

Southern Lakes Fisheries Angler Education and Outreach Campaign - Spring 2020

Education and Outreach Focussed on Grayling, Northern Pike and Lake Trout at the Lubbock River, Little Atlin Lake and additional accessible locations in the Southern Lakes.

Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council
June 2020

Campaign and Outreach Facilitated by:
Dennis Zimmermann - Big Fish Little Fish Consultants



Overview:

Increased fishing pressure in the accessible Southern Lakes was already a concern, prior to covid-19. The concern for vulnerable Lubbock River Grayling and Little Atlin Lake Trout was the impetus for this campaign led by the Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council (C/TRRC). The C/TRRC working with partners Carcross/Tagish First Nation (C/TFN) and the Department of Environment (DOE), hired Dennis Zimmermann with Big Fish Little Fish Consultants to develop an outreach and education campaign in the spring of 2020.

The outreach and education campaign featured numerous tactics and means by which various messages could be presented to the licenced Yukon angling public. Tactics included the installation of signage at approximately 11 locations, a press release, social media communications and outreach over four weekends between May and June at the Lubbock River and one weekend at Little Atlin Lake.

Feedback from anglers and the public has been positive both on social media, in-person responses, and anecdotally comments from the community. Some of the greatest successes of this campaign include:

- facilitating a positively focussed and proactive fisheries campaign during a time of increased fishing pressure (covid-19);
- broad partnerships (11 partners) including four First Nation Governments, Government of Yukon, not for profits, and co-management boards;
- generating awareness around the sensitivities associated with vulnerable Southern Lakes fisheries and beginning difficult conversations around catch and release fishing, best practices in fish handling, and general respect for fish;
- supporting a rare partnership with First Nations, RRCs and the licensed angling public through the Yukon Fish and Game Association; and
- providing a rare platform for outreach and science, and a means for licensed public anglers participation and information exchange.



Lubbock River Fishery Outreach (May 2020) pictures, including team members, kids and families fishing , signage and installing a discarded fishing line receptacle.

Context and Problem We Are Trying to Solve:

Spring grayling runs in the more accessible areas within the Southern Lakes were facing concerning levels of pressure prior to covid-19. These spring grayling runs are popular given they offer an opportunity to fish on water to eager anglers after a long winter. Other fisheries are not accessible or favourable due to the ice/water conditions. In addition, small Lake Trout populations with limited summer habitat at Little Atlin Lake are of conservation concern.

Given covid-19 there was anticipated to be increased pressure on these Southern Lakes fisheries due to Whitehorse anglers not being able to redistribute effort throughout Yukon and Alaska. Accessible areas, such as Lubbock River, Nares River, Johnson's Crossing, Takhini River, Marsh Lake and more, were anticipated to see more pressure on these vulnerable spawning populations.

Current regulations don't limit catch and release effort leaving this as a voluntary effort on the part of anglers. With no requirement for angling education in Yukon some anglers are unfamiliar with fish handling best practices that will reduce mortality or physiological stress on an actively spawning population. There will also be less enforcement or presence of Conservation Officers, Game Guardians, or Ecological Monitors given covid-19 re-deployment. Finally, there is also a secondary concern around the handling practices associated with large Lake Trout targeted and caught on the larger southern lakes (i.e. Tagish, Bennett and Marsh Lakes).

During these uncertain times, fishing is a positive activity that can engage an entire family. These extraordinary circumstances under covid-19 provide a reason, and opportunity to develop a positive, informative, and partnership-driven educational campaign focussed on voluntary behaviours, angler stewardship, and respect for the resource.

Goal:

Educate anglers on fish handling best practices and specific vulnerabilities associated with harvesting and excessive catch and release on various fisheries in the Southern Lakes areas.

Objectives:

- Share science-based best practices in fish handling to reduce mortality of catch and release practices.
- Reinforce the existing regulations and the need to live release larger mature spawning fish.
- Voluntarily reduce angler effort and excessive catch and release.
- Highlight specific information on specific fish and fisheries (i.e. creel data, weir counts - where available)

Specific angler behaviours looking to change:

- Voluntarily reducing angler effort (i.e. hours fished, number of fish caught) during the spring run of grayling (during covid-19).
- Reducing the number of fish caught and released (voluntary and regulatory).
- Raise awareness of fisheries related conservation concerns in the Southern Lakes.
- Support using single-barbless hooks as a means for voluntary and regulatory release of fish.
- Utilizing fish handling best practices - minimize air exposure, eliminate contact with dry and hard surfaces, and reduce handling time.



