

# Walk Softly

Newsletter of the  
Yukon Conservation Society  
Fall 2011

---



---

**Inside:** • The Peel Plan • Oil and Gas • Gold in them thar hills • Whitehorse Planning

## The Vanishing Face of Gaia

There are two books on the table in front of me, one is *The Vanishing Face of Gaia* by James Lovelock and the other is *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy.

The first is an analysis by the scientist who first articulated the Gaia hypothesis, and the other is a work of fiction that unfortunately could easily be set in the future that the first book thinks we are headed for.

Lovelock first put forward the Gaia theory in the 1970's, which (and I am simplifying it a bit here) holds that the Earth and all of its inhabitants make up a living organism.

This organism is self regulating in order to ensure its own survival.

So, when one of its constituent parts starts multiplying and polluting to such an extent that even Gaia is threatened the planetary organism will react in order to survive.

This reaction will take the form of moving to a warmer climate, in order to limit the threat that one constituent part is posing.

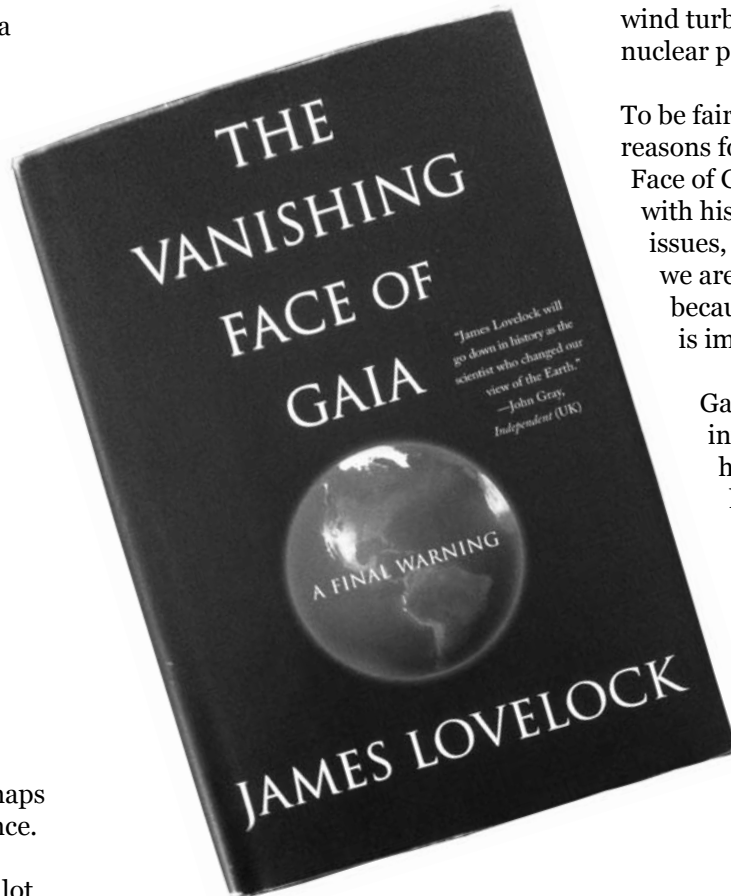
Gaia is going to create an environment that reduces, or perhaps eradicates, the threat to its existence.

Basically, a hotter planet means a lot less humanity which in turn means less to no damage from humans, thus ensuring Gaia can continue to exist, albeit with little or perhaps even no humans as part of it.

And how does one get to a lot less humanity? Well, according to Lovelock this will happen through mass die-offs when the food starts to run out.

A hotter planet will mean agriculture will collapse and quite large sections of the planet will become uninhabitable for humans.

The one cheery note (at least for us Yukoners) is that certain geographic regions might become oases for humanity and the Canadian North is one of these areas.



Lovelock is a bit of an unusual figure in both environmental and scientific world, but for reasons he generally deplures.

The Gaia Theory was put forward as a serious scientific attempt to understand how Earth works at a holistic level.

Unfortunately Gaia was first popularized by New Agers and hippies. This discredited it in the eyes of more mainstream scientific circles.

It does seem to be getting more main-stream acceptance these days.

Among environmentalists Lovelock is reviled for his opposition to wind turbines and his advocacy of nuclear power.

To be fair, he does articulate his reasons for this in *The Vanishing Face of Gaia*. While I still disagree with his reasoning on these issues, his overall message that we are all pretty much doomed because Gaia needs to survive is important.

Gaia looks after its own interests. Generally they have coincided with humanity's, but not for much longer.

After I finished *The Vanishing Face of Gaia* I started reading *The Road* to pick up survival tips on the future that could well be in front of all of us.

*Lewis Rifkind*

## Oil and Gas in Whitehorse

In June 2011, the Yukon Government put out a Request for Proposals (RFP) to do a Petroleum Resource Assessment of Whitehorse Trough. This is a geological basin running roughly from the British Columbia border to just south of Carmacks.

The RFP states in part that Energy, Mines and Resources requires “a quantitative and qualitative assessment of conventional and non-conventional (including coal-bed methane) petroleum (oil and gas) resources potentially contained within Whitehorse Trough, a frontier sedimentary basin in south-central Yukon.”

It explains how previous analyses of the area have shown it to have both oil and gas potential, but has only looked at conventional sources, and that “unconventional hydrocarbon resources are an important new focus.”

It says the need for this new assessment is being driven by recent mining and population growth in the Yukon stressing our electrical generation capacity. In response, it says, Yukon Government is exploring local hydrocarbon resource development for the purpose of electrical power generation.

“Whitehorse Trough is transected by much of Yukon’s power grid and would be an ideal location to source fuel to enhance Yukon’s electrical generating capacity,” it concludes.



YCS sees two things wrong with this.

Opening up the Whitehorse Trough to fossil fuel development is frightening in light of the substantive changes the Yukon Government wanted to make to the Yukon Oil and Gas Act (YOGA) in late summer of 2009.

Most disturbing was the government’s wish to give oil and gas companies the right to enter any land (private property, agricultural dispositions, traplines, outfitter concessions, etc.) to conduct surveys and examinations for the purposes of oil and gas activities, without requiring consent or a license for these activities.

