Annual Report

2025

Yukon Conservation Society

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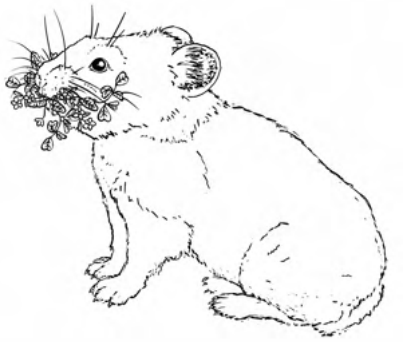
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Year-End Co-Chair's Report

The YCS Board had a challenging year in 2025 as we realized we would need to pivot from a governance model to a working board – and quickly – to keep YCS a functioning society. We started the year realizing that our funding sources had dried up and that funds were still required to cover the 25% of wages not covered by funding agreements. The immediate consequences included difficult and regrettable staff layoffs: Isabelle Cliche, Ian Tuck, Scott Pressnail, Freya O'Sullivan, and Jared Leary were let go. These were all valued employees who we miss immensely.

In addition to these January layoffs, our Office Administrator, Joan Norberg, resigned in February, Mining Analyst, Kayla Brehon, resigned in March, followed by Executive Director, Emmett Lamache, who resigned at the end of April. In the absence of office staff, save for our Outreach Manager, Sarah-Juliet Nadler, we devised a model to carry on in the short term: the board and remaining staff of two jointly worked on an Urgent Items list. Many issues remained unresolved, including dropped communications and financial obligations. These were dealt with on a triage basis; in many cases, accounts needed to be reassigned, passwords reset, and communications re-established.

Despite these challenges, successes emerged:

- Our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policy, developed in draft form in 2024, was finalized and approved in March 2025,
- We welcomed Brian Charles to the board in May –- a valued addition, as Brian has been steady in his support and took up the Treasurer's role,
- Sebastian and Sarah-Juliet, with volunteer help, further developed the YCS StoryMaps, which SJ elaborates on in the Annual Highlights,
- We contracted out bookkeeping to Horizon Bookkeeping, and transitioned bookkeeping from Sage to QuickBooks,
- Rental of space within Parnell House continued, which provided a small but steady income,
- We also made changes to the membership bylaws to facilitate and modernize membership management – a long-standing challenge for YCS.

We received $15,000 in cost-of-living increase funds from the McLean Foundation, for which we are very thankful, as it had not happened at YCS in some time. We also adopted a new pay grid near the end of the year, with staff receiving raises retroactive to November. We are eternally grateful to our staff, Sebastian Jones and Sarah-Juliet Nadler, who persisted and worked through these challenges; they have provided inspiration to us all!



Elizabeth Vickers-Drennan
2025 Co-Chair
YCS Board of Directors



Gerald Haase
2025 Co-Chair
YCS Board of Directors

Acknowledgements

The Yukon Conservation Society respectfully acknowledges that we are advocating for the protection and conservation of the lands, waters, and wild beings within the current Yukon Territory, which have been stewarded by Yukon First Nations, the Inuvialuit and transboundary Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial.

We also recognize that many other human and non-human beings have voices that are not heard. YCS works diligently to amplify those voices and the voices of like-minded folks to speak on behalf of all whose stories are whispered or untold, in an effort to achieve a sustainable future in harmony with nature for us all.

