

## Annual Report 2023



The Yukon Conservation Society, wishes to acknowledge all of the First Nations and Indigenous Peoples who have called the Yukon their home for generations:

Kwanlin Dün First Nation  
Ta'an Kwäch'än Council  
Carcross/Tagish First Nation  
Kluane First Nation  
Ross River Dené Council  
Liard First Nation  
White River First Nation  
Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation  
Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation  
Selkirk First Nation  
Teslin Tlingit Council  
Champagne and Aishihik First Nations  
Vuntut Gwitchin Government  
Na-Cho Nyäk Dun  
Acho Dene Koe First Nation  
Dease River First Nation  
The Inuvialuit, represented by the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation  
Kwadacha Nation  
Tahltan Central Government  
Taku River Tlingit First Nation  
Tetlit Gwich'in Council  
Gwich'in Tribal Council  
Kaska Dena Council

These are just some of those whose stories are woven into this land. This is not an exhaustive list of those who call this land home, but we recognize them with gratitude.

We also recognize that there are many other human and non-human beings whose voices are not heard. The YCS works diligently to speak on behalf of all those whose stories remain unheard or untold in a respectful manner so all may have access to a sustainable future in harmony with nature.

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## Letter from our President

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The past year has been about growth for me at YCS. Not growth of the wanton, unlimited kind that has sent our planet into such peril, but growth of relation and learning, growth of resilience through transition. Much of the Board's activities, and certainly mine, focused on supporting our ED as he grew into his role, and, through him, supporting the rest of YCS's dedicated staff. We have continued to work away on policies to encourage a safe, equitable and healthy working environment, and to respond to a diversity of staff needs from better compensation to adaptable work schedules. We have been there in an advisory capacity when challenges have come up, and we are privileged by the trust staff place in us.

It has been a joy for me to witness Martín's dedication to staff well-being and organizational health, and to be able to support him where we can. Although we are of course sad to see Martín move on from YCS, I feel enriched for having had him in our midst. Personally, it is no exaggeration to say I have found working with him to be a joy; and we are organizationally and fiscally stronger for having had him with us. As we continue to seek ways to improve our staff retention, we are grateful to all those who join us and contribute, even if it is for a short time.

Another focus of the Board this year was to strengthen ties between the Board and staff as a whole, which have been difficult to tend in the shift away from in-person gathering. While it is of course important that we respect each others' roles and autonomy, the fellow-feeling of striving for a shared goal cannot be overvalued - not to mention the personal fulfillment of working alongside these amazing people. Board members joined YCS staff at a number of public events, including the Fireweed Market, the Biodiversity Forum and the annual Career Fair at Yukon University, as well as of course our annual events at the Parnell House.

Our Board continues to evolve based on the needs of the organization and the individuals who join us. We are engaging in practices for mentoring within the Board to ensure the passing on of knowledge and to limit any negative effects of Board turnover on staff. We continue to seek new members, as we believe the best Boards cycle through the organization's membership sustainably.

As YCS grows and takes on more staff our governance role increases, but that doesn't mean we lose focus on long-term vision and the passion for conservation that brings us to the Board in the first place. There will be ample room in the coming years to have a meaningful impact on these things as we focus on the evolution of our strategic planning process as well as YCS's physical space.

I look forward to mentoring the next Board President this year, as well as, along with the rest of the Board, providing a stable support for all staff as we transition to our next ED.



*Kim Melton*  
2023 President  
Yukon Conservation Society Board

## Letter from our Executive Director

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Dear YCS Family,

Reflecting on 2023, my short time leading YCS has seen significant transitions and growth. As I prepare to step down, I am grateful for the opportunity to have led YCS through a year of impactful conservation efforts, community engagement, and organizational development. This year, we made strategic advancements in our key priorities.

Under Lewis, our Mining department, provided critical oversight and input on numerous impactful projects and in the current phase of the New Yukon's Mineral Legislation, ensuring that the voices of the voiceless are represented. Sebastian continued to lead our Wildlife Department, advocating for the protection and conservation of sensitive ecological habitats in the Yukon. This included our Caribou research, participation in the Yukon Lands Act Stakeholder group, and bringing the story of the [Yukon South Beringia](#) to the public.

