



# — CELEBRATING THE LAKES —

## SHARING BACK REPORT



**LIVING LAKES CANADA**

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Łú'àn Män (Kluane Lake), YT





## ▶▶ SHARING GRATITUDE

Celebrating The Lakes took place on the traditional territories of the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and the Kwanlin Dün First Nation. We also acknowledge that the lakes we celebrated during the gathering are on the traditional territories of Yukon First Nations and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups. We recognize the role and responsibility that Indigenous Peoples have to their traditional territories and commit to supporting Indigenous Peoples in water stewardship.

We also want to express appreciation to everyone who made this event possible. Your time, energy, and willingness to share your stories and perspectives played a pivotal role in making Celebrating The Lakes a truly special event. Gunalchéesh, Shàw níthän, thank you.

### **LIST OF THANK YOUS:**

*All attendees and panelists*

*Ann Smith, Betsy Jackson, and Colleen James, Water Ceremony*

*Coralee Johns, Yukon First Nations Advisor, 7Generations Consulting*

*David Wood & Tosh Southwick, Inspire.Reconciliation.Potential IRP*

*Doronn Fox, Fire Keeper*

*Ella Parker & Aaron Barker, Government of Yukon*

*Information Booths - Government of Yukon, CPAWS Yukon, Yukon University*

*Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre*

*Wandering Bison and Baked Cafe & Bakery, Catering*





## ▶ BACKSTORY

The Yukon Lakes Monitoring Initiative was initiated by the Government of Yukon's Water Resources Branch in October 2022, and led by Living Lakes Canada in close collaboration with staff from the Water Resources Branch. Together, with the project's contributors and participants, we explored the current and historic lake monitoring efforts, concerns, and priorities of Yukon rights holders and stakeholders. The participants' perspectives and our subsequent recommendations towards a coordinated lake monitoring effort in the Yukon are presented in the [Yukon Lakes Monitoring Overview Project Report](#).

Out of this report came the specific recommendation to: "Celebrate the beauty, the role, and the presence of Yukon lakes as well as the people who care deeply for these lakes". This led to Celebrating The Lakes, which was a time, space, and place to celebrate Yukon lakes, build and strengthen relationships, and continue the conversation around lake monitoring in the territory.

This 'Sharing Back' Report is a summary of what was shared at the Celebrating The Lakes gathering, which took place in December 2023 in Whitehorse at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre over two days. This report also summarizes where project participants would like the Yukon Lakes Monitoring Initiative to go following the gathering.

Celebrating The Lakes participants, Whitehorse, December 2023.





## ▶ A CELEBRATION ROOTED IN CEREMONY

Lakes in the Yukon have been cared for and celebrated for thousands of years by Yukon First Nations and transboundary Indigenous Peoples. It was important for this gathering to recognize their role in lake health by making the space for both Indigenous and Western ways of celebration. One way Indigenous culture was woven into the gathering was through rooting the celebration in Indigenous ceremony.

### OPENING WATER CEREMONY

To begin, attendees gathered around the sacred fire with Fire Keeper Doronn Fox alongside the Yukon River at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre. Elders Ann Smith (Kwanlin Dün First Nation), Betsy Jackson (Ta'an Kwäch'än Council), and Colleen James (Carcross/Tagish First Nation) led the Opening Water Ceremony.

The Opening Water Ceremony brought attendees together from across the Yukon, B.C., and Alberta. The Water Ceremony made space for all to share their diverse backgrounds and their personal understanding of the importance of water through the act of adding their local lake water to a collective jar. This jar, full of water from Tagish Lake, Okanagan Lake (k'úsxñítk™), Fish Lake (Łu Zil Män) and many more, was placed inside the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre next to a lit candle embodying the sacred fire outside, so the water could absorb the following 1.5 days of discussions.



Art depicting the Wolf and Crow clans at the ceremony area of the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre.