It did not define examinations, so that could include seismic exploration, drilling, and other such invasive and environmentally damaging activities.

The current and unchanged YOGA respects that there are other viable uses for land other than oil and gas activity. It also requires oil and gas companies to obtain consent of persons who hold an interest in land prior to industry access.

Another proposed change to YOGA included an expropriation section. A company, after entering any land to assess potential could acquire interest in that land by agreement, or failing that, by expropriation.

Fortunately, the proposal to amend YOGA never made it to the legislature, but it shows the direction our government intends to take. YCS argued that the changes would essentially give free entry to the oil and gas industry, which would be dangerous considering the potential of the heavily populated Whitehorse Trough area and the conflict the free entry mine staking system has created in developed areas.

The second issue with pursuing fossil fuel development in the Whitehorse Trough is explained in a report by the David Suzuki Foundation and the Pembina Institute entitled: Is natural gas a climate change solution for Canada?

The answer is no, it is not.

True, the report admits, natural gas burns cleaner than oil and coal, and it emits less carbon dioxide for the amount of energy it produces. But should this lead to an increase in its production?

This is where the “unconventional” part comes in. Unfortunately, this includes hydraulic fracturing or “fracking” as well as developing coal-bed methane. Extracting gas from unconventional sources can often require up to 100 times the number of well pads to get the same amount of gas as conventional sources. Each well pad and associated infrastructure can occupy an area of about a hectare, and requires roads and pipelines to access the well pads and pipe the gas out.

In fracking, water, sand and chemicals are pumped at high pressure into rock formations deep in the Earth to fracture the rock, allowing the gas to escape and flow into wells.

Fracking requires enormous amounts of water and uses toxic chemicals. Fracking can also release methane, a more powerful greenhouse gas, into the air.

The David Suzuki Foundation and the Pembina Institute conclude that the non-climate environmental impacts of gas extraction alone are enough to give us pause, but they also state that natural gas is not a good way to fight climate change. In addition to environmental damage and greenhouse gas emissions in its extraction and combustion, greater investments in natural gas development may slow investment in renewable energy.

As YCS has argued in the past, we must get off fossil fuels, not hardwire ourselves with natural gas electricity generating plants and infrastructure to require further damaging extraction of natural gas.

Again, YCS asks why does the Yukon Government so heavily favour oil and gas development rather than real energy solutions?

Anne Middler

### Walk Softly

is published by the Yukon Conservation Society for members and subscribers. Memberships and information about the Society can be obtained by contacting the YCS office.

302 Hawkins Street  
Whitehorse, Yukon  
Y1A 1X6

PHONE: 867 668-5678

FAX: 867 668-6637

EMAIL: [ycs@ycs.yk.ca](mailto:ycs@ycs.yk.ca)

WEBSITE: [yukonconservation.org](http://yukonconservation.org)

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

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

#### YCS BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Mary Whitley (President)  
Joshua Hunt (Vice-President)  
Shawn O'Dell (Treasurer)  
Dave Neufeld (Secretary)  
Peter Steele  
Meagan Christie  
Nick de Graff  
Lee Carruthers  
Heather Paquet  
Jennifer Breault  
Lacia Kinnear

#### STAFF

Karen Baltgailis, executive director  
Georgia Greetham,  
office coordinator  
Anne Middler, energy coordinator  
Lewis Rifkind, mining coordinator  
Jim Taggart and Sebastian Jones,  
peel co-coordinators  
Christina Macdonald,  
wildlife coordinator

#### WORKERS ON THIS ISSUE

Georgia Greetham  
Tanya Handley

printed on 100% recycled paper



## Editorial

Karen Baltgailis

### Final Recommended Peel Plan Supported by First Nations and ENGO's

In February 2011 the Yukon and First Nations governments delivered their official responses to the Peel Watershed Planning Commission's Recommended Plan. The First Nations reiterated their support for protection, while Yukon government called for a plan that allows extractive industry and roads in the watershed.

On July 25, the Peel Watershed Planning Commission released its Final Recommended Plan. Like the previous draft, it is strongly conservation-oriented, calling for protection of approximately 80% of the watershed. It calls for permanent protection of 55% of the watershed (the Wind, Snake and Bonnet Plume watersheds and part of the Peel main stem) as Special Management Areas – a legal designation under the land claims agreements. An additional 25% is proposed as Wilderness Area, in which industrial development is not allowed. The Wilderness Area would be reviewed periodically (approximately every 10 years) as part of plan implementation. In the 20% of Integrated Management Areas, rivers would have a one kilometer no development buffer on each side.

The approximately 8,400 mining claims in the Peel, including Chevron's iron ore leases, are in the area proposed for permanent protection. The Commission recommends grandfathering the claims but not allowing surface access to them. The 25% Wilderness Area has almost no mining claims and little oil and gas potential. Therefore there are few threats and we hope that it will be protected from development in the long term.



The affected First Nations have stated publicly that although they want protection of 100% of the watershed, they will support this plan. They are calling on the mining industry and the Yukon government to do the same. YCS and CPAWS-Yukon are also supporting the plan.

Although Yukon government's official response to the previous draft of the Recommended Plan was vague, it appears that the Planning Commission has done its best to respond to the vague references to the need for 'balance' between industry and protection in the watershed, and Yukon government's desire for road access. The previous draft recommended no road access in most of the Integrated Management Areas where development would be allowed, whereas the final plan would allow road access in IMA's. In addition, the protection for the proposed Wilderness Area is less firm than was recommended in the earlier draft.

It is now anticipated that the final round of public consultations will happen after the upcoming territorial election, which will likely be around the end of September.

While both opposition parties are publicly supporting the Final Recommended Plan, Yukon government has so far avoided voicing an opinion. They may hope to avoid putting their cards on the table until after the fall election. It will be up to Yukon voters to ensure that the current government clearly states whether or not it will implement the Final Recommended Plan, and vote accordingly.

