



LAND AND WATER

RELATIONSHIP PLANNING GATHERING

Summary Report

Front cover: Harrier image by Malcolm Boothroyd, inset image by Mark Kelly Photography. Design by Malcolm Boothroyd
Facing page: A moose wades along the edge of Nares Lake, Carcross/Tagish First Nation territory. Image: Malcolm Boothroyd

“I can see now today that we’re in good hands. The young people that have spoken have been well taught, and for that I am grateful. We are still here and we are still willing to work together to look after the land, water and air. It’s so nice to see people together and looking at the important things in life.”

- Patrick James

**In Loving Memory of Elder “Koolseen” Patrick James
Former Chief of Carcross/Tagish First Nation
and Tireless Champion of the Southern Lakes Caribou**

January 28, 1940–October 12, 2024

Gunalchéesh for your wisdom, generosity, and sacrifice.

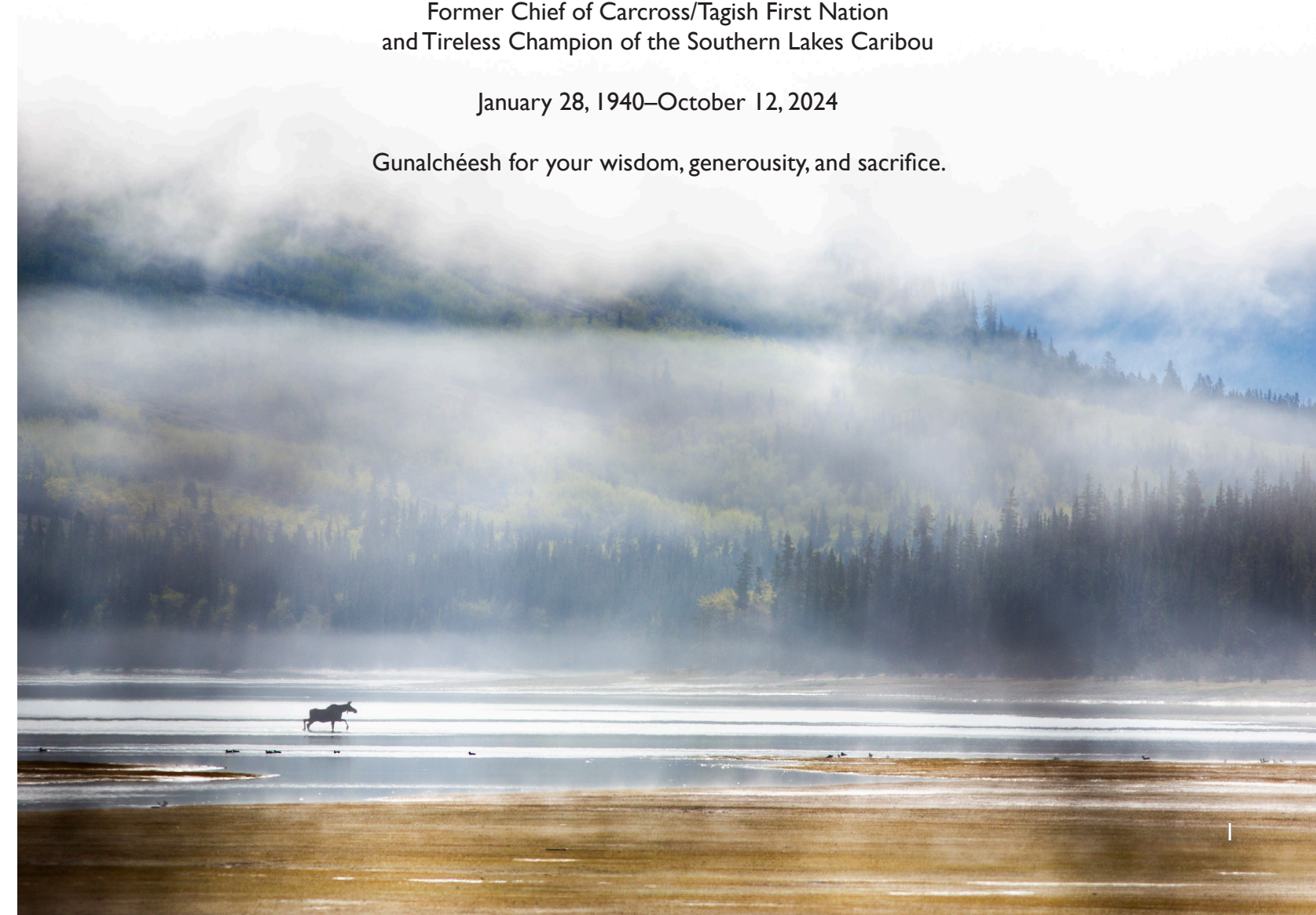


Table of Contents



4	Introduction
8	Opening Ceremony
10	How We Walk with the Land And Water
16	Yukon Land Use Planning Council Presentation
20	Panel Discussion
30	Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission
32	Northwest Boreal Partnership
34	Closing Words
35	Acknowledgements



Presenters

The following people and organizations, listed here alphabetically, generously offered their time and expertise to speak during the gathering:

Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission

Karen Linnell

Carcross/Tagish First Nation

Sean McDougall, Jewel Davies,
and Elders Patrick James, Colleen James, Bessie Jim, and Mark Wedge

CPAWS Yukon

Joti Overduin and Chris Pinkerton

First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun (via Zoom)

Elders Jimmy Johnny and Frank Patterson

How We Walk with the Land and Water Initiative

Colleen James, Mark Wedge, Margaret McKay, Louise Clethro, Jewel Davies,
Coralee Johns, Rebecca Kingdon, Roy Nielson, Patrick James, Bessie Jim, and John Meikle

Northwest Boreal Partnership

Leanna Heffner, Coralee Johns, Mackenzie Englishoe, Zaida Sanguéz, and Mary Hostetter

Ross River Dena Council

Guardian and Youth Advocate Josh Ladue

Yukon First Nation Climate Action Fellowship

Jewel Davies and Nika Silverfox-Young

Yukon Land Use Planning Council

Tim Sellars, Joe Copper Jack, Neil Salvin, and Nicole Percival

Image: A grizzly bear watches as dall sheep vacate the mountainside. Photo by Malkolm Boothroyd





Introduction

The Land and Water Relationship Planning Gathering, held on April 20th, 2023, was a long time in the making. Since 2012, the Northwest Boreal Partnership has been bringing people together from across Alaska, the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and northern British Columbia to talk about land planning, conservation, and collaborating across borders. Through this work, the Northwest Boreal Partnership developed a vision for a gathering, which would centre Indigenous worldviews and approaches to land stewardship. A gathering was planned for May 2020, but had to be cancelled due to COVID-19.

In 2022 the Northwest Boreal Partnership connected with the Yukon chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS Yukon). Both organizations wanted to learn more about land relationship planning, collaborative stewardship, and the possibilities of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs). These shared interests, along with a desire to elevate Indigenous voices, led to planning an in-person gathering. CPAWS Yukon's community outreach manager, Joti Overduin, led the gathering's organizing team, working closely with Coralee Johns and Leanna Heffner from the Boreal Partnership. The gathering coincided with Northwest Boreal Partnership meetings in Whitehorse, so as to maximize the number of people from outside the Yukon who could attend.

The Land and Water Relationship Planning Gathering took place at Haa Shagóon Hídi (Tlingit for “Our Ancestors House”), also known as the Carcross/Tagish First Nation Cultural Centre. This was the perfect space for a large yet intimate gathering. People from a broad spectrum of organizations, governments and institutions came together for this gathering to share and learn about land and water ‘relationship’ planning—an intentional step away from, and in direct opposition to, the extractive, ownership-oriented model of land ‘use’ planning. Throughout the day swans flew overhead on their spring migration, and a northern harrier even glided by the opening ceremony, as if to welcome participants to the gathering.

The Land and Water Relationship Planning Gathering featured presentations from How We Walk with the Land and Water, the Yukon Land Use Planning Council, CPAWS Yukon, the Northwest Boreal Partnership, the Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission, and a youth panel discussion with representatives from the Yukon First Nation Climate Action Fellowship, and the Ross River Dena Council Land Guardian Program. Many speakers touched on the common themes of working together, learning from Indigenous knowledge and western science, respecting the land and water, the importance of reciprocity, and of responsibility to the land and water, and future generations, and shifting the perspective of planning for “land use” to focusing all planning efforts to ensuring and maintaining healthy relationship with the land and water.



Leanna Heffner of the Northwest Boreal Partnership addresses the Land and Water Relationship Planning Gathering on April 20, 2023. The event, which was held inside Haa Shagóon Hídí, pictured here, brought together people from across Alaska, the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and British Columbia. Image: Mark Kelly Photography.

CPAWS Yukon was privileged to work with the Northwest Boreal Partnership to organize this event in collaboration with the How We Walk with the Land and Water Initiative and the Carcross/ Tagish First Nation. Western environmental movements—generally and within the Yukon, our own organization included—have a checkered past when it comes to working with Indigenous peoples, and have often suppressed, ignored, and undermined Indigenous values, stories, and desires in the name of “conservation.” These attitudes and actions are oppressive, paternalistic, and colonial. While this is not the way CPAWS Yukon strives to work, neither with the lands and waters of the Yukon, nor with the peoples and cultures that are inextricably tied to them, it’s important that we recognize the negative impacts of the past and continue efforts to do better. With this in mind, we viewed the Land and Water Relationship Planning Gathering as an opportunity for our organization to listen, learn, and grow positive, meaningful relationships with our friends, neighbours, and fellow human beings working to care for, protect, and nurture Yukon’s lands and waters, and to support and share ways of doing this work in ways which centres and respects Indigenous histories, sovereignty, and ways of being. We are deeply humbled to have had the opportunity to help bring people together to learn about land and water relationship planning, and to be part of the work happening now and in the future. Indigenous-led stewardship is not only essential to meaningful environmental conservation, but to the preservation and protection of a healthy and abundant Yukon for generations to come.



