



SEPTEMBER 2020 | FALL ISSUE 20 VOL. 4

E-CURRENTS

YUKON RIVER INTER-TRIBAL WATERSHED COUNCIL



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ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Brownfield Department would like to let community members know that there is an opportunity coming up fast! If you are interested or know of a potential brownfield site that would qualify for an assessment, contact Birgit Hagedorn at bhagedorn@yritwc.org or Tasha Mockta at tmockta@yritwc.org for more information!

Want to Stay up to Date on Announcements and Available Trainings?
The YRITWC has a listserv, open to everyone interested in receiving any announcements and trainings that will become available! IF you are interested in being added, please contact Kari Eschenbacher Young

Have News to Share?
If you have an announcement, newsworthy story, or would just like to update everyone on your recent projects, please consider submitting content to our next newsletter! If interested, please contact Tasha Mockta at (907)258-3337 or by email tmockta@yritwc.org

Tribal Communities Plan, Prepare, and Respond

CDC – Partnering with Tribes to Respond to COVID-19

What Does CDC’s COVID-19 Tribal Support Unit Do?

Technical assistance in following areas:

- Contact tracing
- Community mitigation
- Data Collection & Analysis
- Epidemiology and surveillance support
- Infection prevention and control



- Mapping
- Water, sanitation, and hygiene support
- Health and risk communications
- Response management



How Can CDC Partner with Tribes?

Remote Support

- Tribal Liaison Officers
- Technical assistance (TA) plan tailored for your community
- Implementation TA
- Information sharing
- Linking to resources and contacts
- Training for developing and implementing a contact tracing plan



CDC staff deployments

- Epidemiological Teams
- Contact Tracing Teams
- Water Access Teams
- Infection Prevention and Control Teams
- Incident Command Teams



Protocol Review

- Incident Command Structure
- Case management
- Contact tracing
- Reopening
- Recovery



Staffing support

- Opportunities to provide public health staff



For More Information:

Contact the Tribal Support Unit at eoevent362@cdc.gov or visit cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/tribal/index.html



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

cdc.gov/coronavirus

How to Protect Yourself & Others

Information Gathered from the CDC Website

Know How it Spreads

Everyone Should:

- Wash Hands Often
- Avoid Close Contact
- Cover Your Mouth and Nose with Cloth Face Cover when Around Others
- Cover Coughs and Sneezes
- Clean and Disinfect
- Monitor Your Health

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>



Letter from the Alaska Executive Director



As summer nears its end and fall begins, the Watershed staff have been trying to work in the field as much as possible. As COVID-19 has prevented travel to and from villages, we resorted to road travel to as many of the Watershed communities on the road system as possible. COVID-19 proves that business as usual (from an office) is being re-invented to working from home and utilizing online meeting software, such as Zoom Meeting. The Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council is no exception. The staff that can work from home are working from home. This is not preventing calls between our community organizations and the Watershed. We are having staff return calls when contact is made to our office as quickly as possible. Zoom meetings and conference calls are not proving to be very difficult as anticipated. We hope the communities are having the same success and look forward to working with communities in this manner for as long as COVID-19 is around.

One of the highlights this summer is working with the staff at the Yukon River Fisheries Drainage Association (YRFDA). We are striving to locate funding to complete additional science on the Yukon River drainage, create a clearinghouse for information, and complete historical documentation. Both organizations have met with our congressional delegation to seek out assistance with this goal.

2020 is not panning to be a good season for fishing. We have reached out to YRFDA to support them in this fishing disaster. With that in mind, we wish that everyone on the Yukon River drainage a successful hunting season.

Till the next newsletter, best regards
Theresa Clark



ACF Internship Reflection: Summer with the YRITWC

ELIZA PERKINS

Throughout the past three months, I've learned the inner-workings of the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council's Science Program through my work on its database and management plan as well as through my efforts supporting water sampling in the field and logistics. I've come to know many of the YRITWC staff through this ACF Science Program Internship. I have enjoyed the personal interactions and exposure to others' work that time in the office has brought with it - a benefit that quickly came to light once I began, given my prior anticipation of a fully remote summer internship.

