

Managing Yukon Fish and Wildlife: **How Are We Doing?**



Background Discussion Paper
Yukon Fish and Wildlife
Management Board

Yukon Fish and Wildlife: A 20:20 Vision

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Yukon Fish and Wildlife: 20:20 Vision

YUKON FISH AND WILDLIFE
MANAGEMENT BOARD



WHAT'S YOUR VISION FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE IN THE YUKON, IN THE YEAR 2020?

To provide long range strategic advice and recommendations that really enable the Yukon Government, First Nations and Canada to manage Yukon fish and wildlife resources for the benefit of Yukon fish and wildlife and their habitat, and "in the public interest", the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board (YFWMB), together with the RRCs and the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee, want **to know what Yukon residents think about the state of these resources and what their vision is for the future.**

From November 2008 to January 2009, we will engage Yukoners from all cultures and walks of life, young and old, male and female, to hear their opinions and views.

We will meet with any association, agency, or such group to provide information and hear their views. We will make a series of presentations in Yukon schools to hear the views of our youth, and the Yukon public is asked for their input through our webpage (www.yfwmb.ca), via telephone, mail, email or at a special three-day event:

YUKON FISH AND WILDLIFE: A 20:20 VISION SYMPOSIUM, YUKON INN, NOVEMBER 26-28.

We will accept input in any form from any individual Yukoner or organized group of Yukoners.

Please contact us or visit our website for our full Discussion Document informing Yukoners of the current state of our fish and wildlife resources and how they are being managed as well as a list of questions designed to prompt thought on:

- **Where are we with fish and wildlife management in the Yukon?**
- **Where are we heading?**
- **Where do we want to go?**
- **How do we get there?**
- **What is your vision for the year 2020?**

We propose nothing be sacred during our presentations, discussions, or your feedback, and that all aspects of the future of our fish and wildlife will be on the table without prejudice or bias. Discussions may include, but not be limited to, fish and wildlife use such as:

- **Recreational hunting and fishing**
- **Wildlife viewing**
- **Subsistence hunting and fishing**

- **Small game hunting**
- **Upland and migratory bird hunting**
- **Commercial use of fish and wildlife: game farming, salmon fishing, trapping and big game outfitting**
- **Non resident hunting and fishing**
- **Local preference**
- **Captive wildlife**
- **Transplanted species**
- **Rare and endangered species**
- **Wildlife disease**
- **Habitat issues such as access, development, and protected areas.**

At the conclusion of the three month feedback period, we propose to assemble and review all of the input and based upon your comments, to prepare a Comprehensive Yukon Fish & Wildlife Strategic Plan complete with a vision for the year 2020, that will hopefully guide the managing governments based upon what Yukoners have told us.

This document will be public and hopefully available in the spring of 2009.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM THE YUKON PUBLIC!

Tell us what you want for Yukon fish and wildlife, in 2020. Provide your views by the end of January 31, 2009 through:

Webpage: www.yfwmb.ca

Phone: 867.667.5835

Email: execdirector@yfwmb.ca

Mail: Box 31104, Whitehorse Yukon, Y1A 5P7

Symposium:

November 26-28

Yukon Inn, Whitehorse



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Disclaimer

The Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board (YFWMB) is the primary instrument of Fish and Wildlife management in the Yukon. It deals with conservation and management of fish, wildlife, habitat and wildlife users on a territorial-wide basis. The Board wishes to provide long-range strategic advice and recommendations to the responsible governments (Yukon Government, First Nations and Canada) on the management of Yukon's fish and wildlife resources. We want to learn what Yukon residents think about the current state of these resources and what their vision is for the future.

Over a three-month period, from November 2008 to January 2009, we will engage with Yukoners from all cultures and all walks of life, young and old, male and female to hear their opinions and views. We have commissioned this "Discussion Document" to raise and broaden awareness of prominent topics and issues in fish and wildlife management.

This is not a scientific or research paper; it contains no footnotes or citations; its information came from public sources. Neither is this a comprehensive critique of wildlife management; that would be a book. It does not propose solutions or assign blame for shortcomings – reasonable people can form different opinions about the topics discussed. The sole aim is to stimulate thinking and discussion among Yukoners about what they hope for and might expect concerning wildlife.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the writer, and are not necessarily those of the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board.

Part One . Introduction

HAVE YOU EVER driven for hours and had tedium evaporate as a moose or bear appears beside the highway? Have you drifted down one of the Yukon's rivers and been electrified as a beaver slaps its tail right by your boat? Or awakened at night to the music of Canada geese winging overhead? Been haunted by the manic laughter of a loon? Moved by the howl of a wolf pack? Entertained by a crowd of crossbills and grosbeaks at a feeder?

Chances are good that, as a Yukoner, you've enjoyed moment like these. If you hunt or fish, you've likely thrilled at that magic moment when a moose or a sheep comes into clear view, or when a fish grabs the lure and runs with the line. Many of us value Yukon fish and game meat for its flavor, its nutrition, and for the connection it creates for us with the land. Most of us value Yukon wildlife because it makes the landscape fully alive.

Without wildlife, the Yukon would be beautiful, but as lifeless as a photograph or painting. Without wildlife, the Yukon would lack a key ingredient that makes life here special and worthwhile; the quality of life for many Yukoners would be sharply reduced.

We currently take natural abundance for granted and expect things to stay that way. We have biologists and conservation officers and regulations as they should be, right?

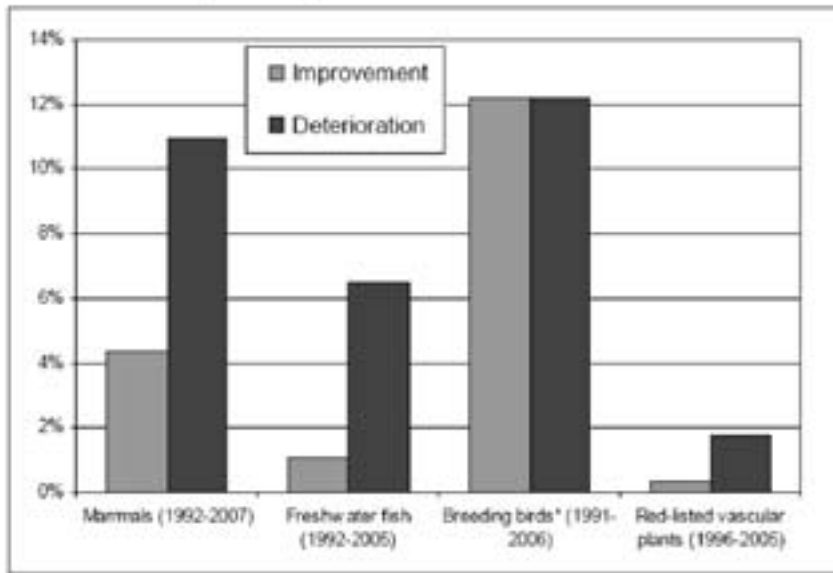
But how are we really doing? Would the old timers – the grandparents of some of us – agree that our wildlife is in good shape? If one looks at the current status of Yukon wildlife and fishing and hunting, there are several trends that suggest the Yukon's wildlife heritage is under stress.

