

Walk Softly

Newsletter of the
Yukon Conservation Society
Spring 2021



Inside: • Yukon Mineral Development Strategy • New Staff • Gerry Whitley

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Cover Photo:

Lynx at Lake Laberge – taken December 17, 2020 by Ray Marnoch



YCS Volunteer of the Year Award 2020

We were very pleased to present the award to Tanya Handley who has provided graphic design support to YCS over the last 24 years. A lot of work goes into preparing the layout for *Walk Softly*, and we are truly indebted to her for this tremendous gift she provides us. We would be remiss without noting that Tanya was also the one to create the sculpture ‘Owlvivia’ which has become an iconic institution to YCS in our garden!

Thank you so much Tanya!

Tanya enjoying the fruits of last summer’s successful rhubarb hunt.

2020 Gerry Couture Stewardship Award

We were very pleased to present the 2020 Gerry Couture Stewardship Award announce that Norman Barichello.

Norman has spent a lifetime pursuing conservation, as a wildlife biologist, First Nation advisor, naturalist guide, and educator. He has spent over 30 years working with the Kaska Dena of the Yukon and BC, and in particular the Ross River Dena. He has participated in studies of grizzly bears, polar bears, wolves, Dall sheep, Mountain goats, caribou and gyrfalcons. He just recently published a natural history book: *Gyrfalcon: The One Who Stays All Winter*.

Upon presenting the medal and award to Norman, Coral Voss, Executive Director of YCS said, “I am honoured to have the opportunity to recognize Norman for his extraordinary lifetime of efforts on behalf of the wild places and all of those creatures who live in these places.”

Norman Barichello responded that he feels “honoured to have been selected for the Gerry Couture Stewardship Award in the company of so many people who have committed their lives to conservation here in the Yukon. In my journeys, I have been fortunate to have learned from many elders and others who have dedicated themselves to conservation here in the Yukon - Dave Mossop, Don Reid, Katarzyna Nowak and Hillary Cooke, to name a few, as well as the late Bob Frisch and Gerry Couture.”



Norman Barichello receiving the Gerry Couture Stewardship Award from Coral Vos at our COVID respecting (chilly!) Holiday Open House.

Walk Softly

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Editorial

Coral Voss

Happy New Year 2021! Yukon Conservation Society has had a busy start to the New Year preparing for an eventful and exciting 2021. We have just completed the beginning stages of a new Strategic Plan, I can't give anything away just yet but we are excited for the coming years. Deborah is tirelessly preparing for the coming trail guide season and 'Created at the Canyon', 10th Anniversary ~ summer is not that far away. We are in the early stages of creating a new website, so watch for something new this Spring!

I would also like to continue by sharing some further thrilling news from the past few months. We have two new individuals joining our amazing crew; we are delighted to welcome Clément Richard in his role as the ETS Project Assistant and Scott Pressnail in his role as the Energy Analyst beginning February 15th. We were sorry to say goodbye to Noah Sternbergh, but wish her all our best in her future endeavours and her new position at Solvest.

YCS hosted a unique and fun Holiday Open House on December 11th with a fire pit and hot cocoa to stay warm and marshmallows to toast. We also awarded Norman Barichello the 2020 Gerry Couture Award, and Volunteer of the Year Award to Tanya Handley.

We have had a busy few months with numerous YESAB and land-use planning submissions. YCS was also involved in water board, water quality and wetland submissions. The ETS project released an announcement over the Holidays that the project would cover 100% of the costs for participants who registered by January 31st. The project now has 16 participants with 20 installations anticipated in the coming weeks.

So, as I stare out my window at the fox prints in the snow, I wish you all a healthy, warm and restful New Year.

Save the Date!
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Tuesday, March 30, 2021
6-8pm

Venue to be decided...



Spring 2021

Yukon Mineral Development Strategy

There's a whiff of change in the air these days around the Yukon Conservation Society offices. Or more accurately, around the online forums and meeting places where YCS staff congregate as most of us work from home.

