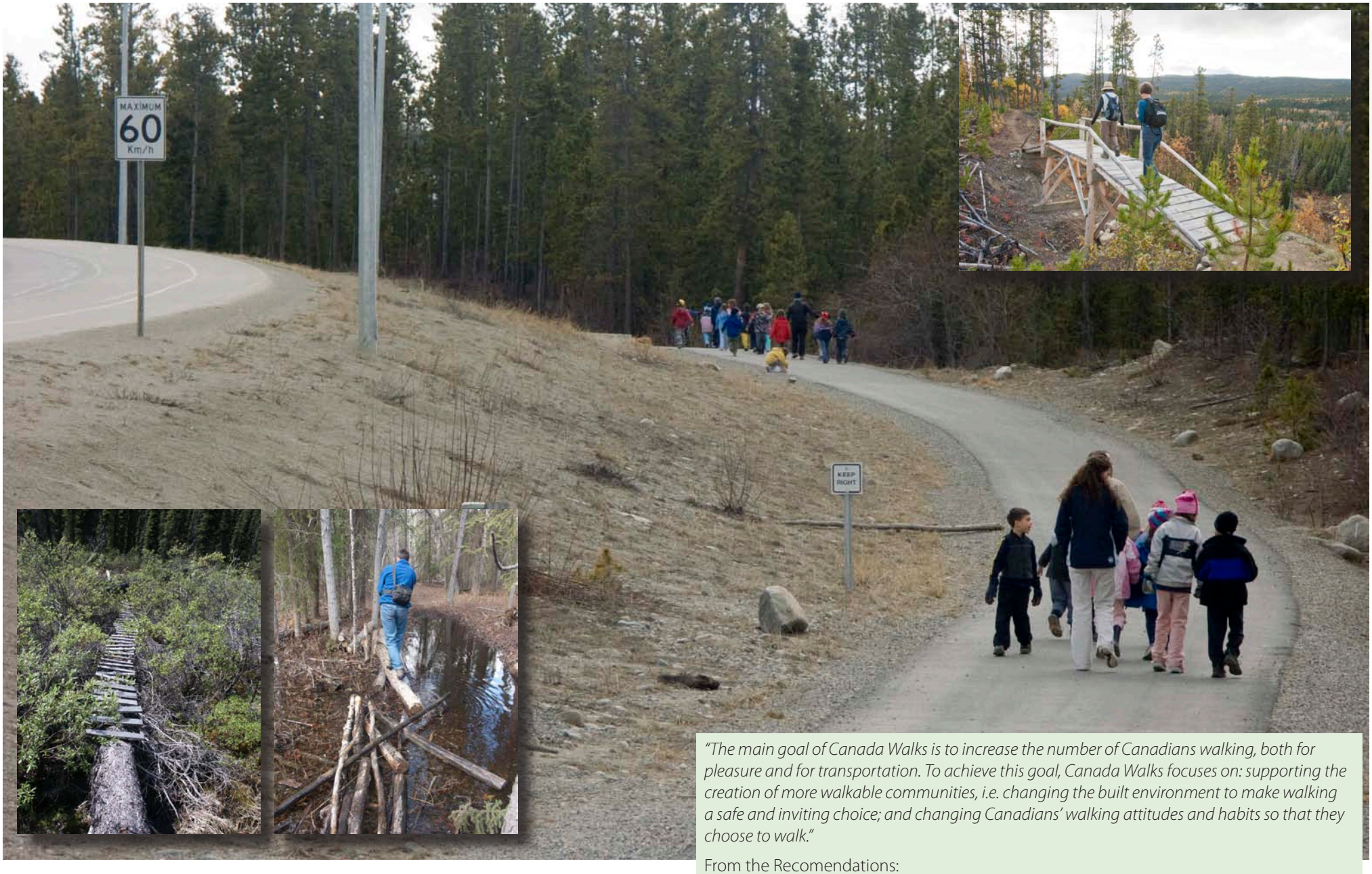
Looking at Whitehorse walking trails

Creating a culture of walking in Whitehorse

Peter Long, Hillcrest, Apr. 4, 2012

www.whitehorsewalks.com



Walkability

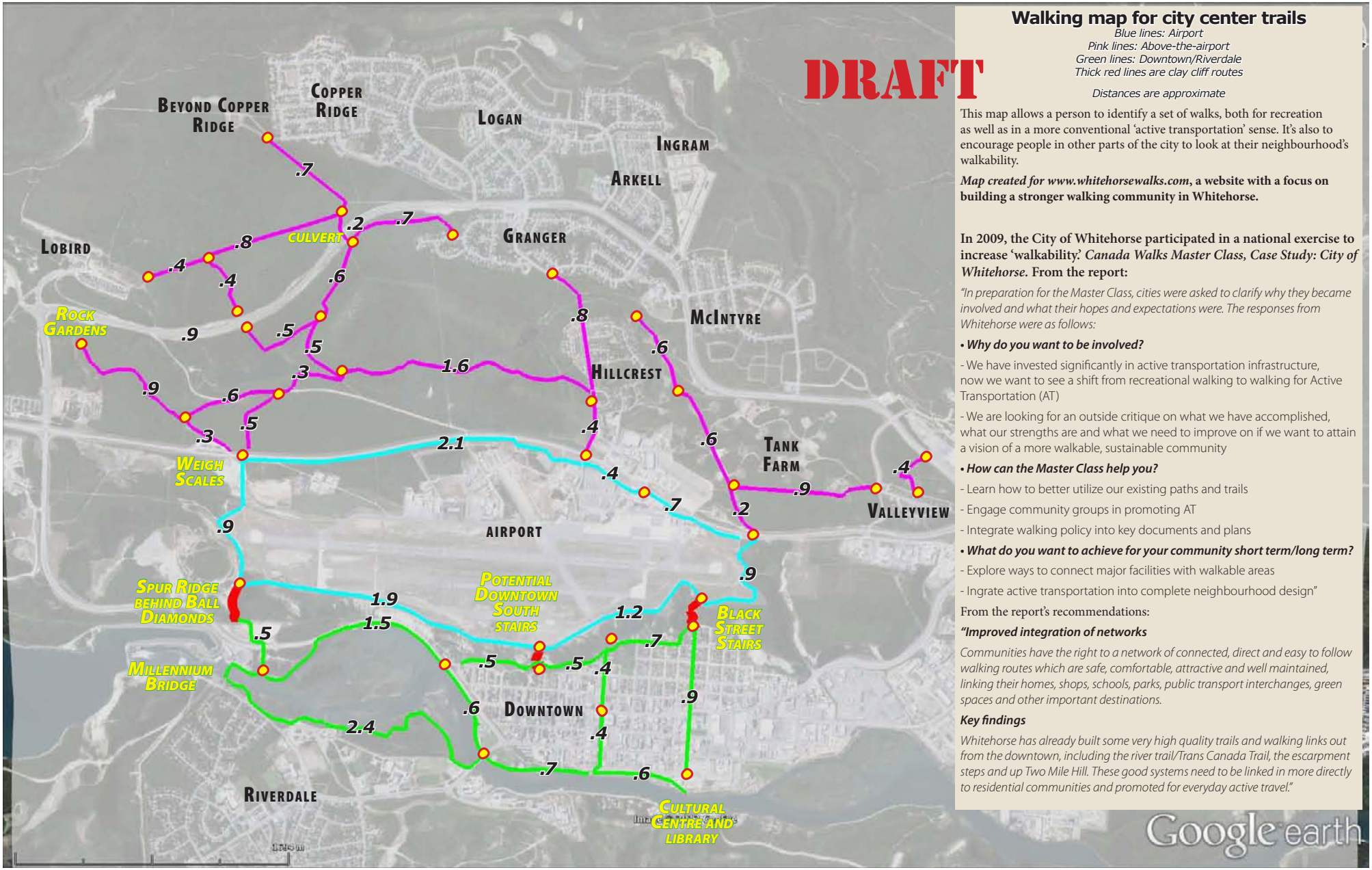
There is much happening in the city these days that affect our city trails and their use. The new Snowmobile By-law, the ATV By-law and survey, new motorized trails, new paved active transportation trails, changes to the intent of the 2007 Trail Plan's "Nurturing Positive Trail Culture: establish interdisciplinary Trails & Greenways Committee," and the Draft Zoning By-law.