- 1** Increased human population demanding access to fish and wildlife for consumptive (fishing, hunting, trapping) and non-consumptive (photography, wildlife viewing) uses. This increased demand comes from both a larger resident population and from visiting tourists attracted by the government and by business.
- 2** Increased access. Each year there are more quads and more snowmachines with greater range, power and reliability, and more trails for them to go on.
- 3** More efficient technology for taking fish and game. ATVs, snowmachines, jetboats, GPS, Rangefinder scopes, ultramag rifles, fishfinders etc, improve the odds for hunters and anglers.
- 4** Alienation of habitat caused by resource extraction (forestry, oil and gas, mining) and settlement (homesites, cottages, agriculture).
- 5** Potential conflict between the wildlife requirements of First Nations and non-First Nations cultures, and between consumptive and non-consumptive resource users.

Scopes, cartridges, rifles, fishing gear, boats and off-road vehicles are better than ever, and there are more recreationists and tourists in the backcountry all hoping to see wildlife or catch fish. Trails have proliferated, thanks to expanding resource exploration and extraction and thanks to vigorous off-road vehicle users. The backcountry has never been more accessible. Surging population in the Whitehorse area has converted much of the Yukon valley from wildlife habitat to homesites and farms in the area stretching from Little Atlin Lake to Lake Laberge, and in much of the Takhini valley. The reach and the impacts of our human population are increasing.

These trends raise questions: can we have abundant and diverse wildlife and robust resource development? Our government departments and our business community promote economic development through more mining, forestry, agriculture, tourism, oil and gas, and infrastructure – almost all of which occurs in wildlife habitat. Are tradeoffs between wildlife, quality of life, and economic growth being made correctly? Who is making these management decisions about wildlife? As a social and government endeavor, is wildlife management working as well as it should?

Fig 1. Proportion of species in BC, by species group, whose status improved or deteriorated enough to change the conservation status.



Our neighbors in British Columbia and Alberta have been facing these trends for some time. You can tell at a glance from the table above (Fig. 1) that despite some successes, fish and wildlife have been losing ground in BC over the last decade. In Alberta, there is concern over the status of 25% of its mammalian species. It's not hard to see why: over the past 25 years, the populations of both provinces have increased by some 50%. Over the same period, the Yukon grew almost as fast, from 23,000 to 33,000, mostly in the Whitehorse area.

The stress to wildlife and habitats has been recognized in both provinces. Alberta, for example, responded to concern over the number of moose in the province by conducting a five-year study that helped managers determine that bull numbers had declined in some areas. Harvest regulations were changed: fine-tuning for individual management units, and taking into account a larger human population that has gained more access to moose habitat in recent years. In the 2000 general status review, moose were ranked "not at risk" and in fact, they are expanding into new areas. BC has recovery strategies completed or underway for 95% of its species under stress. Both provinces have several examples of restoring species "at risk" to secure status.

Despite the public controversies, both provinces are facing up to the undeniable problems posed to wildlife, to habitats, and to other recreationists by the unrestrained use of off-road vehicles. BC is drafting ORV legislation and developing a recreational trail strategy; Alberta adopted off-road vehicle regulations for selected situations years ago.

The foundation goal of fish and wildlife management is to ensure that animals and their habitats persist in health and abundance so people continue to enjoy the benefits that they provide. Historically, the early objectives of game departments in North America were to manage for an abundance of fish and

game, and to reduce pests and predators. Until the middle of the 20th century, the main emphasis was on regulating hunting and fishing, and in some areas, stimulating game populations by habitat improvement, re-stocking, introducing new game species, and predator control. In the 1940s and '50s, the federally operated Yukon Game Branch devoted much attention to wolf control and to enforcing game laws.

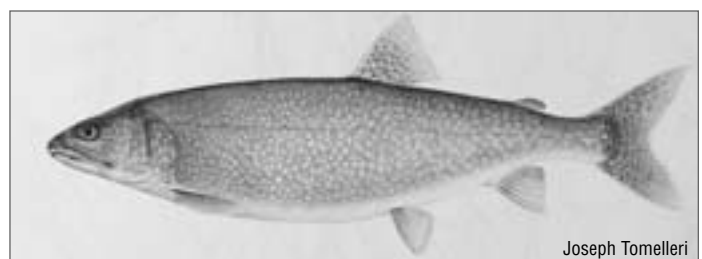
These objectives were largely inherited by today's wildlife management agencies and remain in effect. But an increasingly urban society expects more: wildlife for viewing and preservation of "biodiversity" and "ecological integrity". The professional skills of wildlife management have gone far beyond counting game animals and enforcing game laws, and the emergence of new partners – like First Nation governments – require new management structures.

Yukon's Fish and Wildlife Branch cannot be all things to all people, nor can it devote equal attention to each species of wildlife in all areas. In practice, wildlife management in the Yukon must focus its efforts, but how? Should it concentrate on providing abundance for hunting and fishing? If so, what species, and in which areas? Should it focus on preserving biodiversity? If so, how and where? Should the Yukon recognize and promote certain ethical and values frameworks regarding wildlife, or are all ethical approaches equal?

To "manage" wildlife is really to manage the behavior of people. The animals get on fine without management. We need to "manage" in direct proportion to how many people want to use the resources from ecosystems, and for which purposes. We often forget that supposedly "natural, intact ecosystems", were used and "managed" by native people through such devices as controlled burning, predator control, and moving hunting areas.

Management requires several conditions be met, that: we know (and agree on) what we want and what we need (not necessarily the same things); we understand the ecosystem and how it works; we have adequate information needed for decision-making; we have the capacity to make good decisions and the means to carry them out.

Have we met these conditions in the Yukon?



Joseph Tomelleri

Before starting the case studies, let's briefly review what the roles and responsibilities are for wildlife management. As authorized by the Yukon Act, the Yukon Government manages wildlife on all lands except for National Parks and First Nation Settlement Lands. In general, the Government of Canada manages the many species that migrate across international boundaries such as salmon, waterfowl and other migratory birds, and the Porcupine Caribou Herd. Canada's authorities are based in various acts of Parliament and its responsibilities are further stipulated in international treaties. As set out in the Umbrella Final Agreement, and in various settlement agreements, each Yukon First Nation manages wildlife on its own lands, and the subsistence harvest of its members and of other Yukon First Nations harvesting within its Traditional Territory. The individual First Nations are in the process of enacting their own legislation for their lands. The Yukon Minister of Environment retains ultimate jurisdiction over wildlife management subject to any limitations specifically cited in final agreements.



