The Voice is a seasonal newsletter for the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board (YESAB). YESAB conducts assessments on project proposals and makes recommendations to government decision bodies on whether a project should proceed, not proceed, or proceed with specific terms and conditions.
INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 2012 spring edition of YESAB’s newsletter! In this edition of The Voice, we begin by going “Back to Basics” by explaining what YESAB is and what we do. This will be a good introduction or refresher on Yukon Territory’s assessment process. We also introduce you to some of the faces of YESAB and the work they do in meeting the goals and vision of YESAB to provide effective and transparent assessments of development activities in Yukon.

We also have other articles about our work associated with completing assessments under YESAA. For instance, a summary about some of the outreach activities we have been delivering and engaging in with Yukon communities. As well, we provide an update on the first YESAA Forum held on April 11th and 12th in Whitehorse, a direct result of the YESAA five-year review, and detail some of our future initiatives according to recommendations from stakeholders involved in the five-year review. In addition, we detail some of the work we are doing to include results from our 2010 cumulative effects study in the White Gold area to further enhance future assessments. And, finally, we show how we are continuing to improve how we incorporate climate change considerations into assessments.
ESAB was established under the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act (YESAA), which came into full force November 28, 2005. Chapter 12 of the Umbrella Final Agreement and Yukon First Nation final agreements set the foundation for YESAA.

YESAA sets out a process to assess the environmental and socio-economic effects of projects and other activities in the Yukon or that might affect the Yukon. Two regulations accompany YESAA and YESAB has developed rules that set out in detail how the assessment process works (www.yesab.ca).

YESAB is committed to delivering an assessment process that works well for all Yukoners as well as all stakeholders. Our commitment is to be an impartial, effective, transparent and efficient organization that provides assistance to all involved in the assessment process.

The organization of YESAB includes a seven-member Board and approximately 37 employees (see chart on page 10) located at the Head Office in Whitehorse and in six Designated Offices. YESAB undertakes assessments at the Designated Office (DO) and Executive Committee levels. The third level of assessments is a panel review, although, to date, no assessment has been done at this level. The majority of assessments are done at the DO level.

YESAB conducts environmental and socio-economic assessments on proposed projects and makes recommendations as to if, and how, proposed projects can proceed without having significant environmental and/or socio-economic effects. These recommendations are made to federal, territorial, and/or First Nation governments depending on the location of the project and what permits and authorizations are required.

In the past seven years, YESAB has grown rapidly and has strived to make the process work for all stakeholders.

Between November 28, 2005 and March 31, 2012, YESAB completed over 1,400 assessments. Under the new DO Rules, enacted in 2010, the average time from application received to recommendation sent is currently about 79 days.

The assessment stage comes before the regulatory stage when permits and other authorizations are issued. YESAB is an assessment body, not regulatory body. We make recommendations to Decision Bodies based on the environmental and socio-economic assessment of potential project activities. We do not make final decisions on projects or issue authorizations or permits.
In order to learn more about YESAB, it is important to meet some of the people who work here. One of the people who has been a key figure since the beginning of YESAB is Michael Muller, Project Assessment Manager. As the first technical person hired by YESAB in 2004, Michael has been instrumental in establishing YESAB’s technical systems and assessment methods. Michael’s technical experience has been invaluable in leading the development of the YESAB Online Registry (YOR), an electronic registry and document management system that is accessible at www.yesab.ca, and the strategic direction of the Geolocator online mapping system.

A professional biologist, Michael brings years of northern experience combined with academic knowledge to YESAB. Prior to joining YESAB, Michael had spent 10 years working in Inuvik where he worked for industry, the Inuvialuit, and the NWT government. With his diverse background, Michael brought a wealth of experience and balance to the development of YESAB.

As the Project Assessment Manager, he is the first staff point of contact for Executive Committee screening proponents. His primary role includes providing technical assessment support at the DO and Executive Committee levels, overseeing Executive Committee screenings, as well as supervising and helping staff grow while at YESAB. He adds that “I try to support the talented people that work here.”