Staff

Sebastian Jones | Fish, Habitat & Wildlife Analyst

Sarah-Juliet Nadler | Outreach & Communications Manager

Board of Directors

Elizabeth Vickers-Drennan | Co-Chair

Gerald Haase | Co-Chair

Sabrina Kinsella | Secretary

Brian Charles | Treasurer

Ed Bourcier | Director

Dave Weir | Director

Ozunimi Iti | Director

Lee Hofmeister | Director

Simon Crelli | Director

Former Team Members

Emmett Lamache | Executive Director

Joan Norberg | Administrative Manager

Scott Pressnail | Energy Analyst

Kayla Brehon | Mining Analyst

Ian Tuck | Clean Energy Intern

Freya O'Sullivan | Sustainability Intern

Isabelle Cliche | Educational Program Coordinator

Jared Leary | Fundraising & Engagement Coordinator

Christine Blanchard-Fraser | Director

Funders, Partners & Collaborators

YCS is grateful to the funders who made our work possible in 2025 and would like to thank the Wilburforce Foundation, the Yukon Government Advisory Fund, the Yukon Law Foundation, Environment And Climate Change Canada, the McLean Foundation, and the 444S Foundation.

We would also like to thank our partners and collaborators Raven ReCentre and Zero Waste

Yukon, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, Salmon in the Schools, Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre, CPAWS Yukon, Eileen Melnychuk at NGO Hub, Brian & Paulette Bird of Moosehide Factory, Yukon Plastics, and Bruce Bennett.

When we work together, we are stronger, and our voices are louder!





Volunteers, Members, Donors & Supporters

YCS would like to thank you, evergreen supporters, for contributing to our conservation efforts in 2025. We are eternally grateful for your dedication and support this past year and for your generosity over the decades. We appreciate the rich histories and relationships that folks have with the organization, as supporters of environmental initiatives, volunteers, members, donors, participants in programming, past trail guides and staff, previous and current board and committee members. These contributions have kept YCS' environmental efforts strong in the Yukon and continue to do so.

Whether you: became or remained a YCS member, donated to the good green work this year,offered your time and support in volunteering with us, helped with the maintenance and rejuvenation of the Parnell House and garden, or to whip together funding proposals, helped paint and cut hides for fur boards, as a YCS board member, YCS could not do what we do without your help and support.

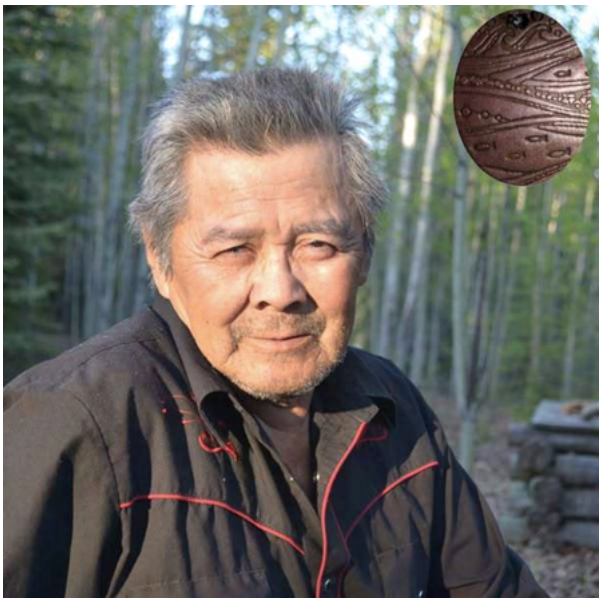
Here's to 2025, and we hope to continue counting on your support, your help, and your commitment to a greener Yukon throughout 2026. Let's keep our feet on the soil, or boots on the ground, and our voices loud for the health, connectivity and longevity of the lands, waters, wildlife and people.

2025 Gerry Couture Award Winner: The late Jimmy Johnny

YCS, and the entire Yukon was saddened to learn of the passing of respected Na-Cho Nyak Dun Elder Jimmy Johnny.

Jimmy had been a friend to YCS since at least the Peel campaign.

He is deeply missed.



A Tribute to Jimmy Johnny

Written by Sylvia Frisch

Wanted to post a tribute to Jimmy Johnny, can you recognize him in this picture without his hat?!
Just got home from his potlatch in Mayo.
Thank you to that community for hosting such a beautiful traditional sendoff.
It was an honour to be there.

