

Walk Softly

Newsletter of the
Yukon Conservation Society
Spring 2020



Inside: • Transitions • Electric Thermal Storage • Yellowstone to Yukon

Protecting the Wild – Lifestyle Transition

The Yukon Conservation Society exists to protect the wild – the animals, the fish, the birds and even the plants. We do this largely by monitoring, and sometimes opposing, the actions of some industries and the policies of some governments. This is important work that has energized the organization for the last half century.

But that is only half the story. The increasing number of people who have chosen to live in the Yukon must also play a role in 'protecting the wild'. Along with people everywhere, we are realizing that continuing to live the status quo will only take us further down the road to unsustainability. We must change our own ways. But how, and in what ways?

In a coming series of articles in *Walk Softly*, we want to explore some of the possibilities for these changes. YCS doesn't have a 'to do' list for its supporters. But we do have some ideas of directions that can lead towards a brighter more sustainable future for the Yukon – for all its parts, human and non-human.



Celebrating Change: look what we did already

COVID-19, despite all the troubles and tragedies for so many, gives us a chance to look at ourselves and our world in a new and progressive way. Let's think about the upbeat side. Before COVID-19 we worried whether we could as a species do enough fast enough to save ourselves from Climate Change effects, especially given the huge differences between those who cared and those who ignored, or even denied. Suddenly! From one day to the next we are ALL face a huge devastating threat and, voila, everyone found a way to respond, to cope. We changed because we had to. Result: we witness the ability of humans to adapt. What about in our precious and privileged corner of the universe, the Yukon?

- People talk about how quiet it is, how much less traffic there is, how they rediscovered a local trail system, how nice their neighbours are to help out the one who had to self-isolate or has no family to shop for them.
- People started shopping once a week and didn't just drive down from Granger to the Independent to get that one missing ingredient
- Some invented new habits and truly enjoy their own backyard and in creative ways.
- And all appreciate that we have possibly the best-on-the-planet combination of wildness nearby, low population, ability to produce despite challenges.

Maybe now we have to re-invent ways to keep ourselves happy and healthy and productive. The future may be different and one difference is we are in the driver's seat. What do you think?

Isn't it reasonable that each of us could easily, for example:

Drive less, heat more efficiently, eat less exotic stuff, enjoy more local everything, do more locally, b-r-e-a-t-h-e more clean Yukon air while staying home, and discovering: a new river, a new mountain ridge, a garden site right there, all in more slow motion?? Go to Alaska or Mac Pass or the Arctic instead of to Katmandu.

Learning intimately your own landscape will protect our unique gifts while living with less stuff especially from faraway places, less material goods but enjoying what you have more, and above all being healthy.

The current crisis, emergency, is based on Health. We all want to be and stay healthy, and avoid the new virus. We have the gifts and the tools as seen so far.

How do you imagine the future health of the Yukon then?

Do you see this time as an opportunity for each of us to sort out what is really important in Life, in community, in landscape, in the world? Think about it – think outside the box...talk about it.

Couldn't we go forward without going back to the parts of 'normal' that we wanted to be better?

Maybe it's time to step back from the business-as-usual in the over-consumption of globalized goods?

What have we learned already about the principles that could guide us into the next steps: Less is More! Stay Healthy! Be Local! Be Kind!

Have you and your family creatively done things under current conditions that could become part of the long-term improved Yukon lifestyle?

In doing that, we help to keep the environment healthy.

Walter Streit and Elizabeth Hofer

Energy – a window on protecting nature

Why does the Yukon Conservation Society bother with an energy program?

What does energy have to do with protecting nature in the Yukon?

Energy issues provide a powerful lens for understanding our relationship to nature. And, of course, there are many practical nature-related issues connected to energy – pipelines, habitat destruction, water pollution, greenhouse gases, etc.

Let's start by looking at our relationship with nature. There is one very inconvenient truth – we, Yukoners, are taking more from nature than the earth can provide. We know it at an abstract level but we resist taking it to heart and responding appropriately. Energy is a handy lens through which to look at this. We buy and operate larger vehicles than we need. We jump on airplanes for just about any reason. Our houses get larger each decade. And we are not alone, the whole of North America is caught up in this.

At YCS, we have begun to take this on by supporting 'energy efficiency' for buildings but, in the past, have been reluctant to push directly for a reduction in energy consumption in transportation. The COVID pandemic's requirement that we slow down, and the new Our Clean Future strategy process may encourage us to be more courageous in discussing energy consumption with Yukoners. Reducing energy consumption is certainly the main underlying message from Michael Moore's controversial recent film, "Planet of the Humans".



But there are also infrastructure issues linked to our use of energy which have a longer history at YCS. When a pipeline along the Alaska Highway was proposed to bring Alaskan oil to southern markets, YCS led the fight to block it in recognition that it would mean more land conversion. When a new hydro megaproject was under discussion, YCS resisted it based on the large-scale damage to wetlands and other wildlife habitat. And when it was proposed to allow fracking to extract oil along the Dempster Highway and elsewhere in the Yukon, YCS joined others in opposition to the land and water impacts and the climate impacts of more fossil fuel extraction.