“Sacrifice is when you give until it hurts, and then you give some more. That’s when you make something sacred.”

- Mark Wedge

Carcross/Tagish First Nation Elder Mark Wedge teases CPAWS Yukon organizer Joti Overduin. Image: Mark Kelly Photography



In his welcoming remarks, CPAWS Yukon Executive Director Chris Pinkerton acknowledged the troubled history that conservation work has with Indigenous communities, and the work that still needs to be done. Image: Mark Kelly Photography

“We understand that we must move forward in a way that recognizes the mistakes of the past and moves us forward as we continue to learn and grow as individuals, and as an organization. This gathering is an opportunity to discuss, rethink, and reinterpret our relationship with the land and the water, and to give an opportunity to honour Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The conversation is bigger than a debate between conservation versus industry – the idea of free, prior, and informed consent is equally important for conservation, as it is for industry, agriculture, or tourism.”

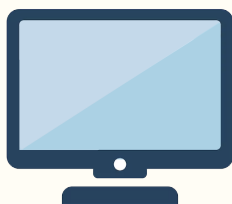
- Chris Pinkerton

About this report

We at CPAWS Yukon compiled this report in hopes of recording and furthering the vital community work accomplished through the Land and Water Relationship Planning Gathering. This document summarizes some of the main points of each presentation, with the intention of not only preserving the memory of what was shared, but to act as a reminder of the work that lies ahead.

While we have done the very best we can to accurately capture the thoughts, knowledge, and intentions presented during the course of the day, it is impossible to present everything in one document. A recording of the day is available on our website at <https://cpawsyukon.org/2023gathering>, and we encourage anyone interested in more depth and nuance to review the sections that interest them most. Please use these time stamps to reference this report’s sections to the video recording of the gathering:

Thank you for spending time with us!
Gunalcheesh! Shāw nithän!



Opening Ceremony	- 0h 00 min
How We Walk with the Land And Water	- 1h 03 min
Yukon Land Use Planning Council	- 3h 53 min
Panel Discussion	- 4h 42 min
Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission	- 6h 20 min
Northwest Boreal Partnership	- 6h 52 min
Closing Remarks	- 7h 25 min

Some Key Takeaways From The Gathering











-  Take care of the land and water, because the land and water takes care of you.
-  Healthy communities need healthy land, and healthy land needs healthy communities.
-  Elders can guide us, and our Youth are the leaders of today.
-  We need to shift away from land ‘use’ planning to seeking, developing and maintaining healthy relationships with the land and water.
-  The values of respect, caring, sharing, and teaching can help us return to and develop these positive relationships with the land and water.
-  The lands and waters need our care and protection in the face of the climate crisis, which itself is the result of damaged and unhealthy or disconnected relationships to the land and water.
-  Reconnection—to the land, to each other, and to our culture—is climate action.
-  It is our collective duty is to protect this land because it belongs not to us, but to the children that are to come.
-  Our fish and wildlife know no boundaries, state borders are imaginary, and we need to share and collaborate freely and openly across them.
-  We, all people, have to learn to walk together, because this work isn’t only for Indigenous communities— this work is for everyone.

Image: Hoarfrost on poplar branches. Photo by Malkolm Boothroyd

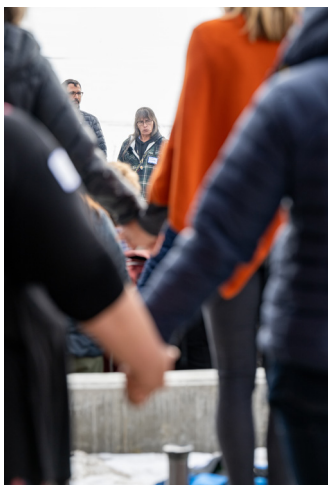


Opening Ceremony

The Carcross/Tagish First Nation Executive Council led the opening ceremony, and welcomed participants with song and prayer. Attendees were asked to stand in a circle around a sacred fire, and invited to call in their ancestors or loved ones who had passed to be with them for the day. Attendees then turned to face and thank the four directions.

Carcross/Tagish Elder Colleen James (Gʷooch Tláa) explained that the items placed around the sacred fire—tobacco, a branch, and a cup of water—would also be participating in the gathering: the tobacco was to “soak up” the feelings of those present, the branch would be brought in and placed on a Creation Chair representing a seat at the table for all of creation, and the water would sit in with them and listen to the gathering, with the intention that they all be returned to the sacred fire, which will burn all day, to send their wishes, actions, thoughts, and intentions to creation and the ancestors to receive and consider. A song, introduced by Carcross/Tagish First Nation Executive Council member and Language Curriculum and Program Developer Sean McDougall (Ltaguhàa Deisheetaan), about a historical journey of migration undertaken by the Carcross/Tagish First Nations people, was sung, accompanied by a ceremonial drum. People linked hands and offered a prayer in Tlingit, led by James, of thanks and relationship to each of the four directions.

Top: Smoke from the sacred fire fills the air as Carcross/Tagish First Nation Council opens the event with a song and prayer. During the ceremony, a northern harrier flew overhead. Elder Colleen James of Carcross/Tagish First Nation later explained that hawks symbolize warriors within Carcross/Tagish culture. Left to right: Carcross/Tagish First Nation language teacher Gary Johnson (Keinas Áxh Łdóos), Carcross/Tagish First Nation Executive Council member and Language Curriculum and Program Developer Sean McDougall (Ltaguhàa Deisheetaan) and Carcross/Tagish First Nation Elders Colleen James (Gʷooch Tláa) and Mark Wedge (TliAan Gooshú) Image: Mark Kelly Photography



Following the ceremony, which was held outside at the fire behind the Carcross/Tagish First Nation Cultural Centre (Haa Shagóon Hídi), participants came inside for a welcome and introduction, opened by organizers Joti Overduin with CPAWS Yukon and Coralee Johns with the Northern Boreal Partnership. McDougall came out to greet everyone and speak briefly about the importance of the gathering. He noted that he had recently returned from a trip to speak at the UN 2023 Water Conference in New York City; during this time, he said, he had the opportunity to talk with other Indigenous people and groups about how they were approaching land and water relationships at a global level. He said he found that a lot of Indigenous groups are “all saying the same things,” even if the language they are using about it is sometimes different, which instilled in him “a sense of hope and pride.” Science and traditional knowledge are finally starting to “talk” he added, because of the shared goals people have about protecting and caring for land and water.

“Indigenous groups, globally, are all saying the same thing; we may have different words, we may have different stories, but the base of every relationship with land and water is the same.”

- Sean McDougall

Johns and Leanna Heffner then spoke about the work the Northwest Boreal Partnership had done leading up to the conference, first imagined as taking place in May 2020. This was obviously disrupted by the COVID-19 outbreak, but “that’s okay,” she said, “because we’re on the path we’re supposed to be on.” Overduin briefly returned to ask participants why they had come today. One man said he came because he wanted to learn more about relationship building with land and water; to see how it could be implemented in a way that treated relationships with them as a whole, followed by a woman who said she came to see “the strength and power of Indigenous-lead conservation” first hand. Another person said they wanted to come and absorb the “ton of knowledge” available through a gathering like this; a fourth person said they worked in regenerative economic development, which “starts with land and water relationships,” and had come to “be sponge” and soak up anything she could.

When they were finished, Overduin said there were “a lot of whys” for her, personally, about why she wanted to attend and facilitate a gathering like this, but hearing and learning from Indigenous youth, in particular, was a big one. She then welcomed CPAWS Yukon executive director Chris Pinkerton to the stage, where he spoke on the colonial history of environmental NGOs and their often paternalistic and/or extractive relationship with First Nations and traditional values in the past. A gathering like this one is an opportunity for both people and organizations to reflect on that history, he noted, and to listen and commit to doing better, now and in the future. It also represents an opportunity to reflect and learn about land and water relationships, which are more “than government policy” and something “we all share together.”