## YCS Friends Events:

### Upcoming Yukon Bird Club Walks:

#### **Whitehorse Sewage Lagoons Bird Walk**

Sun, 11 September, 09:30 – 11:30  
Meet at SS Klondike, Whitehorse

#### **Lake Laberge Bird Tour**

Sun, 25 September, 09:30 – 13:30  
Meet at Porter Creek Super A  
Yukon Bird Club

For more information, contact Jenny Trapnell tel. 668-3918.

### Upcoming Yukon Environment Wildlife Viewing Events:

#### **Elk Bugling**

Tue, 13 September, 18:00 – 21:00

Rest stop by Cousins Airstrip (Alaska Hwy, just before the Mayo Road)  
Join Environment Yukon biologist Rick Ward to view Elk in rut and hear them bugling.

#### **Real Raptors**

Fri, 16 September, 19:30 – 20:30

Alpine Bakery Meeting room, Whitehorse

Raptor Curator Dr. Dan Hart from the American Bald Eagle Foundation will introduce us to the three live raptors that have accompanied him from Haines, AK.

For more information contact Wildlife Viewing, Phone: 867-667-8291, Email: [wildlife.viewing@gov.yk.ca](mailto:wildlife.viewing@gov.yk.ca)

### Mountain WIT Theatre presents: IMAGINEaNATION!

Haines Junction: Sunday September 11, 7 p.m., Convention Centre

Old Crow: Thursday September 15, time/location TBA

Dawson City: Friday September 16, 7 p.m. Palace Grand Theatre

Come and celebrate the 100th birthday of the world's first national parks service! Parks Canada's award-winning professional theatre troupe animates this forty-minute journey through our country's most treasured places. Full of colourful characters, music and laughs, IMAGINaTION! is a treat for all ages. All shows are free of charge.

For more information, contact Kate Alexander at 867-667-3903;

[kate.alexander@pc.gc.ca](mailto:kate.alexander@pc.gc.ca)



### Household Hazardous Waste Day

Saturday September 17

10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

City of Whitehorse Landfill

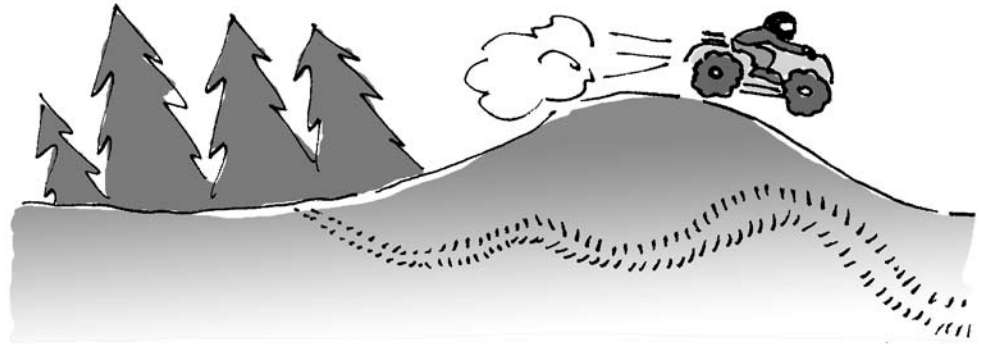
Household hazardous wastes do not belong in your garbage, recyclables, or compostables, nor should they be dumped down the drain.

## Off-Road Vehicle Update

Our ORV Campaigner has been found! Christina Macdonald joined the YCS staff this past July as the new Wildlife Coordinator and is also our new Off-Road Vehicle Campaigner. The focus of the ORV Campaign to date has been on information gathering; as the summer wraps up, Christina will be moving onto synthesizing this information into educational material for distribution to school children and the greater public.

We've also received support for the ORV project from the staff of Yukon Environment's Yukon Youth Conservation Core. We've had 3 Green Team members join us for a stint this summer to do some research for the project. Much of their focus was on researching legislation and regulations in other territories and provinces across Canada. Did you know that the Yukon is the only place in Canada without territorial legislation governing the operation of ATVs? We plan to use the Green Team's data to help develop recommendations for Yukon legislation.

The public awareness component of this project began this summer with a series of public ORV Awareness Hikes, offered Wednesdays through August. The tables were turned for us on these hikes. Rather than being the usual Trail Guides and storytellers on these hikes, we were the ones listening to the guests and gathering information. The locations of our hikes were the Ice Lake Park trail system, the site of the Haines Junction spring Mud Bog, the Carcross dunes, Middle McIntyre Creek, and Crestview trails.



This variety of hikes in diverse terrains provided us the opportunity to hear from different types of trail users (motorized and non) about techniques for best travelling on the trails, interactions (good and bad) experienced between different trail users, environmental impacts and changes they've seen in the area, and recommendations for improving trails and trail use. We were also joined by special guests on many of these hikes who shared their extensive knowledge of the area in consideration. All of this information is now being compiled into a report for review by the YCS' ORV Working Group.

### What is the ORV Working Group?

This is a group of representatives from: Trails Only Yukon, Yukon Off-Road Riders, Yukon Fish & Game, Yukon Fish & Wildlife Management Board, Wilderness Tourism, and YCS. The Working Group also meets with First Nations and RRCs, as needed. The purpose of the Group is to share information about existing trails and terrains, discuss the factors affecting ecosystem integrity, and to develop a targeted and dynamic communications plan in order to minimize trail and off trail impacts to land and wildlife and minimize user conflicts, promote trail stewardship, and provide trail user groups with some guidance over the suitability of trails and terrains for various modes of transportation and use.

The Working Group will be meeting again in late September or early October to review the information gathered and provide Christina with direction on the educational materials and ORV recommendations being developed.

In the meantime, we have also developed a survey for ORV users that will help YCS develop Yukon specific educational material for school children, the public and new ORV users. By surveying ORV riders we hope to collect information and messages that will resonate with other riders and in doing so grow and support stewardship within the riding community.

Concerns over ORV impacts on Yukon habitat and wildlife have been expressed for many years now and conflicts between different user groups will continue to grow as the territory's population expands, access to new areas increases and more pressure is placed on existing trail networks. These concerns cannot be resolved over night. However, YCS hopes that this ORV Awareness Project will begin to improve communication and information exchange between different stakeholders and contribute to a longer-term process that allows issues to be addressed collectively.

