

Yukon River: Thirty Mile Section

10 - Year Review (1990 - 2002)



Recreational paddlers, Thirty Mile Section of Yukon River, 2002

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for

The Canadian Heritage Rivers Board



**THE CANADIAN HERITAGE
RIVERS SYSTEM**

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1. Executive Summary

The Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River has seen no significant change in the integrity of its natural, cultural and recreational values since it was designated as a Canadian Heritage River in 1991. A review of the condition of the heritage values indicates that some improvements to the integrity of the natural values has been accomplished. The most significant improvement was the installation of a new sewer treatment plant for the City of Whitehorse, thus reducing effluent discharge into the Yukon River.

Heritage values have been recorded over the past 10 years and improvements to recreational values have been made.

The Ta'an Kwach'an Council settled their land claim agreement in January of 2002, ushering in a new era for the First Nation which will also affect how land and water use decisions are made for the Thirty Mile.

Recommendations have been made to review the 1990 Management Plan with the Ta'an Kwach'an Council.

2. Introduction

2.1 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.

2.2 Purpose of Report

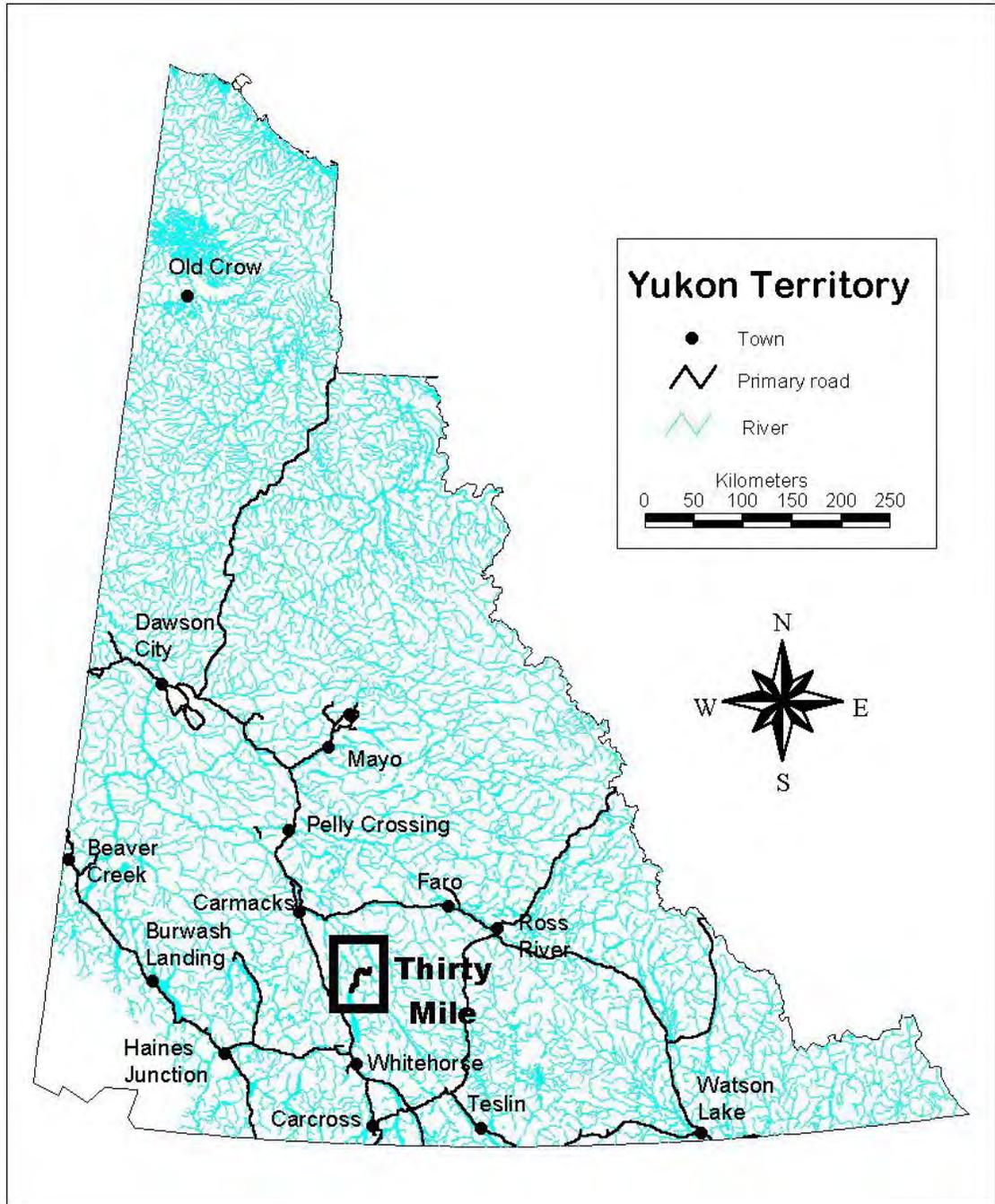
This report fulfils the requirement of the CHR Board to review rivers designated under the CHR System every 10 years, or more frequently, to ensure they continue to meet CHRS selection and integrity guidelines. Since the designation of the Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River in 1991, an important 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, and revised between 2000 - 2001. 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.



