



YFWET - Fish & Wildlife Habitat Steward

2015 Final Report





Left to right: George McLeod, Tamara Stock-Dickson, Cameron O'Shea and Chase Everitt

First and foremost, The Tr'ondek Hwech'in Fish and Wildlife (TH F&W) department would like to thank the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust (YFWET) for the financial contribution that gave us the opportunity to hire George McLeod as Fish & Wildlife Habitat Steward. George was extremely enthusiastic and excited to work in the position and was an invaluable addition to our TH F&W department! Thank you!

George began this position in late July and continued through to late fall (November 27th, 2015). TH F&W department was able to secure additional funding in order to extend George's position further into the fall; this request was supported by our department due to his enthusiasm for the position, his level of experience and his contribution and support to our department.

Under the guidance of the F&W Steward, the Habitat Steward, along with the our F&W Summer Student and F&W Junior Steward, were trained in TH safety procedures and protocols for being out on the land in remote locations. These skills are considered to be the most important aspects to learn, as remote field trips for monitoring occurs on a regular basis. After the first couple of days of orientation, all new workers are taught basic safety procedures, such as, using the satellite phone and radio phone in the F&W truck in case of an emergency. All take various levels of First Aid depending on what is available at the time of hire, (ie. Advanced Wilderness First Aid or Standard First Aid). In addition to his required training for the position, George received trapping certification and is excited to get out on the land and learn from local

trappers. In order to successfully monitor the TH Traditional Territory (TT), last year's F&W crew were taught:

- Basic boat safety
- General boat maintenance
- Proper lifejacket sizing
- Techniques to rescue people who have fallen into water:
 - Lifejackets were tossed into the water and proper approach with boat maneuvering was taught

All were taught how to operate the boat:

- Forward and reverse
- Landing the boat on shore
- Emergency stops/killing the engine
- U-turns
- Spot location and the importance of driver and passenger eye contact on people in river, needing assistance



While safety remained a priority, the Habitat Steward was involved in a variety of tasks that our F&W department undertakes over the summer and fall months. While habitat and wildlife monitoring and the collection of harvest data was a key focus, the Habitat Steward helped with TH F&W newest endeavor, installing, maintaining and operating a TH community fish wheel. The fish wheel operated during the Yukon River Chum salmon run and is set up to provide TH citizens with the opportunity to focus their harvesting requirements on Chum salmon, while simultaneously reducing pressure on the historically harvested Chinook salmon that have been experiencing long term declines in the stocks. The fish wheel was a learning experience for all and provided ample Chum salmon to satisfy departmental requests and provisions for community programs such as Elders lunches, Meals on Wheels, feasts, etc. The end result can be seen on the front page of the report. The Habitat Steward was instrumental from the beginning to end in assembling and dismantling the fish wheel for winter storage, daily upkeep and maintenance, as well as checking the wheel and processing and delivering the fish to departments. While the fish wheel was in operation, the Habitat Steward was responsible for several duties including:

- Daily wheel checks
- Processing/ cleaning fish
- Distribution to community members, as well as other TH departments for such things as Meals on Wheels and Elders distribution throughout the community.
- Sampling procedures required for DFO testing of Chum for toxins
- Daily repairs and maintenance
- Shutting down the wheel, dismantling it and preparing a site for winter storage

Overall, the use of the fish wheel was successful and we look forward to another productive season this year.

Additionally, George had the important responsibility of keeping track of fishers on the river. There were several challenges for George, as the TH government had posted that the fisheries for Chinook salmon was closed for the early run, then DFO opened up the later part of the season, and as a result, a few TH citizens proceeded to fish for Chinook salmon. Compliance from citizens was good and George collected harvest data from the negligible Chinook salmon fishery as well as the Chum salmon fishery.





Another key responsibility conducted by the Habitat Steward was to travel and monitor the TH TT, which is a vast area:

- Goldfields – Hunker and Bonanza
- Top of the World Highway
- Dempster Highway and,
- Klondike Highway

While monitoring these areas, the Habitat Steward recorded hunter activity and looked for any signs of evidence of harvested animals; all sightings were reported back to the F&W department upon return and recorded on our 'Daily Patrol Form'. Occasionally, habitat monitoring is done alongside the TH Fish and Wildlife Steward and the Land Officers in order to assist with programs that are in place. The Habitat Steward provides the TH F&W department with essential information which includes where he recorded harvesters, how many people were in the hunting party, harvesting success, location of their camp and species targeted by the harvesters. This information is important to our department as hunting pressure from southern Yukon has increased dramatically over the past several years and concerns from citizens about low harvest rates for subsistence harvesters have been raised. While TH strives to create an equality amongst harvesters, it is important to note that concern was brought to the attention of the Natural Resources department during the harvest season of 2015, that unsuccessful hunts by citizens were

common. Citizens registered concerns to the Habitat Steward, as well as the TH F&W Steward, stating that there were too many hunters in our TH TT. Thanks to the funding from the YFWET, TH had additional staff and support to hear these concerns and our programs were adjusted to ensure monitoring was happening in the high-use areas. This information will be used in future efforts to protect wildlife and habitat from disturbance and unsustainable harvest.



