



December 6, 2024

To: Jane Koepke
Engagement Lead, Chasàn Chùà (McIntyre Creek) Steering Committee
Groundswell Planning, 19 Donjek Road
Whitehorse Yukon, Y1A 3P8

RE: Chasàn Chùà Public Engagement November-December 2024

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - Yukon Chapter (CPAWS Yukon) advocates for Yukon's wild spaces, wildlife and their habitats while actively supporting Indigenous-led stewardship. As a conservation organization, we carry a responsibility to ground our actions within a commitment to reconciliation and recognize that the lands and waters we advocate for are also the Traditional Territories of Yukon First Nations, the Inuvialuit, and transboundary First Nations in British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, and Alaska.

We fully acknowledge that Chasàn Chùà has been stewarded by Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and Kwanlin Dün First Nation, long before the arrival of settlers to the area, and that it continues to be of deep importance.

CPAWS Yukon is grateful for the opportunity to provide comments during both an input session with the Steering Committee (November 28th, 2024) as well as through this written submission. Permanently protecting Chasàn Chùà strongly aligns with CPAWS Yukon's values of ecological and cultural protection as well as land stewardship. We thank you for your work to establish Chasàn Chùà as a permanent protected area.

Please find our comments below, which touch on some of the questions in the survey and offer additional input.

We look forward to participating in the next stage of the protected area establishment.

Sincerely,

The CPAWS Yukon team:

Stephanie Woods, Conservation Coordinator

Malkolm Boothroyd, Campaigns Coordinator

Randi Newton, Conservation Manager

Work that informs our submission

Chasàn Chùà is a place where stories of connection span across generations, weaving together the land, people, and wildlife. It's a living landscape that holds historical and cultural significance, and through the efforts of many people it continues to serve as a vital space for communities to connect with nature.

Our work towards protecting Chasàn Chùà first began as the growing population of Whitehorse created increasing pressure for residential development in the corridor. This work includes pushing back against Porter Creek D, an extension of the Porter Creek neighbourhood that would have cut into the heart of the corridor. Opposition from Friends of McIntyre Creek and several other groups played a big part in bringing awareness to the area as a vital wildlife corridor and ecological area, and Porter Creek D did not go ahead.

CPAWS Yukon's work deepened in 2020 when Meagan (McCaw) Elliott, a past Conservation Coordinator, completed a report called [*The Story of McIntyre Creek \(Chasàn Chùà\)- The History, Social Values, and Biodiversity of a Creek System in the Wilderness City*](#). The report pools data and information from a variety of sources to create biodiversity maps that show the variety of plant and animal species found in the area. These sources of data included observations made by members of the community, long-term biological monitoring programs (conducted by government, other scientists and local consulting firms), conversations with experts, and our own targeted data collection using remote cameras and bat detectors.

In 2021 and 2022, we embarked on a comprehensive study of the wildlife of Chasàn Chùà. We used dozens of wildlife cameras, audio recorders, and track counts to learn what species use Chasàn Chùà, and how developments like roads and housing impact how different species experience the creek. We published our report, titled [*Caution and Coexistence*](#), in 2023. We have drawn upon the data collected as part of this project to inform the recommendations in this submission.

Chasàn Chùà is a meeting place, and it certainly has been for CPAWS Yukon outreach events. Over the past few years these events include natural history and mining walks, invasive plant pulls, medicinal plant walks, and volunteer wildlife monitoring fieldwork. These activities have taken place across the expanse of the watershed, from the northern reaches of the creek, to the pumphouse, all the way to where the creek meets the Yukon River at the Point. Many other organizations and groups also access this important local natural area to host events and connect.

In spring 2024, we co-hosted a week-long clean up event at Dàmäwtän, also known as "the Point," an important fishing, hunting, and gathering place for Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and Kwanlin Dün First Nation. Once dotted with fishing camps, this area horrifically became a garbage dump from 1942-75. The clean-up, which built on past clean-up efforts from other organizations and governments, removed 17,000 lbs of tires and 13,000 lbs of steel. While we made a dent in the tires and the banks of Dàmäwtän are now much safer for wildlife and people, future and more intensive efforts are needed. We support Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and Kwanlin Dün First Nation in their leadership towards future efforts. We hope that the protected area designation will attract ongoing financial and operational resources for restoration.

What issues, concerns or opportunities should be considered while planning for a Chasàn Chùà (McIntyre Creek) protected area?