Designated campsite along Thirty Mile, Summer 2002

Figure A: Thirty Mile Section of Yukon River, Regional Setting



3.0 Management of the Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River

3.1 Legislative and Regulatory Authorities

The management of the Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River is a cooperative arrangement between the Yukon Government, Ta'an Kwach'an Council and the Federal Government. Each government has jurisdiction in the area for various aspects of land, water, heritage resource, natural resource and visitor use management. The legislative and regulatory authorities are not outlined in detail in this document as they will be changing April 1st, 2003 with the devolution of the Northern Affairs program from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs to the Yukon government.

The federal government continues to manage all land use activities adjacent to the river presently. The management authorities outlined in the 1991 management plan have not changed to date.

3.2 Ta'an Kwach'an Land Claim Settlement

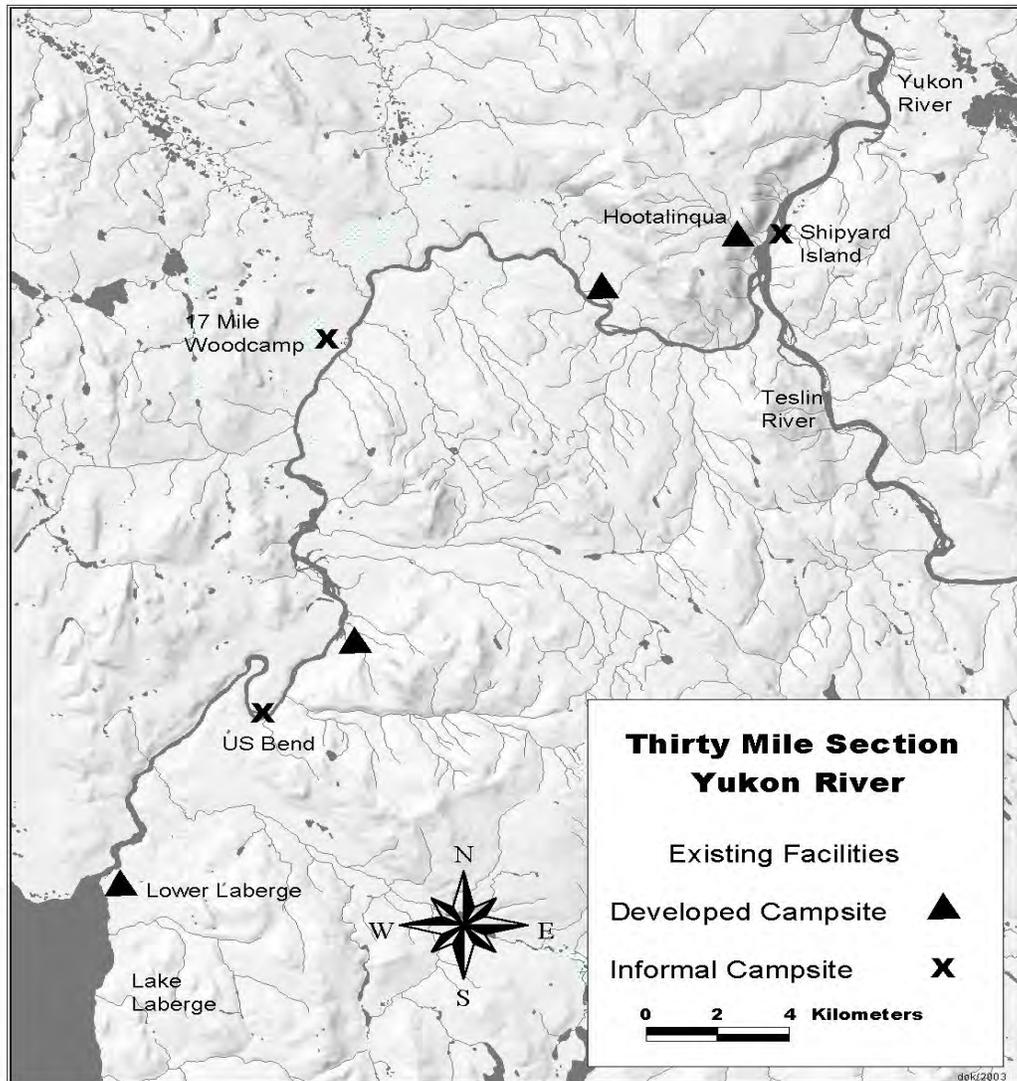
Another significant event, which may impact the future management of the river is the settlement of the Ta'an Kwach'an Final Agreement in January 2002. There are 14 first nations in the Yukon, nine of which have settled land claims. This is a significant step for each respective First Nation as well as the Yukon and Federal governments. The Final Agreements outline specific provisions for each First Nation and represent a new chapter in the history of the Yukon territory. Chapter 13 of the Ta'an Kwach'an 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", thereby recognizing the designation and plan formally through the land claim.