This ACF Science Program Internship here at YRITWC has ultimately provided me with a great sense of purpose, and I am thankful to the science staff for entrusting me with various, sizable projects. It has allowed me to contribute my skills in writing meaningfully.



Eliza Perkins Gathering Water Samples in Minto



Environmental entry guided me in establishing future career goals related to politics and conservation. It facilitated deep learning on my part in terms of indigenous affairs in Alaska and non-profit operations. Because of this internship, I can fully recognize and appreciate the power of effective community monitoring, self-sufficient community-level scientific data collection, and collaboration across diverse industries, including tribal, local, state, and federal agencies. In addition, I can see first-hand how science plays a fundamental role in and is at the core of many political movements, such as climate change policymaking, and that a widespread and accurate understanding of science is key to the environmental, economic, and educational progress in any community. This is a sentiment that captures why I have enthusiastically joined the Yukon-River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council's efforts in its efforts to monitor one of the largest watersheds in the world.

I've spent time working with various environmental and political non-profits throughout my time as an undergraduate and immediately following my college graduation, but what stands out to me, as I reflect on my time with the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council specifically, is that firstly, contrary to many companies, this organization is guided by one seemingly straightforward vision, which in turn allows the council to delve deeply into the many multi-disciplinary solutions that will make this single vision become a reality and which also serves to unite stakeholders very effectively. Secondly, it amazes and inspires me to see that even with such a small staff, a geographic region, the Yukon River Watershed size can still be monitored, managed, and environmentally cared for, as long as collaboration and cooperation across a sundry of industries are prioritized. And this is an area that I believe YRITWC seems to excel particularly.

Overall, I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to work alongside YRITWC's staff. I see purpose-driven, passionate, and forward-thinking leaders in this office and look forward to seeing how YRITWC develops and how its goals become realized in the future. I continue to be motivated by Alaska's unique environmental and economic puzzles and I am looking forward to continuing my work here until December as YRITWC's Environmental Assistant within its IGAP program!

ACF Internship Reflection: Summer with the YRITWC

ELISE LOWE



Reflecting on the time I have spent with the watershed council, I am filled with both feelings of fulfillment and of reluctance. It's very bittersweet. On the one hand, I feel so fortunate to have had such a wonderful, enlightening experience and to have met such an incredible and unique group of people. On the other hand, I am rather opposed to leaving and find it difficult to acknowledge that my time here is rapidly coming to a close. There's so much that I am going to miss.

To Birgit, I will miss how you always take great care when formulating your responses and are mindful of your phrasing before you speak. Let me know if you would be interested in joining the debate team ;).

To Edda, I will miss your ever cheerful, dependable greetings and your undemanding sense of humor—of which, I think, can best be described as rather elegant.

To Eliza, I will miss your infinite database of book recommendations and your uplifting personality; it's inspiring, and has proven to be more than enough to get me through the day, sans morning cup of coffee.

To Kari, I will miss discussing current events with you and will fondly remember the Christmas-y atmosphere that miraculously seems to follow you everywhere. And no, I am not referring to Luna, though I will absolutely miss her sweet visits as well!

To Katherine, I will miss chatting with you in the kitchen whenever we would manage to bump into each other—it was always such a pleasure.

To Maryann, this reference will likely make more sense (and hopefully sound less creepy) if you have seen the movie Elf, or perhaps Kari can fill you in, if not. There's one line in particular that resonates with me, and which I have come to associate with your sunny disposition: "You belong on a Christmas card!" Somehow it sounds less creepy when Will Ferrell (in yellow tights, no less) says it.