Mineral Claim and Crown Grant Relinquishment

Chasàn Chùà still faces uncertainty and potential development pressures, with mineral quartz claims and Crown grants covering much of the area. Mineral exploration could bring disturbance to parts of Chasàn Chùà that support disturbance-adverse wildlife like moose, bears, wolves and snowshoe hares. It could also greatly disrupt the continuity of the protected area and the host of values and activities that it supports. Based on information presented at a July 2024 company open house, our understanding is that one of the major mineral claim holders has identified claims north of Arctic Chief as low exploration priority and there may be an opportunity for claim relinquishment. Claim relinquishment in these areas would be a critical step in protecting this area.

Crown Grants, Zonings and Other Land Interests

Because of its proximity to Whitehorse, Chasàn Chùà is also overlain with easements, various municipal zonings and other land interests. Currently, the proposed protected area boundaries of Chasàn Chùà are missing several parcels of land that have extraordinary ecological and recreation importance. These areas are detailed later in this submission. CPAWS Yukon urges the Steering Committee governments to work with other interest holders in the area to ensure that these areas can be included within the protected area, whether that be through relinquishments, rezoning or other measures.

Protecting Source Water Quality

Chasàn Chùà creek is fed by diverse sources, including groundwater seeps and fens along the slopes of Mount McIntyre, water diverted from Fish Lake, and permanent freshwater springs along the lower sections of the creek. The future Chasàn Chùà protected area is an opportunity to protect source water quality at the headwaters through to the mouth of the creek, although not all these areas are included in the current boundary. This underscores the need to carefully consider the potential impacts of development when determining the final boundary of the protected area. Some of these water sources are unique ecosystems that would ideally be mapped to inform future management planning. For example, in the Yukon the seep monkey flower only grows in freshwater springs, making these areas less than ideal for infrastructure and trails.

Tools to Protect Ecological and Cultural Values

Chasàn Chùà is nestled within the City of Whitehorse, and the creek is a popular destination for motorized and non-motorized recreation, fishing, berry picking, birdwatching, among many other activities. The management tools used in a future protected area should be sufficiently flexible to allow these continued uses, providing they do not pose serious threats to the health of Chasàn Chùà. For example, a targeted protective measure would be a seasonal designation of wetlands as leash-only areas for dogs, to protect ducks, shorebirds, and other ground-nesting birds. In the winter, and away from wetlands, dogs could be free to run off leash. In general, we support using signage, education and voluntary measures as the primary way of managing recreation and other activities within Chasàn Chùà. However, future management plans should be sufficiently adaptable should issues arise in the future, especially if the creation of a protected area draws significantly more visitors to the creek.

CPAWS Yukon staff have witnessed some areas of Chasàn Chùà and activities that would benefit from enhanced management. Over time, as park use grows, so too will the need for management tools, clear guidance and regulations to help balance the diverse activities that take place in this special, semi-urban space.

Chasàn Chùà hosts Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) use, and many users ride responsibly. Unfortunately, we've also witnessed tracks and ruts in areas that can't sustain this use, including wetlands, streams, and nesting sites. The future park would benefit from tools, such as Off-Road Vehicle Management Areas that keep ORVs out of sensitive habitats. The same is true for snowmachines.

Chasàn Chùà's trail network is a community gem and a joy to explore. Some areas, however, have started to sport a spiderweb of trails and shortcuts, at the risk of fragmenting and degrading important ecological and cultural areas. While the City of Whitehorse's *Trail Development Policy* can address these issues to a degree, the future Chasàn Chùà park would potentially benefit from a Chasàn Chùà-specific tool that can nimbly support park objectives and the input of all partner governments.

Considering easements for utility infrastructure upgrades is necessary for maintaining the park's values as these projects can fragment habitat, allow invasive species to spread, and impact ecological and cultural sites.

Collaborative Governance and Management

This moment presents a unique opportunity for the five government members of the Steering Committee to work in equitable partnership, in a way that is inclusive of Indigenous stewardship and supports the priorities of Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and Kwanlin Dün First Nation. We understand that the parties will likely have to draw on a variety of governance tools, tailored to Chasàn Chùà, and we support you in taking the time to 'get it right'.

We've seen the pivotal role that staff from Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and Kwanlin Dün First Nation, such as wildlife monitors, land stewards, and technicians, play in stewarding the vitality of Chasàn Chùà. We hope that protected area designation will support them in these efforts through funding, resources and providing appropriate powers. For example, CPAWS Yukon supports management arrangements that provide the ability for on-the-land staff to have enforcement and/or investigation powers (if these abilities are requested, as we also understand they can be a capacity burden or outside the scope of certain positions).

Stable Funding





One of the key challenges in the conservation and management of protected areas is that funding for planning processes does not consistently carry over into the implementation and operation of parks. While planning stages often receive attention and resources, the transition to full operational funding remains a significant gap. To address this, there is a critical need to draw on the resources and expertise of all collaborating groups to create a stable and robust funding structure to ensure long-term protection. We also support the use of any available tools that can unlock funding for remediation and restoration projects in areas like Dàmäwtän.

