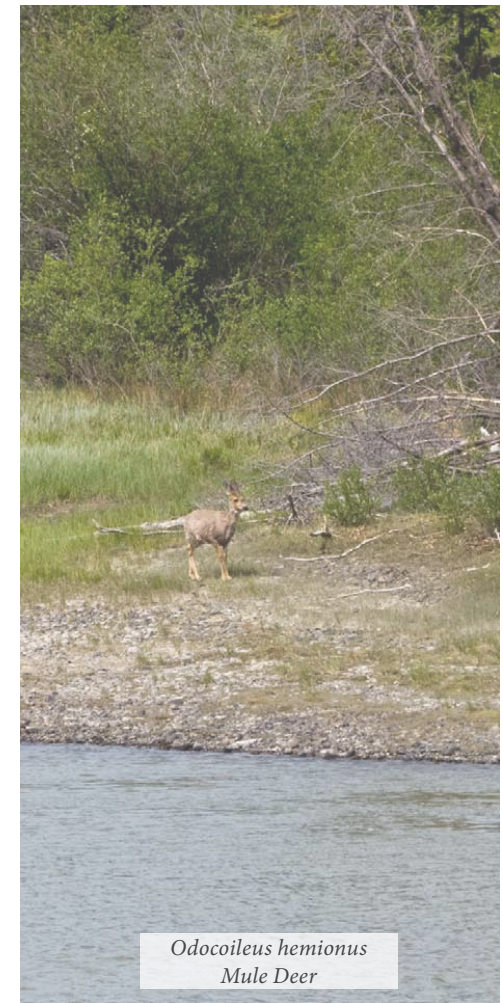


2012 Yukon River Quest, coming down to Whistle Bend.



Odocoileus hemionus
Mule Deer

YESAB 2013-0132, Whistle Bend Subdivision – Phases 3-7 – an illustrated response

whitehorsewalks.com, Peter Long, January 16, 2014

"You can't stop progress," is a common mantra. However, accepting that growth within the City's Urban Containment Boundary will happen, let's try to ensure that what's left over from the Whistle Bend project stays natural.

The Whistle Bend subdivision is on a peninsula and less than 400 m from the Yukon River. But, it almost feels that once you draw a hard line around a development project like Whistle Bend, anything outside of the official project seems not to be involved or to be dealt with later. I hear that designating trails outside the

project boundaries is unfair to future home buyers. Waiting decades to designate a major exterior natural trail route seems destined to bequeath Whitehorse's future residents with a torn-up trail-braided wasteland!

With thousands of projected residents living in Whistle Bend, recreational opportunities need to be more than those provided within the subdivision. People also want the wilderness-city natural trail experiences that living alongside a 3,190-km long river can offer. I've used photos to try convey a sense of the majesty, and the fragility, of this part of the river, and the urgency in protecting it.

Having walked the cliffs and gloried in the stunning views, I tried to keep in mind those who would one day buy a home here. Today's society is much more aware of wellness, both community and individual. So for Whistle Bend, as we think about walking as part of being healthy, remember the walking destination will be the river.

It should be stressed that the area is traditional territory for Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and Kkanlin Dün First Nation and that it has long been used by them.

Here are some thoughts....



Bird lookout and erosion



Will 8000 people living in the area love these dunes to death?

Phase 3-7 scope

Quoting from Table 8-3:
Project Construction: Effects Assessment Summary

5. Wildlife Diversity and Habitat

Appropriate signage will be installed on all trails in the Whistle Bend area illustrating what types of recreational activities are permitted. New trail entry point will have physical barriers to limit unauthorized use of the trail system. Natural green space and riparian buffers that currently exist on-site will be maintained to the greatest extent possible.

Not significant – Likely, low magnitude rating: The trail network on the Porter Creek Bench and their high use

prior to development would suggest that wildlife are already accustomed to a level of human disturbance in the area.

11. Health and Safety

This doesn't address cliffs, soft banks, wildlife.

17. Stable and sustaining vegetation:

The City will consider installing signage at points of potential entry from the development into sensitive areas. Signs will identify the area as sensitive, and note that recreational use (both motorized and non-motorized) should be limited to designated trails.

Not significant – Unlikely. The trail and road networks will reduce the frequency of foot traffic on the natural environment.

21. Surface Water / Groundwater Quality and Flow:

foot traffic and recreation activities.

Trails that are part of the Project design will reduce the number of unauthorized trails and impacts to the vegetation in the area.

Not significant - Unlikely The maintenance of riparian buffers and trail network will minimize the potential of erosion and sedimentation as a result of foot traffic and recreation.

20. Wildlife Diversity and Habitat: Increased people, pets and traffic will cause displacement and potentially death of wildlife.

Habitat in the area outside the Project footprint will be untouched by the development and will still provide habitat function.

Not significant – Likely, low magnitude The magnitude of effects is reduced since the development area is outside designated significant wildlife areas (SWAs). The effect is minimized by the provision of green space.

24. Recreational Use: Loss of the local trail system and / or reduced aesthetic values, including visual, tranquility and solitude.

The trail network proposed for Phases 3-7 connect offsite Whistle Bend Way to Mountainview Drive and to nearby motorized winter 2012 (snowmobile) City wide trail network. The recreational perimeter trail connects the Whistle Bend Community to destinations outside the neighbourhood (e.g. adjacent neighbourhoods, Golf Course, and Eagle Bay park).

Positive effect Although some existing trails will be permanently lost, new trails to be incorporated into the development will compensate for this loss. The effects of reducing the aesthetic values are reduced in scale due to the consultation process and cooperative creation of the development design.