The posters that were placed in prominent locations at the Lubbock River, Little Atlin Lake and numerous other locations within the KDFN, TKC and TTC traditional territories.

Values and Acknowledgements:

- Getting families out fishing, hunting and generally outdoors, especially after a long winter is a good thing and should be encouraged.
- People need to stay healthy and connected to the natural environment.
- There are other priorities, such as human health and covid-19 transmission that need to stay top of mind.

- Yukoners are sensitive to over-regulation and conservation messaging at this time given the numerous engagement processes and resource conflicts (i.e. Adaptive Moose Management Regulations).
- In the absence of emergency regulations, educational messaging needs to support broad partnerships, be simple, positive, and not vilify activity of the public OR they will disregard, tune out or disregard the advice.
 - Positive - should support fishing and respectful behaviours.
 - Partnership driven - co-management and driven by grass-roots organizations such as the YFGA, C/TRRC and supported by Governments (Yukon and First Nations).



Little Atlin Lake Fishery Outreach (June 2020) pictures, including creel survey, team members meeting, kids and families fishing, signage and support Lake Trout signage (YG).

Partners:

The following 11 partners were associated with this campaign:

- Carcross/Tagish RRC (project sponsor and financial supporter)
- Carcross/Tagish First Nation
- Government of Yukon - Environment Yukon

- Kwanlin Dün First Nation (paid for their own printing and installation)
- Ta'an Kwäch'än Council (paid for their own printing and installation)
- Yukon Fish and Game Association (provided \$200 in printing support, distributed to their membership via email/Facebook/Outdoor Canada Magazine)
- Respect for Fish
- Keep Fish Wet/Keepemwet Fishing (provided best practices in fish handling science)
- Teslin Tlingit Council (paid for their own printing and installation)
- Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust (secondary supporter of Respect for Fish)
- Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board.



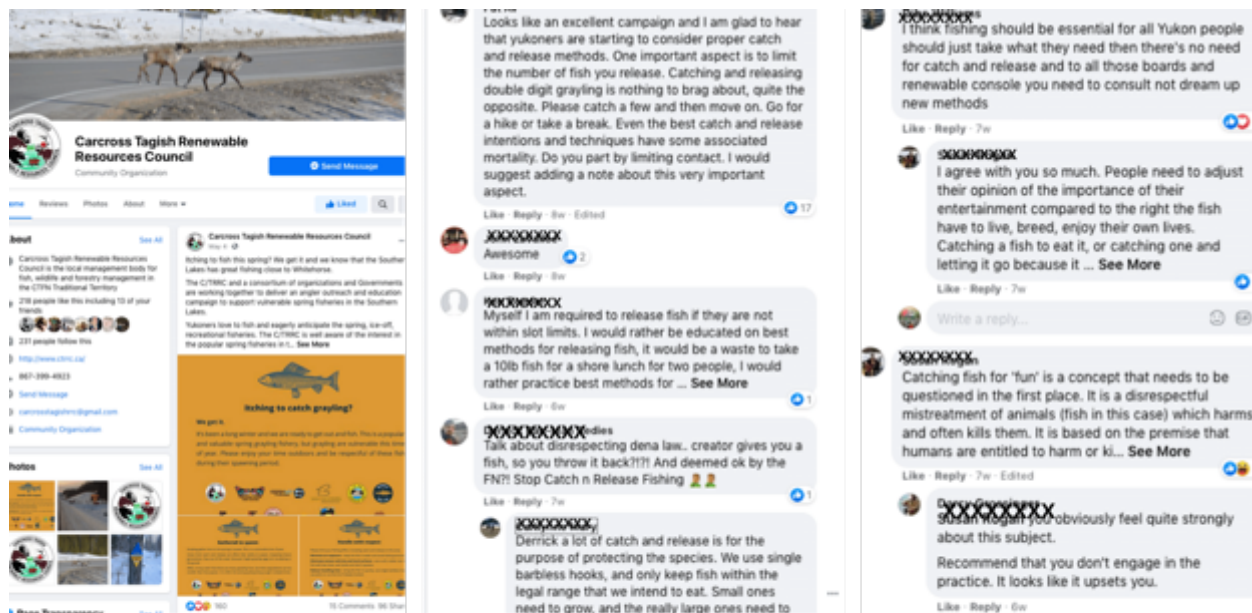
Left to Right: YFGA participation included an email to all members and submission to the *Outdoor Edge*, as well as fishing rods and tackle enjoyed by Pheonix, 8 yrs old.