Michael also develops and delivers workshops and other outreach activities. For instance, last fall, he coordinated a workshop for 40+ consultants on YESAA that focussed on their role in developing project proposals. He has given presentations on YESAA/YESAB across Western Canada, and he recently made presentations on traditional knowledge and how it is incorporated into assessments under YESAA to Yukon College students.

Michael and his wife Kirsti moved ‘south’ from Inuvik to Whitehorse in 2004. Their daughters Hannah and Kate (the rightful owners of the umbrella) are not happy that we’ve lost all the snow already. Away from the office, Michael plays and coaches several sports, is the Chair of his daughters’ School Council, loves camping around the Yukon as much as the rest of his family and routinely fails to find time to ride his motorcycle.
Katrine Frese is celebrating her second anniversary as an Assessment Officer with the Executive Committee at the Whitehorse Head Office.

At YESAB, she has a reputation as a dauntless and fearless researcher. During her time at YESAB, Katrine has applied her skills, knowledge and analytical background to many complex and difficult issues and brought the issue either into focus or to resolution. When we want no stone left unturned, Katrine is our secret weapon.

In addition to her natural curiosity, Katrine brings to YESAB a Ph.D. in Geology from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich, Switzerland, fluency in five languages, and several years of experience working in risk management. Katrine’s risk management background is perfect for YESAB as it was focussed on natural hazards and climate change, specifically hurricanes as well as more generally on extreme weather events.

After working in academia and risk management for about 10 years, Katrine moved to Canada in 2008 to travel and explore the Canadian wilderness. After a summer spent house-sitting and a winter dog handling in Yukon, she travelled to Quebec for several months. However, she soon returned to the Yukon to settle.

Katrine is able to communicate information in these highly technical fields with various stakeholders ranging from academics to land use planners and community groups, which is important to meet the mandate of YESAA. Her interdisciplinary approach to projects in tandem with her appreciation for team work is welcomed at YESAB where assessors must consider the interests of many parties.

For instance, Katrine is the team leader on developing a discussion paper on how climate change and its effects are currently integrated and will continue to be considered in all future assessments under YESAA. (see Climate Change article on page 8).

She is also currently involved in developing guidance documents detailing modelling information requirements for proponents considering submitting a proposal to YESAB.

We intend to continue providing profiles of other staff in future editions of The Voice.
The First YESAA Forum: Building on the Five-year Review

Establishing a YESAA Forum process to address assessment issues in the Yukon is one of the recommendations of the YESAA Five-year review
http://www.yesaareview.ca/

The First YESAA Forum meeting, hosted by Yukon Government with the assistance of Kwanlin Dun First Nation, was held at the KDFN Cultural Centre on April 11 and 12, 2012. The Forum was well attended with representatives from almost all Yukon First Nations, various departments of the Yukon government and Government of Canada, and YESAB. In total, about 35 people attended. YESAB was represented by Stephen Mills (Board Chair), Bengt Pettersson (Executive Director), Keith Maguire (Senior Assessment Officer), and Monique Chatterton (Assessment Officer).

The first Forum was an opportunity for participants to meet, establish contacts and collaborate on ways of working together, and review and approve a Terms of Reference and a Steering Committee for the operation and administration of the YESAA Forum.

YESAB’s Chair Stephen Mills provided participants with a historical background to the establishment of YESAA and YESAB. The Forum approved a Terms of Reference and a YESAA Forum Steering Committee for the operation and administration of the YESAA Forum. Participants also agreed on priorities for future Forum meetings, and on five recommendations that should be addressed by the YESAA Forum in 2012 and 2013:

1. Cumulative Effects Assessments
2. Implementing Monitoring and Mitigation Measures
3. First Nation Involvement
4. Socio-economic Assessments
5. Decision Body Guidance

The topic of cumulative effects is of interest to many, and it was introduced at this Forum and presentations were given by the Yukon Land Use Planning Council, YESAB (Keith Maguire), and Yukon Government.

