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Welcome, Dr. Suzuki, and enjoy your trip!

 By [Whitehorse Star](#) on August 3, 2011 at 3:24 pm

Ed. note: this is an open letter to Roger Rondeau in response to his letter to David Suzuki (Star, July 29).

I think we all realize that the Suzuki party will be an easy target for those bitter about the plan to protect much of the Peel watershed.

I'm happy that you've taken the time to direct a few questions to Dr. Suzuki and I hope he answers you.

By doing this publicly, you are also directing those questions and comments to all of us. I'd like to respond with a few comments and questions for you, and I too would appreciate your answers.

Dr. Suzuki is a huge public figure, respected, even revered by a vast number of Canadians and, well, people everywhere for his tireless efforts to save us from ourselves. But he's not a Yukoner; he's just a messenger here.

On the Peel, he's just another traveller – a tourist. It's us who have forced this discussion and it's us who will cause the Peel plan to sink or swim. Do you agree, Roger?

Should the Suzuki party, because he's a famous environmentalist, be held to a different standard of impact than the rest of us?

"No, of course not," I can hear you say.

So are you really suggesting that all us river rats start walking to and from our destinations? Great idea, actually; I wish I had that amount of energy and motivation.

But it's such a long way from my house to Duo Lake, All kidding aside, we both know you're not seriously suggesting that.

What you're suggesting is that we should feel bad, feel like hypocrites if we say, "No" to mining on the Wind River but yes to driving and flying there for canoe trips. Fair enough; that's a reasonable argument, I guess.

I think about my impact on Earth a lot and I take steps to minimize it.

It's hard to live a life of absolutes, to be morally and physically pure.

We tend to have an impact whatever we do. I see very little in black or white, but most things in every shade of gray.

To compare the impact of us river trippers to that of the mining industry is to compare the drip from your tap to the Yukon River.

Roger: have you ever travelled on one of the Peel's tributaries? If not, you should – just to get an appreciation of what we're talking about, if nothing else.

You might be surprised that you aren't encountering flotillas of rich folks on guided tours day after day, chasing away wildlife and leaving a mess.

I've done dozens of river trips and have rarely, if ever, met a guided tour. Often, I'll meet no one at all.

And if I do, it's usually people like me – self-guided regular folks taking a break from working lives to find a little peace in the wilderness.

It's true; not many are locals. Most are from Europe and these people leave a trail of money through the Yukon economy.

Along the rivers, they leave nothing at all. Most trippers these days practise low-trace camping.

If you travel with an outfitter and you don't know about this, you'll soon learn.

Think about the eco-tour operators, Roger – say Blaine and Mary Walden, for example. They make a living out of thin air, showing people stuff that's already there, riding current that's going their way anyway.

No, they don't produce anything that's tangible, like plutonium that we can use.

The only byproduct of their industry is happiness. Their clients go home happier and continue to do whatever they do, like produce plutonium.

They are not pandered to nor subsidized by government. Most importantly, we don't have to clean up after them. They do that themselves.

They live in Yukon year-round so the money they earn passes through many local hands. And no, Roger, I believe they have very little impact on the land or on our wildlife.

But yes, you're right – they do burn some gas driving and flying. As do I.

Most of my river trips don't involve flying. Usually they involve things like car-pooling, hitchhiking, bike-riding and a lot of hard work.

I try to justify the energy I use by thinking how much more energy I'd use by staying home and working or whatever.

In my day-to-day life, I tend to use fossil fuels, electricity and such, daily. On a river trip, it's just in the getting there and getting home. And I imagine for the Waldens' clients, it's the same thing.

So it's all pretty low-impact when you really think about it, wouldn't you agree, Roger?

I guess we could all just stay home and knit or read quietly by candlelight in our leisure time. In my case, that would lead to all kinds of unforeseen costs to society which would all have a carbon footprint too.

You mentioned the hunting outfitter industry. That gets a lot sketchier in my mind and probably enjoys a lot less public support than eco-tourism.

And if you have a concern about motorboats being allowed everywhere, then we may agree on something else.

In one of Murray Martin's many columns in the Star, he promotes his concept of "backlands".

If I understand correctly, these would be wild protected areas that aren't necessarily "parks".

We could hunt and fish there, but by traditional means only (non-motorized). I love that idea, and hope Mr. Martin continues to promote and expand on that.

Roger: I'm a long-time supporter of the mining industry. But as I've said in the past, today and tomorrow ... not everywhere!

Hope this helps to broaden your perspective. Thanks for your time.

Dr. Suzuki: I hope you've read this as well. Thank you so much for your work.

Welcome back to Yukon. Enjoy your time on whichever of the Peel's rivers you're travelling, and please walk softly.

But hey, you know what? I don't think you need Roger or me to remind you of that.

Dan Kemble

Carross