



BUILDING COMMUNITY

HERITAGE, LANDS & RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

HLRD REPORT

AUGUST 2009

ICE PATCHES REVEAL OUR HISTORY

During the summer of 2008, KDFN and the Ta'än Kwach'än Council did some research on ice patches. We also organized elders tours of ice patches within our traditional territories.

Why are ice patches important?

Ice patches are layers of snow that have built up each year. Some of the ice patches are more than 8000 years old. Unlike glaciers, ice patches do not move. Also, ice patches are created by layers and layers of snow so things that were left on the surface one year get buried gently instead of crushed.

For thousands of years, ice patches in KDFN's Traditional Territory were used by ancient caribou herds to escape the flies, bugs and heat of the Yukon summers. They were also places our people hunted.

As temperatures warm now, the ice patches are melting. And as they melt, they are revealing numerous wooden, stone, and bone hunting weapons and tools that were once left behind by our people. Some of these items show that atlatls and spears were used in these areas. Rock caribou blinds used by hunters have also been discovered at some sites.

Friday Creek tour

While visiting the Friday Creek Ice Patch (near Alligator Lake), Kwanlin Dun Elders had looked for artifacts and shared knowledge of ancient caribou herds and migrations. They also spoke about hunting with a bow and arrow or with an atlatl (also known as 'throwing stick'). Although many of the elders were too young to remember these methods of hunting or the specific tools, the traditional knowledge gathered has been remarkable and invaluable.

HLRD encourages anyone that may have information regarding ancient hunting techniques or ancient caribou migration routes specific to the ice patches to please contact Rae at 633-7866.



Jason Shorty

Elders Martha Van Heel and Bill Webber talk about ancient hunting tools and techniques during a tour last year to Friday Creek Ice Patch, near Alligator Lake.



Jason Shorty



Jason Shorty



Jason Shorty

Last year, the Yukon government's Heritage Branch showed KDFN and TKC members many of the artifacts that have been recovered from Yukon ice patches. The large number of recovered artifacts is astonishing. One of the most notable was the discovery and preservation of a hide moccasin. All artifacts found at the ice patches are currently catalogued and cared for by the Heritage Branch.

MOOSE MANAGEMENT

In the past, the Southern Lakes area had some of the highest numbers of moose in the Yukon. However, traditional and local knowledge suggests that moose numbers began to drop between the early 1970s and 1980s. Moose harvest has also declined and government surveys of moose show that current numbers are lower than they were in the 1980s.



John Melkie

KDFN sits on the Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee

(SLWCC). In 2008, the committee did a regional assessment of caribou. They are currently waiting for comments on the recommendations from all parties. This spring, SLWCC started working on a regional assessment of moose. This assessment will help with moose management decisions in the future.

The SLWCC hosted meetings in Carcross and Whitehorse in late May. At these meetings, the committee shared information about moose and listened to community concerns. The committee will be reviewing these concerns and developing recommendations on moose management in the Southern Lakes area.

For more information, go to www.yfwcm.ca/slwcc or call KDFN's representative on SLWCC, Dave Sembsomoen at 633-7814.

WATCH YOUR STEP!



Jennifer Line

This plant is important to the environment. So please be careful where you step (or drive)!

This little plant, called Baikal Sedge, is a rare find. In Canada, it has only been found in six places, all of them in the Yukon. Two of these places are along the Takhini River in KDFN's traditional territory. This plant has been classified as "threatened" under Canada's *Species at Risk Act*.

KDFN and other First Nations have applied for funding to carry out traditional knowledge research about the sedge, to determine if it was used by people and if it is found elsewhere. KDFN also helped to develop a recovery strategy for Baikal Sedge with a team made up of a number of First Nations, Parks Canada, Environment Canada and the Government of Yukon.

Baikal Sedge likes living in open sand dunes. Its root network plays an important role in stabilizing the dunes, which helps other plants to start to grow. As the sedge successfully stabilizes the dunes, other plants, shrubs and trees start to move in and end up crowding the sedge out.

The main threats to Baikal Sedge are impacts from recreation like ATV use or even hiking, development, disease and natural changes. The rarity of this plant shows how special sand dunes are in the Yukon.

KEEP OUR LANDS CLEAN

Last summer, KDFN cleaned up a number of parcels of land to remove old building and old vehicles. In one case we had to do this on our lands to comply with City bylaws. In another, the land didn't belong to KDFN but our citizens had put the old cars there.

These lands now need to be kept clean and in a natural state. KDFN doesn't have the money to keep cleaning up the same areas so we will be monitoring our lands and requiring people who put used cars and other things on these lands to remove it at their own cost. For the area behind lot 226 (at Crow and Swan), the Yukon government owns this land. It will tow any old vehicles left there and charge the owner towing fees.