For the next meeting, participants agreed that cumulative effects assessment would continue to be discussed as the first official forum topic. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for late October or early November in Dawson City.
Soon after the advent of environmental impact assessment legislation in the 1970s, it was recognized that project assessment had to evolve to incorporate not only the effects of the project being proposed but also any effects of other projects in the area. Discussion around this idea came together in the mid 1980s with “cumulative effects assessment”.

Many people wonder what cumulative effects are. Cumulative effects are at the combined effects of all projects in an area after effects of each project have been reduced or controlled (i.e. mitigated). Section 42(1)(d) of YESAA identifies cumulative effects as a matter that shall be considered in every assessment:

- the significance of any adverse cumulative environmental or socio-economic effects that have occurred or might occur in connection with the project or existing project in combination with the effects of
- other projects for which proposals have been submitted under subsection 50(1), or
- other existing or proposed activities in or outside Yukon that are known to the designated office, executive committee or panel of the Board from information provided to it or obtained by it under this Act.

YESAB’s practice is to examine cumulative effects value by value (e.g. water quality, wildlife) as a project can affect different values in very different ways. Also, depending on the particular value, some projects might have residual effects, or they may not.

A recent Yukon example of examining cumulative effects is YESAB’s 2010 study that examined the potential cumulative effects on wildlife in the White Gold Area. Over the past few years there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of quartz exploration in Central Yukon (the ‘White Gold Area’ – the area around the confluences of the White and Stewart rivers with the Yukon River). Concerns were raised by Yukon First Nations and other Yukoners that the cumulative effects of these projects could adversely affect wildlife in this area.

The purpose of this study was to inform our assessments on the cumulative effects on sheep, 40-Mile Caribou and moose. Much of the study focused on the potential links between moose harvest (the primary driver of population size in this area) and the number of river landing points and the length of access roads. We knew hunters would be using the river to access moose in the area as there is no practical road access to much of this area and we had local and traditional knowledge from hunters in the area. Our models illustrated that if the proposed projects resulted in more river access points and too much access road construction, the resulting moose harvest could exceed the sustainable harvest limits for moose in a couple of Game Management Zones. As a result, YESAB recommended that limits be put on new river access points and too much access road construction, the resulting moose harvest could exceed the sustainable harvest limits for moose in a couple of Game Management Zones. As a result, YESAB recommended that limits be put on new river access and access roads in certain areas. In specific cases, we recommended measures to make hunter access more difficult like gating and supervising who uses roads.

As assessors, we recognize that cumulative effects make sense intuitively but continue to be a challenging piece for assessments in Yukon, across Canada, and internationally. You can help by telling us about the values you care about and sharing information about the project effects that you have observed from other projects. You can also help us understand how you want the land, the water, the families, and the communities to be in the future.
Climate Change in Assessments

YESAB is working with the Northern Climate Exchange at Yukon College to compile research and information related to climate change in Yukon. YESAB assessors, led by Katrine Frese, are working on this project to further enhance how climate change is incorporated in assessments.

The first product was mapped information about current Yukon climate as well as predictions for climate change over the next 30 and 50 years. This included a variety of measures describing temperature and precipitation. The second product is a climate change guidance document on how climate change information will be considered in assessments. This document is slated to be available to the public by the end of this year.

Goals of Climate Change Guidance Document:

• Have a consistent YESAB position to identify proponent requirements regarding climate change and their project. Specifically, information from proponents when describing an activity that might be particularly influenced by a changing climate and therefore needs to consider predicted changes in the future (e.g. water, terrain stability, infrastructure sizing).

• Have a consistent measure and rationale that can be used by assessors to evaluate the adequacy of climate change considerations in a project proposal.

• Have a consistent message to explain how we consider climate change in assessments to First Nations, YG, federal governments, DBs, and others.

