

**Ash Institute Summer Fellowship in Innovation
Project Description | 2009**

**Solid Waste and Energy Management (Yukon River Tribes, Alaska)
*2008 IAG Finalist***

Organization:

The YRITWC is a coalition of 66 Tribes and First Nations in Alaska and Canada united in protecting the 2,300 mile long Yukon River. The YRITWC was created by the largest modern international treaty among indigenous governments in the world. The work of the YRITWC covers the entire Yukon drainage basin. Within the basin, aboriginal governments span numerous distinct cultures, languages, and geographies. Historically, these groups often clashed and at times were openly hostile, fighting over resources and territory. Even in contemporary times, cooperation was rare, while allocations of commercial salmon harvests pitted groups against each other across an international border. The YRITWC completely changed this dynamic. In the face of collapsing salmon runs, declining subsistence resources, epidemics of cancer and suicide, and destructive development proposals, the YRITWC transcended historical divisions and inspired unity with a focus on clean water and coordinated solid waste and watershed management. The chosen solution has been to collaborate across borders, languages, traditions, and generations. The enactment of the Accord has initiated the clean-up and preservation of the Yukon River for the present and future generations.

Project Description and Fellow Duties:

The Ash Summer Fellow will be asked to join the research and advocacy efforts of the YRITWC. The Yukon River Watershed is rich in natural resources, many of which are now targeted for industrial-scale resource extraction. The Yukon River Tribes work with the YRITWC Advocacy Department to evaluate resource development proposals and ensure that the voices of indigenous peoples are integrated into real decision-making. The Fellow will have the opportunity to negotiate a research project of mutual interest. Examples of the types of research that are needed include: 1) A comprehensive research review consulting with environmental and native rights lawyers to establish a summary overview of the current water rights matrix of the watershed; 2) Research on mining companies that are planning to engage in large scale development; 3) A summary of case law and strategies addressing navigable water suits and ownership of river bottom issues; 4) A research paper investigating environmental injustices related to radioactive materials from nuclear reactors and heavy metal saturated tailings from mining companies, and 5) A worldwide legal review of indigenous fishing rights cases, outcomes/precedence. (i.e. Judge Boldt decision 12FEB74)

The YRITWC will work to help identify housing and the Fellow will be supervised by Rob Rosenfeld / YRITWC International Policy Advisor. The results of the internship will be presented at the YRITWC biannual Summit in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada, August 6-8, 2009, before 66 indigenous government leaders.