosters is vital to respect, nurture and to our future as Canadians.

Saul concludes *The Comeback* with the following: "if we start down a road of shared reconciliation and restitution, we will have taken a crucial step in building a sense of ourselves and the country. It is a matter of being true to where we are, to what is fair and possible here. That consciousness, that sense of ourselves, will solidify our ability to live together and to do so in an atmosphere of justice."

From the Yukon to Cape Breton Island, people get this. That's a great way to kick off any vacation!

Ted Parnell Scholarship Awarded to Jared Gonet

We're delighted to announce that the 2015 Ted Parnell Scholarship has been awarded to Jared Gonet. The Ted Parnell Scholarship Fund was established to honour the life and work of Ted Parnell (1947–1981). Ted was a sensitive and committed individual who contributed greatly to conservation and environmental interest in the Yukon. Ted's life and work reflected his keen environmental values and love of the north and its people. These qualities are shared by this year's scholarship winner. We are proud to support Jared's studies and looking forward to his continued contributions to the environment and people of the Yukon.

From Jared: I'm a fourth year Bachelors of Environmental Science student at the Yukon College. I volunteer at Copper Ridge Place and Yukon Learn in my spare time, and am a huge fan of running for the sake of running. I've spent the summer researching boreal caribou and indigenous knowledge/names of birds. As school starts up again I intend to continue working on gathering indigenous knowledge of birds and compiling a database on the subject. Within the Yukon we have a unique opportunity to protect ecosystems that are largely intact. In this we are poised to be world leaders, and a world refugia for species as the climate changes. It is my goal to be part the creation of this refugia.

Thank you to the Ted Parnell Scholarship Committee members and all this year's applicants. Judging by the quality of the applications, the Yukon's environmental future is in good hands!



Jared Gonet and YCS Executive Director Christina Macdonald.

Generating electricity on the grid – a year of experience

About a year ago you may have seen a story describing the planning and installation of our 5 kW roof-top solar photovoltaic (PV) system. We celebrated our first full operating year on August 20 and are excited to share the preliminary results with you. Foremost among these is that during its first year the solar system produced 5,183 kWh, exceeding the target of 4,977 kWh.

Other statistical highlights of the year are as follows:

- Peak power production 4.99 kW (June 5, 2015)
- Most energy in one day 38.82 kWh (June 9, 2015)
- Least energy in one day 0.000 kWh (November 26, 2014)
- Most energy in one week 239 kWh (May 10 – 16, 2015)
- Least energy in one week 1.03 kWh (November 16 – 22, 2014)
- Most energy in one month 906 kWh (May 2015)
- Least energy in one month 24.3 kWh (December 2014)

However, the most surprising statistic for the year for me was that over 70% of the energy generated by our system was “exported” to the grid! Even during the darkest period of the year we had weekly exports of up to 20%. During the high early summer production period, exports exceeded 80%. Since we only assumed a 50% export rate, this increased export has reduced the simple payback period from 21 years to about 19 years (after taking into account the Good Energy Rebate – read on). Our original decision to proceed was based on a 25 year payback.

Maissan solar system with snow.

Some people have expressed surprise at the level of exports but I tell them that we are energy conscious empty-nesters. Over the last several years our monthly average energy consumption has been dropping about 20 kWh per month each year. This is mostly due to technology improvements – for example, when appliances are replaced, we select Energy Star whenever possible. Over the past year we have used an average of less than 500 kWh per month for the first time (and yes, this does include the solar production we use ourselves).

Did we learn anything of interest during this first year? Yes, we sure did and none more important than that the snow does not easily slide off the solar modules even at a 50° tilt (see photo of March 9 below). To get a reasonable amount of winter production I had to climb a ladder to the roof and sweep the snow off the modules after significant snow falls. While I am able to do that right now, I know that I will not always be able to, so this issue is being tackled. If I did not, I would have to accept that there would be no winter production, something I am not keen to do since that is when it is most needed to displace fossil fuel generation.

So, armed with a portion of the unanticipated but much appreciated 20% rebate for the material cost of our system (thank you Energy Solutions Centre and Good Energy Rebate), I set about to develop a system that would allow one person (me for the time being) to change the tilt of the solar system two times a year. The plan is to change the tilt to a higher angle (60° to 70°) for the winter to reduce snow shading by encouraging the snow to slide off easier and by catching the low sun more directly. Then the tilt will be changed to a lower angle (30°) for the rest of the year to maximize power production during the high sun and snow-free period.