Our Energy team, led by Scott, wrapped up the last phases of the [Yukon ETS project](#) and developed clean energy educational programming. Under Sarah-Juliet's guidance, the Outreach department has taken invaluable steps to create key partnerships, provide quality environmental education programming and work collaboratively with Indigenous partners. Our [outdoor education](#) programming, exceptionally led by Aiyana, and supported by this year's excellent guides, Danial and Andrew, was a great success, delivering over 100 free [guided hikes](#), inviting artists and creative workshop leaders to participate in [Created at the Canyon](#), and reaching over 1000 people. We also saw a significant improvement in our systems, membership and online presence thanks to Natalie, our Fundraising & Engagement Coordinator, from spring until fall.

This year also saw significant team changes, including warm welcomes and bittersweet farewells. Kirsten Reid, our former Conservation Biologist, now carries YCS' torch as the Senior Planner for the Dawson Regional Land Use Plan. Tara Howatt concluded her remarkable tenure with the ETS project to pursue a new chapter aligned with her oceanography career, passing the baton to Sarahlily. Sarahlily, supported by Alyssa, our Clean Energy intern, has masterfully coordinated the project's culmination.

Laura, our 2023 Conservation intern, has been an incredible support for our Conservation and Mining teams with her unmatched mapping and research skills. Aiyana O'Shaughnessy, our Educational Program Coordinator, did an incredible job with our summer and fall programming, organizing outdoor learning opportunities, workshops and events that have taken our educational programming to new heights.

Looking ahead, I am confident in YCS' continued success with exciting projects and partnerships on the horizon. I extend my deepest thanks to each team and board member, volunteer, partner and donor for their dedication. Working with this outstanding team has been a privilege and a pleasure, and I will miss you all.

Thank you for your continued support,



*Martin Melendro*  
Executive Director  
Yukon Conservation Society

# Outreach, Education & Communications

Prepared by: *Sarah-Juliet Nadler & Aiyana O'Shaughnessy*

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## Introduction

Sarah-Juliet Nadler was promoted from Membership & Communications Coordinator becoming the Outreach & Communications Manager (OCM) in March. Natalie Van Sterthem was the Fundraising & Engagement Coordinator (FEC) from March to November. Aiyana O'Shaughnessy was the Summer Interpretive Program Coordinator (SIPC) for the summer season and became the Educational Program Coordinator (EPC) in the fall; A new position at YCS as we aim to grow our educational offerings for youth and the general public. Danial Kosarifar and Andrew Smyth were YCS' Interpretive Guides (IGs) leading hikes in Kwanlin/ Miles Canyon throughout the summer.

Although the Outreach Team's turnover has been a challenge in recent years, we have maintained a presence as environmental advocates within the Yukon and made great strides to expand YCS' reach, creativity, collaborative networks and community support, diversifying and enhancing our educational public programming. Since 1968, YCS' staff, board, members, donors, partners, sponsors and volunteers have been essential to the stability, perseverance, growth and potential of the organization, with every contribution creating lasting impacts that feed back into the community as we fight for sustainable conservation in the Yukon. We thank you especially for your wisdom, patient teachings, time and support for our new and blossoming staff. We have so many new ideas on the rise and are pleased to announce the resurgence of YCS' Volunteer Program in 2024 led by the talented Gemma Davis, YCS' Head Volunteer.

## Summer Interpretive Program

This was the **43rd year** that the Yukon Conservation Society has provided free Interpretive Hikes in Kwanlin/ Miles Canyon. It was another successful and engaging season of quality interpretation, collaboration and connection, which expanded YCS' Summer Interpretive Program in diversity and scope. **Over 1,000 visitors and locals** joined us along the journey from Kwanlin Suspension Bridge to Canyon City and for themed hikes, activities and events. We were determined to **amplify indigenous culture and heritage** this year, which led to many meaningful, influential and reciprocal relationships with indigenous-led organizations and Yukon First Nation community Elders, artists, and storytellers.

## Guided Interpretive Hikes

Interpretive guiding is the steady heartbeat of YCS' summer program, offering a plethora of outdoor educational topics including bees, medicinal plants and uses, geology and natural history, Yukon First Nation culture and stories, anecdotes, impacts and key figures from the Gold Rush.

The dedicated and diversely knowledgeable local trainers passing their stories on to the YCS summer team creates the foundation of quality tours we are well known for. This season, Danial and Andrew were our passionate, energetic and harmonious Interpretive Guides. This was Danial's second summer guiding with YCS and he enjoyed interpreting Yukon plant species while Andrew lit up sharing about the local history of the area. The two **led over 100 hikes** and didn't miss a single day! Five were privately booked hikes for groups such as Whitehorse ESL, Adventure Trek Canada, and the CGC kids camp. Thank you for learning with us!