Almost daily we hear about people becoming less active and obesity and type II diabetes rates growing. 'Walking' is often a recommended treatment, so let's look at Whitehorse's walkability.

"The main goal of Canada Walks is to increase the number of Canadians walking, both for pleasure and for transportation. To achieve this goal, Canada Walks focuses on: supporting the creation of more walkable communities, i.e. changing the built environment to make walking a safe and inviting choice; and changing Canadians' walking attitudes and habits so that they choose to walk."

From the Recomendations:
"Whitehorse is a city with opportunities and challenges for more walking that are both unique to the town and very much in common with other communities across Canada... With new sustainability plans in place, now is the time for the Council to promote a strong policy position that not only supports walking but establishes a clear action plan for walking. This plan should place pedestrians at the top of the road user hierarchy and outline how resources, personnel and projects will build a culture of walking in Whitehorse."

- Canada Walks Master Class, Case Study: City of Whitehorse, 2009



Walking map for city center trails

Blue lines: Airport
Pink lines: Above-the-airport
Green lines: Downtown/Riverdale
Thick red lines are clay cliff routes

Distances are approximate

This map allows a person to identify a set of walks, both for recreation as well as in a more conventional 'active transportation' sense. It's also to encourage people in other parts of the city to look at their neighbourhood's walkability.

***Map created for www.whitehorsewalks.com*, a website with a focus on building a stronger walking community in Whitehorse.**

In 2009, the City of Whitehorse participated in a national exercise to increase 'walkability.' *Canada Walks Master Class, Case Study: City of Whitehorse*. From the report:

"In preparation for the Master Class, cities were asked to clarify why they became involved and what their hopes and expectations were. The responses from Whitehorse were as follows:

• Why do you want to be involved?

- We have invested significantly in active transportation infrastructure, now we want to see a shift from recreational walking to walking for Active Transportation (AT)

- We are looking for an outside critique on what we have accomplished, what our strengths are and what we need to improve on if we want to attain a vision of a more walkable, sustainable community

• How can the Master Class help you?

- Learn how to better utilize our existing paths and trails

- Engage community groups in promoting AT

- Integrate walking policy into key documents and plans

• What do you want to achieve for your community short term/long term?

- Explore ways to connect major facilities with walkable areas

- Ingrate active transportation into complete neighbourhood design"

From the report's recommendations:

"Improved integration of networks

Communities have the right to a network of connected, direct and easy to follow walking routes which are safe, comfortable, attractive and well maintained, linking their homes, shops, schools, parks, public transport interchanges, green spaces and other important destinations.

Key findings

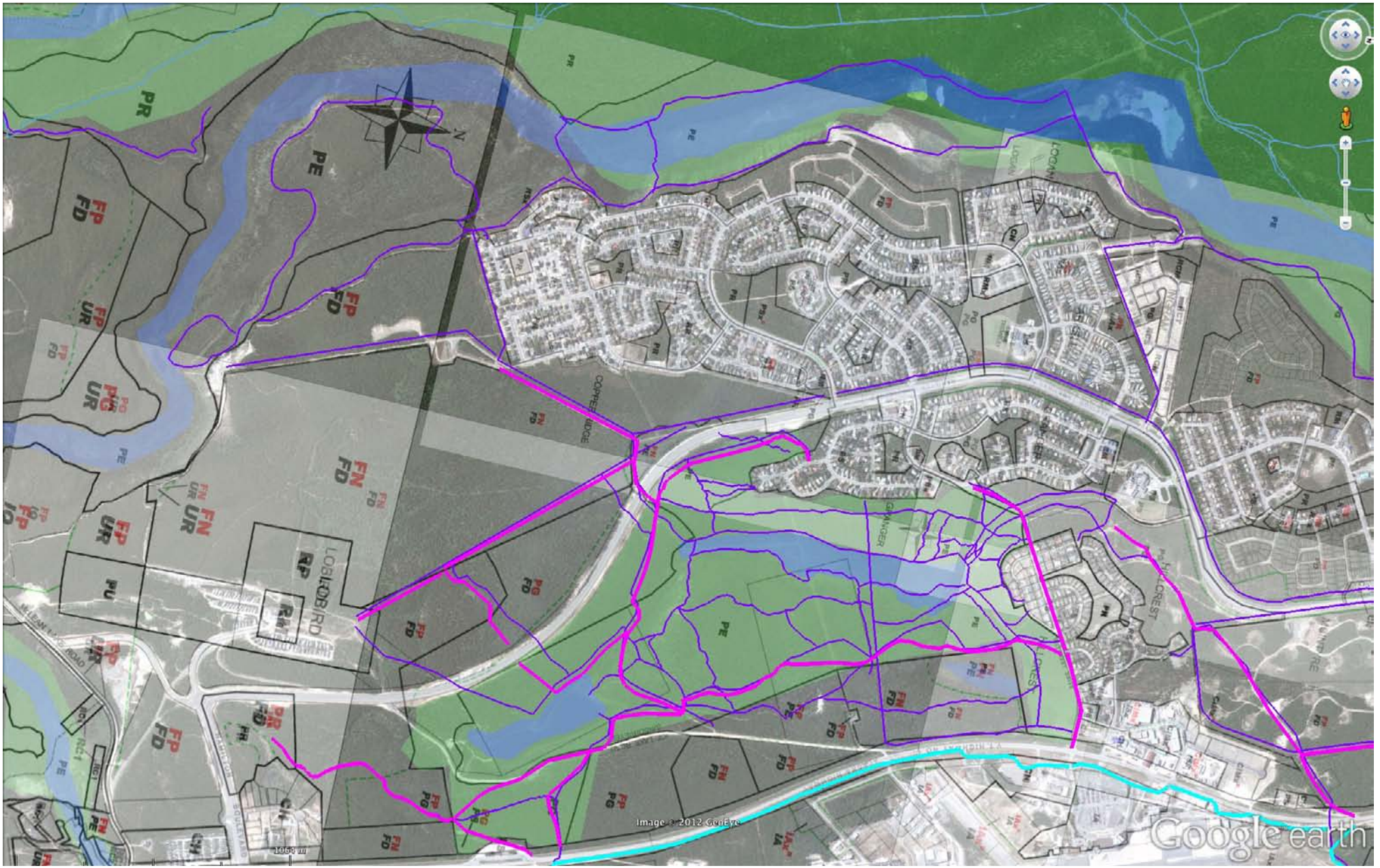
Whitehorse has already built some very high quality trails and walking links out from the downtown, including the river trail/Trans Canada Trail, the escarpment steps and up Two Mile Hill. These good systems need to be linked in more directly to residential communities and promoted for everyday active travel."

