

Walk Softly

Newsletter of the
Yukon Conservation Society
Spring 2018



photo: Matt Jacques Photography

Inside: • Staff Changes • Money and Mines • Conservation Champion



Celebration for the Peel Watershed Victory (above photo: Matt Jacques; photo below: Daniel Bader)



Spring 2018

The Solutions Economy in the Yukon

What if our toughest social and environmental challenges could be transformed into business opportunities to strengthen local economies and make communities more resilient? In November, we invited Yukoners to explore this question in a series of events.

YCS, with support from Cold Climate Innovation at Yukon College and the Government of Yukon's Community Development Fund, hosted Shaun Loney at four workshops and public talks in Whitehorse and Watson Lake. Loney, accompanied by local change-makers, discussed how social enterprises are igniting a new approach to economic development that is community-centred and protects the environment.

Loney is the author of the book *An Army of Problem Solvers: Reconciliation and the Solutions Economy*, the co-founder of 11 social enterprises, and the recipient of numerous awards for social innovation. The former Director of Energy Policy for the Government of Manitoba has been making change in urban and rural areas through low-cost, high-impact approaches that empower communities to address issues such as energy, climate change, unemployment, poverty, and food security.

In both locations, the evening talks and workshops were well-attended. Workshop attendees explored local challenges and opportunities for social enterprise and economic development.

Shaun Loney presents at the Beringia Centre in Whitehorse.
(Photo by Julia Duchesne)

In Whitehorse, presenters included:

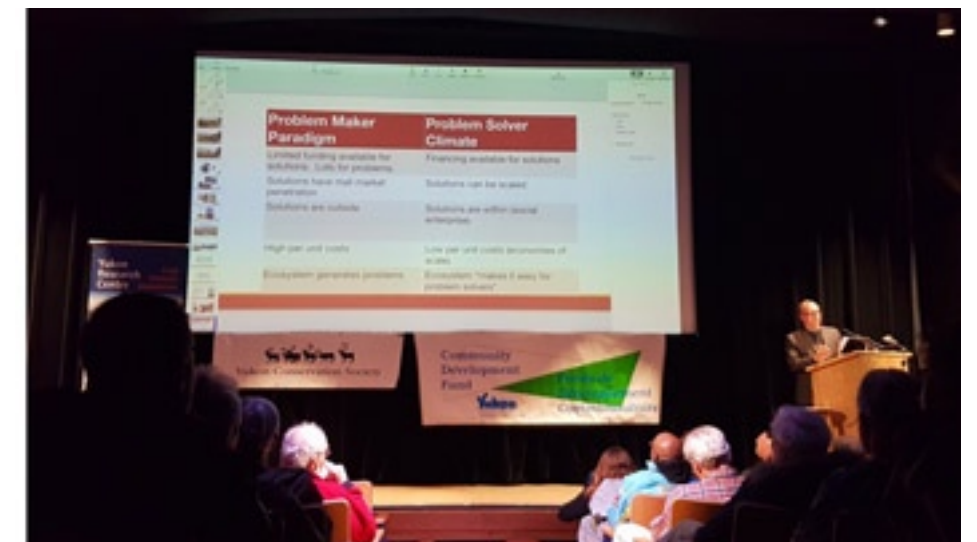
- Challenge Disability Resource Group (social enterprises under the Challenge umbrella)
- Yukon College Centre of Northern Innovation in Mining (social enterprise support as part of a benefits agreement)
- Cold Climate Innovation (biomass energy in communities)
- Carcross/Tagish Management Corporation (community benefits in economic development)
- unFURled (reinvigorating the local fur economy)
- Rivers to Ridges (forest school concept and nature-based education)
- Suzanne de la Barre, Vancouver Island University (social enterprise in leisure and sustainability)

In Watson Lake, both events involved a diverse group of local people from the Kaska nation, municipal government, business community, Yukon government, and the general public.

People were excited to hear about Shaun Loney's experience creating community-driven social enterprises that address multiple issues in innovative ways. It was also inspiring to hear about the incredible projects that are already underway in the Yukon. There was a lot of buzz and excitement resulting from getting people together to break down communication barriers and discuss solutions in the same room.

For so many Northern issues – from climate change to food security – community-driven solutions are going to be the key to creating a sustainable and resilient future for all of us. We have already heard that similar workshops are being planned to continue generating discussion and action – and we'll keep pushing for bold, brave and grassroots solutions in the Yukon.

Julia Duchesne,
YCS Outreach



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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.

302 Hawkins Street
Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A 1X6
PHONE: 867 668-5678
FAX: 867 668-6637

EMAIL: info@yukonconservation.org
WEBSITE: yukonconservation.org

We welcome newsletter submissions and letters to the editor. Deadlines for submissions are Feb 1, May 1, Aug 1, and Nov 1. Views expressed in **Walk Softly** are not necessarily those of the Society.