And that change is to do with the Yukon Mineral Development Strategy. For those not in the know, the Yukon Mineral Development Strategy (YMDS) is a collective strategy for the management of placer and quartz mineral prospecting, exploration, development, production, reclamation, closure and post-closure management.

It is a strategy based on a Mining Memorandum of Understanding between the Yukon Government's Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, the Grand Chief of the Council of Yukon First Nations, and Chiefs of the self-governing Yukon First Nations. It committed the Parties to work collaboratively to improve the management of placer and quartz mining in the Yukon.

The result was the Yukon Mineral Development Strategy independent panel. It went around the Yukon listening to Yukoners (yes, even YCS) and has now issued the final draft of a document entitled the Yukon Mineral Development Strategy and Recommendations. It's available online at <http://yukonmds.com/>.



This draft strategy outlines six strategic priorities:

1. Establish a modern mineral management regime aligned with the modern treaties with Yukon First Nations, transboundary treaties, the principles of reconciliation enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the recommendations of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
2. Create substantive and sustained Yukon socio-economic returns from resource development that benefit Yukon First Nations, local communities and all Yukoners today and in the future.
3. Establish effective, efficient and transparent environmental and regulatory processes.
4. Operate within an attractive investment climate which supports competitive and innovative mineral development enterprises.
5. Demonstrate environmental responsibility and preparedness to adopt practices to address climate change including the implementation of green energy measures.
6. Provide support for leading edge workforce development and public awareness initiatives.

Now a quick glimpse of these six priorities are all very positive. The devil, of course, is in the details.

For example, there is much mention of reforming the placer royalties from the current thirty-seven and half cents an ounce (it hasn't been increased in over a century) to replacing it with a profit-based placer gold royalty. Now there is no mention of how much this could be different from the current placer royalty, nor why a net-output placer gold royalty wasn't mentioned. YCS is of the opinion that the latter royalty scheme would be better.

The YMDS independent panel is giving everyone (yes, even YCS) another chance to provide comments on the independent panel's work. By reviewing and commenting on the draft Strategy and Recommendations YCS will be able to provide input to ensure any future mining legislation and regulation reflects environmental priorities.

YCS staff and volunteers are still reviewing the draft Strategy and Recommendations. There will be updates on what YCS thinks is good, what is bad, and what should be changed, on our social media accounts and email updates. YCS encourages everyone interested in the environmental impacts that mining causes to review the draft Strategy and Recommendations and submit their own comments.

The YMDS Independent Panel is accepting comments on the Strategy and Recommendations until 4:30pm on February 22nd, 2021. There are two ways to submit feedback to the Independent Panel: a public comment survey, or upload a written submission. Details on how to submit comments, and to read the draft recommendations, are at <http://yukonmds.com/>.

If you have any comments contact the YCS Mining Analyst, Lewis Rifkind, at [mining@yukonconservation.org](mailto: mining@yukonconservation.org).

- Lewis Rifkind

Spring 2021

The Seed Library – at the Yukon Energy Mines and Resources Library

The light is returning, slowly but surely, and we are busy processing seed donations and conducting germination testing for the coming year. This past year has been a bit different for the Seed Library, as we had to temporarily close our doors just two weeks after the Seed Library season launch, due to COVID-19 prevention measures across the Yukon.

While we were closed, we still managed to get seeds out to local gardeners: in April, we partnered with the Yukon Conservation Society to offer a “little free seed library” from YCS’ garden: fifty bundles of pre-packaged seeds were up for grabs. They went fast! In late June, we provided bundles of seed packets to Whitehorse Connects, which is sponsored by the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition. We included seeds that work well if they are sown late in the season, and these were extremely popular. We were really happy to provide seeds to our community in these ways, even though we couldn’t be open for part of the growing season.

We reopened the library doors in June, and since then we’ve been open to all who wish to pick up seeds, borrow gardening books and magazines, and share their local gardening questions and discoveries.