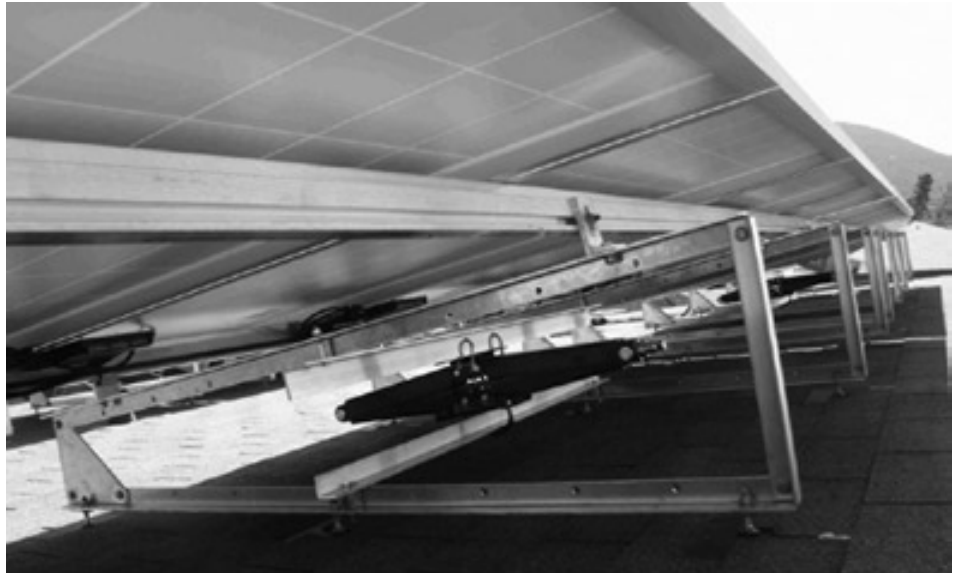
What makes my system suitable for tilt adjustment is that when it was installed we used an adjustable tilt mounting system rather than a flush mounting system which cannot be adjusted. There was extra cost involved for this but we did want to maximize winter power production. I have developed an adjustment system and it has been mostly installed (only a bit more to go). The system involves the use of scissor jacks such as those used for levelling RVs. This is a manual system but similar electrical systems would have been much more expensive.



I will need to calculate new production targets based on different tilt angles in summer and winter. The original target was set taking into account the tilt angles, the direction it is facing, and the shading from surrounding houses, but it assumed the same tilt angles throughout the year. And it did not take into account any losses due to snow cover.

We will let you know next year how things have gone through the 2015-2016 winter!

John Maissan



Scissor jacks installed.

YCS Hydro Alternatives Workshop

The Yukon Conservation Society is hosting a full-day workshop of learning and discussions about the role smart hydroelectricity projects can play in a sustainable energy future for the Yukon.

The Taku River Tlingit Corporations and First Nation will present about its Atlin Hydro project. Alaska Power and Telephone will present about its Low-Impact Hydro Institute-certified Goat Lake hydro project near Skagway.

Yukon Energy Corporation will present about potential applications of hydro pumped storage projects for our independent electricity grid, and John Maissan will discuss highlights from his study looking at pumped/seasonal storage hydro potential along a Yukon transmission corridor.

The Wildlife Conservation Society will share highlights from its recent study about environmental impacts of traditional hydroelectric projects, and we will hear stories from communities about changes to the environment as a result of the construction of the Yukon's legacy hydro assets (Whitehorse Rapids, Mayo, and Aishihik).

We look forward to learning about how smart hydro projects can complement other renewables, provide community economic development opportunities and displace our use of fossil fuels for our energy needs in the Yukon.

The workshop is by invitation only; resources and summaries will be shared after the event. There may be spots available to attend. For more information, please contact Anne Middler, YCS Energy Analyst at 668-5678 or ycsenergycoordinator@gmail.com.

**Town Hall room, Gold Rush Inn
Wednesday, September 30, 2015
8:30am to 4:30pm**



hydro



solar



wind

Peel Appeal 101

On August 20 and 21 the Peel Watershed case was heard at the Yukon Court of Appeal in Whitehorse. Both courtrooms were packed and hundreds of people attended the associated Water Ceremony and BBQ at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre.

At this hearing, Yukon government's legal counsel argued that the ruling from the Yukon Supreme Court be set aside. The Yukon Supreme Court ruling quashes government's unilaterally developed plan and requires government to properly re-conduct final consultations on the Commission's plan. Further, government is constrained from consulting on issues of access and balance of land protected.

The respondents (Yukon Conservation Society, CPAWS-Yukon, the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation) argued that the Yukon Court of Appeal uphold the ruling.

The Gwich'in Tribal Council intervened in support of the respondents.

The three judges overseeing the Appeal reserved their judgement at the time of the hearing; no date has been set for the release of their judgement, although we are hopeful it will be released by the end of this year.

Yukon government's Appeal factum

Not surprisingly, Yukon government (Yukon) argues it was fully entitled to propose the modifications that it did (i.e. the new plan government produced behind closed doors) and that it was entitled to modify the commission's plans following final consultations – that it has “final authority over its land”. Yukon argues that the decision of the Yukon Supreme Court judge should be set aside, or if there are further consultations, Yukon's concerns should be fully addressed (i.e. no constraints against talking about access and balance of land protected).

More specifically, Yukon argues that “the trial judge erred in his interpretation and application of the Final Agreements” by:

- Requiring proposed modifications to the Commission's Recommended Plan to be unreasonably specific. Yukon argues the Final Agreements do not require proposed modifications to be of a certain level of detail beyond being understood by the planning commission.
- Concluding Yukon's final modifications did not flow from its first and second modifications (regarding access and balance of land protected). Yukon argues they do.
- Treating proposed modifications in respect of the Recommended Plan as approval of that plan. Yukon argues that their modifications were more akin to a rejection of the plan than an approval of the plan.
- Concluding that modifications made in respect of the Final Recommended Plan must be the same as those proposed for a Recommended Plan. Yukon argues that the Yukon Supreme Court decision, in limiting the range of modifications open to Yukon, limits mutual consent and runs counter to the Final Agreements' goal of reconciliation.
- Concluding that the Final Agreements required Yukon to do more to fulfill consultation obligations. Yukon argues that they did indeed satisfy each element of their duty to consult at the Recommended Plan and Final Recommended Plan stage.