Publications Mail Agreement number 4154991
Changes of address or undeliverable copies should be sent to YCS at 302 Hawkins St., Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 1X6

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WORKERS ON THIS ISSUE

Tanya Handley
Julia Duchesne

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Message from the Board:

The YCS Board of Directors is thrilled to be moving into 2018 – the Peel Watershed saga is moving into final consultations, our mining and energy programs are ramping up and it is our organization's 50th anniversary. When our incredible Executive Director, Christina Macdonald, decided to step down, we began searching for someone who could take on this integral role as we move into this milestone year. We are happy to announce that our search is complete. We would like to introduce our incoming Executive Director Mike Walton. We recognized as we move into 2018 that we need someone with strong leadership skills, deep knowledge of conservation, and most importantly, the ability to build relationships, with you, our members, to understand what our community wants to see for the future of environmental protection in the Yukon. Mike is a natural fit to take YCS into the future in a strong and reflective way. We are really excited to welcome Mike on March 12th when he will start to work with Christina to ensure a smooth transition. Please stop by to meet Mike and get to know our new leader! Our door is always open.

Message from Mike:

Hello everyone,

It is with delight that I address the membership of the Yukon Conservation Society and other YCS supporters for the first time as your incoming Executive Director. It is a role that is inspiring, exciting and quite frankly humbling given the Society's grass root history, and long time advocacy for Yukon conservation.

There is no mistaking the leadership role YCS has played and is playing in raising awareness of Yukoners and Canadians about threats to the land, water, and wildlife of the Yukon, and the critical role humans play in determining the future of our planet.

From my early days as a park warden and park naturalist to senior roles in government protected areas, I have enjoyed sharing the beauty and wonder of the natural world with local residents or visitors. While working in the Yukon as Manager, Resource Conservation with Parks Canada between 2001 and 2008, I witnessed and experienced first hand the special connection people have with Yukon's natural environment. It is one that gives voice to the importance of the natural world and our love for it.

Now, after a decade away, returning to the Yukon feels like coming home. Robert Service is right. There is a spell and we are thrilled to be under it. I will do my best to represent the priorities of YCS as we move forward from the Society's incredible half-century marker.

Mike Walton, PhD

Celebrating 50 Years of Conservation – and Looking Ahead



Come meet Mike, our new executive director!

The Yukon Conservation Society turns 50 this year. That's right – we were founded in 1968, making us older than Greenpeace! That same year, founding member John Lammers stated that YCS's mandate was to have "any influence on the manner in which a resource-oriented society traditionally attempts to beat nature into submission". YCS began as a group of dedicated volunteers. Since then, we've grown into a leading voice for the Yukon environment, advocating on issues from energy use, mining and cleanup, to climate change and nature education.

Many people have been part of YCS over the years – as the members, volunteers, donors, and staff who give their time and support so generously.

Many more have taken in our nature education activities, or joined us for interpretive walks since our Trail Guiding program began in 1980. In short, we've been a part of the fabric of the Yukon for half a century now, and it's time to celebrate and reflect.

In 2018, we'll be hosting a series of public events and projects to share our history and celebrate our future. The calendar will include: public tours and talks on issues including energy, mining, and wildlife; a new gardening project; our classic summer programming, including the Created at the Canyon event and daily guided hikes to Canyon City; a history and storytelling BBQ in September; and a celebration to finish the year in November (save the date: Saturday, November 17, 2018).

We'll also be reflecting on our vision for the next 50 years. In 2068, what future do we want to be living in, and how do we get there? We hope you'll join us in celebrating, reflecting and sharing the stories of 50 years in the Yukon – and many more to come.

Julia Duchesne
YCS Outreach



Buy a Bag!

We are now selling recycled cotton backpack-style bags made and screen-printed by local artist Sally Wright. These comfy, handy bags are beautifully printed with a custom-made design and revenue supports YCS programming. We'll also have recycled cotton tote bags with the same logo available soon! Each bag is \$22.

Here We Go Again

One of the curses of the Yukon mining industry in the past has been the ability for mining companies to walk away from the mess they have made.

They would operate the mine while it was profitable, take the profits, but as soon as they started losing money they would declare some form of bankruptcy and walk away.

In order to protect the environment the government had to step in and take care of the closure and remediation of these sites.

This means that taxpayers had to fund these operations. It was a classic case of privatizing the profits but socializing the risks.

Four examples of this are the Federal government paying to close, clean up, and remediate the Faro mine, the Keno complex, the Mt Nansen operation, and the Clinton Creek asbestos mine downstream of Dawson City.

