



Connections

Newsletter

Y2Y's Nadine Raynolds in an old-growth forest in B.C.
Photo: Eddie Petryshyn, Wildsight

Connecting and protecting habitat from
Yellowstone to Yukon
so people and nature can thrive.

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The Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative is a trans-border, non-profit organization that connects and protects 3,400 kilometers (2,100 miles) of landscape, to support the health of people and wildlife. It's no simple task, but together with our supporters and more than 460 partners over our history, we're making it happen.

Since 1993, thanks to the Y2Y vision and a dedicated community of supporters and partners like you:



Overall land protection
has increased by 80.5%



The average size of new
parks and protected areas
has grown by 56%



Parks and protected areas are being
created nearly twice as quickly, far
outpacing other regions and North
America as a whole



117 wildlife highway crossing
structures have been built, with
more in the works

INTERCONNECTION

People learning from each other and nature

The Yellowstone to Yukon landscape intersects with the homelands of at least 75 Indigenous groups. Some wildlife species, such as buffalo, have been present here since the last ice age.

The region is also home to diverse ecosystems, from alpine to old-growth, and the source of major rivers that offer clean water for millions of people.

Like you, the many folks who believe in connecting and protecting these landscapes are also unique and diverse. Not just in where they live, but also in the perspectives and experiences they bring to nature conservation.

There's a lot we can learn from each other, and from nature, to achieve our collective vision for wildlife and people and help make this world a kinder, safer and more inclusive place for all.

This newsletter explores the learning journey we are on together. It is about making space for different voices and knowledge; rekindling our human-nature relationship, and understanding what nature needs to help inform conservation decisions.

As you read these stories, think about something you have learned — maybe about an animal or place — and how it contributed to, or changed, the way you see conservation. Learning takes time, but it can be transformative.

At Y2Y, we are still learning and growing, too. Your support helps us along the way so we can tend to nature's needs for the benefit of everyone.

Thank you.

Research shows that not only is the bold Y2Y vision working, but that conservation in the region would not have happened at the same rate without it. (see p.5 for more)

From left to right: Stefanie Krantz, climate change coordinator with Nez Perce Tribe, Y2Y's Jessie Grossman, David Mildrexler, ecologist with Eastern Oregon Legacy Lands and Meadow Wheaton, filmmaker with Nez Perce Tribe. Photo: Brittney Le Blanc



Healing the human-nature relationship

'Camas to Condors' for climate resilience

The camas plant, that grows in wetlands and produces a beautiful, deep-purple flower, and California condor, a gigantic vulture, represent the resilience of ecosystems the Nimíipuu (Nez Perce people) have lived in, stewarded, and depended upon since time immemorial.

However, the absence of keystone species such as condors from these landscapes and the loss of wetland habitat for camas has impacted cultural survival of the Nimíipuu, and an ecosystem's resilience to climate change.

That's why camas and condors are the focal species of a landscape-scale climate resilience initiative in the northeastern Oregon watershed of Joseph Creek — a stronghold for wildlife containing some of the last large intact (but unprotected) wildlands in the Pacific Northwest.

The Camas to Condors (C2C) initiative is a collaborative Indigenous-led conservation initiative between the Nez Perce Tribe, university, and non-profit partners. Thanks to your support, Y2Y is thrilled to be one of those partners.

The lands straddling Joseph Creek contain potential sites for the Tribe's proposed reintroduction of the critically endangered, slowly recovering California condor, and restoration and protection of prairies and wetlands that support root foods such as camas.

In Nez Perce language, this canyon is named after nesting condors, and elders remember stories about condor nests in the canyon. Nimíipuu people continue to live in and steward this landscape, through traditions and connections rooted in place.

By invitation, Y2Y and partners hosted a field tour in July 2022 for four members of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee to showcase this project and seek their support and feedback.

Looking out over the vast landscapes of the Joseph Canyon, the group discussed what is needed to safeguard and strengthen this ecosystem — steps already being taken by the Nez Perce, and future actions needed. They talked about connectivity, climate adaptation, condor recovery, workforce development, and connecting people and the land through culture.

Jessie Grossman, Y2Y's U.S. program manager, was present.

"Getting to share this project with the elected leadership of the Nez Perce Tribe was an honor. Y2Y is grateful to support this important work being led by Indigenous People to reconnect with their homelands and safeguard Nez Perce culture in the face of climate change," she says.

This initiative will help provide a model for centering Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge and practices in conservation and help ecosystems adapt to the changing climate.

Listening to, and learning from the landscape will be a key part of healing these landscapes for plants, wild animals, and people.

Your support helps progress this important work. Thank you.



