



## ***Dátsuq kų yù dánāl kwändür***

### ***“Our Grandma’s House, There She Tells Us Story”***

Community Engagement for the Whitehorse Water-Use Relicensing Project - *What We Heard Report*

#### OVERVIEW

The Kwanlin Dün First Nation’s (KDFN) Story Sharing Event for the Whitehorse Water-Use Relicensing Project took place on August 24, 2023 at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre (KDCC). This event was hosted by the KDFN Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and was funded by Yukon Energy Corporation (YEC), over 50 participants attended the event.

The CAC, made up of five Council-appointed KDFN Citizens and Beneficiaries, have been working over the last year to support the development of a Community Values Submission to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board (YESAB) for the relicensing of the Whitehorse and Lewes dams (the dams).

The event titled *Dátsuq kų yù dánāl kwändür “Our Grandma’s House, There She Tells Us Story”* was to support community engagement efforts to gather additional perspectives and community values from KDFN Citizens and Beneficiaries for the project to ensure:

- KDFN interests are represented and prioritized throughout the dam relicensing process;
- The preservation or enhancement of KDFN environmental, cultural and heritage values in the Southern Lakes region, as well as the health and well-being of the KDFN community;
- Acknowledge historical and ongoing impacts of dams, and potentially seek compensatory or reconciliatory actions for those impacts.

KDFN’s involvement in the project is guided by the following principles: caring for the land, respect, collaboration, considering future generations, community involvement, collaboration, and a strategic approach. KDFN also appreciates and welcomes the collaboration and participation from Ta’an Kwächän Council (TKC) and Carcross/Tagish First Nation (C/TFN) on this important initiative.

Four central themes emerged in advance of this event and were articulated through input from the CAC and quotes from Citizens and Beneficiaries. Short descriptions and illustrations are included below to provide some insight into the values, priorities and perspectives that have been shared thus far:

### 1. “We are River People” – Rosie Charlie

KDFN’s historical connection to activities such as fishing, hunting, trapping, and foraging, as well as the significance of salmon, are intertwined with the present-day relationship to the waterfront and surrounding area. The river is what sustained us and is the reason why we’re in this area in the first place.



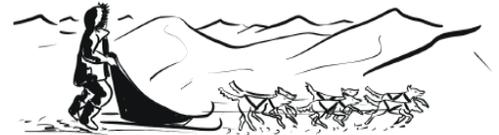
### 2. “Water is a Big Spirit” – Nakhela (Hazel) Bunbury / Cory Holoway

Acknowledging the cumulative impacts over time, the influences of climate change, and the many stressors on salmon, fish, animals and their habitat, the importance of ceremony and water as a sentient being come to light.



### 3. “Break Trail” – Charlie Burns

The Final and Self-Government Agreements took hard work and a long time to negotiate and set up our Governments. We are now in a position to set our own laws, our course for self-determination, and work to fix among other things, the broken salmon trail.



### 4. “Bring Back Voice / Power to Our people” – Larry Smarch

KDFN want to be partners and collaborators not only held with equal value, but acknowledged for the power, leadership and expertise we can provide. Despite the impacts and past wrongs, there are obligations, reconciliatory actions, and opportunities that our Government, partners and people would like to realize through this experience.



## AGENDA AND APPROACH

The agenda for the evening event (4:30-8:00 PM) included a welcome and opening prayer, a community dinner and opening remarks, a series of engagement stations, screening of a short salmon film, an Elder panel discussion, open floor for participant comments and questions, and concluded with door prize draws. The format of the event was hybrid and included in-person and virtual participation options. A wall tent was set up outside the KDCC’s multipurpose room for participants to share feedback. KDFN clinical and cultural supports were onsite for participants for the duration of the event.