We're still looking for more facts, photos and experiences from the public, so if you have anything that could help, please get in touch with Christina at [ycswild@ycs.yk.ca](mailto:ycswild@ycs.yk.ca)

*Georgia Greetham*



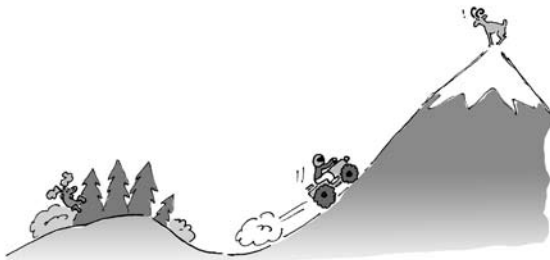
*Deep ruts in fragile marshland near the Hamilton Blvd Extension underpass. Damage was first caused by construction work and then aggravated in the past year by heavy ATV use.*



*Participants in the Haines Junction hike discuss trail usage issues at the site of the mudbogging section of the spring St Elias Lion's Club Poker Run.*



*ATV and motorcycle damage at the south edge of Third Lake, Crestview. Signage requesting people stay off sensitive wetland could reduce this kind of environmental damage.*



*Tami Hamilton explains how pre-existing dry and sandy soil conditions and wind action combined with heavy use from motorized and non motorized trail users can destroy vegetation and cause small foot trails to quickly widen. Middle McIntyre Creek area.*

## Middle McIntyre Creek – the next Whistle Bend?

Open houses, stakeholder meetings, community charrettes, geothermal heating and natural features: there were high hopes for Whistle Bend, heralded as one of the most sustainable communities of the Canadian north. Updates from the City and a walkthrough of the area reveal that much of this forward thinking and designing has been buried: geothermal heating has been relegated to later phases of development, if at all, and sand dunes and forest stands have been leveled due to drainage problems.

Many have been left disillusioned with the role community engagement plays in the planning process for development projects such as this one. But we can't give up on Whistle Bend as a lost cause: the destruction in the Porter Creek Lower Bench may spread into the well-loved and ecologically vibrant wetland and upland areas of Middle McIntyre Creek.

On July 30, 2009 AECOM published a City commissioned report entitled 'Transportation Impact Study for the Whistle Bend Development'. The report examines how a growing city population concentrated in Whistle Bend will impact local and city wide traffic.

Five scenarios are modeled, corresponding with different growth phases of Whistle Bend. For each scenario, the potential impacts of the increasing population on traffic flow are identified and solutions proposed, ranging from optimizing traffic signal timing to construction of new roads.

At full capacity, Whistle Bend is designed to house 10,000 people. The AECOM study states that in order to support this population and to prevent deterioration of travel times and level of service on 12th Ave, Range Road, and Mountainview Drive, three new roads must be constructed. These roads slash through the heart of the Middle McIntyre Creek area. The first is slated for construction once the Whistle Bend population reaches 1000 and involves extending Pine Street south across the creek to the Alaska Highway. The study recommends that the remaining two roads be in place once Whistle Bend reaches a population of 5000; the Alaska Highway Connector would be built from Mountainview Drive to the Pine Street Extension and the College Access Road would extend west from the College and connect with the Pine Street Extension just before the Alaska Highway.

The benefits of this multi-million dollar road construction? At 50% build out when the population of Whistle Bend is 5000, "automobile travel time reduces approximately 2 minutes from the south side of the City to Whistle Bend" (AECOM p.37). The reduction in the distance travelled by vehicle will be 0.5% (AECOM p.55).

And the costs? The Friends of McIntyre Creek (FOMC) and the Yukon Conservation Society (YCS) are very concerned about the potential environmental impacts of this and other proposed development activity in the Middle McIntyre Creek area as well as impacts on recreational use and educational opportunities. FOMC and YCS held a workshop last February that brought together local experts to identify the different kinds of wildlife that use the area. Workshop participants identified seventy two species of birds, mammals, fish and amphibians that either inhabit the Middle McIntyre Creek area or use the area as a corridor for movement. Among these animals are the Olive-sided Fly-catcher and the Rusty Blackbird, species whose statuses are listed as 'threatened' and of 'special concern' respectively by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC).

In addition to the wildlife that makes their home in the Middle McIntyre Creek area, people take enormous pleasure in the network of trails that runs through this area and into the bordering Porter Creek and Takhini neighbourhoods. And the educational potential that this wetland and old growth forest ecosystem represents has only just begun to be tapped by the Yukon College and city schools.

Roads and traffic through the Middle McIntyre Creek area would have widespread ramifications for ecological integrity and, in turn, for the diversity of other benefits people gain from the area.

Save two minutes on your drive to work? Or save Middle McIntyre Creek and the environmental, recreational and educational services this urban wildspace provides and will continue to provide into the future if we demand more vision from developers, local planners and politicians. Whistle Bend is on its way to becoming yet another subdivision built at the expense of both the natural environment and trust in City-led community engagement, but the destruction must stop there. We cannot let Middle McIntyre Creek fall victim to the same hurried and short-sighted development process. Once wetlands and forest are paved over, it's very hard to bring them back.

*Christina Macdonald*

## Canyon City Hikes

Another summer down, another full season of Canyon City Hikes completed. Whether there were bugs, sun or the “torrential” Yukon downpours, there were always friendly folk to entertain and educate. With almost 900 total participants, some visiting the Yukon from as far away as Australia, Europe or downtown Whitehorse, each and every one brought their own sense of enthusiasm and excitement to our daily hikes.

With visitors ranging in age from 5 months to over 80 years, we were always on our toes finding new and interesting ways to relay the information. From Aspen to White Spruce, Beringia to the Peel watershed, Fredrick Schwatka to Norman McCauley, the topics varied as much as the personalities we encountered along our trail.

Along with our usual 10am and 2pm hikes, we also had the pleasure of taking several kids’ camps on specialized lunch-hour tours which always seemed to put a little extra spring in our steps. Whether it was teaching them about the local wildlife, or just ravaging the occasional wild strawberry patch, the kids and their leaders were always a joy to have around. We also hosted nine theme hikes throughout the summer, with guest speakers from all across the territory with topics ranging from storytelling to local flora.