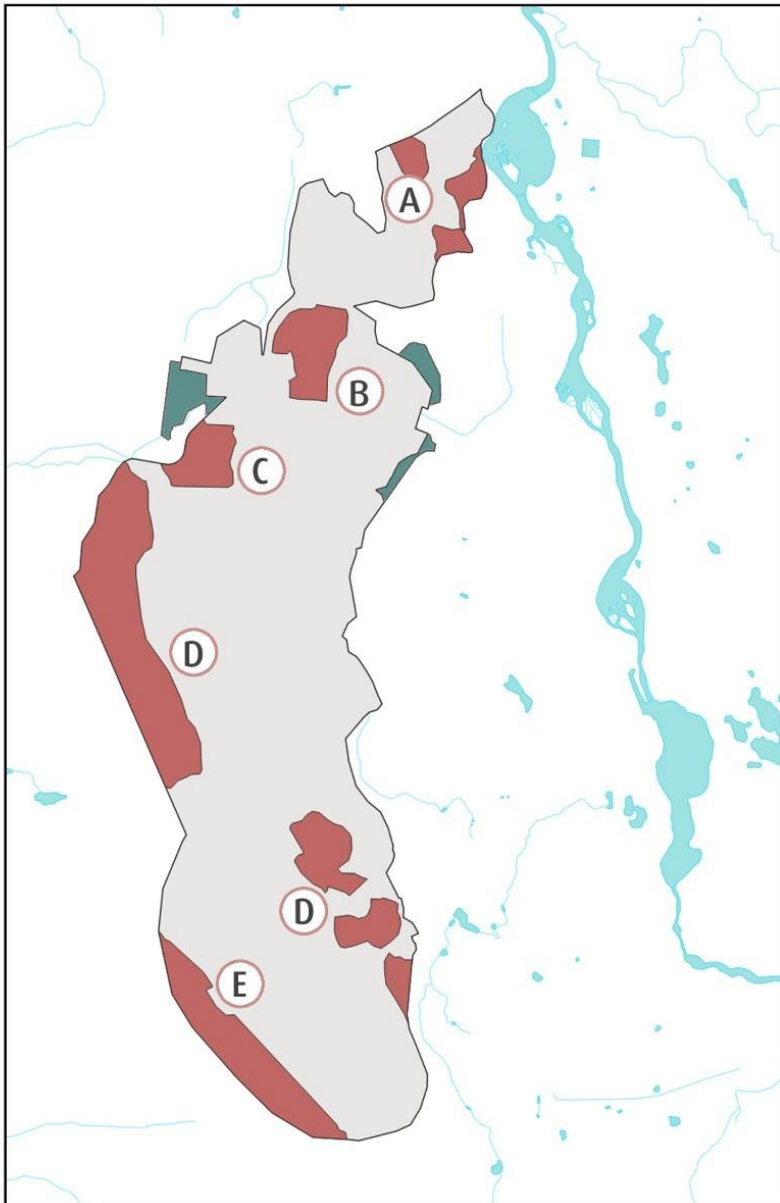
We recognize that different governing bodies have different resources to draw from, and that some may be more stable than others. We support the most stable and long-term options while planning ahead.

Proposed Protected Area Boundaries

Determining the final boundaries of the future protected area will be a complex task, given the array of zonings, easements, leases, tenures and other interests that are held among the lands comprising Chasàn Chùà. CPAWS Yukon, of course, had a simpler task when setting out the boundary of our study of wildlife in Chasàn Chùà, and our map included several areas that are currently excluded from the proposed protected area boundary. As a result, we're able to provide information on several important areas that are currently excluded from the future park. These areas are shown on Map 1 and our following comments provide greater detail.

Chasàn Chùà boundary comparision

-  Areas included in both the Chasàn Chùà conceptual boundary and CPAWS Yukon's Chasàn Chùà study area
-  Areas only included in CPAWS Yukon study area
-  Areas only included in Chasàn Chùà conceptual boundary
-  Specific places referred to in this comment letter



Map 1: CPAWS Yukon's study of wildlife in Chasàn Chùà encompassed a larger area than the proposed protected area boundary. This map shows the areas of overlap, and the areas of difference.

Area A: “Mule Deer Knoll”

The proposed protected area boundary currently excludes parcels of land on the east side of Mountain View Drive and north side of Whistle Bend Way, near the roundabout and Whistle Bend Way. Southeast of the roundabout is a small hill, which we call “Mule Deer Knoll,” which then falls away to meet Chasàn Chùà as the creek emerges from under Mountain View Drive.

