

To: Peel River Planning Commission

Re: Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan

Date: April 27th, 2007

I was under the impression that the Peel Watershed Planning Commission was set up to develop a land use planning process for the area. So why would our government accept "posting requests" in the Peel Plateau (and the Eagle plains area) before a plan is developed? It seems as though the territorial government's Oil and Gas Management Branch is "jumping the gun." Of course, it could also mean that the government plans to allow gas, oil, and other mineral exploration and development in the area, whatever the Commission suggests with regard to the appropriate use of the region.

The Peel watershed is a very special area. Those of us who have had the opportunity to hike and/or canoe in the basin have been awestruck by its varied and unique landscapes, its wildlife, its vegetation, and its fragility. If any part of the Peel watershed is "developed" there is no way that it will ever be returned to its natural state. The attitude seems to be that an area such as this does not have financial worth, unless it can be exploited by mining interests. Unfortunately, it is difficult to put a monetary figure on land, which when left alone does not appear to generate much in terms of economic value to the economies of the territory, or the nation as a whole. But the Peel watershed does have both ecological and cultural value, and these are the values that can be destroyed by an industry that is simply "not sustainable."

Assuming there is oil, natural gas, or other valuable minerals in the area, and assuming it is economically feasible to produce, what we will have left after it has been extracted? We will be left with the infrastructure that was necessary to develop the resource, and it is the building of that infrastructure that will have a serious impact on a cultural and ecological environment that "without mineral development" is sustainable. One might say that this would result in "short term gain for long term pain."

Governments seem to equate oil, gas, and other mineral exploration and extraction with the dollar sign. In other words, we will all have jobs, and we will all get rich if we allow such development regardless of its impact on areas of great ecological and cultural value. However, subsistence harvesting, trapping, outfitting, and appropriate forms of wilderness recreation will also create livelihoods for Yukoners. The difference is that mineral extraction is not sustainable, but subsistence harvesting, trapping, outfitting, and appropriate forms of wilderness recreation are! Unfortunately, mineral extraction will by its very nature negatively impact those pursuits that are sustainable.* There is an old saying which says that "politicians think only of the next election; statesmen think of the next generation." I hope members of the Commission do not act like politicians when they make their final report.

Often people such as myself are considered naïve due to our constant struggle to ensure areas of great ecological, cultural, and recreational significance are preserved for both

present and future generations. However, the Commission's statement that one of its goals "is to return all lands to their natural state as development activities are completed," is to me extremely naïve. Perhaps members of the Commission should take a tour of the Yukon's former mine sites, or even areas that have undergone "exploration," but have not been developed. How much are taxpayers paying now to clean up and maintain abandoned mine sites in the Yukon? How much more am I paying in electricity bills because the owners of a particular mine in Faro abandoned the site?

Certainly we need oil, gas, and other minerals to maintain our current lifestyle. Oil and gas must be used to make the next great leap forward into renewable energy. However, as a citizen of the Yukon I do not see that development in this particular area of the Yukon will bring long term benefits to our territory. We will have large international companies (often foreign owned) sending our gas, oil, and other minerals (should they be found) outside the territory for the use of others. It is highly unlikely that any of the minerals that are extracted will be processed in the Yukon, even though it is in the secondary stage of production that most jobs are created. I suspect that due to the North American Free Trade Agreement much of what gas and oil is produced will end up in the United States. These companies by their very nature are responsible directly to their shareholders and their respective board of directors, and not to the people of the Yukon. Once they have depleted our resources, they will head for greener pastures. We might not be too pleased with the legacy they leave behind.

I know that there will be some environmental restrictions placed on companies that do explore and perhaps mine in the region. However, I have lived in the Yukon long enough to realize that environmental restrictions and promises by "outside" companies with regard to the care of "our" land and its people are often meaningless. The Commission has to ensure that large areas of the Peel watershed (drainage basin) are protected from mineral exploration and extraction.**

Thank you for allowing me to make comments with regard to the future of the Peel River watershed.

Keith Lay
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*In 1992, a number of my friends and I rafted the Firth River in Ivvavik National Park. We hired two Yukon guides. In 2005, approximately 150 people visited Ivvavik National Park. The vast majority of these people raft the Firth. Today, it costs around \$5,335 for a twelve day trip. This does not include the cost of getting to and from Inuvik. Needless to say, none of us could have done the trip in 1992 if the cost had been \$5,335.00. In fact, we could not afford to do this trip today. The value/cost of this wilderness experience has increased dramatically since 1992. People will continue to pay large sums of money to experience a unique environment. They will only do so if that environment remains unique and unspoiled. The future of the Yukon lies in the protection of such areas.

**Some of the special areas I have encountered on multi-day hikes in the area are found in the headwaters of the North and South Stewart River and in the area north and east of Bonnet Plume Lake. This year we will be hiking in the area around the headwaters of Reptile Creek (north of the Snake River) for three weeks.