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Safe watershed development possible: Chevron

By [Nadine Sander-Green](#) on July 29, 2011 at 4:33 pm

Chevron in Canada says its position on mining in the Peel River watershed has not changed.

The oil company, based in Calgary, holds the mineral claims for the Crest iron ore deposit.

This deposit lies on the Snake River, the heart of what the Peel Watershed Planning Commission has recommended be permanently protected.

If the commission's plan is accepted by the Yukon government, Chevron would be able to mine its claim. However, it would be forbidden from constructing any roads, railways or any other surface access to the site.

Leif Sollid, the company's external communication advisor, spoke to the Star Thursday.

"Our position has not changed," said Sollid. "We believe development can happen in a responsible manner that preserves ecological, social and cultural values."

Sollid said the company is aware of the final plan for the watershed and will wait for the government's response before making any further comment.

In June 2009, then-president Mark Nelson wrote a letter to the Star, explaining the company believes it's possible to protect the Yukon's ecosystem while continuing to responsibly explore and develop the territory's resources in the Peel watershed.

Nelson conceded that although the deposit is world class in its size, Chevron faces enormous economic challenges due to its remote location, lack of infrastructure and formidable terrain.

"Imposing unreasonable access to the mine would create a further impediment to its potential future development," Nelson wrote.

The former president asked the commission to consider allowing industry "reasonable access" for transportation in a corridor across the Bonnet Plume River Basin to access the Crest deposit.

Chevron discovered the deposit in 1961. According to a 2006 external review completed for Chevron, the deposit is estimated to have 20 billion to 40 billion tonnes of iron ore.

This, according to the review, would make it the largest undeveloped iron deposit within a developed country, and the second-largest in the world.

Yukon conservation groups and several outfitting companies responded to Nelson's letter four months later.

They asked Chevron to give up its claims in the iron ore deposit.

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and the Yukon Conservation Society asked for the same thing after the commission's final report was released earlier this week.

"Responsible companies listen to the voices of local people and First Nations and respect public processes," Karen Baltgailis, the conservation society's executive director, said in a press release Tuesday.

The Tr'ondek Hwech'in and First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun said this week they are willing to support the final plan in the name of cooperation.

The Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation said the plan, as presented, addressed the recommendations of all parties and is on target with its overall vision of the North.

"It provides direction to the parties on the management of land and resources, it is consistent with our Umbrella Final Agreement, and upholds the principles of sustainable development and conservative management principles," the First Nation said in a statement.

"The commission's work is done. They listened to Yukoners and First Nations to produce a plan which addresses the protection of the Wind, the Peel and the Snake that we lobbied effortlessly to protect.

"The Vuntut Gwitchin chief and council acknowledge that the Peel is a special place and should be treated as such. There are provisions in the plan for potential future mineral development; however, knowing that there are conservation measures integrated into this plan give us great comfort and assurances that the land, environment and rivers will be protected."

The Vuntut Gwitchin and other affected First Nations, "fought for complete protection of the watershed; however, a compromise was made, one that we feel we can live with. We at the Vuntut Gwitchin government agree favourably with the plan as presented."

Vuntut Gwitchin Chief Norma Kassi said her First Nation "agrees with Chief (Simon) Mervyn in his earlier statement: 'The parties acknowledge that the Peel watershed is important to the region's aboriginal peoples and has environmental, social, cultural and economic values of tremendous importance as well as having national and international values.'"

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

Former president Carl Shulze has been vocal in the past several years on the issue. He believed the commission's recommendations would have a huge impact on the Yukon's mining industry.