Tactics and Results:

The following tactics were employed by the C/TRRC and partners through this campaign:

- **Signage** - at key access points (seven plus locations) for Grayling signs within the Southern Lakes (multiple locations including the C/TFN, KDFN, TKC and TTC traditional territories)
 - Lubbock River
 - Marsh Lake bridge
 - Jackson/Louise Lake
 - Fox Creek, Fox Lake and Little Fox Lake
 - Johnsons Crossing (other two other TTC Locations TBD)

- **Signage** - at Little Atlin Lake for Northern Pike and Lake Trout.
- **Outreach at Lubbock River** - 3 weekends within the month of May for Lubbock River Grayling outreach and education:
 - Set up a trailer and large boards. Facilitated education with individual anglers. Most anglers read the signs. We also tried to share statistics and gather their perspectives and provide an opportunity for feedback.
 - On the large boards provided by the C/TRRC. Posted paper with: What is special about these Grayling/Pike/Lake Trout? Why should we care? What can we do to support Grayling/Pike/Lake Trout? This provided an opportunity to gather anglers perspectives, share key messages and present relevant research and data. These were informed by existing studies and discussions with biologists, First Nations and RRC members.
 - YFGA loaned their rods and set them up which were shared them with families that were fishing and perhaps not set up well (especially kids)
 - Handed out the DOE 2020 fishing regulations.
- **Outreach at Little Atlin Lake** - weekend of June 27/28th. Signs posted on the boards at the boat launch area. Distributed fishing regulations and generated angler conversation.
- **Social Media** - C/TRRC and Respect for Fish Facebook page posts with the posters. Facebook paid ads (\$60). C/TRRC - Number of likes: 178, Number of shares: 97 and 15 Comments.
- **Media Release** - CBC Interview with Dave White and Yukon News Story (Ken Reeder and Dennis Zimmermann). Copy of the press release in the appendix.
- **Creel** - at specific locations. DOE supported through this initiative.
- **Monitoring** - visited additional locations at Little Atlin, Snafu and Tarfu Lakes to identify the associated angling and camping pressure with campgrounds closed at that time.
- **Discarded Fishing Line Receptacles** - Youth driven project installed two receptables at Lubbock River and Little Atlin Lake.
- **Photos** - with a professional photographer taken for educational purposes to focus on best practices in fish handling for Grayling.
- **Yukon Fish and Game Association** - an email sent out to all members with key messages regarding this campaign as well a story featured in their membership publication insert in *Outdoor Canada* magazine.



The C/TRRC Facebook page with a post focussing on the campaign. Comments shown support the campaign and the concern and diversity of opinions re: catch and release.

General Observations:

The following were general observations from the campaign:

- Having a Presence - found a balance being on-site and “taking up real-estate” and supporting anglers and their experience. Subtle presence without enforcement and stewardship and positive reinforcement. It was beneficial to have the DOE creel person on-site as well as the supplementary harvest data to analyze.
- Conversations around Management - some anglers wanted to chat and we were able to get into the narrative around fisheries management. Talk about the complexities, and the tools available for fisheries management (i.e. outreach and education vs. regulation).
- Signs - were left up in prominent locations while we were not on-site.
- Discuss regulations - while this was education and outreach, it was beneficial to share thoughts on the regulatory regime and gather perspectives from anglers (i.e. small-bodied lake trout and the minimum slot sizes not being reached by sexually mature fish). The more engaged anglers were very curious about this as well as the data and science.
- Anecdotal Comments - received feedback from anglers that they had heard about the campaign prior to arriving either through Facebook or read the email from YFGA. There were some that voluntarily did not want to fish, or minimized their effort.
- Covid-craziness - a significant increase in fishing pressure was observed on most fishing areas by mid-June in the Southern Lakes. The Lubbock River area was full most weekends with campers, however, there was often room for more

anglers as many were just camping. By mid-June all campgrounds in the area were full by mid-week with the Little Atlin boat launch area hosting nine campers on the long weekend.