**“WATER IS LIFE, AND WATER HAS A SPIRIT. TO HAVE THE COLLECTIVE JAR CENTRAL IN OUR GATHERING AND TO PROMOTE HEALING FOR ALL, THAT OUR HEARTS, WORDS AND ACTIONS WENT INTO THE WATER SPIRIT OVER THE COURSE OF THE DAY AND A HALF AND NOW FLOWS THROUGH OUR LANDSCAPES ACROSS COUNTRIES INTO THE BERING SEA, IS SPREADING THE HEALING.”** - Coralee Johns, Ta’an Kwäch’än Council Citizen, 7GENERATIONS Consulting: Yukon First Nations Advisor



Participants gather around the sacred fire pit at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre.



The collective water with the candle connecting discussions inside the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre to the sacred fire outside.

## CLOSING CEREMONY

To close, the water in the collective jar was ceremoniously released into the current of the Yukon River, to spread the gathering’s rich dialogue across the Yukon and Alaska. The Closing Ceremony was filled with messages of gratitude for one another, for the water, and for being a part of the celebration. As the sacred fire burned out, people left with a renewed sense of hope for the future of lakes in the Yukon, and a desire to take the next steps towards their protection.

[▶ WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

These sacred ceremonies helped set the tone for respectful and meaningful celebration and discussions.



## ▶ HIGHLIGHTING YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON WATER STEWARDSHIP

- » The voices of youth, as the next generation of land and water stewards, are not only important, but integral to conversations around land and water stewardship.
- » Youth shared feelings of worry and desperation at seeing the health of their lakes diminish.
- » Developing water stewardship skills at a young age allows youth to connect to the land, foster hope, and build autonomy for their future through actions to protect lake health.
- » It is vital for youth to keep learning and doing, since the work they do in the future has the potential to return the health of the water, and with it, ways of life.

Łu Zil Män (Fish Lake), YT

**“OUR ELDERS TALK ABOUT HOW THEY COULD FIND FISH AND GO SWIMMING IN OUR LAKES, BUT NOW WE COULDN’T DO THAT. NOWADAYS THERE’S NOT AS MANY FISH AND OUR WATER IS BROWN.”** - Wynter Flett, Peavine Metis Settlement

### PANELISTS:

**Wynter Flett**, Peavine Metis Settlement

**Sarah Sinclair**, Peavine Metis Settlement

**Maddy Mead** (he/they), Yukon Youth Conservation Corps Blue Crew

Moderator: **Ragn Royle** (he/him), Yukon Youth Conservation Corps Blue Crew



Left to right: Sarah Sinclair, Maddy Mead and Wynter Flett sit on the youth panel moderated by fellow youth Ragn Royle.



## ▶ CURRENT LAKE MONITORING EFFORTS

- » There are many great lake monitoring initiatives happening across the Yukon territory, but they are disconnected.
- » The importance of collaboration and community involvement in lake monitoring programs from start to finish, to meet community needs and priorities, cannot be understated.
- » Challenges to lake monitoring in the Yukon include: long-term funding, capacity issues, lack of awareness of what work others are doing, data access, and applying multiple knowledge systems.
- » Temperature is a simple and cost effective variable to measure changes in Yukon lakes over time. Monitoring changes, such as temperature, will be critical to understanding impacts from climate change.
- » Working across diverse ways of knowing, doing, and being, presents an opportunity for further community connection in future lake monitoring efforts.

**“RESOURCES ARE THE CHALLENGE, COLLABORATION IS THE SOLUTION.”**

- Petra Szekeres, EDI Environmental Dynamics Inc.



### PANELISTS:

**Ellorie McKnight**, PhD - Representing Lhù'ààn Mân (Kluane Lake) Monitoring Program (with Kluane First Nation and Dan Keyi Renewable Resources Council) and Yukon University

**Edda Mutter**, Indigenous Observation Network, Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council

**Petra Szekeres**, EDI Environmental Dynamics Inc.



# ▶ THE ROLE OF RELATIONSHIPS IN WATER, LAND AND RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

- » There is often too much talk from federal and provincial/territorial governments without any real change.
- » The first step towards change is working to understand one another by making the space to listen and to be heard. This presents an opportunity to shift the way we work together as people, not just as organizations.
- » Dedicating time to sharing experiences and interacting in person to build and strengthen relationships is important.
- » There is no blueprint for relationship building and it will look different in every context; it is not repeatable, but it is shareable.

