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## With unanimity unattainable, balance is best ( Editorial )

By [Whitehorse Star](#) on August 3, 2011 at 3:26 pm

"You just can't please everyone; you just can't."

Those words, uttered last week by Dave Loeks, who chairs the Peel Watershed Planning Commission, were just as true in 2005, when the planning process began, as they are today and will be in 2012.

No matter what the commission's Final Recommended Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan had suggested, someone, on one side of this increasingly divisive debate, would have been rendered dissatisfied and alienated.

The final blueprint, released last week, recommends that 80 per cent of the watershed be protected under a Conservation Area. The Yukon Party government rejected that concept upon receipt of the first plan in late 2009, and vaguely directed the commission to devise a plan which protected less land.

The rewritten plan sets aside a chunk of protected land divided into two components: one to be permanently protected and one which can be reviewed in later years should political, economic and environmental circumstances warrant it.

The commission hasn't been the only player to modify its stance in the interest of advancing the process.

The three First Nations directly affected by the watershed's fate have agreed to accept the final plan in principle. They had originally sought to have 100 per cent of the watershed preserved.

The government and the Yukon Chamber of Mines have not yet substantially reacted to the final version, so it's not known if or when one or both will change their positions in the interests of compromise and progress.

No one has ever accused the government of formulating policy purely on the basis of public opinion, but the voices endorsing the plan have been vocal and persuasive.

Besides the aforementioned parties, the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon has thrown its support behind the plan. That complements the considerable national and international choruses for conservation heard during earlier stages of this lengthy debate.

Significantly, world renowned environmental scientist David Suzuki also preached the importance of preservation over development during his visit to Whitehorse last week – and promptly left to canoe the region with family.

Dissidents, unsurprisingly, include Chevron Canada, which holds the claims for the vast, world-class Crest iron deposit. It insists it can shepherd the deposit's development without jeopardizing the environment, an argument which has yet to win over a sizeable component of those familiar with the issues.

Premier Darrell Pasloski has declined to be pinned down on specifics, a refrain which can only be assuaged and enhanced for a limited period of time.

Yukoners require and deserve the new leader's timely views on the watershed's future.

It would be entirely inappropriate for the government to seek to leave this file in the hands of a minister who isn't even seeking re-election, and to postpone its decision past the time its previous performance and future ambitions will be tested at the polls.

Clearly, should it seek to override the commission's views and campaign for a greater part of the watershed to be exploited for development, the government would be swimming against a very determined tide.

As the mines chamber warns of potentially devastating damage to the industry should conservation win the day, Yukoners look around and see an unparalleled frenzy in the exploration and development spheres – with the watershed current off-limits to activity.

Ultimately, should the government be tempted to make a stand on the basis of political considerations, it would have to choose between offending a traditional vein of support – those who staunchly value economics over environmental implications – or more mainstream Yukoners who covet the watershed for its unspoiled wilderness features.

Few can argue that this very blessed area of the planet is endowed with cultural and environmental values which are essentially matchless.

Quite properly, the future of the Peel may prove a pivotal topic in the coming election campaign.

The type of informed debate electors desire and are entitled to, however, can't transpire if the government chooses to conceal its true intent behind the cloak of deliberately drawn-out procedure.