A graphic illustrator visually represented values and perspectives shared throughout the evening in the following diagrams:



### Welcoming Remarks and Opening Prayer:

**KDFN Staff Emily McDougall**, HLR Sustainability Planner and WRGS Project Manager welcomed participants. Emily reinforced that this meeting was meant to be like Grandma's House - a comfortable space for people to feel safe, welcome, have tea, and join the community conversations. Emily provided a high-level overview of the project and introduced the KDFN CAC members: Carissa Waugh, Rick Gingell, Mikah Fox, Rae Mombourquette and Larry Smarch.

**KDFN Elder Margaret Mackay**, welcomed everyone and provided an opening prayer.

**KDFN Chief Sean Smith**, provided opening remarks and set the stage for the evening. Chief Smith spoke to the lived experience in the room and the fact that the waterways were a part of their way of life and central to their identity and relations. Chief Smith elaborated on the partnerships that the Southern Lakes First Nations have with YEC and Yukon Government (YG). These relationships highlight the significance of preserving traditional knowledge and environmental

stewardship within the community. It underscores the importance of nurturing relationships with entities like YEC and YG to further these goals. Chief Smith expressed gratitude for the collaborative efforts, highlighting how these initiatives align with the vision of past leaders and Elders who valued cultural preservation, environmental care, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Chief Smith also spoke to the spiritual connection to the land and water, emphasizing the importance of the negotiated land claims by past leaders and Elders. Chief Smith noted that central to this is the goal of increasing salmon populations and wildlife in the respective traditional territories. The teachings of the Elders are a means to achieve this with traditional knowledge and scientific findings working hand in hand. With this in mind, and with permission granted from the Smith Family, Chief Sean Smith wanted to share a special drum song created in 1994 by Chief Johnny Smith called “*Back to the River*”.

After dinner, participants watched the film: *Gēs Tū’è, King Salmon River, T’ahîni* which was produced by Allen Code (Nah Ho Productions) from an Elders Gathering in 2002 and 2003. The video included the voices of Elders, many who are no longer with us, who brought forward the importance of the Michie / M’Clintock area to salmon spawning and First Nations people. In the film, Elders recounted the significance of the area as a place to gather and fish. The negative impacts of the dam to salmon and traditional waterways were also shared by Elders.



Left to Right: Chief Smith Welcoming and Back to the River Song, KDFN Participants and Draw Prizes.



Left to Right: Video and Elder Panel.

## Feedback from Engagement Stations:

Participants were encouraged to visit each of the four engagement stations and provided their comments on written cards. The following is an aggregation of the themes related to their comments.