**“WE (INDIGENOUS PEOPLES) ARE NOT DATA DEFICIENT.  
WE HAVE A LONG, LONG HISTORY OF KNOWLEDGE.”**

- Brian Holmes of the Upper Nicola Band and B.C. Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

## PANELISTS:

**Brian Holmes**, Executive Director Indigenous Leadership  
- BC Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship and Upper Nicola Band

**Heather I. Wiebe**, Area Executive Director, South Area - BC Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

**Tracy Thomas**, Land and Resource Management Specialist - BC Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship





## ▶ ALIGNING ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING WITH DIVERSE KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

- » Current systems that are in place are not working and so something must change in the face of increasing pressures on Yukon waters. The way forward involves making space for Indigenous Knowledge alongside Western science in all work.
- » This can be difficult in colonial systems built around Western science that do not always recognize Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being.
- » Start from a foundation of respect, care, and shared values.
- » Spending time on the land and building relationships with land users is vital to understanding one another.
- » It is important to consider meaningful community engagement that is guided by community wisdom, effective communication of project information, and respecting community codes of ethics.

**“TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE IS OFTEN SHARED DOWN THROUGH OUR STORIES. BECAUSE IT ISN'T WRITTEN DOWN, IT'S NOT ACCEPTED (BY WESTERN SOCIETY). WE NEED TO WORK ACROSS DIVERSE WAYS OF KNOWING AND BEING.”**

- Coralee Johns, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council Citizen, 7GENERATIONS Consulting: Traditional Knowledge Advisor



### PANELISTS:

**Ms. Coralee Johns**, 7GENERATIONS Consulting: Traditional Knowledge Advisor - Citizen of Ta'an Kwäch'än Council

**Colleen James**, How We Walk With the Land and Water, Elder - Carcross/Tagish First Nation

**Tanya Ball**, Dane Nan Yé Däh Kaska Land Guardian Coordinator - Dena Kayeh Institute

**Betsy Jackson**, Elder - Ta'an Kwäch'än Council



# ▶ BREAKOUT GROUP DISCUSSIONS: YUKON NEEDS AND NEXT STEPS

## 1 COLLABORATIVE LAKE MONITORING

- » There is a need for standardized lake monitoring protocols and methods that can help different communities collect viable, transferable, communicable, and comparable data.
- » Data accessibility needs to be improved. A database, community webpage, or regular newsletter focused on Yukon Lakes and one that is managed regularly and consistently should be pursued.
  - This webpage should include (when appropriate) datasets, lake descriptions, contact information, and hyperlinks to relevant reports, to bridge the gap between individual monitoring projects and/or initiatives.
- » A part-time or full-time coordinator should be hired who can help build this page, monitor the page, facilitate quarterly meetings, and share information between different parties.
  - It will be critical to integrate and consolidate existing Yukon lake data and information currently found on online networks such as the Local Environmental Observer or the Northwest Boreal Partnership.
  - This consolidated effort also applies to lake data and observation apps such as iNaturalist, EOLake Watch, and eye on water.

## 2 GROUNDING WORK IN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

- » There is a need to ground lake monitoring efforts, now and into the future, in Indigenous Knowledge.
- » The unique nature of Indigenous Knowledge should not be diluted in this process; we would never compare two different rivers and suggest they are the same. The differences in Indigenous Knowledge provided by one Nation to the next should be recognized.
- » Relationship building through ceremony should be prioritized regularly. An annual or biennial event that supports ceremony, trust building, and relationship building would greatly benefit the monitoring needs and initiatives in the Yukon.
  - Reservations that some may have about Indigenous Knowledge should be shared; starting with the values and ethics is the best way forward.
- » Indigenous Knowledge is living knowledge. It evolves just as culture evolves.



### 3 DATA GOVERNANCE AND DATA SHARING

- » A significant challenge in the Yukon revolves around data governance and data sharing. Who owns the data? Who is responsible for storing and stewarding the data? How is data managed respectfully when multiple parties are collecting data on traditional territories?
  - Prioritizing Memorandums of Understanding and/or data-sharing agreements can open lines of communication and improve data sovereignty.
  - It is essential that these documents are created collaboratively through mutual respect and shared intent.
- » The way data is used and/or interpreted changes depending on who is using it (industry, government, First Nations, youth).
  - Reconcile these differences, meet in the middle, and support the use of hybridized language in data sharing.
  - All parties are equally affected by how data is used and generated. The size of these parties should not determine authority over data.
- » A Yukon Lake Data Portal should be developed and maintained as a user-friendly database accessible by all:
  - Make data more accessible to people in a variety of formats (graphics, maps, one-page documents);
  - Prioritize open source, community access.