Garden research

We’re already dreaming about our gardens and doing a bit of off-season research - maybe this is the year you dig deep on soil health, build a greenhouse, or try square foot gardening. We have lots of gardening books and magazines at the EMR Library, so come by and borrow a few to help your garden dreams along.

Call for seed donations!

Do you have seed donations you haven’t brought in yet? Now is a great time to drop them off, so we have time to test and package them for the coming season. We were very pleased to see that so far, donations this year have been strong – despite (or maybe because of?) how everyone’s lives have been disrupted by the pandemic.



Plant profiles: feedback wanted!

Have you used our plant profiles (the little slips of paper tucked alongside the seed packets) to help guide your planting, growing, harvesting, and seed saving? Do you have useful advice from your own experience growing a particular seed that you’d like to share with other seed library users? The information in our plant profiles has evolved over the years to become more and more locally-specific, and we’re always working to improve them. Your knowledge and experience are so useful to other growers, we would be glad to hear from you.

We are particularly interested in hearing where your experience did not match the instructions on a plant profile! For example, one of our staff grew sorrel last year, and in doing so realised that the seeding dates given on the plant profile were a bit late. We’ll be editing that profile this year to give an earlier planting time to make sure that future borrowers of sorrel seeds have solid info to get their plants started for our short growing season.

Seed Library programming

We are hard at work planning the seed library season to come – it may look a little different than previous years, but we are hoping to get some gardening talks started up again. Stay tuned for more updates to come.

We will launch the 2021 Seed Library season in March – see you then!

The Seed Library is located within the Yukon Energy Mines and Resources Library. We’re on the 3rd floor of the Elijah Smith Building in downtown Whitehorse, and we’re open to the public Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm.

The Seed Library is free to use and open to all. We provide free locally-hardy open-pollinated seeds that are adapted to our northern growing conditions and short season.

Questions? Call 867-667-3111 or email emrlibrary@yukon.ca

Welcome to YCS Clément and Scott!

ETS Project Assistant: Clément Richard

Clément joined us after supporting local entrepreneurs via Innovation & Entrepreneurship with Yukon University at Northlight Innovation. There, he gained experience supporting projects via funding, guidance, workshop, and creating connections in the northern network. Clément moved to the Yukon in 2018 after completing his master’s degree from Sherbrooke University, Québec, where he worked on the insertion of natural fibers in plastic matrices. He completed his engineering diploma from ISMANS, France, in Mechanical Engineering, with an extra curriculum in nanomaterial and advanced characterization from Sherbrooke University. In addition to his technical background, he is focusing on problem-solving dynamics with creative solutions and bringing ideas to their full potential.

His off work-life involves an eclectic mix of cooking, wilderness camping, manual projects, and sword fighting.



Energy Analyst: Scott Pressnail

Scott will be starting remotely on February 15th, and is expected to start at our office in April. We wish to welcome him to YCS!

Scott brings a multi-disciplinary engineering background to the Yukon Conservation Society. Scott holds a Bachelor’s in Mechanical Engineering and a Master’s of Science in Sustainable Energy and the Environment, where he was exposed to a variety of energy technologies. His research focused on developing tools to predict maintenance requirements for tidal stream turbines to increase their reliability. Scott has worked on the construction of run of river hydro-electric projects and enjoys working with data as a tool to develop informed decisions. His enthusiasm for the outdoors has motivated his interest in renewable energy technologies and energy management. Hobbies include spending time skiing, biking and hiking.

The time that the Caribou won: A good news story

This is the story of how the frackers were chased out of Eagle Plain, and how the wintering grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd were saved. It is a tale of how Caribou, determined First Nations, dedicated Yukoners and a courageous assessor overcame the might of the oil and gas industry.

If there is one mammal likely to suffer and decline as a result of the climate crisis it is Caribou.