Help keep our lands clean!



Dave Semsmoen

A PLACE OF ABUNDANCE

Fish Lake or ƛl Zil Män (pronounced Clue Zell Man) translates to Fish Soup Lake. Extensive trail systems indicate that Fish Lake was a cross roads in which people could travel in either direction to various communities including those in Alaska.

The northern tip of Fish Lake is a known gathering place for potlatches and ceremonies. Additionally, there seems to have been a cremation site located in the area.

Prior to the construction of the hydro-electric dam, elders indicate that Fish Lake was used seasonally. In the summer, there was extensive fishing, hunting and gathering of medicines and food. In the fall, the

harvest would be processed, cached and transported by dog pack. By the first snow-fall, most families would return to their respective communities.

As the price for fur increased, more aboriginal and non-aboriginal people started trap lines. Prospectors also searched for copper, gold and silver.

Remembering their childhoods, some elders recounted a time when the fish were so plentiful that people could jig, gaff, use a dip net – bucket or gunny sack as well as set net catching 80-100 fish in one day.

In addition to fishing, there was a large variety of wild game such as moose, caribou, sheep, bear, gopher, grouse, ducks and ptarmigan. Berries and medicines are still found in abundance in the area and it is not uncommon to see families still headed to there to gather berries and harvest traditional medicines that grow all around Fish Lake.



John Meikle

This Yellow-rumped Warbler was banded at a bird banding station that was set up at McIntyre Creek this spring.

FISH LAKE

Last year, Yukon Electrical Company Ltd. (YECL) applied to the Yukon Water Board for permission to continue operating its dam at Fish Lake for another 25 years. The dam was built in the late 1940s.

At the hearing, KDFN raised the concern that some Fish Lake settlement lands are being flooded because of high water caused by the dam.

The Water Board said that YECL must carry out a number of studies before it could get another 25 year license. YECL needs to determine how the hydro system is affecting the fish and wildlife in the area. The company also has to figure out how to manage the Fish Lake dam in a way that will not negatively affect KDFN settlement lands.

YECL sponsored a workshop with KDFN elders in March to help the company develop a list of studies it needs to do. The traditional knowledge and information gathered from this workshop is being stored by the HLRD for future use. Sensitive information will not be shared with people outside of KDFN.

MCINTYRE CREEK

McIntyre Creek is a rich environment cutting through the City of Whitehorse and KDFN lands. Its headwaters start above McLean Lake. Water from Fish Lake and Porter Creek also started flowing into McIntyre Creek after they were diverted into the creek to generate hydro-electricity.

Birds use McIntyre Creek wetlands and wildlife travel the creek, from the high country down to the Yukon River. Chinook salmon and other fish can also be found in the creek.

People also use the area extensively. There have been many road developments in the area. There is also a fish hatchery, housing developments and trails. KDFN has four Community Land parcels in this watershed, with land use designations including residential, commercial and light industrial.

As it is part of the city, the creek is always facing new pressures. New gravel pits and housing developments are occurring in the watershed.

A group called Friends of McIntyre Creek is calling for a park to be created in the area. While KDFN supports more environmental protection in the area, we also want to protect our community and economic interests in the area.

As the creek crosses city boundaries, the Yukon government and the City of Whitehorse both have a say in how it is managed. HLRD staff have been meeting with staff of these governments to promote a joint planning process that will focus on conservation while protecting KDFN's rights and interests. Discussions are still in the early stages. Once we get a planning process, KDFN citizens will have a chance to have input into the process.



THE HLRD TEAM



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HLRD's work falls into two main categories:

1. implementing the land and natural resource sections of our land claim agreements;
2. taking care of KDFN lands and heritage for the future.

WELCOME RAE!



John Meikle

After doing some contract work for us since last summer, Rae Mombourquette officially joined our department last February as our Data and Archival Technician. Rae is a KDFN member of Tlingit and Acadian ancestry. She has a degree in Canadian Studies and wants to do further studies in the field of Indigenous Governance. In the meantime, this new job allows Rae to actively work on her interest in protecting and preserving aboriginal heritage and traditional knowledge. HLRD is happy to have her on our team!

PLANNING FOR KUSAWA PARK

KDFN participates on the steering committee that is developing a management plan for the new Kusawa Park. KDFN negotiated the creation of this park in its land claim agreements. The committee includes KDFN, Champagne & Aishihik First Nations, Carcross/Tagish First Nation and the Government of Yukon.