## Themed Hikes & Teaching Together

YCS collaborated with CPAWS Yukon to deliver a series of three free **Plants of the Boreal** guided hikes in McIntyre Creek. Candace Dow, Lori Fox and Gerry Steers joined as the leaders supported by YCS and CPAWS representatives. The SIPC, OCM, Conservation Intern and IG took part in co-leading three hikes with the organization **Elder Active** where we laughed and chatted our way up the Fish Lake and Kwanlin trails.

We continued to offer specialty **Themed Hikes** this summer which included A Walk Through History; Yoga in the Canyon; Yukon River Fish Species; and a French-led hike. Some were led by the incredible folks who trained our summer team back in May.

Thank you to the **2023 Summer Interpretive Program Trainers** who shared their time and stories with the team and passed what was learned on to all who visited Kwanlin this summer.

The season would not have been possible without the immense continued support and training offered by local organizations and individuals alike. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and expertise, strengthening our Summer Interpretive Program.



## Community Outreach

YCS tabled at the **Fireweed Community Market** on Thursdays from June 1st to Sept 21, primarily manned by the SIPC and FEC with additional support from OCM and our Conservation Intern.

This year, we ran until the very end of the market season with Aiyana and Natalie working into the fall. This offered the opportunity to promote the upcoming educational workshops.

Participating in the FWCM is key for YCS to connect with the local community, sow seeds of future partnerships, promote our educational programming and volunteer opportunities, fundraise, and spread the word regarding environmental issues throughout the Yukon and ways to participate in conservation action! The public loved the refurbished YCS fur board which drew many into our booth. We offered Tanya Hadley prints, various books, and buttons for sale while providing information about YCS' initiatives, trail resources, upcoming workshops and more! CJUC Radio also interviewed the SIPC and Conservation intern which provided a great chance to promote and share our work and opportunities on air!



YCS Staff volunteered on June 21 for **Indigenous Peoples Day** at the Kwanlin Dun Cultural Centre, marking the beginning of a new relationship between our entities. The KDCC gave us the opportunity to table where we had meaningful conversations with dozens of community members, artists, families and YFN citizens with important perspectives that influenced our communications going forward. We later tabled at Yukon U Career, Education and Volunteer Expo, Electrify Yukon and the 12 Days of Christmas Market.



## Created at the Canyon: 12th Anniversary

*Created at the Canyon*, YCS' annual art-in-nature event, took place on July 14th and 15th in Kwanlin/ Miles Canyon. YCS sponsored a total of 7 local demonstration artists and interactive workshop leaders. Local creatives shared their craft, creative process and connection to nature with visitors and offered engaging opportunities for the public to participate in creating artwork. This year's event began with an opening prayer and 4-directions story of the elements led by Carcross Tagish Elder Phil Gatensby. Indigenous artists were at the forefront, with four featured creatives showcasing beading, carving, dream-catcher making, and storytelling. Over 600 visitors participated in the offerings during the two-day event, engaging with the YCS information booth and the artist-led demonstrations and workshops.



*Created at the Canyon 2024 Artists* (left to right): Carcross Tagish Elder Phil Gatensby, Janet Patterson, Aiden Duncan, Nicole Bauberger, Cynthia Asp, Mary Walsh, Annie Maheux and Akassiah

Both the artists and YCS were honoured to have the exhibit hosted by the **Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre** from August 11th until September 5th, with an intimate gallery opening held August 10th. This proved to be well received by the public and our relationship continues to be strengthened with the KDCC. Thank you to Kailen, Hannah and the folks at the KDCC for your support!

We would also like to thank the artists, Arts Fund, Yukon 125 Fund, Historic Resources Fund, Java Connection for their coffee carafes, Annie and Gather for their deliciously nourishing foods, the YCS team, and volunteers TR Gomez, Jérémie Martel-Côté, Preet Dhillon, for bringing together another wonderful *Created* event (Photo: Aiden Duncan's awe-inspiring beadwork torso piece).



## Conservation-Oriented Creative Workshops

As part of the new Educational Programming YCS began developing in the fall, we hosted a total of 4 workshops consisting of two Intro to Salve Making with Amy Genier and Working with Fish Leather with Cheryl McLean. These workshops were made possible due to the generous support of the Yukon 125 Fund.