Building a culture of walking

How can we make a love of walking possible? Acknowledging the city's desire to build a culture of walking, I've started a *www.whitehorsewalks.com* website as an on-line home for local walking information. The above map is to help people become familiar with where they live, show how long a particular walk is and show different, interesting walking trails. Note that these are all non-motorized trails. The next step is to engage neighbourhoods throughout the city to look at their neighbourhood's walking trails, in particular with changes in the draft Zoning By-law.

Looking at some examples will show ways of using this map. A person living in Riverdale might well walk the Millennium Trail, about 4.5 kms. But with the map they could see that a walk to the Rock Gardens, about 3 km from the Millennium Bridge, is well within their capacity.

Or a person living or working downtown might choose to go up the Black Street stairs, along the airport trail, down at the Ball Diamond descent, back along the Millennium Trail to the lower escarpment trail. About 7 km — not a lot longer than walking the Millennium Trail.

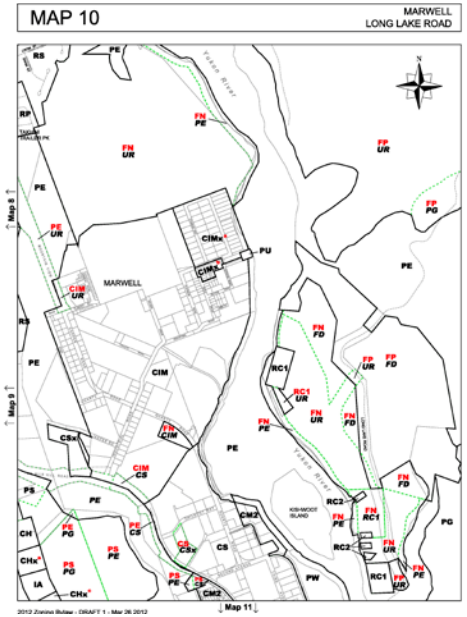


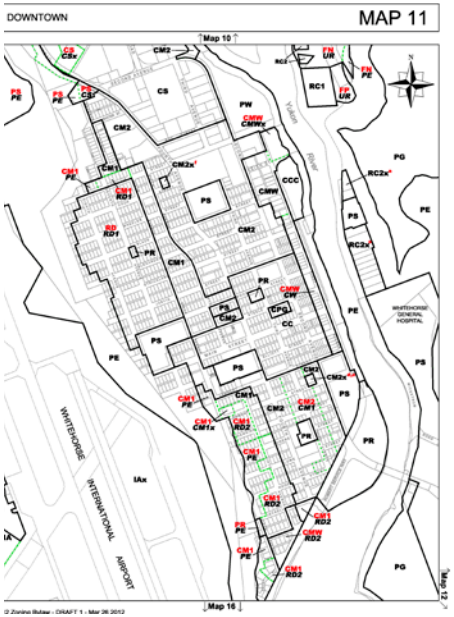
Mapping can be interesting

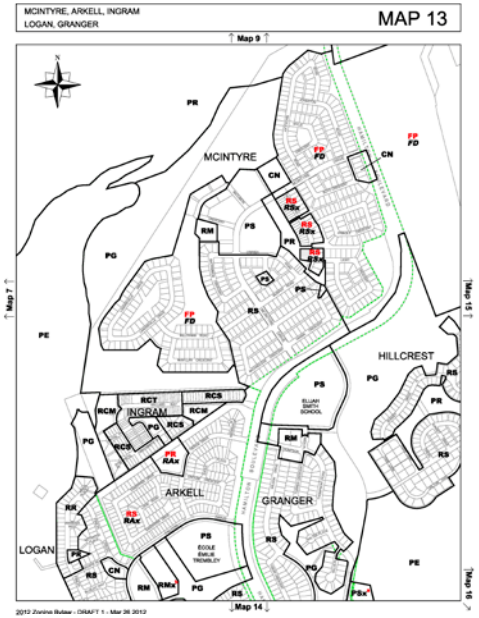
Hillcrest and Granger are at the heart of the above-the-airport area. Zoning designations can affect a city's walkability. But at first glance, this map is much too confusing. This document will try to help readers understand maps that affect our city.

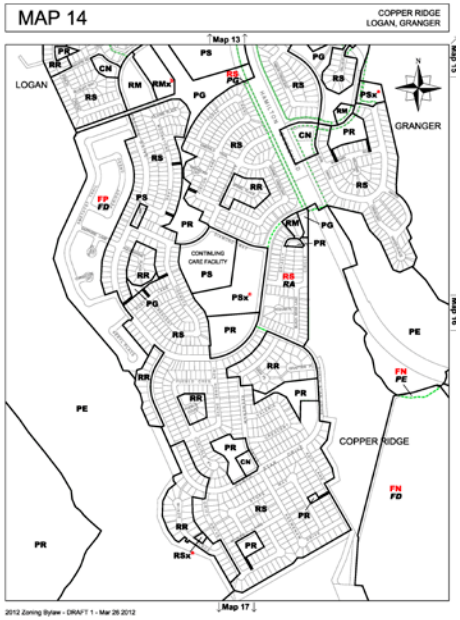
At the heart of mapping a community's walkability are the trails. Where do people walk? Where are they going? Are there bits of trail infrastructure that would open up great trails. Are there places where the normal city growth can discourage walking? If we want people to walk more, we need to do some basics: get people comfortable with longer walks, have a variety of trails that are interesting to use and have useful trails for walkers.