But not all YCS responses to infrastructure developments have been negative. YCS has been a strong supporter of wind power as a key to overcoming our shortage of winter electrical generation and of solar electrical generation which is particularly suited for off-grid locations. However, as the Michael Moore film stresses strongly, such sources of energy are intermittent. But unlike in the US where fossil fuels are the common compensation, YCS has been encouraging the Yukon Government to take advantage of our mountainous terrain to store energy.

We would be following Europe's example of building a pumped hydro storage 'energy bank' so surplus energy, particularly from the summer, can be stored for use in the winter or when solar and wind energy aren't available. Small scale hydroelectrical facilities and geothermal energy may also be part of Yukon's energy mix.

In general, Yukoners have been strong supporters of YCS's work on energy infrastructure issues. But it is becoming ever clearer that 'the house is on fire' as Greta Thunberg warns us, and trying to continue with current or increased energy consumption simply won't put the fire out. With the COVID pandemic forcing us all to slow down and travel less, are Yukoners ready to engage with YCS in the difficult discussion of how we can start taking less from the earth, beginning with our use of energy?

– Stuart Clark

Walk Softly

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Noah Sternbergh (ETS Intern)

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Editorial

Davon Callander

Looking back to the day I stepped into the Executive Director's role on February 1st 2020 seems like a lifetime ago. The world has become an entirely different place today than it was back then, and that was only 3 months ago! I have been with YCS since July of last summer when I accepted the job as Outreach and Communications Manager. Working at YCS through the summer and fall of last year was such a rewarding experience. It has felt so wonderful to be part of an organization that has the ability to effect change in areas of the environment and conservation that are so important to me, and to so many of our members, supporters, and volunteers. It is humbling to now be the ED for an organization like YCS, where I can help amplify the message of our historic organization who is known to punch above our weight in terms of what our small team can accomplish.

Our small team is made up of devoted, knowledgeable, and passionate individuals with whom I love coming to work with every day (though I only see them on video calls these days!). Our members, volunteers, and supporters are inspiring. It has been such a great pleasure to get to know people and hear about their history with YCS. I look forward to meeting more and more of our members as the time goes by.

There are so many exciting things happening with YCS that I'm bursting to tell you about them! We officially launched our Electric Thermal Storage Demonstration project with registration opening on April 22nd, the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day. [There is an article in this Walk Softly about the project.] The Covid-19-friendly summer nature programming is coming together for YCS' hiking program! I've been talking about how 2020 is YCS' 30th year with the trail guide program, but I have realized that actually, it is our 40th year! We are dedicated to make the program this year a success while we work within the health guidelines to keep everyone safe. The YCS community garden outside our office is getting spruced up for the summer too.

Settling in to my new role as ED, working from home (with my two year old roaming around the house where she's not getting into ANYTHING that she shouldn't... ya right!) and looking forward to the rest of 2020 and the years ahead is very exciting. These Covid-19 social distancing days are tough. We are very fortunate here in the Yukon, with our relatively low human population numbers. We can safely get outside into nature and take in the beauty around us. We can look to the rivers, the mountains, the big skies and take a deep breath of that clean crisp Yukon air. We are a part of nature, and it is a part of us. We need to continue to work together to protect it, as I would protect my precious two year old daughter. Together at YCS, we can continue to make a difference in the world to protect the land, water and wildlife. I look forward to working with the board, staff, and our membership to advance the YCS priorities.

Welcome to Our New Staff!

Eric Labrecque (ETS Project Manager)

Eric brings a multi-disciplinary background centered around helping northern communities reduce their reliance on fossil fuels to his role as project manager for YCS's electric thermal storage (ETS) demonstration project. He joined us from the Northern Energy Innovation (NEI) research group at Yukon College, where he contributed his energy system modelling and communication skills to a variety of renewable energy projects across the territories. He completed his Master of Science in Mechanical Engineering from the University of New Brunswick while working with the NEI team, with his master's thesis focused on an ETS technology that utilizes the soil beneath a building as a thermal battery. He spends his free time biking and hiking along Whitehorse's trails, climbing the nearby mountains, playing board games with friends, and renovating his tiny house.

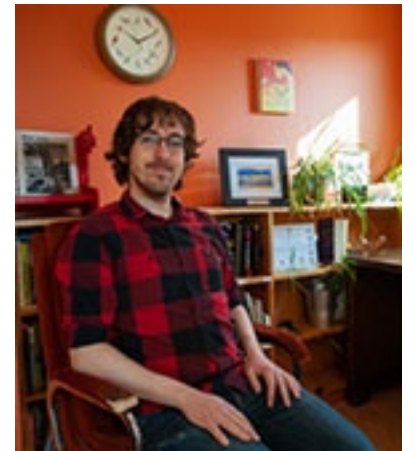


Photo by: Julien Gignac/
The Narwhal



Noah Sternbergh (ETS Intern)

Noah brings her experiences as an engineering student and her time as a research assistant on the Yukon College's Northern Energy Innovation (NEI) team to YCS. Her work in these past roles will benefit her efforts as intern on the Electric Thermal Storage project. During her time with NEI she worked on establishing diverse aspects of the Grid Impact Study project, ranging from report automation, programming and sorting data intake using MATLAB, to designing model validation reports including test protocols for remote micro grids. A born and raised Yukoner, when Noah isn't working or studying, she can be found experimenting with fermentation in the kitchen, coaxing her backyard garden into cooperation, and generally making the most out of living in one of the most beautiful places in the world.