It is also argued in the factum that the trial judge erred “by remitting the matter to a stage at which Yukon could no longer propose or consult on its desired modifications”. Yukon argues the matter should be remitted to the stage in the planning process at which the proposed modifications were made (prior to final consultations – the stage of the planning process to which the Yukon Supreme Court decision remits the matter).

Respondent's Appeal factum

Thomas Berger's response on our behalfs argues that the Yukon Supreme Court decision should be upheld and that Yukon's appeal should be dismissed. Berger makes a number of key points, supported by case law, in response to Yukon's factum:

- Berger argues that because the Yukon elected to propose modifications and not reject the Recommended Plan, the process must proceed on consideration of these modifications, rejection is no longer an option; Yukon government cannot range across the whole spectrum of choices a second time. Further, if Yukon is not confined to its previously proposed modifications, then there is no limit to the modifications it could introduce at the end of the process. This would render wholly meaningless the process of dialogue and consultation.
- Regarding Yukon's argument about the specificity of modifications, the Final Agreements provide that modifications must be "supported by written reasons" and, Berger points out, none were supplied by Yukon for the modifications regarding access and balance. Rather, they were merely expressions of Yukon's preferences. If vague preferences qualify as proposed modifications then this, again, would result in a meaningless dialogue as Yukon could make any changes it wanted to the Final Recommended Plan at any stage in the process.
- Regarding Yukon's argument about remitting the matter to the point when the proposed modifications were made, Berger argues that the courts are bound to uphold the proceedings insofar as they have been lawfully conducted; it was only at the Final Consultation stage that Yukon went off the rails so to remit the matter to an earlier point would mean repeating stages of the process already lawfully conducted, which would be inconsistent with the honour of the Crown.

In his usual eloquent manner, Mr. Berger concludes with the following:

"143. Yukon was at pains to flout the approval process from the time it received the Commission's Final Recommended Plan in July 2011.

144. To sum up, to the point of final consultation, the Four First Nations and Yukon, and the people in the affected communities, had proceeded in good faith. However, Yukon thereafter, in the face of repeated objections from the First Nations, ignored the approval process. The premier's letter, the manner in which final consultation was carried out, the purported designation of the Government approved plan as the 'approved plan' and the steadfast refusal to consider the obvious meaning of s.11.6.3.2, were not only in breach of Final Agreements, but also inconsistent with the honour of the Crown."



For more information about the legal arguments as well as wonderful photos and audio podcasts from the Appeal hearing and public events, please see protectpeel.ca.

Thank you for your support!

Christina Macdonald



Christina Macdonald, our Executive Director, collecting water from McIntyre Creek for the water ceremony

BioBlitz in McIntyre Creek!

The first annual BioBlitz in the McIntyre Creek Park hosted by the Yukon Conservation Society occurred over the weekend of July 4th and 5th. The intent of this weekend was to collect as much biological information as conceivably possible in this area of McIntyre Creek in just two days! As many of you know, the McIntyre Creek Park area has been of particular interest to both Planners with the City of Whitehorse and to community groups alike. The intent of the BioBlitz was to collect biological data from this particular area, to help the City in their on-going land use planning throughout the area.

Budding biologists, young and young-at-heart, joined a team of professional biologists traipsing around the forests, wetlands and streams of the McIntyre Creek Park. Along the way, groups observed, collected, recorded and caught over 80 different species of birds, plants, land insects, fish, mammals and stream invertebrates.

The BioBlitz event was structured to cover one of each type of ecosystem and habitat found in the Middle McIntyre Creek area. Many people don't realize, but the larger City of Whitehorse has been delineated into various habitat and ecosystem types. Many of these are represented in the Middle McIntyre Creek Park area... and the whole idea was to verify the information on the area and begin to collect more specific data for each of these ecosystem types. The existing information is high-level, often identifying the main tree species in an area, and sometimes just the habitat structure. But it is often the smaller details that shed light on the uniqueness of an area... how wildlife use the area, and the microhabitats that offer homes to unique plant, bug and bird species.

While this event was geared towards including folks who didn't know the difference between a bunchberry and a bluebird, the overall structure of the weekend allowed for all inventories and surveys to follow the standardized methods of data collection appropriate for each taxa. This way, the event itself will be repeatable in subsequent years, and the data collected from each year will be comparable. This data will be entered into a larger database to track species composition, changes and additions from year to year in the Middle McIntyre Creek area.

The bird group was led by the ever enthusiastic ornithologist Hillary Cooke from the Wildlife Society (Yukon). Participants benefited from Hillary's knowledge on how to identify bird species by both sight and sound. This group covered pine forests, grasslands, marshes, wetlands, spruce groves and aspen copses, recording every bird species and identifying if each bird was male or female, adult or juvenile. Some of the most notable species included alder flycatchers, belted kingfishers, violet-green swallows, bank swallows, and bald eagles.

The plant group was led by naturalist Mary Whitley, as they carried out numerous vegetation plots at each of the stations. Mary and students with the Yukon Conservation Youth Corps peered through the layers of trembling aspen leaves and pine needles, prickly rose and kinnikinnick, for mosses and lichens, wildflowers and grasses... and identified everything they could! We were fortunate to also have the expertise of Yukon Government biologist Bruce Bennett to help identify things we didn't know.