Caribou are very sensitive to disturbance and are easily overharvested, and in most places, Canada's once great herds have declined to shadows of their former glory.

Caribou survived in the circumpolar north for millions of years; anywhere that lichens grow and snow falls, Caribou worked out ways to thrive.

One of the most remarkable ways that some far northern populations of Caribou adapt is to migrate, some travel over a thousand kilometers on their journeys between their wintering grounds in the boreal forest, through the Barren Grounds that give them their name, to their calving and summer ranges in the tundra beside the Arctic Ocean.

The last of the great herds is the Porcupine Caribou Herd. It winters in the North Central Yukon, and migrates north in summer to Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge by the Beaufort Sea. An entire people, the Gwitchin, evolved alongside this herd; their communities grew up athwart the migratory routes.

The battle to preserve the calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou in Alaska is widely known-and is still raging. Not so many people know that its winter range in the Yukon was recently equally threatened.

The Dempster Highway links Dawson City and Inuvik and cuts across the migratory paths of the Caribou. It was built to enable resource development, primarily oil near the highway, and gas near Inuvik. Oil companies came and drilled a few wells near the highway, about a dozen or so from the 1950s to the 1970s, but they really did not show rich enough flow to justify their dream of creating a northern version of Alberta, so the big companies packed up and left the land to the Caribou and the Gwitchin (and a few leaky well sites for the Government to clean up).

In the 2000s, a new oil extraction technique, fracking, was developed. Using high super high pressure water to blast apart shale rocks, such as those under Eagle Plain, could release oil from rocks that were previously uneconomic. A small Canadian company partnered up with the Chinese government overseas oil corporation and acquired the old oil leases along the Dempster and began planning a brand-new oil field.

There is no doubt whatsoever that had this project been fully realized that it would have doomed the Porcupine herd as surely as the oil and gas industry has devastated the caribou in Alberta and Northern BC.

However, the Yukon is governed very differently compared to the Provinces in southern Canada. The really big difference is that most Yukon First Nations have modern treaties with Canada that include self-government powers, similar to those of Provinces and Territories. In partial return for ceding full sovereignty over the lands Indigenous peoples had stewarded since time immemorial, a series of co-management bodies have been created that manage the land, the fish, the wildlife and the trees.

There is also a body, YESAB, that does environmental assessments. Its job is to examine projects before they get permits and to decide if they will cause negative socio-economic or environmental effects, and make recommendations on how they can best proceed – or recommend they not take place.

So, when the oil company submitted its proposal to drill a series of oil wells at Eagle Plain, environmental groups and caribou dependent First Nations joined forces with co-management bodies such as the Porcupine Caribou Management Board and poked holes into the company proposals until they were torn to shreds.

The war took years, and sometimes the frackers won battles: they scarred the landscape with seismic lines and they drilled a couple of wells, they even shipped some oil to Whitehorse. But the might of the oil and gas industry concealed a fatal flaw: they discounted the rights and powers of Yukon First Nations, the role of Final Agreement co-management bodies and they gravely underestimated the deep experience and fierce determination of the Yukon people.

Oil companies globally are used to buying their way through government permitting processes, reasoning that the prospect of billions in tax revenue would overcome any environmental qualms. This business model does not work in the Yukon.

People have looked after the land in the Yukon- and in return, the land has looked after the people – for longer than anywhere else in Canada. People take their stewardship role seriously.

Ultimately, the Yukon coalition wore down the oil company. We identified flaws and lies in the company plans so they had to keep re-submitting their proposals and they simply refused to address fundamental issues such as the impact of the project on the ability of Indigenous people to harvest caribou- something explicitly protected in the Treaties.

YESAB, the Yukon's environmental assessor, eventually concluded that the proposals were not supplying the information required to complete the assessment and passed the assessment up to a higher level which would enable more resources and more time to be brought to bear.

At around the same time, it became apparent that the Yukon as a whole was deeply uncomfortable with fracking and the Chinese backers, perhaps disgusted with the whole thing, bailed and the company collapsed.