Deborah Donnelly (Outreach and Communications Manager)

B.Sc., M.A. in Archaeological Sciences

Deborah has a diverse career background that includes Environmental, Emergency and Security Management working in a variety of sectors (government, heritage, mining, energy, Navy). She has worked extensively both across Canada and internationally. In addition to her degrees in archaeology (U of T), she has a certificate in Decision Making for Climate Change (UBC) and a diploma in World Heritage Conservation (UCD). Her prior experience in the Canadian Arctic included being the Environmental Coordinator for NorthwesTel. Deborah grew up in northern B.C. and enjoys the outdoor lifestyle found in the Yukon. In her time off she can often be found cycling, gardening or hiking.

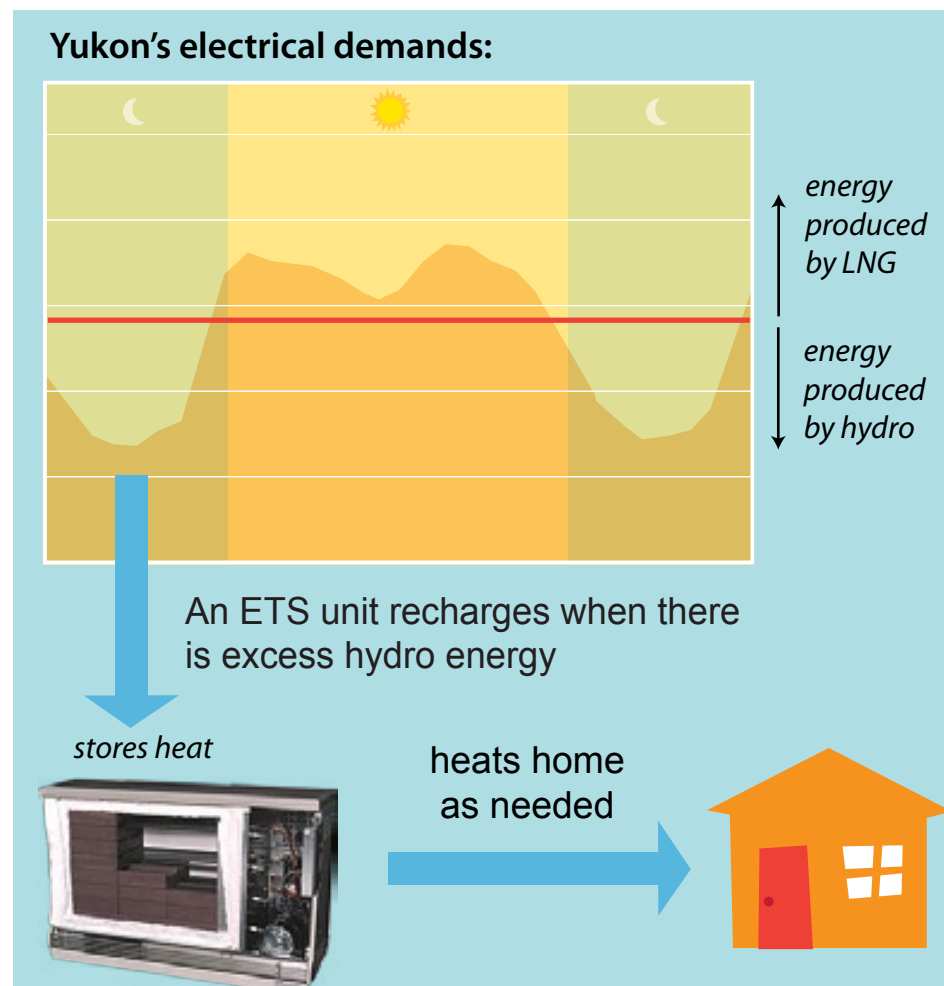


Electric Thermal Storage: Yukoners Leading the Charge!

This year, we have taken on our biggest project ever: the Yukon Electric Thermal Storage Demonstration project. Eric Labrecque, the project manager, and Noah Sternbergh, the project intern, were thrilled to see nearly 50 Yukoners register for the pilot project in the first 24 hours of the registration period, which started on April 22nd - the 50th Earth Day! The project is off to a strong start despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

This pilot project will see electric thermal storage (ETS) systems installed in at least 40 homes, mostly in and around Whitehorse, replacing the main heat source in participating homes. Over the next two winters we will collect data from those ETS units which will be used to answer questions about the use of this technology in the North.

One of our key mandates here at the Yukon Conservation Society is to advocate for clean energy solutions. That's what the ETS project is all about. While 92% of electricity generated by Yukon Energy (one of our project partners) was from hydro in 2018, every year Yukon's average energy demand grows. The recent rise in popularity in electric heating has added to our generation capacity needs. The rising peak winter demand has made it particularly difficult to minimize our usage of fossil fuels to generate electricity. One way to help curb the peak while reducing generation capacity needs, and in doing so reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, is by shifting the demand. That's where ETS could come in.



Electric thermal storage systems are an electric heating solution to Yukon's rising winter peak. Unlike baseboards and typical electric furnaces, they are designed to only use electricity when demand on the electrical grid is at its lowest each day. They work by running electricity through a heating element (similar to what you'd find in an electric stove) which heats the surrounding dense ceramic bricks. While the bricks can be heated relatively quickly, it takes them hours to cool down during which time they are used to heat the home.