CPAWS Yukon surveyed this area on snowshoes and set up a trail camera and audio recorder on the backside of the knoll. We observed more deer here than anywhere else in Chasàn Chùà. During our winter survey we came across over 20 sets of deer tracks, including many places where deer had bedded down. In the summer, our trail camera recorded deer on seven occasions, the highest count from any camera. Across Chasàn Chùà, we found that deer preferred areas with more development, possibly because large predators tend to avoid these areas. In addition to deer, we observed pine marten, lynx, coyote, red squirrel, snowshoe hare and red fox around this land parcel. Our audio recorder captured the sounds of ten bird species, including a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, the only observation of this brightly-patterned woodpecker from our entire study.

The area around Mule Deer Knoll is slated as residential under the latest Official Community Plan. CPAWS Yukon is concerned about the impacts of residential or other development in this area. Chasàn Chùà is already constrained between roads and subdivisions in its lower sections. Development in this area could shrink the amount of green space alongside Chasàn Chùà from over 600 metres to less than 300 metres. Severely reducing the amount of habitat in this area could displace wildlife from the area, or make wildlife less likely to pass through this constriction in order to access the wetlands at the mouth of the creek. Maintaining the existing habitats in this area is key to maintaining the connectivity of habitats across Chasàn Chùà.

There is recent precedent for the City of Whitehorse withdrawing a proposed development because of its impacts to Chasàn Chùà: Porter Creek D. Many of the same concerns that people brought forward in relation to Porter Creek D are relevant to Mule Deer Knoll. Including these lands within the final boundaries of a future park would help preserve the remaining wildlife habitat in Lower Chasàn Chùà.



Left: A deer beds down for a rest, in front of our camera on Mule Deer Knoll. Right: A passing coyote.

