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 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
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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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

Hello everyone,

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 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.

From my early days as a park warden and park naturalist to senior roles working in the Yukon as Manager, Resource Conservation with Parks Canada between 2001 and 2008, I have enjoyed sharing the beauty and wonder of the natural world with Yukon’s natural environment. It is one that gives voice to the importance of the natural world and our love for it.

From my early days as a park warden and park naturalist to senior roles working in the Yukon as Manager, Resource Conservation with Parks Canada between 2001 and 2008, I have enjoyed sharing the beauty and wonder of the natural world with local residents and 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 no mistake in the leadership role that YCS has played and is playing in raising awareness of Yukoners and the critical role humans play in determining the future of our planet.”

Mike Walton, PhD

Message from Mike:

Come meet Mike, our new executive director!

Spring 2018

Celebrating 50 Years of Conservation – and Looking Ahead

The Yukon Conservation Society, formed in 1968, is the oldest conservation group in Canada. Since that time, YCS has grown and become a major force for conservation in the Yukon, working on a variety of 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; and Looking Ahead, which has 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; and Looking Ahead, which has been a part of the fabric of the Yukon for half a century now, and it’s time to celebrate and reflect.

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Julia Duchesne
YCS Outreach

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’ve also had recycled cotton tote bags with the same logo available soon! Each bag is $22.

Julia Duchesne
YCS Outreach

YCS Outreach

Spring 2018
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 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.

Exploration projects in Yukon – asbestos mine downstream of Dawson City. Nowadays, mining companies are supposed to 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 in order to pay for the closure and remediation of a problem, because it isn’t even near the point of becoming that. The Canadian government has determined that the Hudson’s Bay Company is responsible for cleaning up their asbestos mine, but the Federal government has not been able to make them pay for it.

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.

The 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. 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 up front 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 Rijkind, YCS Mining Analyst

Walk Softly

Spring 2018

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, just get in touch!

Spring 2018
The Federal and Yukon Government are rolling out yet another flurry of lucrative subsidies for wealthy corporations seeking to extract wealth from Yukon. The federal government has announced $250 million to support the development of a new transmission line, which is estimated to cost $4 billion. The estimated cost of this folly of a project is so high that it is not financially viable. The Yukon government has committed $10 million to support the project, but it is not clear how this money will be used to benefit the residents of Yukon.

The mining industry receives so much money from the government that it is not like a public treasury. The government pays for the mining industry to support industries such as tourism and recreation. The mining industry is the usual joke.

The mining industry must get its financial (never mind its’ environmental) act together and pay royalties 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.

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.

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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 from 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 Sunnami, 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 kicksped 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 $5 million 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 me with 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.

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
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.

**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.

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 Gwitch’in 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 (Teililt 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 Liem 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, Roxi 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 Gwitch’in 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 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!

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**Nadine Sander-Green**  
CPAWS Yukon
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 it 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. I recall the dumbfounded look someone gave me 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 840,000km² 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 defense 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.

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?

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