### 4 INVASIVE SPECIES: EDUCATION AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

- » Educational campaigns focused on prevention are needed in the Yukon:
  - Prevention is more effective and more affordable than management;
  - Terrestrial and aquatic invasive species should be recognized and discussed.
- » These campaigns should meet people where they are at, and should frame challenges around specific values.
  - For example, educating industry should come from an economic standpoint (costs to infrastructure if certain invasives are introduced).
  - Those concerned with salmon conservation should receive invasive education framed around the impacts endured by salmon species.
- » Popular educational campaigns in B.C. should be used as inspiration (Clean, Drain, Dry and Don't Move a Mussel).
- » Participants conveyed a very strong protection ethic and there was consensus that an invasive campaign stemming from this ethic would be very effective.



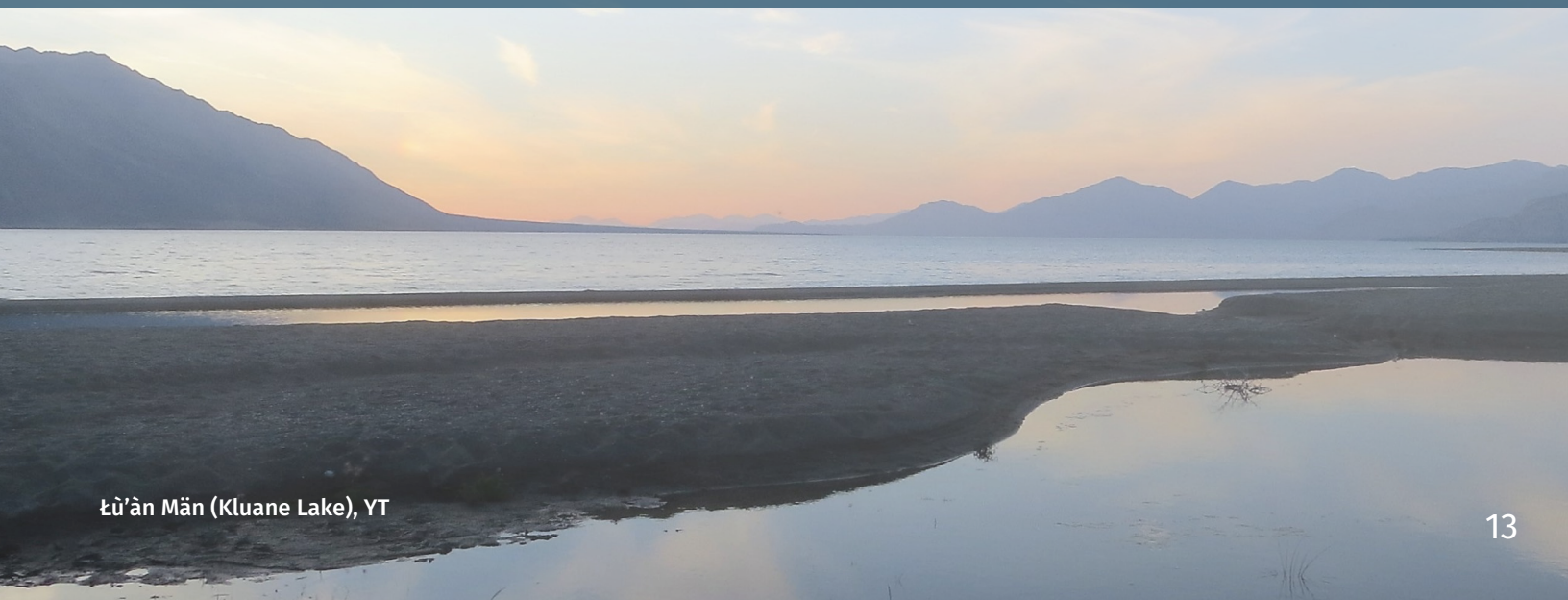
## 5 YOUTH IN ACTION THROUGH CLIMATE GRIEF