- Campers - there were many people and families just camping and not fishing. Side by sides, ATVs, kits, paddleboards and other camping recreational activities took place at the Lubbock River
- Tone - it was important to keep it positive. Anglers commented that we “struck the right cord”. At times, it almost became a celebratory tone at the Lubbock River bridge when kids would catch fish.
- Teach - part of the engagement involved teaching kids how to fish, how to catch, handle and land fish, help them with gear and encouragement.
- Excessive Catch and Release - very few caught and release excessively. Those that knew how to fish would have the opportunity to catch many Lubbock River Grayling or Little Atlin Pike. Message was have fun, catch a few and take it easy on the fish. Note: everybody thinks they are good at catch and release.
- Suckers - spawning suckers at the Lubbock River was an interesting observation and provided an opportunity to learn more and appreciate the fish in general.
- Well-behaved - very little poor behaviour - few “bad eggs” i.e. lifting grayling up at bridge, dragging fish, snagging fish. There were some over-sized Grayling and Northern Pike with anglers not knowing or did not have anything to measure. Additionally, some anglers did not kill their fish prior to providing to the creel (i.e. still alive in a bucket with no water).

In an effort to target messaging to specific angler demographics the following angler profiles were observed. Note, these were generalizations based on observation at the Lubbock River and conversations with these anglers.

- **Fishing Families** - families with young children there to catch a fish with their child. Often had quads and other activities to keep the children busy.
- **Childless Young Couples** - more serious anglers but also interested in the overall camping and wilderness experience as well.
- **Serious Dudes** - males that were there to fish. Also called the “hit squad” as they would park quickly, jump out of the truck, get away from the crowd and fish. Not necessarily interested in the signage.
- **Casual Compadres** - more casual angling pairing that were out for a day of fishing. They were pleased whether they caught anything or not.
- **Novice Anglers** - not aware of how to catch Grayling, however, heard this was a good place to catch a fish. Poor handling practices and gear choices due to lack of knowledge.
- **Fly-fishing Purists** - decked out with the gear that consider spring Grayling part of their annual ritual prior to other fisheries. Can easily catch fish and practice voluntarily catch and release.
- **First Nation Citizens** - citizens and families that are C/TFN or First Nation citizens that have a connection to this area and enjoy catching a Grayling or Pike for subsistence.

- **Retired Campers** - older couples, with friends enjoying camping “off the grid”. Side by sides and other camping related activities as well. One party stayed ~ 10 days at the Lubbock River with a 30 foot motorhome trailer.
- **Ethnic Families** - members of the South Asian communities that enjoy fishing, often fish with multiple families and harvest fish for food.



Other Grayling sign locations: left to right, KDFN traditional territory at Jackson/Louise Lake and the Marsh Lake Bridge. C/TFN traditional territory at Nares Bridge in Carcross.

Suggestions for Future Projects:

The campaign was successful and well received. The following are suggestions for future years:

- **Continued annual presence** would be beneficial to continue this effort for multiple years at the Lubbock River and Little Atlin Lake with the option of rotating outreach and education locations such as, Tagish (Six Mile) boat launch and bridge, Nares River, Snafu Lake and Tarfu Lake campgrounds. Possibility of an annual outreach and education event with more engagement, partnerships, and activities (i.e. Pike Filleting, fly fishing lessons, assuming no covid-19 concerns).
- **Facilitate information and dialogue** amongst anglers interested in fishing in the Southern Lakes. This can be done through social media or facilitated forums bringing anglers together. The upcoming Community-Based Fish and Wildlife Workplan or Tagish River HPA for the Carcross/Tagish Traditional Territory may provide action items in this regard. Hosting a pre-season report or post-reason meeting with science, TK and information on the respective status of specific species and locations in the Southern Lakes.