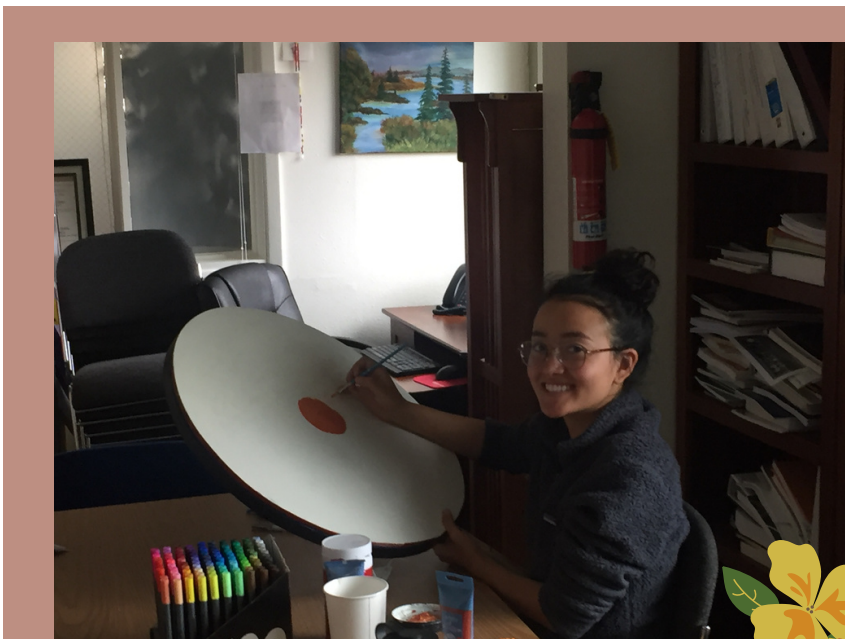
To Tasha, I will surely miss having an inbox with such pleasant emails waiting for me (even if I'm not the only intended recipient) as I doubt the university will adjust its email formatting to include smiley faces :-{.

To Temyka, I will miss helping out with your projects, learning from you, and of course, I will miss having a fellow herbivore nearby.

To Theresa, I will miss how patient, kind, and considerate of others you are; I definitely admire this in you and hope to one day be even half as altruistic.

To Thomas, I will miss your reliable quips—they never fail to bring a smile to my face :).

I will greatly miss the YRITWC family. I wish you all the very best and I thank everyone for all that they have taught me.



4th Quarter Newsletter from Drinking Water Improvement Program (DWIP)

THOMAS AND KATHERINE BROWER

This quarter has been going slow, but sure. Our program staff usually travels all summer to the communities within the watershed.

We ordered and mailed out 52 total medicine take-back program safe containers that have lock and key to every watershed community with a clinic. Some villages have one or more Tribe's, but one had been mailed to the Tribe with the clinic in the municipality. The medicine boxes included safety posters.

River Signs total of 56 had been mailed out to the communities. We have had pictures sent to us with gratitude that they have been posted at the river or other heavy public use areas in their villages. The signs were in English, and for each designated region were in Yup'ik, Koyukon, Athabaskan, and Gwich'in languages.

Six Mini-Grants were awarded out. So far, we have one completed project and report back from one community that helped their lagoon and landfill areas to go around better and maintain their facilities.

One of the communities awarded a mini-grant asked a question of testing private water wells. They wanted to test each well at no cost to the owner; we (DWIP staff) sent out several water well test kits to test these private wells. If you have any concerns about how your water quality is of private water wells, please feel to contact the office, and we'll be able to send these test kits at no cost.

We are currently working on environmental awareness to our drinking water radio ads in each region's language. So far, we have a Koyukon radio ad that was sent to us. Due to the COVID-19, it has been slow to get a response back from some Tribal regions. We are looking to have Yup'ik/Cup'ik, Koyukon, Athabaskan, and Gwich'in languages for the radio ad. When these are completed, we will have them aired in each region's radio station that they listen to.

Sometimes in September, there will be three (3) items posted on the YRITWC Drinking Water Program web site. These will also be disseminated to the Yukon River basin communities. These will be (1) Water Quality Protection Executive Summary, (2) Aquatic Buffer Ordinance, and (3) Resolution.

We are currently working on getting interviews with threats to our drinking water. We would like to review community and hazard mitigation plans. The plans that we have received are outdated and need to be updated so that the communities can become eligible to apply for FEMA grants if needed in the future. If a community wants to jump-start on Tribal Mitigation Planning, one can visit the Fema.gov web site.

We wish you all the best in this stressful COVID season we hope will be eradicated from the globe.



Thomas and Katherine Brower



Left to Right: Lawrence Unok, Michelle Kaganak, Billy Rivers Jr.