### 1. “We are River People” – Rosie Charlie



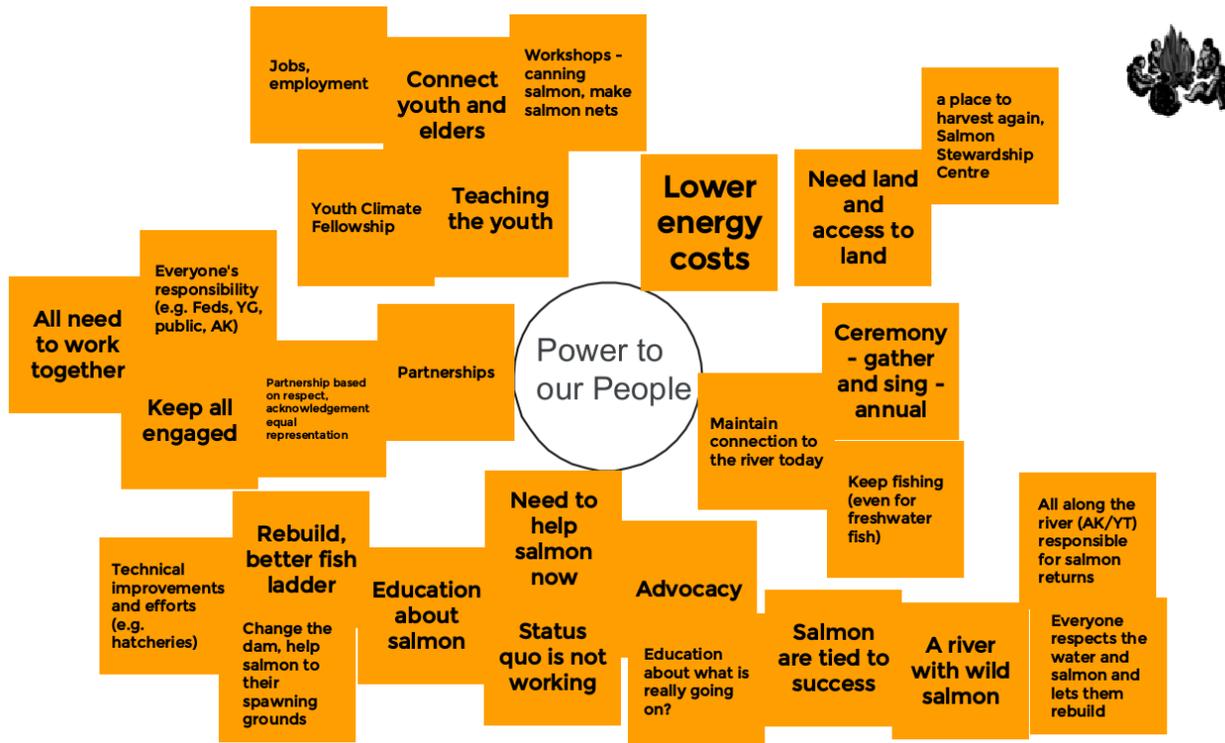
### 2. “Water is a Big Spirit” – Nakhela (Hazel) Bunbury / Cory Holoway



### 3. "Break Trail" – Charlie Burns



### 4. "Bring Back Voice / Power to Our people" – Larry Smarch



## Elder Panel Discussion

Rae Mombourquette, a Tlingit Citizen of KDFN with Northern Tutchone and Tagish Kwan heritage, moderated a panel of esteemed KDFN Elders. Rae serves as the Yukon representative for the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, is part of the KDFN CAC, and has dedicated 15 years to preserving the wisdom of Kwanlin Dün Elders.

*The Panel featured:*

**KDFN Elder Pat Joe**, a Tagish Citizen of KDFN and Dak'laweidí clan. Pat, a former Deputy Chief and chief land claims negotiator for KDFN, is a dedicated advocate for her culture and values. Recognized for her expertise in First Nation curriculum, traditional law governance, and social justice, making her a powerhouse of knowledge in the post-colonial and developmental context. She was honored with the 2021 Canadian Teachers Federation Award for Leadership.

**KDFN Elder Dr. Norma Shorty**, a Tlingit Citizen of KDFN with Northern Tutchone and Tagish Kwan heritage. Norma preserves traditional practices like fish cutting and smoking, while also researching grease trail stories for her classroom teachings. Holding a PhD in Indigenous Studies, she instructs in the Yukon Native teacher education program at Yukon University, collaborates with various institutions, and serves as a cultural expert in international sustainable working groups. Norma's work encompasses guest lecturing, sustainable Indigenous knowledge in the circumpolar north, and published articles, with plans for more in the future.

**KDFN Elder Joan Viksten**, a Tagish and Tlingit Citizen of KDFN, Joan possesses a diverse background in First Nation justice, housing, heritage, lands, and resources. With a stream keepers' certificate from the Pacific Stream Keepers Federation, she conducted critical research on salmon in partnership with Kwanlin Dün and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, particularly focusing on the Michie / M'Clintock Chinook spawning grounds. Joan's ancestral connections extend to Marsh Lake. Joan is a proud Mother and Grandmother who passionately engages in conversations about fish, family, and Marsh Lake.

As the moderator, Rae asked a series of questions to each of the participants. The following are short excerpts or bulleted lists of their individual responses.

