

Respect for Fish – Generating New Conversations Around Yukon’s Fish and Fisheries

Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust Final Report 2019-2020



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Introduction

Project funding from the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust (YFWET) to develop the new Respect for Fish initiative is providing insights into how the Yukon can understand and support solutions for our current and emerging freshwater fishery conflicts. These conflicts are complex and polarizing and were identified in detail through the 2018-2019 YFWET research “Exploring Perspectives on Catch and Release”.

The YFWET 2019-2020 contribution took the next steps and focussed on the development of public outreach and education tools through the implementation of the Respect for Fish initiative. One partnership with Respect for Fish supported through additional funding was with the Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council (C/TRRC). Please note that while the project is reporting on Respect for Fish activities collectively, the financial transactions between the two projects were kept separate. The majority of YFWET funded activities took place prior to August 30, 2019. Expenditures for YFWET have been detailed within the associated YFWET “Final Report Budget Sheet”.

This YFWET final report will report on all activities related to the Respect for Fish initiative using the final report template as provided by the YFWET.

Goal:

Develop a collaborative catch and release (C & R) related outreach and education campaign that supports different knowledge systems with the intention of articulating and changing angling behaviour around “Respect for Fish”.

Approach:

- Bring together a diverse group of stakeholders and various perspectives on C&R
- Meaningfully engage and discuss their various perspectives
- Explore each other’s perspectives and identify shared values
- Collaborate on a professional, multi-faceted education and outreach campaign in the Southern Lakes.

Problem We are Trying to Solve:

- Conflict around clashing perspectives/world-views related to C&R – results in difficulties collectively co-managing fisheries under self-government agreements
- Slot-size management tool forces the public to release fish which goes against many perspectives – results in conflicts between various user groups
- Excessive C&R and poor handling practices around released fish – results in increased mortality of released fish.

Project Activities:

What activities did you complete?

The *Respect for Fish* initiative, through the services and initiative of Dennis Zimmermann (Associated with the sole proprietorship of Big Fish Little Fish Consultants) conducted the following activities:

Respect for Fish Visual Identity

The logo for *Respect for Fish* was developed by a Whitehorse based graphic designer.



Respect for Fish Website

A website with the URL <https://respectforfish.com/> was developed in order to present the initiative and relevant information. Sections included:

- <https://respectforfish.com/about/>
- <https://respectforfish.com/faq/>
- <https://respectforfish.com/resources/>
- <https://respectforfish.com/contact/>

In terms of partnerships, the following organizations agreed to be supporters and were listed on the website:

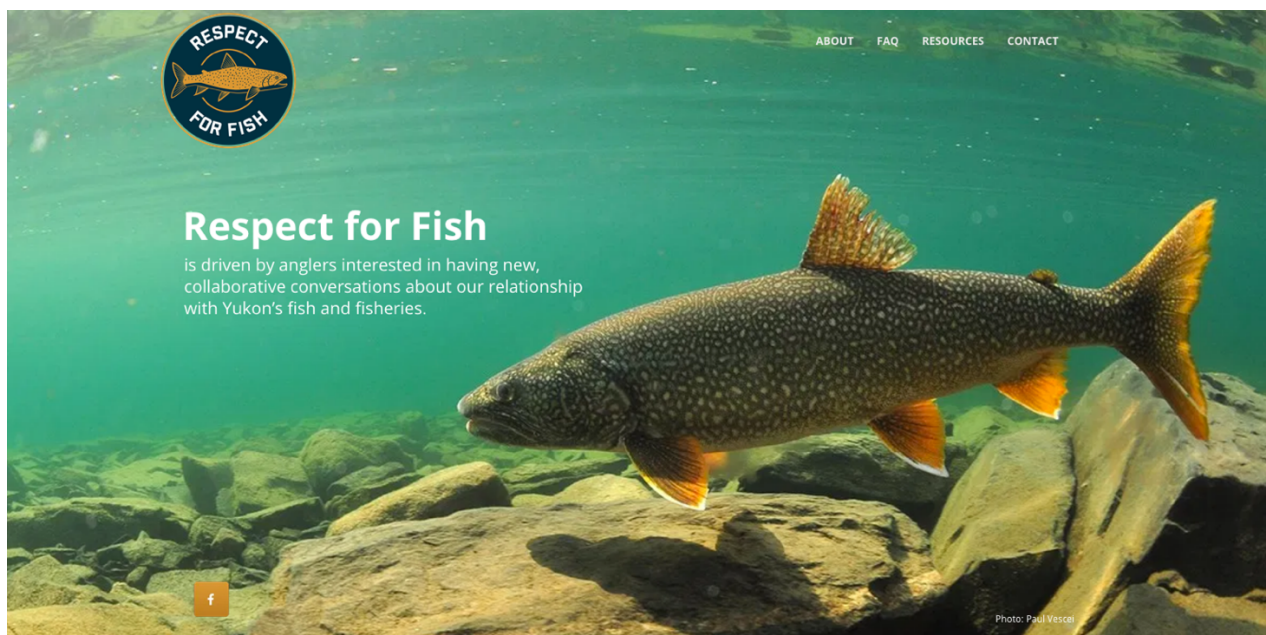
- Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council
- Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust
- Dan Keyi Renewable Resources Council
- Yukon Fish and Game Association
- H2O Troutfitter Guiding and On Top Fly Shop
- Keep Fish Wet
- Environmental Dynamics Inc.
- Big Fish Little Fish Consultants
- International Year of the Salmon

