

**50-Year Vision Statement: (Established in 1999)**

*To Be Able to Drink Water Directly from the Yukon River.*

**Mission Statement: (Established in 1997)**

*We, the Indigenous Tribes/First Nations from the headwaters to the mouth of the Yukon River, having been placed here by our Creator, do hereby agree to initiate and continue the clean up and preservation of the Yukon River for the protection of our own and future generations of our Tribes/First Nations and for the continuation of our traditional Native way of life.*

**The way the Watershed Council incorporates its guiding principles:** We will strive to behave like an elder by nurturing relationships that are inclusive and respectful, while striving to gain wisdom and knowledge that enables the watershed council to reach its collective vision.

**Guiding Principles: (Established in 1999) - (We will strive to:)**

<i>Be Good Listeners</i>	<b>Be Consensual (using the circle)</b>
<b><i>Be Respectful</i></b>	<b><i>Be Unifying</i></b>
<b>Be Flexible</b>	<b>Be Fair and Equal</b>
<i>Have Integrity</i>	<b>Be Tenacious</b>
<i>Be Honest</i>	<i>Be Trustworthy</i>
<i>Be Timely</i>	<i>Be Patient</i>
<i>Be Non-judgmental</i>	<b>Be Bold</b>
<i>Share wisdom (need it first)</i>	<b><i>Be Inclusive (allowing for diversity)</i></b>

## **Executive Summary:**

The Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council (YRITWC) is an international organization with non-profit status in the U.S. and societal status in Canada. The organization operates pursuant to the Inter-Tribal Accord, signed by over 56 First Nation and tribal governments spanning the entire Yukon River watershed; the YRITWC thus provides outreach to over 60 communities. This updated plan is designed to guide the organization through the next several years.

The plan is organized in four principal sections: Understanding; Education; Preservation, Restoration, and Stewardship; and Capacity Building. Each of these sections defines the scope of work and contains long-term goals that the Watershed Council will pursue in order to accomplish its vision and mission. The YRITWC uses a combination of methods - advocacy, education, training, and access to information and key support - to accomplish the goals within each section.

The section “*Understanding*” speaks to the need to understand the health of the Yukon River watershed. It is the key that opens all other doors for the YRITWC’s success. For any of the Watershed Council’s work methods and decisions to be effective – whether advocacy, training, education, or access to information and key support – there must be an unbiased and explicit understanding of the health and trends of the river. Thus, the YRITWC’s work in measuring and monitoring the Yukon River watershed serves to support all other endeavors and is a critical precondition for sustained progress.

*Education* is intended to strengthen the knowledge base of the individuals living in communities of the Yukon River watershed, particularly in the area of environmental education. *Preservation, Restoration, and Stewardship* identifies the areas that are of concern to the watershed community, such as violations of environmental standards, safe and cost effective disposal of hazardous and solid waste, and sewage; and contaminated sites caused by the military and mining activities. In addition, it addresses the need for the indigenous governments to gain a seat at decision-making tables. Finally, *Capacity Building* includes working to strengthen not only the YRITWC’s sustainability as an organization, but also the individual ability of each tribe and First Nation of the Yukon River watershed to further the goals of its own community. The Watershed Council recognizes the importance of building the capacity of tribal governments to enhance stewardship initiatives by providing the best available information, training and key support.

To accomplish its vision, mission and goals, the Watershed Council will maximize partnerships and collaborative opportunities in all aspects of its work. For example, by establishing collaborative relationships and agreements with other entities, it will ensure that the mission and vision of the Watershed Council are shared, understood, and advanced. Additionally, it will develop sustainable methods of integrating programs and activities to maximize collaboration between the Watershed Council and indigenous governments, and facilitate exchange between watershed communities to optimize learning opportunities, avoid redundancy, and maximize the use of available resources.

## Narrative Descriptions of Major Program Areas, Long-Term Goals (Established in 2004) and Annual Work-Plan Targets

### **#1 Understanding:**

#### **Understand, Measure and Monitor** (*narrative*)

Monitoring allows us to identify problem areas, measure progress in clean-up efforts, and gradually build up an understanding of the health and trends of the river. We will have baseline data about the Yukon River Watershed established with permanent monitoring stations and an ongoing evaluation program in the future. We will collect, analyze, and share all monitoring data. Additionally, we will become the information center for water quality and health trends of the Yukon River Watershed. While we assist in developing indigenous government's capacity and necessary infrastructure, the Watershed Council staff will begin sampling above and below contaminated locations.

**1.a) Long Term Goal:** We will gather and use Indigenous knowledge regarding the Yukon River Watershed to enhance the quality of scientific and management decisions and promote environmental stewardship and traditional ways of life.