Nowadays, mining companies are supposed to help pay up front financial security for mining and exploration projects in Yukon – but dig deeper into what’s actually happening, and you’ll find it’s nowhere near enough.

The concept is that a regulatory authority holds in trust funds supplied by the mining company to cover closure and remediation costs.

If the company does declare bankruptcy, monies other than taxpayers’ dollars are available to cover the full cost of dealing with the abandoned mine site.

This financial security is held under a quartz mining licence, a mining land use approval or a type A or type B water licence. The amount and form of security is determined under the Quartz Mining Act and the Waters Act.

Ever since devolution occurred, when the Yukon Government assumed a lot of the powers previously held by the Federal Government, the responsibility for approving mines devolved or changed to the territorial level.

This means that if a mine situation like Faro, or Mt Nansen, or Keno, or Clinton Creek, were to re-occur, the Yukon Government would be on the financial hook.

For the four mines mentioned in the previous sentence, the Federal Government is responsible for the hundreds of millions of dollars associated with the mine cleanup because it approved the mines prior to devolution.

Now any mine that the Yukon approves is the responsibility of the Yukon Government, and by association Yukon taxpayers.

This brings us to the Wolverine Mine. Located on the Robert Campbell Highway between Ross River and Watson Lake, it was active in 2013 for three years.

It has had an interesting financial history, at one point receiving court protection from creditors. The owners are no longer in bankruptcy, and they still own the mine. It is not operating, and is in what is termed temporary closure.

The Yukon Government even holds fiscal security for the site, to the amount of \$10,588,966.

This \$10.6 million is actually a bit of a problem, because it isn’t even close to what is required to close and remediate the site. And here’s how we know this.

The owner has been quite diligent with the paperwork and reporting required by the various permits and authorizations on this property.

One of the permits was issued by the Yukon Water Board, and as part of the ongoing correspondence a cost estimate of closure and remediation was submitted. The amount? \$25,907,086.

That’s two and half times more than what is currently held by the Yukon Government.

Should the mine ever be sold, unlikely as it is now flooded and who buys a flooded mine these days, the first thing the new owners are going to have to do is to fork over another \$15 million.

And if a new owner isn’t found, and the current owner walks away (which in certain circumstances is entirely legal), Yukon taxpayers will be on the hook for cleaning up yet another mining mess.

There is nothing wrong with doing responsible mining. It provides the metals and minerals that keep our industrialized society going. It can, if managed right, provide a stream of wealth in the form of royalties, paycheques, and taxes. Unfortunately, the past track record shows that mining cannot cover the cost of its own cleanup.

If the Yukon keeps allowing mining companies to not provide adequate upfront financial security to clean up the mess they are going to make, it’s time for the Yukon to get out of the mining business.

*Lewis Rifkind,
YCS Mining Analyst*

Screenshot from Wolverine Mine Reclamation and Closure Plan 2016-07 V.3, Table 8-2: Summary of Final Reclamation and Closure Costs

Access Road			
Temporary camp	Camp at the Robert Campbell Highway when reclaiming road	250,000	
Decommission and Reclaim Access Road		551,414	
Reclaim Seepage Recovery Dam		24,673	
	Sub Total	9,156,958	
Water Treatment			
Design WTP	Design WTP		Completed in 2017/2018
Capital WTP	Construct and install WTP		To be completed in 2018
Water treatment costs	Seasonal operation of WTP for 4 years to dewater the TSF	7,581,930	
	Sub Total	7,581,930	
Monitoring			
MMER Monitoring	Cycle 4 Biological Monitoring, Study Design and Interpretive Report; Final Biological Monitoring Study prior to Closing Mine; EEM Sublethal Toxicity Testing;	186,405	
Water Quality Analysis	Surface and groundwater quality monitoring	132,660	62,425
Metals in Vegetation analysis		11,340	11,340
Environmental Monitoring Consultants	Monthly/quarterly/annual sampling	843,324	175,693
Environmental Consultant	Monthly/annual reporting	249,600	104,000
Hydrogeological assessment	Required to improve condition of groundwater wells; assume repairs conducted as well	120,000	
Geotechnical Inspections	Annual tailings dam inspection; Dam Safety Review every 5 years; Annual earthen structures inspection	180,000	235,000
	Sub Total	1,723,329	588,458
	Sub Total	22,600,107	665,558
	Contingency	2,470,637	37,133
	Total	25,070,744	702,690
	Adjustment for Inflation	26,306,520	812,078
	NPM	25,194,015	713,071
	TOTAL SECURITY REQUIREMENT	25,907,086	

