

# COVID Recovery Research: Why Leisure Matters More Than Ever

*2021 Heathy Living Study*

*2022 Pandemic Impacts on Rural Recreation (PIRR)*

Dr. Aggie Weighill & Amber Underwood

World Leisure Centre of Excellence at Vancouver Island University



# Land Acknowledgements

*We are honoured to be able to share our research on the traditional territory of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation.*

We acknowledge and thank the Selkirk, White River, Carcross/Tagish, and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nations whose traditional territories we conducted the Pandemic Impact on Rural Recreation project.

*We would also like to acknowledge that we work, learn, research, and share knowledge on the unceded traditional territory of Snuneymuxw First Nation.*





# Funding Acknowledgements

The 2021 Healthy Living Study was funded in part by the Government of Yukon's Sport and Recreation Branch.

The 2022 Pandemic Impacts on Rural Recreation was funded in part by the Government of Yukon's COVID Recovery Research program.

Funds to support student engagement in the research process were provided by Government of Canada's Innovative Work Integrated Learning program and CEWIL Canada's iHUB.

RPAY and VIU also provided additional funds to both projects.



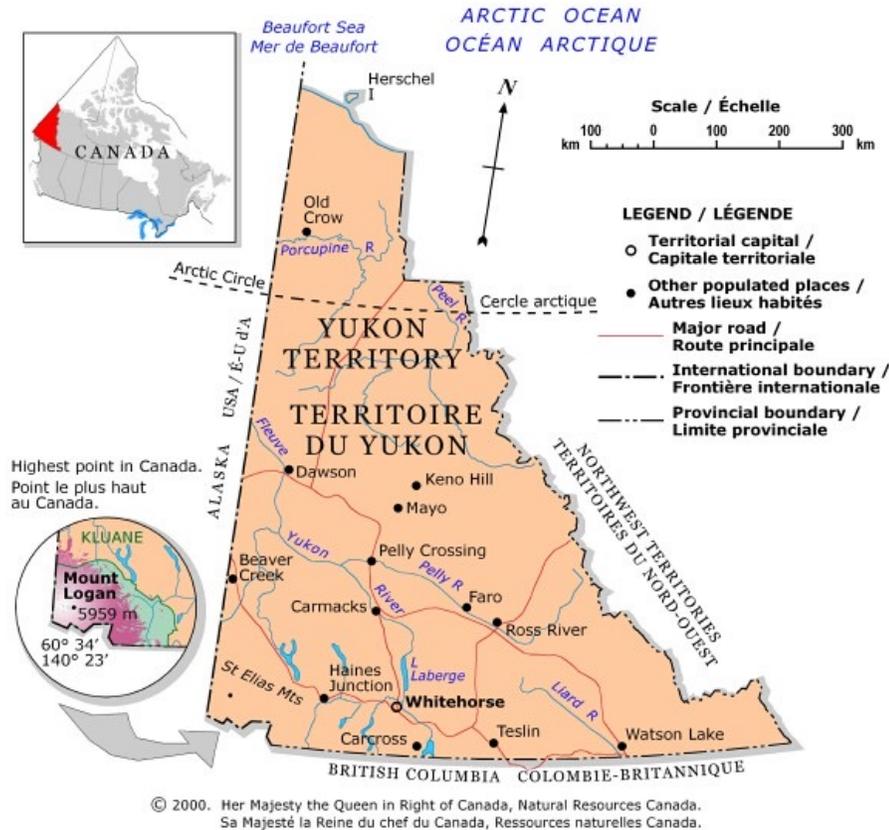
# Why Leisure Matters More Than Ever..

- Summary findings from the Healthy Living Study.
- Preliminary findings from the Pandemic Impacts on Rural Recreation project.
- Future proofing rural recreation – group activity.