- **Southern Lakes public fishery strategy** - Raise the profile of Southern Lakes fisheries and coordinated efforts. Include focussed presentations and dialogue with C/TFN, YFGA, YFMWB, DOE, boat retailers, fishing guides, Yukon Energy Corporation, Kwanlin Dün First Nation and more.
- Target **specific angler demographics**. Understanding which angling segment to be targeted and which tactics to approach them (i.e. new anglers at the Lubbock River and large boat anglers targeting large Lake Trout at Large Lakes).
- Focus on **specific angler behaviours** to change. General best practices in fish handling information and angling regulations are useful to all anglers, however, specific behaviours such as excessive catch and release, using single-barbless hooks (avoiding treble-hooks, and best practices in fish handling for large Lake Trout from large boats.
- Continue to Focus on **specific locations and species** (i.e. Little Atlin, Lubbock River, Six Mile River, Tagish Lake) - the more specific to that lake or river the better as anglers often frequent the same areas and have a connection or knowledge of that location.
- **Align this research and observations with DOE Creel Data.** Bring together the data, reports/studies, creel into a Southern Lakes Public Fishery Strategy in partnership with C/TFN and DOE. This would be aligned with implementation items in the Community-Based Fish and Wildlife Workplan. This would support regulatory efforts and potential changes.
- Support fisheries training and education related to **Online Education in Fish Handling Best Practices and a Fisheries Education and Ethics Development Course** (FEED) for the Southern Lakes.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to the C/TRRC for their vision, commitment, and funding of this initiatives. Specifically, to Chair Ken Reeder and his dedication and hard work in setting up the outreach locations and RRC member Don Toews for his participation, passion and insight into these fisheries. Many thanks to Karlie Knight, C/TFN A/Natural Resources Manager for her presence and participation as well as to the DOE creel worker Catherine Pinard. Finally, thanks to all eleven partners and the anglers themselves that took part in our outreach activity.

We also wish to acknowledge that the outreach efforts took place in the traditional territories of the Carcross/Tagish First Nation and Taku River Tlingit.

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Photo Credits:

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Appendix:

Press Release



For Immediate Release

May 4, 2020

Itching to Fish this Spring? Campaign to Support Vulnerable Spring Fisheries

All Media Contacts

Tagish, Yukon Territory

The Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council (C/TRRC) and a consortium of organizations and Governments are working together to deliver an angler outreach and education campaign to support vulnerable spring fisheries in the Southern Lakes. The outreach and educational campaign includes outdoor signage, a social media campaign and a physical presence in certain areas.

Yukoners love to fish and eagerly anticipate the spring, ice-off, recreational fisheries. The C/TRRC is well aware of the interest in the popular spring fisheries such as: Nares River, Lubbock River, Marsh Lake, Little Atlin Lake, Snafu Lake and Tarfu Lake. Given their proximity to Whitehorse, these areas have seen an increasing amount of fishing pressure over the last decade. Some specific populations of grayling and lake trout are of notable concern and have been subject to regulation changes in order to address this increasing pressure.

Given covid-19 there is anticipated to be increased recreational fishing this spring and the C/TRRC is concerned that some of the more vulnerable, Southern Lakes spawning populations may struggle with this stress. Fish such as grayling, gather and spawn in the spring and are targeted by catch and release recreational fisheries. This stress from catch and release can affect their ability to spawn, which can impact future generations.