While the ETS units heat your home continuously, charging is timed using controls tied to grid demand and user settings. This allows the units

to charge during off peak hours, usually during the overnight hours, and switch off charging during peak demand hours, which are usually in the morning and evening (during which time the home's heat load is instead met with thermal energy stored in the ETS system's bricks). The ability for ETS systems to reduce peak demand, as well as to store excess energy produced from intermittent energy sources such as wind or solar, has been proven in other jurisdictions such as Summerside, PEI and Alaska.

The Yukon ETS demonstration project will give greater insight into how this technology can be used in the Yukon, both as a home heating solution and as a grid

storage solution. In future, this technology may help to provide additional flexibility to our grid and allow for a higher penetration of intermittent renewables. Improved energy storage infrastructure is key to helping the Yukon kick the fossil fuel habit for good.

Over the course of the project, the ETS team here at YCS will be helping everyone get as much benefit from this project as we can. We will be making energy literacy videos to explain some of the more complex aspects of the project. While COVID-19 restrictions last, we'll be posting on our Facebook and Twitter pages some little-known facts about energy. Once the farmer's market is open again, we'll be reaching out to Yukoners from our stand there to tell you about what we've learned about electric thermal storage. We're excited to take part in this project with all of you!

This project is the culmination of a lot of hard work from a diverse group of partners, stakeholders, experts and Yukoners. We'd like to thank everyone who has participated in getting the ETS project off the ground, especially the Northern Energy Innovation team, Yukon Government's Energy Branch, Yukon Energy Corporation, JP Pinard, and all of those who have been taking an interest in ETS since the beginning.

Eric, Noah, and the whole YCS team looks forward to finding out what we can do when Yukoners take charge!

– Eric Labrecque
and Noah Sternbergh
(YCS ETS Manager and Intern)

You could be a part of the ETS project!

Those who would like to participate in the pilot project are encouraged to apply through the ETS page on the YCS website. To be eligible to participate, applicants will need to own their own homes, have completed or be willing to arrange an energy audit on their homes (arranged through the Yukon Government's Energy Branch, one of our project partners), have an internet connection, and live in Southern Yukon.

We will be selecting eligible applicants based on specific details of their energy audits and a number of other criteria designed to help us select a group of participants whose heating systems are representative of Southern Yukon.

Participants will have their ETS systems set up to send information to a customized secure cloud-based data collection service. That timestamped, coded data will be collected over the next two winters. It will be used by our partners in the Northern Energy Innovation team at Yukon College to answer a number of research questions about ETS's viability in the Yukon.

We are offering to cover 75% of the purchase and installation cost of participants' ETS systems. Those who stick around through the project's two-year duration will be provided with an additional 10% rebate upon its culmination. So, in addition to helping Yukoners know more about how electric thermal storage works up here, participants can look forward to a brand new, state of the art home heating system for 15% of what it would otherwise cost.

A note from the YCS Board President

Being from the Yukon, I have a strong love for the land and all things on it. My father who is Taku River Tlingit and my mother who is Liidii Kue First Nation, brought me onto the land a lot as I grew. I like to think this instilled a deep need to conserve these spaces we call home and help lend voice to the voiceless. So, it seemed only natural to gladly accept when two years ago Dave Mossop asked me to serve on the Yukon Conservation Society Board of Directors.

Over the years I have come to greatly appreciate the passion I see so often while serving on the Board of Directors. It has been a great honor and privilege to do so while getting to know our amazing YCS membership, and our wonderful staff.

In these changing times, YCS will continue to be a strong advocate for the ecosystems that sustain us, the voiceless which we share this place with, renewable energy, and responsible mining. YCS will continue to be a place where people can come together, share new (and old) ideas, and their dedication to advance conservation in the Yukon.

– Jared Gonet (President)



A message from Mike Walton, former YCS Executive Director

Hi everyone,

I trust you are all staying safe and well. Little did I know when I telephoned Skeeter after Christmas to let him know that I would be retiring from YCS as the Executive Director, that we would find ourselves in this difficult time. It is clearly a watershed opportunity for our society to reflect on what truly is important. I hope we come out of COVID-19 better than when we went in.

Deciding to leave YCS wasn't easy. Deciding to retire was. As many of you reading this will know, retiring is a good feeling kind of thing but leaving people is much harder. In my two years at YCS, colourful descriptions of YCS' founders, subsequent leaders, award winners and previous Executive Directors, informed me about the heart of YCS and the affection people carried for the organization. Memories and storytelling explained how YCS touched so many lives throughout the Yukon.

For me, a powerful memory at YCS is associated with writing thank you notes to members for their donations and membership renewals. As busy as it was and as stressed as I felt in the face of reporting deadlines and other commitments, writing to thank you for supporting us always gave me a moment of peace and gratitude. As I wrote, I would think of all the things you could be doing with your money and your time, and I marveled that you were choosing YCS as the beneficiary of both. Those thoughts remain inspirational to me and I thank you for that.



There were also the times when big cheques arrived from our funders. Looking at those amounts led me to think about the funders as individuals and their choices. I reflected that instead of just keeping the money for themselves they were sharing it. They didn't have to do that. This generosity, like that of our members, interrupted moments of cynicism and continued to buoy me when caught up in the chaos of balancing budgets, meeting deadlines, media calls and getting work out the door.

