

Suzuki stays strong on Peel

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Yukoners, not miners, should decide what happens in the Peel River Watershed. And they should do it during this upcoming election, says David Suzuki.

"Anybody can drive a stake in there and say, 'Now I've got rights and you're going to have to pay me if I am not allowed to go in and mine it,'" he said during a conference call Wednesday afternoon.

"Most of the people that are staking have nothing to do with the Yukon, itself. It's crazy if we're going to let those stakes that have been made, now somehow determine the future of that territory. That's short-term planning for very little results for Yukoners.

"Believe me, most of the people that are going to be employed, if you open up the huge amount of the Yukon, most of the employees are not going to be from the Yukon.

"So let's not use the job thing as the excuse for just wide-open development.

"Our government is there to represent us. Isn't that why we elect them? Yukoners have got to express the values that are important to them and make that known in the democratic process. Governments are not there to make unilateral decisions for whatever reasons, they're there to protect our interests and our values. I

think that it's up to Yukoners."

Suzuki, and his family, just finished a 14-day canoe trip in the Peel region.

It is an experience most people – and many Yukoners – will never have.

And Canada's most famous environmentalist is aware of that.

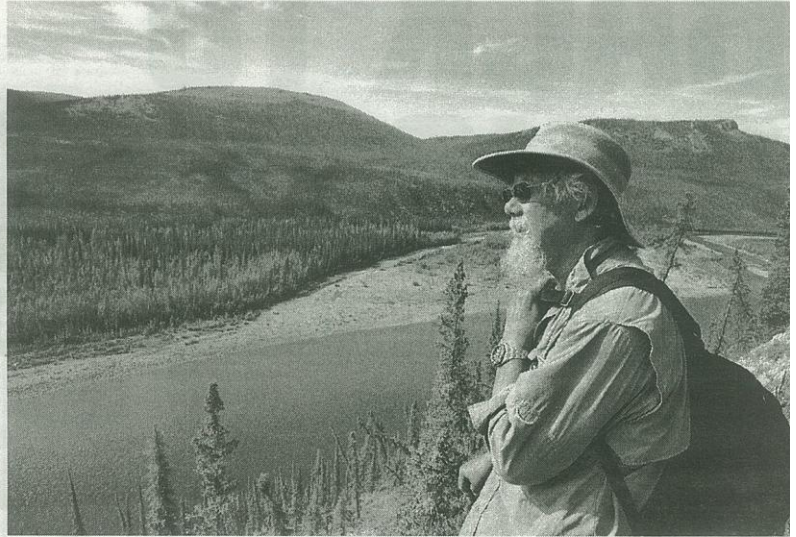
"I'm reminded of how fortunate we are in this country, where you can go literally days, and not see a single sign of another human being," Suzuki said. "I think it's a real privilege to have the opportunity to experience that."

And despite two full days of rain and low numbers of wildlife sightings, the avid fisherman was happy to live the two weeks off the grayling he caught, be without his computer and cellphone and drink directly from the lakes and rivers – something he hasn't been able to do since his childhood in the 1930s and '40s, he said.

But the most memorable experience from the trip was witnessing the engagement of his daughter, Sarika, whose Yukon river-guide boyfriend proposed to her at the confluence of the Hart and Peel rivers, he noted.

And it is memories like those, which summon ideas of the future, that have Suzuki speaking up.

"The survival of our species is dependant on how we fit into the protection of natural systems," he said. "There are far too many people demanding far too much from nature.



Juri Peepre/Yukon

David Suzuki looks out over the Hart River during his family trip to the Peel Watershed this month.

"Around the world, the planet's life-support systems are being torn up in the name of the economy. We have created a totally unsustainable system and we are creating a world that is less and less likely to allow us, as a species, to survive.

"If we can't take that kind of a warning seriously and find a different

way of living in the planet, then we deserve to go extinct."

Again, Suzuki turns to politics.

The recent firing and muzzling of scientists in Environment Canada proves that the government is not only ignoring the wishes of many Canadians, but also the objective science that is capable of guiding our

survival, he said.

"The great strength of scientific information is that it is not vested interest," said Suzuki. "Scientists tell us the state of the world as it is, and if we begin to muzzle scientists or shape what they say through ideological or political priorities, I think we're in deep trouble, because then it's no better than relying on the Bible, or the Qur'an, as the way that we try to govern ourselves and go into the future. Science provides the best possible indicators that we have for the state of the world, what the problems are and where the solution will lie in the future."

But the only option Canadians and Yukoners, have right now, is to go to the polls, said Suzuki.

"People better be thinking a lot about what the Yukon's going to be like in 30 or 40 years," he said. "What are you willing to give up and what are you willing to protect?"

"I can't help thinking that if the Yukon just thinks, 'Oh well, we'll stake every bit of the Yukon and whatever resources we can so that we can ship these resources somewhere else, where the jobs will be created and the real money value added, that you're just going to be like another Third World country."

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