

Yukon Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS Yukon)

# HOW WE WORK



Photo by Malkolm Boothryod

 **CPAWS**  
CANADIAN PARKS AND WILDERNESS SOCIETY  
YUKON CHAPTER



At the Yukon Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (**CPAWS Yukon**), we aim to conserve the Yukon's ecologically and culturally important lands and waters for all. We believe that public awareness, engagement, grassroots community organizing, education, and empowerment are key to achieving land and water protection.

Relationships based on respect and our Commitment to Reconciliation are foundational to our work as an environmental organization.





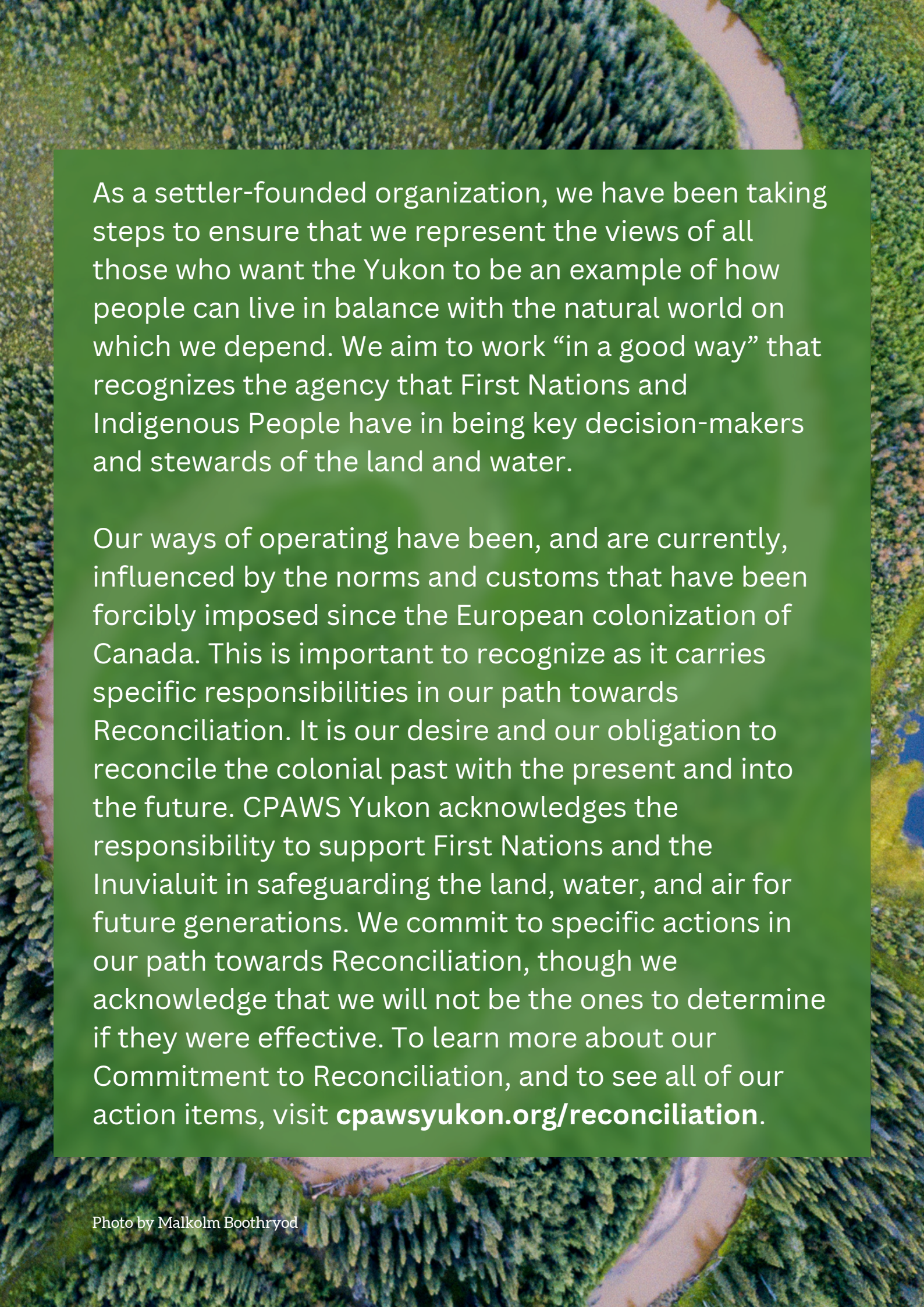
**CPAWS is a national charity founded in 1963, which now includes thirteen chapters and 40,000 supporters across the country. A dedicated organization in the environmental movement, CPAWS has been deeply involved in establishing two-thirds of Canada's protected areas.**