An alpine sunrise during a research flight over the Rockies.
Photo: Annie Loosen

Exploring and protecting the wild

When recreation is more than just having fun

Exploring lands and waters and seeing wildlife often instills a drive to protect nature. Below are some recent updates and stories about recreation that show how learning from nature can strengthen our connection with the landscapes we roam, and help us to keep them healthy.

Raising the bar for recreation

A recreation ecology project led by researchers at Y2Y and the University of Northern British Columbia teaches us about the impact of recreation on nature. Your support is a real boost that helps keep this vital multi-year project going!

The study area covers Alberta's Kananaskis-Ghost and B.C.'s Upper Columbia — both adventure hubs that have seen literally millions more visitors in the past couple of years. Often, the most scenic places to enjoy the outdoors are also great wildlife habitat, freshwater sources, and sensitive (or even rare) ecosystems. Where, how, and how many people are recreating in these areas? Do they overlap with wildlife habitat?

Learning the answers to these questions will lead to better land use planning and policy making by governments, and better decisions about development — and, ultimately, help take pressure off wild places and improve people's experiences in these cherished places.

Adventuring across Y2Y

In May 2022, two friends set off on an epic journey. Their goal? To travel the Yellowstone to Yukon region on a five-month-long voyage that would see them hike,

bike and canoe these landscapes, thanks to a 2022 Royal Canadian Geographical Society's Women's Expedition Grant. Y2Y staff caught up with the adventurous pair of conservationists: Heather from Invermere, B.C., and Amaya from Whitehorse, Yukon Territory.

Y2Y: *Why is protecting nature in the Y2Y region important to you?*

Heather: (For one) it is in my backyard. I see first-hand the landscapes and wildlife that can benefit from and need these conservation efforts in this vital corridor of interconnected ecosystems for so many species.

Y2Y: *What have you learned about the region?*

Amaya: The connectedness of this expanse of wilderness. How this entire area could be the range of one grizzly bear, how seeds carried on its fur or inside its belly could increase the biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems thousands of kilometers away.

Y2Y: *Do you have advice for folks looking to start their own adventures?*

H: It can seem daunting to know where to go or what gear to bring, and how to plan an adventure if you've never done it before! In my experience there are many people willing to share their knowledge and even their equipment if you just ask. Once you're comfortable and competent, it becomes easy to dream up new adventures based on which aspects of nature you most love and enjoy.

Read the full Q&A at y2y.net/DynamicDuo.



A buffalo lantern illuminates the night.
Photo: Aerin Jacob

'Buffalo brings people together'

Illuminating linnii's story in Alberta's Bow Valley

This summer, Y2Y supported Iniskim, Return of the Buffalo, performance in its Canmore debut. This story is a glimpse at the evening and the meaning behind it.

As the sun made its grand finale, a full moon and stars lit the August sky. The mountains became shadows. Dozens of people, holding lanterns they assembled themselves, were guided through the forest to the performance space.

There, they were immersed in storytelling through lantern sculpture, puppetry, spoken word, songs in Blackfoot and Stoney languages, dance and drumming. Light and sound echoed through the valley, sharing the story of the buffalo and how Na'pi (the trickster in Blackfoot culture) has hidden the buffalo in the mountains.

"Na'pi in Blackfoot knowledge describes a beautiful and informative relationship with light," says Amethyst First Rider, member of the Blood Tribe, a leader in the performing arts community, and co-creator of Iniskim. "When you see the puppets and linnii (buffalo), you begin to feel a relationship with light and darkness, and the beautiful landscape we are blessed to be in."

Buffalo once numbered in the tens of millions in North America. They have long been central to many Indigenous Peoples' culture, language, spirituality and survival. Tragically, buffalo were nearly driven to extinction in the late 1800s.

Today, we are seeing hope for their return. You have supported collaborative efforts to recover buffalo

over the years — including in 2017, when buffalo were reintroduced to Banff National Park. Iniskim was created in celebration of this.

"When community discussions started about returning the buffalo, Elders provided guidance and told us, 'When you're ready, you're going to need friends, you can't do it on your own.' We made friends with a number of people and groups," says First Rider, whose work has been integral to bringing buffalo back in Canada and the U.S. through the Buffalo Treaty. "Support from NGOs like Y2Y makes it possible to celebrate linnii."

Buffalo is also returning to other parts of the region, thanks to efforts to connect and protect the landscapes that wildlife, such as buffalo, and people, rely on.

"Buffalo brings people together," says Marie-Eve Marchand, who coordinated the movement to bring the plains bison back to Banff National Park and supports the implementation of the Buffalo Treaty as Executive Director of the International Buffalo Relations Institute. "The Iniskim story reconnects us with the bigger landscape. Everyone comes away from the performance with a different learning. To me, the diversity of perspective that the arts bring is magical."