Screenshot from Yukon Government website

Financial security held for mining projects			
Project name	Pursuant to Waters Act	Pursuant to Quartz Mining Act	Total security held
Brewery Creek - Golden Predator Canada Corp.	\$455,163.00		\$455,163.00
Carmacks Copper - Carmacks Mining Corp.		\$80,300.00	\$80,300.00
Eagle Gold - Stratagold Corporation	\$2,433,471.00	\$14,697,581.00	\$17,131,052.00
Keno Hill Silver District Operations - Alexco Keno Hill Mining Corp.		\$6,304,508.00	\$6,304,508.00
Minto - Minto Explorations Ltd.	\$22,965,581.00	\$49,177,572.00	\$72,143,153.00
Sa Dena Hes - Sa Dena Hes Operating Corporation		\$4,941,924.00	\$4,941,924.00
Wolverine - Yukon Zinc Corporation	\$64,000.00	\$10,524,966.00	\$10,588,966.00

The company itself estimates that the closure will cost this much.

This is what the Yukon government is holding as the security deposit.



Community Garden

YCS will be starting some garden boxes this spring. If you’d like to help out with construction, planting, or harvesting, or just want to learn more, get in touch!

Roads, Powerlines, and Royalties...Oh My!

The Federal and Yukon Government are rolling out yet another flurry of lucrative subsidies for wealthy corporations seeking to extract wealth from Yukon.

The Feds will kick in \$250 million, the Yukon \$110 million, and the private sector another \$100 million for something called “Gateway Roads to Resources”. These are roads that will be built specifically for mining companies and probably not available for use by the general public.

Then there was a recent ministerial musing about maybe connecting the Yukon electrical grid to the BC grid to take advantage of excess power from the Site C dam, all to provide power to prospective mines. The estimated cost of this folly of a connection would be between one or two billion. Recall that the previous government, not known for its shyness to throw money at miners, rejected this project because it made no financial sense.

And we are still waiting on the cost of upgrading the Mayo-Keno transmission line, which is estimated to be in the range of \$70 to \$90 million. This line upgrade was rolled out purely for the benefit of anticipated mineral development, and not for the residents or businesses within the greater Keno area.

So ten million here, hundred million there, a couple billion even, pretty soon we are talking serious amounts of taxpayers’ dollars being spent to benefit mining. The question that must be asked is why does this one industry receive so much? It’s not like they are exactly contributing much to the public treasury.

Perhaps the answers to this are in as follows. Mining conferences are big glitzy affairs that Yukon government regularly attends and likes to get attention at. Ministers get serious flattery from mining executives every time they roll out hundred million dollar subsidies. We all know politicians love flattery almost as much as votes.

Yukon has no lobbying registry, so the identities and numbers of steady procession of mining lobbyists into government offices, and any inducements they may offer are held confidential. While their activities are hidden, their influence is manifest in the handouts they receive.

To make things worse, royalties that the Yukon got last year from the mining industry are the usual joke. Placer royalties garnered \$26,715.15, and that was the royalty on the roughly \$90 million dollars’ worth of placer gold that was extracted.

The Yukon Government got NOTHING from hard rock mining, but the Selkirk First Nation did. The Minto Mine is on their Class A land and they received \$14,367,764.00 in 2016, for a grand total of \$29,057,213.69 since 2007. Well done, Selkirk First Nation, but the Yukon Government got nothing in 2016.

Even if a bunch of hard rock mines were to open tomorrow the Yukon wouldn’t see a penny in royalties for a few years- if ever. The Yukon Government collects royalties based on a net profit royalty system. This means mines can offset their initial startup costs and operating costs- including returns to their international investors- from any profit they might make thus ensuring little to none get paid.

The negotiators for Selkirk First Nation included a royalties deal called “Net Smelter Return”, which stipulates that a portion of the royalties are paid on the value of minerals that are sold to the processor/smelter. No deductions for corporate investors. The big implication here is that the companies will pay more. Their threats to decamp to other places are just bluster. Perhaps the Yukon needs to hire the same folks that negotiated Selkirk’s deal.

So, hundreds of millions of taxpayers’ money is being spent on mining infrastructure. And the return on investment to the taxpayers is minimal to nil.

In fact, given the track record of the mining industry in the Yukon regarding taxpayer funded cleanups, it is most likely any new Yukon mine will be a net financial drain on future Yukon taxpayers, just like Faro, Mt. Nansen, Keno, and Clinton Creek were to Canada.

The mining industry must get its financial (never mind its’ environmental) act together and pay for its own damn infrastructure. Currently, all they are doing is mining the public purse.