Frequency of coyote, deer and hare observations in Chasàn Chùà

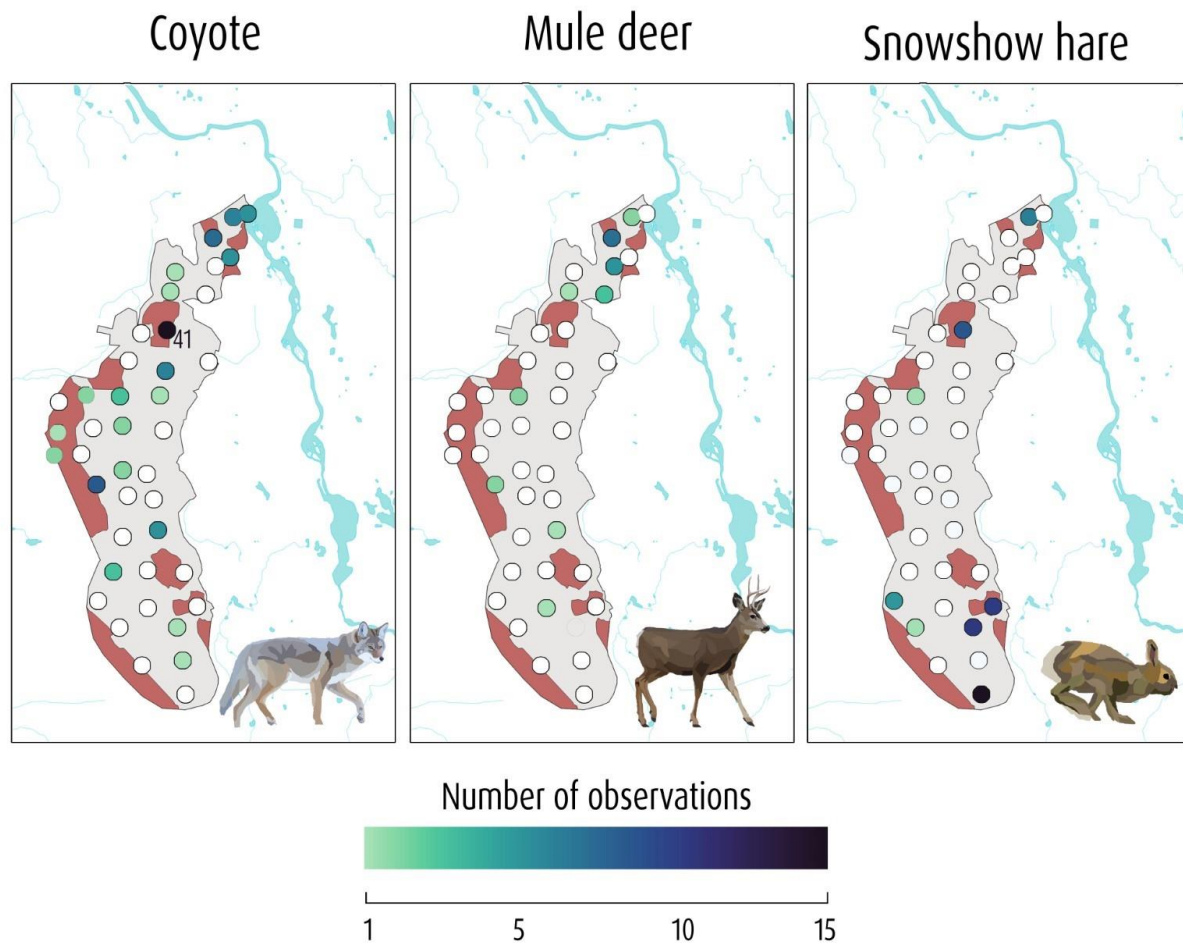


Figure 1: The frequency of coyote, deer and snowshoe hare observations across Chasàn Chùà. The red parcels of land are areas currently missing from the conceptual boundaries of the park. Deer and coyotes were both species that thrived in areas with high levels of human development, while we recorded the most snowshoe hares in the upper sections of Chasàn Chùà, where there is less human activity.

Area B: “Pierre Harvey ski trails”

Around Raven’s Ridge there is another sizeable portion of land excluded from the proposed protected area boundary. The private properties that comprise Raven’s Ridge form part of this area, but the excluded lands also extend up the steep hillsides that rise up to the south of the subdivision. Much of this area is overlapped by the Pierre Harvey ski trails, known for steep hills with many hairpin bends. CPAWS Yukon surveyed this area by counting wildlife tracks in the winter, and setting up a wildlife camera and audio recorder in the summer.

We recorded more coyote observations than any other camera location in our study, likely in part to the proximity of a coyote den. Our camera recorded dozens of images of coyote pups exploring, wrestling one another and playing with sticks. Our camera also recorded snowshoe hares and a porcupine. On our winter survey of the area, we recorded coyotes, pine marten, snowshoe hare, red squirrel and

moose tracks. We observed the songs of 15 bird species, including Golden-crowned Kinglets, Townsend's Warblers, White-winged Crossbills and Red-winged Blackbirds.

Much of this area is characterized by spruce hillsides with scattered granite outcrops, which coyotes sometimes bed down upon. There is also a small wetland tucked into this otherwise hilly area, and skiers have reported seeing moose tracks leading towards it.



Image: A coyote family in a clearing near Raven's Ridge.

Area C: "Pumphouse Lake"

The parcel of land surrounding the Pumphouse Lake, near the intersection of Fish Lake Road and the Copper Haul Road, is among Whitehorse's best birdwatching locations. While none of our wildlife camera or audio recording locations fell directly inside this plot of land, a wealth of data about its bird life is available online through eBird. 103 species of birds have been recorded at this site, including eight species at risk: Horned Grebe, Red-necked Phalarope, Lesser Yellowlegs, Common Nighthawk, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Bank Swallow, Barn Swallow and Rusty Blackbird. Bank Swallow, Barn Swallow and Lesser Yellowlegs are assessed as Threatened and the rest are species of Special Concern.

The area surrounding the pumphouse lake may not be feasible to include within the final boundaries of Chasàn Chùà, given ATCO's tenure here. We also recognize that the existing amount of public utility work in this area is minor, and CPAWS Yukon does not see the current use of the area as a risk to Chasàn Chùà. However, this area is also zoned as country residential under Whitehorse's Official Community Plan, and residential development bordering so closely upon Chasàn Chùà is more

concerning. Even if this area remains outside of a future park, the Steering Committee could advise the City of Whitehorse on alternative zoning or protection measures that could help safeguard this important piece of land.

Area D: “The Moose Belt”

The highest quality moose habitat in Chasàn Chùà exists along the wide swath of wetlands in the upper sections of the creek, and among the lower slopes of Mount McIntyre (Figure 2). We call this strip of land, roughly parallelling the Copper Haul Road, the “Moose Belt,” for the abundance of moose we found in it. Half of the wildlife cameras we used in the study fell within this area, but this area accounted for 87% of our moose observations. Here, there is no residential development, little traffic and no hunting, making the area a sanctuary for moose. This same area was also where we found the most lynx - 91% of observations. We observed relatively few large predators in our study (five black bears, two grizzly bears and one wolf) but each of these observations came from the Moose Belt.

Several key parcels of land within the Moose Belt are currently missing from the proposed protected area boundary. One is a long strip of land on the lower slopes of Mount McIntyre, west of the Copper Haul Road. The other three parcels lie at the base of Mount McIntyre, near the Maclean Lake quarries. Development within these areas could threaten the headwaters of Chasàn Chùà and disturb some of the most important habitats within the creek for wildlife like moose and lynx. For these reasons, CPAWS Yukon encourages the Steering Committee, and the governments the committee represents, to work with title holders in the area to address any barriers to including these lands within the future park. We will briefly here describe the areas we believe are in need of additional protections.