When I arrived at YCS many funders were wondering what next for YCS? It was evident that making the transition from a very focused purposeful "Protect the Peel" campaign that had captured the organization for so many years was critical. Whatever happened next had to resonate with funders' priorities and reflect what was important here in the Yukon.

We landed on an approach that advanced YCS growing the conversation about the urgency of protecting biodiversity, maintaining ecological integrity, and the need for landscape-scale conservation planning, including the establishment of protected areas and their interconnectivity across the landscape.

We also spoke to the funders about our intention to support a solutions-based approach to economic diversification through transitioning away from the use of fossil fuels to other forms of energy. We argued that it's not only important to protect wild places from extractive industry, but also to ensure that people can make a living on the land without impairing it.

We pointed out that in the Yukon, opportunity exists to apply the world's best thinking about how to live sustainably together on the land and that, reciprocally, Yukon could share with the world how addressing different ways of knowing, building alternatives to a wage economy, sharing power and decision-making, and learning together, can ultimately protect the wild places that are fast disappearing from this planet.

The funders agreed. So much so that YCS was able to increase funding contributions and position itself favourably with other potential funders. We also advanced relationships with different departments of the Yukon government and grew our relationships with the City of Whitehorse, the federal government and First Nation governments; all of which signaled to me that the transition from the Peel campaign to a diversified conservation program had successfully taken place. With this in mind I made the call to Skeeter to let him know my decision to retire.

Gerry Whitley is the winner of the 2019 Gerry Couture Award!

Gerry W's skill and fondness of flying has contributed greatly to the Yukon Conservation Society's ability to keep an airborne eye on things from up on high. Thanks to Gerry, YCS has been able to observe the cleanups and remediations – or lack thereof – occurring at mine sites, observed the impacts of oil and gas seismic lines at Eagle Plains, and been privy to seasonal environmental changes along lake shores and wetlands.

Gerry's skilled handling of his airplane along with his ability to capture camera images and videos have contributed immensely to YCS's ability to observe and protect the environment. He has done this all with a dry sense of humour and a gentle ability to remind us of the importance of seeing the truly big picture from the level of 3,000 feet above the ground.

On top of this, Gerry's encyclopedic knowledge and courage mean that he is feared by polluters and scofflaws. Just the type of person the Gerry Couture award was created for.

Fly on Gerry Whitley!



Jason Lane received the YCS Volunteer of the Year Award!

Jason Lane is a recent addition to our group, joining YCS in 2018. He started out last spring by helping us plant our edible garden deep beds. Showing a keen interest in gardening he continued by committing to watering the garden one day a week throughout the summer. In addition to his gardening help with YCS, Jason also helped out at our market booth at the Fireweed Community Market. With experience in retail, Jason was able to interact with the public in a positive way. Jason also participated on the Membership committee, bringing valuable insight into the discussion.

Thanks for being such a great volunteer Jason!

Type II Mine Cleanups Happening (Maybe)

It might still be too early to celebrate, and one hesitates to jinx the whole process by talking about it, but it does look like the Federal Government is actually doing something about the Type II Abandoned Mines. And by doing something, it means they are starting to do the paperwork in regards to remediation and site closure of these environmental disasters of mine sites.

The definition of a Type II Mine is a Yukon mine that the Federal Government originally approved. This means that if the mine ran into financial trouble, and someone had to pay to close it and do environmental remediation, the Federal Government would pay to do it. Mines approved by the Yukon Government since devolution are the responsibility of the territorial government. Now it is recognized that there is only one tax payer, but it is assumed (at least in Whitehorse) that Federal tax dollars are unlimited when it comes to paying to clean up mining messes, whereas Yukon tax dollars will hopefully never be sullied in such a manner.

The most infamous of the Type II Mines is the Faro Mine due to its geographic scale and the huge expense associated with its remediation, but there are actually six others. Not all of them require remediation and closure, but all of them are the responsibility of the Federal Government. The six are: Brewery Creek, which is being revitalized by a new owner; Clinton Creek, an old asbestos mine downstream from Dawson City; Ketz River, near Ross River; the Minto Mine still producing ore west of Pelly Crossing; Mount Nansen, near Carmacks; and the Keno Hill complex, north of Mayo.

The reason for possible celebration is because of the way the environmental assessment and approval process is moving forward. Let's start with the Faro Mine remediation. Very many documents have been posted on the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board (YESAB) website in regards to the remediation project the Federal Government hopes to be starting soon. It is not open for public comments yet, but the documents are available for download and review. If this is your sort of thing, go to the YESAB registry and search for project 2019-0149, or directly click on the Faro project.



Faro Mine Overflight – photo by Gerry Whitley/LightHawk/YCS

The next piece of good news is the Keno reclamation project. Its full title is United Keno Hill Mines Reclamation Project, and it is YESAB project 2018-0169. It has actually gone through the YESAB process and a Recommendation Report has been released by the board. Once it has been finalized in the form of a Decision Document, it will then proceed to the water licensing stage. The YESAB documents on Keno can be read here.

Rumour has it Mount Nansen will be up next for the YESAB process, maybe within a year or two. Alas, no word yet on the status of remediation and site closure of Clinton Creek, nor Ketz River. All that is known is that ongoing care and maintenance continues at these sites, and that the Federal taxpayer dollars continue to flow to pay for it all.