A shadow of the company still exists, it still owns the old wells and the few wells it drilled for itself. But Eagle Plain is quiet again, except when the Porcupine Caribou Herd fills the air with the clicks of its hoofbeats on its annual rounds.

The eight wells that are still the responsibility of Chance Oil are currently suspended – a temporary condition. Wells are not allowed to remain suspended beyond a defined period of time before they are either brought into production or permanently closed. These wells have greatly over run their allotted suspension period, we expect that the government will soon require that they be either closed or used.

*Sebastian Jones,
Wildlife Analyst for the Yukon
Conservation Society*



YCS Sponsors 'The Magnitude of All Things' at ALFF

This documentary film looks at grieving and climate change. It will be held online as part of the Available Light Film Festival (ALFF) from February 7th through the 22nd.

The documentary was written and directed by Jennifer Abbott and produced in 2020. Following is a short description from the ALFF website.

When Jennifer Abbott lost her sister to cancer, her sorrow opened her up to the profound gravity of climate breakdown. Abbott's new documentary *The Magnitude of All Things* draws intimate parallels between the experiences of grief—both personal and planetary. Stories from the frontlines of climate change merge with recollections from the filmmaker's childhood on Ontario's Georgian Bay.

What do these stories have in common? The answer, surprisingly, is everything.

For the people featured, climate change is not happening in the distant future: it is kicking down the front door. Battles waged, lamentations of loss, and raw testimony coalesce into an extraordinary tapestry, woven together with raw emotion and staggering beauty that transform darkness into light, grief into action.



Arctic National Wildlife Reserve

Debate over the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve (ANWR) in Alaska goes back decades. And while the end is in sight for Trump's deplorable regime, the administration attempts to strip its last bit of land and culture by recklessly beginning oil and gas lease sales within the refuge's coastal plain, an area that the Gwich'in people have called a "sacred place".

Located within the Arctic Circle in the northeastern corner of Alaska, the region once nicknamed 'America's Serengeti' was protected in 1960 by President Dwight Eisenhower for its rich habitats from Brooks Range Mountains, to rivers, to the Arctic Ocean. Well before this time, the Gwich'in people have relied on the Arctic refuge and abundance of life for thousands of years.

It's difficult to describe how non-negotiable this ecosystem is for the persistence of wildlife in a short form article. Each summer, more than 200 species of birds from six continents migrate to the ANWR, taking advantage of plants and insects. Polar bears and cubs den on the coastal plain over winter. And perhaps one of the most impressive wildlife migrations in the world - over 200,000 caribou from the Porcupine Herd migrating annually to calve in the region. An abundance of wildlife that's become the center of culture and survival for the Gwich'in people.

Seismic testing is hugely destructive to wildlife. In the middle of denning season in an area holding approximately one-third of all female bear dennings, seismic activity will disrupt hibernation for a species whose habitat is already in dire conditions from rising temperatures and melting sea ice. Migration of birds is also largely disrupted and will have consequences for bird populations across the globe. Not to mention the catastrophic effect of irresponsible oil drilling on climate change, particularly in Arctic regions where the effects on ecosystems are magnified.

In January, the Trump administration suffered a miraculous setback with a lease sale that attracted just three bidders - one from the Alaskan state-owned economic development corporation and two from other oil companies. The sale generated a pitiful fraction of the revenue it was expected to raise likely due to a global recession, low oil prices and immense pressure against the lease by drilling opponents.

Favourably, the oil leases can take up to two months to finalize and the Trump administration will no longer be in power at this time, and the Biden administration has openly opposed drilling the Arctic region. With major pushback from the Gwich'in people, the general public, environmental NGOs and the YCS team, we hope to see permanent protection for the Arctic region in the new presidency.

The idea that the destruction of land so precious to people, culture, and wildlife is even up for debate, is gut wrenching. Especially, while the world gains unprecedented momentum and the largest expansion of clean energy from wind and solar in the previous five years as well as battery technology for electric cars.