The Umbrella Final Agreement and the individual First Nation final agreements created a number of standing advisory bodies. Each body is advisory and has no authority or power other than the power of persuasion. Renewable Resources Councils (RRCs) are local bodies appointed for each Traditional Territory to provide advice concerning fish and wildlife management to the Yukon Government, and to the affected First Nation Government. The Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board (YFWMB) has a wider mandate: it provides advice to all governments, RRCs, and Committees on matters of broad policy concerning fish and wildlife. The Salmon Sub-Committee may make recommendations concerning salmon to government, to First Nations, to the YFWMB, and to the RRCs.

Certainly, there has been progress in wildlife management. Before the First Nations Final Agreements came into effect, the Yukon Government had no authority to limit subsistence harvest except for species declared in danger of extinction. The settlement agreements have helped to create innovative and progressive protocols and relationships between the Yukon Government, First Nations, advisory bodies and communities for co-management of wildlife. It is said that wildlife managers in other provinces are envious of the Yukon of these relationships and structures, of our framework of completed agreements, our small population base, and the extensive amount of public land that is not affected by resource development.

These are accomplishments to appreciate and be proud of. At the same time, it is fair to point out that all is not perfect and that there are things we ought to fix. The following game management cases in the Yukon illustrate some past and present problems. These problems include having mixed or unclear management objectives, inadequate inventories (due in part to rising costs and insufficient budgets), and incomplete harvest information. In these cases, there is no one "culprit". Although the Yukon Government and the First Nation governments have responsibilities and roles in solving these problems, the people of the Yukon – collectively and individually – do too.

1.1 Yukon Case Studies

1. Bison.

Successful introduction of an "endangered-threatened species". Between 1986 and 1992, Wood Bison were "reintroduced" into the upper Nisling Valley of the Yukon. This was done because Wood Bison were considered "threatened" (formerly "endangered") as a species, and the Yukon offered an isolated haven, free from disease and free from the threat of genetic mixing with Plains Bison. Whether this counts as a "reintroduction" of a missing natural component of Yukon wildlife, or the "introduction" of an exotic species depends on your point of view. Some people believe bison have been absent from the Yukon ecosystem for so long that they no longer count as a naturally occurring species and that the new herd is essentially foreign. Others maintain that bison should be considered a "naturally occurring" part of the ecosystem because they were present in "historic" times (within the past few centuries), and because they can survive here today.

Technically, the operation was a success. The herd increased by 10-20% annually, and reached 1100 by 2007 – exceeding management objective of keeping the herd size to 500. The bison were uncooperative in another way too, leaving the Nisling Valley for the Alaska Highway. Although this opportunity to see bison thrills some Yukoners and certainly tourists lured to the Yukon with the largely unmet promise of seeing wildlife, bison on the highway are seen by others as a menace to safety. Of the two main solutions, one is obviously effective and cheap (Slow Down and Enjoy Them – the approach used farther down the Alaska Highway at Muncho Lake); the other is difficult and more costly (Get Them Off the Highway). Debate about bison on the highway

– and for that matter, bison in the Yukon – continues. Are there any principles or standards for resolving these matters, or are we simply in a tussle of opinions and values?

If hunting has been the preferred way to keep the bison herd around 500, it hasn't worked. The management target itself raises a string of questions.

If Wood Bison are “threatened” as a species, why is it being restricted to only one location in the Yukon? Best practices of endangered species are that as many as possible in as many separate locations as possible be established. Thus if there are surplus animals in the Aishihik area why are they not moved to Ross River, Carmacks, or Watson Lake areas?

How was the “carrying capacity” of 500 animals arrived at? No “carrying capacity” objective exists for any other Yukon big game animal – if we can and should do it for bison, why not for other species? Should these animals be managed for abundance or artificially limited?

Again, if they are “threatened”, why is hunting allowed at all? It is considered unethical for hunters to spot game from the air and use this to hunt more effectively, thus it is illegal for Yukon hunters to do this. Why then, in the winter of 2007-08, did the Wildlife Branch spot bison from the air and encourage hunters to hunt the areas where they were located? If it is deemed desirable or necessary for hunters to kill more bison to maintain the carrying capacity, why are hunters restricted to hunting them in the winter only rather than also in the autumn during the traditional hunting season? Since it is illegal to pursue animals with vehicles, why is snowmobile hunting tolerated and even encouraged by the Wildlife Branch? This is not permitted for any other specie of game.

Finally, predator control in the form of wolf contraception is being practiced in the Aishihik area as a means of restoring the Aishihik caribou herd and local moose population. It is known that predators have a lag period before they learn to hunt an introduced species such as bison. Once wolf management is halted, and the predators learn to hunt bison, how will this impact the bison, caribou and moose populations?

These are valid questions; not only are they largely unanswered; they are largely unasked in the context of public wildlife management discussions.

2. Finlayson Caribou Herd.

In the early 1980's, the Finlayson Caribou herd was in serious decline, down to a population of about 2000-2500 and dropping 11% per year. Predation, hunting (facilitated by building the Campbell Highway through the herd's winter range, and by the growing adoption of snowmachines), and possibly the effects of fire on key habitat may all have contributed to the decline. The dynamics of the decline were not really clear.



Tony Grabowski

In an attempt to save the herd, the First Nations agreed to curtail subsistence hunting. A carefully designed study with an aggressive wolf control program was conducted from 1983-89 with the objective of eliminating wolf predation as a factor in herd mortality. The caribou population responded quickly: estimated at about 3000 by 1986 and 6000 +/-1 by 1990. Wolves rebounded quickly after the control program – from 29 known survivors in 1989 to 240 by 1994, equal to their 1982 population. The moose population experienced a similar bounce.

Hunting occurred throughout the wolf control and picked up in 1990. The number killed per year increased from an estimated low of 40 in 1983 at the start of the study, to 200 in 1994. Certain fly-in lakes were popular with licensed hunters, and the First Nation harvest is also thought to have surged. These are best estimates as First Nation harvest was not reported.