Top: Attendees during the opening ceremony, which called for participants in remembrance of those that came before them, to think of those to come after, and to prepare to come together in a good way. Images: Mark Kelly Photography



How We Walk with the Land and Water Opening Presentation

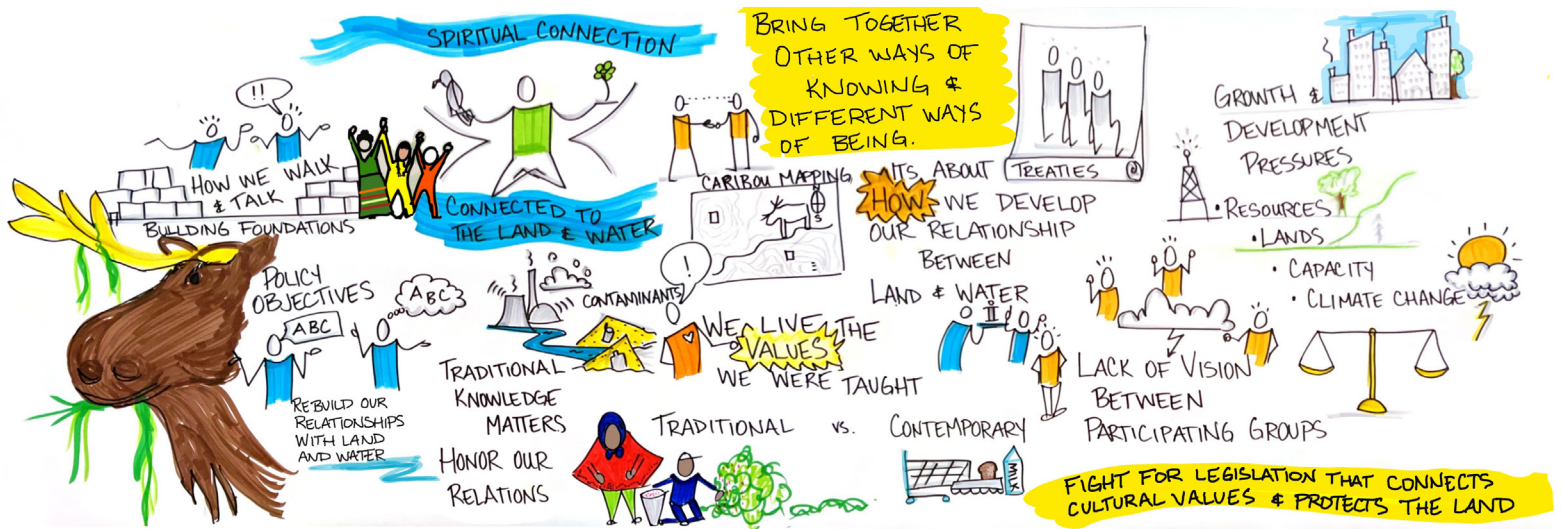
With Colleen James, Mark Wedge, Margaret McKay, Jewel Davies, Coralee Johns, Rebecca Kingdon, Roy Nielson, Patrick James, Bessie Jim, and John Meikle

How We Walk with the Land and Water is a collaborative effort, years in the making, representing what what KDFN land planner Roy Nielson refers to as “a unified First Nation vision” developed jointly by three Southern Lakes First Nations: Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and Ta’an Kwach’an Council. It is not a land plan, said Nielson, but a work of collaborative preparation between these First Nations to develop a collective, supportive vision for up-coming land planning with the Yukon Government under Chapter 11 of the Umbrella Final Agreement (UFA), which is the framework First Nations with Final Agreements and the Yukon government use to develop regional land plans.

As Margaret McKay noted during her introduction, there is a need for First Nation governments and communities to come together to set out their goals and objectives before entering into the land planning processes with other governments, and to, “as human beings, pull together to make our governments listen to what we need to protect our land and water.” To this end, How We Walk represents a proactive, collaborative process developed in keeping with First Nations values and needs, meant to ensure that when these First Nations come to the planning table, they can support one another in meeting their goals, sharing information, and staying in alignment with their values and relationships.

One of the goals of How We Walk is to maintain and grow opportunities for First Nation families to practise traditional activities on the land. The future of these activities, Nielson said, is under threat by demand from the Yukon’s growing population, which is largely concentrated in the Southern Lakes region, and exacerbated by

Top: Margaret McKay, John Meikle, Jewel Davies and Rebecca Kingdon listen as Carcross/Tagish First Nation Elder Bessie Jim speaks during *How We Walk With The Land And Water’s* presentation. Image: Mark Kelly Photography



A graphical recording of *How We Walk With The Land And Water's* work. Illustration: Marjie Cowell

“The land sustained me, made me who I am today and kept me healthy. It’s our land. We need to go back to it. ...The land belongs to our people, to help look after it and respect it. Please work together real hard.”

- Elder Bessie Jim

a Western-centric legal and economic system which privileges resource extraction, personal recreation, and private land ownership over the well-being and relationships of both people and ecosystems. How We Walk is part of the work required to accommodate these increasing pressures in ways which will benefit not only First Nations, he said, but “all Yukoners.”

First Nations are sometimes reluctant to enter into planning processes that may not meet their needs, and land use planning is generally a Western process, Neilson explained. Under contemporary Western approaches, land use plans are often siloed off and separated in ways that don’t link up or talk to each other across landscapes or First Nations. This Western process upholds and supports profit-centric “tenureship” of land, relying on Western technical and bureaucratic processes and “outdated legislation” which excludes community participation, traditional law, and other ways of knowing, he said. To shift this, How We Walk is breaking new trail by envisioning a land and water relationship plan which integrates both Indigenous and Western knowledge in ways which are “rooted in First Nations culture and law,” in relationship with and “affirmed” by Western science.

The cultural and environmental pressures placed on the Whitehorse-centric Yukon population boom, particularly as it pertains to increasing tourism, recreation, and resource extraction, were also echoed by Carcross/Tagish First Nation Elder Bessie Jim, who noted the physical damage colonization and the colonial diet, which focuses on processed, rather than traditional, foods, has done to the physical and spiritual health of her people, adding that we need to care for the land and respect it, not use it and throw our garbage anywhere. This land, says Jim, belongs “to people who respect and care for it,” and she “sometimes feels invaded” by the heavy influx of tourists on her traditional territory. First Nations people “deserve to protect what we have,” she added.

In keeping with this, How We Walk is rooted in values McKay says she and other First Nations Elders were “not taught” but which they “lived on the land, in our homes and with our families,” values which revolve not around how to “manage” resources, but on the connections between people, land, water, and animals. These lessons—use only what you need, don’t waste what you take, share surpluses with those who don’t have enough, clean up after yourself, and work to ensure the health and success of the next generation—are at the heart of the How We Walk process.

How We Walk with Land and Water is an Indigenous-led land and water relationship planning initiative that creates tools and processes by applying ancestral and present-day knowledge to articulate relationships with the land and water and all relations. During the opening presentation, speakers provided gathering attendees with a breakdown of How We Walk’s land-planning preparation process, and discussed how the information generated from it will become part of the inter-governmental planning process when the three Southern Lakes nations begin Regional Land Planning under Chapter 11 of the Umbrella Final Agreement.

The overall goal of How We Walk With the Land and Water is to guide the First Nations of the Yukon Southern Lakes—Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta’an Kwäch’än Council—to meaningfully participate in Indigenous-led land and water relationship planning processes, (land-planning), consistent with natural law and traditional customs.

This is reflected in the initiative’s charter, which includes five key principles:

Honour All Our Relations Our connections make us stronger. We recognize what we have in common, our individual strengths and support each other.

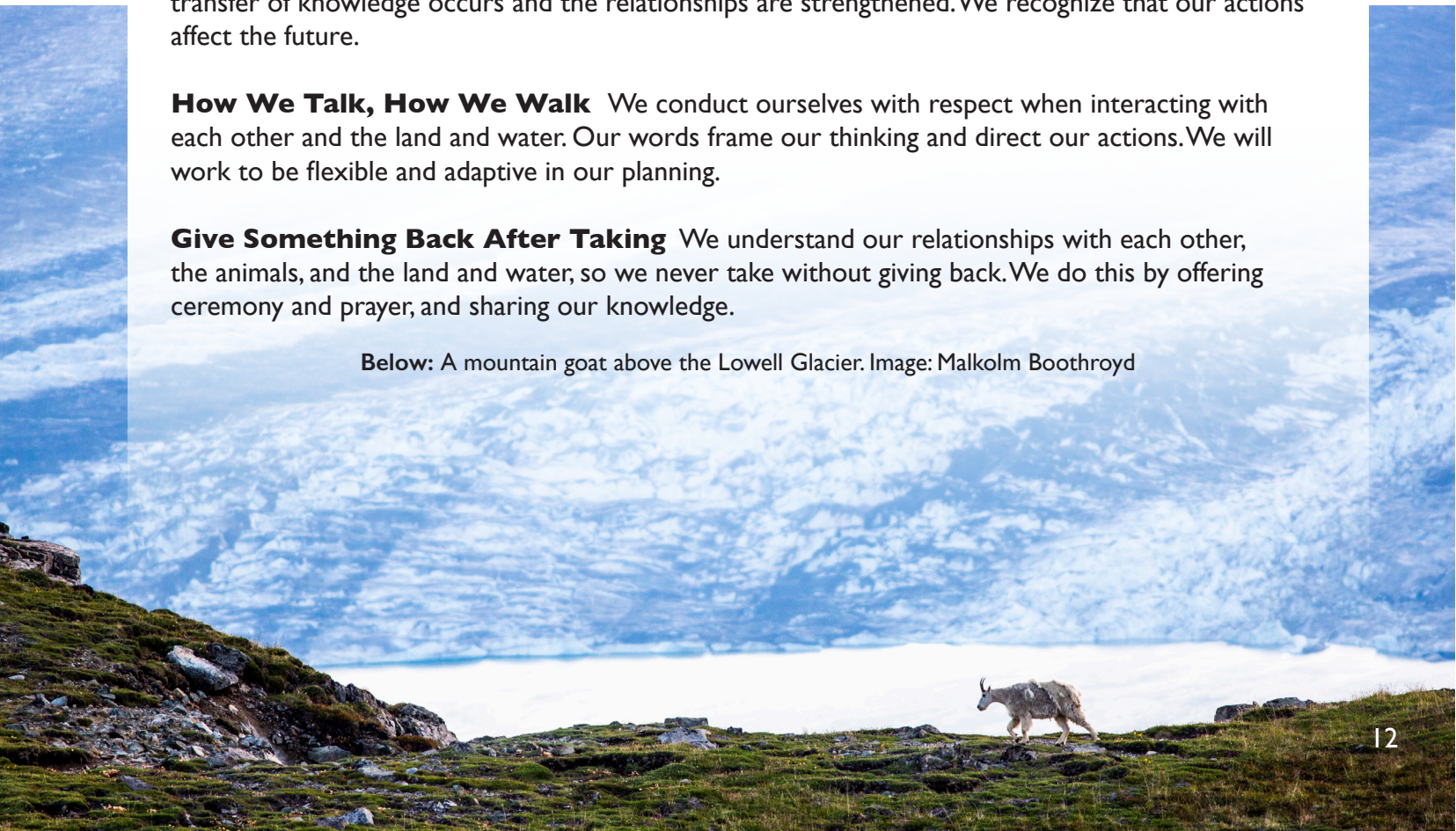
Acknowledge Everything Is Connected We value different ways of knowing, including traditional, technical and scientific knowledge. We aim to provide a holistic First Nations perspective.

