

Yukon Region Office

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Third Bi-Annual Summit "Captures History with Accord Signing"

In May 1999 Leaders from the Yukon River Watershed gathered at the mouth of the Yukon River, in Mt. Village, Alaska, the second Bi-Annual Summit to discuss the future and objectives of the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council (YRITWC). The YRITWC was formed in 1997 as an effort by the Indigenous Peoples to begin working toward gaining the technical capacity to make changes within their own communities and for the entire river system.

During the 2nd Summit, it was recognized that there needed to be a mechanism for others as well as each other, to solidify the inter-tribal relationship and the relationship each community has to the Yukon River watershed. Therefore the idea of the agreement was formed and the many hours of work began toward the finalization of what would become a historic agreement between the Tribes and First Nations within the Yukon River watershed.

Briefly, a treaty committee was formed to begin drafting the agreement. This committee consisted of several people from each region of the Watershed. In 2000, the YRITWC Steering Committee made the decision to go out to each region and begin gathering feedback on the draft treaty. It was at the Fairbanks meeting in March of 2000 that "Indigenous Peoples" and "Accord" was adopted as official language to be used. One of the main reasons behind changing to an "Accord" was the historical negative connection with the word "treaty." In addition, the reason behind the adoption of the wording "Indigenous Peoples" was felt to be more inclusive and embraces the 'unity' foundation of the organization.

The YRITWC is grateful for the many hours of work and travel dedicated by the Indian Law Resource Center in the drafting and final signing of the Accord. In particular, we would like to recognize the efforts of Ms. Dalee Sambo Dorough and Mr. Andrew Huff. Both worked very hard at all the stages of the development of this historic document. Continued on Page 6 is the Accord in full.



YRITWC Steering Committee Members & Staff

Alaska Region Representatives

Clarence Alexander, Yukon Flats Region Rep.
Peter Captain, Sr., Middle Yukon Region Rep.
James Landlord, Lower Yukon Region Rep.
Edna Hancock, Tanana River Region Representative
Jack Wholecheese, Koyukuk River Region Rep.

Yukon Region Representatives

Harold Gatensby, Dahka Region
Joel Jacobs, Interim Southern Tutchone Region
Chief Darren Taylor, Tr'ondek Hwech'in/Vuntut
Gwich'in Region
Chief Eddie Skookum, Northern Tutchone Region
Vacant, Ross River Dena Region

YRITWC Staff

Heidi Istchenko, Yukon Region Director

Suchot Sunday, Communications/Website Developer
Maxine Benoit, Office Manager
Vanita Sahni, Research Intern

Rosetta Demoski Alcantra, AK Region Director

Tricia Waggoner, River Assessment Coordinator
Carl Wassilie, Waste & Contaminant Coordinator
Krystal Harris, Grants Administrator
Diana Ervin, Environmental Education Coordinator

Mission Statement

We, the Indigenous Peoples from the headwaters to the mouth of the Yukon River, including its tributaries, having been placed here by our Creator, do hereby agree to initiate and continue the clean up and preservation of the Watershed for the protection of our own and future generations of our Indigenous Peoples and for the continuation of our traditional Native way of life.

"Keep our water clean so it will be
safe to drink for all of our grandchildren."

Marge Smith

Third Bi-Annual Summit Re-Cap

This past August the Teslin Tlingit Council hosted the Third Bi-Annual Summit in their traditional lands located at Brooks Brook. Participants representing the Elders, Youth, Technical Staff and Leadership from each community gathered for the three day outdoor meeting at the headwaters to commemorate their commitment to one another with a signed agreement to work together and protect/preserve the Yukon River for themselves and for their future generations.

Although the Summit was primarily focused on the Accord signing it was very significant as it was the first time that the Elders, Youth and Technical Staff played a major part of the gatherings. The Elders and Youth held a working group to come up with a narrative 'story of the river' using a variety of media: drawings, poetry and writing. The technical staff also gathered for the first time to begin discussing one of the primary objectives of the YRITWC, to document the trends of the Yukon River and to discover ideally what is happening to the river in technical terms. The Leadership representatives concentrated their efforts on finalizing the Accord and making organizational structural changes.