By 1993-94, biologists reported the herd mortality from natural causes (not including hunting) exceeded its yearly recruitment, despite a favorable cow:calf ratio. Yearly losses from predation by the recovering wolf population and other natural causes were already more than yearly gains – the herd was going down again. It is said by some that the First Nation was uneasy about having any hunting of a herd known to be declining, but the Yukon government was unwilling to impose limits. Others disagree. In any event, no limits were imposed by either government, and by 1996 the herd had dropped to 4500, and by 1998, to 4100. Limited entry hunting was reintroduced in 1998 and the First Nation resumed a voluntary reduction in hunting, but the herd continued to decline. In 2007, it stood at 3000, just about where it was 20 years earlier before the wolf control/caribou recovery program began. As the herd was already dropping with the resurgent wolf population, the increased harvest by licensed and First Nation hunters accelerated its decline.

Some biologists have speculated other factors may have contributed to the herd's decline. During this period, there was an unprecedented amount of helicopter activity over the herd's

core area. Recruitment in the core area dropped, while it appeared stable in the herd's peripheral areas. The topic was never fully investigated.

As a biological experiment, the Finlayson wolf control program was a success: it proved its hypotheses, generated valuable information on predator-prey dynamics and population responses, confirmed wolf control could yield dramatic increases in a declining caribou herd, and that wolves were resilient and recovered quickly. It provided insights into the how much (how little) human harvest might be sustainable in a system that has a natural abundance of predators. The Finlayson program is an important reference for projects like the Aishihik caribou and moose recovery effort.



- a backcountry transport revolution occurred with the widespread adoption of ATVs and snowmachines. The terrain of Zone 7 is especially well-suited to long-range penetration by snowmachines and ATVs.

Approaching the mid-1980s, it was understood that both caribou and moose were in trouble – not only were cow permits phased out, the licensed hunting was cut back in '84, then virtually halted in '89. The Southern Lakes area was in the same fix.

As with the Finlayson Caribou herd decline, which was becoming noticed at about the same time, biologists suspected that predators were responsible

for most of the mortality, while excessive hunting sped the decline and guaranteed that there would be no recovery. Under the circumstances, rebuilding the moose population depended on two things: reducing the predator take, and/or reducing the human take. Predator control was not considered an option: the Finlayson project was all government had appetite for. Reducing the human take was the only remaining option: the licensed hunt was drastically cut, and First Nations were asked to voluntarily curtail the subsistence hunt. The Ibex and Southern Lakes caribou herds were identified for specific management plans and public and First Nation support was sought. A comparable recovery strategy for moose was not developed.

As a social endeavor, however, the program is disappointing: 20 years later we are back where we started in terms of herd size, in part because Yukon people and their governments did or could not limit the harvest when it was known natural mortality was exceeding recruitment. Is anyone accountable for this? Has anything been learned? We are back to miniscule harvest levels – should we try again to rebuild this herd? If so, what guarantees this history will not be repeated?

3. Moose, Game Management Zone 7

Game Management Zone 7 – west of Whitehorse and Carcross Road, south of the Alaska Highway and north of the BC border – may illustrate what happens to an ecosystem when stresses to wildlife are met with social and political indecision, including the decision not to obtain the information needed to understand the problem, and the social decision not to insist this be solved. The story of Zone 7 is largely the same as in Zone 9 – Southern Lakes.

Throughout the 1960s, '70s, and early '80s, Zone 7 was assumed to reliably produce all sorts of game, including moose. Habitats were productive, moose densities were high and people expected an "easy moose". Moose was considered so abundant that cow moose could be taken by licensed hunters during an "antlerless season". Several trends came together during these two decades to create a "perfect storm" for game management in Zone 7:

- the human population of the area tripled from about 6000 to nearly 18,000 in 1980;
- the road network penetrating Zone 7 proliferated to include resource roads in the Watson-Wheaton Valleys, Coal and Alligator lakes, Fish Lake, the Ibex Valley, and a number of trails east and south of Haines Junction;

Through the 1990s the licensed moose hunt in Zone 7 remained negligible, development in the Yukon and Takhini valleys continued, government biologists confirmed that predators were taking up to 85% of moose calves each year, the areas reached by snowmachines and ATVs expanded, and solid information about First Nation moose harvest remained unavailable. Inventory surveys confirmed that moose populations persisted at low levels, but some interesting observations were made: though there was a general lack of moose across Zone 7, there were (and are) pockets of abundance – in inaccessible areas. People also speculated about habitat change (good deciduous browse in former burns were shifting to conifers), and climate change. But the facts permit a reasonable explanation: since predation is more or less constant, human hunting must persist as a significant factor in keeping moose from recovering. One problem is that we don't know how much subsistence hunting occurs; a second problem would be how to reduce it as a factor in moose recovery even if we did know.

Twenty years after the licensed hunt was curtailed, moose populations remain depressed in Zone 7; even though sheep are doing fine and there is cautious reason to be optimistic about caribou, thanks to cooperative management processes.

The managing partners have recently formed the “Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee” which promises to address moose recovery in its workplan. Will this be good enough? Will there be clear objectives, adequate inventories, complete harvest information, and effective management responses to actually restore the moose to the abundance they once had? Alternatively, must the people of the Yukon insist that the responsible governments – Yukon Government, Carcross-Tagish FN, Kwanlin Dun FN, Ta’an Kwatchan FN, and Champagne-Aishihik FN – actually solve this twenty-year-old problem?



that the Pilot Mountain area has produced exceptional rams over the years. Horn growth in this area is well above the Yukon average, which means that rams will develop a full curl (and thus become legal to shoot) at a younger age.

The Pilot Mountain sheep herd was one of the first to be aerially surveyed; between 1975 and 2007, 12 surveys were carried out. It was determined early on that this sheep herd had an unusually low ratio of rams to nursery

sheep (about 32%). As this range was both accessible and well known, this low ratio may have been the result of heavy hunting in the decades before records were required. Through the 1970’s, the herd is estimated to have been between 130-140, and it grew through the ‘80’s and ‘90s to a current size of between 170-180. However, by 2007, the ram to nursery sheep ratio was down to 27%, less than half that of the population on Sheep Mountain.

4. Sheep, Miner’s Range (data from M. Hoefs).

Wild sheep are one of the most prized and sought-after game animals in the Yukon. As a trophy animal, they are the cornerstone of the outfitting industry, and one of three licensed resident hunters buy sheep tags. Sheep have traditionally been an important part of the subsistence diet as well.

Sheep are among the easiest of all wildlife to count and track. They are highly faithful to traditional ranges and the white coats of Dall’s Sheep make them easy to spot. Sheep surveys aim for close to a total population count, unlike estimating caribou or moose populations, which are statistical extrapolations of samples. Because of these traits and their value, wild sheep have been quite well-studied and a variety of data has been consistently collected for several decades. Licensed kills are reported and skulls submitted for measurements. Surveys and hunter success rates convey information about the size and trends for sheep populations and skull measurements convey information about the health and ages of rams.