*YCS Trail Guides Matt & Chad*



*Bev Gray’s Edible & Medicinal Plant Hike*

Our greatest resource at YCS is the volunteers. We would both like to thank everyone and anyone who helped make our hikes possible, that includes the guest guides, the local museums, and most importantly the wonderful hikers who put up with our eccentric personalities throughout the summer. We would also like to invite you to contribute again next year – whether it’s teaching children about bird songs, beavers, conservation, or leading hikes – you are how this program works!

Thank you again for making this the Yukon summer experience of a life-time.

*Sincerely,*

*Chad “Old Man” Bustin*

*Matt “Bear Wrestler” Paré*

## Unreasonable claims to “reasonable access” in the Peel

The Final Recommended Plan for the Peel Watershed recommends permanent protection for the Wind, Snake and Bonnet Plume watersheds, where most of the approximately 8,400 mining claims in the Peel are located. The Commission is recommending that these claims be grandfathered and the companies be allowed to work them, but that no ground access to them should be allowed. A recent editorial in the Whitehorse Star speculates that if Yukon government accepts the Final Recommended Plan and does not allow “reasonable access” to these claims (i.e. roads or railways) mining companies will sue for compensation.

I do not agree that there will be a stampede of companies racing to sue the Yukon government if the plan is accepted.

First of all, YCS has not been able to find the words “reasonable access” in the Quartz Mining Act (QMA) or regulations, or the Territorial Lands Act. Section 78 of the QMA guarantees companies the right to “enter on and use and occupy the surface of the claim ... for the efficient and miner-like operation of the mines and minerals contained in the claim” but the act does not specifically talk about access over land outside the claim to get to it.

“Reasonable access” may be a term that has been used in legal cases in the south, but it does not appear to be in Yukon legislation.

More importantly, given the history and laws in the Yukon, companies should not be surprised if they don’t get whatever kind of access they desire to their claims. There are a number of examples where companies have not been allowed the kind of access to their claims that they wanted.

When the Ni’iinlii’Njik (Fishing Branch) Wilderness Preserve & Protection Area was formed, the Rusty Springs mineral claims were cut off from building a new access route directly to the Dempster highway. The company is allowed access through the Wilderness Preserve on an old existing cat trail – however the company is not allowed to alter or improve the trail. Any improved or all-season access to Rusty Springs must occur outside the Wilderness Preserve.

In 2010 YESAB and the Yukon government did not allow Canadian United Minerals to use a winter trail and helicopters to access their Horn claims within Tombstone Territorial Park.

Even outside of protected areas, companies are not always allowed the access that they want. In 2008 Cash Minerals applied to use the Wernecke Winter Road (better known as the Wind River Trail) in the Peel watershed to get supplies to their claims in the Peel watershed. They also wanted to build an air strip along the Wind River. YESAB approved both the use of the winter road and the air strip, although YESAB required a depth of snow cover on the trail that is rarely reached in that area.

However, the company then had to get a Land Use Permit – and Lands Branch refused a permit for the air strip. Cash Minerals never did use the winter road – probably because without the air strip it would not have been economically viable.

In 2010 YESAB and the Yukon government turned down Rockhaven Resources’ application for a 15 kilometre access trail for exploration of their Killerman Lake claims, due to the impacts on Dall’s Sheep and woodland caribou.

So when mining companies stake claims in the Yukon, there is no guarantee of the kind of access that companies may want.

The Peel claims have always been explored by air, so companies would have no grounds to claim that “reasonable access” to explore these properties suddenly means roads.

None of the metals projects in the Peel have had feasibility studies, and they are not proven mineral reserves. The Iltyd Coal license had a pre-feasibility study – but it is over 30 years old. None of the other coal licences have had one.

In other words, the claims and leases in the Peel are extremely speculative, especially considering the prohibitive cost of access and supplying power in this remote location.

Maybe if ever any of these properties were explored sufficiently to prove that they were economically feasible despite the enormous logistical difficulties, companies might consider going to court to get road or rail access. But that is a very long shot.

And if a company tried to get compensation for any of the approximately 6800 claims that were staked after the planning process began, one would have to ask whether they were staking in the hope of finding minerals – or of striking the mother lode of financial compensation by Yukon tax payers.

*Karen Baltgailis*

## What's Happening at YCS?

**CWY Comes to YCS** We will be welcoming Canada World Youth back to the YCS office again this fall for a few weeks.

Two volunteers will be pounding the pavement helping us get responses on an Off-Road Vehicle survey as well as helping out generally with some tasks in the office and we get the whole team here on September 16 for a deck tear-out day.