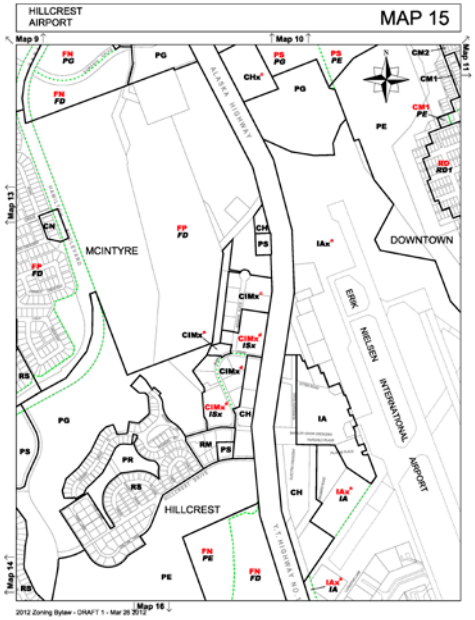
Let's dissect this map. A few hints: It uses maps 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 of the *Draft Zoning By-law*. It uses map 6 of the *2010 OCP* to show Paddy's Pond/Ice Lake Park (green shading). Trails (purple lines) are from community use, as well as from the City's *A Guide to the Popular Trails of Whitehorse*. Thicker pink lines are core trails as identified on the map on the previous page.

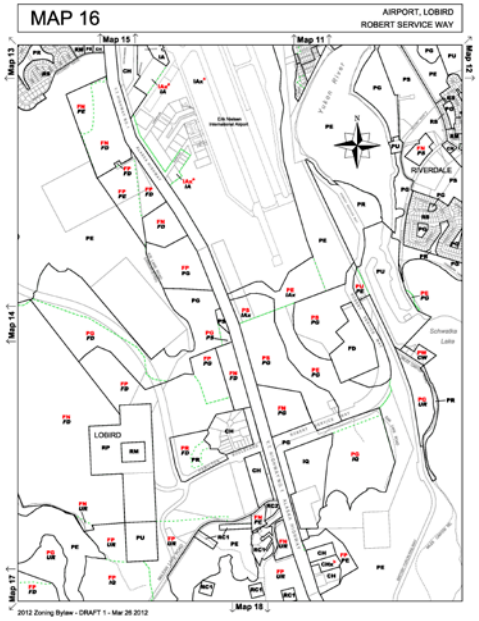


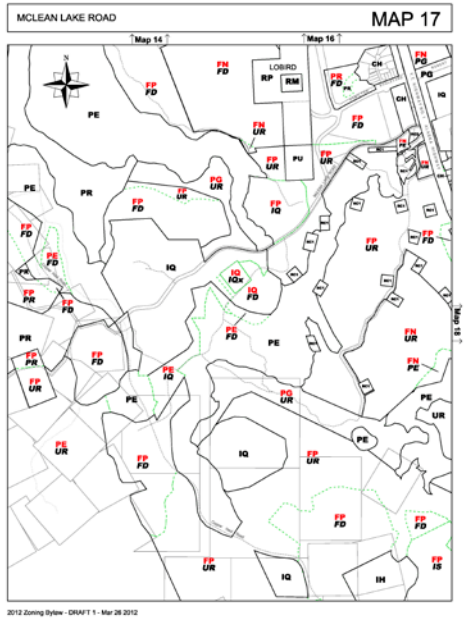












DRAFT 2012 ZONING BYLAW

The draft By-law incorporates changes required by the 2010 OCP. The City wanted to change the older general greenspace designation so people would understand that some lands will, in the future, be looked at for development.

Thus we see some old PG - Public Greenspace land sometimes becoming the new FP - Future Planning. The FP designation allows a myrid of uses, trails being one of them. But is this enough?

The needs of community walkability should be included at a more basic level as PG - Public Greenspace or PR - Public Recreation. In essence, important trail routes need to be designated by PG-designated corridors. We'll look at this over the next pages.

But first, the above maps are the ones that affect the above-the-airport neighbourhoods. These zoning maps are hard to understand in relation to walking around in our neighbourhoods, and in the woods. So let's put these maps into a more interesting format....

Google Earth Overlays

Here's what happens in Google Earth when we overlay draft zoning maps 10-17. A tricky job. When this set of maps is made transparent, the meaning of the zoning comes alive. The designations start to make sense, the map becomes more useable.

On the next page we'll rotate the area outlined by the red box 90° counterclockwise to see this area more closely.

Inside the red box outline and zoning designations

How does zoning work? The top red letters in each pair are the new zoning, the bottom black letters are the old zoning. Some old FD designations have been updated to reflect the results of land claims, other times the old FD has been updated to the new FP designation. The draft Zoning By-law has many pages of explanations for each designation and allowed uses in that type of zone.

This picture uses maps 14 (Copper Ridge), 16 (Lobird) and 17 (McLean Lake), with their overlap causes difference in background shadings. Duplication between the map overlays could all be made much simpler. Perhaps as the City grows, mapping will be provided in Google Earth so people can use it more easily.

The next stage in dissecting our original mishmash map on page 3 is to look at some other types of land designations that can affect walkability and trails. First we'll look at the environmentally sensitive areas, then we'll look at trails.

