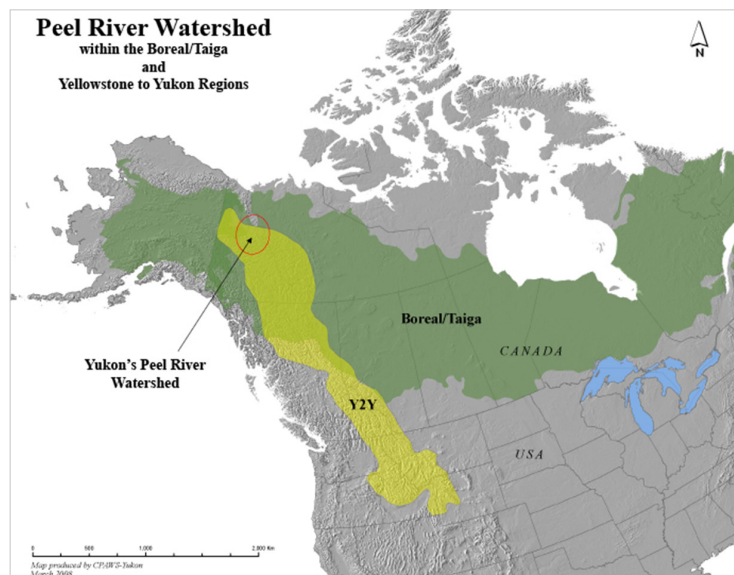


# Protect the Peel

Yukon's great boreal wilderness

## The Yukon's Peel Watershed

The Peel River Watershed is a vast and spectacularly beautiful wilderness of great cultural importance and international environmental significance at the northern end of the Rocky and Mackenzie Mountain chain in the most remote reaches of northeastern Yukon. The watershed is the northern anchor of the Yellowstone-to-Yukon Conservation Initiative, a broad-based international project to protect ecosystem connections for wildlife. First Nations, conservation groups and wilderness outfitters are now trying to get permanent protection for the area, an effort that has overwhelming local support.



- The watershed covers 26,000 square miles, or 16 million acres – an area larger than Scotland.
- The area encompasses the drainages of seven clean and free-flowing rivers: Peel, Snake, Bonnet Plume, Wind, Ogilvie, Hart and Blackstone.

### Cultural Homeland

The watershed is the traditional hunting, gathering and spiritual territory of four First Nations: Na-Cho Nyak Dun, Tet'it Gwich'in the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Vuntut Gwitchin.

- For thousands of years, First Nations have found physical and spiritual sustenance in the watershed — traditions that remain strong as they balance modern and old ways.
- Canadian land-claim settlements involving Canadian, Territorial and First Nation governments establish strong native rights to use and protection of traditional lands.

## Globally Significant Ecological Value

The Peel Watershed is one of North America's largest intact ecosystems – a region of mountains, deep canyons, plateaus, wetlands and rolling hills laced by free-flowing rivers.

- Wildlife includes a host of high-profile species that are vulnerable elsewhere, such as grizzly bears, wolverines, wolves, Dall sheep and caribou.
- The watershed provides essential winter range to the Porcupine Caribou Herd — the same animals that spend their summer raising calves in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.
- It's also home to the Yukon's largest herd of woodland caribou – along with several other notable populations of woodland caribou, a species in decline elsewhere.
- Extensive wetlands are significant as migratory waterfowl nesting and staging areas, along with necessary habitat for peregrine falcons and other birds of prey and a host of nesting shorebirds and neotropical songbirds.



Photo: © Juri Peepr

### Climate Connection

In the Ice Age, portions of the Peel Watershed remained ice-free, a factor contributing to the remarkable plant and animal communities found there today. As the earth faces a new phase of climate change, the Peel Watershed could again become what scientists call a "refugia" – a large, connected and naturally functioning ecosystem providing survivable conditions for species likely to become imperiled elsewhere.

### Recommended for Protection

The First Nations whose traditional homelands make up the Peel Watershed are firmly on record with their desire to see the Peel remain free from industrial development. In July 2011 the independent Peel Watershed Planning Commission released its final recommended land-use plan calling for protection of 80 percent of the watershed. The commission recommends permanent protective Special Management Area designation of 55 percent of the watershed, with a further 25 percent in interim wilderness zones. This reflects the strong local and national support for conserving the Peel.

- Although affected First Nations and conservation organizations sought 100% protection of this globally important ecosystem, they are willing to compromise and accept the final recommended plan.
- Consultations in 2010 showed that a majority of Yukon residents want at least 80% of the watershed protected.

### High Priority: Old Mining Claims

Along the scenic Snake River, in the core area the Peel Watershed Planning Commission recommends for protection, Chevron holds 525 iron-ore mining leases of 160 acres each, known as the Crest deposit. Chevron has not actively explored these isolated deposits for nearly half a century.

- Beyond potential conflict with the emerging watershed land-use plan, the Crest deposit is some 120 miles from the nearest road and nearly 300 miles from the nearest railroad.
- First Nations and conservationists are asking Chevron to join in protecting the Peel Watershed by retiring the leases.

For more information, please contact:

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