**Question for All Panelists:** *Can you each of you please briefly share a childhood memory of life on the Yukon River?*

**Joan Viksten** - In grade seven, I fondly recall a beautiful day after a long Yukon winter when my friends and I hiked down the railway tracks to Miles Canyon, enjoying the crocuses and the swinging bridge. Years later, with my firstborn barely a year old, we had a memorable boat encounter near the same spot as the M.V. Schwatka approached, and despite the close call, I can't even recall if we were wearing life jackets.

**Dr. Norma Shorty** - My Grandfather, Jim Shorty, had Dak'laweidí connections to Tagish Khwáan through his Mother, who was the sister of Tagish John. My earliest memory of the Yukon River is at my Grandpa's camp on the other side of the blue bridge, where I recall him walking to Whitehorse along the river's path.

**Pat Joe** - I was born on ancestral territory at a place known as Rat Camp, between the mouth of the Yukon River and the Lewes River Bridge. My Grandparents who raised me, shared stories of our culture and the importance of the land and water. We must decolonize the Yukon River by reviving our ancient stories, beliefs, and values to protect our environment and heritage.

**Question for Pat:** *I once had a conversation with Former Kwanlin Dün Chief Rick O'Brien, who conveyed to me the fight it was to negotiate the waterfront parcel of land that we are on today, here at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre, can you describe for me the importance of this land claim and the importance of the Tàgä Shrō or "Big River" or Yukon River in Kwanlin Dün society today?*

**Pat Joe:**

- Provided 10,000 years of First Nations history
- During negotiations, secured 50 square miles within the city limits to reclaim land
- Expanded land claims to Chadburn Lake, Marsh Lake, and more
- Despite being forced off land, the KDFN community remains strong and is returning
- Encouraged younger generations to reconnect with the river
- Highlighted the value of sharing and the potlatch house for our enjoyment

**Question for Joan:** *I have heard you speak passionately about your role in the past working with Yukon Energy and specifically about your work researching mitigation measures for salmon smolts going through the dam. Can you describe for me the research you did, and how it has shaped your personal view of salmon management? What became of the work you did?*

**Joan Viksten:**

- Project began in 1998, assessing salmon smolt migration on M'Clintock River
- Private contractor secured funding for the project from the Yukon River Panel
- Research aimed to determine the timing and duration of smolt migration from Upper Yukon spawning grounds and assess the impact of turbines at the dam
- Data collected during the summer was inconclusive regarding the smolts' migration patterns
- Ongoing efforts by fisheries staff and stakeholders to determine if a specific migration time can be identified and mitigated
- Highlighted the uniqueness of the Yukon River salmon run, which is longer than most and features overwintering smolts
- Noted the presence of hatchery-raised smolts, potentially complicating the assessment of wild salmon stocks
- Emphasized the multitude of challenges facing Yukon River salmon and the importance of understanding these issues.

**Question for Dr. Norma Shorty:** *In your doctoral theses 'Inland Tlingit of Teslin, Yukon: Gaanax.adi and Kookhittan clan origin stories for the immediate and clan family of Emma Joanne Shorty (nee Sidney)', you document stories and story-gathering processes, can you explain the*

*importance of place-based knowledge and the importance of making space for Tlingit stories, and ways of being and doing within Western constructs?*

**Dr. Norma Shorty:**

- Indigenous identity is linked to land and water, often overlooked in curriculum
- Stories essential for preserving heritage, ensuring children aren't strangers on their lands
- Indigenous stories seen as history, not myth or legend
- Challenges of aligning Indigenous and Western constructs, including different timekeeping and worldviews
- Call for equal time and resources for Indigenous knowledge growth and language revitalization
- Value of stories tied to identity, land, and place
- Yukon history extends beyond the Gold Rush, with ancient stories about creation and prehistoric times
- Various oral traditions connect Yukon First Nations to land before the land bridge theory
- Indigenous stories have historical and cultural significance, offering insights into the past
- Emphasized the importance of teaching children about the length of Indigenous presence on the land and their rights.