The Summit was organized in an effort to limit the congestion of the participants. As this was the largest gathering to date, with well over 250 participants, it was necessary to separate the Summit into three working groups. Many of the participants flew in on Tuesday afternoon and began by setting up their individual camp sites along the lake and elsewhere. There were two plane loads chartered from Fairbanks on Air North arriving into Whitehorse and busing 45 minutes to Brooks Brook. As well, there were charters coming into Fairbanks from locations throughout the river.

On Wednesday the participants joined for a general assembly, welcoming words were given by Chief Eric Morris and Sam Johnston and the agenda for the gathering was approved. The Elders and Youth held their workshop in a nearby tent and the technical staff ventured into Teslin to hold their meetings at the Teslin Tlingit Council Long house

For two full-days each of these groups met and discussed the various issues at hand. The final day of the gathering consisted of a panel presentation by the Summit funders and agencies from both Canada and the United States. The purpose of this panel was to introduce the Tribes and First Nations to a small group of people who have taken a proactive interest in the development and success of the YRITWC. We were very grateful to have Ms. Rebecca Sieb from the First Nation Development Institute, Julie Jessen from the Alaska Conservation Foundation and Laurie Betlauch from the Lannan Foundation join us at the gathering. In addition, Perry Mead, Ken Margolis, Geoff Dates, Angie Read, Deborah Schaaf and Andy Huff described the work and function of their respective agencies.

Watershed Assessment Technicians



Elders & Youth tell the 'Story of the River'

The Elders and Youth worked hard on coming up with a story that encompassed the past, present and future. The 2 days they spent together will most likely be remembered throughout their lifetimes. The Elders spent the initial 1.5 days telling their stories and then the Youth recounted the story back to them. For many of the Elders this was one of the first times they had participated in this traditional approach.

Their presentation on the final day was moving and motivational and clearly defined why the efforts of cooperation are so important to the progress of preserving the Yukon River. Mr. Bill Stokes graciously asked for permission from the Elders and offered his assistance in this project. We are very grateful for his efforts. During this ceremonial day the Elders and Youth presented their story. Ms. Martha Wright from Ruby facilitated the presentation, poems were shared by Youth and Elders, as well as personal stories and several young men read the story and presented the drawings detailing their collective vision of the "past, present and future". There were very few dry eyes in the house during this presentation. A standing ovation was and is in order for your Youth and Elders. (Please see story on page 4)



Leadership makes ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES....

This past year has been a significant year of growth for the YRITWC and in that effort the organization has encountered many challenges as well as successes. During the Summit there were some very important structural changes made that will allow for a cohesive and stable organization to better serve the Tribes and First Nations which formed it. The YRITWC staff much appreciate the volunteer hours by the long-time Steering Members and those who have actively participated. It is important to recognize the efforts of Harold Gatensby, Clarence Alexander, Peter Captain, Sr., James Landlord and Jack Wholecheese for their guidance and leadership this past year.

Following is a list of important items addressed and approved at the Summit. If you have any questions please contact the respective director in your region.

- Yukon and Alaska Regional Offices

In the interest of having the ability to access the international funding arena and to effectively address 'capacity building' it has become technically necessary to have two registered offices. The registered offices are located in Whitehorse, Yukon and Anchorage, Alaska. The intent is for each regional office to operate in separate capacity in relationship to its region specific agenda's and to act as a unified body in the creation and implementation of organizational objectives. The YRITWC Steering Committee operates as an International Committee when addressing the entire watershed issues and operates separately when addressing the administrative needs of the respective regional office in question.

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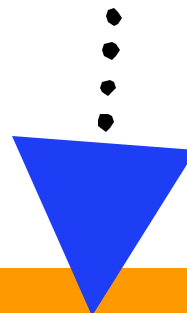
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- Co-Directorship adopted at the Third Bi-Annual Summit
 During the Third Summit a co-directorship was adopted based on the needs indicated above. Ms. Heidi Istchenko has been acting as the Yukon First Nation Coordinator since January 2001, she has now become the Yukon Region Director. As well, Ms. Rosetta Alcantra will continue in her capacity as the Alaska Region Director. This change is strategic as it will allow for each director to concentrate on the immediate regional needs, fundraising and administration. In addition, this change will allow for the directors to work cooperatively and address the 'unified' approach to program development, 'grassroots' assurance and organizational development. As the opportunity presents itself, the directors will coordinate

- Steering Committee Members increased
 The YRITWC Steering Committee was increased to 10 members. This action further demonstrates the commitment of the watershed communities and provides for a broader base of representation. By increasing the Steering Committee this indicates to the potential funders there is a commitment to the organization and to the entire river .