The Habitat Steward participated in several opportunities to work in conjunction with other governmental organizations on projects that the TH F&W department contributes to. One example of this is the Habitat Steward assisting with an YG aerial survey of the Goldfields in the later part of the rutting season for moose. George also had the opportunity to partake in an aerial survey and count of Hart River and Porcupine caribou herds. Additionally, the Habitat Steward collected tissue samples for Department of Fisheries and Oceans for a radioactive isotope sampling program for salmonids.

Because of his experience on the land, George was able to help with TH culture camps and delivered educational materials to the youth, as well as important conservation messages to the youth and the community. He made himself available to answer any questions that arose from TH citizens and he attended several community meetings concerning TH F&W issues. George was also involved in evaluating and commenting on the proposed amendments to the Wildlife Act and changes to the Yukon fishing regulations. He learnt about the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Final Agreement, specifically Chapter 16, Fish and

Wildlife objectives and familiarized himself with the various boards and their responsibilities as legislated under Chapter 16.

The Habitat Steward position was an excellent addition to Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Fish and Wildlife branch and allowed us to more fully address our goals and objectives of monitoring habitat, maintaining harvest records, assessing harvesting pressure within the TT, distributing educational materials on best practices, as well as relaying important conservation messages. This work contributed greatly to the on-going efforts in protection of fish, wildlife and their habitat through maintaining accounts and recording data, as well as communicating to the broader public that TH is committed to ensuring that harvesting rights guaranteed under our Final Agreement are protected through careful observation of environmental conditions and addressing issues as they arise. In order to ensure healthy and sustainable wildlife populations continue to thrive on the landscape, this position will be fine-tuned in the future to allow for more emphasis on harvest monitoring. The TH TT is experiencing increasing harvesting pressures and we feel that this aspect of monitoring is important in its contribution to our departmental goals and objectives.

Communications

This position was responsible for monitoring trends and occurrences related to wildlife and habitat within the TH TT. The information collected was recorded on daily patrol forms and regularly shared with appropriate parties. Chief and Council were informed of various issues that had arisen over the course of the season, as was the Dawson District Renewable Resources Council, Porcupine Caribou Management Board, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and the (Dawson) YG Regional Biologist. All parties were informed of pertinent information through e-mails, phone calls, meetings and/ or workshops. TH citizens were regularly communicated through the distribution of monthly calendar distributions, Këntṛą Tąy (community newsletter) and citizen information meetings. Strategies to collect information included surveys, personal interviews, citizen meetings and on the land observations. Education and conservation messages were mostly conveyed orally at culture camps. The youth are exposed to many learning opportunities provided at these camps, and Fish and Wildlife makes a concerted effort to include talks about best practices and conservation strategies (why they are important and who has spear-headed them).

The Enhancement Trust funding for this position was recognized verbally at all culture camps, as well as community meetings. We have also identified that if we obtain future funding, we could include the 'Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust' logo on appropriate distribution materials, as well as any educational pamphlets that may be created. We apologize for this year's oversight with respect to including the logo on our distribution material, and, if successful in securing future funding from YFWET, we will commit to having your logo included on appropriate distribution materials and venues.

Financial Reporting

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Payroll Administrator has created a spreadsheet to verify our costs associated with the creation of the Fish and Wildlife Habitat Monitoring position. In 2015, we requested funding support from YFWET totaling \$5,625.00 to be used (100%) towards wages. This position became a 4-month term position lasting from end of July to end of November. The spreadsheet outlines the cost of wages for this position and confirms that the funding from YFWET was allocated to wages; these numbers also demonstrate the in-kind support by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and their contribution to wages for this position.

Costs associated with programming, monitoring, training, administrative expenses, etc. have not been captured by this spreadsheet and need to be considered if assessing the actual funding required to employ a position such as Fish and Wildlife Habitat Steward.

We have hopes that this position will be continued in the future as it provides an excellent learning experience for the successful applicant and provides much needed assistance for a busy department.

Again, thank you for your support and from the F&W staff, we are greatly appreciative!



George McLeod, Fish and Wildlife Habitat Steward teaching youth from First Hunt butchering techniques