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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.
YESAB received over 180 project proposals since January 2012. That has kept our Designated Offices in Dawson City, Mayo, Haines Junction, Whitehorse, Teslin, and Watson Lake busy.

This issue of The Voice will showcase outreach efforts by our Board and staff and offer tips on making your comments count during an assessment.

We give an update on the Draft Screening Reports and take a look at the record breaking number of comments received for the recent Horn Quartz Exploration Project proposed in Tombstone Park. Statistics from the past fiscal year and a staff bio of Sarah Chan, Assessment Officer in the Haines Junction Designated Office are also included. Thanks for reading.
OUTREACH: Then and Now

Outreach has always been a focus for YESAB. During the 2004/05 fiscal year, YESAB travelled to every community in Yukon and the Mackenzie River delta region of the NWT to outline the draft assessment rules of Yukon’s new assessment process. We hosted community dinners, presented countless power point presentations and met with anyone who would listen to us. It was an exciting time for a brand new organization that was tasked with administering a new federal act that changed the way projects would be planned and executed in Yukon.

Fast forward to 2012 and outreach remains on the forefront of YESAB’s list of immediate and long-term priorities. The difference between then and now is that our audiences are much more familiar with the process and require more detailed information, specific to the issues or projects that affect them.

With that in mind, YESAB recently produced a Strategic Outreach Plan that incorporates the idea that every audience has specific needs and that the audience should dictate the issues and topics presented. So whether you or your organization invites YESAB to a meeting, a General Assembly, a community function or requests a presentation you can be sure that the information presented will be targeted to your requests. And if a basic “YESAA 101” is all you need to get started then we can do that too. Please call any YESAB office to arrange a meeting or presentation (contact information at the back of this newsletter).

YESAB AT YOUR DOORSTEP

As part of YESAB’s Strategic Outreach Plan, each Designated Office and the Board produces individual outreach plans on an annual basis. These plans help guide and track the outreach efforts of each office and ensure that we are meeting our community outreach objectives. This summer the Board teamed up with Designated Office staff and hit the outreach highway to make presentations and attend a number of events throughout Yukon. YESAB has set up trade show booths, made presentations to audiences large and small, and have sat down to discuss the finer points of YESAA. We love what we do and are keen to share that knowledge and understanding with you.

This summer YESAB has

- attended the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations General Assembly
- attended the Kluane First Nation General Assembly
- attended the Dawson City International Gold Show
- discussed cumulative effects assessment with the Carcross Tagish First Nation Land Use Planning Team
- delivered a presentation to the Pacific Northwest Economic Region Forum – Arctic Caucus
- provided a detailed presentation on assessment timelines to the Yukon Chamber of Mines,
- held a meeting with Ross River Dena Council representatives on assessment-related topics, and
- attended the Moosehide Gathering hosted by Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in.

Invite YESAB to present on any assessment related topic that interests your organization, mention this article in “The Voice”, and we’ll make sure you’re drinking coffee out of a very fashionable, limited edition, YESAB thermos mug!
The Executive Committee conducts screenings on larger or more complex projects that are identified in the Activity Regulations or are referred by a Designated Office. The process for a screening is similar in many ways from that of a Designated Office evaluation but there are some key differences. One important difference is the release of a Draft Screening Report part way through the assessment. The Draft Screening Report is released to the public for review before a final version is finalized and submitted to a Decision Body. This allows the public, governments and proponent the opportunity to view the draft report and provide comments before a final version is completed.

The Executive Committee will complete the Draft Screening Reports for two Executive Committee Screenings in the near future. The first to be released is the Eagle Gold Mine Project being proposed by Victoria Gold Corporation. The Project involves the design, construction, operation, closure, and reclamation of a gold mine located in central Yukon. The mine will sit within the traditional territory of the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun, approximately 45 kilometres north-northeast of the Village of Mayo. The project is proposed to be mined over a ten year period starting in 2014. The Draft Screening Report should be released within the next few weeks. Once released the document will be open for public comment for 30 days with the option of extending it to a maximum of 60 days. Copies of the report will be available on the YOR, at the Mayo Designated Office and YESAB’s Head Office in Whitehorse. The other draft report will be for the proposed Mactung Mine Project. North American Tungsten Corporation is proposing the construction, operation, decommissioning, and closure of a tungsten mine and concentrating plant. The underground tungsten mine is predicted to produce tungsten concentrate over an 11-year mine life. The property is located in eastern-central Yukon, approximately eight kilometres northwest of Macmillan Pass. When completed, the Draft Screening Report will be posted to the YESAB Online Registry and be available at the Mayo and Watson Lake Designated Offices as well as the Head Office in Whitehorse. The document will be available in October 2012 and will be open for public comment for 30 days with an option of extending to 60 days.

For more information on either of these Draft Screening Reports please contact the YESAB Head Office 867-668-6420.
Canadian United Minerals Inc. proposed a class 3 advanced mineral exploration project on 18 mineral claims within the Tombstone Territorial Park. The project garnered a lot of interest from around Yukon and beyond. During the seeking views and information stage of the assessment, the Dawson City Designated Office received close to 900 comment submissions. That was over 200 more public submissions than the previous spring when a similar project was proposed in the park. Assessors ensured that every comment submission was reviewed and considered in the assessment within the established timeline. Many comments helped to inform the assessment and highlighted the values that could be potentially affected if the project were to proceed as planned.

