

Letter to the [Whitehorse Star](#), October 5th, 2011

Premier Pasloski is verging on fear-mongering

We would like to correct misleading statements by Yukon Party candidates regarding the Peel Watershed Land Use Planning process.

The Yukon Party contends it would be irresponsible to speak to the recommended Peel Watershed Land Use Plan because of Chapter 11 of Yukon First Nation Final Agreements and the joint letter of understanding on the Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Planning Process.

This is false.

Nothing in our agreements or joint letter of understanding suggests it is inappropriate for governments to articulate their views on the plan prior to undertaking the final round of public and intergovernmental consultation.

In fact, as part of the planning process, all affected governments are expected to provide their positions on important planning issues — something the Yukon government has failed to do.

In 2009, the Peel Watershed Planning Commission recommended that 80 per cent of the watershed be protected from industrial development.

Subsequent public consultation indicated overwhelming public support for protecting the Peel.

In accordance with Chapter 11 of Yukon Final Agreements and the joint letter of understanding, affected First Nations provided a clear and unequivocal response to the commission:

“We believe that the entire region deserves the very highest level of protection We encourage you to consider a modification of your recommendation so as to allow for the provision of Special Management Area designation for up to 100 per cent of the region.”

The Government of Yukon, however, provided a vague response on the “form” of the plan (it’s long; there are too many land management areas) and avoided commenting on the substance. That left everyone involved in the process wondering what the Yukon government’s views on the plan really were.

In July 2011, the commission released its final recommended plan. The plan was shorter and contained fewer land management areas, but was otherwise similar to the 2009 recommendation, calling for 80 per cent of the region to be protected from industrial development.

Recognizing the hard work of the commission and the need to compromise to reach consensus, our nations endorsed the plan.

As expressed by Chief Mervyn, “It’s time to set aside our differences and work together. We’re willing to support the final recommendation in order to protect the core values of the Peel.”

First Nations have been very clear with respect to the Peel, but we have still not heard a clear statement from the Yukon government.

It is obvious the Yukon Party is avoiding the issue and hiding behind “process” to avoid divulging a position they know will not be supported by the electorate.

This is irresponsible. Before casting their ballots, Yukoners deserve to know the position of the Yukon Party on the recommended Peel Watershed Land Use Plan.

The recent assertion by Premier Pasloski that implementing the plan would bankrupt the Yukon is misguided, verging on fear-mongering.

The plan does not call for expropriation of mining claims. It is also interesting to note that the Yukon Party government allowed the number of mining claims in the Peel to quintuple during the planning process.

The next Yukon government will make a binding, permanent and irrevocable decision regarding the Peel watershed.

Unlike other important issues the next government will wrestle with, there will be no opportunity in the future to correct a bad decision on the Peel. As stated by the Peel Planning Commission:

“We can always decide to develop in the future, but once this decision is made, we cannot return to a pristine ecosystem and landscape — not in our lifetimes and not in the lifetimes of our great grandchildren.”

It is not an overstatement to say the fate of the Peel watershed will be determined by the outcome of this election.

We implore Yukon voters to obtain a clear statement from all candidates with respect to the recommended Peel Watershed Land Use Plan before casting your ballot.

Prior to casting your valuable vote, please give due consideration to those candidates who have a clear message on this important issue.

Eddie Taylor
Chief, Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in

Simon Mervyn
Chief, Na-Cho Nyak Dun
Norma Kassi
Chief, Vuntut Gwitchin
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