Signage in Minto



Integrated Solid Waste Management Planning Project

TAL SHITKIN

With few roads, limiting environmental conditions, and high transportation costs, rural Alaska poses many challenges to sustainable solid waste management. Despite these challenges, responsibly managing waste is as vital to ensuring safe communities and a healthy environment as it is anywhere.

The Watershed Council’s IGAP staff have been working with the EPA Region 10 IGAP and Tribal Waste programs on a project surrounding sustainable solid waste management in rural Alaskan villages. Specifically, we have focused on supporting some of our signatory Tribes in drafting Integrated Solid Waste Management Plans (ISWMPs). An ISWMP is a document that describes how a community reduces, manages, and disposes of waste generated within its boundaries. These plans help ensure that solid waste management proceeds in an orderly and effective fashion that aligns with current capacity and a future vision.

So far, we have collaborated with five Tribal IGAP coordinators located in three “wastesheds”—areas served by the same landfill. These include IGAP employees of Native Village of Kotlik, Pitka’s Point Traditional Council, Algaaciq Native Village, Yupiit of Andreafski, and Rampart Village Council. It has been a pleasure working with everyone and learning from each of their experiences in local solid waste management.

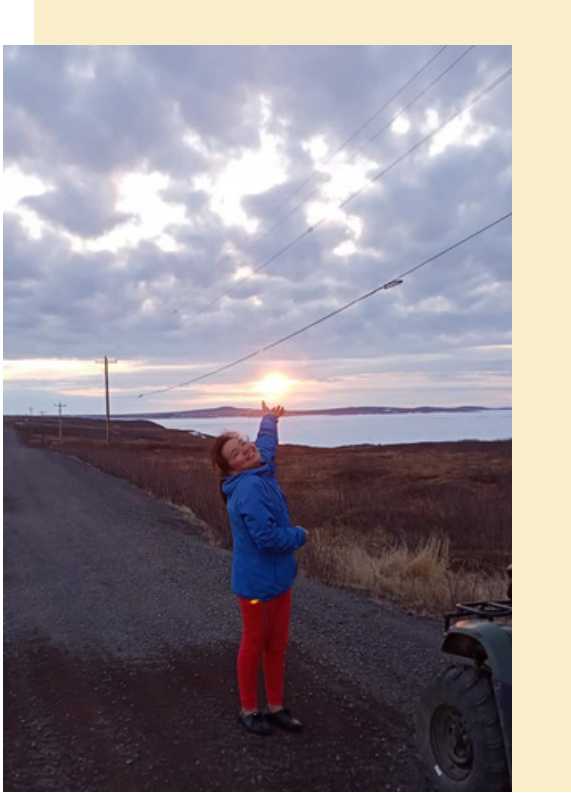
Of the three wastesheds where we are working, the most complicated is Saint Mary’s – Pitka’s Point. Two villages share a landfill, which is managed by the City of Saint Mary’s. This circumstance highlights a big difference between solid waste management in Alaska Native communities versus reservations in the Lower 48. That is, it requires cooperation between multiple governing bodies. One lesson that has emerged from this project is that the EPA’s ISWMP guidelines can and should be adapted to reflect your community’s unique structure and circumstances.

As the EPA begins requiring Tribal ISWMPs before funding IGAP solid waste work, some people may feel intimidated. However, remember that these plans do not need to be overly complicated. If seen as an opportunity to reflect on your current solid waste management program and its future goals, these plans can be essential tools in ensuring a safe and healthy community into the future.

For assistance with solid waste management planning, please check out the ISWMP resources available on the YRITWC’s website (www.yritwc.org). And of course, always feel free to contact our staff for support.