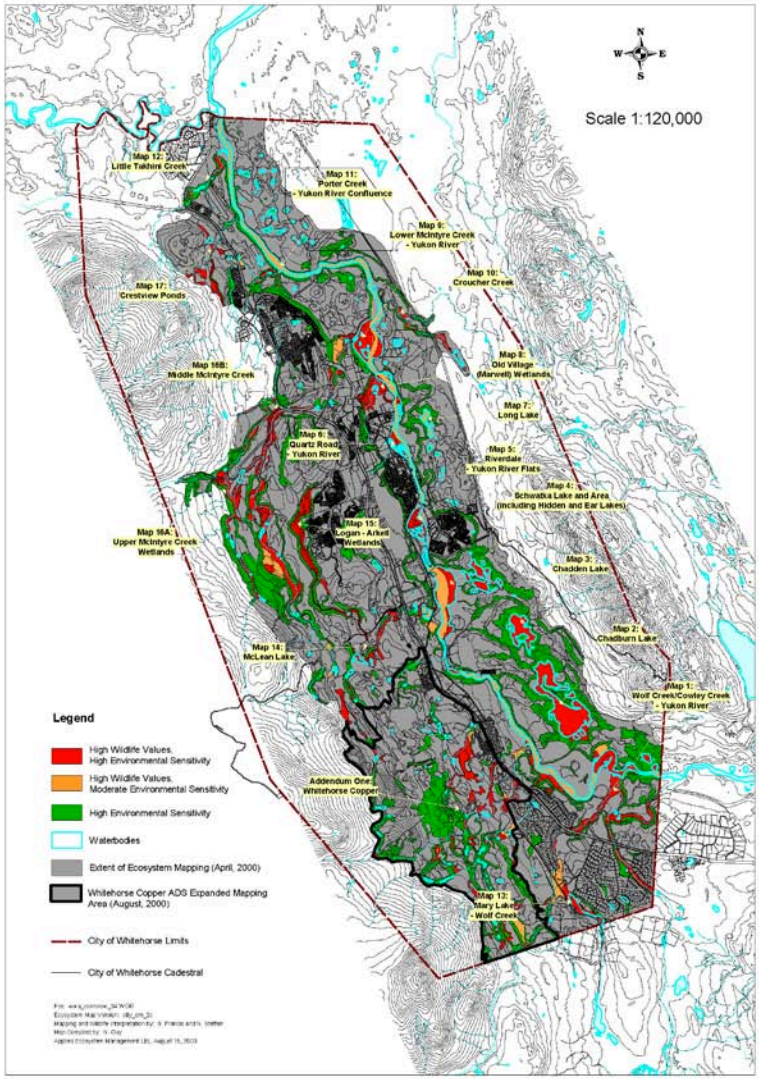
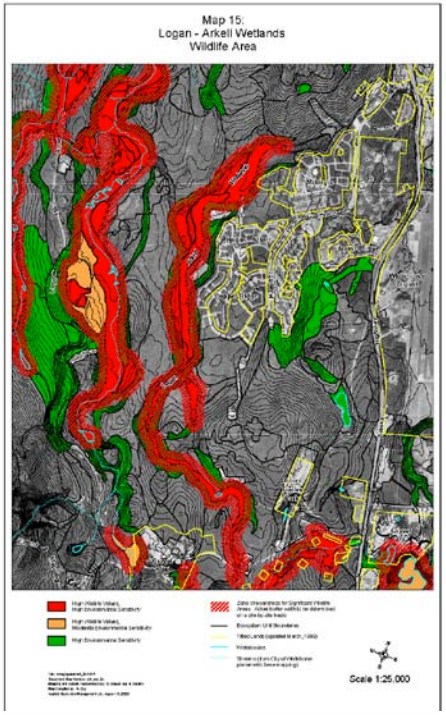
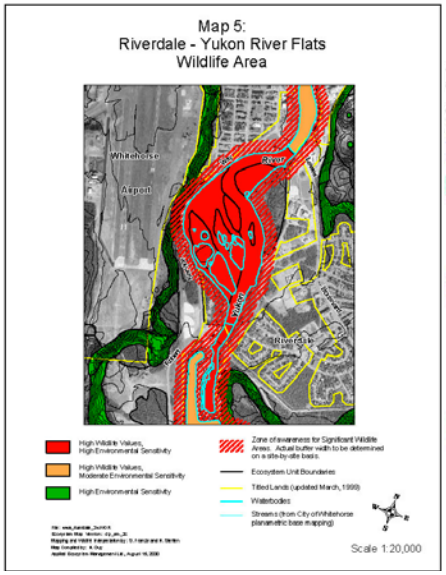
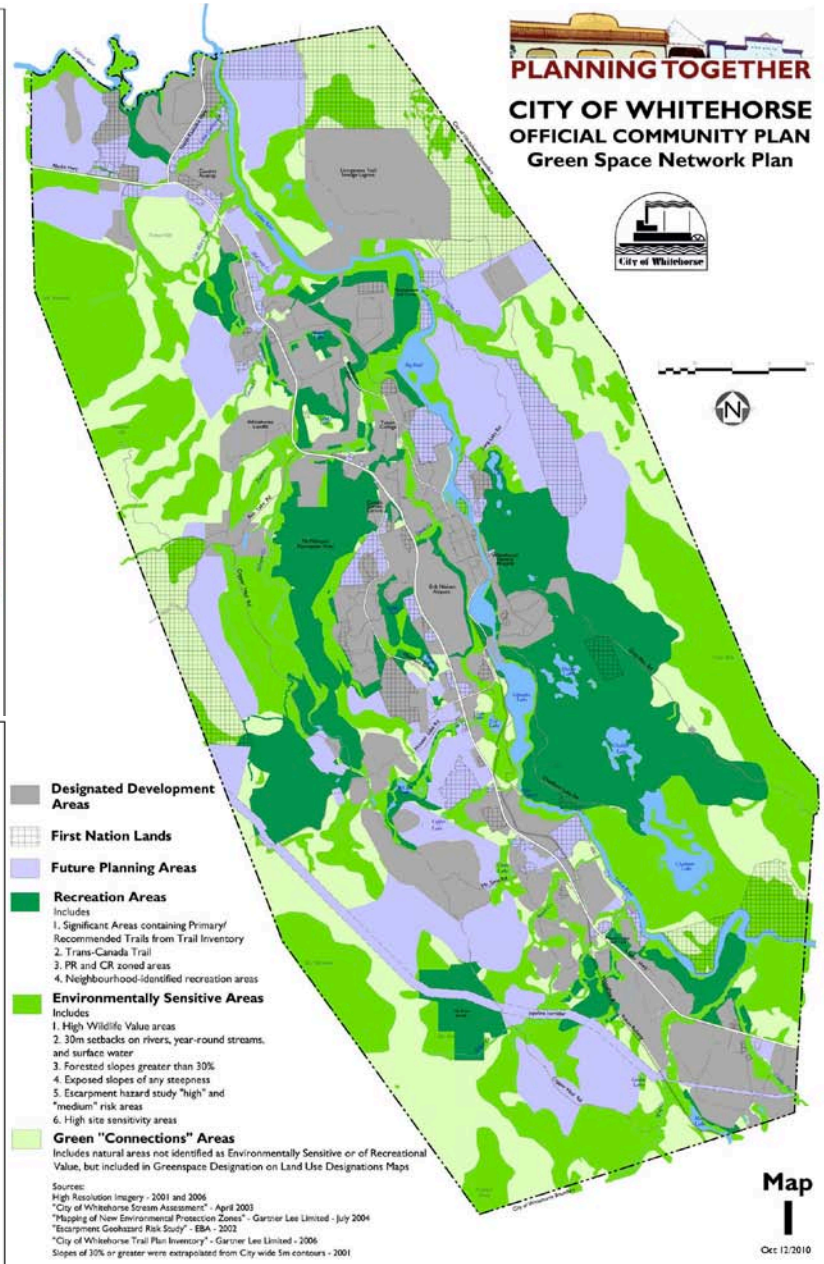


Figure 1. Overview Map: Significant Wildlife Areas and Environmentally Sensitive Areas within the current extent of City of Whitehorse Ecosystem Mapping. Detailed Ecosystem Mapping and wildlife interpretations for the Whitehorse Copper ADS Expanded Mapping Area are presented in Addendum One.