Generations Coming Together Involve Elders, youth and children together, so that the transfer of knowledge occurs and the relationships are strengthened. We recognize that our actions affect the future.

How We Talk, How We Walk We conduct ourselves with respect when interacting with each other and the land and water. Our words frame our thinking and direct our actions. We will work to be flexible and adaptive in our planning.

Give Something Back After Taking We understand our relationships with each other, the animals, and the land and water, so we never take without giving back. We do this by offering ceremony and prayer, and sharing our knowledge.

Below: A mountain goat above the Lowell Glacier. Image: Malcolm Boothroyd





The process of planning through How We Walk, as explained by Carcross/Tagish First Nation citizen and Yukon First Nation Climate Action Fellowship representative Jewel Davies, involves an ongoing cycle which begins with gathering together to listen to Elders, traditional teachings, and community values, such as understanding that when sheep are lambing in the spring, the mountains “belong” to the sheep. This gets translated into “policy objectives,” meaning tangible goals or outcomes based on those values, thoughts, and stories, such as protecting lambing areas for said sheep at appropriate times; this is then backed up and reaffirmed through “technical work,” including things like habitat mapping, population studies, and climate change projections, and then implemented through things like land relationship planning and education before returning full circle to community consultation and gathering.

This cycle—which Davies said is both more culturally integrated and “more flexible” than the Western approach—is rooted in consultation with Elders and communities from all three First Nations. Ta’an Kwäch’än Council citizen and Canadian Vice Co-Chair of the Northwest Boreal Partnership Coralee Johns explained these processes as ways of “walking together” which include First Nations values and ways of knowing, such as building relationships with each other and with the land, talking frequently and consulting with each other and Elders, looking at things holistically instead of piecemeal, and accepting and upholding that community knowledge holders are the experts.

Top: Jewel Davies (C/TFN) speaks during How We Walk presentations. During this discussion, presenters stressed that this work isn’t just for First Nations; it’s for everyone. Image: Mark Kelly Photography



While How We Walk is intended to uphold traditional values and encourage collaboration and support around future land planning between the three Southern Lakes First Nations, it has been developed alongside Settler researchers and policy creators, including John Meikle, who noted during the presentation that, for his part, although he had been “trained in Western land use planning and ways of viewing things,” he has come to appreciate the “very different” First Nations values from which How We Walk has been developed. Looking at human care and use of land and water “not as an overlord, but in a relational way has been transformative,” for him and his work, Meikle said, in a way that has been “goal-shifting.”

Meikle’s work, which is rooted in the technical aspects of data collection and mapping, has come to reflect the ways in which we can “map” traditional knowledge and express it in a way that “translates to bargaining tables” with a Western government, such as the Yukon government. How We Walk is not, he said, an attempt to merge traditional knowledge and Western science as if they were “parallel streams” but rather to support traditional knowledge through respectful relationship and affirmation with Western science in a way that respects First Nation values and traditions. As part of this learning process on his end, for example, Meikle said he has been “brought over the coals” by Elders like Mark Wedge (also present for the talk), in order to understand that separating something like “cultural mapping” and “ecological mapping” when it comes to caribou is inappropriate, because the two things are one and the same under the values from which How We Walk has been derived. As a result, Meikle has been able to help develop caribou maps that reflect this, as well as integrate both traditional concerns and interests around land and water with more “contemporary” ones, such soil mapping for agricultural interests, which First Nations, he noted, are increasingly interested in.



Top: Graphical notetaking artist Marjie Cowell’s take on How We Walk’s vision.

Bottom: Southern Lakes caribou trot down the middle of the highway near Tutshi Lake. Image: Malkolm Boothroyd



During the presentation, C/TFN Elder Mark Wedge (Aan Gooshú) told a story about a conversation he had with his brother, in which his brother asked him if he knew what “sacrifice” meant. Wedge told his brother he thought it meant you had to give something up, but his brother said that wasn’t so, that it was more than that: to sacrifice, he said, meant “you give until it hurts, and when it hurts you have to give some more until it feels good—when it feels good, you know you’ve ‘sacrificed,’ and when you sacrifice, you’ve made something sacred.” Wedge noted that, in previous negotiations with Settler governments, First Nations had done the best they could within that system, based on the colonial values and approaches presented to them to work with. Those systems, however, uphold ideas about private ownership, tenureship, and land “management” that not only cause people to forget how to have good relationships with the land, but are simply “not working well.” In order to revive traditional relationships and make space for healthier and alternative ways of being, First Nations need to revive themselves through culture and ceremony, and to work to redesign systems in ways that incorporate their teachings in values. We need to be thinking about these ideas and issues in more holistic, non-property based ways which reflect traditional First Nations values around respect and relationship: when swans are in the river migrating, he said, swans “own” that river, just as when sheep are lambing on the mountain they “own” that mountain.



Top: Elder Mark Wedge speaks⁵ about how sheep “own” the mountain during lambing season. Image: Mark Kelly Photography.
Bottom: Dall Sheep in Kluane National Park and Reserve. Images: Malkolm Boothroyd



Yukon Land Use Planning Council Workshop

With Tim Sellars, Neil Salvin, Joe Copper Jack, and Nicole Percival

Representatives from the Yukon Land Use Planning Council (YLUPC) presented on the process and implementation of land use planning in the Yukon, as established under Chapter 11 of the Umbrella Final Agreement. YLUPC director Tim Sellars explained the planning is led by a commission of community members nominated by citizens and/or the government. Much of the Yukon Land Use Planning Council's work is grounded in Western science but its members are learning about other ways of knowing, Sellars said.

In regards to regional planning, Sellars said First Nations and the territorial government are meant to work as equal partners. Two regional plans—the North Yukon and the Peel Plan—have been completed in the Yukon so far, with the Dawson Regional Plan currently in development. Other First Nations have expressed interest in starting the planning process soon, with either the Southern Lakes or the Northern Tutchone regions expected to be the next areas to begin.

Canadian government-appointed Chair of YLUPC, Neil Salvin, said land planners in Yukon want to do things differently, not just how they were taught to undertake the process in university. He noted that the work being done by How We Walk with the Land and Water is closer to how land use planning should happen in the Yukon. The council needs to figure out how that works under the Chapter 11 framework, he said, which probably won't require having to rewrite or amend Chapter 11. These plans are intended to be created in partnership with First Nations, which means that "once the plan is finished, you need to remain equal partners," and so although the Yukon government tends to treat them with a one-and-done mentality, the plans shouldn't be "static" documents. This means they must be able to change over time and be re-evaluated regularly as circumstances, such as shifts in community need or changes to the landscape or wildlife as a result of the climate crisis. YLUPC would like to see successor mining and Lands Act legislation that codifies regional land use plans as law, not just recommendations, he added.

Top: Neil Salvin of the Yukon Land Use Planning Council said land use planners in Yukon want to do things differently than how they were taught, and more in keeping with the values presented by How We Walk With The Land And Water. Photo Credit: Mark Kelly Photography



Regional plans can create protected areas and other land designations with high standards of care. Such plans take stewardship into account, as well as principles of how to act on the land. The inclusion of First Nations traditional knowledge and experiences in the land planning process, moreover, is also codified under Chapter 11 (specifically 11.1.1.4 and 11.4.5.5-.7) of the Umbrella Final Agreement, Sellars said. In order to better meet these requirements and better integrate the voices and needs of First Nations in the planning process, the YLUPC has been undertaking a series of traditional knowledge learning initiatives, including the creation of an Indigenous Planning and Traditional Knowledge (IPTK) group to advise the YLUPC in 2020, and a 2021 review of how successful YLUPC was at implementing IPTK in the two completed regional plans—it concluded, Sellars noted, that the answer was “not very well.” In November 2021, a Land Relationship Gathering workshop was held online with 62 participants and “strong Indigenous representation from across the Yukon,” and at which YLUPC “learned a lot,” and was “an awakening” for the group. Among the issues discussed during this time, Sellars said, was the perception that government land planners don’t have “a strong connection to the land,” which is an admitted “blindspot” for the YLUPC. The workshop was a “kick in the pants towards moving ourselves to a new process,” he added.

Land planner and Elder Joe Copper Jack said he saw the 2021 Land Relationship Gathering workshop as a “major shift,” in First Nations participation in Chapter 11, one which expressed a “strong” desire to move away from “land use” planning to “land relationship” planning. This is an important problem to think about, he noted, particularly because in the “document they’re waving around,” (the UFA) Chapter 11 itself is titled “Land Use Planning.”

When you “draw a line in the ground or on a piece of paper, you create conflict,” especially around issues of “use” he said, which is not in keeping with First Nation values; by contrast, “relationship” planning is about “stewardship” and carries “a lot of responsibility” to the land, as opposed to simply “using” it. “Relationship” is the “whole reason we are here,” from a First Nations perspective, he added.