**The Yukon Chapter was founded in 1992 by passionate Yukoners who wanted to bring greater attention to conservation issues in the territory. CPAWS Yukon has the ability to inform and mobilize many supporters, collaborating with First Nations, the public, and other governments to develop solutions that will protect the environment.**



Photo by Malkolm Boothryod



An aerial photograph showing a wide, brown river meandering through a vast, dense forest of evergreen trees. The forest is a mix of dark green and lighter green, suggesting different tree species or perhaps some autumnal tints. The river is a prominent, light-colored feature that curves through the landscape.

As a settler-founded organization, we have been taking steps to ensure that we represent the views of all those who want the Yukon to be an example of how people can live in balance with the natural world on which we depend. We aim to work “in a good way” that recognizes the agency that First Nations and Indigenous People have in being key decision-makers and stewards of the land and water.

Our ways of operating have been, and are currently, influenced by the norms and customs that have been forcibly imposed since the European colonization of Canada. This is important to recognize as it carries specific responsibilities in our path towards Reconciliation. It is our desire and our obligation to reconcile the colonial past with the present and into the future. CPAWS Yukon acknowledges the responsibility to support First Nations and the Inuvialuit in safeguarding the land, water, and air for future generations. We commit to specific actions in our path towards Reconciliation, though we acknowledge that we will not be the ones to determine if they were effective. To learn more about our Commitment to Reconciliation, and to see all of our action items, visit [cpawsyukon.org/reconciliation](https://cpawsyukon.org/reconciliation).



# CPAWS Yukon's Commitment to Reconciliation

Reconciliation is about balance and healing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples, including non-profit organizations. We are an environmental organization that is settler-founded and has a staff and board that remains mostly settler. Our ways of operating have been, and are currently, influenced by the norms and customs that have been forcibly imposed since the European colonisation of Canada.

## Our Pledge:

- Follow a path towards Reconciliation.
- Learn from, and be accountable for any mistakes we make and have made. We will work to reinforce and expand positive efforts and approaches.
- Listen.
- Be true partners with Yukon First Nations and other Indigenous Peoples as we seek to maintain species and places that shelter and provide for those species.
- Continue to prioritize building and stewarding relationships with First Nations and Inuvialuit communities, Citizens and governments. We recognize the responsibilities that come with these relationships and that trust is difficult to earn, but easily broken.
- Recognize the history of colonialism that exists within conservation and environmental management and take action to ensure that it does not continue.
- Create awareness about:
  - The structures that were designed to foster and uphold colonialism, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and Terra Nullius. It is helpful that these ideas have been renounced both nationally and internationally, in particular by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and through UNDRIP, though the concepts tied to them are still used today and impede the path to Reconciliation;
  - How the environmental sector can support the abolishment of colonialism.





CPAWS Yukon is currently set up to have four major teams: Outreach Team, Conservation Team, Communications Team, and Operations Team. We all work collaboratively to ensure that our campaigns and projects incorporate diverse perspectives, run smoothly, and align with our mission.

Our core team is based in Whitehorse on the traditional territories of Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and Kwanlin Dün First Nation. When we work on a specific area or region, we look to the goals of the First Nations whose land it includes, and we use that to inform our own goals. Supporting Indigenous voices and initiatives is a fundamental part of our conservation efforts.



As an organization, we want to advocate for changes that are important, evidence-based, and supported by the broader community. We recognize Indigenous peoples have the knowledge, wisdom, and relationships with the natural world that we need to tackle the biodiversity and climate crises effectively. First Nations are already working hard to protect their lands and waters; we want to help move this meaningful work forward.





Our team works with First Nations, Governments, organizations, businesses, and citizens to translate values and ideas into meaningful actions and policy changes. We break down complicated (and often colonial) processes, and create tools and space for citizens to speak up and share their own perspectives.





# EXAMPLES OF OUR WORK





# Upholding Indigenous Rights

- Organized meetings with Peel Nation leadership, staff, and legal team including Thomas Berger during the Peel Land Planning process.
- Participated as a co-plaintiff on the court case for the Peel Watershed, alongside Trondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, and the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation – defending Yukon First Nation rights, democracy, and the environment.
- Helped connect the First Nations with funders for the legal fees.
- Organized many public and community events throughout the court cases to update and gather support from across the Yukon.
- Coordinated with First Nations and media in the Yukon and across Canada to help tell the story of the fight for the Peel and First Nation rights.
- This case was launched in 2014, and went all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, where it won unanimously in 2019.