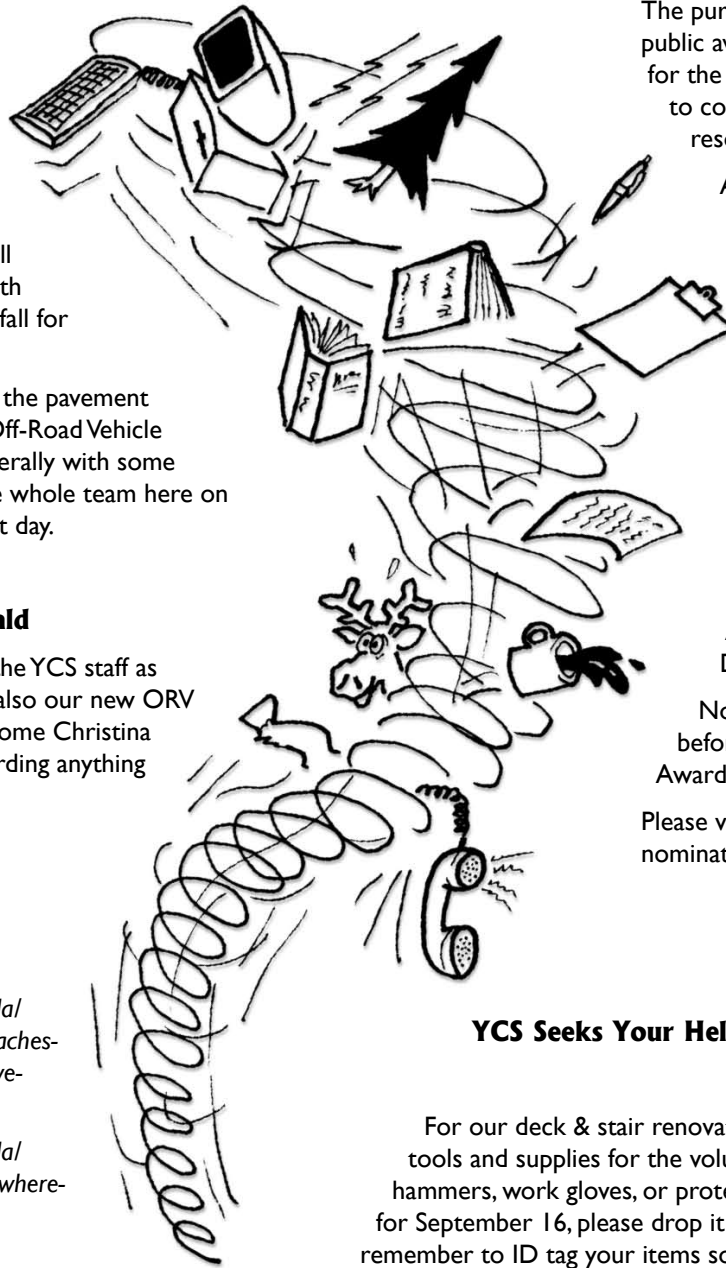
### Welcome Christina Macdonald

Christina Macdonald has joined the YCS staff as Wildlife Coordinator and she is also our new ORV Campaigner. Please help us welcome Christina and feel free to contact her regarding anything "wildlife" or "ORV".

### Two Toronto Star articles about the Peel:

<http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/1042608-as-industry-encroaches-yukoners-make-last-stand-to-preserve-unspoiled-wilderness>

<http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/1042339-a-majestic-yukon-where-humans-are-still-outsiders>



### Gerry Couture Stewardship Award

The purpose of this award is to foster public awareness of and appreciation for the personal dedication required to conserve and manage our natural resources.

A mature Yukon resident who has demonstrated outstanding personal dedication to natural resource conservation and management will be chosen to be the recipient of a Gerry Couture Stewardship Medal and a \$1000 prize.

The Award is given annually, and the recipient is chosen by the YCS Gerry Couture Stewardship Award committee.

Nominations for this Annual Award to be awarded in December.

Nominations can be made anytime before November 10 for this Annual Award to be awarded in December.

Please visit the YCS website for a nomination form.

### YCS Seeks Your Help!

#### September 16

For our deck & stair renovation project, we need some tools and supplies for the volunteers. If you have: crowbars, hammers, work gloves, or protective eyewear we could borrow for September 16, please drop it off before hand to YCS. Please remember to ID tag your items so you can identify your items afterward.

#### December 28

Some young volunteers are organizing a Youth Winter Eco-Ball event happening on December 28, and we are tasked with finding volunteers to work security. This will be a licensed (cash bar) event, so we need help ensuring everyone is safe and sober when they leave later in the evening. For details or to help out, call Georgia at 668-5678. email: [ycsoffice@ycs.yk.ca](mailto:ycsoffice@ycs.yk.ca)

#### On the Peel Plan:

**Stay posted on YCS website and emails for the last round of consultations on the Peel Land Use Plan, and please take this final opportunity to have your say!**

## White Gold

The new gold rush reality.

Google “Yukon Gold Rush” and these days you’re more likely to be directed to mining conglomerate and investor web sites than discover historic information about the Klondike original. Legendary as they may have been, stories of fame and hardship from a century ago presently take back stage to resource estimates and investor share options. The reason? The current ‘perfect storm’ of record-high gold prices, the discovery of “potentially significant” gold deposits, enabling legislation and a territorial government that sees mining as the primary route to economic prosperity.

The eye of this particular storm currently centres on the ‘White Gold’ region, located south of Dawson. With tens of thousands of Quartz mining claims staked, hard-rock exploration and mining interests now cover vast areas, some larger than several European countries. More than 20 publicly listed mining companies have now staked or purchased an unparalleled number of claims in the area. This trend is expected to continue in the short-term as gold retains its commodity-of-choice status amongst investors.

While financial analysts and the Yukon Government see this as a wonderful opportunity to raise investment and revenues, others are concerned that development on this scale raises enormous, and as yet unanswered, questions of sustainability and the cumulative impacts on the environment.

Consider, that in the White Gold area since 2008 the following activities have been approved: surface removal for 25 air strips and heli-pads, 6 barge landings, 4557 drill sites, 218,360 cubic meters of trenching, 2711 kilometres of cutlines, and a total of 23,029 ha of vegetation clearing. Compare this with the vast expanse of greater Whitehorse; approved land clearing in the Whitegold area would cover over half the area of our Capital. The area allowed to be cleared for exploration in the White Gold area is about 19 times the area allowed to be logged under Yukon’s total annual allowable cut for forestry.

What are the cumulative impacts of all these activities, and how are they being assessed? Are their appropriate bonds and reclamation plans in place for this massive scale of impact over a broad landscape? A visit to what’s left of the Indian River or to the Faro mine provide classic examples of unfettered and irresponsible mining development.



If gold prices continue to rise, and the Yukon Government persists with single-mindedly promoting mining, large-scale mines and infrastructure will likely be developed. Then, maybe sooner rather than later, gold will inevitably crash again and investors will withdraw, followed by the mining companies, leaving behind disturbance and habitat destruction.

Yukoners already have plenty of experience of cleaning up after poorly managed and abandoned mines sites where the cost of dealing with toxic contamination often proves greater than the value of all the minerals that ever came out of them. There’s no great leap of faith required to imagine it becoming a reality on the White Gold area.