The Ta'an Kwach'an have five site specific properties (private land owned by the First Nation) located within 250m of the river. These sites fall within the identified management area for the Yukon River: Thirty Mile Section, and are 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. The mandated bodies with responsibilities in the Thirty Mile CHR management area are listed in Appendix C.

The 1990 Management plan for the Thirty Mile recommended a Management Group 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 branch of the Department of Environment continues to liaise with all managing jurisdictions and the Ta'an Kwach'an Council. It is unlikely that such a body is required at this point in time, given the establishment of the above noted boards and councils.

Figure B: Thirty Mile Section (Yukon River)



3.3 *Other Changes and Operational Work*

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,
- on-going revisions to the Yukon Wildlife Act to enable implementation of Yukon First Nation Final Agreements, and
- adoption of parallel legislation (to the federal government) for devolution e.g. the Yukon Environmental Assessment Act .

The Parks Branch has maintained a maintenance contract with the Mundessa Corporation (economic development arm of the Ta'an Kwach'an Council) 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.

4.0 **Significant Changes to Natural, Cultural and Recreational Values**

The Yukon is in a privileged position with regards to the condition of values associated with the Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River. There have been no significant negative changes to any values for which the river was nominated (refer to summary in Appendix A).



Recreational boating on Thirty Mile, Summer 2002

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 than they have since the late 1880s.

4.1 Natural Values

Under the Natural Integrity chart, the main changes have been noted. These include the installation of pump out toilets at campsites along the river.

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.

INTEGRITY VALUES

Integrity Guideline	Situation in 1990	Changes since 1990	Actions and Related Research
Natural Integrity			
The nominated area is of sufficient size and contains all or most of the key interrelated and interdependent elements to demonstrate the key aspects of the natural processes or other phenomena which give the river its outstanding natural value.	The management area boundary extended from the north end of Lake Laberge at the historic Lower Laberge site, downstream to Hootalinqua and Shipyard Island at the confluence of the Teslin River. The Heritage River boundary is approximately 45 sq. km., with a minimum corridor width extending 250m back from each river bank. It includes all significant natural and cultural heritage features associated with the river.		It is generally felt that the 250 m set back for the Heritage River management area is too small to cover "all significant natural and cultural heritage features associated with the river." Would recommend this be expanded to include the height of land along the river or the immediate watershed of the Thirty Mile section of the Yukon River.
The nominated area contains those ecosystem components required for the continuity of the species, features or objects to be protected.	The nomination document stated that the Thirty Mile section is an outstanding example of the Yukon River which contains representative ecosystem common to the entire river.		
There are no man-made impoundments with the nominated section.	Yes.		As noted, there are a number of man-made changes that have affected the river, but not impoundments.

Integrity Guideline	Situation in 1990	Changes since 1990	Actions and Related Research
Natural values for which the river is nominated have not been compromised by impoundments.	Yes.		Salmon spawning habitat has been negatively affected by the work that was done on the river for navigational purposes.
The natural aesthetic value of the river is not compromised by human developments.	The recreation highlight of the Thirty Mile is the opportunity for viewing and interpreting outstanding cultural heritage features in a wilderness setting.		
The river's water must be uncontaminated to the extent that its natural aquatic ecosystem is intact.	There were no reports available on the water quality within the Thirty Mile section in 1991.	Pump out toilets installed at all formal campsites. The City of Whitehorse installed new treatment facilities for sewer that is released into the river.	

Although industrial activity is not addressed directly in any of the charts, activity has decreased significantly over the past 10 years. Trapping efforts and mineral exploration have decreased due to low market prices. 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.

4.2 Cultural Values

There have been no changes to the cultural values or cultural integrity of the Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River. As mentioned earlier, the settlement of the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council Final Agreement is an important component in Yukon history. The work that has been completed as part of the land claim negotiations, and which is provided for through Chapter 13 of the Final Agreement will definitely enhance our understanding of the Ta'an Kwäch'än's activities in the Thirty Mile Area.