These events provided an opportunity to connect the public with traditional skills and conservation messaging. Each workshop was held in the YCS office for 12 participants who registered by donation through EventBrite. Although the space proved to be a bit tight at times, it offered a very friendly atmosphere and an opportunity for the public to become familiar with YCS and sustainable-making practices.

Workshops will continue throughout 2024 as we connect with more local eco-oriented creatives and educators while prioritizing offering multi-perspective and hands-on learning opportunities.

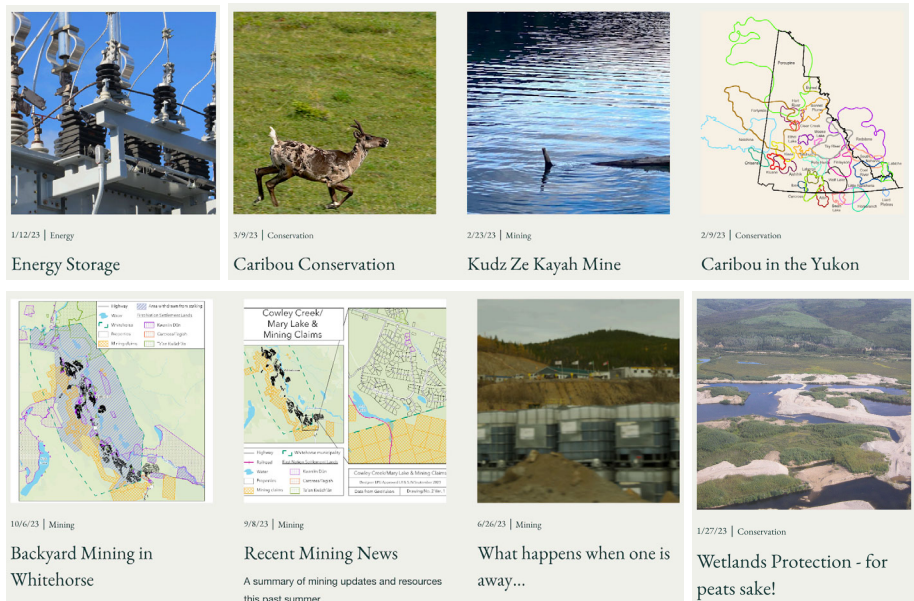
## Communications Channels

YCS' perspectives were highlighted over 100 times through radio and written media publications via local and national news outlets. Social media communications held steady through Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Overall, our following has grown significantly across all platforms in 2023.

YCS' long-time quarterly publication *Walk Softly* was put on hold for the year as we evaluated and strategized its content and production frequency. We thank members for your understanding and patience.

*Tread Lightly* was delivered to over 1000 subscribers regularly throughout the year, packed with environmental news, local events and opportunities, and more!

In collaboration with YCS analysts, the OCM prepared conservation stories to share through our e-newsletter as well as published several of them in long form on our website as blogs. A handful of these were kindly distributed further by our friends at Sierra Club Canada.



## Community Support

For the 2023 Available Light Film Festival, YCS sponsored the documentary film, *Pleistocene Park* directed by Luke Griswold-Tergis. It is a hilarious, informative, and wildly hopeful tale of a scientist's quest to resurrect ice-age ecosystems in order to spare us all from the threatening feedback loops of global warming.

On June 27th, we participated in the annual **Community Clean Up with the City of Whitehorse**. It was a group effort with support from the YCS team, board, and volunteers to tidy up the litter that lined the 2nd Avenue road, adjacent trails and banks of the Yukon River. Sharing snacks, trash pickers and sweaty smiles, we triumphantly cleared out several bags and felt grand! Thank you to all the folks who came out to help us under the hot summer sun. See you next year!



Our team also joined in on **Fridays for Futures Climate Action** marches as well as several other events hosted by local non-profits, environmental, historical, cultural and tourism organizations.

## Partner Projects

YCS has continued a partnership with **Yukon South Beringia Priority Place Initiative**, organizing Beringian Fairs as well as heading communications and marketing. In 2024, we hope to expand our involvement in the initiative with a focus on youth and community outreach, education and collaboration throughout Beringia. YCS is also working on an educational **Road Ecology** film with **Yukon to Yellowstone**, featuring interviews



with Yukoners sharing their knowledge, stories and perspectives of road impacts on ecosystems and culture over time. The project is scheduled for completion in the summer of 2024.

## Member & Donor Support

YCS' Annual General Meeting was held virtually on March 20th. We thank all the members, staff and board for attending, listening, sharing and demonstrating their ongoing support towards our work.