1. The mountainside along the Fish Lake Road

The first is the long parcel of land on the lower slopes of Mount McIntyre, next to the Fish Lake Road. Three of our study locations fell within this area. Our cameras recorded moose, lynx, coyote, porcupine and black bear, while during winter track counts, we observed the footprints of coyote, lynx, moose, snowshoe hare, red squirrel and ermine. Our audio recorders captured birdsong from twenty different species, including Lesser Yellowlegs and Rusty Blackbirds, both species at risk. This area comprises the western edge of the Moose Belt.

We were surprised to find wetlands here, on the lower slopes of Mount McIntyre, where the terrain gently rises. Here there are places with deep moss and pockets of standing water, possibly comprising a fen peatland. Our audio recorders duly recorded many wetland bird species, Lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson’s Snipe, Solitary Sandpiper, Green-winged Teal, Rusty Blackbird and Lincoln’s Sparrow. We also heard wood frogs. This sloping wetland is a distinctive, and presumably uncommon habitat type, as we do not know of similar environments elsewhere in the Whitehorse area. The slopes of Mount McIntyre form the headwaters of Chasàn Chùà. Including these areas within the boundaries of a future park would help safeguard the creek’s water, and protect the unique habitats nestled along the sides of the mountain.

The Chasàn Chùa Moose Belt is a hotspot for large mammals

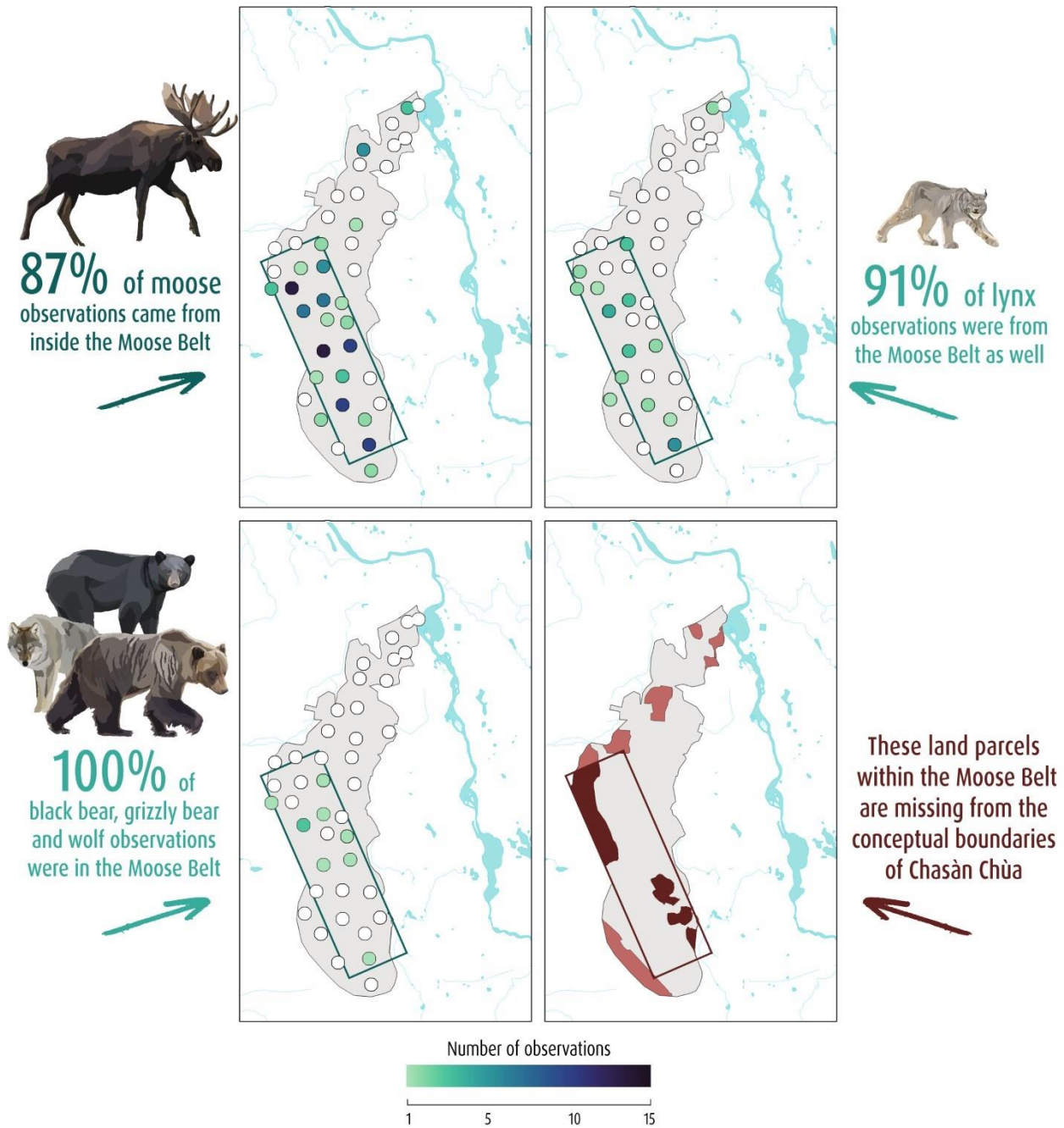


Figure 2: The “Moose Belt” is the part of Chasàn Chùa where we recorded most moose, lynx and large predators.

2. The parcels of land near Maclean Lake

Finally, there is the cluster of three parcels, near the current Maclean Lake quarries. These parcels lie right at the base of Mount McIntyre, and the forests rise steeply up immediately to the west of these land parcels. Chasàn Chùa and its tributaries flow through the northern two parcels in this cluster, before the creek bends north and runs through a small, steep ravine, surrounded by granite outcrops. Five of CPAWS Yukon’s survey locations were near these parcels. In total, these cameras observed 21

snowshoe hares, 15 moose, 3 lynx, 1 coyote, 1 deer and 1 porcupine. We found lynx, marten, snowshoe hare, moose, ermine, coyote and squirrel tracks during the three track counts we conducted in the area.

CPAWS Yukon is aware that YESAB has approved a new gravel quarry in the southernmost of the three land parcels, around the Heather Lakes. To our knowledge, there are no currently proposed developments in the other two land parcels, though these areas are zoned “industrial” and/or “future planning” under Whitehorse’s Official Community Plan. It may not be practical to include the southernmost of the three parcels within the boundary, given the approved quarry development here. However, CPAWS Yukon urges the northern two parcels, through which Chasàn Chùà and its tributaries flow, be included within the boundaries.



Above: Several of the large mammals our wildlife cameras documented in the Moose Belt.