There were not one, but TWO groups focusing on invertebrates... One group focused on all the bugs on land, led by infamous entomologist Cris Guppy, who boasts one of Canada's largest private butterfly collections! The other group waded right in to capture all the invertebrates found in stream and wetland waters, led by benthic biologist Bonnie Burns. Did you know that most of the bugs we see on land start their lives in the water? If you were able to join both the land and the stream groups on this weekend, you would have seen the larvae of many of the land insects that we see more frequently! Caddisfly larvae and adults, mayfly larvae and adults, mosquito larvae and adults... and so many more!

The group that headed out to track mammals in this area was led by wildlife biologist Heidi Schindler and René Rivard. This group used tracks, scat, hair, trails, middens, and browse to identify potential mammal species that use the Park. Red squirrels, beavers, shrews, foxes, deer, Arctic ground squirrels, and coyotes, all had left a sign that they were around. Even a few piles of moose pellets were found! With such diverse habitats, the Park is a haven for many species, and if you are lucky and keep a careful eye out, you might just see one of these creatures for yourself.





Up and down the McIntyre Creek, fisheries biologist Paul Sparling and a crew of eager fish-finders trapped and netted Chinook salmon parr, grayling fry, and slimy sculpin. The quiet waters throughout McIntyre Creek provide great rearing habitats for these species, when the fish are too small to handle the rapids of the creek in other areas. Interestingly, Paul and his crew found both Chinook who have escaped from the hatchery, as well as locally-born Chinook! This can be distinguished by the presence of adipose fins on the naturalized fish, which is lacking in those born in a hatchery.

We hope that this event is just the first of many, not just in the McIntyre Creek Park, but in the other city parks around Whitehorse. The next step is to consolidate all the data into one database that can be added to in future years. We will then be generating a biological report providing context for all the data. The hope is that the level of detail and the information collected will be useful for the City of Whitehorse in various planning projects in the future. Every little bit helps!

Keep an eye on the YCS website and newsletters for information about next summer's 2nd Annual McIntyre Creek BioBlitz! A great event for all ages and all knowledge-levels. See you then!

*Alexandra de Jong Westman, MSc,
RPBio.
Principal Biologist, Elknwillow
Environmental Consulting
BioBlitz Coordinator for the Yukon
Conservation Society*

The conservation airforce is now flying

It has been difficult to convey the impacts mining has on the land. One can attempt to describe how big a mound of waste rock is, or how a tailings pile can stretch for hundreds of metres, but the effort usually fails. The orange colour of a water settling pond is sometimes difficult to express in words. Of course, it is often said that a picture is worth a thousand words. If that is the case, imagine what a video is worth?

Now one can ponder these thoughts while looking at aerial video footage of mine waste rock piles, tailings mounds and orange-coloured settling ponds right on the Yukon Conservation Society website.

Of course, there is also positive video footage. Be sure to check out the short film about all the benefits that McIntyre Creek Park brings to Whitehorse. It too features some aerial video footage.

This is all thanks to the dedication and contributions of Gerry Whitley, a long-time YCS supporter and pilot. In addition, he has become something of a Skookum video editor and aerial photographer.

A big thank you also to the LightHawk Organization, an NGO dedicated to bringing pilots and environmental groups together. To learn more about them visit www.lighthawk.org.

To see the various videos check out the Yukon Conservation Society website. Click on the Mining link to see the various mining videos, and the Energy link to see some of the footage of the activity up at Eagle Plain. The McIntyre Creek Park short film is on the Sustainable Communities page.

If you have film footage or photographs of items you think might be of interest to the Yukon Conservation Society, please contact us at 668-5678 or yvspipe@ycs.yk.ca.

Lewis Rifkind



Joining Together to Protect the Peel

Thank you for joining us on August 20 and 21 to protect the Peel Watershed.

As the fight to protect the Peel continued in the Court of Appeal this summer, we joined forces with the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, the Gwich'in Tribal Council, CPAWS Yukon, and many Yukoners to attest to the importance of the Peel Watershed and all that it stands for.

Both days of the Appeal saw the courtrooms packed with observers, while many other supporters followed the proceedings online.

At noon on Thursday, many of you joined us for a community Water Ceremony led by elders from the four First Nations, who reminded us that the rain was something to be thankful for. 100 vials of water, collected from precious places throughout the Yukon, were mingled in a solemn ceremony on the steps of the Yukon Law Courts.

Later that evening, we gathered at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre, where the waters were poured into the Yukon River to symbolize the importance of water to the Peel Watershed and all of the Yukon.

This gathering affirmed the strength and solidarity that have grown through years of fighting to protect the Peel.

Hearing the passionate words and songs of the youth, elders, and others who are committed to protecting this watershed for future generations, while sharing good food and a common cause, made for an unforgettable evening.

Now, we wait and prepare for the ruling from the Yukon Court of Appeal.

Visit the YCS website to watch the beautiful video about the water ceremony and appeal – with thanks to filmmaker Marty O'Brien. Don't forget that you can always stop by the YCS office for free Protect the Peel stickers or to find out more about the campaign! Information can also be found at protectpeel.ca.