*Jim Taggart*



## EAGLE GOLD ATTEMPTS TO SOAR

*“Ashes and dust and thirst there is, and pits, pits, pits.”*

– Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings*

It had to happen. With the price of gold going through the roof and with all the exploration that has been happening over the past few years, it now looks like the Yukon will be seeing a new large gold mine up and running within two years.

This mine will be called Eagle Gold, but it has also been known as the Victoria Gold project and before that as Dublin Gulch. It is located about fifty kilometers north of Mayo.

The Eagle Gold mine project is in front of the Yukon Environment and Socio-Economic Assessment Board for an Executive Committee screening.

Once it has gone through this process it will then go before the Yukon Water Board to get a water license.

These reviews are meant to ensure that environmental impacts are minimized or reduced.

As the Yukon landscape regrettably knows though, all mines profess the best of intentions for environmental protection at the start but more often than not the end story is sadly different. The history of Faro, Mt. Nanson, Clinton Creek and Elsa show this.

But with the high price of gold and the amount of development work that has been done so far it looks like the Eagle Gold mine will proceed. According to the proponents it will take two years to build, the actual mining will last for about seven years, and will take at least another ten years to close down and reclaim the land.

And after all that, there will have to be what is politely termed a post closure monitoring phase. Basically, this means watching to see what nastiness oozes out of the mine workings and onto (and into) the land.

The reason for all this is to get access to the gold bearing ore. Getting the gold out of the ore requires using a process known as sodium cyanide heap leaching.

This process, to greatly simplify the description, means moving a lot of rock to create a big pit, removing lots of ore from the bottom of this pit, crushing said ore, piling it on a really big gravel pad, sprinkling cyanide over everything, letting the cyanide dribble through the crushed ore collecting the gold as it does so, gathering the cyanide/gold mix at the base of the pad and then separating all that useless but valuable gold from the cyanide.

While the gold gets removed and the owners of the mining company and the investors make lots of money, the real important question is what to do with the leftover pit, the huge mound of ore and all the contaminated water that could be leaching out of the mine site.

And even more importantly is to ensure there is enough money to pay for remediation of all the mess that has been made.

The Yukon Conservation Society will be closely monitoring the permitting process of this mine to ensure strict environmental controls are incorporated into the design, construction and operation of this project.

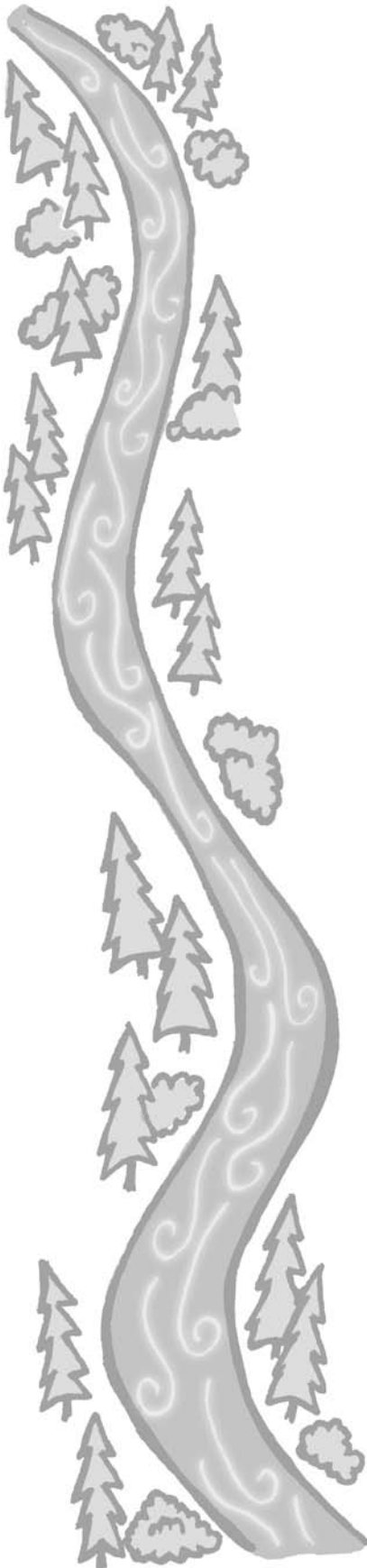
This will, to a certain degree, make the closure of this mine easier to do and somewhat reduce the environmental harm it is going to create.

But as the quote from Tolkien (it is actually Gollum describing what the Land of Mordor is like) rather aptly puts it a mine site is never really reclaimed.

The Eagle Gold mine may only be active for seven years but Yukoners will be seeing ashes and dust and pits, pits, pits for much longer.

*Lewis Rifkind*





## Land (for homestead)

Land. Land use. Land claim. Land survey. Land tenure. In the Yukon, we talk a lot about land, and also a lot about the land, and we use very different voices. When we speak of the land, we talk of something vast, and awesome in the true sense of the word. Something old and giving, something that teaches, and nourishes both body and soul. “Land” however can be spoken of as a commodity. A chunk of the land that is diminished by it’s parsing out to lines on a map, something that drives conflict, something that can be owned. No one speaks of owning the land. Rather, it owns us.

Landless. Land loss. Land lust. I’m at a stage as an aspiring farmer where I dream of having my land – this, I think, would allow me to begin: to build soil, to grow food, to support myself directly through my work and sweat. There is a sense of security that I imagine comes with legal ownership that is perhaps not all together false. However, there are still the vagaries of nature and economy that we do not control in the least, and can in a moment sweep away all that we own and consequently believe we are master of. I am also somewhat repelled to discover that I covet that elusive status of ‘having title’. The land owns me. Who am I to want to chunk out a piece to call mine and mine alone for however many short years I grace this earth?

I toy with other ways of feeling at home, for that is really what I’m after. It is an assumption on my part that buying land will get me there, based mostly on what I see around me as a path many people take. How is ‘owning’ land with a mortgage, being required to pay a certain amount to a lending institution per month, different from leasing land? Or from paying my rent by the labour of my hands? We seem to have a stigma attached to living without ownership – words like ‘freeloading’, ‘taking advantage’ come to mind. Yet in an age where so many are making efforts to reduce their carbon footprint, sharing space and resources hardly seems like an ignoble thing to do.

