

Alpine Rare Plant Surveys 2025

Project objectives

We conducted this project to:

1. Continue collecting baseline data on rare and endemic plants and alpine ecosystems across the Yukon.
2. Identify, classify and describe alpine ecosystems in the Yukon.

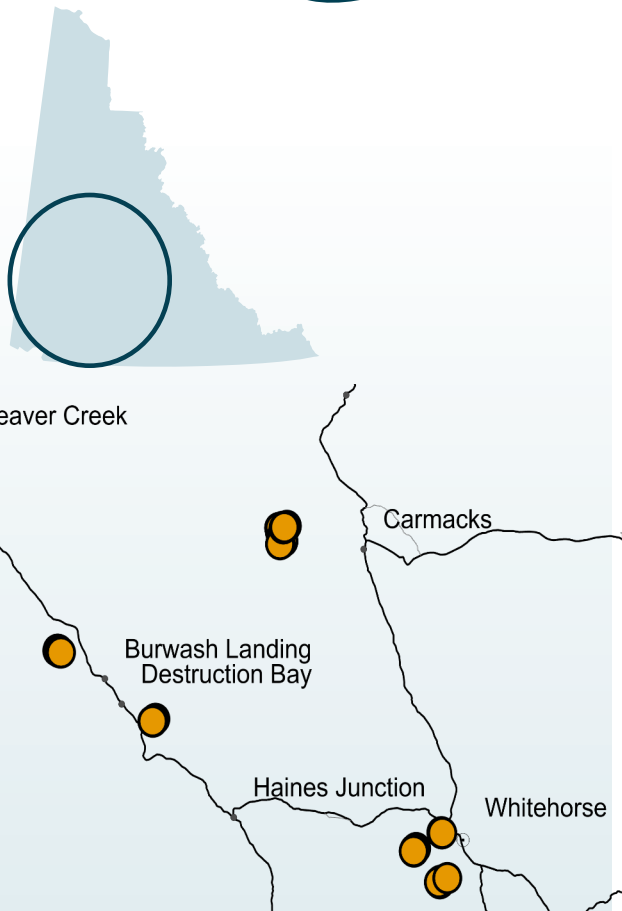
Project overview

Alpine plants, including rare and endemic species, are important components of Yukon flora. Alpine plant communities provide important habitat resources for wildlife species such as collared pika and woodland caribou. Understanding the distribution, abundance and environmental conditions of alpine plant communities is critical for species assessments, such as those carried out by Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Alpine ecosystems are vulnerable to environmental changes, so understanding these plant communities across the Yukon is essential to forecasting habitat change over time.

The goal of this project is to find rare and endemic plant species and develop ecosite descriptions for Yukon alpine ecosystems. This work builds on alpine rare plant surveys started in summer 2024.



Podistera yukonensis (Yukon podistera) found around Mount Nansen.
Photo: Denise Gordon



Study area

This project targeted alpine ecosystems around Mount Nansen, Kluane and Southern Lakes regions.

For more information, please contact

Caitlin Willier
Habitat biologist
Caitlin.Willier@yukon.ca

Denise Gordon
Ecological landscape classification coordinator
Denise.Gordon@yukon.ca

Kirsten Wilcox
Senior habitat biologist
Kirsten.Wilcox@yukon.ca

Rare plant surveys

Over summer 2025, Government of Yukon biologists conducted rare plant surveys in 73 alpine plots. Across all plots, we observed 267 unique vascular plants species, including seven species that are tracked by the Yukon Conservation Data Center.

We conducted surveys in the Klondike Plateau, Ruby Ranges, Saint Elias Mountains and Yukon Southern Lakes ecoregions. All sites were accessed using a combination of utility terrain vehicles and on foot.

At each plot we conducted comprehensive rare plant surveys and collected environmental data to characterize plant communities and associated environmental conditions. We also collected lichen and bryophyte samples for expert identification. In 14 plots, we dug soil pits to characterize alpine soils.

Notably, we documented two occurrences of *Draba bruce-bennettii* (Klaza Draba) in the Southern Lakes region, approximately 160 km south of previous observations. Globally, this species has previously only been recorded from two other mountaintops in the Yukon. Collections of this species have been sent away for DNA barcoding.

Tracked species observed within survey plots included *Podistera yukonensis* (Yukon podistera), *Cerastium maximum* (Great chickweed), *Rumex lapponicus* (Lapland sorrel), *Artemisia woodii* (Yukon wormwood), *Draba bruce-bennettii* (Klaza draba) and *Draba ventosa* (Wind River draba).

We also observed *Taraxacum carneocoloratum* (Pink dandelion) while hiking between plots, representing a southern range expansion for a species considered to be a Beringian endemic.

Results from this work will contribute to ongoing rare plant monitoring and provide baseline information to support conservation planning and future species assessments at territorial and federal levels. As next steps, we will analyze relationships between plant communities and environmental conditions to support alpine ecosite classification, refine ecosite descriptions and identify priority areas for future surveys.



Alpine plot in the Southern Lakes region with *Draba bruce-bennettii* (Klaza draba) (left, Photo: Breanne Johnson) and *Draba bruce-bennettii* observation (right, Photo: Brett Pagacz).