- » Youth should have the time and space to support their needs in dealing with climate impacts on mental health.
  - Schools, clubs, teams, and youth groups should be encouraged to take pause from responsibilities and should be provided with opportunities to ground and surround themselves in nature.
- » Youth voices are promised to be upheld yet consistently are not.
  - Youth have spoken (see the 2021 Yukon Youth Panel on Climate Change Recommendations [here](#) and the Yukon First Nations Climate Action Fellowship Reconnection Vision [here](#)).
  - Youth may be included, but they are not empowered.
- » Youth need a variety of options to speak and be heard. Safe spaces need to be cultivated so youth can deliver their thoughts in the format they are most comfortable with.
  - A Yukon Lakes webpage or database should include platforms for youth to communicate their thoughts, feelings, or concerns through a variety of mediums (art, poetry, film, written word, etc.) and in every aspect of climate action and governance.

### **'END THE PARTY' ANALOGY**

*"Youth, NGOs, and other non-government individuals are often looked at by the government as whistleblowers or the nosy neighbor knocking on the window asking for the music to be turned down or the party to end. Conversely, the government wants to keep playing one more song and then the party can end. Meanwhile, it's 4 a.m. and the party needs to end or we're all going to suffer tomorrow."*

*As shared by Youth Panelist Maddy Mead, Yukon Youth Conservation Corps (Y2C2)*

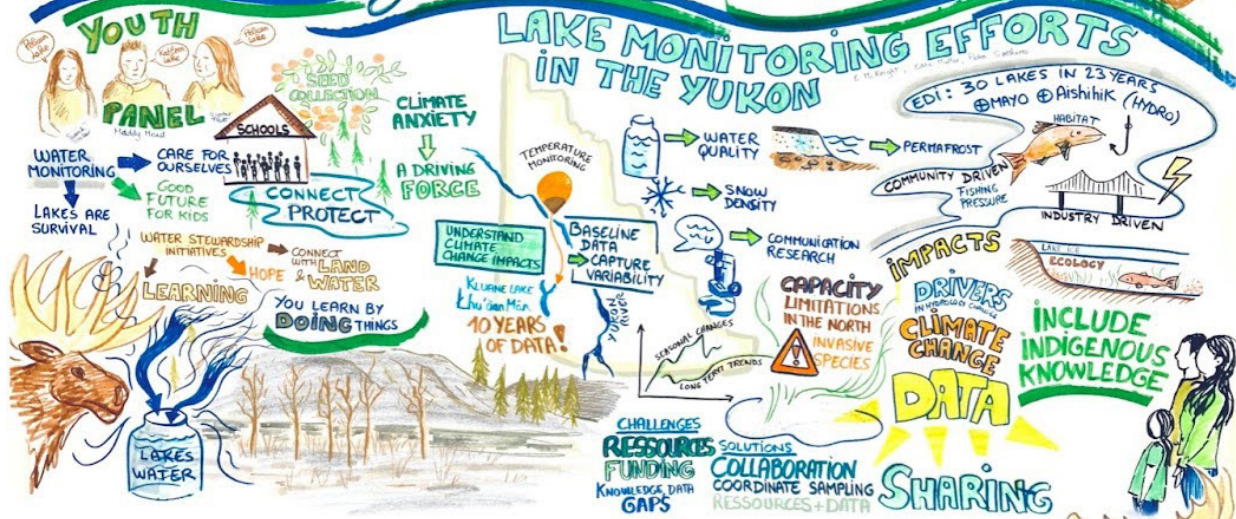




# Celebrating the Lakes

DAY 1

Whitehorse, Yukon, Dec 12-13, 2023

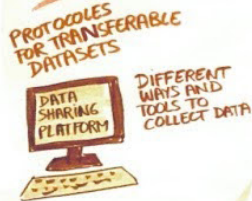


DAY 2



## BREAKOUT SESSION

### COLLABORATIVE LAKE MONITORING



### GROUNDING WORK IN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE



### DATA GOVERNANCE SHARING

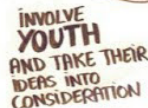


### INVASIVE SPECIES



### YOUTH IN ACTION THROUGH CLIMATE GRIEF

### TIME SPACE RESET



## CHANGE THE SYSTEM!



Yukon Graphic Recording



## ▶▶ KEY THEMES

### RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

The importance and value of building relationships was at the forefront during Celebrating The Lakes. This includes not only strong relationships between one another, but also with the water and the land. Significant time and resources should be dedicated to creating and strengthening those connections. Although not always simple, working together to build a sense of community and trust is paramount to coordinating efforts in lake monitoring.

### HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Conversations around climate change and environmental issues can often be heavy, but the youth voices set the tone for the event as one of hope and resilience for the future of lakes and water. Many participants shared how the words from the youth presenters left them feeling optimistic and inspired. Hope is necessary to sustain long-term change. Knowledge is power, so education and opportunities for youth to get involved in protecting their environment can help turn climate grief into action. A need for action and passion for change was felt across sectors and generations.

### A SHARED CONNECTION TO WATER

As evident during Celebrating The Lakes, water has the power to connect. We all rely on water and we all want water to be healthy and sustainable for future generations. The way forward is in recognizing these similarities rather than focusing on differences. This shared connection to water can help pave the way forward in cohesion without separating from each other or from the water or the land. Caring for the water means caring for one another and for those who have yet to come.

### GROUNDING WORK IN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Grounding all work in Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being in practice, and not just in theory, was echoed throughout the presentations, discussions, and ceremony. This will require not only listening, but hearing one another to work across diverse knowledge systems and cultural practices. Water should not be seen as a resource but as a relative and a way of life and survival.

**“WE’RE GOING BACK TO THE LAND AND WATER, TAKING THE TIME TO TAKE IN LEARNINGS AND SIT WITH IT IN NATURE, AND THAT’S GIVING US THE SPACE TO HAVE HOPE AGAIN FOR OUR FUTURE.”** - Maddy Mead, Yukon Youth Conservation Corps Blue Crew





## **MOVING FORWARD**

The vision and actions described below were developed through the collective discussions at Celebrating The Lakes. Living Lakes Canada acknowledges that not all rights holders and stakeholders could be present.

Community involvement is necessary at each stage of this project to ensure the future direction this project takes meets community needs. Thus, the actions outlined below only describe proposed next steps. Beyond this, future stages are dependent on community input. Any next steps are also dependent on securing sufficient funding support. In implementing the following actions, Living Lakes envisions its role as a facilitator working with local community groups to realize the described vision.

It is also important to highlight the overarching themes of making space for Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, and youth voices that have been woven through Celebrating The Lakes and this report.



# VISION



**Yukon Lakes  
Data Hub**



**Yukon Lake  
Monitoring Manual**



**Active Community  
of Practice**

# ACTIONS

★ Formalize a collaborative fundraising plan and pursue collaborative funding opportunities to fund the Data Hub, Monitoring Manual, and Community of Practice.

★ Hire a Yukon-based coordinator to manage the Data Hub, co-develop the Monitoring Manual, and facilitate the Community of Practice.

★ Build and manage a community-based Yukon Lakes Data Hub

- Aligns with the First Nations Principles of OCAP® (Ownership, Control, Access, Possession)
- Aligns with the Yukon Lake Monitoring Manual
- Caters to community needs; customizable
- Makes space for both Indigenous Knowledge and Western science
- Centers community and relationship building through a one-to-one approach to data management and data management planning
- Includes training manuals, how-to videos, supporting documentation and training sessions & workshops

★ Co-develop lake monitoring protocols

- Standardize water monitoring methods and quality assurance and quality control (QA/QC) procedures
- Reflect community priorities and values

★ Biennial Celebrating The Lakes Gatherings

- To continue to build and strengthen relationships and ensure this work continues effectively
- May be hosted at a different lake each time to connect with the diversity of lakes in the Yukon

★ Virtual roundtables hosted twice per year

- Update on project progress
- Connect interested parties
- Presentations on ongoing lake monitoring work to share knowledge
- Share on the ground observations of what is being noticed about Yukon lakes

★ Published newsletters twice per year

- Connect and highlight current lake projects

*We look forward to exploring these next steps together.*



**Living Lakes**  
CANADA