Thank you to the following people and places for helping with the events around the Peel Appeal:

- The Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre
- The Yukon Law Courts and security team
 - The Old Fire Hall
 - The Claim
 - Icy Waters
- Marsh Lake Tents and Events
 - Zero Waste Yukon, Raven Recycling, and Ben Derochie
 - Melissa Atkinson
- Luann Baker-Johnson
 - Jona Barr
- Michael Bendall
- Linda Cameron
- David Hedman
 - Peter Heebink
 - Erica Heuer
- Sandy Johnston
 - Shauna Jones
 - Tyler Kuhn
 - Joel Luet
- Karen McKenna
 - Leet Mueller
 - Marty O'Brien
 - Jody Overduin
 - Jill Pangman
 - Jannik Schou
- Denise Schwerzmann
 - Shelagh Smith
 - Troy Suzuki
 - Kelly Taylor
 - Dana Tizya-Tramm
- Jacqueline Vigneux and friend
 - Kate White
 - Nate Wood

Thank you to everyone who lent a hand (or two) to the Unity Wall.

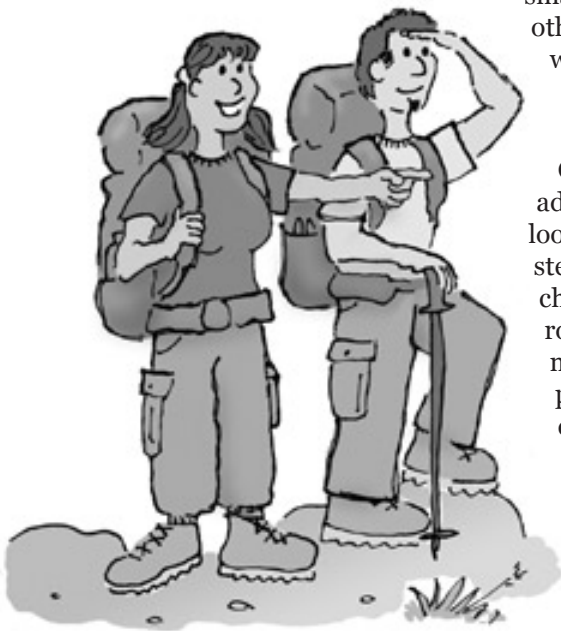
Cherishing hiking memories

Summer is the easiest season to explore the Yukon – the longer, warmer days just make me want to go outside to enjoy the natural beauty our territory has to offer. In summer I love to explore the Yukon on my mountain bike and, for longer trips, by backpacking.

Just recently a couple of friends and I set out for a week to hike in an area close to home: the mountains west of Annie Lake Road. We'd all been there for day hikes at various times, and felt that the impressive mountains and alpine plateaus had more than enough to offer for a multi-day backpacking adventure.

Our float plane took off on a sunny August afternoon, and landed at a rainy Primrose Lake beach. While the pilot took off searching for more sun, we put on our rain gear and started our climb up from the lake.

The first day of any trip I take is filled with anticipation, excitement, some worries about the amount of food I fit in my bear canister, and strong legs. It took us only a few hours to hike into the sub-alpine where we set up camp.



For the next two and a half days we hiked on high alpine plateaus, with most amazing views on rugged peaks, ice fields, and small creeks that would soon turn into rivers. We met many sheep, even more caribou, and a couple of bears. Later, when we were hiking in the river valley, we came upon many wolf tracks as well as moose prints.

Another experience that immensely impressed me was the extreme silence. The ground squirrels kept quiet, there was no wind for the first couple of days, the birds didn't sing their songs, and we didn't hear any planes until the last day of the hike. The peace of this welcome silence during our time in the mountains will stay with me forever.

However, the one thing that I'll never forget, are the many times this hike reminded me of the places of my childhood vacations. Growing up in The Netherlands, you can safely say that I didn't spend much time in the mountains, or in very quiet areas.

Our summer vacations were spent at the beaches and dunes of the North Sea. There, my sisters and I spent our days collecting crabs, starfish, small sea snails, seaweed, and any other living thing we could find. We walked the dunes admiring the tall grasses, and – a highlight – the occasional bunny.

On day two of our six-day hiking adventure, it struck me that while looking down at my feet with every step, I was reminded of these childhood adventures. The many rocks covered in lichen reminded me of the storm breaker rock piers covered in seaweed and sea creatures where we found most of the crabs. Memories of barefoot rock-hopping in search of starfish came back when I carefully stepped my hiking boots on our way up the steepest climb of the week.

Enjoying my time on the huge alpine plateau, I recognized something in the heather and purple lichen surrounding my feet. Similar plants grow in the fairly dry dunes and on the 'heide' (heath regions) in various part of my home country. The shades of purple, white and green brought me back to my pre-teen years. Even the fact that we could see countless mountains near and far all around us, reminded me of the times I stared at the North Sea imagining that I could see Great Britain on the other side. And the strong wind that almost blew me off my feet one day, brought me back to the times I walked the stormy, rainy beaches of The Netherlands with my dad - not a soul in sight.

These bridges between the Yukon mountains and The Netherlands came as a surprise to me. They also gave me a new appreciation of a nature that is smaller than the 'larger than life' Yukon. Living in the Yukon sometimes makes me – arrogantly – belittle the small, crowded national parks of The Netherlands.

Our hike in the always inspiring mountains of the Yukon brought me back home again, and made me realize that my childhood experiences in the small natural spaces of my home country where I learned to value nature, are a necessary predecessor for the current deep love for my new home territory's beauty. I'll definitely take this with me on my next visit to nature in The Netherlands.

Judith van Gulick

Another great trail guiding season

As the days get crisper and colder, another great season of interpretive programming in Miles Canyon has drawn to a close.