PROJECT SUPPORTERS:



Project Sponsors listed on all PowerPoint presentations. YFWET and C/TRRC acknowledged as a financial supporter.

The website remains active and will continue to be updated including the addition of new partnerships.



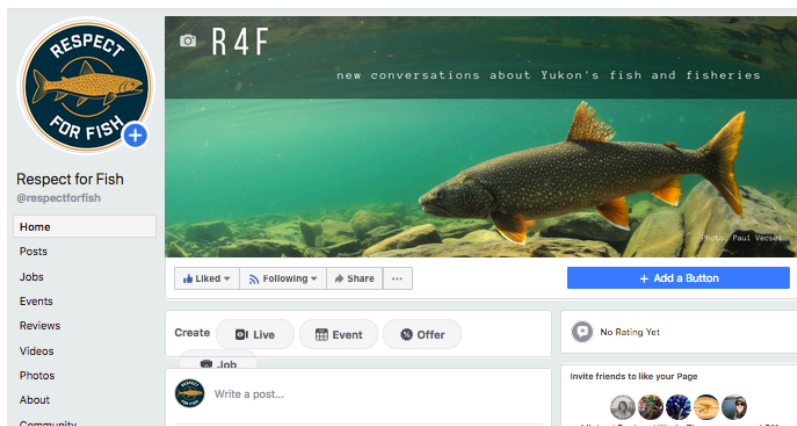
Our Respect for Fish partners:



Picture of the website landing page for www.respectforfish.com

Respect for Fish Facebook Page

As a means of generating conversation within the licensed public angling community the *Respect for Fish* Facebook page was created with periodically updated content. Facebook page URL – <https://www.facebook.com/respectforfish/> with 495 page likes and 503 followers as of February 12, 2020.



Respect for Fish Socio-Ecological System Schematic

To illustrate the holistic nature of fish and fisheries, the interactions between fish, people and the environment, a designed schematic was developed. In this case, the quadrants included: respect for catch, angler segmentation, water and habitat, and relationships and collaboration. These are four critical ingredients required to understand and identify solutions for today's complex fishery issues. The schematic is located in the appendix.

Respect for Fish Online Survey

To gather motivational and value-based information from Yukon anglers as well as begin to identify specific angler segments a "SurveyMonkey" online survey was released. The survey resulted in 337 responses including 300+ responses on "what does respect for fish mean to you" and "what are your biggest concerns around recreational fishing". This information is incredibly rich and valuable and will be used in the future to target outreach and education. The survey was distributed through the website, Facebook page, YFGA, Lions Trade Show, and the Yukon College.

More detailed data analysis including coding was completed by a sub-contractor and resulting in the following top 5 key insights:

1. New Yukoners and those with less fishing experience are more likely to fish from shore or in streams.
2. There is a distinct geographic divide on perceptions of C & R between Whitehorse and rural Yukon. Whitehorse residents practice proportionally more C & R as a conservation tool.
3. Most anglers rate their knowledge and experience on C & R best practices as high.
4. Young Yukoners claim higher release rates, while "born and raised" Yukon claim 0% release rates.

“Trying not to harm fish. Understanding fishing is a source of food for some and the practice has long-standing traditions in First Nations cultures. Also appreciating there is a sport component to fishing where respect of wildlife/environment conservation is very important.”

