

Yukon River: Thirty Mile Section

10 - Year Review

December 2002



Recreational paddlers, Thirty Mile Section of Yukon River, 2002

Parks and Protected Areas Branch
Department of Environment
Yukon Territory

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Designated campsite along Thirty Mile, Summer 2002

1. Introduction

Background

The Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River was nominated to become part of the Canadian Heritage Rivers System in 1988. Designation took place in 1991, following the completion and approval of the management plan in 1990. The Thirty Mile was the first Canadian Heritage River (CHR) to be designated in the Yukon.

Purpose of Report

This report fulfils the requirement of the CHR Board to review rivers designated under the CHR System every 10 years, or more frequently, to ensure they continue to meet CHRS selection guidelines. Since the designation of the Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River in 1991, an important change has occurred within the CHRS that has implications for this report.

- **National Frameworks.** National thematic frameworks were adopted by the Board between 1997 and 1998. These now provide a mechanism for organizing and classifying natural, cultural and recreational values represented by rivers. They can also be used to identify unique or rare values that a river brings to the System. The structure of the frameworks has been used throughout this report and the river's original "nomination values" are redefined according to the theme elements. Values that have been identified over the past 10 years, which did not show up in the original nomination document or management plan have been added. The revised list is contained in Appendix A.

2.0 Overview of Yukon River: Thirty Mile Section Management 1991-2002

The management of the Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River is a cooperative arrangement between the Yukon Government, Ta'an Kwach'an First Nation and the Federal Government.

A Thirty Mile Management Group was to be established to act as the main advisory and coordinating body for this section of the river. This group has not been established to date, however the Parks and Protected Areas branch of the Department of Environment continues to liaise with all managing jurisdictions and the Ta'an Kwach'an First Nation.

The federal government continues to manage all land use activities adjacent to the river, through the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. This will change upon devolution of those powers to the territorial government, April 1st, 2003. At that time, the Yukon government will assume responsibility for the entire Northern Affairs program. However, the management authorities outlined in the 1991 management plan have not changed to date.

A significant achievement over the past 10 years has been the recent settling of the Ta'an Kwach'an Council Final Agreement. Chapter 13 of the Final Agreement, acknowledges "the designation of and the management plan for the Yukon River: Thirty Mile Section as a Canadian Heritage River pursuant to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System Program". There are five site specifics owned by the First Nation which are located within 250m of the river. These sites are all subject to the management plan, as per the provisions of the Final Agreement.

Several boards and councils have been, and are being established in the Yukon pursuant to specific Final Agreements and the Umbrella Final Agreement. These mandated bodies will have advisory roles related to the management heritage values on the Yukon River. A current listing of these boards and councils and their relevant duties is attached in Appendix C.



Old cabin at Hootaliqua, Summer 2002

The Parks and Protected Areas Branch has maintained a maintenance contract with the Mundessa Corporation (economic development arm of the Ta'an Kwach'an First Nation) for the past 10 years. The contract includes maintenance of the established campsites along the Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River, visitor liaison and general monitoring duties.

Other key changes that affect the management of the Heritage River include the adoption of the Wilderness Tourism Licensing Act for the Yukon in 1998, revisions to the Yukon Wildlife Act (on-going), and work to adopt the Yukon Environmental Assessment Act.

3. Significant Changes to Natural, Cultural and Recreational Values

There have been no significant changes to any of the heritage values for which the river was nominated (refer to summary in Appendix A). More information on the various values has become available and may be useful in future reviews and management plan updates.



Recreational boating on Thirty Mile, Summer 2002

Wilderness tourism statistics from commercial operators indicate an increase in use along the Yukon River. Data has been collected since the summer 2000. Vegetation has been trampled (in some cases entire areas are denuded) at some campsites along the Thirty Mile portion of the Yukon River. A heavily used informal campsite was discovered this summer. Human waste management is a problem at this site and will be addressed next summer as part of the maintenance contract for the river campsites.

Although visitor use impacts have occurred, they are not considered to be causing significant degradation of the river's heritage values at this point in time. Monitoring of the campsites and human use is recommended to continue.

During the fall of 1996, a new sewage treatment lagoon system was installed for the City of Whitehorse. The system has reduced the amount of effluent flowing into the Yukon River system. Subsequent water sampling on Lake Laberge and the Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River in 1997 and 1998 by Water Resources (DIAND), indicated a reduction in contaminants e.g. fecal coliform, giardia, etc. The water quality is now considered to be higher than it was pre-1996.

There are presently 6 mineral claims located within one kilometer of the river, which is down from 41 claims when the Thirty Mile was designated.

Given the low levels of industrial activity in the area, lack of new developments and/or resource harvesting, it is concluded that the heritage values on the Thirty Mile Portion of the Yukon River are receiving less impact by human use and activities than they have since the late 1880s.

4. Chronology of Events Affecting the Thirty Mile Section, 1991 - 2002

Year	Events
1991	Kitchen shelters installed at Lower Laberge and Hootalinqua Campsites and sealed toilets installed Dedication ceremony
1996	City of Whitehorse installs new sewer treatment plant Interpretive Signs installed at Deep Creek, Lake Laberge Campground
1997	Yukon River Visitor Survey
1998	Fox Lake Forest Fire Yukon - Wilderness Tourism Licensing Act (WTLA) passed
1999	Regulations developed and approved for WTLA
2002	Ta'an Kwach'an Council First Nation ratifies Final Agreement, January



Makeshift latrine at informal campsite on Thirty Mile, 2002
To be replaced with sealed privy.

5. Review of the Implementation Priorities - Yukon River: Thirty Mile Section Management Plan

A management plan was approved in 1990 for the Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River. Tasks were identified in the plan, prioritized and summarized into an "Implementation Priorities" chart. The responsible branches, departments and agencies were included. Appendix B outlines the status of each identified task.

One of the most significant outstanding tasks is the establishment of a cooperative Thirty Mile Management Group. Several tasks related to heritage values on the river are also outstanding.

It is recommended that the 1990 management plan be reviewed with the Ta'an Kwach'an First Nation and affected departments, prior to any new work taking place based on the Implementation Priorities. In the context of the Ta'an Kwach'an land claim settlement, there may be different priorities and issues that require attention, particularly related to First Nation heritage values along the river. Final Agreement obligations through Chapter 13 (Heritage) may provide direction on implementation priorities over the next 10 years and need to be discussed in the context of heritage river management.

6. Recommended Actions

The following are recommended actions to be completed in the next 2 years and included in on-going management of the river.

1. Include TRBM map notation of the Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River
2. Initiate discussions with Ta'an Kwach'an Council and YG Heritage Branch to review the 1990 management plan and update as required.
3. Conduct comprehensive visitor survey of the Yukon River every 5 years
4. Continue to collect Wilderness Tourism Licensing data for the river
5. Install 1 toilet at informal campsite
6. Water quality testing to continue



Thirty Mile Interpretive Panels at Lake Laberge Campground, Installed 1993