YCS does not blame these multi-national companies for doing this- why should they pay for something that the taxpayers of Yukon and Canada appear willing to cover? However, YCS does hold our government responsible for consistently prioritizing these companies’ bottom lines over the public purse.

*Lewis Rifkind,
YCS Mining Analyst*

Recognizing Yukon’s Conservation Champions: Angela Sabo Wins the 2017 Gerry Couture Stewardship Award

We are pleased to announce that Angela Sabo has been awarded the 2017 Gerry Couture Stewardship Award for her work to protect the Yukon’s land and water from contamination. Since 2009, an anonymous donor has provided the Gerry Couture Stewardship Medal and \$1,000 prize to an individual chosen for outstanding personal dedication to natural resource conservation and management in the Yukon.



Photo: Angela Sabo

“Angela’s passion and determination have been invaluable to the Yukon Conservation Society and other grassroots groups in the territory,” said Executive Director Christina Macdonald. “From investigating the effects of oil and gas drilling in Dempster country, to canvassing door-to-door against fracking, to her legendary determination to keep digging until she gets answers, Angela is a formidable force against industrial misdeeds and environmental hazards in the Yukon.”

Sabo has been active in the Yukon environmental community for decades. She has spearheaded multiple initiatives for YCS and is a key member of Yukoners Concerned about Oil and Gas. She has been a leader in attacking the high radon readings that exist in many Yukon homes, pointing out that mitigation is necessary if lung cancer rates are to be lowered. On her own time and costs, she has travelled across the Yukon doing radon testing and contacted experts across North America to assist her research. She has met with officials to share her research and suggest that regulations should be put in place to protect Yukoners from radioactivity and high radon readings.

On receiving the Gerry Couture Stewardship Award, Sabo said: “I am very honoured to be chosen to receive the Gerry Couture Stewardship award. The work to prevent hydraulic fracturing in the Yukon has been a team effort and I’d like to thank my son Ray Sabo, Sebastian Jones of YCS, Don Roberts, and the Yukoners Concerned for their continuous contribution, encouragement and support. We all know that the Yukon is a precious place and we need to care for our water, plants and animals. Let’s follow our hearts and the ones who know the land today to keep our environment healthy for tomorrow.”

Angela is a formidable force against industrial misdeeds and environmental hazards in the Yukon.

Don Roberts of Yukoners Concerned contributed his perspective on Sabo’s award: “Yukoners Concerned is extremely pleased that Angela Sabo has been nominated to receive the Gerry Couture Stewardship Award. Angela is a person of conscience who is passionate about maintaining most of the Yukon as one of the last pristine areas remaining in the world. She is truly a lady of conviction and does her research to support the issues she believes in.”

The donor of the award is inspired by Gerry Couture’s fearlessness, creativity, innovation, and ‘curmudgeonliness’. Gerry Couture has a long and varied past as a commercial pilot, homesteader, trapper, commercial fisherman, and placer miner. For years he was a respected member of the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board and the Yukon Salmon Committee. Gerry most recently worked as YCS’s Mining Coordinator until he retired in 2009.

Time for new energy at YCS – Anne Middler says goodbye!

Seems like I haven't written much lately, in the newsletter, other YCS dispatches. Truth is, life has been pulling me away from YCS for a while. As hard as it was, I made the decision to make space for a new person to take my place as Energy Analyst at YCS.

I started working at YCS in June 2008 for one day a week, tasked with providing input on the draft Energy Strategy for Yukon and Climate Change Action Plan. It was a fantastic opportunity to begin working with the YCS energy committee, meet key energy players in the community, and start the journey of learning about the complex world of energy in the Yukon.

The first sweet taste of victory came early as YCS took on the charge to end burning garbage in Yukon communities. Working on that campaign, I learned how the toxic air pollution was harming people in Ross River, Haines Junction, Watson Lake and elsewhere.



YCS's manifesto to YESAB was well received and they put out perfect recommendations. After a dodgy initial decision document by Environment Yukon, we got a Solid Waste Action Plan from Community Services that was the first step in more responsible waste management by ending the indiscriminate burning of unsorted garbage at unstaffed unincorporated community dumps.

We still have far to go to make less waste and manage it better, but every day I breathe clean air in Tagish, I feel grateful for being part of the movement that put an end to burning garbage.

Another hard fought victory: Fracking has never happened in the Yukon and hopefully never will. YCS played a very big part in that, and despite some people questioning our means, I take pride in YCS's role in the Whitehorse Trough Oil and Gas disposition process resulting in no exploration, in YESAB processes around Eagle Plain resulting in no fracking, and in the creation and success of the Select Committee Regarding the Risks and Benefits of Hydraulic Fracturing.