28. Adjacent Land Users: Increased likelihood of conflicts from operational activities with land use adjacent to Project.

Representatives from the golf course were invited to review preliminary and revised concept plans of the Project. No specific concerns were raised.

Not significant – Likely, low magnitude The population increase resulting from the Whistle Bend Project is likely to have a positive impact on the golf course as it may increase its client base. Representatives from the golf course were involved in the Project concept plan development to minimize effects on this land user.

Will this project provided for reasonable protection of the band of land on the Whistle Bend peninsula outside the project's Boundary?

I don't believe so. I'll try to give a sense of the uniqueness, and smallness, of this narrow band of land.

The problem is the project focuses on building a subdivision here, but minimizes the probable effects of people actually living here—5000 from Phase 3-7, as well as over 2000 from Phase 1,2.

Realistically, active transportation routes alongside major roads, paved motorized and groomed-surfaced trails and green streets within the subdivision will not stop people from wanting to use the natural areas outside the developed subdivision, easily accessible in a 30-minute walk.

But many people walk much further than short walks. Suggesting signage and barriers to protect the perimeter natural space is not enough. Look at examples of trail users elsewhere in the city where people feel that “you can’t tell me what to do”.

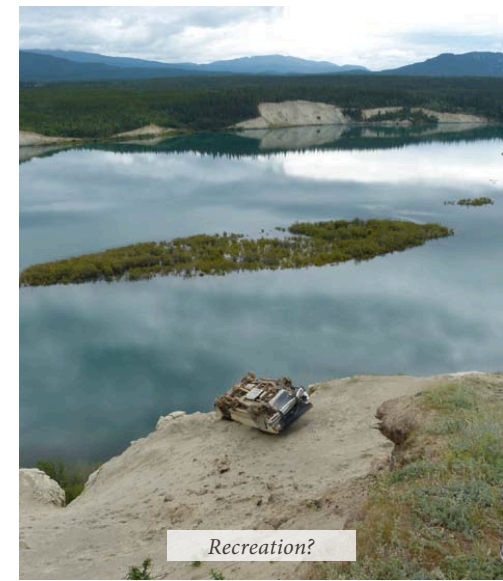
Whistle Bend subdivision needs to get creative to be able to preserve the land around the subdivision: peer pressure from groups of organized trail users; designating and zoning a route for a Yukon River Corridor Trail through the area; and most importantly, offering attractive alternative trails.

Addressing preservation of surrounding natural spaces—before the city accepts transfer of the subdivisions—seems a cheaper process and more fairly addressed as a development cost today, rather than deciding in 10 or 15 years to address damage, when it might well be irreparable.

Let’s look further at that small amount of natural land outside the border and see if it feels more important than was assessed in the report.



High water, Kwanlin Dün land



Recreation?



Bald Eagle
Haliaeetus leucocephalus



Bird nests



Erosion problems



Well-worn sandy trail

How far do people walk? Getting to 4th and Main

Health studies say we are not active enough. One solution is walking. Look at the popularity of the Millennium Trail and the Rotary Centennial Bridge. Interesting trails will become destinations, encouraging people to expand their horizons. What will make residents of Whistle Bend want to walk?

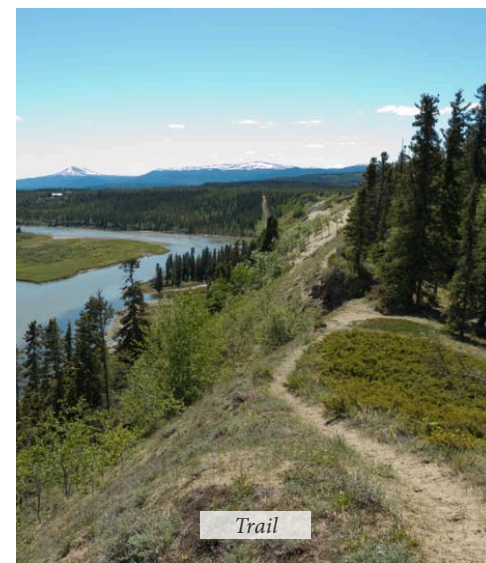
Before people set out on a walk they sometimes want to know how far, how long, where to go. So I made the above map with the corner of 4th and Main as the destination. Generally I chose to follow paved trails if they are obviously faster (shorter). But walking alongside roads is boring, noisy, smelly, so where I could, I chose cleaner air, quieter, more interesting scenic routes.

Think of walking about 4 km per hour for a moderate pace.

The City has an active transportation plan to use paved trails to connect neighbourhoods. As their network grows, this will help those in a hurry, particularly those going downtown to work. They are most interested in growing the number of people who walk.

Let's look at recreational walking next.

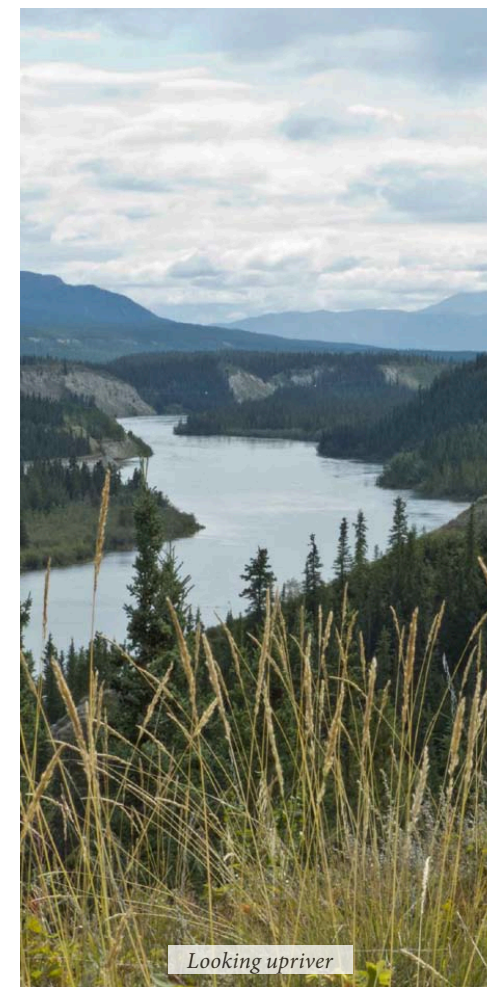
We want people to walk for health and wellness, and to be able to do longer walks, but with local destinations that are environmentally fragile, or require walking alongside roads, we may well be discouraging them from walking.