I've known Jimmy Johnny for 21 years,
Exactly ½ my life. A smaller fraction for him.
I met him on the Wind River Trail in March 2004.
A time of energy and sunlight, bright snow and snowbuntings.
I brought him stew, and wiped the dishes.
He told me I would make somebody a good wife someday.
Without thinking I twirled my dishrag into a whip and whacked him hard.
My mortification at having hit an elder shocked me.
But he just laughed.
I didn't know Jimmy yet.

Over the next 20 years he became a regular at our camp out on the McQuesten Ridge, and a part of our family. We snowshoed and hunted, picked berries and canoed, played music, drank tea, laughed always, told lots of stories. One story I love for its strength is not one I was a part of but one he told. I pull it out when people need something to lean on. Or when I am lost. Many might know it. I heard him tell it again this fall, before Linda passed and everything changed.
It is a part of his story of healing from addiction. The path to recovery is long and full of obstacles, the bottle is always right there within reach. But Jim knew he wanted to sober up if he was going to survive, and he did it.

The part I can carry forward for him is the part when he comes home from treatment, back into Mayo. All his old patterns were waiting for him, calling him loud. The way he said it, on his first day he woke up wanting a drink so bad. It was winter. He strapped on his snowshoes and walked out of town. He went across the river and up the hill on the far side. He pushed hard, as far as he could go. Then he followed his track back in the dark. He was exhausted, too tired to drink, he fell asleep. The next day he woke up and did the same. He wanted a drink so bad but instead he would strap on his snowshoes. On his own broken trail he could go farther. He says he did that every day, the cravings didn't give him a break so he didn't give himself a break. I like to imagine the network of trails he pounded out there that winter.

A snowshoe line is a work of practical art. Each time you push forward in a new direction it is like a new way of thinking, you have to engage with what's around you and figure out which way to go. It is physically hard to get anywhere. Each step is work. The snow is deep, there are branches whipping you and putting snow inside your coat, there are fallen trees like fences blocking your way, there are steep places, up and down, you stumble, you get stuck, you get really stuck, sometimes you have to backtrack. Returning on your tracks you pack the places you missed, stepping opposite where you did on the way out, and the trail evens. After a freeze it sets up hard like snow concrete and you can move faster; what was a day's work takes a few hours. You can go farther each time.

I don't know how many miles Jim walked that winter but by spring he was sober. His path to recovery was a literal path.

He did the hard human work to get out of his head and back into the world. As it does the land met him half way. It doesn't give free hand-outs. You have to work for it. Jim worked for it.

He had his land and his traditional ways to support him and it saved him. He needed to be so strong. The land itself is strong. And it is still there, the bush is still there.

I know lots of people from other places maybe don't see the value in it, just an empty wilderness outside your front door. They are trying to take it apart for money and that messes it up.

Jimmy lived its true worth. He raised his voice to protect the land and the water. He used those words. Now that he has crossed over we have to fill those big boots that stood strong.

True: people have changed, we don't have all the same muscles and skills and wisdom of the ancestors. And the land itself has changed, been exploited, cut up and poisoned.

But it is still kicking and it shows the same resilience I saw in the face of my friend Jawa. We are not alone, we have the power of this place behind us.

We have that cowboy in the sky to guide us.
In death you are ever present.

I don't have to call or go there or try to get you new wheels.

You're just in my heart all the time.

Hotdog.

Staff Report

Once the dust settled from the departure of most of the YCS staff in April 2025, Sarah-Juliet and Sebastian prioritized net positive revenues for the organization. Over the course of several years, YCS's finances had reached a point where it depended on money from successful funding proposals to pay people to complete projects already underway, and when some of those proposed grants did not come through, the entire inverted pyramid that was the YCS financial model collapsed. Our first and ongoing priority was completing existing projects so we could receive our final payments and applying for additional grants to continue our work.

We paused hiring and operated without an ED or office manager as we restructured and stabilized our finances. Without the ability to hire summer interpretive staff, we were unable to offer guided hikes in Kwanlin/Miles Canyon. Staff expertise and capacity also limited our engagement with Energy and Mining developments in the territory.