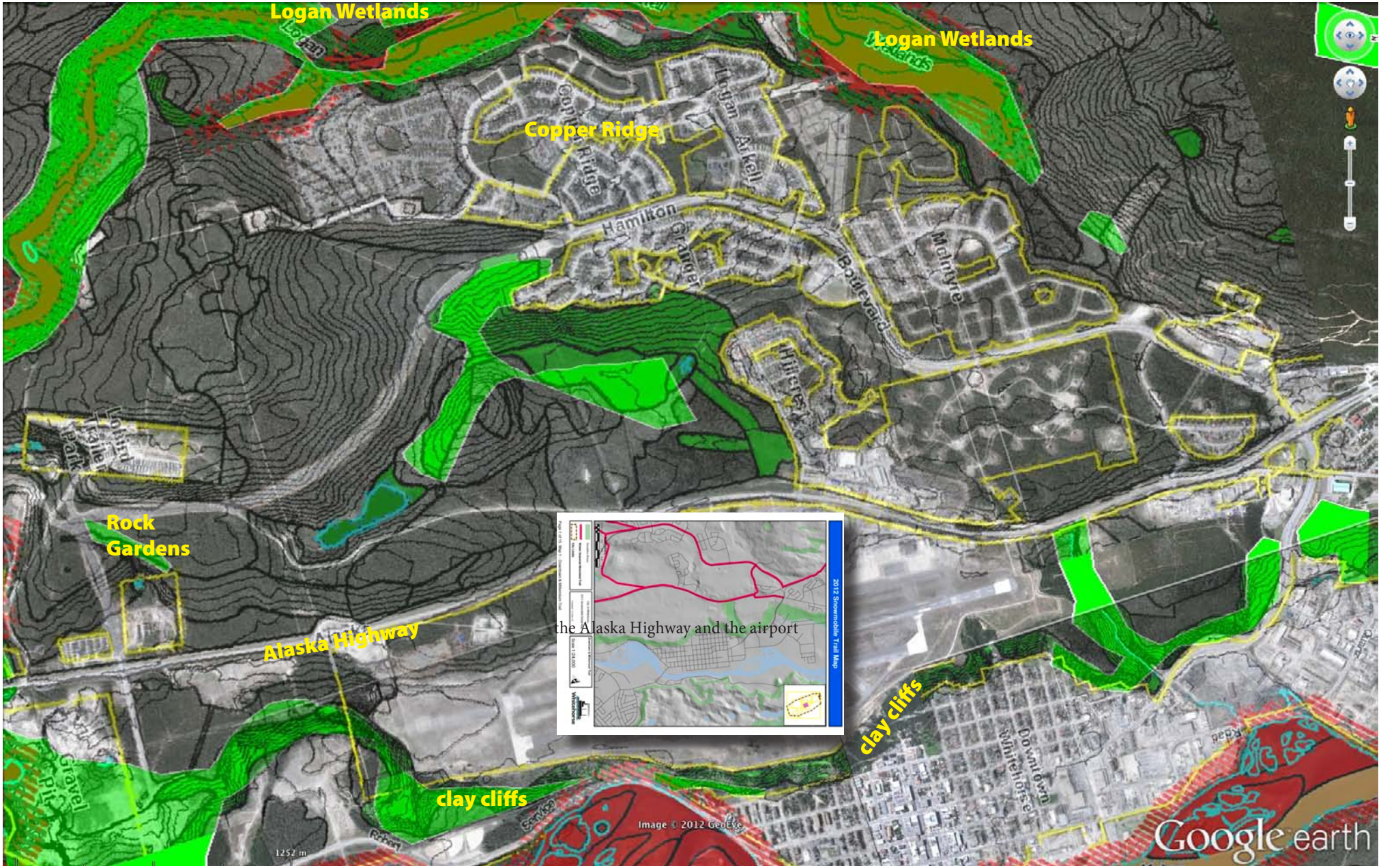


High Environmental Sensitivity

In the report, *Defining Ecologically-Based Significant Wildlife Areas for the City of Whitehorse (AEM 2000)*, "High Environmental Sensitivity" is defined as: "Areas with low tolerance to human disturbance where slight alterations would result in functional or structural changes to the ecosystem unit with potentially negative impacts on wildlife or visual aesthetics". This definition was also used in the Yukon River Corridor Plan (1999).

These report's appendicies have 20 coloured maps showing areas of environmental and wildlife importance as reds, greens and orange. The overview map and 2 area maps are shown above.

As a part of the 2010 OCP, map 1 (on the right) shows the Green Space Network Plan with environmentally sensitive areas as pale green. When these maps are combined in Google Earth, the data becomes more usable as we will see on the next page.