Top: A grizzly bear family along the banks of the Stewart River, part of the Northern Tutchone land planning region. Image: Malkolm Boothroyd

LAND USE PLANNING COUNCIL



In 2023, a follow-up Elders gathering was held to help YLUPC build on and continue that work, with a focus on learning how decisions were traditionally made by First Nations in the region and the four cornerstone principles of “respect, caring, sharing, and teaching.” Elders at this gathering told the YLUPC that it was important for the Yukon government and the planning council to remember that there was already a “plan” for the land, one which First Nations had set out long before Settlers arrived, and in keeping with their traditional knowledge and values. The Elders reiterated that they believe land planners must spend time on the land in order to do the kind of work they’ve been assigned to do and that the final agreement should be viewed as a whole, not just one chapter, and in the context of *Together Today For Our Children Tomorrow*. Based on feedback from the Elders workshop, the council has formally made a recommendation to shift from Western science based planning processes to a traditional knowledge based approach.

The “next step” from these recommendations, once they’re implemented under Chapter 11, said Copper Jack, is to have it endorsed by the Yukon Forum so that it can be moved into legislation, because there is currently no legislation that supports Chapter 11, making it, effectively, “almost toothless.”

Through the work done at these gatherings, the YLUPC learned about the challenges and shortcomings of the current planning process under Chapter 11. These issues include that maps and documents are static and don’t change with the land, and that Western planners don’t have a strong enough connection to the land. The council described this as a call to start working towards a new way of doing things alongside First Nations, and more in keeping with the values of those First Nations. The YLUPC needs to “figure out a way to do things differently,” Salvin said, and “move away from maps and hard lines to more stories and reasoned explanations that don’t recognize the little borders” a purely Western, data-based approach represents and reinforces. Sellars added that the YLUPC has released formal recommendations that there be “a shift away from our Western-based planning processes towards an Indigenous-based and traditional knowledge approach.”



Left: Nicole Percival speaks to attendees about the importance of language in the planning process, and how different words such as “stewardship” mean different things to different groups during a presentation by the Yukon Land Use Planning Council. **Top right:** Yukon Land Use Planning Council director Tim Sellars breaks down the land use planning process for attendees. **Bottom right:** Land planner and Elder Joe Copper Jack speaks about shifting the focus from land planning to land relationships. Images: Mark Kelly Photography.

At the end of the presentation, Erika Gilson, executive director of Pelly Banks First Nation, a First Nation among the Kaska not currently recognized by the Yukon government, pointed out that “land use planning is born out of the UFA under the authority of Yukon Government,” but that as her nation is “unsigned and unceded” the Yukon government does not have jurisdiction over “land use” in their traditional territories, although it “continues to overstep its authority” as it “relates to the land.” She said that her nation is currently involved in a court case to remind the Yukon government that (she is referring to an on-going legal battle around the proposed Kudz ze Kayah mine) it doesn’t have that authority. She wanted to know how the YLUPC would—or if it plans to at all—enter into land planning with unsigned nations like the Kaska.

Salvin replied that he “doesn’t like thinking that way,” and that the council’s recommendation is to get the entirety of the Yukon, regardless of signatory status, under “some kind of plan” in the next ten years. He would be “really interested” to see how an unsigned nation who wants to proceed with land use planning and came forward to say “here’s our plan” would approach land planning, and what that process would look like with them. All First Nations have signed onto the UFA, he noted, even if they don’t all have Final Agreements, but he thought that would allow them to do “something like” Chapter II land planning, even if they didn’t want to work with the Yukon government and give them that authority, “as you see it,” although he would “really appreciate” the YLUPC being “invited” to that process “just so they can learn from what you’re doing and what you’re thinking.”

Gilson thanked Salvin and said her nation would “keep that in mind” but reminded him that they hadn’t “signed away their authority or their right to self-determine and say that all of what we decide should be done on the land, as it relates to usage and land use planning.”



Panel Discussion

Josh Ladue, Jewel Davies, Nika Silverfox-Young and Elder Patrick James
Facilitated by Joti Overduin

Editor's Note:

The following is a transcript of the panel discussion led by CPAWS Yukon Outreach Manager Joti Overduin. The discussion centered around the critical importance—culturally, emotionally, and practically—of relationships, both between people and the land and waters, and between Yukon First Nations. To better reflect both the nature of the conversation and the spirit of its content, it has been presented in this format, as opposed to a paragraph summary.

Any form of summary or transcription from spoken word to text has limitations: people do not write as they speak or speak as they write. This transcript is presented verbatim and in the order in which speakers presented themselves, but has been edited for brevity and clarity: this means the transcript has been “cleaned up” to remove unfinished thoughts or sentences, and information not necessarily relevant to the immediate conversation to make it easier to read and understand, while still maintaining the tone and personal style of the speaker. Nothing has been added to the transcript, except where a name or word was necessary to indicate a relationship between two people—for example, where a gesture indicated to whom the speaker was referring, the name of the person has been inserted to replace the lost non-verbal cue.

Additionally, portions of the conversation not held in English have also been removed, both because the transcriber is unable to speak these other languages and would be transcribing phonetically (and undoubtedly incorrectly), and because the transcriber does not have consent to transcribe the text in other languages. CPAWS Yukon recognizes this to be an unfortunate omission in the context of this conversation, in which the beauty and vitality of First Nations languages are discussed extensively; the editorial decision not to include other languages is due to a lack of resources, not laziness or a lack of care. We encourage you to refer back to the original video in order to hear this presentation in its full and correct breadth of languages.

Top: The panelists. Left to right: Johsh Ladue, Joti Overduin, Nika Silverfox-Young, Jewel Davies and Elder Patrick James. Image: Mark Kelly Photography

Introductions:

Joti Overduin, CPAWS Yukon

Good afternoon, I'm gonna just give the panellists a chance to introduce themselves, and then I'll and then we'll have a little bit of a discussion up here with maybe some questions. We'll start with Patrick, if that works for everyone.

C/TFN Elder Patrick James

I'm an Elder from Carcross/Tagish First Nation, and my English name is Patrick.

Nika Silverfox-Young

Good afternoon, everybody. It's really nice to see you. My name is Nika Silver Fox-Young. I do not have a traditional name, yet. I live in Whitehorse Yukon, and I am a member of the Wolf Clan. My grandparents were the late Sally Blackjack from Carmacs, Yukon

and Peter Silver Fox Sr. from Pelly, Yukon. My family comes from Carmacs and my dad's family comes from Newfoundland. I'm an alumni of the Yukon First Nations Climate Action fellowship, and I'm really excited to be here and talk about my greatest passion, which is revitalization of my Indigenous language, along with salmon.

Jewel Davies

Hey everyone! As well as being involved with the How We Walk Initiative since 2021, I've also been taking part in the Yukon First Nations Climate Action Fellowship with Nika and 11 other Yukon First Nations youth. I'm very excited to share with you all what that's all about.

Josh Ladue

My name is Josh Ladue, and I'm from Tu Łidlini, which is Ross River, Yukon, and I'm part of the Wolf Clan, and I'm also the Land Guardians coordinator for Ross River Dena Council.

“We have a duty and an obligation as First Nations to make sure these lands are okay. We are here to protect it, it belongs to the children that are to come.”

- Josh Ladue



Josh Ladue speaks about the power of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas in safeguarding lands for the generations that are yet to come. Image: Mark Kelly Photography



Discussion:

Overduin

Thank you, everyone, for being here and sitting on this panel together.

As an Elder, Patrick, you've been a part of these gatherings and meetings and discussions for a very long time. Nika and Jewel, you two have been on a long journey together which began with climate action, but has gone past that label in learning and seeing it in a much broader, holistic way, including language and culture. Josh, as a young Ross River person who works on the Land Guardian program and is closely tied to the Indigenous protected and conserved areas that your nation is putting forward. We've heard a lot together today, and as we're reflecting on what others have shared, I wanted to begin by getting your perspectives here.

Could the four of you just give a few reflections to the audience on some of the things that you've heard today or which resonated with you, and how that connects with you as an individual and what you're working on? Who would like to start?

Top: Freeze up on the Tutshi River. Image: Malkolm Boothroyd

What Have You Heard/Learned Today?

Silverfox-Young

I can start.

I wrote it down, but I don't have my paper with me and I'm gonna butcher this, I'm so sorry, but Mark Wedge, what you talked about earlier today, about sacrifice—that really deeply resonated with me. I've been learning my Indigenous language for the past few years, and it's been a big sacrifice. It's been very difficult. It's been very hard. I'm Northern Tutchone, and we are, sadly, really lacking in terms of coming forward in language. My heart feels so happy hearing all the Tlingit spoken here. It's so nice, and I long for the day when Northern Tutchone can catch up to that.

Talking about sacrifice, and especially in the Climate Action Fellowship, we're sacrificing what we're doing right now for the children of tomorrow, and for the people who came behind us, and that's been really really big. I wish I'd brought my paper with me, but Mark, you had that beautiful quote, and it really, really touched me.

Overduin

I have it, I wrote it down too!



Silverfox-Young

Yeah, do you? Can you read it aloud, please?

Overduin

Mark, what I wrote down is that you said “To sacrifice, you have to give until it hurts, and then you have to give more, and then keep giving more until it feels good, and then it’s a sacrifice.”

Silverfox-Young

Wow, that’s incredible. I feel like myself, I have sacrificed a lot of who I used to be to become the woman that I am now, and I’m okay with that. I really appreciate it, and it’s been a big sacrifice—a part of me has died to be reborn, to spawn and to come on and do this stuff. Your words, Mark, really touched me in ways that you’ll never know. And I really appreciate that. I just wanted to just start the conversation with that.