For example, from studying relatively undisturbed bands at Sheep Mountain in Kluane National Park (this one had not been hunted in many decades), and in the Ruby Ranges, it is known that a healthy, sustainable sheep population will have 50-66 rams to every 100 nursery sheep, expressed as a ratio of 50% to 66%. Smaller ratios will have a number of unwanted consequences for a population. It is also believed that a robust sheep population can sustain a harvest of about 3% for a limited period, but this must be reduced to 2% or less for populations that show signs of stress. It is also well known that sheep are highly susceptible to human disturbances.

The Miner’s Range, located northwest of Whitehorse, has been a popular sheep hunting area for many decades. Non-resident trophy hunting occurred there as early as 1950, and data show

From 1978 to 2007, licensed hunters took 116 rams from the Miner’s range; this is an unsustainable, average rate of 3.6%. This figure does not include First Nations’ kills, which in this population are presumed to be quite small. In the first decade 1978-1988, the licensed kill rate was 2.6 rams/year, (26 for the decade) or 2.3% - a sustainable rate, assuming the First Nations’ harvest was small. In the second decade, the (licensed hunt) rate doubled to 5.4 rams/year, (54 for the decade) or 4.7%. Ominously, the harvest of rams 9 years old or older went from 6 per decade to 25 per decade. The older rams were being “mined out”.

What changed was that the first ATV made its appearance in the Miner’s Range in 1989, and local hunters report that each year brought more ATV-borne sheep hunters, as traditional horse trails used by locals were widened and new ATV trails were cut and made known to more people. The ATV hunters were “new” hunters coming to the Miners Range. The local hunters of the previous decade continued to use their horses, but they were unhappy about a sheep hunting experience that had changed for the worse by the arrival of machines.

In the third decade, 1998-2007, signs of decline were clear: sheep harvest dropped by more than 30% and hunters were having difficulty finding legal rams. Many hunters failed, some after repeated visits. The (licensed) kill rate declined to 2.4%, which normally would be sustainable, but was no longer given the unnatural condition of the population. The actual kill rate is likely higher. The ratio of rams was also distorted. There were very few rams, and most were young, since rams in this area developed a full curl and became targets well before they

reached the age of 8. The average size of horns declined as well, showing a deterioration of general condition.

The sheep of the Miners' Range now occupy only a portion of their former range, and the small number of old rams remaining represent a worrisome loss of genetic diversity, vigor, and knowledge to the population. In 2007, a study commissioned by the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Branch, Ta'an Kwach'an Council and the Laberge Renewable Resources Council recommended a two-year moratorium on hunting, followed by a limited hunt of no more than 3 rams per year – or a bit less than 2% of the population.



In 30 years, this well-monitored and once-productive sheep population has been degraded. It followed a familiar trajectory: sustainable use by a small number of hunters, then “discovery” and over-hunting facilitated by new access for motorized hunters, and finally degradation to “crisis” conditions.

It is fair to ask “Why this was allowed to happen? Why did it take so long for governments or citizens to intervene?” After all, compared with other wildlife management situations, there has been good information for this population, readily available, and the concerns about increasing ATV access were flagged over eight years ago. In wildlife management, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”, and cures are typically costly, divisive, and slow to yield results. Everyone concerned with wildlife – hunters, the general public, government agencies, First Nations – knows this.

5. Teslin Burn.

The “Teslin Burn” lies between Teslin Lake and the Atlin Road. It is the result of an extensive forest fire occurring in the great fire year of 1958, which also produced the Takhini Burn. High-quality moose habitat regenerated over much of this burn, and moose populations responded. When the first surveys were done in 1982, moose densities at 500/1000km² were estimated, among the highest ever recorded in the Yukon. The management unit was estimated to contain some 1300 moose. Through the 1970's though early '80s, some 80 moose per year were taken by licensed hunters – this does not include the moose killed by First Nation Hunters. Access was from the Atlin Road, the Alaska Highway, across Teslin Lake, and through the many fly-in lakes. At the minimum, this harvest rate was an unsustainable 6%; it is even higher and less sustainable when the amount harvested by First Nations is estimated and factored in.

What happened is predictable: by the mid-1980s, harvest rates started to drop and are now less than 10 (reported) per year. It is inferred that moose populations declined, the trend possibly reinforced because the high-quality moose habitat is giving way to less productive pine stands as the forest regenerates in the Teslin Burn.

In the Teslin Burn, there are in principle three levers to pull if people want to rebuild moose

population numbers: reduce hunting, reduce predators, or enhance habitat, likely by burning. None of these are easy or guaranteed – wildlife management is not an exact science.

1.2 General Conditions in the Yukon.

The cases just described are specific population-level examples showing reasons for concern for wildlife management in the Yukon. There are also general species-level examples that provide reassurances – or indications – that things in the Yukon are in comparatively good shape.

Since “wildlife” embraces all wild creatures in the environment (some jurisdictions recognize all wild living things including plants), we can look at only a sampling, and information is pretty sparse for even the most visible species. There are reasonably sound numbers for selected populations (for example, sheep in the Miner's Range), but overall population numbers for the Territory are the expert estimates of informed people.

The following information was provided by the Department of the Environment.

Moose appear to be doing better overall than ever, despite depressions in certain populations. Twenty years ago, they were estimated to be about 50,000; today they are thought to be about 65-75,000. Moose appear to be expanding onto the North Slope. The overall population may be responding to improved forage following large fires of the last two decades, and perhaps to climate change.

Deer, a relatively new arrival, have prospered in the southwest Yukon with the expansion of agriculture. Twenty years ago they were thought to be under 100; today, they are roughly estimated to be around 800 and their range appears to be expanding. A limited hunt was introduced last year.

Sheep are considered to have remained generally stable at 20,000 over the past 20 years, but increased access has diminished some localized populations.

Bison, introduced in 1988, expanded rapidly and at 1100, have vastly exceeded a management population target of 500.

Bears appear to have stayed stable. There has been no overall change observed in the last 20 years in the number of Grizzly Bears (about 6,000-7,000) and Black Bears (about 10,000).

Caribou offer less reason for optimism. The Porcupine herd is declining, and several mountain caribou herds are depressed, including the Finlayson, Little Rancheria, Southern Lakes, Ibx, Chisana, and Aishihik herds. The status of others, like the Bonnet Plume and the Hart are uncertain. The Fortymile Herd, now rebuilding, is a bright spot.

Yukon River Salmon have been in crisis for 20 years. This is a problem of international scope that has so far defied resolution.