The four founding members Harold Gatensby, Clarence Alexander, Peter Captain, Sr., James Landlord, have been joined by Jack Wholecheese, Edna Hancock, Darren Taylor, Joel Jacobs, and Eddie Skoo-



Let's Get To Know Our New Staff at the YRITWC Whitehorse Office:

Vanita Sahni - Research Intern – Vanita is a BSc Graduate from the University of Guelph with an Environmental Science Major and with an emphasis on Environmental Impact Assessment. She has done habitat rehabilitation work in South Australia, environmental education in Japan and worked with the Canadian Wildlife Service in GIS habitat assessment. Vanita will be focusing her efforts on research for the Yukon River Transboundary Watershed Assessment and will work from both this office and Environment Canada's office.

Suchot Sunday – Communications / Web Page Developer – Suchot is a BSc Graduate from McGill University with a Biology Major and a Computer Science Minor and has extensive experience in both communications and research. She will be developing a web page for the YRITWC to be used as a communications tool between the YRITWC, the Yukon First Nations, Alaska Tribes, and government and non-government agencies. In developing the webpage she will work closely with the Indigenous Peoples of the Watershed, government and non-government agencies and the Alaska office to develop the format and at the same time to foster improved communications, networking and partnerships.

Maxine Benoit – Office Manager – Maxine is a Senior Secretary and a Web Page Developer. She will be managing the clerical and administrative operations of the Yukon Region and assisting with research and the development and ongoing maintenance of the web page.

Excerpts from the Elder and Youth Narrative “The Story of The River”

“Once upon a time there was a very beautiful land, with all different kinds of animals, abundant plants, fish, clear water, stronger and healthier people, and clean air. We had our own spiritual religion, beliefs, and languages. We only hunted what we needed and when we did hunt, when we caught something, every part of the animal was used. Nothing went to waste. There were a lot of trees and the animals were fat and healthy and the river was clean. Clean enough to drink out of. There weren’t a lot of big cities or a lot of people to clear our land and use our waterways. This was the way of our past.”

“This is what the present looks like through the eyes of our children and our grandchildren. As you can see, the earth is heavily polluted with contaminants in the air on the land and in the water. This is a time where you have to buy a bottle of drinking water from the store. A place where the big industries take all of our natural resources and leave us with a big mess to clean up while they make a profit.”

“The youth of the Yukon River would like our future to be very similar to our past. We have heard stories from our elders of the abundance and health of fish and the game they have hunted, as we would like to see this come back. We have learned from the past and believe if we take care of our land, our land will take care of us. This is our hope for the future.”



We will be distributing a Summit document sometime in April, which will provide an in depth look at this years Summit, the Accord, the gathering of Youth and Elders and the Story of the River as well as the objectives and the history of the organization.

Watershed Assessment Workshop

For the first time ever the technical staff from both countries met to begin discussing their individual concerns and issues at home and tried to 'wrap their minds around' what will likely be the largest watershed assessment project attempted. As part of this larger trans-boundary Watershed Assessment effort, Tricia Waggoner, Alaska River Assessment Coordinator introduced a United States Clean Water Action Plan Initiative called a Unified Watershed Assessment (UWA). An outline of this initiative can be found below. If you would like more info on the UWA please contact Tricia at 907-883-3968 or twagg@aptalaska.net. This initial meeting between the technicians was the beginning stage of what will become a long-term trans-boundary assessment and monitoring project. A map of the Yukon Watershed is included on Page 8.

UWA Outline & Description

I. Introduction: The introduction is a brief history of the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council, and the background to the Unified Watershed Assessment Project.

II. Watershed History and Statistics: This section describes the recent history and the physical characteristics of the Watershed.

III. What is a Healthy Watershed: This section provides the information on key indicators of a healthy watershed as determined at the Summit meeting in Teslin. Digital images of the drawings will be in the document as well as a discussion on how the Watershed is not meeting the indicators of a healthy watershed. A second portion of this section will focus on the Alaskan Water Quality Standards and the Canadian Water Quality Guidelines.

IV. Overview of Major Issues: This section will provide an overview of the major issues within the Watershed as discussed at the Summit. This section will also include maps of the various sources of pollution within the Watershed and look at the cumulative impacts of these sources.