Now the cynics among the YCS membership will be quick to point out that having paperwork being processed versus actually doing something on site are two very separate things. There have been many vague promises over the decades to do something with the Type II mine sites, and how can anyone be sure this isn't more of the same? It's a good question, but in these unsettled times one must live in an optimistic frame of mind. Given that the various levels of government will soon be frantic to stimulate the local economy once the Health Emergency is over or at least contained, pumping millions into Type II mine site cleanups will be just the answer everyone craves.

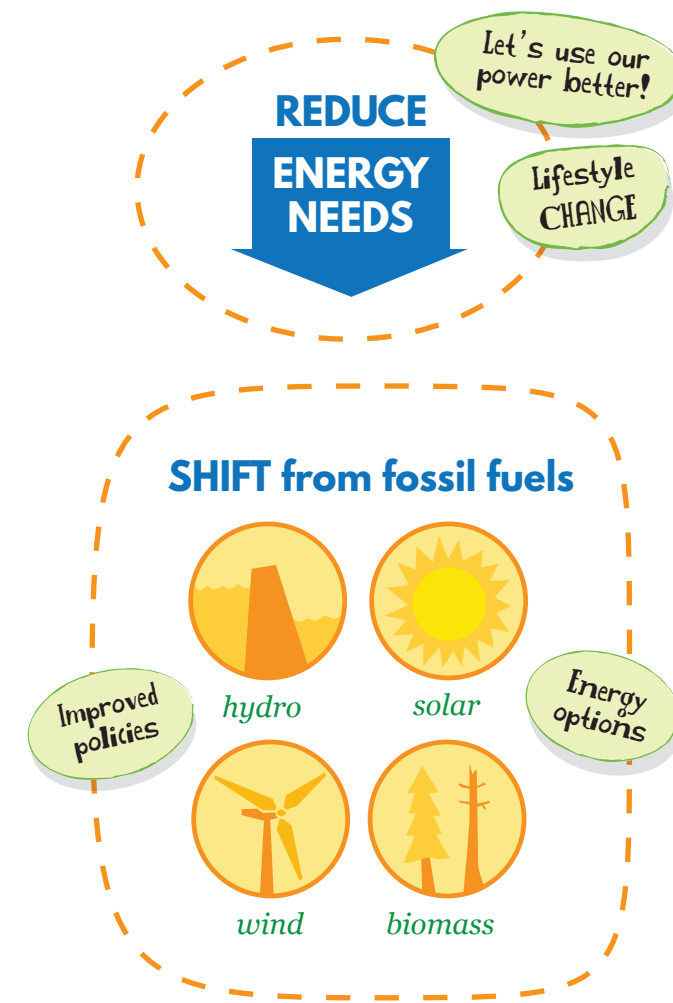
The local economy gets a huge stimulus, and these toxic threats to the environment will be removed, or at least reduced. So, let's hear it for the Type II mine cleanups. May they happen soon, but also may we never do anything so foolish as to create more types of these mine sites ever again.

– Lewis Rifkind
YCS Mining Analyst

How YCS is fighting Climate Change:

Rethinking Energy Use

YCS works to help individuals and the Yukon to use energy efficiently through **advocacy, education** and **pilot projects**.



Tipping points:

There are all sorts of climate crises that we are tipping but hopeful changes have tipping points too. Social movements don't need everyone involved to create great change. Once as few as 25% of people change, a movement tips over and becomes unstoppable. This is why individual action is so important even in the face of overwhelming odds.

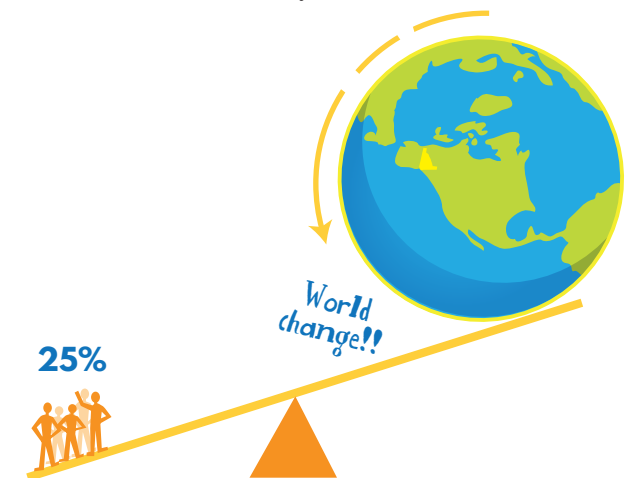
Nature Based Climate Solutions

Protecting nature and its services is cheaper and more effective than trying to fix it later.

Preserving wilderness is key to combating climate change.



- YCS is a strong voice for wildlife and habitat protection. Much of the Yukon is valuable global wilderness.
- YCS works to ensure responsible development with limited environmental impact. (eg. mines, roads and landuse plans)
- YCS connects people to nature and builds environmental literacy.



Yukon Needs (at least) Half

When this article was conceived, the Peel Watershed Land Use Plan still hung in the balance.

Happily, for reconciliation and for conservation, the Peel plan is signed with a total of 83% under permanent or interim (minimum 25 years) protection.