**Question for Pat:** *In your acceptance speech for the 2021 Canadian Teachers' Federation Award for Leadership, you credited the knowledge of your Grandparents, John and Julia Joe, who raised you in the Marsh Lake area until you went to Residential School in Whitehorse. Can you tell me about those early informative years and how this has shaped your understanding of the importance of Marsh Lake?*

**Pat Joe:**

- Descendant of Marsh Lake Chief Gunaatak' with ancestral ties to the area
- Mentioned the presence of longhouses at Marsh Lake where the bible camp is now
- Chief John Smith and Margaret McKay played a role in choosing the area
- Only one of the siblings who stayed in Marsh Lake, the others went to residential school
- Grew up with a strong knowledge of oral history and tradition
- Expressing gratitude for Grandparents and their cultural teachings.

**Question for Joan:** *In 2002 and 2003, you participated in the Mitchie M'Clintock Gathering at Marsh Lake where citizens of Carcross/Tagish, Ta'an and Kwanlin Dün met to discuss the importance of that watershed for salmon, can you describe to me the importance of Marsh Lake in your family, and why it's important to have those three Nations represented in that area?*

**Joan Viksten:**

- Brother Joe Suits voice heard in the video, he worked for YEC
- Created an interpretive panel about salmon in the hatchery
- Family's traditional land by M'Clintock River bridge, Sister staked a claim there
- Remnants of a cabin where Mother raised five kids

- Story of Sister's birth in a wall tent outside the cabin
- Personal connection and fondness for the area
- Significant Elders gathering in the video with Lucy Wren, Clara Schinkel, Kitty Smith, and others
- Importance of remembering stories on the land for a connection to our roots
- The desire to pass down this knowledge to her children and grandchildren.

**Question for Dr. Norma Shorty:** *In 2019, the Arctic Council published a report called 'Meaningful Engagement of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in Marine Activities', you talk about facilitating and researching alongside 30 Tlingit Elders to articulate Tlingit Knowledge on Tlingit history, literacy, stories, language ceremonies, thinking, medicines, foods and values. You wrote: "Elders together see themselves as teachers and agree that Tlingit subject matter needs to be taught by Tlingit people". Can you break it down for us, how can oral history be applied in how we approach water?*

**Dr. Norma Shorty:**

- Emphasis on the importance of Indigenous methodology in teaching and learning
- Recognized the power and need to sustain Indigenous language and knowledge
- Acknowledged the worldview difference between Indigenous and Western perspectives
- Mentioned the co-production of Indigenous knowledge and the involvement of Indigenous peoples in the process
- Discussed the importance of collectivity in Indigenous constructs
- Mentioned greater fluidity and migration in Indigenous communities before land claims
- Shared personal efforts to incorporate Indigenous methodologies in teaching and work, including developing day culture camps
- Emphasized the importance of applying Indigenous constructs to all aspects of life.

**Question for Pat:** *You have worked closely with the story of the Girl and the Bear, can you share with us how elements of that oral history can be applied in how we approach water use, respect for the river and preserving our salmon?*

**Pat Joe:**

- Importance of Indigenous stories and oral history, teachings for survival
- Story of "The Girl Who Married the Bear" and the time of common language
- Ability for transformation between animals and people for communication and understanding
- Mentioned the symbolism of clans and the traditional laws associated with them
- The requirement for opposite-clan marriage, and the consequences of breaking this law
- The potential future scarcity of water
- Emphasized the importance of respect for all things and the consequences for disrespect, including bad luck and negative impacts on animals, land, and water

**Question for Dr. Norma Shorty:** *You and I have had many kitchen-table talks on the word 'Reconciliation', in your own words can you define reconciliation and strategies towards reconciliatory action when it comes to the Yukon River, Salmon and our communities?*

**Dr. Norma Shorty:**

- Reconciliation is a top priority, influenced by Mother's experience in mission school
- Reconciliation involves reconciling the Western and Indigenous aspects of identity
- Reconciliation is about acknowledging the long history of Yukon First Nations
- The Government, fish ladder, and written history need to reconcile with Indigenous peoples
- Reconciliation includes teaching the next generation and empowering them to lead
- Mentioned the importance of art in Indigenous culture
- Reference to "Together Today for our Children Tomorrow"
- Acknowledged the strength and adaptability of their family.