Area E: “Fraser Loop”

The proposed protected area boundaries also leave out a section of high-elevation habitat, intersecting the narrow road that ascends Mount McIntyre, and encompassing part of the Fraser Loop ski trail. This

parcel of land follows a natural bench in Mount McIntyre, home to forests of subalpine firs, wetland meadows, and is the source of a creek that tumbles down towards Chasàn Chùà.

None of our survey sites fell directly within this parcel of land, but four sites were nearby. At these high-elevation sites we found porcupine, lynx, moose, and more snowshoe hares than in any other part of Chasàn Chùà. We did not record any caribou on our wildlife cameras, but this is the part of Chasàn Chùà where we would have most expected to observe caribou, given caribou's use of alpine and subalpine habitats in the Southern Yukon. We recorded Olive-sided Flycatcher, a species at risk, at a nearby audio recorder location.

Other special places in Chasàn Chùà

One of the most rewarding parts about studying wildlife in Chasàn Chùà was the opportunity to explore many of the lesser-visited corners of the creek. We found mossy benches carpeted in cranberries, beaver dams that doubled as bridges for wildlife crossing the creek, and tunnels in the snow from which otters had emerged. This section describes a few of the special places we learned about through our research, and other times spent around the creek.

Beaver dam causeways

Several beaver dams run all the way across Chasàn Chùà in the creek's middle section, just downstream from McIntyre Marsh. We set up a wildlife camera near one of these dams, and observed deer, lynx and coyote using the dam to cross the creek. We spotted fish darting about the deep pools sitting right behind these dams. The dams also form a series of broad wetland meadows.

Tucked away lakes

There are a handful of small lakes tucked among the lower slopes of Mount McIntyre, in and around the Moose Belt. Several of our survey locations were located near these lakes. At one lake, we saw a distinct wildlife trail cut was carved into the hillside above the lake, and our wildlife camera observed a coyote, six lynx, ten moose and one grizzly bear. Our audio recorder captured the song of a Pacific Wren, a rare bird recorded only a couple of times before in the Whitehorse area. At another of these lakes, we recorded the only wolf seen in our study, and numerous moose and lynx.

Stinky Lake and nocturnal moose

The trail camera we set up near Stinky Lake, behind Porter Creek, revealed a surprising nighttime visitor: moose. This part of Chasàn Chùà is sandwiched between roads and residential developments, so we had expected that moose would avoid this area. Instead, we found that moose use wetlands near densely populated areas at night, when neighbourhoods go quiet and traffic dies down (Figure 3). We went back and looked at the times of day we had observed moose all across Chasàn Chùà. We found that moose were significantly more nocturnal in areas with more housing development.