Photo by Justin Van Leeuwen



# Knowledge Collaboration

- Listening, learning, and providing a platform to share information and teachings from Indigenous Knowledge holders.
- Identifying a blind spot in the Yukon government's Climate Action plan and shining a light on the astronomical carbon releases that could come from disturbing ancient wetlands in the Dawson Region.
- Setting up trail cameras and sound recorders in Chasàn Chùà to understand whether developments like roads are impacting where wildlife are found.
- Hosting an Appreciation Inquiry with the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun to help the community dig deeper into its values and community vision.
- Using mapping tools and information to create story maps that help educate people about the cultural and ecological importance of areas.







## Youth Trips and Films

For decades CPAWS Yukon has organized or helped organize and guide on the land trips into different areas. These trips always include Citizens of all ages from those areas, and sometimes different artists, journalists, guardians, researchers or technicians, funders, politicians, and other local supporters and staff from Yukon First Nations.

Getting youth on these trips has been of utmost importance and has been our focus more and more. **These kinds of trips not only give youth life-changing skills and experiences**, but also the agency and confidence to speak up for the land, water, and wildlife.



# CPAWS On the Land Trips

- Three Rivers Journey: Organized simultaneous river trips on the Wind, Snake, and Bonnet Plume Rivers
- Organized a trip on the Wind River in 2010
- Organized Peel Youth Wind River trip in 2015
- Supported Paddle for the North trip on the Hart, Peel, Rat, Porcupine, and Yukon Rivers in 2015
- Supported Paddle for the Peel Canadian Artists Residency trip in 2015
- Supported the Youth of the Peel trip on the Wind River in 2016
- Supported a second Youth of the Peel Trip on the Wind River in 2017
- Organized Tsé Tâge (Beaver River) community trip with FNNND in 2019
- Organized Tsé Tâge Youth Trip in 2020
- Supported FNNND Tsé Tâge Youth trip in 2021, first year collaborating with YFNED
- Supported the Climate Fellowship trip on the Àa Tlein Lake in 2022
- Supported FNNND and YFNED on the Mayo to Moosehide Youth trip in 2022
- Co-organized Wind River Youth trip with YFNED in 2023





# Public Advocacy

- Hosting letter writing events and a webinar to walk people through commenting on how to strengthen the draft Dawson Land Use Plan and areas with important cultural and environmental values like the Indian River wetlands.
- Launching “Stories from the Dawson Region,” a social media series to amplify and share different perspectives and experiences to encourage people to speak up for stronger protections in land use planning.
- Working together with Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, the Gwich'in Tribal Council, and other organizations to push Canada's big five banks to adopt finance exclusions for the Arctic Refuge.
- Organizing countless events throughout the Peel Land Planning process to encourage the public to participate, highlighting the Peel nations values and vision for the watershed.

**Speak up for  
conservation in the  
Dawson Region!**





# Environmental Education & Outreach

- Encouraging connecting with the land through guided walks on the edible, medicinal, native, and introduced species of Chasàn Chùà's boreal forests and wetlands.
- Publishing interactive booklets that highlight the traditional territories of First Nations and species found across the Yukon.
- Amplifying rallies and protests, like the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun's recent rally supporting the Yukon Court's decision to quash a mining project in their territory, and the Kaska's rally for the Kudz Ze Kayah court case.
- Hosting election forums with the Yukon Conservation Society for people to hear from prospective candidates on issues around climate change, biodiversity loss, and reconciliation.
- Leading beading nights with meaningful conversations about Yukon's history with residential schools.
- Joining Caribou Days in Old Crow, highlighting the significance of caribou to the cultural and subsistence practices of the Vuntut Gwitchin in the media.