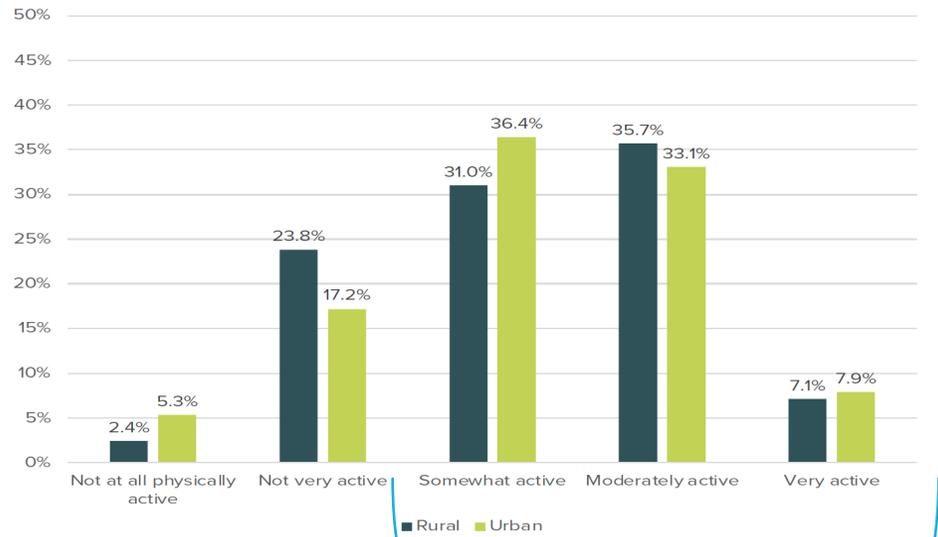
# 2021 Healthy Living Study

- Online Household Survey
- Postcard Mail-Out
- Social Media Ads
  
- Total sample = 560 people
  - 78% Urban: 22% Rural
  - 77% Female: 23% Male
  - Average age 47 Years



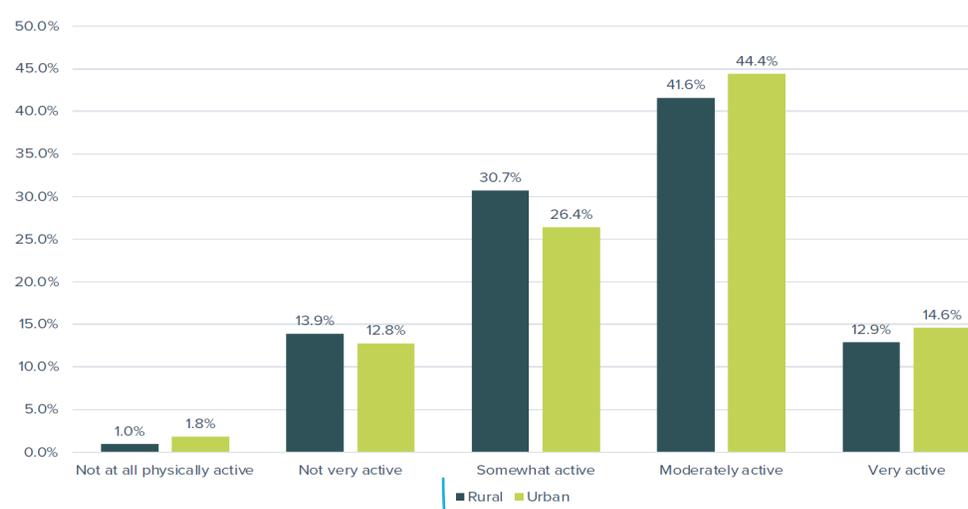
# 2021 Healthy Living Study: Levels of Physical Activity

Figure 4: Activity Level of Participants Impacted by Their Health or an Injury



Somewhat to Very Active

Figure 5: Activity Level of Participants Not Impacted by Their Health or Injury



Somewhat to Very Active



# 2021 Healthy Living Study: Beliefs About Recreation

Table 1: Average Agreement with Belief Statements About Physical Activity

Beliefs About Physical Activity	Type of Community	
	Urban (n=416) Mean (SD)	Rural (n=116) Mean (SD)
Physical activity reduces my stress and improves my mental health	4.46 (0.73)	4.50 (0.60) ←
Being physically active is a major priority in my life	4.19 (0.90)	4.15 (0.91)
I love to exercise in the summer	4.14 (0.79)	3.95 (0.90)
I was able to remain active during the pandemic	3.86 (0.99)	3.69 (1.11) ←