People may not appreciate how close we were to having the rapturist extractivist development-focused government give fracking permits to oil and gas companies without any public consultation or environmental assessment. I am grateful for the support of the public and the work of Yukoners Concerned About Oil and Gas Development for that fight, and that our focus can now be on creating the renewable energy future we want, rather than opposing a dying and destructive industry.

We didn't always win though. In my early days, Yukon Energy built Mayo B, not a wind farm on Mt Sumanik, with generous 'no cost money' from the federal government. We had to fight Yukon Energy through Access to Information for the favourable wind study, which was irritating and came too late to be useful for the Yukon Utilities Board to recognize it as a viable and better alternative.

Yukon Energy's LNG facility was a bitter loss. It still hurts pretty bad and makes me want to shake my fists at the sky and smoke cigarettes. If you have several hours, I may be willing to tell you the entire sordid tale, but in the meantime you can watch Lewis's hilarious (nothing funny about it) Hitler video, (the first search result for "Whitehorse LNG Hitler" on YouTube) which took the edge off the disappointing post-construction revelations. Best not get me started.

Anne hopes to revolutionize winter transportation. You too can join the kicksled revolution!

One LNG consolation is that our more recent effort in front of the Yukon Utilities Board succeeded in preventing ATCO Electric Yukon from adding \$5million to the ratebase to modify its diesel generators in Watson Lake to burn LNG. YCS intervened, exposed weaknesses in the business case, and the YUB quashed the idea. Watson Lake remains a blank slate with ample opportunity for all sorts of renewable energy projects to meet the energy demand. We learned about a number of them during our Solutions Economy work in Watson Lake this fall.

Since making my decision to leave YCS, it has been hard to let go! I have felt honoured to represent YCS and our energy vision at important tables over the past decade. I have enjoyed developing professional relationships on behalf of YCS with people in First Nations, municipal and territorial governments; utilities; the private sector; political parties; other ENGOs and the Yukon community. I have been lucky to have a job that provided flexibility, one that aligned with my values – that gave me the freedom to speak my mind, never having to compromise my convictions. I always tried my best, but the weight of responsibility became too heavy for me.

It's been tough to be a single parent, operate a small business, and keep on top of the obligations of a YCS energy analyst – even part time. I have been lucky for an amazing and understanding team who always had my back. Karen Baltgailis and Christina Macdonald were exceptional Executive Directors and bosses. Both helped me grow personally and professionally, endured many of my close deadlines and passionate outbursts, and helped me plan ahead and work through tough losses.



Christina and Anne brainstorming at the Whitehorse Shaun Loneyworkshop. (Photo by Julia Duchesne)

Lewis, Sebastian, Georgia, Julia, Judith, Christina and the ever changing and always wonderful Board, all shared in my good and bad days, supported me in the important work we did together, and tolerated my oddball antics. I will miss the camaraderie and workplace humour. Members and volunteers, most notably those on the YCS energy committee, also provided critical support and helped shape my education and thinking around complex energy issues. Thank you!

I look forward to working with YCS to execute a strong transition in the new year. I will support the work of YCS as a volunteer member of the energy committee. Although I won't speak for YCS anymore, I will continue to be outspoken for smart energy policy and projects in the community. I look forward to flexing my engaged citizen muscles for the Yukon Government's Energy, Climate and Green Economy Strategy in 2018.

Typical for me, I don't really have a plan for the future. I will keep trying to revolutionize winter transportation and stimulate a solutions economy. I will take time to make things and connections at YuKonstruct and (co)space. I will head out on kickspeditions, sailing voyages and other adventures with Juniper and select first mates. Thank you for your support over this amazing decade in YCS's first half century!

Anne Middler

Celebration for the Peel Watershed Victory – and next steps!

At the Whitehorse Livestream of the Peel Supreme Court decision last December, when the news came through that we had – in a unanimous victory – won our court case, a couple things quickly became clear.

Yukoners were ready to celebrate. This is a massive victory for the Peel Watershed and First Nations rights, and it's the result of decades of dedication from so many people. The other thing we noticed at the livestream was that people had stories to share about their connection the Peel; that although the land use planning process has been embroiled in the courts for the past three years, the Peel Watershed is so much more than politics. Everyone has a unique connection to this land. We knew that after many years of hard work, we had reached the moment where it was so important to come together and share our stories.

We couldn't have achieved what we have achieved without unity. It was the first time in history that First Nations and environmental groups took a case all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. But this was not the only reason for the success of this campaign. On a broader scale, success came from an entire territory rallying long and hard to protect this incredible watershed and modern treaties. If you were at any of the Peel events in the past few years you could see how people from all walks of life came out to support a cause we so deeply believed in. And we won! It's a success story that we hope will inspire other campaigns to know that they too can rise together. They too can protect some of the world's vulnerable and irreplaceable wild places.