The Arctic is all of ours.

You see, state-territory lines may discern governance but the unique ecosystem of the Arctic region is a treasured entity that knows no borders. In these times of political and social turmoil, YCS will stand strong and true to our mandate to secure conservation successes in the territory and Arctic region alike. Moving forward we will keep an eye on this progression and support our neighbours in the fight for environmental health.

Ana Giovanetti



Geological Evidence of Climate Change



These two environmental photos illustrate one aspect of climate change. There is a person in each of the photos to give you an idea of the size of the feature.

Apparently, the triangular-shaped feature (mounds) in the black and white photos is a Molard. I had never seen such a feature until August of 2019 when three of us were hiking in the Goodwin Lake area (headwaters of the Kusawa River), just south of the BC/Yukon border. When I got back I went to see one of my former students (Kristen Kennedy), who is a Surficial Geologist with Yukon Energy, Mines and Resources. She looked at the photo and identified it as a probable Molard. (It is so nice to be educated by a former student!) I had never heard of this feature before.

I have included a link to an abstract "Molards as an indicator of permafrost degradation and landslide processes" (2019) that explains how the feature forms and indicates that we will probably see more of these due to climate change.

See <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0012821X19301955>.

Excerpt from this paper's abstract:

We demonstrate that molards are readily recognisable not only in the field, but also in remote sensing data; surveys of historic aerial imagery allow the recognition of relict molards, which can be used as an indicator of current and past permafrost conditions. The triggering of landslides as a result of permafrost degradation will arguably occur more often as global atmospheric temperatures increase, so molards should be added to our armoury for tracking climate change, as well as helping us to understand landslide-related hazards.

Information and photos provided by Keith Lay

Contemplating the Garden

Winter is a time of contemplation, and what better way to contemplate than sitting by the fire with a seed catalogue and a hot drink. Catalogues are meant to entice us to grow the newest and fanciest vegetable/flower/plant ever. But not all plants are created equal, and living north of 60 has its own unique challenges. So, planning a garden can be quite the ordeal.

Some things to keep in mind while perusing the catalogues is the time it will take until harvest/bloom of the plant. There is nothing more depressing than watching a plant grow to the point of bud and then not have it blossom because it got covered in an early snowfall. Planting times, whether indoors or outdoors, and protection requirements should be taken into consideration.

The type of growing conditions required is vast due to the many micro-climates in the Yukon. Some places can't grow potatoes as it's too cold, some fight frost every night, some have clay soils while others are sandy, and some lack sufficient water in the soil. None are the perfect location, but over time we do learn what works best in our own particular gardens.

Most northern gardeners make allowances for season length and hardiness. But there are other things that may not make it into the garden plan. With some plants, heat is a requirement and many of us try to accommodate that for our special tomato or pepper plant. Other plants that seem to need heat, actually only need daylight. The longer days may be a good thing when it helps the plant finish the season in fewer days.

One plant I have seen this with is peas. I can plant peas around the same time as my mother, who lives on the prairies, but I tend to harvest earlier than her because in June the plants can grow almost 20 hours/day. But extended daylight can be a bad thing when it comes to plants like spinach, which tend to go to seed in the longer days of the North.

Another thing that some gardeners don't take into consideration is whether the particular seed or plant choice will end up causing problems by becoming invasive. Here in the north we are usually so happy when something actually grows, that we often don't consider the repercussions on the environment around us, like colonizing our garden, and our neighbor's garden, and the hinterland near our garden. The Yukon Invasive Species Council (<https://www.yukoninvasives.com/>) has very good information on what is, and what isn't a good choice for a Yukon garden.

Invasive species mainly pertain to permanent plantings (perennials) or annual flowers, but vegetables can sometimes produce seed that will go wild in the garden. I have had this happen in our vegetable garden, with a few different varieties. One thing I have noticed is while they may volunteer (grow back) for a few years, they often don't take over an area permanently.

