

## Y2Y PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction:**

The purpose of these principles is to guide the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y) and its Network partners in their work and relationships with Aboriginal People. Y2Y is an organization that seeks to engage a variety of partners, including Aboriginal People, in the delivery of the Y2Y vision on the ground. The Y2Y Network represents a diverse group of organizations and individuals with many different approaches to conservation. While Y2Y can decide how it will engage with and relate to Aboriginal People, it cannot make policies that bind Network partners. These principles will thus be interpreted and used in different ways throughout the region, depending on the local situation. However, Y2Y encourages its Network partners to adopt these principles in their own dealings with Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal People or other Aboriginal organizations may wish to become part of the Y2Y Network, as is the case in Canada's North. Therefore, these principles should be used as a guide to working "amongst ourselves" rather than recommendations about how to work with "them".

These principles focus on how Y2Y and its Network partners can achieve biodiversity protection, healthier economies and more sustainable communities, and better conservation management strategies by working effectively with Aboriginal People. They are not meant to judge Aboriginal legal rights with respect to protected areas – these rights vary across Canada and the United States according to treaties, land claim settlements and court decisions. It is the responsibility of Y2Y to recognize Aboriginal People' rights and respect them accordingly.

Y2Y recognizes that Aboriginal legal rights, treaties, land claim settlements, traditional uses of the land, and the amount of land still in a natural state vary across the Y2Y region. There may be a need to modify communication and advocacy strategies in different parts of the Y2Y region, while adhering to the basic principles set out in this document.

### **Background:**

The success of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative depends in large measure on how well Network partners work with diverse communities and across the broad range of interests in the region. The Yellowstone to Yukon area is complex, crossing

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Aboriginal People" refers to both First Nations, the term usually used in Canada, and Native Americans, the term usually used in the United States.

an international boundary and many state, provincial and territorial jurisdictions. The Y2Y region also encompasses the traditional territories, land claim settlement regions, and reserves of many Aboriginal People.

The governments of Aboriginal People and other Aboriginal organizations own large tracts of land and have further influence or decision-making powers on land use, resource allocation, and protected areas. The situation with Aboriginal People and their local governments varies throughout the region depending on treaties, land claims, and a variety of other legal arrangements.

For example, north of the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel, there are nine Aboriginal People in the Y2Y region encompassing eight language groups. This pattern is reflected throughout the rest of the Rockies. In the northern half of the Y2Y ecosystem, it is likely that Aboriginal People eventually will own outright, control resource development on, or have significant influence over a significant portion of the land base. The ownership and land management arrangements as one moves south to the international border and into the United States are very different, but no less complex.

The potential for working with Aboriginal People towards a common goal encapsulated by the Y2Y vision is great, and the benefits for conservation and economic diversification could be enormous. Our capacity and need to work with Aboriginal People varies throughout the region, yet there is much to be gained with a common, informed understanding of how best to approach Aboriginal People.

### **Y2Y Principles for Working with Aboriginal People:**

- Aboriginal People are a level of government and consistent basic principles and protocols should guide Y2Y's work with Aboriginal People's governments.
- Y2Y supports the just settlement of outstanding land claims, and supports Aboriginal People's rights to self-determination on their traditional lands. However, Y2Y's operating principles will continue to reflect conservation as its first priority.
- Conservation and protection are foundations of economic stability and healthy communities. Y2Y will honour the need for Aboriginal People to benefit economically from increased conservation of the landscape and its components.
- Y2Y will support Aboriginal People initiatives and agreements to establish protected areas, develop land use plans (including conservation zones or special management

areas), diversify economies, build sustainable communities, and improve land and resource management regimes that:

- maintain ecosystem integrity, and
  - preserve the full diversity of natural habitats and species.
- Y2Y accepts that ecological integrity includes the well-being of those Aboriginal People dependent on the land for subsistence and traditional ways of life.
  - Aboriginal People pursuit of traditional subsistence and ceremonial activities (such as hunting, fishing, and gathering) in protected areas within their traditional territories may be supported by Y2Y provided these activities do not compromise:
    - ecological integrity,
    - the long-term health of habitats or species, or
    - the wilderness nature of the landscape.

- In some cases, Aboriginal People have established protected areas, or established zones within protected areas, where, in the interests of protecting habitats and species, hunting and gathering practices have been voluntarily restricted. Similarly, alternative harvesting methods have been adopted where such methods would be more compatible with maintaining ecological integrity and the health of habitats or species. Such Aboriginal People efforts will be supported by Y2Y. Where compatible with the goals of ecological integrity, habitat and species protection and wilderness conservation, Y2Y will support Aboriginal People' use of their own laws and enforcement practices to achieve compliance with hunting or gathering restrictions in protected areas.
- Y2Y will acknowledge the cultural and political diversity of Aboriginal People and understand that each Aboriginal People may establish protected areas on its own terms with its own unique set of aspirations and political conditions. Y2Y will use consistent standards to define protected areas and other areas managed for conservation to help measure its support for conservation in different jurisdictions and under different management arrangements. These standards will be applied to protect wildlife and the integrity of ecosystems, not measure the relative merits of Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal views on the reasons for conservation.
- Aboriginal People' organizations are both national and local, have diverse objectives, and may have very different decision-making roles and processes. Y2Y will communicate with the most appropriate level of organization in its work with Aboriginal People.
- Y2Y will understand the importance of, and support the use of, Traditional Ecological Knowledge in combination with conservation biology and other sciences to determine the management objectives for protected areas.
- As a sign of cultural respect – and only after careful research and consultation – Aboriginal/traditional names should be used for significant landmarks when possible.