Trail



A dog's life...



The Yukon River Corridor Trail

Stories from the past have much to say about the importance of the river in the lives of the people who lived here. As one would expect from being in the heart of two traditional territories, a trading trail once ran from Marsh Lake to Lake Laberge.

Whistle Bend celebrates the river's history by naming its streets after the paddlewheelers. One day, if we plan well, we will again be able to walk along the river within city limits, and eventually, lake to lake.

To have a river corridor trail, we need to plan — zoning and land use rules are critical. While many parts of this corridor trail exist

throughout the city, the area around Whistle Bend (white arrow on map above) is still only a vision, an opportunity for the city.

On the above map, green shows existing trails or routes, orange shows pieces that need to be looked at. The parts of the trails along the river generally follow the edge of the height of land, usually with a fairly sharp slope down to the river or low benches along the river. Sometimes the trail is on the east side and sometimes on the west.

Because it isn't always easy to walk with good river views, when choosing a trail route, we should use side trails to natural lookout spots.

This will be especially the case for Whistle Bend. Is there the concept of a legal public right-of-way alongside the river?

The importance of this route through the narrow strip of land left after building the Whistle Bend subdivision, should be addressed in the YESAB evaluation of Phases 3–7. We should not wait until Whistle Bend is almost full in 10 to 20 or more years before citizens of Whitehorse can create this part of the river trail.

So let's look at the Whistle Bend peninsula. I'll continue to use this term to remind us that Whistle Bend is surrounded on three sides by water.



Whistle Bend's neighbourhood

On the map below right, the concentric circles, centred at the corner of Keno and Goddard ways, are spaced every .25 km (250 m). This is to give a sense of scale, of distance between places. The green line is to be the paved Perimeter Trail. Coloured shading reflects the Zoning By-law (2012). Map on right overlays By-law Map 6 (Whistle Bend) over the Whistle Bend concept map. Below are from the By-law.

- **red** is Mountainview Golf Club, *Commercial Recreation (CR): outdoor recreation development with tourist facilities and complementary secondary uses that encourage year-round activity.*
- **dull orange** is Future Planning (FP): *protect land with no determined use in a generally undeveloped and natural state until such time as planning has occurred to determine appropriate zoning.*
- **bright orange** is Kwanlin Dün land (FN-FP): *lands owned or selected by the Kwanlin Dün First Nation which shall be planned and designated in accordance with the Kwanlin Dün self government and final agreements.*
- **greenish-turquoise** is Environmental Protection (PE): *protection and preservation of environmentally sensitive areas, wildlife habitat and other significant natural areas.*
- **blue** is river, creek, wetlands, also Environmental Protection (PE).
- **green, and dull green** within the concept sketch, are Greenbelt (PG): *public land typically left in a natural state and may be used primarily for buffers, walkways, trails and for unorganized or passive recreation.*

• **ICONS:** slides = playgrounds, masks = Guild Hall, flagged buildings = schools, "\$" = stores.

The land beside the river, shown as PE, is often high cliffs, steep banks, sand dunes. The river is about 400 m north of the Whistle Bend subdivision and about 300 m to the south.