Last summer, the committee hosted a three-day gathering to develop a First Nation vision for the park (see HLRD Report, October 2008).

In March, the committee asked for public input about what they value about the Kusawa area. In May, the committee started a second round of public consultation, inviting the general public to comment on the

vision and six guiding principles for Kusawa.

For information or to comment on the draft vision and principles, talk to Rae Momberquette at HLRD (633-7866) or visit www.kusawapark.ca.

Draft Vision

A Dall sheep dozes on a steep mountainside while on the lake below a kayaker pushes off the shore, seeking the solitude and the splendor of the lake's southern waters. Around a campfire, a woman shares her grandmother's stories about the caribou that once covered these mountains; their tools found on the mountaintop ice patches so well preserved, they look as though they might have been dropped yesterday.

Kusawa immerses visitors in a sense of escape and opportunity – close to Whitehorse but worlds away. Steep mountains and narrow valleys carved by glaciers; the long, twisting lake at its heart. This valley connects the Yukon interior to the Pacific coast and the past to present. Rich in history, the park honours the heritage and cultures of the Carcross Tagish, Champagne and Aishihik, and Kwanlin Dun peoples.

Kusawa Park continues a tradition of co-operation and respect – for the land, the plants and animals, and for each other. As Nùłátà once welcomed his neighbors to gather at Nekh̄, today 3 First Nations and Yukon Government share responsibility for managing this special place. Many hearts and hands working together – tending a campfire to which all are welcomed.

Draft Guiding Principles:

Kusawa Park will be managed in adherence with the following guiding principles. These principles will guide management and decision-making in achieving the objectives of the plan.

- 1. Inclusive Engagement and Management:** The management of Kusawa Park, as led by the Parties, is inclusive, transparent and uses innovative strategies. There are clear and meaningful opportunities for people to learn about and contribute to the management processes.
- 2. Ecological Integrity:** The management of Kusawa Park ensures ecological integrity. The wellbeing of ecosystems, biodiversity, fish and wildlife populations is considered in all management decisions.
- 3. First Nation Homeland:** First Nation people pursue traditional activities, honour sites and remnants from the past, and experience First Nation values, culture and language.
- 4. User Experiences:** Kusawa Park respects and sustains opportunities for Park users to experience the natural beauty and cultural resources of the area. While the appreciation and enjoyment of the park is encouraged, the principles of Ecological Integrity and First Nation Homeland take precedence and are not compromised.
- 5. Two ways of knowing:** Kusawa Park management embraces two ways of knowing. It integrates modern and traditional approaches to research, knowledge, learning and communicating about the Park environment, history and culture.
- 6. Economic Benefits and Opportunities:** Kusawa Park provides economic benefits and opportunities. Park management supports First Nations people to participate in these benefits and opportunities.

HLRD and the Yukon government are beginning a Local Area Plan for Marsh Lake. The planning area stretches from the Lewes River bridge south to Judas Creek.

One of the most important wetlands in the Yukon for migrating shore birds is where Judas Creek enters Marsh Lake. Many common birds use this area. It is also a hotspot for rare sightings of birds like the male Red Knots in the photo.

The Local Area Plan will make recommendations on land use in and around this important wetland. More information on the planning process will be in the next HLRD Report.



John Meikle

ORGANIZING OUR INFORMATION

HLRD is frequently asked by other governments to comment on things like forest management plans, agricultural or water license applications, city subdivision plans, or road construction projects. They want to input about how the project or plan might impact KDFN lands and culture or fish and wildlife.

KDFN also needs to know how its own projects and activities might effect our lands, culture or natural heritage. However, sometimes we don't have enough information about the location of important cultural resources or fish and wildlife habitat. We might not have good records about how the land is currently used or was used in the past. Or we have the information but it is not organized in a way that makes it easy to access or to see exactly where on the land something is located.

Last year, our department got funding from the Northern Strategy Trust to help us gather and organize information about our cultural resources, lands and fish and wildlife. We are using this funding

to develop inventories of these important resources and to organize this information in our GIS system. This is a computerized data management system that will make it easier for us to figure out if a project or plan will have an impact on KDFN interests.

First, we are building an effective system to organize the data. Then we will enter the information we already have or that other governments have about our lands. We will also be gathering some new types of information, which we will also put in the GIS system. This new system will also include information on lands next to KDFN lands.

We will be able to make many different types of maps using GIS. For example, we will be able to create maps that have KDFN settlement land, our cultural sites, and caribou and moose habitat all on the same map. Or we can make maps with just one of these things on it. Having information that is easy to access will help HLRD and other departments effectively manage KDFN lands and heritage.