• Ensure that climate change is considered in a way that provides context (e.g. the level of confidence) in the predictions made.

Climate Change Workshop

YESAB hosted a half-day staff workshop on April 12 to introduce the newly produced climate change data to assessors. The workshop examined climate change in the Yukon, its potential applications in assessments and its availability through our online geographical information system (GIS) tool, the Geolocator. The workshop was attended by YESAB assessors and Board members plus staff of the Northern Climate Exchange, Yukon College.

The workshop was organized by Katrine Frese, and facilitated by John Streicker, P.Eng.; a climate change expert and science advisor to the Northern Climate Exchange. Michael Muller, Project Assessment Manager with YESAB, presented a case study to examine potential affects by climate change and to become more familiar with YESAB’s Geolocator, now with climate and climate change layers of information.

Project Assessment Manager, Michael Muller (along with John Streicker, Kathie Thibaudeau and Shelby Jordan) brainstorm the use of climate change data on a sample project.

The agenda of the workshop included the following items:

• Overview of climate change science, current and projected impacts for Yukon, and historic climate data and climate models.

• Assessment: the new climate layers in the Geolocator were introduced using an example, and it was discussed how the climate change information relates to assessments.

• Uncertainty and Confidence: the climate change layers in the Geolocator were explored in more detail with an emphasis on the chosen climate change scenarios, and the ranges of the projections (using temperature as a clear example and precipitation as a vague example). Further, confidence, uncertainty, and knowledge gaps related to the projections were highlighted.

• Risk: variability and climate risks were discussed, and applied to other assessment examples.
The Mayo Designated Office held public meetings in Keno and Mayo on April 25 and 26 regarding Alexco Keno Hill Mining Corp’s (Alexco) proposed mining application (Project 2011-0315). These meetings were held during the Seeking Views and Information stage of the assessment, in order to gather information from community members with concerns about the project.

The proposed project involves the underground development and silver/lead/zinc mining of the Lucky Queen and Onek deposits within the Keno Hill Silver District, and milling of ores at the existing mill. Lucky Queen and Onek deposits are 4km and 500m, respectively, northeast of Keno City. An amendment to the Type A Water Use Licence and Quartz Mining Licence will be required to support development of these two new deposits.

While YESAB’s primary mandate is to conduct assessments, we also have an important mandate to inform the public, governments, community groups and interested parties about YESAB and what we do. In order to provide this information, we have a number of outreach activities during each year.

This quarterly newsletter, The Voice is part of our ongoing outreach activities. Our website http://www.yesab.ca/ is another important information source with access to all fact sheets, publications, rules and regulations.

The YESAB Online Registry (YOR) is also available via the website. It is an electronic registry that allows public access to documents and information associated with projects submitted for assessments under YESAA.

YESAB Board members and staff also attend a number of meetings every year to provide information. We give presentations about YESAA and YESAB to government departments, First Nations, renewable resource councils, and many other groups. For the 2011/12 fiscal year, YESAB conducted about 40 outreach events.

As required, we also hold public meetings on projects being assessed. Some examples of such meetings are reported in the story below.

Keno City and Mayo residents were able to discuss their concerns about Alexco Keno Hill Mining Corp’s proposed mining project with representatives from YESAA, Alexco, Environment Canada, and Yukon Government regulators at a meeting organized by the YESAB Mayo DO. Mayo DO Manager, Loralee Johnstone facilitated the meeting along with Board Chair, Stephen Mills.

Public Meetings in Keno and Mayo

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The meeting in Keno was held at the Sourdough Café. Approximately 30 people attended; with about half from Keno and the other half representing YESAB, Alexco, and government departments. Presentations were made by Alexco, residents, YESAB, and government departments. Keno residents asked questions and raised concerns about the project and relation to the existing project, traffic, noise, dust, and health-related issues.

The following morning, a meeting was also held at the Curling Club in Mayo. About 25 people attended an open house meeting. Comments and concerns raised during these meetings will be considered during the assessment of this project.