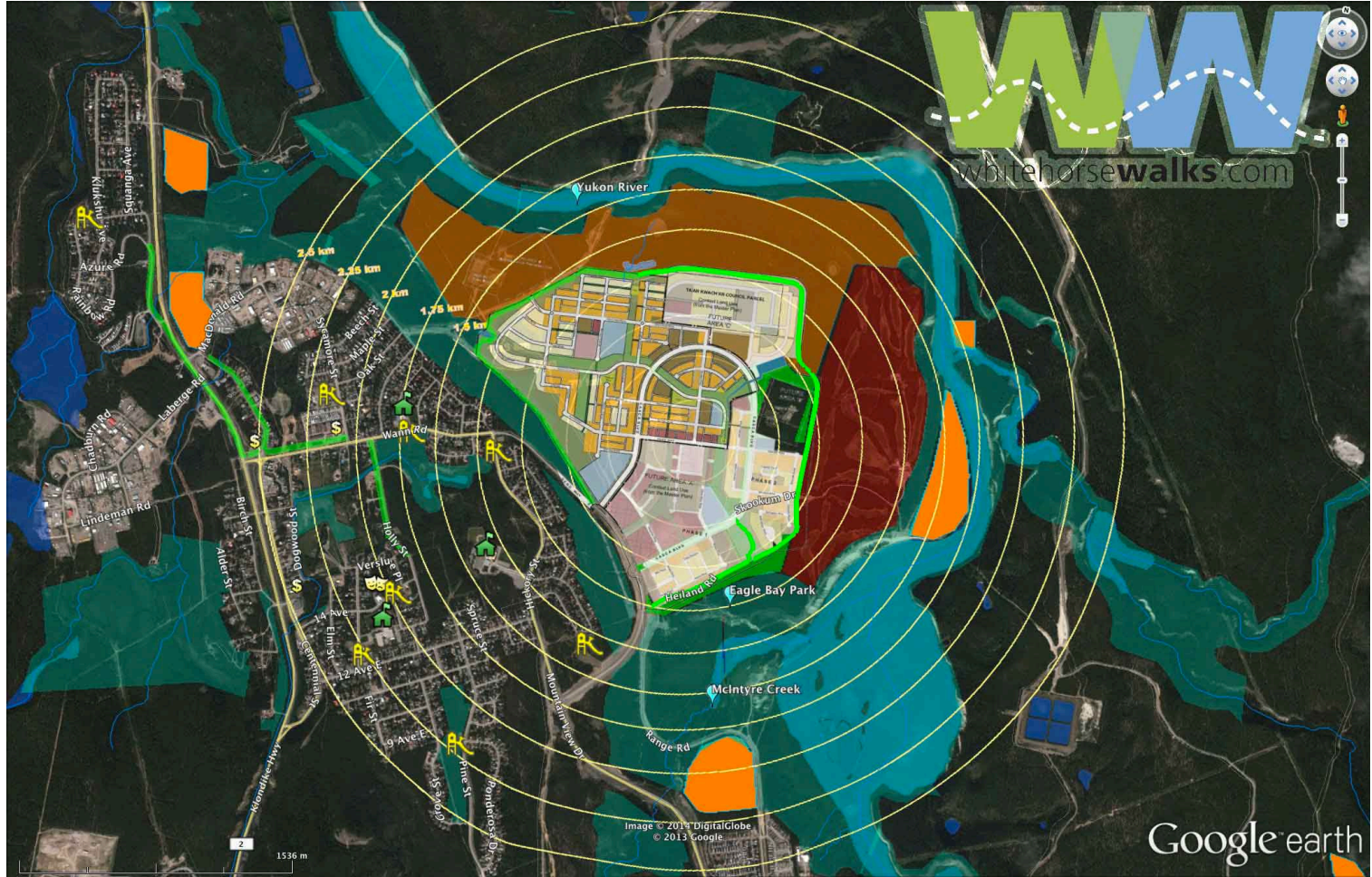
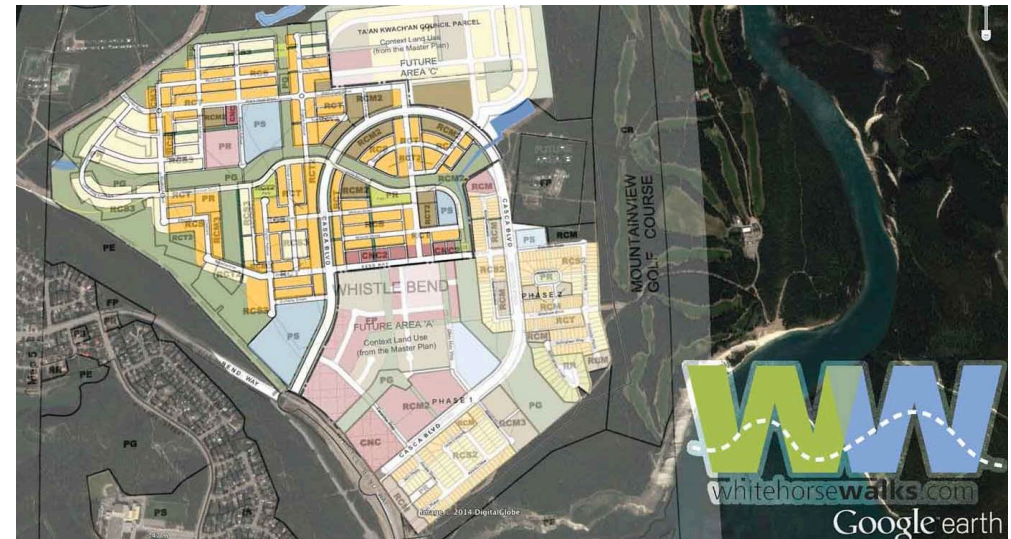
Obviously, the off-leash map produced by By-law will need updating.

It's important to keep in mind that while YESAB is looking at Phases 3-7, really Phase 1, 2 is part of the pressure on the greenspaces. A big focus for many walkers, and others, will be getting to the river.

Let's look at each of the three sides of the peninsula: south, east and north.



Paved Perimeter Trail, Phase 1



South end of Whistle Bend

The Whistle Bend bench on the south side has spectacular view points (red view icons), and reflecting this, Eagle Bay Park was designated as part of Phases 1,2 of Whistle Bend. The park sits high over the sandy cliffs above the mouth of McIntyre Creek with peeks down into beaver ponds (photo below) and eagle nests, and often paddlers heading downriver.

The banks will quickly start to show signs of love as Phase 1,2's 2200 residents wander out and along the escarpment trail here. As Phase 3-7 starts to fill, the pressure will only increase; thinking that this end of Whistle Bend isn't affected by Phases 3-7 would be short sighted.

It's important to look at ways of encouraging hiking away from the cliffs by providing interesting alternatives. How? Use the focus of a Yukon River Corridor Trail—designed as a sturdy, interesting and natural trail—and people will follow it south towards town. Orange lines on the map (right) are some routing ideas. They mostly follow existing trails.