Despite the unpredictable weather this summer, our programs attracted a wide diversity of visitors and locals alike to explore Miles Canyon with YCS. The annual interpretive hikes program provided local residents and visiting tourists with free guided hikes through Miles Canyon to Canyon City.

On the two-hour tours, our interpretive guides discussed topics such as the local flora and fauna, gold rush history, First Nations history, geology, Beringia and the ice ages. Our hikes ran at 10am and 2pm each day, five days a week, from June 13th through August 22nd. Guides were also available for Virtual

Tours offered near the Robert Lowe Suspension Bridge, where our interpreters shared information and images with people who were unable to come on the trails or arrived between hiking times.

Over the summer, more than 600 people joined us for a hike in Miles Canyon – not only local Yukoners but also visitors from the rest of Canada, the USA, and countries as far afield as Australia, Germany, Spain, and Japan.

We hosted eleven themed hikes, with guest speakers sharing their expertise on everything from Beringia to Northern Adaptations.

We also ran a two-day live art creation event at Miles Canyon with a follow-up exhibition at Baked Café, attracting nearly 300 art and nature lovers to see the area in a new creative light. We included musicians and mixed-media artists in this event for the first time this summer, a well-received development.

Finally, our Kids' Ed-Ventures programming, for kids ages 5-12, reached more than 200 children over the course of the summer through daycares, camps and family attendance.

Thank you to our stellar trail guiding team of Shawna Smith (coordinator), Jon Koltun and Clara Reid (trail guides), plus junior trail guide Emily, who all brought fresh ideas and great expertise to their roles.

We're excited about continuing to develop new and engaging ways for locals, visitors, and youth to explore nature and history in Miles Canyon in the year to come. Thank you for attending this summer's events – and stay tuned for 2016!

We're always happy to hear great feedback from our hikers:

"Wonderful tour! Well informed and humorous guides!"

"Excellent! We are Yukoners and learned all sorts of things we didn't know. So glad we finally did the hike!"

Clara and Jon teach hikers about Beringia during the hike.





Our trail guides Clara, Jon, and junior trail guide Emily.

With thanks to...

Our Guest Speakers

Andrea Altherr
Sylvie Binette
Shailyn Drukis
Greg Hare
David Jennings
Sarah Laxton
Maria Leung
Carrie McClelland
David Neufeld
Corin Noble
Beringia Centre
MacBride Museum
Transportation Museum

Our Funders

Yukon Government
Government of Canada

For Design Services

Tanya Handley
Jodie Thomson
Sally Wright

Our Interpretive Trainers

Bruce Bennett
Clare Daitch
Shyloh van Delft
Markie-May Gray Bailie
Greg Hare
Sarah Laxton
Brent Liddle
Briana Mackay
Mary Whitley
Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre staff

For Created at the Canyon

Baked Café and staff
Deanna Bailey
Lianne Cranfield
Kelsey Eliasson
Leslie Leong
Jordon Lindoff
Steve Slade
Doug Kerley
Joslyn Kilborn



Thank you for giving bats a home!

YCS would like to thank Yukon Women in Trades and Technology (YWITT) and the Youth Achievement Centre (YAC) for donating seven bat houses to YCS.

YWITT partnered with the Youth Achievement Centre (YAC) to build the residential bat nurseries as a demonstration project at the Territorial Skills completion April 16, 2015 in Whitehorse.

Dave McDougall from YAC solicited donated materials from both Kilrich Building Supplies and Northerm Windows and he and a student at YAC pre-cut and pre-stained lumber and made kits to be assembled on-site.

They also worked with YWITT's volunteer carpenters on the day of the Skills competition to help students assemble the houses.

Students from Teslin assembled one house to take for their community and another will be located at the YAC cabin on Annie Lake.

All of the bat houses donated to YCS were quickly snapped up by people looking to give our northern bats a cozy home!

If you want to build your own bat home, or just learn more about Yukon bats, visit <http://www.env.gov.yk.ca/animals-habitat/mammals/bat.php>.



Getting the paperwork out of the way

It has become apparent that there is a downturn in the Yukon's mining activity. One of the ways this can be measured is by how busy the local environmental assessors are.

The number of hardrock mining exploration applications going through the Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Board (YESAB) has dropped to barely one a month.

Compare this current small number of assessments with a few years ago when dozens of mining project applications a month would be churning through the environmental assessment process.

Hard rock is when the metal, be it a base one such as copper or something a bit more valuable like gold, is part of an ore body which requires the ore to be crushed and processed to extract the metal.

This slowdown is due to the collapse in commodity prices. Not only does it show up in a lack of exploration in the Yukon, it shows up in the number of operating mines.

There is only one functioning hard rock mine left operating in the Yukon, the Minto Mine near Pelly Crossing.

The operations at Keno and Wolverine have stopped, the latter in a somewhat spectacular fiscal implosion.

But that does not mean mining and mining related activity has halted altogether in the Yukon.

The placer operations continue apace, with the price of gold somewhat stable and the cost of diesel relatively low. Placer is when the gold nuggets and flakes are loose in the gravel, and have to be panned or sluiced out using water.

But what is interesting is how some of the better organized hardrock operations are investing in getting their paperwork done.

For example, the Casino Mine project is fully immersed in the YESAB process. It's still in the Adequacy Review stage (at least at the time of writing this article).

That means that YESAB is not taking comments from the general public just yet, but all the proponents documents are available online for review. Go to the YESAB registry website (www.yesabregistry.ca) and look for project number 2014-0002 - Casino Mine Project.