Iniskim was created to call attention to an amazing story. It enriches relationships between people, and with the land, and strengthens our ability to learn from each other.

Thank you for helping bring stories like these to light.
Learn more at y2y.net/iniskim.



Entering Ethical Space

Deepening understanding of Indigenous Peoples' worldviews

Decisions are a regular part of life: at home, in our work, on future plans, and about who we want to be in our lifetime. These decisions are shaped by our lived experiences, cultures and societies, and gathered knowledge.

When it comes to conservation, the environment, and communities we work with, we must take time to understand perspectives other than the ones we may be used to and most comfortable with, to make more ethical decisions and better our relationships with each other and nature.

From time immemorial, Indigenous Peoples have maintained healthy reciprocal relationships with the natural world. Knowledge and teachings passed down through generations guide deep connections among lands, waters and all beings. Indigenous Peoples' understandings, practices and aspirations need to be respected, supported, and learned from.

"Ethical Space" introduces an opportunity to deepen understanding of Indigenous Peoples' worldviews and authority, which is integral to Truth and Reconciliation efforts and to effectively supporting Indigenous-led conservation. Since 2020, Y2Y has hosted seven virtual workshops on Ethical Space thanks to guidance from Gwen Bridge, who is a member of the Saddle Lake Cree Nation of Alberta and Y2Y's Indigenous Relations advisor; the engagement of presenters with unique knowledge and experience; hundreds of participants; and your invaluable support.

"Ethical Space is a beginning moment. It is about acknowledging that we need to create time, space and a place for that learning to happen and through important relationships," said Michele Sam, a Ktunaxa scholar, who

led a 2021 workshop. A Ktunaxa Perspective on Ethical Space was grounded in her own work since 1990s.

"I believe that learning is action," she says. "The key piece in learning is understanding the 'why' behind it... When you are only trying to 'tick a box' on a list, that's when learning becomes disconnected from the intention."

Through the Ethical Space series, more than 800 people from all backgrounds have come together to discuss how Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people and organizations can collaborate to create and sustain prosperous communities and healthy landscapes. These workshops have been a catalyst, especially for non-Indigenous people, wanting to learn more about the roles of Indigenous Peoples' Knowledges in conservation.

Paris Marshall Smith, a sustainability planner with the Regional District of Central Kootenay, participated with an initial curiosity about what Ethical Space could mean in practice for land-based reconciliation.

"It is easy to get caught up in the dominant ways of being and knowing. This means ongoing learning and curiosity," says Paris. "I am continuing to learn about Secwépemc, Syilx, Sinixt and Ktunaxa laws and practices to inform my work with climate action, water and watershed governance. I look forward to opportunities to support Indigenous-led land use decisions."

For nature and people to thrive, transformational change is needed. Exploring Ethical Space is a good place to begin. We're grateful for your support that helps enable these important conversations.

Watch for upcoming workshops in late 2022 and review past presentations: y2y.net/EthicalSpace.

Listening to nature's voice

Learning from one another

Y2Y's work was first inspired by the wide-ranging wolf, Pluie, whose long journey from Alberta covered an area 15 times that of Banff National Park. Other species also teach us that the Yellowstone to Yukon region is the right scale at which to support their need to roam.

Grizzly bears are among those teachers. With the landscapes they roam divided by human activity over the years, grizzly bear populations became disconnected. But because of the Y2Y vision and you, we're reconnecting the habitats they and many other species rely on. Since 1993, grizzly bear ranges have started to expand in the U.S. — more than doubling in size. Their population numbers have more than tripled in U.S.-designated Recovery Zones.

That's one example of how you have made a difference. As you help Y2Y continue to expand its impact, we are fortunate to have a superb team to drive conservation forwards.

"I have long admired Y2Y for its inspiring vision," says Scott Brennan, Y2Y's new senior director of conservation programs (inset photo) who will lead our work advancing

protected areas — especially through supporting Indigenous-led efforts, maintaining connected landscapes, and promoting coexistence.

"Having lived and worked in and near the Yellowstone to Yukon region for most of my life, I understand the importance of protecting these places and their wildlife. The opportunity to learn from everyone's expertise on the team, and from our huge network of partners and supporters, is exciting as we progress Y2Y's vision for nature and people."

Science and research continue to point towards an increased need for large, connected landscapes. Whether you are just joining us on this journey now, or began on this path with us decades ago, your donations progress the Y2Y mission and help us learn from nature and others along the way.

Learn about Y2Y's impact at y2y.net/25years.



Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative



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Monthly donors are the cornerstone of our work.

Your consistent and dependable gift ensures we can continue to connect and protect essential habitat, and supports on-the-ground projects that keep our wild places wild, communities healthy and our water and air clean and pure.

Contact information

First Name: _____

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