McIntyre Creek

The “?” icon on McIntyre Creek shows where the Yukon River Corridor Trail could cross McIntyre Creek with the building of a small bridge. Whistle Bend residents would see walking here as a recreational pursuit; as well, Range Road residents would gain pleasant access to Whistle Bend and the Eagle Bay Park. This crossing, likely the site of an earlier road, would be an attractive spot, much like the bridge below the college.

Continuing towards downtown, after crossing McIntyre Creek and ascending to the heights on the south side of the creek, one arrives at the site of the old dump overlooking a wide panorama of mountains and the confluence of McIntyre Creek and the Yukon River. There are interpretive signs here (oops, they were vandalized and removed... sigh!), partly commemorating the work of the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council in spearheading the cleaning of the dump, restoring natural vegetation on the steep slopes below and restoring salmon habitat on the creek.



This whole area easily opens up interpretation opportunities (photo at right: beaver pond beside McIntyre Creek below the slope of the old dump; parts of Range Road and Mountainview Drive can be seen; photo taken from about 1.5 km from Phase 3-7, .5 km from Phase 1,2.)



Yukon Beardstongue
Penstemon gormanii albiflora



looking out over the confluence of McIntyre Creek with the Yukon River

South end:

Range Road North neighbourhood

There is a neighbourhood planning exercise currently underway which will address this site from the Range Road side.

The next event, the Range Road North Design Workshop, is scheduled for January 21-23 at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre. The current report on the city web page is hopeful and interesting to read.

Hiking McIntyre Creek

The obvious area that will offer alternate hiking is McIntyre Creek. Part of the City's McIntyre Creek Park, it has many really nice trails.

The "!" warning icons (red triangles on map on the right) show where people will want to cross Range Road and Mountainview Drive.

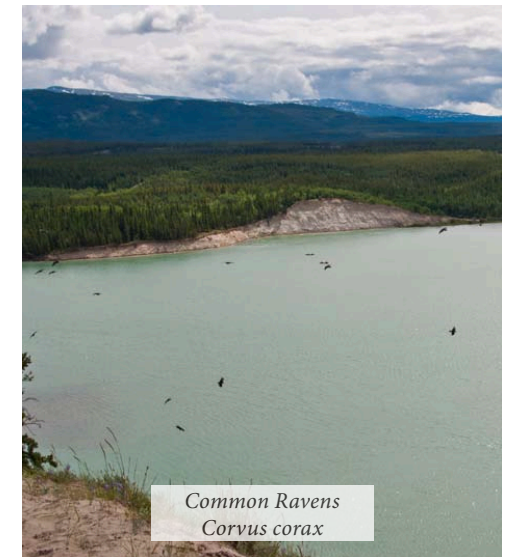
As an example of distances, look at two routes to the college: the yellow line (map on the right) is about 4.54 km; pinkish purple line via the McIntyre wetlands lookout, by Takhini Trailer Court, is about 7 km. The walk to McIntyre wetlands will be popular with its incredible views into the wetlands below.



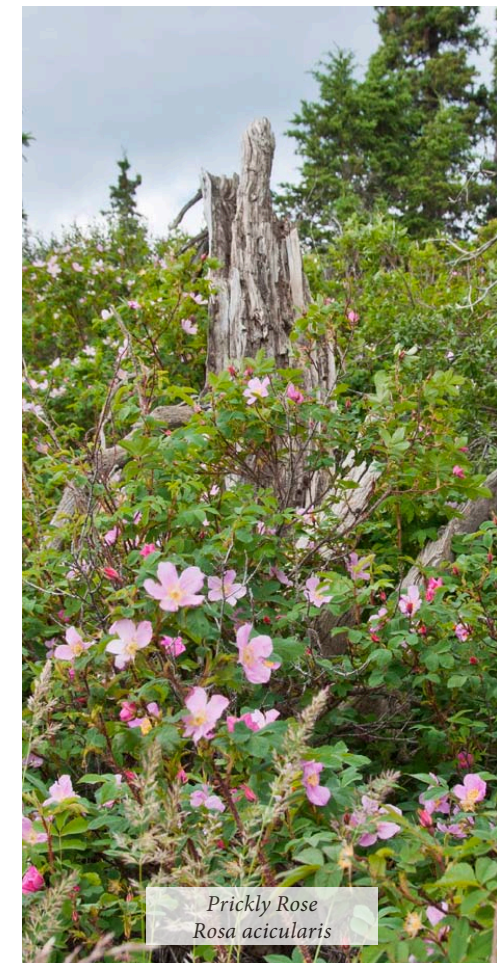
Broom rape
Orobanche fasciculata



Looking upriver to downtown



Common Ravens
Corvus corax



*Prickly Rose
Rosa acicularis*

East side of Whistle Bend, the golf course

There needs to be larger discussions with the golf club on how the thousands of people living here are to interact with the space and how the Yukon River Corridor Trail would either pass through the course or along the edge.

The golf course here will be an attractive tranquil place to walk. Winter use for trails will be tempting for snowbikes, snowshoes and walking.

On a recent hike in a walking festival in Wales, one hike we followed used a path that went right through a golf course, thus showing it is possible to mix golf and trails. This might be a good role model to explore for our Whitehorse situation.