This suggests that moose might have altered their behavior to compensate for human disturbances by being more nocturnal near residential areas. As Whitehorse awakens, these individuals might bed down in a safe place for the day or retreat to more remote habitats. Habitats in the most developed parts of Chasàn Chùà were desirable enough for moose to still visit them, but human activities appeared to deter moose from these areas during the day. The nocturnal moose activity we documented shows how moose can adapt their behaviour to cope with some disruptive human activities—rather than abandoning these habitats altogether.

Presumably, these moose are regularly crossing the Alaska Highway and Mountainview Drive to access the habitats in the lower sections of Chasàn Chùà. Large mammals crossing these busy roads poses a danger to wildlife and drivers alike. Wildlife underpasses or overpasses where Mountain View Drive and the Alaska Highway cross Chasàn Chùà would help soften the impacts of these roads to wildlife and enhance the connectivity of habitats across the creek. Planning ahead for higher levels of protection around the above listed sensitive habitats and species can be a key step in the Steering Committee process.

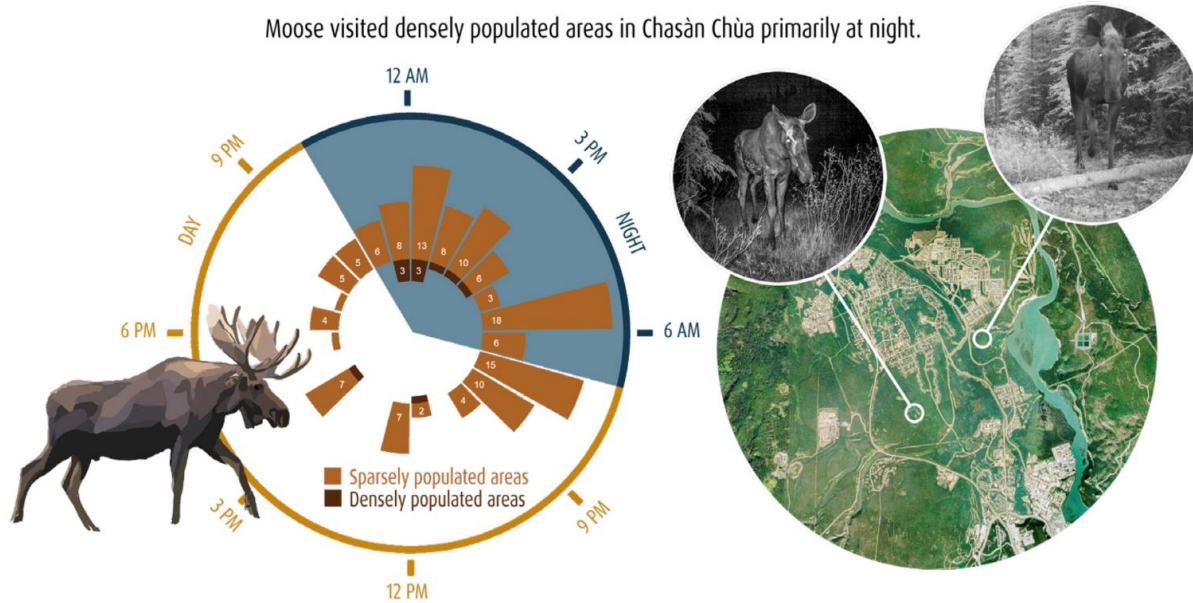


Figure 3: An hourly comparison of moose occurrences between densely populated (dark brown) and sparsely populated areas (light brown). The numbers inset within bars indicate the number of moose observations in each hour. Moose were commonly observed between 10 PM and 7 AM across all locations, but this trend was more exaggerated in densely populated areas. Right: Trail camera images of moose at night near the Porter Creek and Whistle Bend subdivisions.

What do you want to see in the Chasàn Chùà (McIntyre Creek) area in 20 years?

In 20 years, we envision the Chasàn Chùà protected area as a thriving meeting place-- a cultural and ecological hub that brings together communities, visitors, and nature. This area would be ecologically and culturally protected, with stewardship led by the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta’an Kwäch’än Council, ensuring that Chasàn Chùà is conserved for future generations. We hope that establishing a protected area within Chasàn Chùà can inspire restoration efforts within the creek. We would like to see continued work to clean up the historic landfill site at Dàmäwtän (the Point) and would be thrilled by efforts improve salmon spawning habitat in the lower sections of Chasàn Chùà. Expanding the protected area boundary to include the locations mentioned above as well as mining claim relinquishment safeguards Chasàn Chùà from development threats now and into the future.