I see the main difference between owning land and living with others in the things that threaten my security. In my current situation (see past issue on my tiny house on wheels), I am reliant in a very real way on the good will of other people. Not as a charity, but on my relationships with them. I have no more control over when a forest fire will come through my property, or when I won’t be able to make mortgage payments, and yet somehow it is uncomfortable to be able to call by name those who have so much influence over my sense of home.

I try to be Buddhist, or perhaps Zen, about it – if I can find a sense of place within myself (and perhaps with the help of my little house), maybe I don’t need a permanent parking spot. If I can feel at home through a variety of landscapes and microhabitats, isn’t that seeing the permanence in impermanence? After all, the only constant is change...to come back down from the philosophizing, I think it is high time we consider other ways of being and doing than individually owning land. There are successful land co-ops in the Yukon which provide great models, and other options out there to check out, like the Land Conservancy in BC, and variations on the Commons theme. If we are to sustain ourselves in the Yukon we need to find ways to get people that want to grow food onto land, to begin to grow that soil. If we can find ways to do it without turning the land into ‘land’, we will be richer for it.

*Kim Melton, YCS member*

**YES!** I want to help protect the Yukon's environment and support the Yukon Conservation Society!

**I'd like to make a tax deductible gift!**

\$50  \$100  \$500  \$1000  \$ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Sign me up as a 2011 member!** Memberships are activated on day of receipt for a 1 year period and include a subscription of the *Walk Softly* newsletter.

\$10 student  \$25 individual  \$40 family

\$25 subscriber (receive *Walk Softly* without membership rights)

**Save Paper!** Do not send me newsletters. Please notify me by email when they are available for download from your website. My email address: \_\_\_\_\_

**I am donating \$100 or more**  so I get a free YCS membership for the year!

but I do not want a free membership.

PAYMENT METHOD: Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Cheque enclosed (payable to Yukon Conservation Society)

I am putting it on my VISA:

I'd like to make a monthly donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ on my VISA:

VISA # \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Signature for VISA: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME(S) \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

POSTAL CODE \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

Yes, add me to the Yukon Conservation Society's members email list (I want to receive up to two emails a month on Yukon issues or Yukon Conservation Society activities).

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

Mail your form to  
Yukon Conservation Society,  
302 Hawkins Street,  
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 1X6



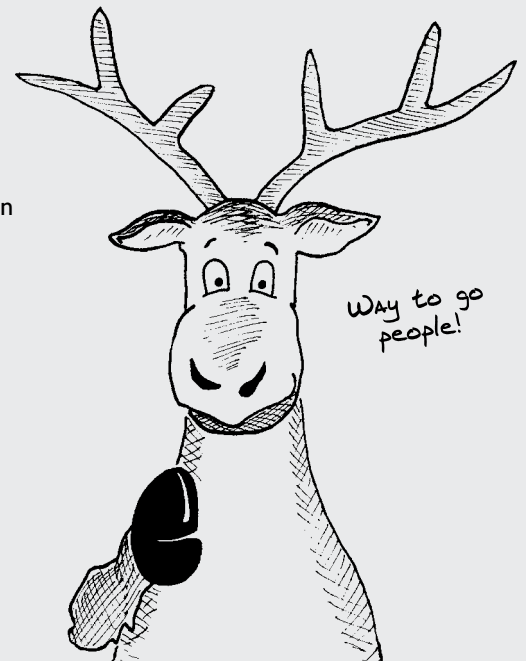
Yukon Conservation Society



*Kudos to our hard-working and dedicated volunteers! The Yukon Conservation Society wouldn't be the vibrant, active organization it is without your help!*

Anat Tal  
Mary Amerongen  
Tanya Handley  
Bob van Djiken  
Nick de Graff  
Joshua Hunt  
Mary Whitley  
Shawn O'Dell

Chris LeBlanc  
Mark Daniels,  
Tammy Hamilton  
Joan Turner  
Mike Ivens  
Kate Moylan  
Bruce Bennett  
Bev Gray  
April Lies  
David Neufeld  
Greg Hare  
Sally Robinson  
Tara Stehelin  
Pat Joe

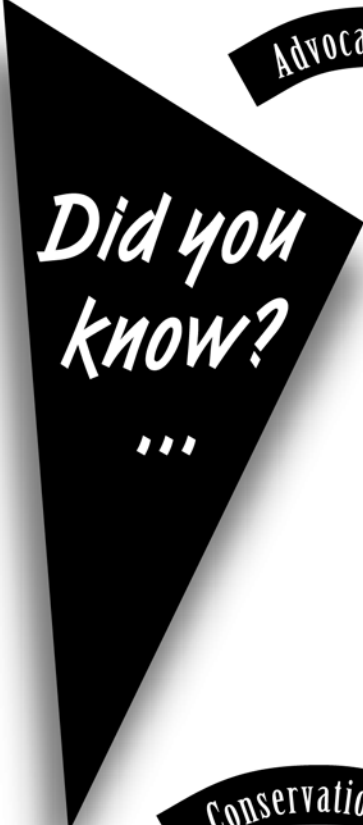




CANADA		POSTES
POST		CANADA
Postage paid		Port payé
Publications Mail		Poste-publications
4003		7322



Advocacy  Research  Environmental Education  Planning  Consultation



**Did you know?**  
...

Licence plates and liability insurance are a requirement for motor vehicles (including ORVs) travelling on a “highway” under the Yukon Motor Vehicles Act. The Act defines a “highway” as “any cul-de-sac, boulevard, thoroughfare, street, road, trail, avenue, parkway, driveway, viaduct, lane, alley, square, bridge, causeway, ice-road, trestleway or other place, whether publicly or privately owned, any part of which the public is ordinarily entitled or permitted to use for the passage or parking of vehicles,” and includes sidewalks, roadside ditches, and highway right-of-way cut-lines.

Excessive noise is also prohibited under the Act.

Enforcement of these laws would help make ORV riders accountable for their actions on the land. Encourage your local agencies to enforce these existing Yukon laws that can help to protect the Yukon environment.

Conservation  Sustainable Communities  Grassroots  Non-profit  Volunteers