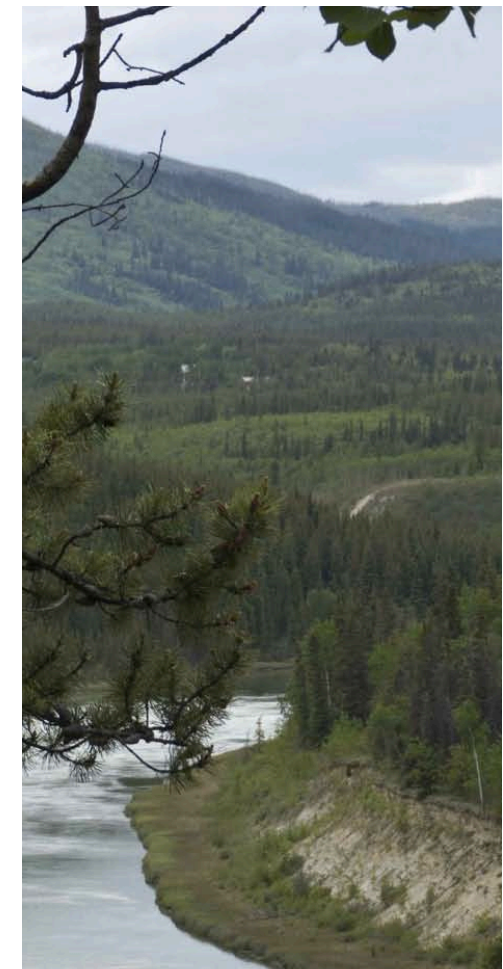
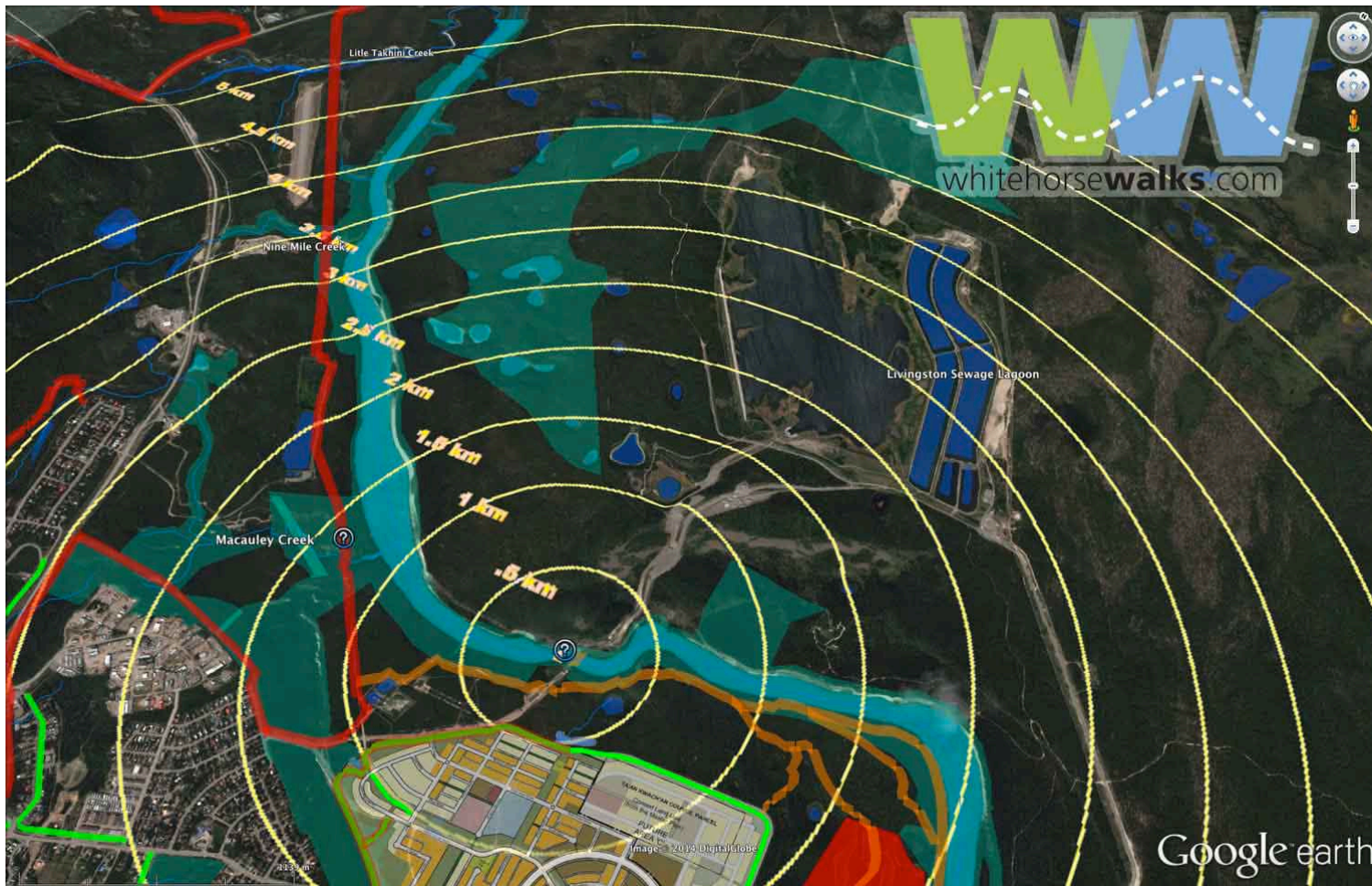
High fences and restricting walkers to just using the paved Perimeter Trail would be unsightly and not very neighborly.

The orange routes above are suggestions, often following existing trails. Concentric circles spaced every .25 km (250 m).

When looking at trails with the golf course, keep in mind that the trail along the cliffs on the south edge of the golf course is heavily used, very fragile and really pretty. It's a raven playground on a windy day.



looking along cliffs, past the golf course, to the low bench with Kwanlin Dün land



North end of Whistle Bend

The north end green space above Phases 3-7 was considered as recreation in earlier concept plans, but the 2012 Zoning By-law considers it FP, Future Planning. It should be PG Greenbelt. Are there plans to develop it further? The space is about 2.7 km wide by around 200-400 m high. Outside this, the land slopes steeply down to the river. This is designated as PE, Environmental Protection.