Even Tom Berger, our lead lawyer, spoke of the campaign's grassroots success. "I think all the people involved, and Yukoners – not just those who belong to the environmental organizations, or those who were members of First Nations – participated, it really seemed to be a community enterprise," Berger told CBC on the morning of the celebration. "That was my impression every time I came up here, and the enthusiasm was so much."

Sharing our stories

We were planning on hosting an event after the decision, no matter what happened, but it quickly became apparent that one thing that many of supporters wanted was a space to share why the watershed matters to them so deeply. The wilderness, after all, is why so many of us live here. It is who we are and what we believe in. We planned a celebration that included a venue to share these stories, and were blown away with how it turned out.



Spring 2018

The celebration

The celebration began with a ceremonial fire-lighting, led by Na Cho Nyäk Dän Elder Walter Peters, and a water ceremony, led by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Elders Clara Van Bibber and Angie Joseph-Rear. It was a windy, frigid day – the temperature dipping below minus 30 – but that didn't deter the large crowd that gathered on the banks of the Yukon River to share in prayer and song.

We were expecting a few dozen people to show up to the story sharing circle afterwards, seventy at the most. By 5 pm, when the event was scheduled to begin, the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre's Longhouse was packed with over two hundred people. It was a challenge to restructure the circle at such short notice, and we had to come to terms with the fact that with such a huge turnout, not everyone would be able to share their story.

Still, we were in awe as person after person stood up with the microphone to share their connection to the Peel. Whether it was exploring the watershed by boat or horse, or working behind the scenes organizing the events and protests that brought us to where we are today, every story was charged with emotion and passion that kept the audience captivated. Although everyone's experiences and stories were vastly different, one common thread was the sense that we did it, together.



photo: Daniel Bader

The joyful energy continued throughout the buffet dinner and speeches. The audience heard from Chief Roberta Joseph (Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation), Chief Simon Mervyn (First Nation of Na Cho Nyäk Dän), Chief Bruce Charlie (Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation), Christina Macdonald (Yukon Conservation Society), Chris Rider (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Yukon Chapter), The Hon. Pauline Frost (Minister of Environment, Yukon Government), Chief Wanda Pascal (Tetlit Gwich'in), President Bobbie Jo Greenland-Morgan (Gwich'in Tribal Council), and even Thomas Berger (O.C., O.B.C, Q.C.), who flew from Vancouver for the celebration. Afterwards, Matthew Lien hit the stage with his beautiful song "Headwaters," followed by Ben Chuck and Bruce Charlie and other fiddlers, who got the crowd on their feet and jigging in no time.

Despite some challenges adapting to the larger than expected crowds, we couldn't be happier with the celebration, and from what we saw and heard, many who came shared the same sentiment. All night long the room was full of a sense of pride: for the land, for how hard we have worked together and for our commitment to protecting a place that will now remain vast and wild.

A huge thank you to The Wandering Bison for the fabulous meal, The Kwanlin Dun Cultural Centre for the venue and staff, Kate White for her chocolate cake, The Chocolate Claim, Bean North, Roxx Hunter and our fabulous musicians, the Youth of Today society, Matt Jacques and Dan Bader for capturing the evening, all of our incredible volunteers, and of course our Peel partners: The Yukon Conservation Society, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, First Nation of Na Cho Nyäk Dän and Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation.

Thank you to everyone who helped make this night such a success!

What's Next?

Although we won our Supreme Court case and the Peel Watershed is much closer to being protected, we're still a step away from full and legal protection for the watershed.

The Supreme Court directed the Yukon Government back to the stage of final consultations on the Final Recommended Plan. On December 1st, the day the decision was released, Sandy Silver called it a "A victory for all of Yukon" and committed to implementing the Final Recommended Plan.

The Yukon Government and First Nations have already met to discuss next steps for final consultations, which will be starting soon.

Stay tuned for more details about consultations once they are released. We need your voice for one last push to see this campaign to the end!

Nadine Sander-Green
CPAWS Yukon

Spring 2018

Musings on the Road to Alberta

“You don’t know what you’ve got til it’s gone.” The iconic lyric from Joni Mitchell’s Big Yellow Taxi is perhaps overused, but it’s exactly what I was thinking as I drove down the Alaska Highway last October, the rugged Yukon wilderness becoming fainter in my rear-view mirror and the familiar signs of oil and gas country looming larger on the horizon.