# 2021 Healthy Living Study: Benefits of Recreation

Table 2: Important of Benefits of Participating in Physical Activity

Benefits of Physical Activity	Type of Community	
	Urban Mean (SD)	Rural Mean (SD)
Having energy to do all the things I want to do	4.33 (0.75)	4.29 (0.78) ←
Managing stress	4.14 (0.89)	4.12 (0.96) ←
Preventing illness and chronic conditions	4.11 (0.89)	4.08 (0.93) ←
Living longer	3.77 (1.03)	3.66 (1.05)



# 2021 Healthy Living Study: Indoor Summer Activities

Table 14: Frequency of Participation in Indoor Summer Activities

		Never	<1 day a week	1-2 days a week	3-4 days a week	Most days
<b>Exercise at Home</b>						
	Urban (n=422)	34.6%	27.0%	21.8%	11.4%	5.2%
	Rural (n=119)	31.9%	33.6%	22.7%	5.0%	6.7%
<b>Sports at Local Facility</b>						
	Urban (n=421)	87.2%	8.3%	4.0%	0.2%	0.2%
	Rural (n=119)	79.0%	11.8%	6.7%	0.8%	1.7%
<b>Exercise at Local Facility</b>						
	Urban (n=421)	78.9%	11.2%	5.9%	3.6%	0.5%
	Rural (n=119)	80.7%	4.2%	10.1%	3.4%	1.7%
<b>Exercise Classes</b>						
	Urban (n=421)	76.5%	11.6%	8.1%	2.9%	1.0%
	Rural (n=118)	79.7%	12.7%	6.8%	0.0%	0.8%
<b>Swimming &amp; Water Sports</b>						
	Urban (n=422)	65.6%	22.5%	8.3%	2.8%	0.7%
	Rural (n=119)	63.9%	20.2%	7.6%	5.9%	2.5%
<b>Dance</b>						
	Urban (n=421)	88.1%	9.5%	2.1%	0.2%	0.0%
	Rural (n=117)	77.8%	14.5%	5.1%	0.0%	2.6%
<b>In-line Skating or Skateboarding</b>						
	Urban (n=419)	97.6%	1.7%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%
	Rural (n=118)	95.8%	1.7%	1.7%	0.8%	0.0%



# 2021 Healthy Living Study: Indoor Winter Activities

Table 10: Frequency of Participation in Indoor Winter Activities

	Never	<1 day a week	1-2 days a week	3-4 days a week	Most days	
<b>Exercise at Home</b>						
Urban (n=430)	25.1%	26.5%	28.1%	14.0%	6.3%	
Rural (n=123)	22.0%	33.3%	22.8%	13.8%	8.1%	
<b>Sports at local facility</b>						
Urban (n=422)	77.7%	8.1%	10.4%	2.8%	0.9%	←
Rural (n=124)	66.9%	12.9%	14.5%	4.8%	0.8%	←
<b>Exercise at local facility</b>						
Urban (n=424)	66.3%	15.1%	12.0%	5.7%	0.9%	←
Rural (n=125)	68.0%	12.0%	10.4%	8.0%	1.6%	←
<b>Exercise Classes</b>						
Urban (n=427)	70.5%	13.1%	11.0%	4.4%	0.9%	
Rural (n=125)	66.4%	16.8%	12.8%	4.0%	0.0%	
<b>Swimming or Watersports</b>						
Urban (n=425)	69.9%	18.8%	9.2%	1.6%	0.5%	
Rural (n=124)	91.1%	5.6%	1.6%	1.6%	0.0%	
<b>Hockey or Skating</b>						
Urban (n=424)	80.7%	12.7%	5.0%	1.4%	0.2%	←
Rural (n=123)	64.2%	18.7%	10.6%	6.5%	0.0%	
<b>Dance</b>						
Urban (n=422)	83.4%	13.3%	3.3%	0.0%	0.0%	
Rural (n=126)	75.0%	18.5%	5.6%	0.0%	0.8%	