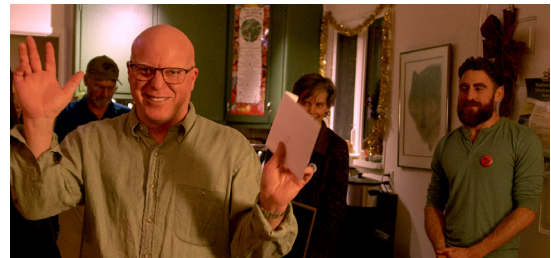
The Annual Membership & Donor BBQ was held on August 30th at the YCS office. We provided an array of locally-sourced meat and veggie dishes to members and donors. YCS' dedicated volunteer Luc Garceau manned the BBQs. We were very pleased to have Simon Crelli, The Fiddler in the North playing for attendees. After Lewis and Yurri overhauled YCS' basement, we were able to offer old maps and books by donation, which drew passerbyers into the event.

YCS had 170 members as of the end of 2023. Memberships and donations contributed just over \$40,000 of funding towards our Outreach & Education programming. Thank you so very much for your continued support for the conservation, outreach and education work we do in the Yukon.

## Open House, Pop-up Shop & End-of-Year Party

What a hoot! On December 7, 2023 we held an inviting opportunity for the community to visit YCS' office during the holiday season. By co-hosting with CPAWS on the same day, we hoped to encourage the community to interact with environmental organizations with a holiday spin. It was a successful afternoon for visitors to connect and shop from 6 local makers while also interacting with our staff, learning about conservation efforts and initiatives both CPAWS and YCS have partook in over the last year. YCS was able to sell existing and new merchandise products thanks to Sarah-Juliet creating two new beautiful Pika and Chinook Salmon illustrations printed onto tote bags and t-shirts by silkscreen queen Sally Wright.

The End-of-Year Party kicked off when Martin Melendro (ED) and Kim Melton (Board President) were able to present this year's awards of recognition. YCS Staff and Board laid out a potluck feast for all who attended to enjoy. It was a lovely time for the YCS family, new and steady, to chat, share a meal, enjoy music and share laughter during team-building games late into the evening. Lewis exclaimed that the event was in his top 3 of YCS Christmas parties!



### Awards for 2023

Gerry Couture Stewardship Award:

Bruce Bennett (left)

Volunteer of the Year Award:

Luc Garceau (above)

Ted Parnell Scholarship Award: Sasha Emery

# Mining

Prepared by: *Lewis Rifkind (?-2024)*

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## Introduction

The Yukon Conservation Society researches, educates and advocates on mining activities so that the industry is more ecologically and culturally acceptable. YCS regularly pushes for better and stronger mining legislation and regulation; participates in environmental assessments and licensing processes (of both exploration and mine projects) to ensure the highest possible environmental standards are applied; monitors abandoned mine cleanups to ensure they get done; acts as a watchdog for current and ongoing mining operations to make sure they meet their licensing and regulatory obligations; and educates the general public and other parties (i.e. schools, academics, journalists) on key mining issues.

## Environmental Assessment Participation

There is one main form of environmental assessment (EA) in the Yukon, the Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Board (YESAB), and an equally important licence issuer, the Yukon Water Board. Both have a review process that is open and transparent and invites submissions from the general public, various government departments, and groups such as the Yukon Conservation Society.

YCS was very active in 2023 when it came to environmental assessments. Comments submitted:

- YESAB: 10 submissions
- YWB: 4 submissions
- Other (regulations, legislation, municipal): 4 submissions

## Media Interviews

As always, YCS was the voice of rational thought when the media needed an entity to discuss the latest Yukon mining development. It is kind of telling that whether it's a business or government announcement to do with mineral extraction, the media approaches YCS to get the environmental perspective. They tend not to immediately approach government departments who should be dealing with it, opposition political parties, or even other non-governmental agencies. YCS is almost always available to provide comments from an environmental viewpoint or what is sometimes referred to as the landscape, as seen through green goggles.

## Legislation, Regulations and Guidelines

The New Mineral Legislation is an initiative between Yukon First Nations and the Yukon Government. It will supersede the current and antiquated Yukon Placer and Yukon Quartz acts. YCS is part of a table that is contributing ideas around environmental concerns. After a robust start in 2022, 2023 was a bit of a slack year as far as YCS was concerned on this file. However, it is anticipated that 2024 will see further developments in moving this new legislation (and associated regulations) forward. But don't get your hopes up. Realistically, the legislation probably won't be finalized until 2027.