The shifting scenery and constant hum of tire against pavement seem to draw out new insights from the mind during road trips such as this. Just 18 months prior, I had made the same journey in reverse, driving my clunky tan sedan the 2000km from Edmonton. I had always been a bit of an anomaly as an environmentalist, a late bloomer who couldn’t trace his passion for the planet back to summers at the lake or tromps through national parks. No, mine was a suburban upbringing, with many more nights spent falling asleep under the bright glow of a television than that of the night sky. And even as I grew into an activist, I remained a city creature. So I was nervous as I drove north to work on the Peel campaign. Sure, I was armed with some decent tools to help advance the cause, but when it came to my ‘on-the-land’ credentials, my résumé was embarrassingly thin.

What struck me immediately upon moving to the Yukon was the intimacy with which people knew the land and its non-human occupants. Folks seemed to have a topo map in their mind from which they could easily describe where remote rivers converge or where their favourite trail ascends. I recall the dumbfounded look someone gave me in my first week when I sheepishly admitted that I didn’t know which direction Lake Laberge was. A few weeks later, a local frowned at me for hesitating ever so slightly as I named the rivers that drain into the Peel, while someone else was disappointed that I couldn’t correctly identify the bohemian waxwings socializing in a nearby tree.

Amongst most Yukoners I met, it felt like accepted wisdom that the land has value in its natural state, offering riches beyond anything that could be dug up. Yet in the oil and gas producing towns of Northern BC and Alberta, the land is often valued more for what can be extracted from it. Leaving the Yukon behind, I started thinking about how we come to occupy these vastly different mindsets. As I filled up my car at the pump in Fort St. John, mindful of my hypocrisy as a climate change activist, I wondered what it would be like to grow up surrounded by oil drilling, gas flaring, refineries, and LNG plants. Would it normalize the imprint of humans on the landscape?

In the Yukon, there is fury over the abandonment of just a handful of oil and gas wells by industry, and the damage they cause to the environment. In Alberta about 155,000 of these inactive wells exist, cutely dubbed ‘orphan wells’, yet no one talks about them. Perhaps the difference is this: when fundamentally altering nature is the norm, the loss caused by additional development feels negligible. Supporters of the Kinder Morgan expansion point to the 840,000km of pipeline already built in Canada. “What difference does another pipeline make?” they quip.

Few places like the Yukon remain, where wilderness holds the balance over development. Maybe that’s the reason people pay attention to what’s happening in Eagle Plains or McIntyre Creek or the Peel, and why they’ll mobilize in defence of conservation. Maybe on some level they know that if we allow development to chip away at our wondrous natural spaces, then eventually we’ll have less motivation to protect them. And like Joni Mitchell said, we won’t know it until it’s all gone...

Jason LaChappelle worked and volunteered for CPAWS and YCS during his time in the Yukon.




Yukon Conservation Society

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

I’d like to make a tax deductible gift!

- \$60 \$200 \$500 \$1000 Surprise us! _____
- I’d like to make a monthly pledge by credit card of \$_____ (charged on the 15th of each month)
- I have made a bequest to YCS in my will

Please, sign me up as a member:

- Student \$10 Individual \$25 Family \$40 (2 or more people)
- I am a **new** member!
- I am **renewing** my membership for 2018!

Memberships are activated on day of receipt and good for 1 year, and include a subscription to the Walk Softly newsletter. Both donations and memberships are tax-deductible.

Do not send me newsletters. Instead, **notify me by email** when they are online.

Payment Method: Total \$ _____

- Cheque # _____ enclosed (payable to Yukon Conservation Society)
- Visa/Mastercard # _____ 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 – info@yukonconservation.org

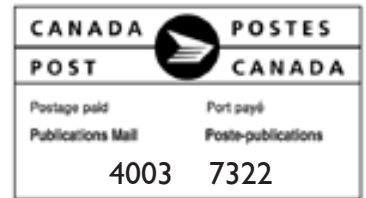


Thank you to all our wonderful volunteers who keep YCS running smoothly, including:

- Our Board of Directors and Energy and Mining Committee members
- Mary and Anat for their work on our membership system, outreach and database
- Shailyn for her help with outreach
- Tanya for her design work, including this newsletter
- The many people who helped out with the Peel Party!



Thank You Volunteers!



Did you know?
...

Annual General Meeting March 20 – You’re Invited!

Tuesday March 20, 2018, 5:15-7:15pm, 302 Hawkins St., Whitehorse

Dear members, donors, supporters and partners of the Yukon Conservation Society,

We warmly invite you to the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of YCS.

Join us to learn about our achievements over the past year, hear about our plans for the coming year, meet our incoming Executive Director, Mike Walton, elect new Board members, and help us kick off our 50th anniversary events!

For more information, please contact Marjolene Gauthier, Financial Manager, by email at info@yukonconservation.org or at 668-5678.

Cake and refreshments will be served.

We hope to see you there!

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