# 2021 Healthy Living Study: Promoting Healthier Lifestyles

Table 4: Likelihood that Program Characteristics Would Promote a Healthier Lifestyle

Factors that Would Promote a Healthier Lifestyle	Type of Community	
	Urban Mean (SD)	Rural Mean (SD)
Programs that use parks and trails	3.94 (1.03)	3.89 (0.90)
More outdoor programs	3.90 (0.97)	3.96 (0.87)
On-the-land programs or activities	3.82 (1.05)	3.91 (1.06)
Equipment loans or rentals (e.g., rent/borrow skis, kick sleds)	3.79 (1.09)	3.87 (1.03)
Low or no-cost activities at local recreation centres	3.77 (1.08)	3.80 (1.10)

# 2021 Healthy Living Study: Activity Participation Summary

- ✓ Outdoor activities were generally more popular than indoor activities.
- ✓ Walking was the most popular activity in both summer and winter.
- ✓ Exercising at home was the most popular indoor activity.
- ✓ Sport (court, ice, field) had some of the lowest participation rates.
- ✓ Outdoor summer activities were the most likely to have increased participation due to the pandemic.
- ✓ Indoor facility-based sport activities were the most likely to be impacted by pandemic restrictions.

**Did any of the result surprise you?**



# Pandemic Acknowledgement

- *We recognize that the pandemic was experienced differently by everyone and that the outcomes for some were truly life altering.*
- *In this research we spoke with survivors, people who lost loved ones, those who felt ostracized and isolated, some who were/are fearful and angry, and those who experienced very few negative impacts.*
- *Our goal is to give voice to those who live in rural communities and to the diverse ways that they experienced the pandemic.*



# Pandemic Impacts on Rural Recreation (PIRR)

- ❖ Purpose of the research was to better understand:
  - ❖ The ways that rural residents and rural communities experienced and were impacted by the pandemic.
  - ❖ How recreation service delivery and participation was impacted by the pandemic.
  - ❖ How communities can ‘future proof’ their service delivery.



# PIRR: The Communities

- ❖ Pelly Crossing
- ❖ Beaver Creek
- ❖ Tagish
- ❖ Carcross
- ❖ Dawson City



# PIRR: Methods

- ❖ Community Gatherings ( e.g., BBQ, pancake breakfast, open house)
- ❖ Modified Community Café – Sticky notes + dots
- ❖ Key Stakeholder Interviews – First Nation/Community leaders, recreation staff, First Nations' staff (Selkirk, White River, CTFN), residents.
- ❖ Researcher Observations – Notes from conversations with locals, observations from posters and events, and general impressions of the community and recreation facilities.



# PIRR: Preliminary Themes



- Impacts to mental health and community cohesion.
- On-the-land and cultural practices.
- Absence of sport.
- Preoccupation on kids.
- Facility decline and perceived deficits.
- Fragmented service delivery.

# PIRR: Mental Health & Isolation

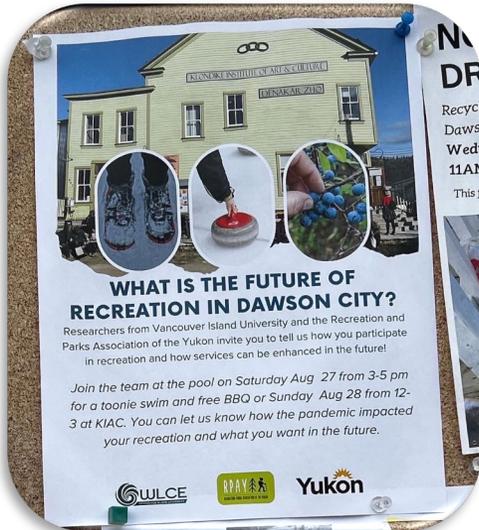


- Isolation, depression, & reduced mental health were the most common impacts identified.
- Lack of access to programming, the closure of community facilities, and the inability to move beyond one's “bubble” were identified by most as the root causes.