The Peel was only the second regional land use plan to be completed in the Yukon. The first was the North Yukon, and that plan too concluded that the majority of the land is best suited for conservation.

It is hard to exaggerate the significance of these achievements; in large part thanks to the wise leadership of First Nations, the Yukon is set on a path very rare on this world, one where we acknowledge that if we are to survive the climate and bio-diversity crises, we have to start with looking after the land. Our very lives depend on it.

A third regional land use plan is underway around Dawson.

This is a very different social environment to the North Yukon and the Peel; it hosts the second largest community in the Yukon and bears the marks of a century of gold mining. It also contains large intact landscapes, rare endemic species and magnificent free flowing rivers.

Partly inspired by the North Yukon and the Peel, partly inspired by the need to limit the expansion of the industrial footprint in the Dawson region, YCS, and others, have identified over 50% of the Dawson planning region as being better suited to conservation than development.

The Yukon was lucky enough to be visited by a remarkable human being, Harvey Locke in 2018. He gave an inspiring talk. Harvey has had an astonishing career, combining stunning accomplishment with game changing vision.

The SMALLER of his big visions is a system of connected protected areas along the spine of the North American Continent, stretching from here in the Yukon to Montana in the U.S. The system will roughly follow the Rocky Mountains, taking in iconic protected areas like Banff and Jasper- and the Peel- and ultimately anchored at Yellowstone National Park in the American state of Montana.

To achieve this vision, he formed an organization: Yellowstone to Yukon or Y2Y.

Ambitious as this project is, he realized that on its own it would not guarantee the endurance of the wild spaces, biodiversity and healthy habitat upon which we all depend.



You see, his great insight is that the larger the chunk of intact habitat, the greater the level of biodiversity and the more resilient it would be to shocks such as disease or climate change. This cause and effect has been well documented now in the field of Island Bio-Geography. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insular_biogeography

However, he recognized that it would be impossible to protect the entire Y2Y habitat because so many people had built towns and roads and mines and resorts in the area. The Island Effect would need to be mitigated by creating large protected areas and providing corridors between them through which wildlife could pass.

This work is progressing and is proving to be quite a success, not least by showing that we can vastly increase the amount of protected habitat while not negatively impacting society's ability to thrive.

Having set this astonishing vision in motion, Harvey Locke did not rest. The world, he said, is more than the Y2Y region. It all needs nurturing, so he began another organization, a global one, that was much more ambitious. It too is eponymous: Nature Needs Half.

At least half of the landscape, he argues, needs to be left intact so that biodiversity can persist and the ecosystem services upon which our communities depend, such as water filtration and storage, nutrient cycling, and carbon sequestration can take place.

Nature Needs Half is working around the world to make this vision come true, but in many places, the goals seems so far off as to be unattainable. Think of nations such as England, where almost every inch has been grossly modified over thousands of years. Even the wildest parts of England are planted forests with a rigid harvest schedule or moorlands that are regularly burned and grazed to boost grouse numbers for hunting.

But Yukon is much more lucky. People have lived in the Yukon since time immemorial, learning how to live with and from the natural bounty of the land. The knowledge of how to live here sustainably still exists.

Only recently, and mostly concentrated in a few places, have other people come and begun modifying the land, paving some of it, building on other parts. Some places have become farms or ranches; some places have been dug up for fleeting supplies of minerals. The Chinook salmon have been overfished to a remnant and several caribou herds have been overhunted almost to the point of extinction.

But they have survived. They have survived in large part because much of their habitat is still intact.

Almost uniquely in North America, Indigenous Peoples in the Yukon have constitutionally protected voice in the nurturing of our lands. The wisdom and knowledge of countless generations is available to make sure we do not repeat the mistakes we see to the south.

Most of the Yukon is still intact, but it will require hard work to make sure it stays that way.

It will require smart, focused, and strategic effort.

We need a goal.

I expect you are guessing where I'm going with this...

Regional land use planning is a provision of the treaties between Yukon First Nations and Canada.

A dozen or so large chunks of Yukon are designated to undergo the same style of collaborative planning as we have experienced in the North Yukon and Peel planning regions.

When Yukoners sat down together to consider the values of the land in these regions, they soon realized that the true value of the land was the land itself, and in both of these regions, we decided to conserve at least half as places where natural process could take place, uninterrupted and not dissected, for all time.



The question before us now is: Shall we carry on this courageous and visionary precedent and decide to protect at least half of the rest of the Yukon?

We have an opportunity here to do something truly remarkable.

If we achieve this vision, and over half the Yukon is preserved, the Yukon will be a shining example to the rest of Canada and justly held up as an inspiration to the rest of the world.

But I'm nervous.

I'm nervous because the consequences of failure are so dire.

If we cannot make this happen here, where can it happen? Without protection, natural systems, including our climate, will continue to deteriorate, threatening our very existence.

I'm nervous because while I know we can do this, we will only do this if we go about it in a smart and compassionate way.

I'm nervous because of the reaction this bold vision will produce. We have already seen the cries of outrage as we try to take steps to reduce our carbon emissions. I expect these same voices will consider that saving the world will be the end of the world.

I'm nervous because we have not properly considered how these actions will be received elsewhere or planned how to counter for this reception.

But, in the end, I'm confident that we do have the courage, the vision, the experience and the brilliance in Yukon people to make this happen and to secure a bright and sustainable future!