At present, the Yukon cannot provide information with much confidence on the overall status of most of its wildlife populations. Information provided above is educated guesswork. It is noteworthy that such basic information is not available, as funding for inventories dropped in real dollars from the mid-1990s through the early part of this decade. Information is the

foundation of management. The Yukon has been correcting its inventory deficiencies: the Department of Environment increased its inventory budget by \$1.2 million in 2006-07 and by an additional \$500,000 in 2007-08. It reports a dramatic increase in inventory work completed in the past two years.



By comparison, both Alberta and BC regularly assess the overall state of their wildlife populations (including fish, invertebrates and plants) and publish their findings. Both are experiencing population growth and economic expansion, increased stresses on wildlife habitats and increased hunting pressures. Alberta considers 20 out of 77 mammalian species to be of concern or at risk – a hefty 26%. All of its big-game species are considered “secure” except grizzlies (habitat degradation),

wood bison (chiefly disease), pronghorn antelope (climate stress and agriculture), and woodland caribou (loss of old growth forest, vulnerability to wolves with increased access). In BC, the number of species of concern or at risk is 26 out of 120 or 19%. Yukon may be in better shape, but at present we don't really know.

Good species-level information has permitted wildlife managers in Alberta and BC to focus their efforts. Alberta, for example has several examples of retrieving species from an “At Risk” or “Sensitive” status, including moose, which are now expanding into new areas. BC has prepared or is preparing recovery strategies for 95% of the 140 species of concern in the province.

Fig. 2 compares licensed hunting with 25 years ago.

Yukon: Selected Big Game harvest (territory-wide)

Year	moose kills			caribou kills			sheep kills			grizzly bear kills			black bear kills		
	hunted	non hunted	tags	hunted	non hunted	tags	hunted	non hunted	tags	hunted	non hunted	tags	hunted	non hunted	tags
2007	635	22	3277	251	15	3037	278	3	1408	54	9	1458	78	31	1885
NR	268			132			172			27			7		
1983	850	na	3998	447	na	2440	223	1	1079	76	11	771	96	36	1385
NR	103			193			151			47			12		

GMZ 7:

Year	moose kills		caribou kills		sheep kills		grizzly bear kills		black bear kills	
	hunted	non hunted	hunted	non hunted	hunted	non hunted	hunted	non hunted	hunted	non hunted
2007	9	1	0	1	47	0	6	2	6	3
1983	99	na	2	na	53	0	4	0	3	5

What Figure 2 does not tell us is how many days it took to get a moose or a caribou in 1983 compared with 2007, or how far afield the average hunter had to go.

Yukon Licensed Hunting has declined over 25 years.

We know quite a lot about licensed hunting in the Yukon thanks to data collected by the Fish and Wildlife Branch. For example, fewer Yukoners are buying hunting licenses than 25 years ago. In 1983, about 4000 hunters had licenses; last year it was 2865. The decline is among people under the age of 40 – this age group has dropped by 2/3s since 1983. If this trend continues, there will be about 1500 licensed resident hunters 20 years from now.

Yukon Recreational and Commercial Fishing has also declined.

A decline in fishing activity among Yukoners is also evident: in 1984, 12,424 resident fishing licenses were sold. By 2007, this had dropped by one-third to 7,861 licenses. Over this same period, non-resident licenses increased by 50% to nearly 7000, but the total declined to 15,000 licenses of all kinds.

In 1983, anglers caught 233,000 fish of all kinds and kept 109,500; in 2007, they caught 275,000 and kept 51,000. The trend over the past 25 years appears to be fewer resident anglers, more non-resident anglers, more fish landed, but fewer kept – likely a consequence of catch-and-release, and size limit regulations. The data do not show whether the average fish is smaller than it was years ago.

In the 1970's and early '80's, there were on average 110 commercial fishing licenses issued each year and an average of 19,000 lbs of trout and whitefish caught. In 2007, there were but 13 licenses (not all active), on just four lakes - the commercial catch was 6,615 lbs. When the Yukon assumed management of commercial freshwater fisheries in 1983, it closed several lakes and set quotas on others. In this case, the decline in commercial production is largely a function of stricter stewardship.

Wildlife Viewing and Appreciation has increased

The increasing number of non-resident hunting and fishing licenses is part of a broader trend: the steady growth of tourism as a wildlife-based activity in the Yukon. In 2007 329,000 people visited the Yukon, and highway tourists report that wildlife sightings are their most cherished experiences. Wildlife viewing is a major reason for outdoor adventure tourism, which serves between 35-40,000 clients a year. Guided wilderness expeditions take about 1300 people into the backcountry for nearly 13,000 visitor-days each year.

Wildlife viewing is also important to non-hunting Yukoners as well as to hunters. It is safe to assert that a large majority of Yukon residents value wildlife sightings in the many ways in which they occur.

Hunting and Fishing harvest figures for Yukon First Nations is fragmentary.

First Nation hunters are not required to have licenses when hunting within their Traditional Territory. As a general rule, the number of FN hunters is not public knowledge, neither is the number of animals taken by them. However, the quality and availability of First Nation harvest data varies across the Yukon: some First Nations obtain good records, others do not. Solid information about the First Nation Salmon fishery is collected by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and is well known. Since some people are unclear about First Nation hunting rights in the Yukon, these are summarized below. There is constant dialogue on the interpretation and application of hunting rights as set out in the Umbrella Final Agreement.



First Nation Hunting Rights

(adapted from Dept. Environment website).

Citizens of First Nations with signed settlement agreements have a right to hunt and fish for food inside the Traditional Territory of their First Nation where they can harvest any species, male or female, at any time of year, with no bag or catch limits, subject to regulation by their First Nation. They do not need a Yukon hunting or fishing licence to exercise their right. Other rules apply to citizens of First Nations without signed agreements.

First Nation responsibilities

If a First Nation Citizen wants to hunt or fish outside his or her Traditional Territory, he or she:

- must have a valid Yukon fishing or hunting license and follow the Laws of General Application, OR
- must have written consent from a First Nation with a Final Agreement to hunt or fish for food in the part of its Traditional Territory that does not overlap with another Traditional Territory. When harvesting with consent he or she must follow the laws of the First Nation. The First Nation cannot give permission to hunt in an overlap area. In overlap areas outside one's own traditional territory a First Nation Citizen must hunt under the Laws of General Application.

A First Nation may require one to report any animals killed under one's right to hunt for food.

A First Nation citizen's right to hunt and fish for food may be limited by laws set in consultation with First Nations for the purpose of conservation, public health or public safety.