## Watch Dogging

One of the most vital aspects of YCS is monitoring what the mining sector is doing, what the Yukon regulators are (or occasionally are not) doing, and what entities related to mining (such as land use planning



bodies) are up to. Of note this year was watching the bankruptcy proceedings of the Wolverine Mine finally draw to a sad close and the start-up of similar proceedings for the Minto Mine. This involved following various legal cases and then continuing to monitor the court-appointed receiver as they dealt with the slow legal and financial process any abandoned mine must go through.

Another monitoring aspect YCS does is monitoring mining companies' press releases. While they tend to be very optimistic and boosterish, there is sometimes a kernel of information that is important to the Yukon environmental community. This information can be important when later YCS submits comments during the environmental assessment process.

## Thank You

The unsung volunteers of the YCS Mining Committee largely support the mining activities of the Yukon Conservation Society. Thanks to them, so many YESAB and YWB reviews can be done, many ideas can be put forward in the New Mineral Legislation discussions, and strategies can be developed for dealing with mining activity within Whitehorse city limits.

A big shout-out should also be made to other community and non-governmental organizations involved in the Yukon mining sector. These range from neighbourhood associations dealing with mineral exploration on their doorstep to recreational groups trying to get mining claims removed from atop their trail systems to formal environmental groups striving to ensure environmental values are protected over short-term resource extraction projects.

Finally, personally, I would like to thank the volunteers, the staff, and the Board of the Yukon Conservation Society for their support and commitment over the past few decades. I've been with YCS for at least twenty years, perhaps longer (no one, including me, can remember), and the organization's dedication to protecting the Yukon's environment has been second to none. I'm retiring this year but will still be around in a volunteer capacity to contribute what I can towards YCS's efforts in dealing with the mining sector. Keep up the good green fight.

# Fish, Wildlife and Habitat

Prepared by: *Sebastian Jones*

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## Introduction

Sebastian Jones, the YCS Wildlife Analyst is tasked with staying abreast of all matters relating to Fish, Wildlife and Habitat in the Yukon, and with providing the YCS perspective in environmental assessment and permitting processes. The Wildlife Analyst also has the duty of providing public education through various media and public engagements. If this list seems broad, it is.

The Wildlife Analyst assists the Mining Analyst in most YESAB and Yukon Water Board (YWB) submissions, typically focusing on impacts on fish, wildlife and land use. Assistance is similarly provided to the Energy Analyst, particularly on high-impact projects such as hydro dams.

The Wildlife Analyst position is a permanent but part-time (25 hours/week) position, although the position could easily absorb full-time hours. The Wildlife Analyst is supported by the YCS Conservation Biologist and the YCS Conservation Intern.

YCS's conservation work has benefitted hugely from the Conservation Biologist position; the capacity and rigour that Kirsten Reid brought to our organization. The position had a limited term, and Kirsten has moved on to become the Senior Planner for the DRLUP, so we shall continue to work with her from time to time.

Our 2023 Conservation Intern, Laura Pothier Guerra, has dived into several projects with YCS and brings excellent mapping skills which have greatly improved our reports and submissions and ability to communicate complex issues. We are fortunate enough to have her until spring.

## YESAB and YWB comments

The Wildlife Analyst contributed to or wrote twenty of the comments submitted by YCS to YESAB. Notable projects included additional mining proposals in the Clear Creek watershed, which is becoming a poster child for unmitigated cumulative effects. We have submitted comments in favour of a few projects as well, not something we do a lot of, due to time constraints, however, at the request of the Minister, we supported a couple of renewable energy projects.

## Wetlands

The Yukon Wetlands Policy came into effect in 2023 and appears to have achieved its purpose, from a government perspective, by damping down the wetlands wars. The Recommended Dawson Land Regional Use Plan (DRLUP) helped by placing some contentious wetlands off limits. The policy focuses on wetlands benefits as opposed to wetlands as beneficial in and of themselves. Unfortunately, the policy does not include a mechanism for calculating these benefits- something that will doubtless cause some additional contention. Developing the Policy did shine a light on how little we know about Yukon's wetlands, so the Policy addresses these gaps, including the posting of the position of Wetlands Biologist. The Policy allows for the designation of Wetlands of Special Importance (WSI) using a hitherto unused provision of the Wildlife Act. While not promoted as a Protected Area, WSIs do protect the wetlands. YG is sometimes nervous about appearing to protect too much of the Yukon, so it went to pains to ensure this protection measure does not count towards our protected areas' quantum.

