



October 16, 2006

Re: *Issues and Interests Report: The Commission's Concluding Remarks*

Dear Stakeholder:

During the first several months of the Peel watershed planning process, the Commission has sought comments from the planning partners, stakeholders and the general public, regarding their concerns, issues and interests for the planning region.

In January, 2006, the Commission released the *Issues and Interests Report* that summarized the comments received. The report and the comments have been posted on our website, www.peel.planyukon.ca. While this concludes one phase of the planning process – identifying the public's issues and concerns – this initial consultation and feedback will provide an important foundation for guiding the remainder of the land use planning process in the Peel watershed.

The Commission has gained valuable insights into the public's vision for the Peel watershed, through public consultation sessions, stakeholder presentations, correspondence and responses to the *Issues and Interests Report*.

The following bullets represent some of the main highlights (in no particular order) of the comments we have heard:

- Water quality is key.
- Maintaining the health of fish & wildlife populations and their habitat is very important.
- The Peel watershed is one of the most ecologically significant regions in the Yukon.
- The Peel watershed plays an important cultural role for the Tetlit Gwich'in, Nacho Nyak Dun, Vuntut Gwitchin and the Tr'ondek Hwech'in, with respect to their relationship with the land, water and wildlife of the region.
- There is strong public interest in the creation of protected areas in the Peel watershed.
- The Peel watershed currently supports ecologically sustainable tourism and outfitting industries. Adventure tourism (commercial and private excursions) and outfitting contribute significantly to the economy of the Yukon. For these industries to continue to prosper, the wilderness character must remain largely intact.

- Much of the Peel watershed remains unexplored with respect to mineral development potential, although there are known to be significantly large coal and iron deposits.
- The mining sector desires continued access to explore and potentially develop throughout the region.
- The oil & gas sector desires continued access and potential development opportunities in the watershed.
- Both mineral and oil & gas sectors require access routes into and out of their areas of interest, for the necessary infrastructure to extract and transport the resources to market.

One can conclude from the feedback that the public – Yukoners and Canadians – feel passionately about the Peel watershed. However, the public’s vision for the region is not homogeneous. It spans the spectrum, from “full protection” to “open access and unfettered development”, and everywhere in between. All viewpoints will be respectfully considered by the Commission, but it is important to recognize that the plan cannot meet all expectations when visions and interests are so diverse.

In addition to considering the diverse views of the public, the Peel Watershed Planning Commission is directed by the planning objectives identified in their General Terms of Reference:

- Promote the well being of the affected First Nations, other residents of the planning region, the communities and the Yukon as a whole, while having regard to the interest of other Canadians (reference 11.4.5.7);
- Recommend measures to minimize actual or potential land use conflicts throughout the planning region (reference 11.4.5.4);
- Recognize and promote the cultural values of the affected First Nations and other affected Yukon Indian People (reference 11.1.1.3);
- Ensure that social, cultural, economic and environmental policies are applied to the management, protection and use of land, water and resources in an integrated and co-ordinated manner so as to ensure sustainable development (reference 11.1.1.6);
- Promote sustainable development (reference 11.4.5.9);
- Take into account that the management of land, water and resources, including fish, wildlife, and their habitats, is to be integrated (reference 11.4.5.8);
- Recognize all economic potential of the planning region, including, but not limited to sub-surface resources;

- Provide for enhanced opportunities to have ongoing cooperative land use planning activities between the Peel Watershed Planning Commission and the Gwich'in Land Use Planning Board. (7.1.3, GCLCA).

These objectives will play an important role throughout the planning process.

The Peel watershed is an exceptional landscape, of regional, territorial and national significance. From a regional planning perspective, we have the very unique opportunity to design a land use plan for a region that is largely intact in its natural state, lacking any significant human footprint (perhaps with the exception of the Dempster Highway). In short, we have a chance to do the planning right, which is both a privilege and our responsibility.

As a first step in presenting a management direction for the Peel watershed, the Commission has drafted a *Statement of Intent* as an expression of the Commission's guiding principles and vision for the Peel watershed, as they flow out of the public comments and the above objectives that are outlined in the Commission's *General Terms of Reference*.

**PEEL WATERSHED PLANNING COMMISSION'S
STATEMENT OF INTENT**

The goal of the Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan is to ensure wilderness characteristics, wildlife and their habitats, cultural resources, and waters are maintained over time while managing resource use. These uses include, but are not limited to traditional use, trapping, recreation, outfitting, wilderness tourism, subsistence harvesting, and the exploration and development of non-renewable resources.*

*Achieving this goal requires managing development at a pace and scale that maintains ecological integrity**. The long-term objective is to return all lands to their natural state as development activities are completed.*

*** Wilderness is defined as:** any area in a largely natural condition in which ecosystem processes are largely unaltered by human activity or in which human activity has been limited to developments or activities that do not significantly modify the environment, and includes an area restored to a largely natural condition. (Yukon Environment Act)

**** Ecological integrity is defined as:** a concept that expresses the degree to which the physical, chemical, and biological components (including composition, structure, and process) of an ecosystem and their relationships are present, functioning, and capable of self-renewal. Ecological integrity implies the presence of appropriate species, populations and communities and the occurrence of ecological processes at appropriate rates and scales as well as the environmental conditions that support these taxa and processes. (U.S. National Park Service)

The Commission is currently gathering data so that our recommendations are based on the best available information. It will also be vital for the Commission to consider all of the available management tools at its disposal, and choose the most appropriate tools for each situation. Some of the tools will likely include: a land use designation system (zoning), land use thresholds or targets, general terms and conditions, and special considerations within land use zones, such as access corridors, timing windows, and wildlife corridors. There are a myriad of tools and options available and the Commission must be flexible and creative in its application of these tools.

The Commission has appreciated the participation and interest of the public thus far in the planning process, and we look forward to receiving further input throughout the process. The Commission will provide the public with regular progress reports and invites public feedback throughout the process. With continued public participation, we are confident that the Commission can recommend a regional land use plan that meets its objectives and serves the best interests of First Nations, Yukoners, Canadians, and the Peel watershed.

If you have any questions or comments for the Peel Watershed Planning Commission, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED

Albert Genier
Chair