“Recognizing fish are more than just food and sport for humans. They are prey for many aquatic and terrestrial species and nutrients for the riparian. You don't have to be a fisher to appreciate this ecological value.”

“Only fishing when you intend to kill and eat a fish. Releasing big fish if caught incidentally (to reduce mortality in the primary spawners). Choosing to target numerous species and fishing areas to reduce pressure. Try to consume as many parts of the fish as possible when you eat it (including eggs, liver, heart etc.). Stop fishing when you have enough to eat.

What concerns you most about the future of fishing in the Yukon?

“Lake trout grow slowly and when I see some videos how people handle those fish, I am worried about % of survival those that are ‘catch and release’”

“My biggest concern is fisheries management decision-making based on political and emotional priorities rather than good science”

“As the population grows, relatively static productivity will need to be shared among a larger group of harvesters. Regulations should continue to be updated to ensure sustainable harvest into the future. Lake trout are precious, and not a fill-the-freezer resource. Within the current conversation, I am concerned that world views other than my own (i.e. releasing fish is "bad") will be imposed on me by regulation. I have spent a great deal of time and consideration honing my approach to fishing, and it reflects this care and consideration. Imposing someone else's intent on me will alienate me (and others) from the depth of engagement I feel for my interaction with the natural world through fishing. I am very much in favour of educating on variety of world views re: fishing - anglers are sponges for information - but would be vocally dismayed with regulating intent re: live release”.

“Outfitters who bring clients in from outside the territory, who then catch multiple massive lake trout and proceed to bear hug the fish for a photo shoot.”

Presentations, Meetings and Workshops

Much of the time associated with this project was used to present findings, research and gather perspectives from various stakeholders. The following is a list of organizations and dates of presentations and meetings that took place. For more detailed information on any specific meetings please contact me. A copy of a recent presentation has been provided in the appendix.

Meeting/Presentation/ Workshop	Contact or Organization	Purpose of the Meeting	Date
Workshop	FH Collins Youth Workshop	Youth outreach	04/23/19

Workshop	YFGA Yukon Outdoor Women Program Fishing Course	Adult outreach, training	06/02/19
Meeting	TTC Lands Staff	Awareness, discussion	06/05/19
Workshop	R4F Angling Focus Group	Feedback, testing, discussion	06/11/19
Presentation	YFWMB/YFWET On the Land	Update	06/13/19
Presentation	CANDO Conference	Awareness	06/19/19
Meeting	Bernard Stehelin – WFY - Mandanna Lake	Discussion	06/?/19
Presentation	Alsek RRC	Awareness, discussion	07/18/19
Presentation	KDFN Lands Staff	Awareness, discussion	08/20/19
Presentation	Yukon College – Innovation and Entrepreneurship	Awareness, discussion	09/09/19
Presentation	C/TFN Heritage, Lands and Resources Staff	Awareness, discussion	09/23/19
Workshop	C/TFN Fall Engagement Fair	Outreach to citizen, gather feedback	10/17 & 22/19
Presentation	RRC Annual General Workshop	Awareness, discussion	11/16/19
Presentation	EDI Lunch and Learn	Awareness, discussion	12/05/20
Presentation	C/TRRC Meeting	Update	12/12/19
Meeting	YG Sr. Fisheries Bio C.Sinclair	Planning, update, discussion	12/?/19
Meeting	YG HEED Coordinator J. Welsh	Planning, update, discussion	01/15/20
Meeting	YG Southern Lake Regional Bio – L/ Jessup	Planning, update, discussion	01/17/20
Meeting	YG – Species Manager – R. Perry	Planning, update, discussion	01/23/20

Presentation	YFWMB – Angler Working Group	Planning, update, discussion	02/10/20
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Catch and Release Best Practice E-Learning Platform

Based on feedback from the survey, Angler Focus Group, presentations, meetings, and workshops, the concept of an online course came up repeatedly. As a result, some initial discussions took place with Yukon College Innovation and Entrepreneurship for their advice and support on an e-learning platform. As a result a new spin-off project is being developed and is in progress to develop a made in Yukon curriculum with support from Keep Fish Wet, Appendo Learning Systems and possibly partnerships with select Yukon First Nations.