## Land Use Planning

The Recommended Dawson Regional Land Use Plan is still being mulled over by the parties to the Plan- the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Yukon. We are told we shall see the response by the end of 2023. I expect that sufficient modifications will be proposed and that a Final Recommended Plan will need to be developed, giving us and others a final opportunity to make comments and provide suggestions. Yukon, in partnership with CYFN, is developing a new Yukon Public Lands Act which will have a significant impact on land use plans of all types. YCS has participated in a stakeholder group, vetting and critiquing proposed elements of the Act. Judging by what we have seen to date (in confidence), the new Act will greatly improve how we manage and protect land in Yukon.

YCS continued to bring to the public the story of the Yukon South Beringia Priority Place Initiative (PPI). We maintained a website and social media accounts and will host an in-person 'South Beringian Fair' to bring to the public the projects led by the various partners. YCS submitted proposals to lead Yukon's Bioblitzes, but unfortunately, we were unsuccessful, which meant we had very few resources to bring to bear on the project in 2023.

## Conservation Plans

Yukon was the first jurisdiction to partner with Canada to implement the Convention on Biodiversity, which, among other provisions, commits us to place 25% of our lands, and 25 % of our waters in protected areas by 2025, and 30% by 2030. The Yukon has endorsed the 25X25 goal, and committed to strive towards 30X30. YCS has explained to Yukon's Ministers and our MP that meeting this goal means we are almost halfway there in achieving a stable future for Yukon's biodiversity, pointing out how in caribou country (almost all of Yukon), we need at least 65% of the land to be free of disturbance to have a better than even chance of securing a future for caribou. To date, this revelation has not been met with enthusiasm, but we'll continue to work on it.

## Caribou

YCS was invited to present our Clear Creek Caribou Herd report at the North American Caribou Workshop and Arctic Ungulate Conference, which took place in Anchorage in May.

Kirsten, Sarah Juliet and I attended this gathering of 600 plus caribou and conservation scientists from across North America and beyond. Our report was well received and we made valuable connections while raising the profile of YCS.



Laura has been working on a new edition of the report, this time including the Klaza Caribou Herd, which is similarly threatened as is the Clear Creek Herd, by rampant staking and massive road and trail construction. The Klaza range is where the proposed Casino mega-mine is located, so making the case for habitat protection is vital.

The revised report took advantage of a new disturbance mapping data set which did not exist when we wrote the first report, so while the numbers are somewhat different now, they are much more robust and detailed.

## Media

The Wildlife Analyst leverages the work of YCS through the YCS website and social media accounts with the Outreach and Communications Manager and through articles published in local newspapers, YCS publications, and through interviews with journalists.

This year, the Wildlife Department contributed 13 articles to the YCS outlets Walk Softly and Tread Lightly and assisted with several others. Yukon Newspapers and local and national media sought our take on various topics an equivalent number of times. In addition, Sebastian supplied the Wildlife perspective on several other articles written by the Mining Analyst and the Conservation Biologist.

## Working with others

YCS is a small organization that typically wields an outsized influence. Its influence is enhanced through collaboration with First Nations, other ENGOS, Umbrella Final Agreement-mandated bodies and even government departments. While it is difficult to point to tangible markers of success in this category, a very important part of the Wildlife Analyst's work is to establish and foster good relations with these groups. This happens through being perceived as an ally, as being helpful when co-engaging. Reaching out to offer assistance and to include others in YCS initiatives is also a key strategy.

In 2023, the Wildlife Analyst was approached for help by CPAWS Yukon (YESAB, YWB, DRLUP, Wetlands), the Klondike Active Trails and Transport Society (YESAB), The Dawson RRC (YESAB, Cumulative Effects, DRLUP) and Friends of Dempster Country (YESAB, DRLUP). Sebastian has been fortunate enough to have been appointed to two senior fish and wildlife bodies, the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board and the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee. His work for these bodies does take him away from YCS sometimes, but his gains in knowledge, experience and contacts are a net positive.