Part Two . Potential Threats to Wildlife and Habitats

HOW MIGHT THINGS CHANGE? If conditions are generally good for fish, wildlife, and habitats in the Yukon, is there reason to fear that that they will not stay that way? In a word, yes. The reason is that Yukon has based a large part of its economy on exploiting its natural resources. Much of government – itself the mainstay of the economy – is devoted to promoting, facilitating, and managing this exploitation. This is not necessarily good or bad, but it does have consequences for wildlife management.

Resource-based economies, when markets and conditions are favorable, promote population growth and more houses, increased affluence (more snowmachines, ATVs, and boats), increased access to the backcountry, and habitat loss. Collectively, these spell increased harvest, increased disruption to wildlife, and displacement of wildlife populations. The doctrine of growth also drives other sectors that depend on the land, such as tourism and agriculture. In view of our past, it is well to consider whether we have demonstrated a good ability to manage the effects of growth, and whether our institutions and our processes are up to it. As a society, does the Yukon have a common vision or ethic for how wildlife can coexist with a resource economy? Our experience to date provides reason to wonder. The examples of our neighboring provinces, which have experienced rapid population growth, habitat loss, and a large portion of species at risk, give us more reason to wonder.

Population growth, driven in part by economic growth, has largely occurred in the Whitehorse area, which grew by 45% in the past 20 years. Habitat loss from settlement affects only a tiny fraction of the Yukon's land base, but it occupies the Yukon valley corridor from Little Atlin Lake to Lake Laberge, and westward up the Takhini River Valley. Along with homesites, agricultural development has been the other driver of habitat loss in the Whitehorse area. As of 2007, 33,000 acres of farmland

have been disposed by the Yukon Government for agriculture; 74% within 100 miles of Whitehorse. Some 8,300 acres were actually in production, while a portion had been cleared but was reverting to forest. South of Whitehorse, the pattern of settlement and agriculture blocks the Southern Lakes Caribou Herd from part of its winter habitat and from migration routes.

The loss of habitat and movement corridors in the Whitehorse area was compounded by more hunting stress, itself increased by more access roads and trails, and by more people driving improved quads and snowmachines. Moose were hammered throughout this area. It should be noted, though, that agricultural development benefits some wildlife: deer and elk have prospered thanks to increased forage production and there have likely been increases in seed-eaters like rodents, and the foxes, coyotes, raptors and other predators that prey on them. However, the loss of habitat around Whitehorse for moose and caribou is permanent (at least for the foreseeable future), and the effects on these populations are difficult to counteract.

Increasing settlement (with or without agriculture) causes other effects, including more encounters with “problem” wildlife drawn to homesites and farms, and reducing the land base open to hunting by minimum of 3km² per homesite (there is a no hunting buffer zone of 1 km around each house). This has had a noticeable impact on hunting (especially waterfowl hunting) in the Whitehorse area.

The forestry industry also modifies wildlife habitat. About 30,000 acres (roughly equal to the area disposed to agriculture) have been logged over the past 20 years. If this seems like a large area, consider that in a bad fire year such as 2004, some 4,000,000 acres burned in the Yukon. Of course, as a natural occurrence, fires burn randomly over widespread areas, while logging is highly concentrated in valley bottoms, which are often high-quality wildlife habitats. On the other hand, most of the acres logged are regenerating.

Logging impacts are not necessarily permanent, but they may have lasting effects. In the Liard valley, a small local logging industry mushroomed during the “Green Rush” of 1993-98. Over a 10-year interval, it is estimated that approximately 1/3 of the



merchantable riparian stands in the Watson Lake area were logged. The regeneration that follows logging can be favorable to moose and other animals that eat the willow and aspen that colonize the openings. But logging can have longer-term consequences for wildlife: it can fragment habitat, it can provide better success for wolves, and it increases access for hunters. In the case of logging in or around the upland pine stands in the Little Rancheria Caribou range, the consequences of fragmenting habitat demand careful planning and management attention.

Even if the effects of logging on habitat are minimized (remembering that in some cases, habitat may actually improve), the lasting effect for wildlife is increased access, which leads to increased hunting pressure. This also applies to exploring for, and developing minerals, oil, and gas: the actual “footprint” on the ground may typically be small (and the sites can be largely restored), but the lasting effect is increased access to vast areas for hunters, anglers, and other backcountry visitors.

More hunting and fishing pressure is not the only effect of increased access, it also increases opportunities for “non-consumptive” (non-hunting or fishing) recreation and tourism. If these activities are too intense – too much noise and commotion, too frequent, too many people – they can displace wildlife from important habitats, cause them stress, disrupt breeding or calving, or deny them food at critical seasons. Improved access also opens a door for increased resource exploration, activities that cause stress to animals. Stress and displacement can cause mortality just as sure as a bullet.

The known problems for wildlife stemming from a rising population and a resource economy cry out for effective responses...which have been mostly absent, or at best partial. Let us reflect again on the earlier statement about management in light of Yukon experience:

Management requires that several conditions are met: that we know (and agree on) what we want and what we need (not necessarily the same things); that we understand the ecosystem and how it works; that we have adequate information needed for decision-making; that we have the capacity to make good decisions and the means to carry them out.

a. We know (and agree on) what we want and what we need...

Clear goals and objectives are the starting point. As they say ... If you don't know where you are going, you'll probably end up somewhere else... The bison introduction had clear biological objectives and these were wonderfully met. But it lacked clear social objectives, and we have been challenged by these for two decades. The same is true for the Finlayson Caribou herd and for moose recovery in Zone 7. Game farming, catch-and-release fishing, disease control – these are all topics about which people have different values, and thus form different objectives. It is said that knowing how to do things is usually not difficult, what's hard is knowing what to do. For that you need to clarify what you want, and Yukoners seem to speak with many voices at present.

b. We understand the ecosystem and how it works...

We are still figuring this out – there is a world to learn, both through Traditional Knowledge and through scientific inquiry. For example, Larsen's work on predators in the Southwest Yukon in the 1980's was an eye-opener: if wolves and bears at their natural levels take up to 85% of the yearly crop of calves, that does not leave much for people to kill. Once other causes of mortality are factored in, biologists estimate that a long-term sustainable hunt should average no more than 2%. Do we understand such basic ecological concepts as how many moose a given range can support? How many predators does that assume? How will this vary over the expected fire interval? Will climate change affect this? In short, do we devote enough resources to research? Is the research targeted as well as it should be?

c. We have adequate information for decision-making...

Quality information is the foundation of management. You cannot manage a business, household, agency, or wildlife population if you don't know what you have, how much you have, what you are spending, and what is coming in. The inventory information for many wildlife populations is scanty – budgets are limited and the area to be covered is vast. Consequently, attention is largely paid to species and populations that are “in demand” or in the public eye, which are usually those fairly close the road network and already under stress.