And be sure to check out the Yukon Conservation Society mining page. We'll be posting information updates, pictures and videos as the assessment process continues. It's at <http://www.yukonconservation.org/mining.htm>.

Victoria Gold will probably have received its water license from the Yukon Water Board by the time this article is printed. It should be available on the Yukon Water Board website at www.yukonwaterboard.ca.

Another project Yukoners might want to keep an eye on is Selwyn Chihong Mining's Howard's Pass Access Road Upgrade Project. This project is just over the border in the North West Territories, and runs from the end of the Nahanni Range Road up to Howards Pass, that's about halfway to the North Canol Road.

It is being reviewed by the Mackenzie Valley Review board. The details are on their website at <http://www.reviewboard.ca/>. Look for project number EA-1516-01.

One thing that doesn't look like it's going anywhere fast is the Faro Mine reclamation project. To see some water results and rather disturbing video footage check out the YCS mining page yet again.

If you are interested in helping out on mining issues for YCS, such as participating in the various review processes, or have video or pictures of mining related issues in the Yukon that you would like to share with others, contact Lewis at yvspipe@ycs.yk.ca.

Lewis Rifkind



Personal Diary of a Zero Waste Lifestyle

Earlier this year I started working for Zero Waste Yukon. I advocate zero waste lifestyles and help educate the public on how to better reduce the amount of garbage we send to the landfill. However, working in a position where you are always focused on changing other people's behaviour makes you consider your own lifestyle. How could I advocate zero waste if I wasn't following my own recommendations?

I therefore decided I would personally try living a zero waste lifestyle and see how realistic it would be. I could still use anything I could recycle and compost, but I could not throw anything in the garbage. To add another challenge to this, I decided to live in an off-grid cabin this year, further influencing my desire to try this lifestyle since I have to transport all the waste I do produce back into town. Luckily my neighbour has a greenhouse and uses all of my compost, but it's still not fun to transport a car full of stinky garbage.

So after three months of living like this, what has it been like? It's actually been easier than I expected. There are a few behaviours and habits I've had to change, but nothing really all that drastic. Any recyclables I have I can take to Raven Recycling, and I mix sawdust in with my compost to eliminate that "ewwww" factor. Most of the disposable material I do acquire is packaging from groceries, the majority of it being plastic and cardboard. I rarely eat fast food, so I have hardly any dirty food wrappers. Tools and other everyday products always have lots of packaging, but if you're willing to take the time to separate the materials then most of this can be recycled as well.

Perhaps the most immediate insight I've gained from this is that most common products we do throw out are actually recyclable, but simply easier to throw in the garbage since they are made of different materials mixed together. Toothpaste tubes are great example of this: they are made of plastic and aluminum, both of which are recyclable separately, but since you can't separate them from one another they have to go in the garbage. Toothpaste tubes infuriate me.



Are there ways I can still improve? Definitely! I wish I was reusing more products than I am now. I still have to recycle a fair bit of packaging, which is better than throwing it in the garbage, but nevertheless still keeps you thinking in a mentality where everything is disposable. Having to recycle all that packaging does motivate you to reduce the amount of stuff you purchase and try to reuse more items (milk jugs make great archery targets!).

Do I ever cheat? I'm human, so I have fumbled a few times. Since living in a cabin where I have to transport all my recycling back into town, there have been times when the woodstove's ability to make nearly anything "disappear" does have a certain appeal, but then I remember how stinky and horrible burning plastic is and quickly forget that option.

One weakness of mine is forgetting my reusable coffee cup back at my cabin and succumbing to my evil caffeine addiction by buying coffee in a disposable cup (but rejoice, for Baked Cafe has biodegradable cups!). I also have been known to balance multiple items at the grocery store on one another at the checkout when I forget to bring my reusable bag, but I still surrender to the convenience of plastic shopping bags when I do forget my reusable one and don't feel like playing Tetris with egg cartons.

After having done this for a few months, do I still want to continue this lifestyle? Do I believe we can all become zero waste? In my opinion, zero waste doesn't mean throwing absolutely NOTHING out (some items simply can't be reused), but rather means becoming more conscious about what we throw out and how much we throw out every day. I estimate that compared to 6 months ago, I'm throwing out about 80-90% less garbage now. Achieving this does take a bit more time and effort, but I've become accustomed to this quite fast. The best part about this lifestyle is that I have a simpler life. I focus on purchasing things not meant to be discarded, that can be reused and repaired. Food is a big priority for me now; I spend lots of time cooking with real ingredients and trying new recipes rather than purchasing premade foods. And in typical Yukon fashion, throwing out zero waste really reinvigorates the desire to become even more self-sufficient. Simply put, I deal with less 'manufactured scat' in my life now.

Ben Derochie is the Zero Waste Yukon Coordinator. He dreams of building a fishing boat made out of pop bottles.

Food and Climate Change

In most areas of the world, the main cause of deforestation is agriculture expansion. Besides the loss of habitat for wildlife and other ecosystem services such as water and air purification, the replacement of forests with croplands leads to the emission of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane, which were retained in the forest floor and in the trees or parts of them that are burnt or left behind to rot. Furthermore, since trees are able to fix much more carbon than crops, when we lose forests we lose carbon sequestration potential. For these reasons, growing food generally means contributing to climate change.