P. James

There’s so many different ways, you know, that Elders pass on information. Elders teach in a very simple way, but in a very meaningful way. And you know, the simplest way, it’s just how we walk the land.

As I’ve heard an Elder from Champagne-Aishihik say—and as our First Nations have said many times, too—they said, “If you want what I have and you want me to teach you these things, these types of information, then learn to walk with me. Don’t walk behind me. Don’t walk in front of me. Walk beside me, and together we’ll make it.”

You know, those are some of the important things. It’s very simple, but they said, “Walk with us together. We can do it. We can make it livable for you and me and for everyone that you know.”

Those are some of the important things that I’ve learned in life from Elders that have passed on this information. Even today, with all the beauty around us, someone has taken good care of us—it’s our Elders who came before us, and they’ve done a magnificent job to save that beauty for all of us, so that we can enjoy it together, and together we can make it livable. Those are some of the important things I know, and these are some of the things I’ve learned today, too.

Ladue

What I’m hearing today is that everything is about protection and preservation of our culture and our ways of life. I think that is so very, incredibly important to me, as a young man. I just became a father last year, so I have a one-year old, and it made

Ladue cont.

me think about a lot of things, like what I want for my child and what I had, and the things that I want him to experience as well. I want the opportunity to pass down my teachings to him, and for him to continue on our teachings. That's why I think we have come across a great tool in IPCAs, which helps us guarantee that safety and that protection over our lands for our children to come to in the years ahead.

I think a lot of beautiful things were born from our IPCA. We have our Tu Łidlini assessment process going now, which is kind of like YESAB, but it's our own process, our own ways. It focuses more on the things that are important to us as a First Nation. My Lands Guardians were born out of that as well, because the question was, 'who's going to watch these IPCAs?' And we came together and decided to have a Lands Guardians team, and me and three other guardians would patrol all of the Ross River area by ourselves. It's a little difficult, but my grandpa told me that we have a duty and obligation as First Nations to make sure that these lands are okay. That's why we are here, to protect it.

"Our values can bring us back into good relationship with the land."

- Jewel Davies

These lands aren't ours, but our children's to come, the ones that haven't seen it yet. I think it's extremely important to protect and preserve our cultures so we can continue to pass it on and make sure that these teachings will stay and live forever.

Davies

One thing that I really enjoyed listening to today was hearing the value of working together from the land use planning council, from our Elders here today and from others, having this as a crucial foundational point for moving forward. It's so important for us to work together in a good way. Referring back to *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*—working together is in the title, and we are meant to work together in a good way, not only for First Nations children, but for all of Yukon's children. This work incorporates relationships that all of us as humans are meant to share, and that's an important point I wanted to touch on.

How can people get involved in a good way?

Overduin

Thank you, all of you. What you just said, Jewel, that this is about all of us, was brought up in the land relationship planning gathering in 2021. There are a lot of people in this room today and online from different walks of life, and we're all here together to talk about land and water, and so, while we have all these people together. Is there something that you would like to share that you feel would be a good thing for people to do to help with this work? What can others do to be part of that in a good way? How can people get involved? How do you want us involved? How can we support you?

P. James

About a year ago, in the springtime, right in this very room, there was a group of people that wanted us to work with them, asking 'How do we work together,

you know?' My answer to them was that before we work together, we have to learn to walk the land together. I said, "Don't walk behind me. Don't walk in front of me. If we walk side by side and share things together, we can make this a better place to live."



Jewel Davies speaks as Joti Overduin and Nika Silverfox-Young listen on. Image: Mark Kelly Photography

Years and years ago, my dad, when I was just a little kid, he told me, “When you’re going somewhere, you know where you’re going. You got to know what you’re doing. Don’t just look in front of you—look back too, because things look different when you look back. It’ll teach you to utilize some of the most important information I’m giving you. You need to utilize not only what’s ahead of you, but you need to backtrack every now and then, so you don’t get lost.”

These are the important things.

Silverfox-Young

One of the biggest things, from my perspective, is that I would challenge all you guys to believe in your youth and uphold your youth in your communities. Never in a million years would I have thought I’d be sitting on a stage talking about stuff that means so deeply to me. I’m here because of the group of people that believed in me. With the crisis of everything going on, we’re losing our youth at an alarming rate. I don’t mean this lightly, but this group has saved my life. It really, honestly, has. I think a lot about them. They are my family. They are my strength. They are my courage. They are the ones who help support me and uplift me in the things that I wanted to do.

I used to go to school for Northern conservation and environmental sciences. My dad’s family comes from Newfoundland, and I grew up hearing him talk about the loss of the fish there, and watching it happen real time in my life here—this is what extinction looks like. That really scared me, so I felt really compelled to come forward and start speaking up for the fish.

I spent the past few summers learning my Indigenous language with my great aunt, Lizzie Hall. She’s my grandma, and the amount of knowledge I’ve gained is absolutely incredible. Indigenous knowledge is knowledge. It’s real. We’ve been the stewards of these lands for millennia, and our knowledge is valid. Look—what I’m holding here is actually fish leather. This used to be a sockeye salmon, a little, tiny one, but it is one of the most strong, durable fish leathers known to man. It is absolutely incredible. There’s so many stories, there’s so much knowledge surrounding fish. I didn’t learn anything at college—they didn’t teach me anything about this. They’re like, “This is how many bones a fish has. This is a lateral line.” But

like, what about the relationship of that? What does that really mean? It doesn’t really mean anything versus, like, learning how to make fish leather with my grandma, being able to learn my language, to feel that blood memory come alive as we scraped these skins together, as we pulled it.

We have so much traditional law around the stories of salmon. I didn’t get that much support when I was going to school. People didn’t believe in me. But now, as I speak about fish, as I talk about my language, the amount of support and love I get is absolutely insane, and that’s what I needed.

If you can see on my hat, it says “Climate action is reconnection.” We believe when you’re disconnected from your lands, your languages, your people, you don’t really care what’s going on. But when you start walking your trails, when you start learning your languages and having these relationships with your community and people, you deeply care about what’s out there, and you really start to learn about that. This is what I want to give back to my youth. I want to uphold them the way I’ve been upheld. I want them to feel the reconnection that I felt.

Davies

Yeah, I guess I’ll just start by speaking a little bit to the climate action fellowship. In 2020, the first Assembly of First Nations Climate Gathering happened in Whitehorse, and it was there that leadership decided that they were going to sign a climate change emergency declaration. It was also decided that the youth will be the ones to create this new plan and to make the decisions because, ultimately, it’ll be our futures that will be affected by the decisions that are made today. Youth from around the Yukon and from different language groups, were tasked with creating a climate action plan for the Yukon that leadership would uphold. From that journey together we decided that our main messaging would be that reconnection is climate action.

So, looking through the medicine wheel and thinking about ourselves, we’re talking about our emotional, mental, spiritual and physical portions of ourselves, reconnection with each other as community, understanding that we need to work together, and



Davies cont.

then reconnection with the lands, and understanding that the lands are not just a resource there for us to use, but that we're actually in an intrinsic, interconnected relationship with the land, as all humans. Our Yukon First Nation cultures have been able to hold on to this connection, despite generations of colonization, and reconnection to our values is what we need to ultimately bring us back into good relationships. It all begins with us as individuals, and that relationship with ourselves then goes on to determine how we interact with each other, and how the decisions and systems built upon these relationships are made, and, ultimately, what kind of effects and outcomes these systems will have on our lands.

What we're seeing today, and we have identified within the climate fellowship, is that we have built the current systems off of ideas and values of disconnection: disconnection with ourselves, the oppression of our emotional and spiritual portions of ourselves, as well as disconnection with each other as community, not seeing ourselves as helping one another out, disconnection from the ideas of sharing and community that First Nations value replaced with the idea that we're individuals and must compete with one another to get where we want to go, disconnection with the land and our understanding of ourselves as a part of her and upholding the reciprocal role that we as humans are meant to share. We believe a foundational portion to our reconnection vision and Climate Action Plan

is understanding different worldviews; this means understanding Indigenous worldviews, but also understanding the Western worldview that we live and swim within today.

One thing I think is important to take away from today is not only learning about different ways of being, but also understanding our own way of being and where that came from. I think that is crucial in moving forward, and also having the privilege to be able to learn about different Indigenous worldviews and ways of being. We first must understand our way of being, where that comes from, where those histories originated, and move forward from there, so we can move forward in a truly good way that upholds both worldviews with the same integrity and honour that they're meant to.

Ladue

One thing I want people to take away from all of this is what I've been told before, which is that without healthy people, we can't have healthy land. I believe that 100 percent, and I think we need to continue to have more opportunities to be out on the land. Like the girls here are saying, we have an issue with disconnection from our people and our culture. We need to go back to those ways and revitalize those ways so our younger generations can continue to bring those up. For me, I left my community for school for quite a while and when I graduated I felt like I had lost a sense of belonging—I felt very disconnected. Everyone makes you think you got to worry about jobs and stuff when you're done school,



but I chose to go back home and relearn my culture. I've taken up drumming and hand games and all sorts of other different things, learning how to hunt and harvest properly. All these things are very important. It helped me find who I am as a Dena man. I wish for that, for all of my Native brothers and sisters, to be able to find that and be able to reconnect with their land and their culture, because, like I said, without healthy people, there cannot be healthy land. We can't sit here and expect it to take care of itself when we can't even take care of ourselves. The Lands Guardianship was a big help for me—every day I get to go out and patrol around on my land and see the changes and see good things happening. It really gives me a sense of belonging, and I feel like I'm doing something right.