Respect for Fish Angler Focus Group

Through this project a workshop was delivered to a representative group of 15 licensed recreational anglers. The group included fly fishers, boat fishers, new anglers, experienced anglers, women, Francophone anglers, retailers and commercial guides. The top insights from this group included:

- Public has heard about concerns about C & R, but have not experienced it directly.
- Catch and release is only useful when done correctly – and everyone thinks they do it well – missing link is education.
- Catch and release does not mean you can do it all day – show restraint and it is a finite resource.
- Following regulations are the first and most basic level of respect.
- Anglers need to demonstrate by example – it is about developing conscientious anglers and demonstrating ethics voluntarily.



Picture of the Respect for Fish Angling Working Group meeting in Whitehorse.

- Many people come to the Yukon to step back – but we are moving forward.

- Opportunities: with education campaigns, youth, online licensing, FEED (HEED) courses, more engagement with broader communities.

Most notable was the statement that anglers have heard that some First Nations are against C & R, however, they have never heard about it. This is a disconnect that can be bridged through dialogue, outreach and education. In addition, there was a real interest in education and a fishing course on C & R.

How did your activities contribute to your goals and objectives?

This initiative is iterative and has been developed in response to long term issues that have not been resolved. It is a difficult project that has no defined path forward, as it has never been done before. As a result the 2019-20 *Respect for Fish* has tested a series of outreach and education initiatives in an attempt at establishing a platform and community willing to have new conversations about Yukon's fish and fisheries. The activities mentioned above have all resulted in additional awareness and learning and can be built upon in future years.

It is doubtful that angling behaviour has been changed, as this requires long term initiative and is tied to many other important issues facing Yukon (i.e. land claim implementation, First Nation relations, resources scarcity and competition, and a sense of identity).

These activities were all met with some degree of success and involved many people and organizations. The positive feedback and momentum will ensure this initiative continues to evolve in a forward manner.

Were there any changes to your goals, objectives or work plan and why did they occur?

The initiative progressed largely as anticipated. A few of the major pivot points for the project included:

- Initially the plan was to directly bridge and facilitate conversations with different user groups (i.e. First Nation Citizens and Recreational Fishers). ***This was changed after specific meetings with C/TFN, YFGA and an Angler Working Group. The public was not aware of the conflict with C&R and First Nations perspectives.***
- Based on consistent engagement with various user groups, it is clear that views on C&R are wrapped up in layers of "identity", concerns or lack of understanding around land claims, land claim implementation, food security and sovereignty. ***This means each user group is concerned about "losing" something or needs to protect their position. It is difficult to discuss C&R when there are so many other important "identity" issues wrapped within it.***
- After many discussions with recreational anglers through direct contact, the angler working group, and social media, ***the public does not understand the recreational fishing connections to First Nation governance, and ill-prepared for Chapter 16 implementation.*** There is much work to do with the public directly to prepare them for this conversation.
- The R4F online survey identified some great insight into public perspectives, especially that the public believes they are very knowledgeable about catch and release best practices. ***The public thinks they are very good at catch and release which goes against anecdotal information and angler observations. Rates of release mortality, effects on large fish, social media effects, are not well understood, ignored or disputed.***

How did the results of your work contribute to the protection, enhancement or restoration of fish or their habitat?

This initiative has the potential to have a direct positive impact on fish in terms of raising awareness of the mortality associated with C & R and promoting better handling practices. In addition, discussions about excessive C & R and overall fishing effort have the ability to directly increase the survival of fisheries. There are specific behaviours that have been identified in the Southern Lakes that require some additional angler behaviour change. These were identified as:

1. Lubbock River – Grayling
 - Issues: Excessive C & R, spawning vulnerability, habitat vulnerability, angling pressure on limited population and threats on the angling experience.
2. Tagish River Bridge – Lake Trout
 - Issues: Targeting large lake trout, regulatory incompatibility, physiological stress, Cisco.
3. Little Atlin – Lake Trout, Pike, and Whitefish
 - Issues: Angling pressure (winter/summer,) excessive C & R, heat stress.
4. Teslin Mudline (Spring) – Lake Trout
 - Issues: Angling pressure/vulnerability
5. Snafu/Tarfu Lake – Lake Trout and Pike
 - Issues: Angling pressure, C & R, accessibility.
6. Tagish/Bennet/Marsh Lake – Lake Trout
 - Issues: Targeting large lake trout, downriggers/barotrauma, C & R for social media.
7. Nares River Bridge – Grayling
 - Issues: C & R, angling pressure, garbage/disc. fishing line, respect/ethics concerns.