**Question for All Panelists:** *In closing, can each of you briefly summarize your hopes for the Tàgä Shrō / Yukon River, our waters, our salmon and our people?*

**Pat Joe:**

- Emphasis on understanding the meanings and teachings of oral stories
- The loss of meaning in translation to English and the impact of Christianity
- Importance of oral stories in conveying traditional laws, beliefs, values, identity, teachings and respect
- Importance of helping young people understand their Indigenous identity, relatives and clan affiliations
- The ease of teaching oral stories compared to other aspects
- The last 100 years have seen many changes and disruptions including changes to the water, flooding, construction and impacts from dams, salmon decline, climate change, forest fires
- Concerns about the environmental impacts of resource extraction including issues from fracking, commercial overfishing and logging
- The responsibility of the younger generation to address these challenges, they have been left with a mess.

**Joan Viksten:**

- Mention of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC) 93 calls to action
- Personal connection to the residential school experience through her Mother
- Brief mention of poor conditions in residential schools and the revelation of stories by survivors
- Anger and its impact on the life of First Nations peoples
- Importance of salmon as available food source for wildlife and providing nutrients for forests and ecosystems.

Rae Mombourquette closed the panel session by recalling a memory from her youth, describing a moment at fish camp with her late Grandfather Norman Shorty Sr. and Great Auntie Gertie Tom. At 16 years old, she was entrusted with preparing salmon but by mistake of not preparing it properly, it went bad leading to the fish having to be fed to the dog. This was the only salmon she was able to cut and she has not cut one since. This experience left a lasting impact, and Rae hopes to bring back the voice of KDFN people through the dam relicensing process as they reflect on their past and future aspirations for salmon and reconciliation. Rae shared a powerful sentiment that she wants her daughter to have salmon as part of her DNA.

### Final Questions and Comments from Participants

The floor was opened and participants were encouraged to ask questions and share their perspectives and feedback from the evening. Some of the general comments are shared below:

- Require more Indigenous stories about how the world and salmon were created, including how Crow dropped salmon berries into the water.
- Importance of knowing First Nations stories, unfortunately Government and other organizations don't consider these stories as our truth. We respect their science but they don't respect our stories. There are not many First Nations Elders left so it's important for YEC to hear this.
- Chief Sean Smith spoke to reconciliation and shared a story from his Great Grandmother Kitty Smith. He was 10 years old below Hootalinqua and fished with his Grandparents in a nice big eddy. He would help swat the wasps away as his Grandma cut 50-60 Chinook salmon. He had memories of the fish cache, packing fish up the hill and hauling rocks to weight down the net. Without salmon we are missing these opportunities, so how can we create that important connection again? Appreciate that traditional knowledge is now part of the Yukon River Panel.
- "We need to eat salmon; it is in our blood". We crave salmon head; we don't waste any part of the animal. Spoke about salmon ear bones and how Grandmothers used to hang them on babies' ears so they became good listeners. First Nations have always shared salmon and are taught not to be stingy with it. Salmon integral to First Nations culture and way of life.
- As an Elder we fished at Marsh Lake, Carcross and Teslin. We spent time together, had many laughs, and taught each other how we cut fish. We were always welcome at fish camp and had meals together at a great giant table with cake from Grandma (ingredient she cooked with was love).
- KDFN staff spoke about the Southern Lakes Salmon Plan being completed as a plan for Southern Lakes First Nations to work together.

**KDFN Elder Margaret Mackay** thanked all for participating and provided a closing prayer.