What I want everyone to take away from this is that we need healthy people, and we need to strive to make that happen.

What is the Importance of Indigenous Language and Culture in the Development of Land and Water Relationships and Protection, and for Indigenous Youth?

Overduin

I'm really happy to see so many people here listening with their whole hearts, minds, and bodies. What we've all heard from these young people and Elder Patrick, sitting here, is hard to put into words or even to reflect on, because it goes beyond words. The wisdom shared just in these last few minutes touches

on something very deep, very deep and meaningful and holistic. 'Holistic' isn't even the best word—I don't even know, I need a different language that can speak to this better than English. I want to loop back to language, and the fact that I couldn't capture things in my first language—a lot of you have touched on that piece, especially you, Nika.

I'm in a program that right now that's teaching me a bit about Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs). One of the things that I learned so far is that language and culture is at the heart of an IPCA. I wondered if any of you would like to speak a little bit more about the importance of language and culture in the bigger picture for land and water, but also for youth?

Silverfox-Young

English is... it's like a dead language? I don't know how else to describe it. It's so hard to think and speak in English. Before I started learning my language, I would easily get up and, you know, use my words and find the right thing to say, but as I've been learning my language and learning my culture, I have such a hard time putting my thoughts to paper, to really talk about what I'm experiencing, to talk about what this journey has meant.

Our Indigenous languages are polysynthetic, meaning there's more than one meaning of each word. English is so dead, so scientific, so extractive. It has no

Top: Jewel Davies speaks about different worldviews, and the need to understand them. Image: Mark Kelly Photography



“I’m here because of the people that believed in me.”

- Nika Silverfox-Young

Silverfox-Young cont.

life in it. There’s no love, there’s no meaning. When you start learning your Indigenous languages, you develop relationships with so many different things. I would have never imagined that I would develop a relationship with fish skins, but here we are. I believe in myself, I have the support and love of my fellowships believing in me. It makes me so happy to speak my language and to hear Indigenous languages spoken. That’s another big thing—you have to be happy, especially learning your language. You have to be so happy and out there to do it, because our languages were taken from us in really hurtful ways. So the more happy and outgoing I can be, the more language I elicit from my family.

Nika Silverfox-Young (top left) and Elder Patrick James (top right) share their insights and experiences during the panel discussion. Image: Mark Kelly Photography

I really challenge you guys, wherever you’re from, to learn some local Indigenous languages, for those of you who live here in Kwanlin to learn how to say “hello” to learn how to say “goodbye.” There’s so much more context, so much more feeling in these languages. I don’t have the right English words to talk about it.

Ladue

I think our language and our culture is extremely important to us, because it’s our identity. It’s part of our identity and who we are as First Nations people. I’m slowly learning my language, and I think it’s a lot of fun—more fun than English is. English is more straightforward and kind of has no flavour to it, really. I see my Elders laughing all the time when they speak their language, and that just makes me happy,

and actually urges me to make me want to learn my language a lot more. There's a lot of happiness around the language. I always see the Elders smiling, telling each other crazy jokes or crazy stories or just something funny all the time. They always have something to say when we're meeting with YG or any government, and they're always saying something funny sometimes, or something serious, and it's just something else.

English has no way to even come close to describe how descriptive First Nation languages are. Like I said, it's a part of our identity, and it's a very special thing. I think that it's pretty cool that even though there's so many different First Nations out in the world, we all seem to have the same goal, and that's to protect what we have and to make sure that it's going to flourish for the next ones to come.

“Today we're not just giving half of ourselves. We are giving everything. This is how we live. The greatest gift we can share is our knowledge and experience.”

- Patrick James

P. James

The greatest gift we can share here is our knowledge and experience to survive—how we live in this world together in a good way, not only good for me, but in a good way for you and your children and your families, not only now, but in the future. This is what is meant by you giving all you've got until it hurts. I'm sharing with you. Mark is sharing. Some of our Elders are sharing with you, sharing everything we've got. This morning, I mentioned all the beauty you see around you, and you can be thankful to our Elders for that, for what they've taught us, and now we're sharing it with you. Not only the beauty and whatnot, but how we do it, how we've done it—it's by working together.

Those are some of the important things. These are simple little things, but it works. It worked for us. It'll work for anyone.

The information that Elders give us has helped us in many ways. We talk about the caribou and the southern lakes caribou herd—this herd is considered

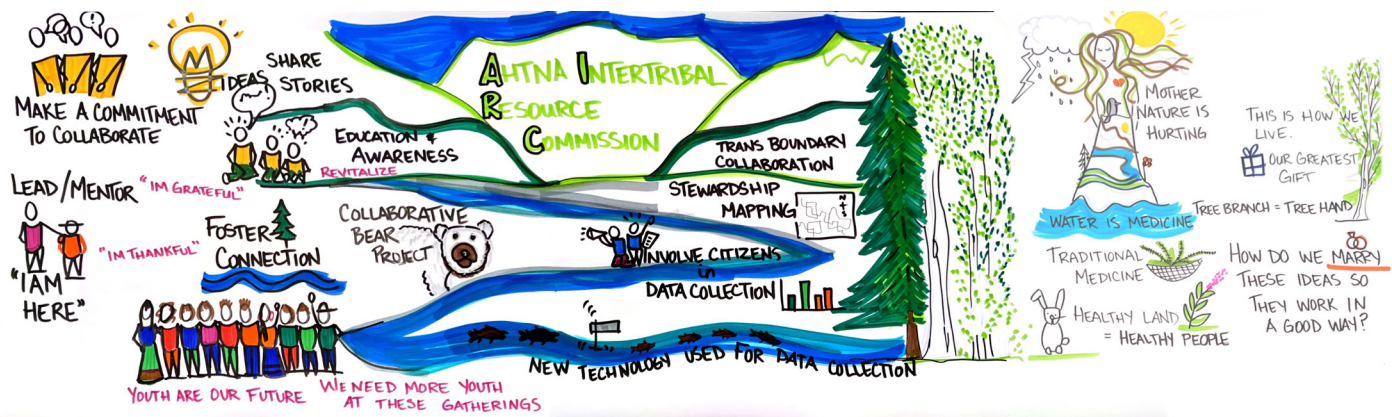
a miracle. This is the only place that ever brought a caribou herd back. Why? We used not only the information First Nations give us, but that non-First Nations give us. We utilized all of that, put it all together and made it work for us. That's sharing, that's how we find this way: we can marry the two information, the traditional and the non traditional.

Davies

I think language revitalization is critical to this work, this work we're all doing towards changing how we see ourselves in relationship with the land and the water. This is because language holds culture. It is how one group of people decides to communicate that worldview with one another, and the worldview is

encapsulated within the language we decide to use with each other. I haven't had the privilege of been able to learn my own Tlingit language as much as I'd like to, but I just wanted to share something with you all that Jocelyn Joe-Strack shared with the fellowship, as she is a co lead of the fellowship—the word in Southern Tutchone for “tree branch” can actually be translated to “tree hand,” and so within the language is also how we relate to the land, and acknowledging and recognizing that we are the same as land. We're in relation with the land, so not exactly saying that we're brother or sister or how we understand family within the English language, but nonetheless, there's an intrinsic relationship there, and implies that we have a reciprocal role to uphold within that relationship.

A Question and Answer with the audience begins here. It is available online and begins at 5:25 in the offered recording.



Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission

With Karen Linnell

Executive director and “life-long subsistence hunter” Karen Linnell explained that Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission (AIRC) is composed of eight Alaska Native tribes working to implement tribal resource stewardship. It was created in part, Linnell said, because the government was “regulating us out of our traditional way of life” to such a degree that you needed a “land surveyor and a lawyer” with you whenever you went out hunting. AIRC was established to fight against this, and using traditional values coupled with Western science to “to defend” those practices, which she described as “innovative.” The group is leading the fight for subsistence rights, which were extinguished at the eleventh hour from the tribal agreement. It’s not only right, but entirely necessary, Linnell argued, for First Nations to retain and maintain their rights and relationship to the land and subsistence culture, as the land and the people are interdependent on each other, and repairing those relationships not only protects and heals the land, but would address social and economic problems amongst First Nations peoples.

Linnell described an interdependency among the tribes with the land, water and air, where the land makes people whole. Subsistence is their way of life, culture, and spirituality, and reconnection to the land helps develop healthy communities. Maintaining healthy, respectful relationships with the land and water is intrinsic to First Nation culture and ways of being, she said, as “the Creator put us on the land to be stewards of the land—that’s what we’re here for,” although it’s important to remember that protecting the land and water can’t “be just on the Indigenous people,” but the responsibility of everyone.

“There’s so much more going on when people hear each other’s stories that will allow us to unite and fight a stronger fight to fix things.”

- Karen Linnell

Several of these projects, Linnell added, came directly out of questions and observations from Elders living in the communities being studied, and some have led to intertribal or intergovernmental information sharing and management strategies. Linnell closed with some comments on the importance of transboundary collaboration, both across borders and within them. We’ve been taught to fight with and blame each other for these kinds of problems, she said, which is often the result of separation and misinformation—for example she had been told Yukon First Nations families were getting so many salmon off the river that they “were feeding their dog teams with them,” which is not true. Family ties across Alaska and the Yukon were separated by the international border, and she stressed the importance of showing those connections. Alaskans and Canadians have to constantly educate each other about what they are trying to do and what their concerns and issues are, so they can support one another. People have common goals, interests, and values on either side of the border, and that’s “so important.” One salmon goes through four different management regimes when migrating from the ocean to the Yukon, but fish and wildlife know no boundaries, and so we need to work in a similar way to protect them, she said.



