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## Conservation groups embrace updated Peel plan

By [Nadine Sander-Green](#) on July 27, 2011 at 4:39 pm

Although the Yukon government is not yet ready to comment on the final recommended plan for the Peel watershed, opposition parties and local conservation groups are already singing the praises of the final blueprints.

"This is a good plan on the table," Mike Dehn, executive director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) Yukon chapter told the Star this morning. Dehn was also speaking on behalf of the Yukon Conservation Society.

"It gives everyone something they want, and we're saying, 'Let's go for it,'" said Dehn.

The Peel Watershed Planning Commission's Final Recommended Regional Land Use Plan was released Monday to the government, the four affected First Nations and the public.

The plan recommends 80 per cent of the watershed be protected, with a portion of the protected area categorized as "Wilderness Area"— a region with interim protection which can be reviewed periodically.

The planning commission is not defunct, and the process moves to consultations with the parties and affected communities. This was laid out in a letter of understanding signed by the government and affected First Nation governments last January.

Dehn explained that although CPAWS has been calling for 100 per cent protection of the watershed, this plan is a compromise the conservation group can "live with."

"We think this plan presents tremendous opportunities for all stakeholders to come to a consensus on what we want for the Peel," Dehn said. "Everyone is getting a piece of what they want."

The final recommended plan allows for existing mineral claims and leases to be accessed and developed in the conservation area. Roads would not be allowed. CPAWS is expecting responsible resource firms to withdraw their interests in the protected 80 per cent of the watershed.

Dehn said CPAWS is asking for responsible players in the mining industry to recognize what the Yukon public and First Nations want to see in the watershed.

As for whether he thought this is a realistic request or not, Dehn answered by saying that it has been done, and done successfully, in other regions of Canada.

Energy, Mines and Resources Minister Patrick Rouble said Tuesday afternoon the government will take the time to read and understand the recommendations.

Since review and consultation with affected governments still have to happen, Rouble said, there is still "quite a bit to do," but the government is ready to get to work on the next steps.

In a press release, Rouble said the government recognizes the challenges the commission faced in working to create a balanced approach.

The expectation is that there will be protected areas within the Peel watershed which allow "a variety of activities that address the interests of all the planning partners and all Yukoners."

Clare Derome, president of the Yukon Chamber of Mines, said the chamber is not ready to comment on any specifics of the final plan.

"At this point, we're going to review the plan," said Derome. "We do know we want to work with parties in going forward with this."

Derome said she hopes the chamber and industry have the opportunity for further consultation and discussion on the Peel.

"And I hope it's based on the principle of balance and fairness," she said.

Official Opposition Leader Arthur Mitchell told the Star this morning that although the final plan isn't giving everyone what they want, it is a "good arrangement".

Mitchell said he supports the plan because it is principle-based and was reached after an "exhaustive examination" of each management area within the watershed and extensive public consultation.

"Now it's time for (Premier Darrell) Pasloski and his government to indicate their position on how they will move forward with this," said Mitchell.

The Liberal leader said that with a territorial election on the horizon, the Yukon Party owes it to the public to be open and accountable about how it will protect the

Peel watershed.

NDP Leader Liz Hanson also supports the commission's final plan.

"The commission has listened to the people of the Yukon and produced a plan that provides a blueprint for the protection of this unique and important ecosystem," she said in a statement.

"The plan also recommends a precautionary approach to future development that would ensure maximum socioeconomic benefit and minimize potential environmental harm."

Hanson believes the plan represents a principled and practical way forward.

The Senior Liaison Committee representing the Yukon government, along with the First Nation of Na-cho Nyak Dun, Tr'ondek Hwech'in, and Vuntut Gwitchin First Nations, will now review the plan and meet to discuss the next steps in the planning process.

According to the government's and First Nations' letter of understanding, a decision on whether they will move forward with the plan will be made by November.