# Energy & Yukon Electric Thermal Storage Project

Prepared by: *Scott Pressnail* & *Sarahlily Stein*

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## Introduction

YCS's energy vision is of a sustainable energy future for the Yukon. In realizing this, peak electricity demand and energy use must be drastically reduced through conservation, improving efficiency and adopting smart technologies. Imported fossil fuels must be displaced by local, low-impact renewable energy projects. YCS strives to these goals through advocacy, outreach and collaboration as noted below

## ETS Study Period Conclusion

As the Electric Thermal Storage Demonstration Project winds to a close, so does my time at YCS. 2023 saw the completion of the residential ETS installations, including seven air source heat pump-ETS combination systems. To facilitate the installation of residential ETS systems and increase local capacity, YCS hosted ETS contractor training sessions. YCS staff followed up with regular site visits to participant homes. Now that the study period has ended, YCS staff wrote and mailed specialized ETS user manuals to the project participants to help them troubleshoot any issues going forward.

## Commercial ETS

YCS is currently working with the Yukon Government Department of Highways and Public Works Business Transformation Unit on the installation of a thermal storage system at Yukon University. Baseline data collection for this project took place over the 2022-2023 heating season. This system is currently under construction and is expected to be in place for the 2024 heating season. Because of the size of this commercial thermal storage unit, we anticipate its impact will be equivalent to switching 10 homes to ETS. YCS has engaged in collaborative exercises with other organizations as we work to further reduce reliance on fossil fuels throughout the Yukon. The focus has been largely on Electric Thermal Storage, assisting homes in the switch to electric heat while not increasing the peak demand on Yukon's islanded grid.

## Capacity Building

We were honoured with an invitation to present at the Generation Power event, a program empowering Indigenous youth to lead Canada's transition to a clean energy economy, held at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre (KDCC). YCS was pleased to host a clean energy intern through the generation power program. YCS also hosted contractor training for ETS, we had educational material delivered to local contractors from the suppliers of ETS units in the Yukon ETS project, Steffes and Coldbrook Electric

## Parnell House - Sustainability Hub Planning

YCS engaged with a local architect to plan out opportunities for making the YCS head office a community sustainability hub. This study included energy models for scenarios of renovating and refurbishing the office to make it a more efficient space to host workshops to share information and research from YCS with our community.

## Outreach

YCS engaged with multiple different media outlets over the past year to provide input on a range of energy

conservation and clean energy topics. YCS was pleased to table at the Electrify Yukon, KDFN and the Fireweed Market to share information about energy conservation topics and ETS. Post Project Participant Packages distributed to participants in the ETS Project and postcard campaign for rebates to continue the expansion of ETS in the Yukon so that we can continue to integrate more intermittent renewable energy on the grid and reduce our collective reliance on fossil fuels during peak hours.

## Final Report & Energy Education Programs

The funding period for the Electric Thermal Storage Demonstration Project will conclude at the end of March 2024. We are working closely with our research partners at Northern Energy Innovation to complete the ETS Project final report. We are also planning energy education programming to improve local energy literacy and communicate the results of the ETS project to the public. These programs will take place in Spring 2024.

## ETS Community Mapping Project

A dedicated team of students from the University of Victoria is currently working on a story map of the Yukon Electric Thermal Storage demonstration project. They are working with YCS while we share our experience from the project and the data we have collected throughout. The final deliverable is anticipated in April 2024 and it will be shared on the YCS website when completed.

## Energy Conservation Rebates

The Greener Homes grant was released in 2021 and as of February 2024 has stopped accepting new applications. This program includes specific rebates for Canadians living in the North. This in conjunction with the Good Energy rebates offered at the territorial level provides an opportunity for energy conservation within the household through energy retrofits and upgrades. The precursor to this program is that prospective participants must have a pre and post-retrofit energy assessment and the rebate in some cases is determined based on the improvement. Since an energy assessment was a requirement for the ETS applicants, individuals who did not proceed with ETS installations still had a valuable resource from their home energy assessment to allow them to qualify for the Canada Greener Homes Grants. YCSI continued to advocate for individuals to apply for these available retrofit rebates and to connect with the appropriate personnel and contractors.

## ETS Phase II

Looking towards the future of ETS in the Yukon, we have begun brainstorming ideas for an ETS Phase II. More information to come in 2024, but we hope to advocate for ETS rebates and continue increasing access to ETS heaters for Yukon homeowners.

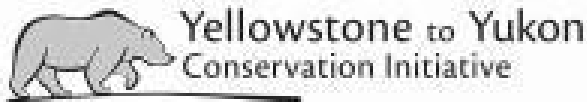
## Partners & Funders

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YCS would like to thank our partners and funders for their continuous and generous support.

### Funders



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### Partners