– Sebastian Jones
YCS Fish & Wildlife Analyst

Gardening for Success

Social Distancing is a term that has only recently come into our vocabulary. It means we are to stay a certain distance away from people who we do not live in close proximity with. It also means we are not to gather in groups larger than a certain number. With social distancing can come loneliness and a lack of purpose. This loneliness can lead to other anxieties and stresses that are not easy to alleviate.

Thankfully, here in the Yukon, we are able to relieve some of this by getting outside to enjoy nature. Moreover, gardening is just one way to enjoy it and still stay at home. Even a few potted plants on a balcony will provide this beneficial release. It just feels good to work with soil, physically and mentally. Planting the different garden beds gives a bit of hope for the future. Looking forward to tasting the rewards of the harvest with the first greens, fresh peas or a ripe tomato.

Getting into the garden this year will have other benefits as well. By growing some or most of our food, we will build some food security into our lives. We do not have to rely on the trucks coming up the highway just so we can have a salad. The grocery shelves might get low on stock, but our pantries and freezers will still have last summer's bounty. Becoming more self-sufficient will allow us to be more resilient when life or the world throws us a curve ball.

By growing your own garden, the food never tasted so good or so fresh, and saving the seeds from that garden allows the plants to develop Yukon hardiness. Every time plants are grown from Yukon seeds another layer of hardiness is added. This then strengthens our self-reliance, because the Yukon hardy plants will be able to grow and thrive in our local conditions, which its southern counterparts could not.



Check out Joan's successful garden!

Now we should not have waited for a lock down and social distancing to start growing our own food. We should have been doing this all along. There is less trucked up the highway or shipped across oceans when we grow more of what we eat.

Eating locally is not a new concept and its benefits are numerous. It cuts the carbon footprint of our food; it strengthens our food chain, and benefits our economy. Not everyone can grow an entire year's worth of food in their back yard but they can support those local farmers who do grow the food.

How does one eat local? Start by adding tomatoes or cucumbers from Whitehorse Gardens to your lunch. Carrots or potatoes from The Yukon Grain farm combined with some locally grown meat from Tum Tum's Butcher shop or YBAR meats for supper. Finish off the day with a locally brewed ale from Winterlong beer or Yukon Brewing.

In addition to a tasty meal, you have succeeded in supporting several local producers and local businesses. Succeeded in cutting down on carbon emissions because the food did not travel hundreds of miles. Succeeded in adding to the local economy. Succeeded in helping a neighbour while maintaining social distance. Succeeded in having a purpose with every food dollar spent. And success tastes great.

– Joan Norberg
Yukon farmer and
YCS Office Manager

YES! I want to help protect Yukon's environment by supporting the Yukon Conservation Society!

Send or drop off form to:
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info@yukonconservation.org

Both donations & memberships are tax deductible. A printable tax receipt will be emailed to you unless you request a paper copy.

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- I would like to receive a twice-monthly email with YCS news and events.
- I would like a paper tax receipt.



Yukon Conservation Society

YCS has been working since 1968 to protect the Yukon's land, water and wildlife – thanks to the support of members, donors and volunteers like you!

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Thank You to the 2019 Board of Directors for their dedication and service to YCS.

Thank you to our former Executive Director, Mike Walton, for your commitment and efforts in keeping YCS running.

Thank you to all our volunteers on the various committees for the work and expertise you provide to YCS.

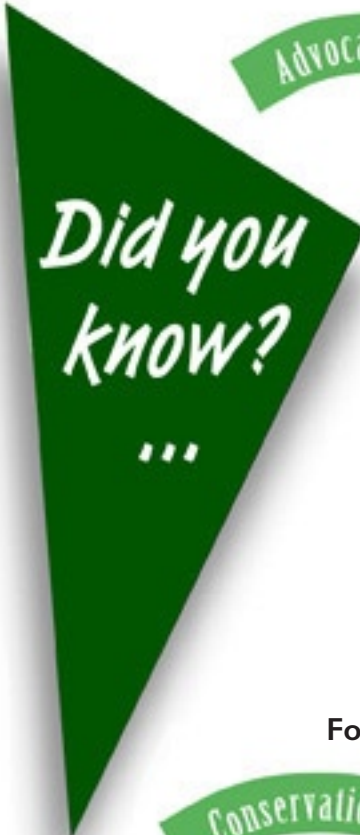
And thank you to our members, supporters and partners who make the work YCS does possible!

Stay Safe and Have a Happy Spring!

Thank You Volunteers!



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All Events have been postponed or cancelled to comply with YG guidelines with respect to COVID-19.

All YCS staff will be working from home for the foreseeable future. If you need to reach YCS, it is best to email the appropriate staff member (staff emails can be found on our website. <http://yukonconservation.org/who-we-are/our-team/staff>).

Stay healthy!

Review: Call of the Forest

“Call of the Forest, the Forgotten Wisdom of Trees” is an engaging and very beautiful film which takes us to forests from Japan to our own Boreal. With wonder, it focuses on the science of the trees’ gifts to us of life and health, and on forest restoration and protection. Diana Beresford-Kroeger, Canada and Ireland’s preeminent tree botanist, comes with us from one forest to the next. In its conclusion, hear her brief, practical plan to reverse climate change.

If you love trees, the hour-long film is available to watch on TVO.

– Mary Amerongen

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