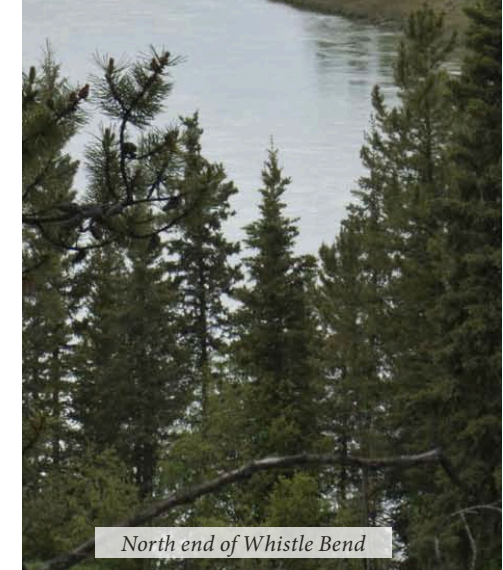
There are a number of existing trails here but I've chosen just one (marked in orange) as being a goal of the Yukon River Corridor Trail. On-the-ground testing would obviously be needed. Red lines are the City's official motorized trails. Concentric circles spaced every .5 km (500 m).

A big unknown is where people who don't want to walk on motorized trails will be able to walk as they go north along the river. To encourage walking in the north, crossings at the creeks, (above map "?" icon on motorized trail at Macauley Creek) will need bridging. Without planning, the northern area, both above the subdivision and along the river, could easily degenerate into multiple braided trails as the subdivision fills.

Also at this end of the Whistle Bend peninsula, interaction with the golf course needs to be addressed so residents will know what rules they need to follow.



Crossing Macauley Creek



North end of Whistle Bend

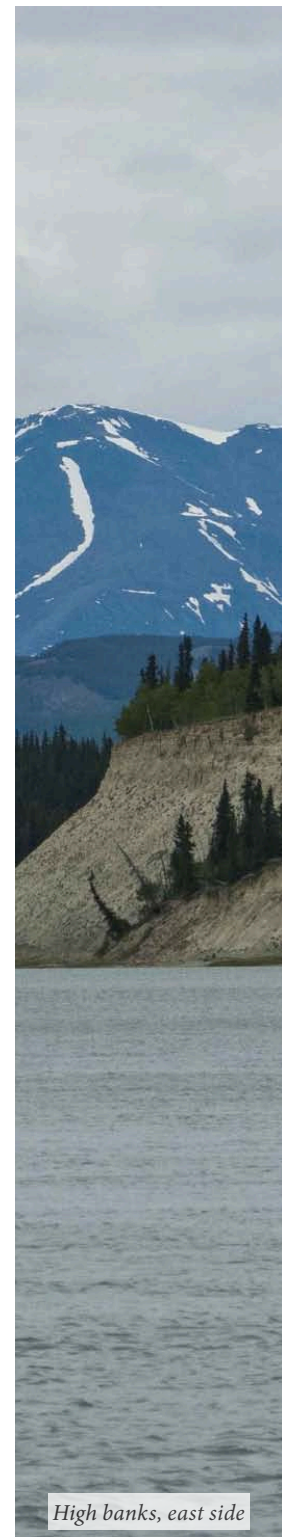
North end:

Whistle Bend pedestrian bridge

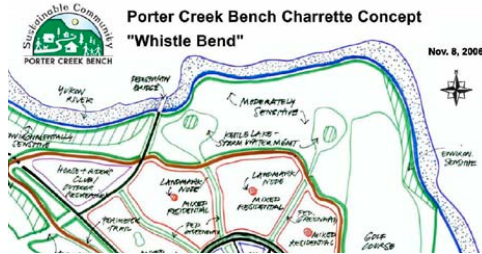
Photo at right: Looking upriver at the cliffs (right of photo) of Whistle Bend north, in the area where the sewage pipes cross to the sewage lagoons on the north side of the river. This is where a proposed pedestrian bridge could be located — marked on the map below by the “?”; it is also where the .5 m concentric circles on the previous page’s map are centred.