The situation in the Yukon, as usual, is unique. We Yukoners still have lots of forest, so our carbon sequestration potential is considerable. Forests cannot feed us all, though. First Nations people lived sustainably off the land for thousands of years. Nowadays, our lifestyles have changed and our numbers have grown. This means that our food needs to come from somewhere else.

Yukon's short growing season is a challenge for large-scale agriculture. In fact, we only have a few local, full-time farmers. As a result, most of Yukoners' food supply is trucked or flown from down south using fossil fuels. Over 60% of Yukoners' greenhouse gas emissions actually come from heavy duty transportation. If we want to reverse climate change while having food security, we must grow our own food. This is challenging, but we have a huge potential!

In the Yukon, many people have backyards: huge, usually fertile, and very accessible areas to grow food (and to compost food scraps – using bear-proof containers, of course). You might like to keep a grassy yard, but there is always room for a couple of garden boxes and/or a greenhouse. Greenhouses are a great way to extend our short growing season and to grow vegetables that would not do well otherwise, such as tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and even corn. Here in the Yukon we have some of the most creative greenhouses, and visionaries are usually more than happy to share their knowledge and inventions. We definitely have the local expertise and the space.

Even if you have limited space, there are creative options for small spaces, such as vertical gardens. We are also lucky to have a fantastic community garden in Whitehorse (<http://dugsyukon.blogspot.ca/>), where both food and knowledge are constantly shared. This is not limited to the capital: more and more communities are starting and developing gardens. These initiatives provide great benefits such as higher food security, increased connection between people and nature, community building and collaboration, and climate change mitigation.

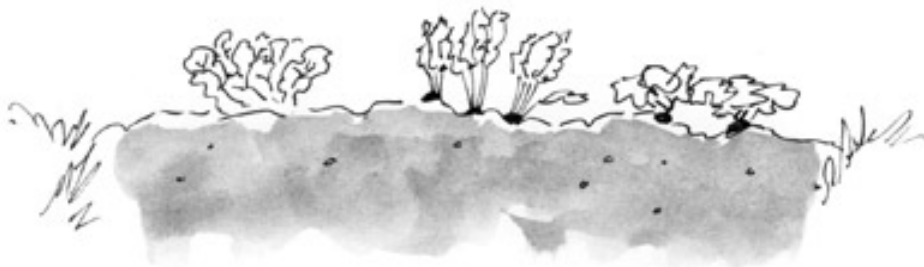
If you decide, after all, that growing food is not for you, you can still have a positive impact. Products from local farmers are available all summer long at markets and farms. Every time you buy food from local farmers, you keep your money in the Territory, as well as oil in the ground. Also, some Yukon stores sell products from BC – which is way more “local” than California, South Africa or New Zealand.

Conventional agricultural methods are very fossil fuel intensive. Machinery, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides all depend on fossil fuels. Organic operations may use machinery, but they do not use chemical fertilizers or pesticides. Every time you buy organic, besides avoiding sketchy chemicals, helping bees, and other benefits, you are fighting climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. If you buy food in bulk as opposed to packed with plastic or Styrofoam, even better.

Finally, nature always provides. There are lots of wild plants and fruits out there that can be a great supplement for our diets. Again, local knowledge abounds among First Nations people and other Yukoners. We just have to talk, share, and spend some time outside, working with nature and harvesting just what we need, honouring these gifts. After all, this is what Yukoners love to do.

Climate change is having a visible impact in the North. If we people seeing, and struggling with, the effects of climate change do not do anything about it, how can we expect others to do it? Let's show the rest of the world our Northern leadership. Let's grow food!

*Alberto Suarez-Esteban
(University of Alberta, Yukon College)*





YES! I want to protect the Yukon's environment and support the Yukon Conservation Society!

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I am putting it on my Visa # _____ Expiry _____ Signature _____

Name(s): _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

Email – for Tax Receipt and YCS Email List _____

Mail completed slip to: 302 Hawkins St. Whitehorse, YT Y1A 1X6 – Phone: 668-5678 – ycs@ycs.yk.ca

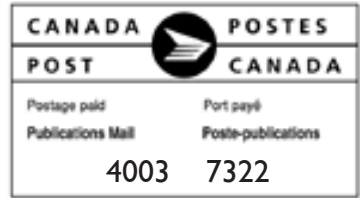
Thank You Volunteers!

Thank you to all our volunteers for the vital work you do at YCS. If you'd like to help out with any of our events, campaigns, or projects, contact Julia at ycsoutreach@ycs.yk.ca or 668-5678. We'd love to have you!



Particular thanks to:

- Klondike Business Solutions for the much-appreciated donation of a printer.
- Mary Ann & Rob Lewis for the loan of their PowerPoint equipment in support of the YES Showcase event.
- Paul Davis for lending a bike to our Trail Guide Coordinator and volunteering at the Fireweed Market this summer.
- Mary Amerongen for all her work, including volunteering at the Fireweed Market this summer.
- Shailyn Drukis for donating tea and popcorn to the office.



If you love exploring the Yukon, try geocaching!

You can join 'the world's largest scavenger hunt' by following GPS co-ordinates to hidden caches around the world – or right here in the Yukon! Start off by finding our YCS geocache in Canyon City – it's available year-round, even though our hikes have ended for the season. Visit www.geocaching.com/geocache/GC583DR_canyon-city for more info. If you're already an avid geocacher and would like to get involved with YCS, email ycsoutreach@ycs.yk.ca or call 668-5678 – we'd love your help hiding and maintaining more caches around town!



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