V. Sub-Watershed & Community Descriptions: This section will focus on specific information of each sub-watershed and each community. Information obtained from the survey/questionnaire will be included. Any additional information available for this section would be greatly appreciated.

VI. Priority Categorizations: This section will detail those rivers that Tribes have indicated through the survey/questionnaire that should be prioritized.

VII. Conclusion

VIII. Bibliography

Steering Committee Meeting update:

The Yukon and Alaska Region Steering Committee members met in Fairbanks November 8th thru 10th, 2001. The focus of this meeting was policy and organizational development. A summary of the meeting will be included in the next newsletter.

New Additions to the Alaska Region Staff:

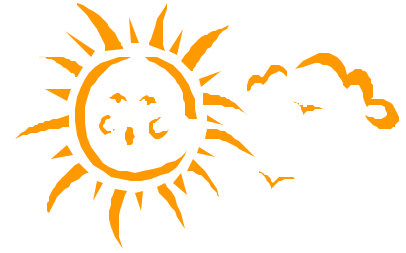
Carl Wasilie was hired in October as the Hazardous Waste & Contaminants Coordinator. Carl is originally from Seward, Alaska but has ties to many family members in the Lower Yukon region. Carl has a B.A. degree in Biology from The Colorado College, which adds greatly to the YRITWC technical staff and compliments his ability to effectively outreach. Currently, Carl is working on the Community Emergency Preparedness Training and the Resource Conservation Recovery Act trainings.

Krystal Harris, Grants Manager/Administrative Assistant was hired in October to monitor and track the progress on the YRITWC grants and administration. Krystal has a B.A. in Criminal Justice from the University of Alaska Anchorage as well as Human Resources experience working for the First National Bank of Anchorage and TSI/Qualex. Currently, Krystal is organizing the IGAP trainings and becoming familiar with grants management areas to provide technical assistance to the Alaskan Tribes.

Diana Ervin, Environmental Education Coordinator was hired in January to begin the development of a culturally sensitive environmental education curricula that will be applicable on a trans-boundary basis and focuses on a "grassroots" approach to solutions guided by cultural needs and traditional wisdom. Diana is originally from Northway, Alaska, where her parents raised her to be an avid hunter, trapper, and dog musher in order to live a subsistence lifestyle. Diana has many technical certificates pertaining to water treatment and hazardous waste and currently is working on an Associates program in Environmental Technology.

The next Alaska/Yukon Steering Committee meeting will be held in Whitehorse, April 8-10. Contact either regional office for more information.

Yukon River Watershed Inter Tribal Accord



Signed
August 9th 2001

PREAMBLE

The Indigenous Peoples of the Yukon River and its tributaries, hereinafter known as the Watershed, parties to this Accord,

1. Conscious of the value and the sacredness of the Watershed and of the urgent need to maintain, protect and enhance the life and quality of the Watershed,
2. Alarmed by the contamination of the Watershed with toxic and solid wastes, chemicals, sewage and other forms of pollution, as well as increased human activity in the watershed, which is causing environmental impacts including cysts, deformities and other anomalies in the wildlife resources of the Watershed, and high rates of cancer and other diseases in the villages within the Watershed,
3. Aware that the Indigenous Peoples of the Watershed have initiated the effort to protect the environmental integrity of the Watershed and cultural vitality of the indigenous communities that are dependent upon and part of the Watershed,
4. Aware that our relationship with the Watershed is reciprocal and that the sacred river provides for us as we continue to assist in its care taking,
5. Recognizing that the Indigenous Peoples signatory to this Accord have titles and interests with respect to traditional territories, and that we affirm our right to self-determination, by virtue of which we continue to freely determine our political status and freely pursue our economic, social, cultural and traditional development,
6. Affirming that We, as Indigenous Peoples of the Watershed, have the right to participate fully in all levels of decision-making, through our own governments, in matters which may affect the rights, status or destinies of the signatories to this Accord, and asserting our government to government relationship with each other and with other governments,
7. Being determined to recover, maintain and strengthen our distinctive spiritual, cultural, traditional and material relationship with the lands, waters and other resources that we have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used, including access to our lands, waters and resources, and to uphold our responsibilities to present and future generations in this regard,
8. Recognizing and affirming that We, the Indigenous Peoples of the Watershed, maintain contacts, relationships and cooperation presently, and have maintained these relationships since long before the establishment of the international border,
9. Affirming the need to promote cooperation, communication and education among the Indigenous Peoples of the Watershed in the planning, management and protection of the Watershed for our peoples and future generations.