# PIRR: Reduced Social Cohesion



- Not a major issue in all communities but significant in those that experienced it.
- Divisions within communities were linked to vaccine and mask mandates.
- A lack of understanding over who was responsible for these.
- Work to (re)build bridges will need to be creative and intentional.



# PIRR: On-the-Land

- Traditional hunting, fishing, and food gathering activities.
- Cultural teachings, camping, hiking were all activities that were identified as important during the pandemic and for recovery.
- On-the-land (traditional/ cultural) activities were identified as important social bonding and knowledge sharing spaces.



# PIRR: Absence of Sport



- Sporting activities (court, field, ice) were identified more by recreation staff and community leaders than by residents.
- With the exception of hockey in Dawson – there was limited discussion of sport as a priority recreation activity.
- Baseball was identified as a sport that promoted inter-community travel pre-pandemic.
- Year round access to swimming (rec) was highlighted by a vocal few.
- The focus on outdoor and on-the-land activities versus sport was extremely strong.

# PIRR: Preoccupation on Kids



- Despite low numbers of children in some communities, there was an overwhelming focus on programs (and funding) for children.
- Limited programming for adults (young, middle, and older) was available.
- Most identified self-led and on-the-land activities or more passive leisure activities such as reading or crafting.
- Non-driving older adults experienced high levels of social isolation.



# PIRR: Facility Decline & Perceived Deficits

- Every community had facilities in need of repair (ranging from condemned to cosmetic).
- Recreation providers identified challenges with funding for maintenance.
- Residents have a sense of entitlement to facilities that would typically only be seen in communities with larger tax basis.
- Most residents (including kids) identified that their favourite recreation activities were not indoor facility based.



# PIRR: Fragmented/Siloed Delivery & Funding

- Recreation, sport, arts, culture, outdoor recreation = Leisure.
- Leisure = vehicle for health, wellness, social cohesion, harm reduction, and more.
- Leisure service delivery in the Yukon was described as fragmented at both the community and Territorial levels.
  - Duplication of services – role overload on community staff.
  - Valuing of ‘recreation’ is diminished.
  - Extra stress on recreation leaders chasing funding.



# Recreation Governance in the Yukon

## *Municipalities*

- ❖ For the purposes of this Act, a municipality is responsible for (1):
  - ❖ (a) all matters respecting the recreation of its residents taking place exclusively in the municipality;
  - ❖ (b) sports competitions at the recreational or competitive level between residents of the municipality and residents of other communities.
- ❖ (2) A municipality may accept responsibility for any matter respecting the recreation of its residents in addition to its responsibilities under subsection 1.

[S.Y. 2002, c. 193, s. 14]



## *Local Authorities*

- ❖ Who can be a Local Authority?
    - ❖ An organization is registered under the Business Corporations Act or the Societies Act, or is a First Nation; and
    - ❖ A school, community hall, or other adequate facility is located in the geographic area for which it is appointed.
- [S.Y. 2002, c. 193, s. 16]
- ❖ Responsibilities are the same as municipalities.



# Take Aways!

- ✓ Mental health and social isolation were the main impacts.
  - ✓ Many did not feel that their physical activity decreased.
  - ✓ Outdoor and on-the-land activities were the *most popular* activities and identified as the *most important* for recovery.
  - ✓ Current approaches to facility development and maintenance are not sustainable.
  - ✓ Wellness and physically active leisure does not equal fitness.
  - ✓ Funding priorities do not align with community realities or needs.
- Current recreation activity inventories are inadequate, outdated, and often urban focused.
  - We must change our thinking about recreation being sport or physical activity. Social connections are as important.
  - Recreation is:
    - Healthcare
    - Emergency management
    - Tourism
    - Vital to community wellbeing
    - An essential service.



## For More Info...



*SCAN ME*

Aggie Weighill

World Leisure Centre of Excellence

Vancouver Island University

900 – Fifth Street, Nanaimo, BC

V9R 5S5

[Aggie.Weighill@viu.ca](mailto:Aggie.Weighill@viu.ca)