Integrity Guideline	Situation in 1990	Changes since 1990	Actions and Related Research
Cultural Integrity			
The nominated area is of sufficient size and contains all or most of the key interrelated and interdependent elements to demonstrate the key aspects of the features, activities, or other phenomena which give the river its outstanding cultural value.	One of the striking features of the Thirty Mile corridor is the extensive evidence of past and present human activity in the area. A full listing of all the cultural heritage features is found in the 1991 Management Plan.		The resources along the river have been fairly well documented however work is still required to evaluate their value, threats to the resources and mitigation strategies.
The visual appearance of the nominated section of the river enables an appreciation of at least one of the periods of the river's historical importance.	Twenty sites and features of cultural heritage interest were mapped and described in 1991.		
The key artifacts and sites comprising the values for which the river is nominated are unimpaired by impoundments and human land uses.	Yes		
The water quality of the nominated section does not detract from the aesthetic appearance or the cultural experience provided by its cultural values.	Not an issue.		

4.3 Recreational Values

The recreational integrity of the river has been maintained over the past 10 years.

Wilderness tourism statistics from commercial operators indicate an increase in use along the Yukon River. Data has been collected since the summer 2000. 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.

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.

Integrity Guideline	Situation in 1990	Changes since 1990	Actions and Related Research
Recreational Integrity			
The river possesses water of a quality suitable for contact recreational activities, including those for which it is nominated.	Water quality was described in 1991 as one of the most attractive features of the Thirty Mile and was exceptionally clear.		
The river's visual appearance is capable of providing river travellers with a continuous natural experience or a combined natural and cultural experience without significant interruption by modern human intrusions.	The Thirty Mile section does not have spectacular scenery, nor are the visual features unusual within a Yukon context. It is the wilderness setting that enhances the visual quality.		General disagreement with the statement found in the original document. A broader appreciation of the river would be appropriate.
The river is capable of supporting increased recreational uses without significant loss of or impact on its natural, cultural or aesthetic values.	The Thirty Mile section has the ability to absorb relatively high use levels provided appropriate management is practiced e.g. waste management, etc.		Continue to monitor visitation and collect visitor statistics.

More information on the various natural, cultural and recreational values has become available and this is noted in Appendix A. This information will be useful in future reviews and management plan updates.

5.0 Review of the Implementation Priorities from 1990 Management Plan

5.1 Implementation Work

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.

It is recommended that the 1990 management plan be reviewed with the Ta'an Kwach'an Council 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.



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

Major tasks that were completed as a result of the 1990 management plan include:

- inventory and assessment of heritage resources at Shipyard Island,
- evaluation and documentation of structures at Hootalinqua, Lower Laberge and Seventeen Mile Woodcamp,
- 3 campsites built along the Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River,
- annual contract with Mundessa Development Corporation to patrol river and clean campsites,
- interpretive panels installed at Deep Creek Kiosk.

5.2 Other Major Events

The 1997 Yukon River Visitor Survey was the first comprehensive visitor use survey of Yukon River travelers. Information gathered through this work has helped to establish visitor use patterns, demographics and visitor satisfaction levels for river travelers which will be extremely useful for future work and planning in the area.

Major Events Related to the Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River 1991 - 2002

Year	Events
1991	Canadian Heritage River dedication ceremony
1996	City of Whitehorse installs new sewer treatment plant
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 ratifies Final Agreement, January

The 1998 Fox Lake Forest Fire did not directly impact management of the river. However, given the extent and location of the fire, it is expected that natural values associated with the biotic environment have been affected.



Old cabin at Hootalinqua, Summer 2002

The Wilderness Tourism Licensing Act (WTLA) is the first of its kind in Canada. The Act was passed in 1998 and provides standards and regulations for wilderness tourism activities across the territory. Commercial operators licensed under the WTLA must have liability insurance, first aid and worker's compensation for any staff. Statistics are provided by the operators, to the Yukon government, as part of their licensing agreement.

6.0 Recommended Actions

There are a number of recommended actions that should be completed in the next 2 years in relation to management of the Thirty Mile section of the Yukon River.

1. Ensure Territorial Resource Base Maps have a notation of the Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River
2. Initiate discussions with Ta'an Kwach'an and YG Heritage Branch to review the 1990 management plan and update as required.
3. Conduct comprehensive visitor survey of the Yukon River in 2005 and every 5 years thereafter
4. Continue to collect Wilderness Tourism Licensing data for the river
5. Install 1 toilet at informal campsite in 2003
6. Water quality testing to continue by Department of Environment



Thirty Mile Interpretive Panels at Lake Laberge Campground, Installed 1993