Coming out of Whistle Bend, heading to Dawson City



High banks, east side

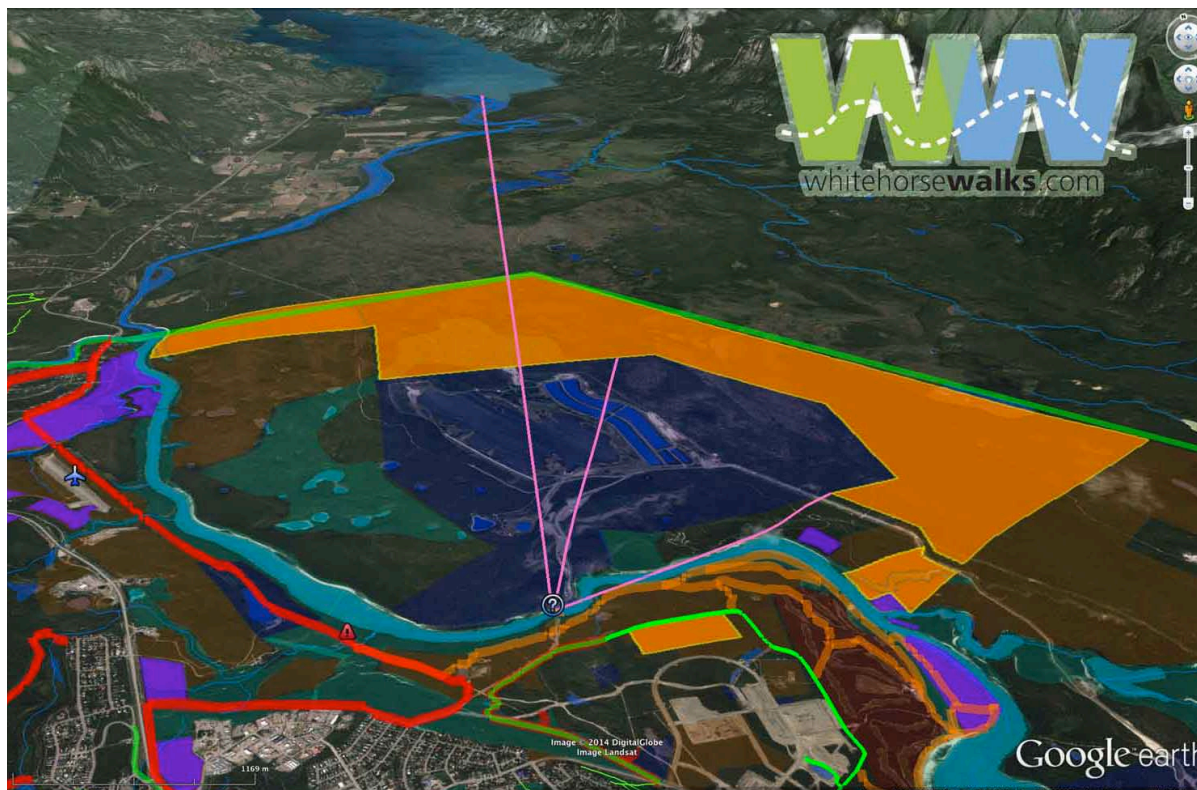


This proposed pedestrian bridge was shown on the Nov. 8, 2006 Porter Creek Bench charrette concept map. A bridge here would be a huge asset to the community. It would give access to trails on the other side of the river. A Yukon River Corridor trail would get a major asset with access to the beautiful high banks on the eastern shore of the river.

Note from an earlier consultation map: “The possibility of a bridge was explored to increase connectivity to the regional trail network. Will need to work with Ta’an Kwäch’an Council to ensure adequate controls are made to protect their land across the river.”

Map at right: **red line** is City motorized trail; **orange** is Ta’an Kwäch’an Council land; **purple** is Kwanlin Dün land; **blue** is Zoned PU Public Utility. Long **pink line** out to start of Lake Laberge is 20 km and shorter **pink line** is 4 km. Perspective results in the two line lengths looking more like a 1:2 ratio.

Public money is always tight when looking at luxuries. Bridges, trails, staircases are not the first items in a city’s budget, rather they’re the first to go in the budget. And yet, if we think community health, they should be right up there with roads and sewers. YESAB should consider whether these costs should be borne by future residents, or should be project development costs.





Millennium Trail

Snowmobiles, ATVs, dirt bikes, ...

Phase 1,2 talked of a paved Bike Path and I pictured the above photo from the non-motorized Millennium Trail. Phase 1,2 also said “Motorized vehicles would not be able to gain access to the greenbelt but would be provided with out and away trail connections”.

Now, in Phase 3-7, the project talks about “these spaces [natural areas and storm water dry ponds] could provide residents with ‘park-like’ spaces for passive and spontaneous recreational activities. These spaces could provide winter staging areas for motorized recreation and access to perimeter

and off-site multi-use trails” and suggests “Motorized vehicles are permitted on multi-use perimeter trails. Consideration for a dual-track along the perimeter path way is recommended to reduce conflict of motorized and non-motorized users”.

This is a new subdivision. Designating new motorized trails should not be done without community consultation. This will not be popular and the idea of buying a home in a neighbourhood that promotes spontaneous motorized recreational activities will hurt sales.



Trail sign, motorized paved trail Hamilton Blvd.

Speed limits

Both ATV and Snowmobile By-laws state:

- when on designated trails, operators are required to follow the posted speed limit.
- maximum speed is 50 km per hour unless posted otherwise.
- When approaching or passing a pedestrian, dog, or cyclist, operators must reduce their speed to 15 km/hour.

Also to be discussed with the community are reasonable speed limits. The paved Perimeter Trail is essentially a wide sidewalk. It seems odd that vehicles with motors are allowed to go faster on trails, often with poor sight lines, than we are allowed to drive in school zones.

What we should be looking at in the area is how as a community, we can keep what’s surrounding the development as natural as possible.

- The south end of Whistle Bend can’t survive intensive motorized use.
- Golf club members would hope to escape this.
- In the north, if there is any hope for a natural green space, then it should be non-motorized.

Most residents would likely wish for a quiet green space somewhere on the peninsula. The problem is that with a slow trickle of new residents, it will take years to organize an effective voice of a Community Association.

In reality, the best way of protection would be if the various motorized clubs used peer pressure and encouraged their members to help protect what’s left here.

So, where should they go — north along the river and out of the city? Not in Whistle Bend north’s FP area for sure. Not off the motorized trails. The small amounts of recreation land on the peninsula outside the project is too little to support motorized recreation, winter or summer.

Whistle Bend pedestrian bridge

The previously mentioned foot-bridge could be a solution for getting vehicles out and away. The Riverdale motorized trail task force experience has likely made the sewage lagoon end of the city many people’s idea of hinterland! Maybe this bridge should be a high priority KSA project.