In the absence of an Executive Director or Administrative Manager, YCS staff and board worked hard to share the administrative load and redefine team capacity. A substantial overhaul of YCS's operational systems began in an effort to improve the organization's efficiency. While navigating admin and project work, our team also engaged in strategic planning to help guide YCS into the future.

Despite these efforts and initiatives, YCS still had insufficient capacity to complete the work we had committed to. We faced the need to simultaneously reduce our commitments and increase our capacity. So, we dialled back our energy, climate, and mining work while engaging volunteers and contractors to perform some of the administrative and technical tasks.

In an effort to address capacity constraints, it became clear that community collaboration on projects would be crucial to sustaining the organization's work. We reconnected with longtime collaborators, sought contractors, asked for feedback from the committees, and announced volunteer opportunities.

Furthermore, we are modernizing our membership and donation systems to reduce the burden on staff and ensure donors receive their tax receipts on time; our website is also being overhauled to better serve as a searchable repository of YCS's work and ongoing efforts.

Overall, 2025 was a difficult year for staff at YCS. While many challenges are still pending resolution, the board has been a reliable source of support for the organization's ongoing commitments. The staff and board are actively working together to complete YCS's ongoing projects while realigning the society's functions to both meet the needs of Yukon's land and secure the financial stability necessary for the continued viability of conservation in this modern landscape.

We believe that resilient, informed and activated communities matter now more than ever. Thank you for being part of the Yukon Conservation Society community.

Good Green Work

YCS's project work prioritized protecting the lands, waters, and wildlife throughout the Yukon and transboundary regions. Our small but mighty staff and board maintained our assessment and advisory role, developed educational resources, and participated in important conversations with community leaders, politicians, organizations and the media – all with caribou, salmon, other species at risk, and ecosystem wellbeing at the core.

YESAB Comments

Due to YCS's scope and capacity narrowing drastically in 2025, and because we were uncertain whether commenting on YESAB was financially viable, we paused comments on projects under review through YESAB and the Yukon Water Board. However, as the year progressed, we picked up the reins again. We also secured our seat at the New Minerals Legislation ENGO table. We kept an eye on developments around the Dawson Regional Land Use Plan, and prepared to read and use the Final Recommended Plan in 2026. We kept abreast of Yukon Energy's efforts to relicence its old hydro dams amidst energy capacity issues.

Because there are, and always have been, far too many proposals to comment on, we had to triage and prioritize which projects to dig into. Even then, we weren't always able to submit a comment. Broadly speaking, we selected projects that fell within regions with Regional Land Use Plans, like North Yukon, Peel Watershed, and Dawson. We also selected projects likely to impact caribou and wetlands, or that spark public concern.

Notable 2025 comments included:

- Sixty Mile Quartz Exploration This project is concerning because of how YESAB incorporated concerns raised by commenters, given the existence of a Recommended Dawson Regional Land Use Plan, and then how YG, as the Decision Body, watered down those recommendations, particularly regarding access, caribou and wetlands.
- Barney Ridge Quartz Exploration YESAB recommended against this project proceeding based on its impacts on the Clear Creek Caribou Herd. YG has not yet issued a decision document. We expect YG will advise the company to rewrite its proposal so as to get through YESAB.
- Clear Creek Quartz Exploration This project was from the same proponent as the nearby Barney Ridge proposal. However, it was withdrawn when YESAB requested additional information after recommending against the Barney Ridge project.
- Quartz Exploration Rau Project Again, YG's decision document significantly reduced the wetlands mitigations advanced by YESAB, to the point where the proponent can simply say that no wetlands exist in the project area and therefore need not avoid them.

Species At Risk

After several years of work, YCS focused on wrapping up the Yukon South Beringia Priority Place Initiative project activities in 2025, as the primary project funding from Environment and Climate Change Canada, and the YSB PPI federal project itself, was set to end in Spring of 2026.