Through identifying the fishing issues/vulnerabilities and the associated behaviour change required, we are in a better position to be able to address the issues through outreach and education.

If you were to do it again, what would you do differently?

Most likely this project would have engaged licensed anglers earlier and more often. There are few opportunities for anglers to participate in the management process. This type of project, given the fish and wildlife structures within the Final Agreement tends to focus on First Nation interests. There is a need to engage the public more often and more consistently as they are drastically unprepared for land claim implementation and not meaningfully engaged in fish and wildlife management (until there is a controversy or conflict).

We have seen this play out with the Adaptive Moose Management regulation process, which results in issues around “identity”, lack of trust and things perceived as being taken away. One must also engage those that don’t normally participate in these processes. They are the silent majority out there simply fishing and not participating. Better understand angler segmentation is a future goal for this project.

Communications:

What did you do to ensure your results were shared?

The majority of work was shared through the website, Facebook and all of the presentations to various organizations. The project's goal was to be transparent and participatory; meaning that it was all in the public domain. Much of the learning with this project has come from directly sharing results in order to facilitate conversation.

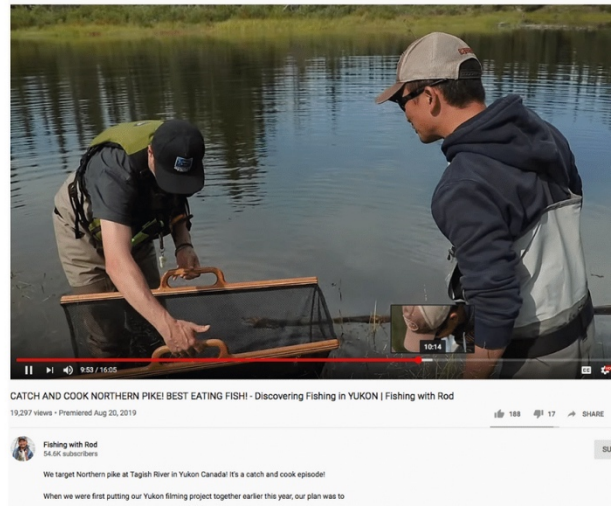
How did you recognize the YFWET?

YFWET was recognized through all presentations by name and logo on the slides.

What communications materials, strategies did you use to promote your project?

In addition to the website, and Facebook page, there were many communications, outreach and education tools used throughout this project. Specifically, the following communications related projects:

- Fly Fishing Film Festival *Respect for Fish* launch and audience presentation - April 23, 2019
- YFGA Booth – Lions Trade Show – May 1-3, 2019
- TRRC R4F Booth – Community BBQ – June 6, 2019
- Hosted a Respect for Fish Movie Night and discussion by screening *Love Flows* and *Rock, Paper, Fish* – June 18, 2019
- Calendar update for YFWET (written and submitted but not used)
- Two Specific R4F Fishing Videos – “Fishing with Rod” Yukon fishing in Tagish:
 - <https://youtu.be/4tsmgzglfsw> - Interview with Dennis Z. re: R4F
 - <https://youtu.be/c0J2rtdZRxU> - “respectful” fishing experience in Tagish
- October Respect For Fish Newsletter -
<https://www.facebook.com/respectforfish/photos/pcb.1445932365555594/1445929285555902/?type=3&theater>
- Secured and licensed four professional fish photographs for two years from Paul Vecsei
- Professional Photography – Pike fishing in the Tagish River from Rodney Hsu
- In order to demonstrate angler stewardship worked with FH Collins Social Justice Club on a R4F Climate Change project to remove discarded fishing line -
https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/whitehorse-fishing-line-students-1.5325334?fbclid=IwAR3XWot5KyngMmUtcCvCkrT9fkPkGK_DsFnCLmnyqneTdcTvJnnq-hGlflI



Sample Communications Initiatives - Top left and right - Paul Vecsei Grayling and Pike, middle - Rodney Hsu Pike, Newsletter, bottom left - Discarded Fishing Line Project, and bottom right - Fishing with Rod Youtube video.

Do you have photos to share?

Photos are available upon request. Paul Vecsei photos are licensed for the project, however, the Rodney Hsu and any Dennis Zimmermann photos can be shared and used by YFWET.

Appendix:

Respect for Fish Schematic



Sample Presentation – Respect for Fish