Congratulations to Tia Katcheak from Stebbins, winner of the YRITWC Spring Photo Contest! Tia submitted three wonderful photos, each highlighting a different aspect of springtime in the Yukon River watershed. The first, welcoming the return of the sun after a long winter. The second, children from Stebbins in beautiful spring lighting. Finally, the third photo captures a scene from spring cleaning. Thank you and congratulations, Tia! (Photographed to the right)

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YRITWC IGAP Update and Farewell to Tal

KARI ESCHENBACHER YOUNG

The year 2020 is not what anyone was expecting but everyone is doing their best in these interesting times. This couldn't be any truer for YRITWC's IGAP Program. Not being able to travel this year definitely changed some of the plans we had however it gave us the space to be more creative. After talking to a some of the other IGAP Coordinators in the Yukon River Watershed, I know that lots of other coordinators are finding different approaches for their work plans as well. If you are finding yourself looking at a screen more these days, like so many of us, I want to remind you that YRITWC has multiple recorded webinars that are informative for IGAP Coordinators. These webinars can be found on YouTube with videos on YRITWC resources, Integrated Solid Waste Management Planning, IGAP reporting, Brownfield information, and more. Check out these resources at the following link:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_Jw7bb2wn2pwXADOvk37eQ.

Additionally, YRITWC's IGAP Program has continued to outreach to signatory tribes' IGAP programs, along with other interested workers, with a program listserv. Once or twice a month I send out emails sharing upcoming opportunities put on by YRITWC as well as other useful trainings, webinars, grants, etc. from other organizations. If you are interested in joining this listserv, please send me a message at kyoung@yritwc.org and I'll be sure to add you!

Lastly, our IGAP Program has been working on a special project funded by the EPA Region 10 to create a tool for Integrated Solid Waste Management Plans (ISWMPs). YRITWC's IGAP staff member, Tal Shutkin, did an amazing job creating a tool titled Untangling Integrated Solid Waste Management Planning which will be shared in the listserv and on YRITWC's website soon, so keep a watch out for it! Speaking of Tal, he came to YRITWC in the summer of 2019 as a Ted Smith Conservation Intern where he assisted in various Science Department projects, participated in a river trip from Galena to Koyukuk, and attended the Summit as superb helper and shuttle driver. YRITWC was pleased to hire him as IGAP staff last fall and he has done phenomenal work in his position. Last month was Tal's last with YRITWC as he just recently started graduate school. YRITWC sends Tal the biggest thanks for his dedicated hard work and the best wishes in his next adventure!



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Resilient Research During Challenging Times

MARYANN FIDEL

COVID-19 is changing our world, so how do we embrace resilience during these difficult times? Resilience means being able to cope with challenges and take advantage of opportunities during times of change.

At YRITWC, we went from a planned summer of travel and fieldwork to working from home, at times, only leaving the house to walk the dog and get groceries. We have been able to do a little fieldwork, where we don't have contact with community members. Most academic institutions, state and federal agencies have suspended their field seasons. It may be that the only water quality and active layer data collected this summer is through our Indigenous Observation Network (ION). This is important to maintain a continuous data record. ION is a model of research called community-based monitoring, or citizen science. It empowers Tribal Environmental Professionals with the 'know-how' and equipment needed to get the work done, and doesn't rely on 'outsiders' to collect the data. This is a resilient model to conduct research during a pandemic.

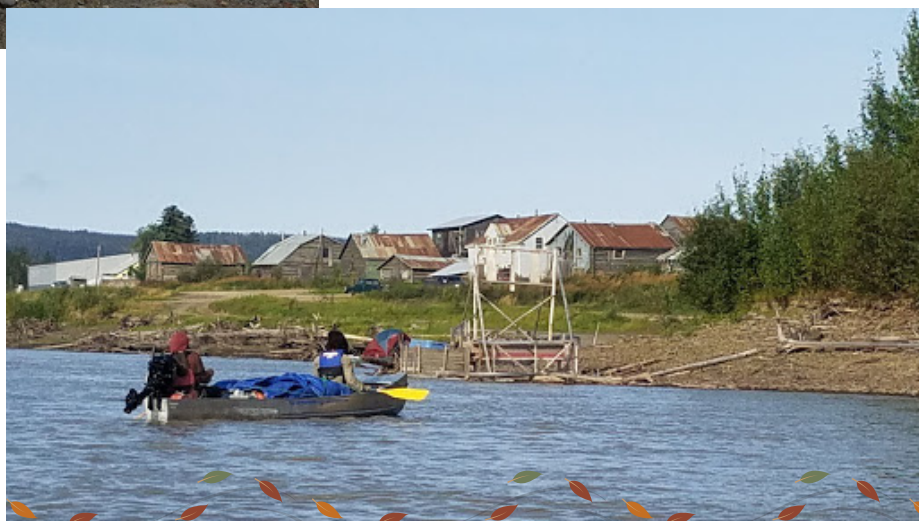
As the Nation's attention turns to deal with COVID-19, protections for the environment have received less attention. It concerns me that both the EPA and the State of Alaska have said they will not be enforcing air and water quality permits this summer. We need a healthy environment more than ever. This is our life support system. YRITWC's Mining Watchdog program is working with Tribes to collect water and soil samples at sites impacted by mining. Again, highlighting the importance of community-based monitoring. Tribal Environmental Professionals can collect data that can be used to hold polluters accountable, even when the Federal and State systems fail.