The PPI project enabled us to attend Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in culture camps, including our return to First Fish Camp in Summer and Hide Tanning camps in Spring and Fall. During these gatherings, we made new connections and reconnected with old friends. We were welcomed by Sharon Vittrekwa and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage to participate and document the process of tanning moose hides, with seasoned hide tanners and teachers Paulette and Brian Bird of The Moosehide Factory and sisters Montana & Delaney Prysnuk of Copper Caribou. In collaboration with The Moosehide Factory, a hide tanning guide is in the works.

We also led wildlife walks and taught folks how to become citizen scientists through using the iNaturalist App we identified rooted, four-legged, and winged beings at Moosehide and Nänkäk Chèholąy, and we researched and collected feedback for an iNaturalist pocket guide. The guide is set to be published in 2026, with help from seasoned botanist and iNaturalist connoisseur Bruce Bennett! Speaking of getting acquainted with wildlife, we are in the process of building several interactive educational fur boards. We have been collecting hide donations and compiling animal names in Indigenous languages. Once these are complete, they will be gifted to communities throughout the Yukon.

Beyond the YCS PPI, we built on the publication of our 2024 report regarding the Clear Creek and Klaza herds by giving a community presentation in Dawson City, and in successfully applying to the Wilburforce Foundation for funding more caribou work in 2026. In addition, we are developing presentations and publications around cumulative effects, caribou, and conservation.

Along with Caribou, Salmon remain at the heart of our conservation efforts. In addition to YESAB comments and interviews advocating for Salmon, we joined Salmon in the Schools to co-lead programming on the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun territory at J.V. Clark School in Mayo.

StoryMaps

We worked on a series of educational Story Maps; these are living documents and are regularly updated as new information emerges.

YESAB Explained

Learn how to navigate Yukon's unique environmental assessment process, review proposed projects, and write comments that highlight concerns about how any project might impact the things that matter most to you!

Yukon Water Board Explained

Preparatory work was done to build out a Yukon Water Board explainer in the same style as our YESAB explained work. While this project is ongoing, we hope that it will enable Yukoners to stay informed on projects impacting Yukon waters while putting forward important comments on how proposals affecting water in turn impact local peoples, fauna, and flora.

Caribou in the Yukon

Check out this story map as a one stop shop for information about Yukon's caribou herds. We are currently updating and revising it to incorporate the latest knowledge.

YCS in the Press

Both print and broadcast media seek our views on topics such as electricity generation, the proposed grid connection to BC, critical minerals, mining royalties, and even what the change in government might mean for conservation in the Yukon.

YCS was able to maintain a media presence and we provided our perspective to several outlets on a variety of topics:

- January 10 | CBC | Proposal to relicense Whitehorse dam clears review hurdle, conservationist calls foul
- January 29 | CBC | '75 years too late': Yukon Energy criticized over Whitehorse dam relicensing proposal
- July 19 | CBC | Thousands of fish could be killed at Whitehorse dam, new study suggests
- April 17 | CBC | Conservationists, Yukon First Nation say decision on Whitehorse dam could help salmon
- August 11 | CBC | Placer mine reclamation issues, Salmon Gold (promotes reclamation)
- August 14 | CBC | Ross River Indigenous Conservation and Protected Area
- September 19 | CBC | What on Earth re: Yukon's PV 'pause'
- September 19 | CBC re: Salmon fry mortality at Whitehorse Dam
- September 20 | Up Here Business | re: Clinton Creek
- September 21 | Up Here Business | re Mt Nansen
- Oct 14 | CBC | How one company is making money, and jewelry, from abandoned mines
- Oct 6 | CBC | Energy as an environmental issue
- Oct 27 CBC | Radio Interview re: Casino mine
- Nov 15 | CBC | Yukon/BC grid connection
- Nov 27 | Yukon U | Bison and Elk
- Dec 15 | CBC | Future of mining in the Yukon

Events

No Wasted Words Writing Contest

Zero Waste Yukon and Yukon Conservation Society partnered to host our 2nd No Wasted Words Writing Contest. Folks of all ages were invited to submit a short work of fiction, non-fiction, or poetry with a zero waste or conservation theme for a chance to share their work at the award night event on Earth Day (April 22) and win a prize! We had a great turn out for the reading and it was special to celebrate Earth Day expressing ourselves - connecting with nature and each other.