Equally serious is that harvest information is fragmentary. We know reasonably well what the licensed harvest is, thanks to comprehensive license surveys. In many (but not all) cases, First Nation harvest data is incomplete, forcing all wildlife managers to estimate and guess. Some First Nation wildlife managers report that like other governments, they do not have adequate funding to do wildlife surveys or collect comprehensive harvest data. As the cases of the Finlayson herd and Game Management Zone 7 illustrate, in the presence of healthy predators, there are typically small margins between a game population declining, holding its own, or increasing. The lack of complete harvest information can cripple management efforts. The point here is not about rights – First Nation rights are clearly spelled out in the UFA – it is about the responsibility and the means to co-manage wildlife effectively – that is, sustainability.

Wildlife belongs to the people of the Yukon, managed in trust for us and for future generations by the Yukon and First Nation governments. Imagine having a joint bank account on which two parties can write cheques; if both parties can't or don't record their withdrawals, the account can be overdrawn. It is in both partners' interests that this doesn't happen. Avoiding this is not rocket science: all withdrawals must be recorded, which can't occur if FN governments are not provided with sufficient funding to collect harvest data. Doesn't good stewardship need both good inventories and good harvest reporting?

Other things would be useful to know. Knowing how many people travel in the backcountry (when, where, party size) would help understand other stresses on wildlife. We know this about commercially guided wilderness tours (which are licensed), but we don't know this about non-commercial trips. We know where licensed hunters take game, but we don't know the size of party, how they traveled, how long they stayed out, and whether they saw other parties. It is helpful for game managers to know where ATV and resource exploration trails are but this information is fragmentary. If you ask government for the number of kilometers of such trails in any management area... they can't tell you as this information has not been digitized into departmental GIS data sets. Why not? No one knows the number of snowmachines or quads in the territory. Why not? In short, we don't really know how access to the backcountry is changing from one decade to

the next, and thus how fast and where wilderness habitats are shrinking – such basic information.

d. We have the capacity to make good decisions and the means to carry them out.

Harvest management. We do not have the means to manage a game population if we do not know how many there are and how many are being harvested. We cannot salvage a population at risk unless both licensed hunters and First Nation hunters participate in a management scheme that monitors and limits, if necessary, their harvest. In cases where wildlife management would halt a decline or help a depressed population to recover, there is often not much margin of error and success depends on *everyone* cooperating. Partial cooperation is a ticket for failure, which hurts First Nations and all other Yukoners equally. There is no need to point fingers for this failure – is it not enough for the Yukon people to insist their governments solve this?

Resource development decisions. The Yukon Government advertises the Territory as “Open to Business”, and its Department of Energy Mines & Resources (EMR) which is responsible for land management and resource development promotes as follows:

“...Yukon boasts over 80 defined deposits of copper, lead, tungsten, zinc and silver. Northeastern Yukon is also home to one of the world's largest iron ore deposits. In addition, several important occurrences of asbestos, barite, molybdenum, nickel, uranium and coal have been discovered. Emerald and diamond potentials also exist. And after all these years, Yukon still produces placer gold.

The Yukon government spends more per capita than any other Canadian jurisdiction on direct financial incentives for exploration in the mining industry. It also commits more, as a percentage of its total budget, to direct exploration incentives than any other jurisdiction in Canada. Through the Yukon Mining Incentive Program, we can also help your investment dollars go further by providing a portion of the risk capital required for locating and exploring mineral deposits.”

As Yukon's land manager, EMR is steward of Yukon's wilderness and wildlife habitats, and it is the regulator and decision-maker for land use activities. But by its own description, EMR's primary business is promoting, assisting, and financing access and industrial development in wildlife habitats.



On the other hand, the Department of Environment is charged with the conservation and management of wildlife and their habitats but it does not directly control activities that affect these lands. Thus the wildlife managers have habitat responsibilities, but lack practical means to discharge them outside of designated Habitat Protection Areas.

Of course there is an environmental assessment process, but the practical effect of this process is to facilitate development while mitigating environmental damage. Just ask this: Is there an example of a significant industrial project being denied in the Yukon because of wildlife interests? Wildlife managers fret about reducing impacts, but their influence on the decision-making process to actually permit resource development in wildlife habitats is problematic. Thus, the integrity of Yukon wildlife habitats depends more on market conditions, not on a conservation commitment. Over the long haul, with this set of values, it is likely that wildlife habitat will diminish. Does this bode well for the sustainable well-being of wildlife in the Yukon?

Access management. The government and the people of the Yukon have known for over 15 years that unmanaged motorized access to the backcountry can have serious effects for wildlife and habitats, and that it can create conflicts between backcountry users. Virtually every jurisdiction in North America has understood this and done something about it – or is in the process of doing so. But not the Yukon. We are not exempt from these problems but we behave as if we are. It is commonly explained that the Highways Act does not permit “public roads” to be closed, but this begs the question of why the Act is not amended in the interests of wildlife management.

First Nations subsistence hunting rights and practices also have a bearing on access management. The UFA guarantees First Nation individuals can use contemporary technologies in subsistence pursuits. Effective and socially acceptable approaches to access management would likely have to bear on all people.

Backcountry management. We still treat our backcountry as if it was endless and as if it had little value as wild habitat. We promote tourism without considering carrying capacity – we do not know how many unguided tourists and recreational users are in the backcountry, how big their groups are, how long they stay and where they go. There is nothing that would prevent a half-dozen large parties from showing up on the Snake, or the South Macmillan, or the Nisutlin rivers at the same time. Nothing keeps

a convoy of snowmachines from crossing the Coast Mountains. Consider how large parties can disturb wildlife. Consider the impacts on campsites. Consider how this would affect the quality of any hunts going on in the area. Needless regulation is unwelcome (“If it ain’t broke don’t fix it...”), but it is also said that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

Let’s sum up

By most comparisons, the overall condition of fish, wildlife, and habitats in the Yukon appears to be good. Mostly, very good. Yukon hunters have access to at least ten species of big game, there is no lack of places to hunt and fish, backcountry travelers frequently see wildlife, and the Yukon wilderness is so expansive that there seems no need to be crowded. There is reason to be concerned, though, that our capacity to manage specific populations and our capacity to manage the backcountry is not as good as it could or should be.

Could it be that the generally good condition of wildlife in the Yukon is due more to the size of the territory and to our small population than to our management? If this is possible, then as development picks up pace and as our population grows – which is what our government enthusiastically aims for – we might be uneasy about how our wildlife will fare. We might be uneasy that we apparently have not articulated a common ethical framework for valuing and managing wildlife – one that would inform not only licensed hunting, but subsistence hunting, non-consumptive wildlife uses, and resource development.

Are we doing the best we can?