Have *agreed* as follows:

PURPOSES OF THE ACCORD

Article I Purpose

We, the Indigenous Peoples from the headwaters to the mouth of the Yukon River and its tributaries, having been placed here by our Creator, do hereby endorse this Accord to initiate and continue the protection and restoration of the Watershed for the welfare of our own and future generations and for the continuation of our way of life. The purpose of this Accord is to plan, monitor, protect and enhance the environmental integrity of the Watershed and the cultural vitality of its peoples through cooperation, communication and education.

Article II Cooperation

The Indigenous Peoples signatory to this Accord, agree to consult and cooperate with each other in planning and implementing specific projects to carry out the purposes of this Accord. All cooperative action taken pursuant to this Accord will recognize and respect the authority and self-determination of the signatories.

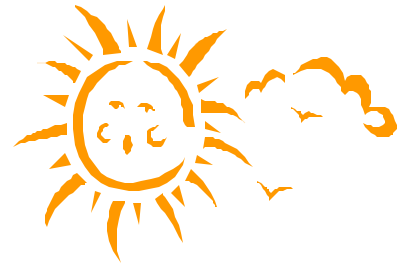
Article III Communication and Education

1. The Indigenous Peoples of the Watershed will encourage understanding of the importance of, and the measures required for, the protection and promotion of the environmental integrity of the Watershed, and will make best efforts to coordinate and cooperate with other Indigenous Peoples and with other approved cooperating entities in developing educational and public awareness programs.

2. The Indigenous Peoples of the Watershed will facilitate the development and exchange of information, from all publicly available sources relevant to the protection and promotion of the environmental integrity of the Watershed, including technical, scientific and socio-economic research, as well as information on training and surveying programs, specialized knowledge, and traditional and local knowledge as appropriate.

Accord continued on Page 7

CARRYING OUT THE PURPOSES OF THE ACCORD



Article IV. Summit Meetings

The Indigenous Peoples of the Watershed, as a means for carrying out the purposes of this Accord, agree that they will continue to meet in a summit every two years. The Indigenous Peoples signatory to this Accord may schedule additional summits or other meetings as needed. The time and place of the summit meetings will be determined by the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council (see Article V.) in consultation with the Indigenous Peoples of the Watershed.

Article V. The Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council (YRITWC)

The Indigenous Peoples hereby approve the establishment of the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council, pursuant to the summit of the Indigenous Peoples at Galena, Alaska, on December 11-14 of 1997, *provided* that the Articles of Incorporation, By-Laws and mission statement of the YRITWC are amended and clarified to conform to the terms of this Accord, and *provided* that the YRITWC faithfully carries out the directions agreed upon by the Indigenous Peoples of the Watershed and its tributaries, carries on its work with full respect for the authority of the Indigenous Peoples of the Watershed and its tributaries, and reports regularly to them.

Article VI. Amendment of the Accord

Amendments to this Accord may be proposed by any of the Indigenous Peoples signatory to the Accord. Amendments may be adopted only by consensus at a summit of the Indigenous Peoples. The YRITWC shall inform all signatories to the Accord of any proposed amendments at least 30 days in advance of the summit meeting, unless otherwise agreed. Amendments will be implemented upon ratification by the governments of the Indigenous Peoples signatory to the Accord.

Article VII. Implementation of the Accord

This Accord will take effect upon signing by the Indigenous Peoples of the Watershed, and will remain open for future signatories.

Article VIII. Withdrawals

At any time any signatory may withdraw from the Accord by giving written notification to the YRITWC, which will inform the other Indigenous Peoples of the Watershed.

Article IX. Disclaimers

This Accord will strengthen the ability of signatory Indigenous Peoples to resolve issues of mutual concern through cooperation, communication and education. This Accord will not be used in any court of law or against any signatory.

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Definitions:

Indigenous Peoples – The Tribes and First Nations of the Yukon River Watershed and its tributaries, as represented through their indigenous forms of government.

Yukon River Watershed – The Yukon River from its headwaters to its mouth, including all of its tributaries.



A copy of the Accord may be obtained by contacting either of the YRITWC Whitehorse or Anchorage offices.