Thank you to all our sponsors, prize donors, Baked for hosting, CJUC Radio for recording, and to all of you who submitted your words.

We look forward to next year's contest where we will be welcoming French submissions and improving our outreach to schools. We are looking forward to reading your words!

for the earth

look at the trees
look at the flowers
you don't always think
of how much it matters.
don't just leave your garbage
throw it in the bin.
don't just sit inside and pout
go outside and sing.
when you go to eat food
make sure it isn't packaged
just go outside
have some fruit and you'll feel better
when you think you're hungry
you might want a lollipop
but what your body wants
is a little bit of water.

Written by Kirrily Giesbrecht | Age 10 | Ibex Valley

Annual General Meeting

The AGM was held on August 28, 2025, where members, staff and board came together to reflect on 2024 and share updates from 2025. Members elected Ozunimi Iti to join the Board of Directors.

All-Party Forum on the Environment

On October 6th at the Gold Rush Inn Town Hall, CPAWS Yukon and YCS hosted a discussion panel for Yukon NDP, Yukon Party, and Yukon Liberal Party candidates. Attendees had the opportunity to find out about each party's vision for the Yukon's environment and ask candidates questions ahead of the territorial election.

To stay connected with YCS news and events, subscribe to our newsletter or give us a follow!

Facebook: www.facebook.com/yukonconservationsociety
Instagram: www.instagram.com/yukonconservation
Eventbrite: www.eventbrite.ca/o/yukon-conservation-society

Looking Forward

Strategic visioning & planning

In 2026, YCS will begin a strategic alignment process to clarify where the organization can have the greatest impact with the resources and capacity available to us. As a long-standing organization, YCS has accumulated a broad range of interests and responsibilities, while the Yukon itself has changed considerably. This process will help us distinguish between the issues that matter most to us, and the areas where YCS is best positioned to lead, contribute, or collaborate. It will also help us better align our ambitions, organizational capacity, and funding, particularly as we work toward stable financial footing that allows YCS to sustain its work and, over time, grow its impact.

A key outcome will be a practical strategic framework to guide decisions about future projects, partnerships, and funding opportunities. The process will consider the changing environmental, social, and governance context of the Yukon, while ensuring that our priorities reflect both our mission and the realities of our current capacity. By developing a clearer strategic compass, we aim to make more deliberate choices about where to focus our limited resources and build a stronger, more sustainable organization for the years ahead.

Fundraising

The YCS team would like to thank you, our supporters, for contributing to our conservation efforts. We remain committed to our work protecting the Yukon's unique ecosystems for future generations. Our conservation efforts, our work towards educating & protecting, and our commitment to leaving a legacy that our kids can be proud of are all done with this singular goal in mind. But we need your help, and it's never been easier to make a significant difference!

Make a donation, make an impact on our work. Your contributions go towards another year of our work protecting the Yukon's wild places and providing a voice for the voiceless. Struggling to find a gift for the person who has everything? Consider donating to YCS on their behalf and give them a sustainable & protected Yukon that will be around for future generations! Interested in continuing to support YCS after you're gone? Naming the Yukon Conservation Society as a beneficiary will leave a lasting legacy and impact on the Yukon's conservation efforts. We also consider brand partnerships as a way to support our work.

Or, take the next step and become a YCS member. Members are able to join YCS committees, participate and vote at Annual General Meetings, receive exclusive communications, and receive one free seat in a YCS workshop! This year, we're making some moves to re-vamp our membership system and we're super excited to roll out some new features that make being a YCS member better than ever!

To explore ways to support our work: www.yukonconservation.ca/support