After reviewing mountains of information the Dawson City DO found that four Valued Environmental and Socio-Economic Components (VESECs) would be adversely affected by the proposed project. These values included wildlife and wildlife habitat, ecological integrity, contemporary, traditional and cultural uses and Tombstone Territorial Park. It was a difficult assessment because some project effects attached to one value could be mitigated, however; doing so would result in an increased level of significant adverse effect to another value. The DO recommended that the project not proceed, as it determined that the project would have significant adverse environmental or socio-economic effects that could not be mitigated. Government of Yukon accepted the recommendation.
Making Your Time and Effort Count

YESAB gets excited when we see large numbers of participants getting involved in assessments during the Seeking Views and Information Stage (SV&I). The SV&I Stage is a part of every assessment we conduct and on occasion a project will strike a chord with the general public and we see submission rates sky rocket. However, environmental and socio-economic assessments are not about votes or the number of letters submitted. It is about meaningful content that outlines the values that are related to the environment (land, air, water, fish, wildlife), socio-economics (health and well-being of people), and how those values could potentially be affected by a proposed project.

To help participants capture and express their views in a valuable manner YESAB produced four key questions every YESAA participant should ask themselves when submitting comments into an assessment.

Below is a list of questions that will assist you in producing comment submissions that feed seamlessly into the process and ensure that what you value is clearly expressed in a way that informs the assessment.

Ask yourself….

1. What do you value in the proposed project area? Values may include specific wildlife species or populations, environmental elements (land, air, water), aesthetics, social or cultural values (trapping, way of life), etc. How do you use or interact with the area?

2. How might those values be affected or impacted by the proposed project, and why? Explain how you think these values would be affected if the project goes ahead. How would this be different from the way it is now?

3. Do you have any suggestions for how these effects could be reduced or eliminated? Include any measures you believe may lessen project effects, and why you think these measures would be successful.

4. Are your concerns based on your own experience, studies you are familiar with or information passed on to you from someone else? This will help assessors consider your information and allow them to follow-up with questions, if necessary.

Consideration of your comments

Section 39 of YESAA states…
A designated office, the executive committee or a panel of the Board shall give full and fair consideration to scientific information, traditional knowledge and other information provided to it or obtained by it under this Act.
YESAB’s expertise lies in its diverse and dedicated staff. This issue of The Voice highlights one of our newest employees, Sarah Chan, Assessment Officer for the Haines Junction Designated Office. Originally from Montreal, Sarah gained a degree from McGill University in Biology before mushing dogs in Churchill, Manitoba. The polar bears were so prevalent in Churchill that she had to install an electric fence perimeter to keep the bears out of the dog food. Quite the mitigation! Surviving that, she moved on to Newfoundland to complete a Master’s of Science Degree in Geography. Her research focused on the sensitivity of tundra and tree-line ecosystems to climate change and included fieldwork in the newly formed Torngat Mountains National Park and Reserve. From there she began work with the Nunatsiavut Government (Labrador Inuit) on the environmental assessment of a proposed hydro development. The focus was on the downstream effects to the aquatic environment from the damming of the river and the consideration of the socio-economic effects from the Inuit’s perspective. This included a focus on contemporary and traditional land use of the area, while also considering how traditional knowledge could be incorporated into the assessment.

She then found herself in Watson Lake working for YESAB as an Assessment Officer before taking a similar position at the Haines Junction Designated Office. Living in Haines Junction has allowed her to pursue many activities. On her days off Sarah can be found hiking in Kluane Park or paddling down the near-by rivers. In the winter months she can be seen exploring the Haines Pass on skis.

When asked why she traded in death defying polar bear mushing to pursue a career in assessment with YESAB she said, “One of the things I like most about working at YESAB is the broad range of disciplines that we pull from to complete our assessments. I’m able to apply knowledge I’ve acquired over the years from biology, geography, and a mix of everything in between and beyond”.

Be sure to introduce yourself to Sarah the next time you visit the Haines Junction Designated Office.
YESAB PROJECT STATISTICS What the Numbers Say.

325 Number of projects submitted to YESAB for assessment in the 2011/12 fiscal year: the largest number of projects ever submitted in a fiscal year. 2006 was the second highest year at 272 project submissions.

34 Median number of days to complete an assessment in the 2011/12 fiscal year. (Proposal adequate to recommendation sent)

65 Number of land development projects assessed last fiscal year. The largest number of projects submitted of any sector. The placer sector was a close second at 63 project submissions.

1780 Number of projects submitted to YESAB since implementation (November 2005).

Total Project Assessments for Top 5 Sectors (November 2005 - March 2012)

- Transportation: 151
- Placer Mining: 357
- Quartz Mining: 243
- Land Development: 356
- Recreation and Tourism: 111
- Agriculture and Aquaculture: 79

Total Number of Projects Submitted
YESAB RELEASES ANNUAL REPORT

YESAB has released the 2011/2012 Annual Report. The report outlines activities for the past fiscal year and is an excellent resource for learning about the YESAB process and YESAB. It contains the latest statistics, financials, Executive Committee project overviews, Designated Office project summaries and offers insight into some of the work YESAB will be doing in the future. It is a worth-while read. This year we enhanced the content with photography from local photographers Robert Postma, Peter Mather, and Cathy Archbould. To receive a copy, contact any YESAB office (below) or find it out on our website at www.yesab.ca.

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