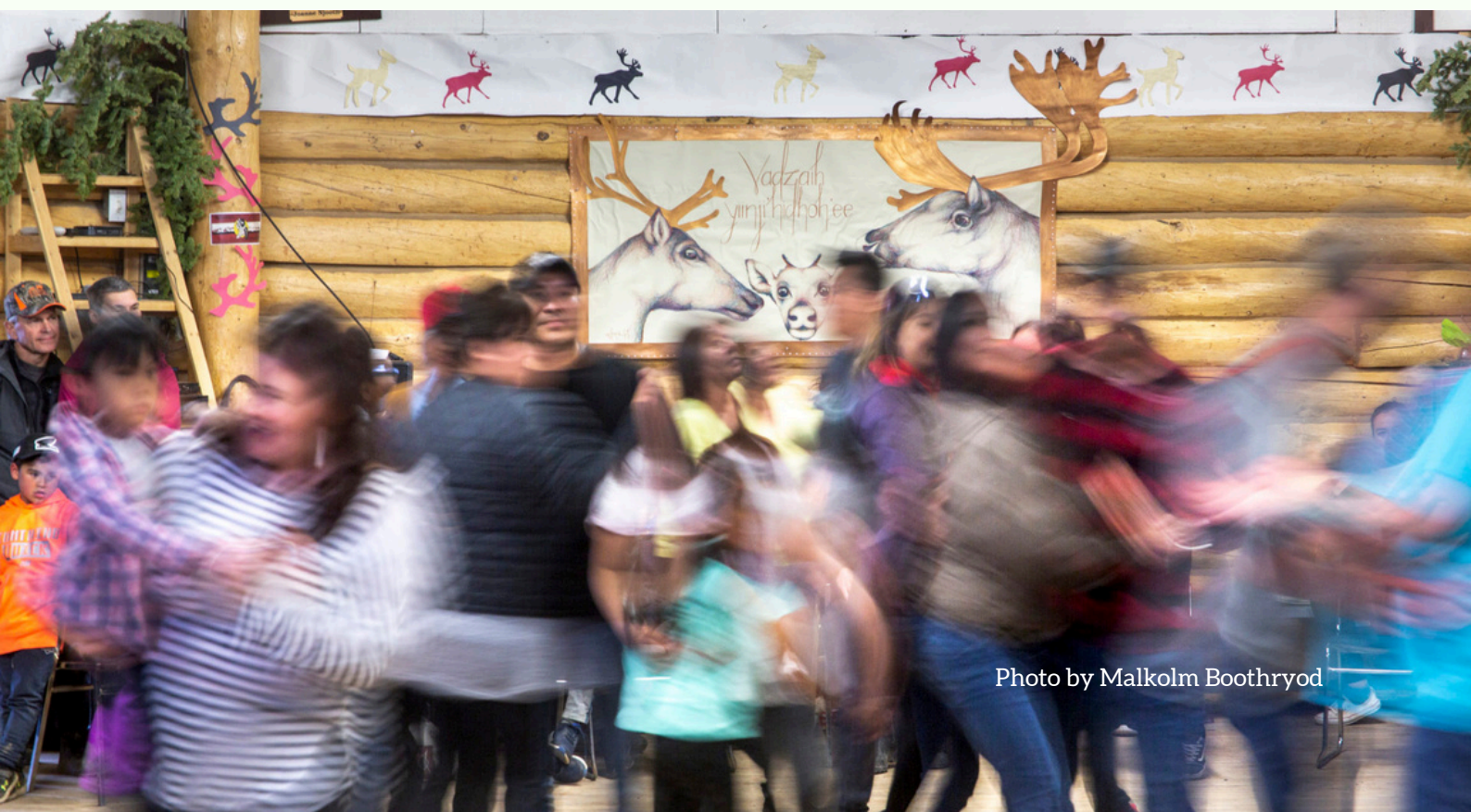


Photo by Malkolm Boothroyd





# Collaboration

- Organizing and co-hosting a Land and Water Relationship Planning Gathering to center Indigenous worldviews and approaches to land stewardship and transboundary collaboration.
- Traveling together with Shauna Yeomans-Lindstrom and Jewel Davies, two inspiring young First Nation women in the Yukon First Nation Climate Fellowship, to attend the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15) and present at CPAWS events, as well as be featured in the media.
- Hosting a space for Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation citizens to participate in the virtual hearings for the Arctic Refuge at our office in Whitehorse.
- Supported Peel Nations in organizing and recording multi-group meetings and gatherings on the future of the Peel Watershed, which ended up being a foundation for the long journey to protection.



# Policy Submissions and Stakeholder Meetings

- Being a part of a steering committee, along with other organizations and industry, as the Yukon government worked on addressing key aspects of mining legislation to change.
- Highlighting gaps in incorporating traditional laws, values, and historical and present-day knowledge of Kluane and White River First Nations in Asi Keyi Park management.



Photo by Malkolm Boothryod



# LEARN MORE

To learn more about our work, here's how you can find us,  
**and please come see us when you are in town!**



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Photo by Bethany Paquette