the Alaska Highway and the airport

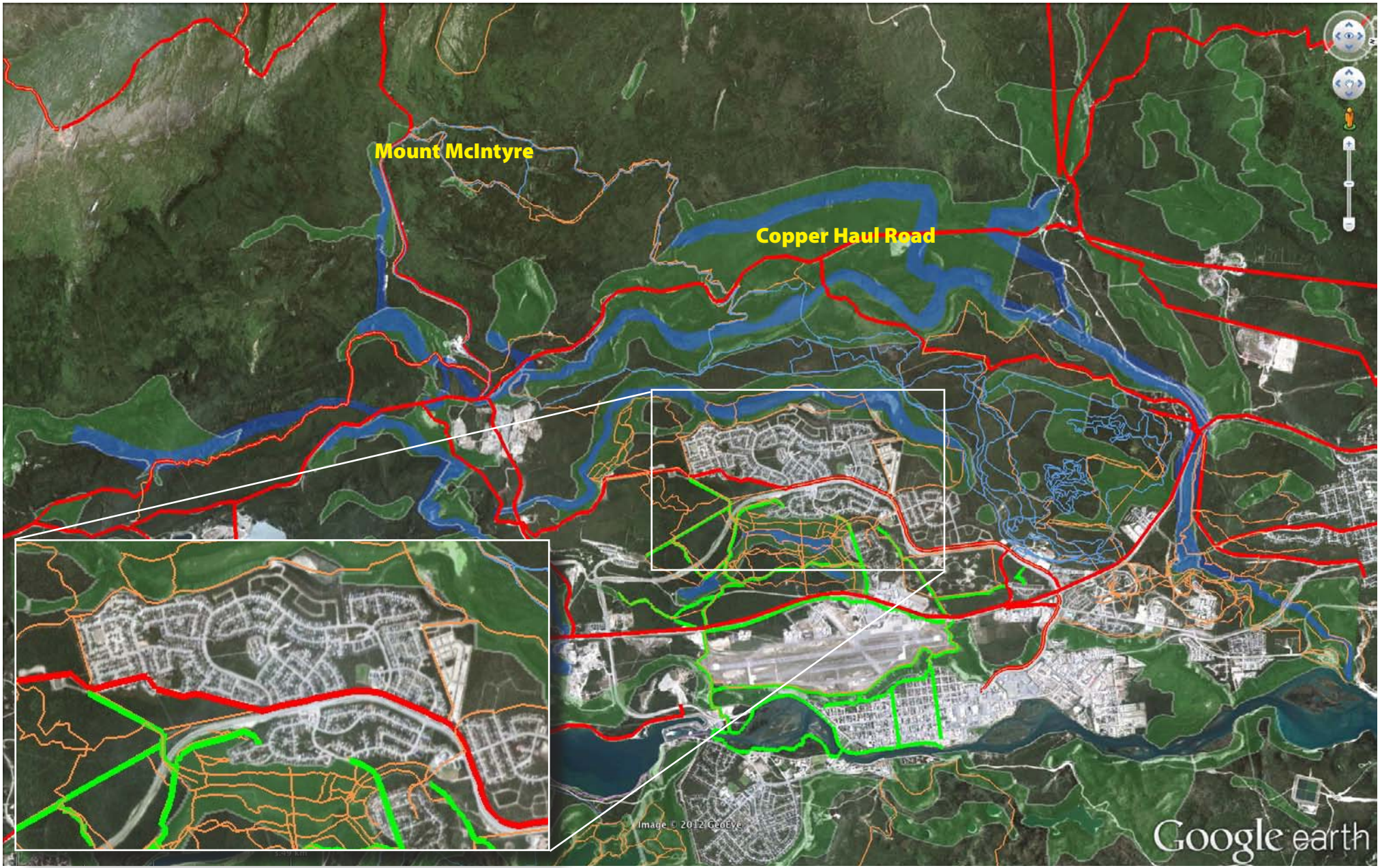
Above the airport

The above-the-airport neighbourhoods are constrained the Alaska Highway, the airport and the downtown clay cliffs. The Logan Wetlands block access to the large area of the Mount McIntyre Ski Club trails and to Mount McIntyre. Our neighbourhoods' walkabilty needs help!

The bright green shows areas that the OCP map 1 designates as environmentally sensitive. They are overlaid on the AEM 2000 report's maps 5, 6 and 15 as dark green and red areas. As you can see, there are some discrepancies between the maps — areas like the clay cliffs and the Paddy's Pond Ice/Lake Park area need to be re-assessed to show the environmentally sensitive areas better.

The snowmobile trail map (inset is map 2 of 15) has classified all of Paddy's Pond/Ice Lake Park as non-environmentally sensitive for snowmobiles. Problems can arise as these users return in the summer (with ATVs) and don't understand that these areas are indeed environmentally sensitive.

Let's look at trails next, particularly, how one crosses the Logan Wetlands.



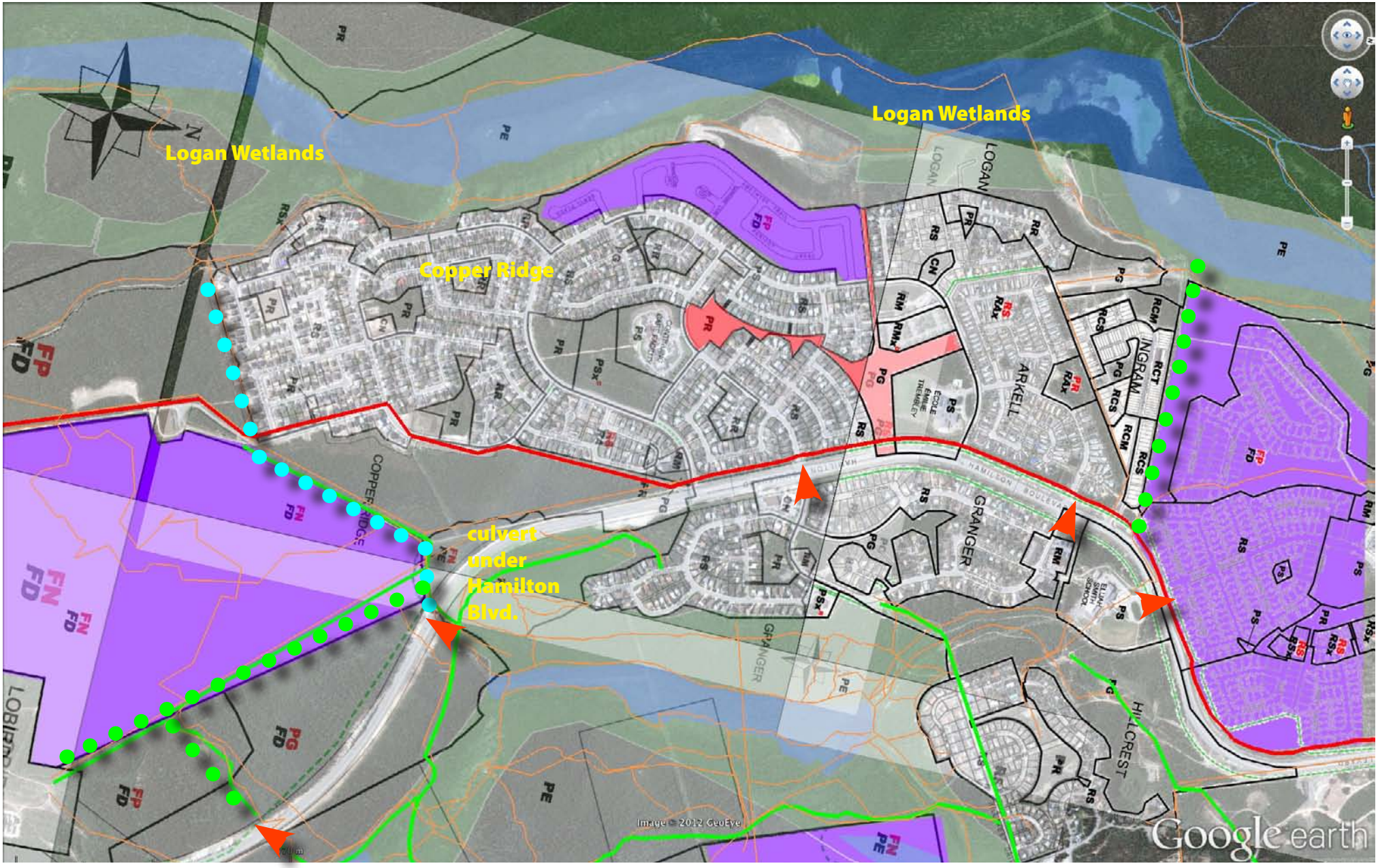
Trails

Again, at first glance this is a complex picture. Green shading is environmentally sensitive, red lines are motorized trails, orange lines are neighbourhood/local trails, blue lines are ski trails and bright green lines are the core walking trails as on the map on page 2 of this document.

People from above the airport want to be able to walk around the airport and to get downtown. Some want to walk the Millennium Trail. Often people out for a walk enjoy walking on trails, rather than on sidewalks or beside roads. For getting to work, a peaceful walk can be a bonus.

People from Hillcrest and Granger also want to walk to the trails behind Copper Ridge, Arkell, Ingram and Mcintyre, or to the ski trails, or even to the Copper Haul Road and Mount McIntyre. But this is difficult in the summer. Not only are there wetlands to cross, there are no 'trails' through the many neighbourhoods!