**1.b) Long Term Goal:** We will use quality assured monitoring to identify contaminated areas, prioritize them by severity, promote their restoration and measure the success of restoration efforts.

**1.c) Long Term Goal:** We will coordinate a network of monitoring entities to collect, analyze, and share information regarding the health trends and subsistence resources of the Yukon River Watershed.

### **#2 Education:**

#### **Environmental Education** (*narrative*):

Environmental education is a critical to the survival of tribes and first nations and the continuation of the traditional native way of life. Youth are the most important audiences; as they become more educated and aware, their enthusiasm and determination can influence adults, and adults are ensured that future decision-making is in good hands. In order to provide the youth with education, leaders and their communities must also strengthen their knowledge base. The YRITWC intends to address all audiences – youth, leadership, communities, and visitors – in this effort to promote responsible stewardship.

**2.a) Long Term Goal:** We will develop a program to promote Indigenously produced and adapted environmental education resources to carry out traditional values of resource stewardship while creating jobs, internships, scholarships, incentives, and volunteer opportunities for youth, leadership and communities.

### **#3 Preservation, Restoration and Stewardship:**

#### **Environmental Standards and Enforcement (*narrative*):**

Through advocacy efforts, the YRITWC will promote the enforcement of environmental standards, which will constitute empowerment for indigenous governments and more effective protection of the environment and traditional ways of life.

**3.a) Long Term Goal:** We will advocate for and develop strong Indigenous, state, territorial, federal and provincial environmental standards to be enforced that ensure the watershed is healthy and free from contaminants.

#### **Solid Waste, Hazardous Waste and Sewage (*narrative*):**

The YRITWC is in a unique position to provide information and key support because of its access to communities of the watershed. All across the watershed solid waste, hazardous waste, and sewage are common concerns. Some villages and communities have implemented successful systems that are appropriate to their specific conditions, whereas others have experienced tremendous problems. By serving as a clearinghouse, the YRITWC can provide best practices, lessons learned, and support to all interested parties, thus leading to affordable and appropriate solutions for each community.

**3.b) Long Term Goal:** We will provide information and key support to communities within the Yukon River watershed, to develop and implement comprehensive waste-water, sewage, and solid and hazardous waste systems and plans, leading to affordable and appropriate improvements.

#### **Policy and Management Decisions (*narrative*)**

In order to effectively advocate for the clean up of contaminants and prevention of future environmental degradation, it is important for the indigenous leadership to be at key decision making tables, assuring responsible stewardship. The YRITWC will use the clarity of its mission, the effectiveness of its work, and the unity of its leadership to gain this recognition.

**3.c) Long Term Goal:** We will continue to be a body that is responsible for the watershed and participate in policy and management decisions that impact the health and future of the watershed.

#### **Contaminated Sites (*narrative*)**

The Department of Defense, private industry and other sources represent the major polluters of the Yukon River Watershed. Therefore, it is important to identify and prioritize sites, promote the prevention of environmental degradation, and advocate for the clean up of contaminated sites.

**3.d) Long Term Goal:** We will continue to map the locations and update the status of contaminated sites along the Yukon River Watershed and advocate for their clean-up on a regular basis.

## #4 Capacity Building:

### **Organizational Capacity of the YRITWC** (*narrative*)

To successfully achieve its ambitious goals, the YRITWC must strengthen its organizational capacity. It must strengthen its capacity in three ways: 1) Continuously improve the board's knowledge of YRITWC activities and improve its ability to direct administrative staff, 2) Create sustainable working conditions which include clear job descriptions, competitive salaries and benefits, and performance incentives. 3) Secure diversified funding sources which include government grants, foundations, individuals, corporations, and eventually an endowment and reserve fund.

**4.a) Long Term Goal (Financial Resources):** We will have a diversified funding strategy that adequately meets the long-term program and operational needs of the organization without competing with Indigenous governments within the watershed.

**4.b) Long Term Goal (Governance):** We will have a well-informed unified governing body that provides oversight and guidance to the organization and establish appropriate working committees.

### **Indigenous Governments Capacity** (*narrative*)

To assist indigenous nations in operating effectively in the modern age there exists a critical need to develop administrative and program capacity at the village level. Through training, information sharing, and helping provide access to resources, the YRITWC will strengthen the ability of aboriginal governments to meet environmental challenges.

**4.c) Long Term Goal:** We will assist Indigenous governments in improving their organizational capacity in order to achieve their goals and advocate for continued government funding allocated to Indigenous governments for the protection of the watershed and traditional way of life

**4.d)** To accomplish its vision, mission, and goals, the Watershed Council will maximize partnerships and collaborative opportunities in all aspects of its work.