These are the plants it would be good to save seed from as they would have a "memory" of the Yukon summer "genetically programmed" into them naturally. Saving seeds that have a natural hardiness to our northern climate is a good thing, even though the climate is changing, because these changes are also "programmed" into the seed.

If you are looking for local seeds, the Yukon Energy, Mines & Resources Seed Library (<https://yukon.ca/en/science-and-natural-resources/outreach-and-collaboration/share-and-borrow-seeds#borrow-seeds>) usually makes locally saved seeds available, with the hope of receiving saved seeds back in the fall. The library also has a wealth of information on how to save seeds and other gardening techniques.

There are also local gardeners who save seed, and are often willing to share. In Whitehorse, there has usually been a "Seedy Saturday" event, held in February or March, where this sharing can happen and gardeners can gather to discuss all things plant related. There may not be an in-person meeting this year, but on social media you can often find places to connect with other gardeners.

Another thing to take into consideration while planning this year's garden is plant rotation, which is changing the location of your plants in your garden from year to year.



Some plants take more nutrients than others (heavy feeders), while some like legumes (peas and beans) will add nitrogen back to the soil (nitrogen fixing). It is a good practice to rotate the "heavy feeders" and the nitrogen fixing plants. Crop rotation combined with compost will prevent the soil from becoming nutrient deficient. A good gardening practice is to ensure that you change the location of each type of plant from year to year.

For example, two different types of tomatoes will still require similar nutrients, but a basil plant followed by beans and then squash, would utilize different nutrients. This practice is often used in vegetable gardens, but in a flower bed, rotation can mean sunflowers followed by sweet peas or lupines, and then petunias.

Plant rotation keeps the garden healthier, as disease usually shows up when there is a nutrient issue which may linger in the soils. Pests may winter in the soil as well, but when they leave hibernation in the spring it will take them more time and effort to find their food source again.

While there seems to be a lot to consider while planning your garden, with time and practice it does become easier. Finding out which plants work best in our own micro-climates may be challenging, but once found, seeds can be saved from those plants, which can then become "regulars" in the garden. These challenges are no reason to skip over those pretty pictures of the latest and greatest plant/vegetable/flower varieties in the catalogue, because you never know what may work in the North, and it is always good to have a dream.

- Joan Norberg



So Long, Farewell...

To my fellow Yukon Conservation Society staff, volunteers, and members:

Thank you. The past ten months have been an incredible learning experience for me. Not only did I gain a lot of valuable knowledge while working on the Yukon Electric Thermal Storage project, but I've also had my eyes opened to the spirit of conservation in the Yukon. I am grateful to have met so many Yukoners who are passionate about protecting the future of our land and standing together to create tangible change to the status quo. Everyone here at the YCS office have been mentors to me in many ways but especially in demonstrating what it means to practice what you preach. From our diligent composting, to the fiery conversations we have about waterway degradation and corporate greed that later transform into letters of support and advocacy for change, its clear to me that the YCS staff is full of people with integrity and the will to make a difference.

I have also been deeply inspired by the enthusiasm and drive shown by all of our project participants who stepped forward to be part of the Yukon's green energy future. The YCS community really does practice what it preaches. Finally, my heartfelt gratitude goes out to all the project partners, contractors, and all other contributors who showed me what can be accomplished with hard work and open-minded collaboration. While I am moving on to a new position with Solvest, I look forward to seeing the ETS project, YCS, and the YCS community continue to strive for a sustainable Yukon.

*Warm Regards and a Fond Farewell,
Noah Sternbergh,
ETS Project Assistant*

Gerry Whitley will be missed



It is with great sadness that the Yukon Conservation Society (YCS) learns of the passing of Gerry Whitley. Gerry was a passionate supporter of protecting the environment and used his many technical skills in support of this.