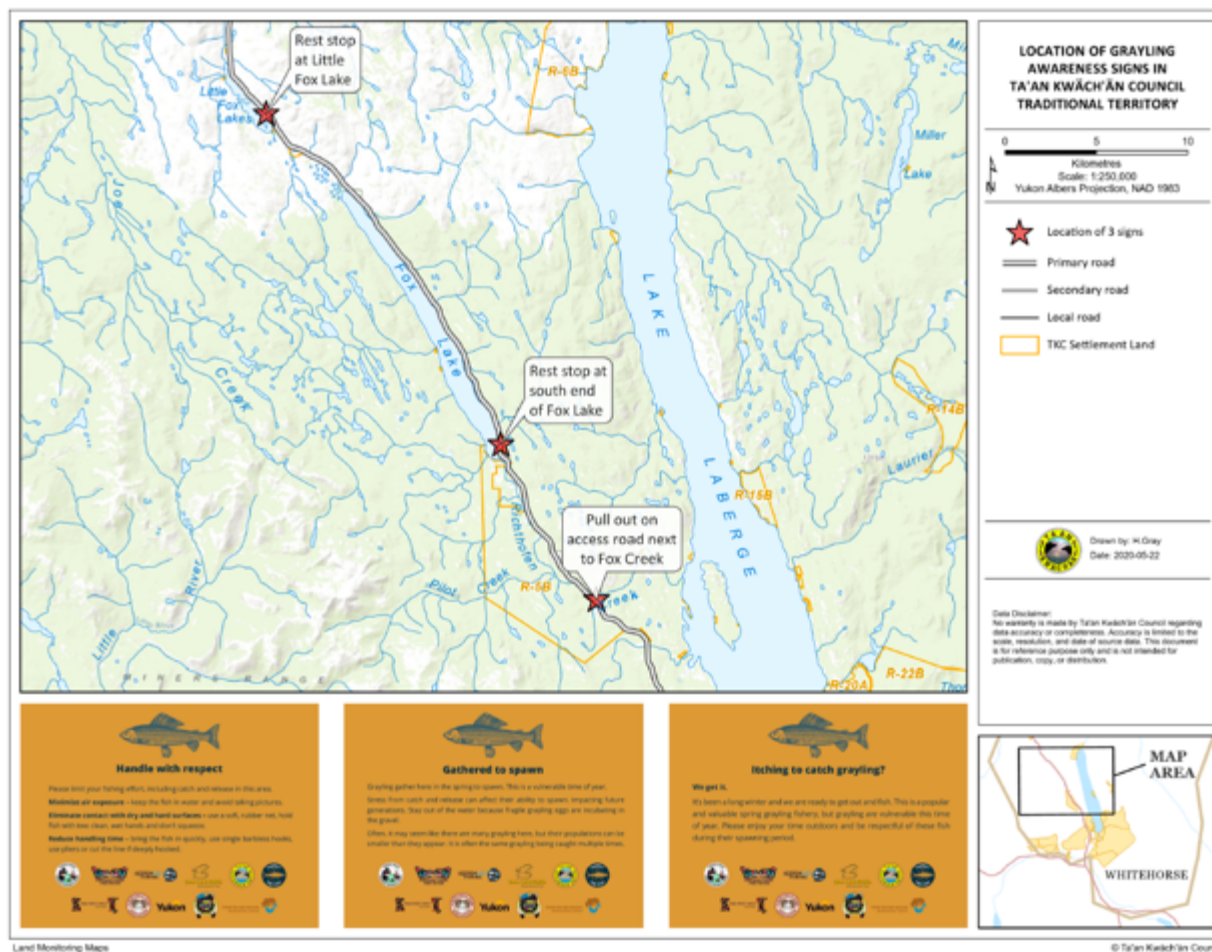
Ken Reeder, C/TRRC Chair states “we know that fishing is a great way for families to get out and enjoy the beautiful Southern Lakes. We also know that some of our populations of grayling are smaller than they appear. Often it seems like there are many grayling in a particular area, but it is often the same grayling being caught multiple times. We want anglers to enjoy themselves, while limiting their fishing effort, including catch and release, and treat fish with respect”.

Current regulations don't limit catch and release effort leaving this as a voluntary effort on the part of anglers. With no requirement for angling education in Yukon,

some anglers are unfamiliar with fish handling best practices that can reduce mortality or physiological stress on an actively spawning population. Dennis Zimmermann, a local fish and wildlife consultant responsible for delivering the campaign states “we are pleased to see such a great level of partnership in this campaign. These organizations are working together through education and outreach to demonstrate a shared stewardship of these fish and fisheries. We hope the licensed angling community follows the best practices and does their part to contribute to the conservation and sustainability of these vulnerable fish at this time of year”.

The campaign is funded by the C/TRRC and the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust (YFWET). Partners in the initiative include: C/TRRC, YFWET, Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Yukon Fish and Game Association, Yukon Government, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, Taku River Tlingit, Respect for Fish, Keepemwet Fishing, and the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board.

TKC Locations for Sign Placement





YUKON NEWS



A fisherman casts his line into the Yukon River in Whitehorse on May 5, 2017. Fishermen travelling to the Southern Lakes region this season are being asked to show restraint and respect to help protect vulnerable grayling and lake trout populations. (Tom Patrick/Yukon News file)

Fishermen urged to show restraint, respect when fishing in Southern Lakes region

JACKIE HONG / May 8, 2020 1:00 p.m. / [LOCAL NEWS](#) / [NEWS](#)



The Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council is urging fishermen travelling to the Southern Lakes region this season to show restraint and respect to help protect vulnerable grayling and lake trout populations.

The council, along with a group of other organizations and Yukon First Nations governments, launched an awareness campaign on May 4 reminding fishermen to catch only what they need and limit catch-and-release activities.

The campaign comes in anticipation of an increase in activity in the Southern Lakes region due to COVID-19 potentially deterring Yukoners, particularly Whitehorse residents, from travelling Outside instead, C/TRRC chair Ken Reeder told the News May 5.

"We're not saying don't come and fish and enjoy it — we want everybody to get outdoors and you know, enjoy bringing the kids fishing," Reeder said.

"Just respect the fish, handle them properly and really think about, you know, how many fish do I need to harvest and take home? Maybe I can just get by