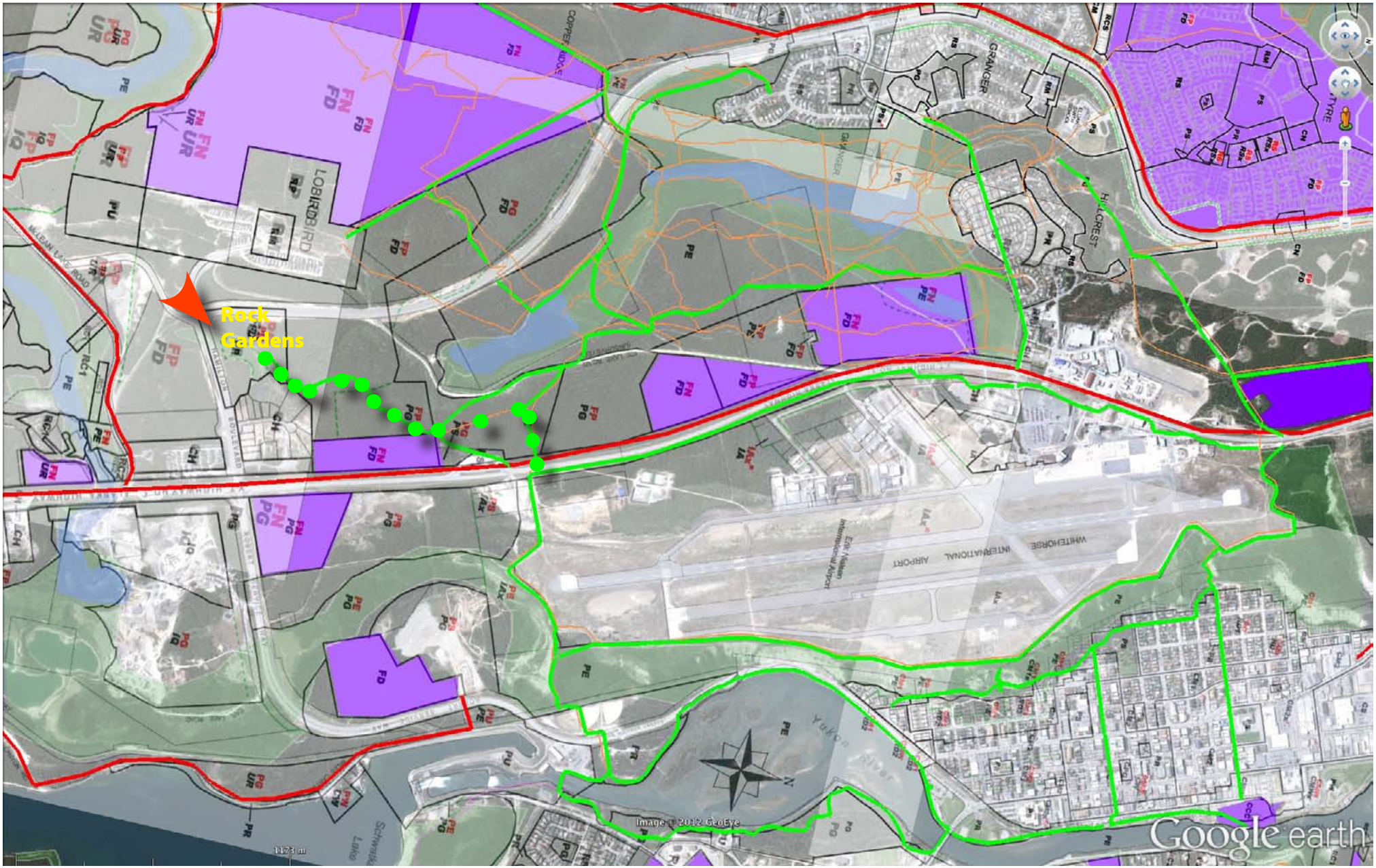
The inset shows a close-up view of the some of above-the-airport neighbourhoods. On the next page we'll look more closely at this area.



Crossing the 'barrier'

The red arrows show where people can cross Hamilton Blvd. The PG-designated space in the middle of the picture (red shading) offers a way through the Arkell/Copper Ridge neighbourhoods, but it doesn't come out at a Hamilton Blvd. crossing. To access it, one must walk on the motorized trail (red line), snowmobile and ATV use of this trail may deter walkers. Outside of the street intersections, Granger has no trail access to Hamilton Blvd., nor is there a trail alongside the Granger side of Hamilton Blvd. In short, people generally walk around the ends of the barrier.

Now let's look at the draft zoning. How First Nations use their lands (purple shading) will be seen in time. But for this draft of the Zoning By-law, the only place where a core trail can go past Copper Ridge to join the trails along the Logan Wetlands is through the FP - Future Planning area. The trail is marked by a blue dotted line. To protect our community's walking trails, this corridor should be significantly wide and zoned as PR. Likewise the green dotted trails going towards Lobird and past Ingram need PR-designation corridors.



Rock Gardens

This city jewel (marked by red arrow) was proposed for a City Park in the 1994 Parks and Recreation Master Plan. However, some of the wetlands at the site were recently converted to industrial use. As part of the new Hamilton Blvd. extension, a parking lot was built for those who drive to the gardens.

But a city that values walkability shouldn't require people to drive to the Rock Gardens. This trail is a very lovely walking trail. The walking access (green dotted line) crosses an area newly designated as FP in the draft Zoning By-law. During the OCP process it was repeatedly pointed out that the area needed greenspace designation. There needs to be a PG-designated trail corridor here to protect this lovely trail.

The Rock Gardens are as close to Riverdale as they are to much of the above-the-airport neighbourhoods. Trail discussion for accessing the Rock Gardens was started last year with the city's trail consultant.

Changing the culture of the city so that people choose to walk for daily activities as well as recreation is certainly a challenge and will require a comprehensive approach of both physical changes to the environment and social changes in how streets and public spaces are used.

- Canada Walks Master Class, Case Study, 2009

View along Logan Wetlands

Conclusion

This is a quick bit of feedback for the Zoning By-law. Our walking possibilities are vast. But much depends on whether we have a 'culture of walking'. The consultation timelines are too short. One month to inform people about how a particular plan or by-law might affect them and get them to be involved does not allow community members enough time to research and prepare responses.

Making this presentation makes me curious why the City's proposed Trail Plan revision is changing the Trail Plan's recommendation for neighbourhood-driven input, to become just part of a task force as needed. The trail building process is too complex for a small staff with a small budget. There needs to be a city-wide citizen/neighbourhood/district advisory group with impartial views.

Parking spots and safe highway crossings at the ends of the airport, interpreted wet land crossings, stairs at the Riverdale end of the airport, these will take planning and funding but will add immensely to walkability in this area. See more at *www.whitehorsewalks.com* ... a website to promote walks and walking in Whitehorse.

Peter Long, Hillcrest