He had been a member of YCS since 1990, had served on the Board of Directors and was most recently a member of the YCS Mining Committee. As a member of this committee Gerry used his vast knowledge of water issues to good effect when it came time to submit comments on proposed mining projects. Not only did he have a way of explaining technical issues in such a manner that the average layperson could understand them, his years of experience working around the Yukon at a variety of mine sites was invaluable in providing a historical perspective to the environmental issues associated with specific mines. And what a wealth of experience he had!

He came from Trail BC where he worked for some years as an assay chemist for the nickel company, Cominco. In 1971 he arrived in the Yukon to work for the then-starting Faro Mine. After four years there he took a job in 1976 with Indian and Northern Affairs, Water Resources Branch. Gerry worked there as a water pollution control specialist until his 2002 retirement.

During his time as the water pollution controller, he had placer miners frequently confront him in his office. The confrontations included placer miners pounding Gerry's desk, threatening him and his family, accusing Gerry of somehow benefiting financially by enforcing the law, all the while demanding he relax the regulatory requirements. He did not.



During the 1980s, Gerry also directed the Yukon River Basin Study. Upon retirement, Gerry bought a plane and gained his private pilots license. In 2004 he began flying for Lighthawk, a non-governmental organization (NGO) made up of aviators who use their flying to support the work of environmental NGOs, such as YCS.

Gerry enjoyed flying in his own aeroplane, and taking photographs. He combined these two interests into taking aerial photographs for a variety of groups and organizations, including YCS. His overflights of mining activity, oil and gas seismic lines, and wetlands became something of a legend. If a person visits the YCS website these photographs are on display for a variety of issues and projects.

Of particular note are the aerial photos of the Faro Mine he provided on an annual basis and occasional photos of other environmental problem areas. His aerial photos have been instrumental in revealing the extent of pollution at the Faro mine site and providing those with less knowledge of the Faro mine with a stark, visual example of poor Yukon mining practices. He offered flights to YCS Mining Committee members so they too could observe areas of concern and be able to discuss the issues from a first-hand perspective.

Gerry was a stalwart supporter of protecting the Peel Watershed. He would sit day after day in the Yukon legislature wearing a YCS Save the Peel t-shirt! Not only did Gerry have a technical and activist side that contributed towards environmental protection, his appreciation of the environment was remarkable. His birding skills were second to none, and his enjoyment of the great outdoors was a joy to behold.

- Lewis Rifkind

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The staff at YCS would like to thank everyone who helped out or attended our End of Year Outdoor Holiday Party, it was wonderful to have the chance to see some of you in person.

Thanks also to Ana Giovanetti, who continues to volunteer with us, even though she is located in BC. Thank you to all our volunteers on the various committees for the work and expertise you provide to YCS.

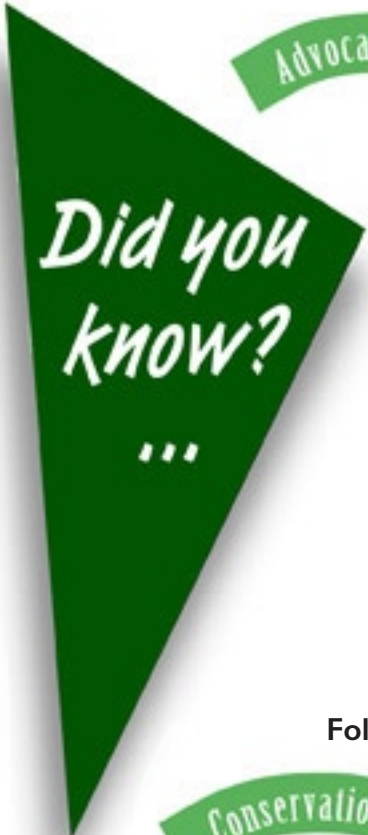
As always, a big thank you to Tanya Handley for her continued work on formatting and preparing *Walk Softly* for publication. And thank you to our members, supporters and partners who make the work YCS does possible!



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