The Commission has a number of projects underway:

River ice isn't freezing in certain locations anymore, which is restricting subsistence hunting and trapping access. The Commission is working on a snow and ice Traditional Ecological Knowledge program to help learn more about what is going on and what the effects are.

The Commission is running a collaborative bear project that came from Elders asking why bear hunting permits are being sold when no one knows how many bears are on the land. This is a DNA based study, and they've recorded more bears than expected. Through this project, the commission has established the first data sharing agreement with the state of Alaska.

A project looking at moose health through harvest was developed because people were asking if moose were still safe to eat. The project involves collecting samples from the liver and kidneys from harvested moose to check for heavy metals, and ageing the moose by assessing the teeth.

The Commission is studying salmon through two projects. One project uses environmental DNA, studying if it is possible to bring salmon back to a lake they used to inhabit. The other project is a sonar project on sockeye salmon along the Klutina River, monitoring for the effects of a pipeline that crosses the river.

A tribal stewardship mapping project has been developed in partnership with the Indigenous sentinels network. Citizens can use an app to document what they see on the land. This is part of the commission's efforts to incorporate new technology into data collection. They are also working to develop another app to document harvest, as well as a pantry app to document the level of sharing within communities.



Northwest Boreal Partnership

With Leanna Heffner and Coralee Johns

Leanna Heffner, Partnership Director, and Coralee Johns, Canadian Vice Co-Chair of the Northwest Boreal Partnership, concluded the day together with a short presentation on the work their organization does. The partnership brings together representatives from academic institutions, governments, First Nations, and non-governmental organizations from Alaska, Yukon, and northwest British Columbia to collaborate, exchange ideas, and share information and strategies around protecting, caring for, and engaging with the boreal landscape, with the aim of a future in which Northern land, water, and wildlife are protected and sustained for future generations. The Northwest Boreal Partnership helps foster and support events like the Land and Water Relationship Planning Gathering to help people come together around stewardship of lands and waters, particularly in the context of climate change. Heffner described the organization “an incredible journey” of partnership, with relationships at the core of their mission: the goal is to build trust and relationships and heal some of the divides caused by the artificial divisions created by these state, provincial, territorial, and cultural delineations.

“Sometimes bringing youth in can be performative, but we need to ensure youth can come in with equal partnership.”

- Leanna Heffner

Following this brief introduction, there was a short pause for an “interpretative dance” and to facilitate movement, led by Heffner, who guided the room through a series of stretches intended to mimic a Yukon River salmon heading to their spawning grounds. Listeners were instructed to “be a salmon,” swimming, dodging nets, bears, and fish wheels before finally encountering a fish ladder to leap over, taking a partner, and spawning. When the “dance”—which prompted a lot of laughter from the participants—was over, the salmon “died” with a big breath, the salmon-dancers were instructed to sit back down, and the presentation resumed.

The most recent Northwest Boreal Partnership meeting took place concurrent with the Land and Water Relationship Planning Gathering Whitehorse, a three-day event of workshops and discussions over April 18-19,

Top left: Leanna Heffner speaks as Coralee Johns listen in. **Top right:** Leanna Heffner leads the room through a salmon-themed dance break, Image: Mark Kelly Photography

with the last day spent participating in the Gathering itself. The meeting involved lots of learning, sharing and connecting, Heffner explained. During one of the workshops, participants identified topics to discuss; at the end of the second day, each meeting participant committed to three action items to follow up on, created by the group, which were:

1. Identify one organization across the opposite border to connect with and learn more about
2. Identify a way to bring more youth into their work in ways that let “youth shine”
3. Select a third, personal commitment of their choosing

The Partnership meeting featured three youth speakers, Mackenzie Englishoe, Zaida Sanguéz, and Mary Hostetter, as well as a presentation from Joe Copper Jack on his land relationship model. At this time, the youth were asked to speak about their experiences. Heffner stressed that the youth were all “amazing” and that part of the goal of the organization was “co-create” opportunities with and for youth that genuinely gives them a seat at the table, as sometimes the way youth are brought into these types of events and spaces can be merely “performative.” It’s really important to value and create spaces for youth to both guide and participate in learning, community practices, and planning because youth aren’t actually the “leaders of tomorrow,” they’re actually “the leaders right now.”

Englishoe, who is Gwich’in and of the Caribou Clan from Interior Alaska, said she was very grateful to be able to come to the conference and “collaborate in this fight,” and to learn about other First Nations in order to bring that knowledge back to her people in her own community.

Sanguéz, who is Dene from Tthets’éhk’edéli (Jean River) First Nation, said she was really thankful to be able to travel from her “small First Nation village” to be here and learn. Youth need to be more involved in these kinds of events and in decision making, because they’re the next generation of leaders, she said.

Hostetter, who is Yup’ik from southwest Alaska, said she really happy to be able to participate, and that she would like to see more people like her have the opportunity to learn about other First Nations and reconnect with their own. She was “honoured to share this space” with her fellows at the conference.

When everyone had spoken, the floor was opened up for questions and comments from other people who had attended the Northern Boreal Partnership (the affiliations of these persons outside of the Partnership was not identified). The need for policy changes to reflect the “triggering” nature of having to “ask permission” to use land in traditional ways was identified as something to take away from the meeting, as well as the amount “good will” and collaboration the Northern Boreal Partnership represents.

Lastly, Malinda Chase, who is Deg Hit’an Dene from the village of Anvik and works with the Tribal Resilience Liaison with the Alaska Climate Adaptation Science Center, spoke at length about how moved she was to be in Whitehorse; she had a “profound” experience during the conference. She was here once before, when she was 14—she is now 50—on a school trip with 10 other youth from her community. Of those people, she says, only three, herself included, are still alive, all of whom are women; all of the men from that trip, she said, have since passed on. That trip was very important to her, she said, because it was around this time she realized she wanted to do something different with her life and that she wanted to change the course she was on, because it was shortly thereafter that she began to lose people. Being back here now makes her think very hard on the ways “our lands are connected” to each other. She returned to what Colleen James said during the opening ceremony, about how powerful it was to say “I am,” and noted that she was here “on this land” with everyone in the room, which has been “very significant” for her.



Closing Words

The day wrapped up with thank yous, including some from Leanna Heffner, who thanked all the participants, Elders, youth and organizers. Heffner especially thanked Joti Overduin of CPAWS Yukon, who was the “main herder of cats” for the event, and her colleague Coralee Johns, who has become “like a sister” to her, she said, and “supports all her crazy ideas.”

Overduin gave a short wrap up, including an invitation for participants to take any leftover food with them when they went, and an offer for a rideshare back to Whitehorse for those who needed it. She then called on Elder Betsy Jackson to lead in a closing prayer; unfortunately, as the event had run longer than anticipated, Jackson had to leave before the time arrived, and so Elder Mark Wedge graciously filled in for her. Wedge also tried to involve Jewel Davies in the prayer, but she had also had to leave, and so was absent; Wedge said he was always “teasing” her because he wants to get more youth to participate in prayer.

“Prayer shouldn’t be this scary thing. It’s just a conversation between you and the Creator.”

- Mark Wedge

Wedge offered a short song, sung in Tlingit and Tagish, which he explained was a lullaby sung to him as a child about birds going to sleep, and which was intended to bring “peace and calm” at the end of this long day. “Go to sleep now, by little birdies,” he said, when the song was concluded, adding, “Thank you, Creator.”

The event disassembled, with an open invitation for people to join in a community dinner of Arctic char.

Thank you.
Gunalcheésh.
Shāw nithän.

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Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission	Resource and Governance Consultant
Alaska Climate Adaptation Science Center	Rivers to Ridges
Alaska Outdoor Alliance	River Voices Productions
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society	Ross River Dena Council
Canadian Wildlife Service	Stantec
Environment and Climate Change Canada	Ta'an Kwäch'än Council
Carcross/Tagish First Nation	Trondëk Hwëch'in
Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council	University of Alberta
Central Council of the Tlingit and	University of Alaska Fairbanks
Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska	US Army Corps CRREL
Council of Yukon First Nations	US Bureau of Land Management
Copper River Native Association	USDA-NRCS
Dawson Land Use Planning Commission	US Fish and Wildlife Service
Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada	US National Parks Service
Ducks Unlimited Canada	White River First Nation
First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun	Wilfrid Laurier University
Fort Smith Metis Council	Wildlife Conservation Society Canada
Glacier Bay National Park	Yellowstone 2 Yukon
Gwichyaa Shee Gwich'in	Yukon First Nations Culture & Tourism Association
Haines Chamber of Commerce	Yukon Conservation Society
Iglugig Village Council	Yukon Energy Food Security Network
Jean Marie River First Nation	Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board
K'ahsho Got'ine Positive Foundation	Yukoners Concerned
Kwanlin Dün First Nation	Yukon First Nation Climate Action Fellowship
Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre	Yukon First Nations Tourism and Culture
Lakehead University	Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board
Living Lakes Canada	Yukon Government - Community Development
Lorne Mountain Community Association	Yukon Government - Department of Environment
Makeway Foundation	Yukon Government - Economic Development
NASA (permafrost research)	Yukon Government - Energy Mines and Resources
National Audubon Society	Yukon Government - Lands
Northern Council Global Cooperation	Yukon Government - Tourism
Northwest Boreal Partnership	Yukon Government - Water Resources
Pelly Banks	Yukon Land Use Planning Council
Polar Knowledge Canada	Yukon Organics
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