If the environment becomes, polluted no one has more to lose than the people living there. When tribal members collect their own data, they are building their capabilities and advancing their sovereignty. Community-based monitoring is a more equitable and socially just way to conduct research.

This fall, I will be working to secure additional resources for YRITWC's community-based monitoring efforts. I hope that more resources will be provided to support community members to get the work done and that this pandemic will force us to think about different, better ways to conduct research.



Photos from Yukon River from 2018 and 2019. Reminiscing about times when we could travel—looking forward to seeing you all when this is over!



Brownfield Updates

BIRGIT HAGEDORN

Brownfield Updates:

What is a Brownfield? A brownfield is a real property (land and/or building) with a potential presence of hazardous substances, pollutants, or contamination, which complicates the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of the property.

EPA Cleanup Grants now open

EPA announced the opening of the 2021 Brownfield Cleanup Grant applications which are due on October 28, 2020. Please contact us if you consider applying to one of them and need any assistance.

Brownfield Leadership Group progress

Our Brownfield Leadership Group is active and meeting regularly. We are making progress on initiating investigations of brownfield sites located in leadership communities. If you are interested in becoming a Brownfield Leader in your community and work with us please contact us.

Brownfields in 2006 and today:

It may take some time: here are two pictures from the first inventory of a site in 2006 and one taken this summer. We hope to start a Phase I investigation here soon.

The Brownfield Department would like to let community members know that there is an opportunity coming up fast! If you are interested or know of a potential brownfield site that would qualify for an assessment, contact Birgit Hagedorn at bhagedorn@yritwc.org or Tasha Mockta at tmockta@yritwc.org for more information!



Image from 2006



Image from 2020



“Water isn’t just for drinking or washing. Water has its own spirit. Water is alive. Water has memory. Water knows how you treat it. Water knows you. You should get to know water too. ”

- Wabinoquay Otsoquaykwhan, Anishinaabe Nation

Getting to know and think about our water Quiz!

1. Even though you can’t see it, the water around you contains a dissolved gas that gets into the water from the surrounding air and from plants that are undergoing photosynthesis. The dissolved gas in the river is critical for the aquatic life (fish and other organisms) living in it. We don’t want this gas to get too low or the aquatic life could feel stressed or even die.

- A) Dissolved Oxygen
- B) Methane
- C) Nitrogen
- D) Dissolved Carbon Dioxide

2. This term is a measure of how well the water can direct an electrical current. Electrical currents can pass through water because it contains dissolved charged particles called ions. This term depends on the amount of solids dissolved in the water: pure water has a low one whereas seawater has a high one. When this goes up or down, it is telling us something about the amount of dissolved solids in the water.

- a) Turbidity
- b) Conductance
- c) UV Absorbance
- d) Alkalinity

3. The Yukon River is:

- A) 3,300 miles long
- B) 900 miles long
- C) 1,982 miles long
- D) 2,700 miles long

4. At Dawson City, the earliest recorded breakup of the Yukon was _____ (the latest was May 28, 1964). What factors contribute to earlier breakups?

- a) March 1, 1939
- B) April 1, 2010
- C) May 1, 2018
- D) April 23, 2016

5) Writing Prompt:

With a pencil in hand, think about the quote above and the water in your own community. At what moments do you learn about your water? When do you feel closest to your water? What can you do more of to protect your water?