

Letter to the [Whitehorse Star](#), September 30, 2011

The Yukon environment is not for sale

Ed. note: this commentary has been written on behalf of the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun

Anyone who thinks protecting the Peel will affect mining investment in Yukon hasn't been to Na-Cho Nyak Dun (NND) territory in recent years.

Our Lands Department is being run off its feet by pressure from mining companies to explore and develop in our territory, and it is happening while the Peel River watershed is under a moratorium against staking.

We also have assurances from major companies currently operating in our traditional territory such as Golden Predator, Victoria Gold and Alexco that their future opportunities will not be adversely affected by full protection of the Peel River watershed.

Some people are acting like Chicken Little, claiming that protecting the Peel watershed will damage our mining sector and that Yukon needs to favour mining over all other uses of the land.

That is not the way we operate in our territory, and other Yukoners don't need to settle for it either. We can have the best of all worlds.

Our approach is simple. We defend and protect special places like the Peel watershed where the stewardship responsibilities given to us by our forefathers can be honoured and the land-based opportunities remain available for future generations of Yukoners.

At the same time, we work with industry through our co-operative engagement process to develop resources and generate employment in places where we support development.

We do not need to sacrifice what we value to generate the economy our communities need. The current situation in our traditional territory and throughout the Yukon shows this is true.

The staking ban in place in the Peel watershed has not impacted the recent Yukon mining boom.

We have publicly supported full protection for the Peel River watershed while negotiating with a number of mining and energy companies elsewhere in our traditional territory.

NND and TH were also involved in developing an MOU with the Yukon Chamber of Mines to better define our relationship.

The Peel has enjoyed short-term protection and the planning commission has recommended 80 per cent protection without the sky falling.

If 80 per cent of the Peel is protected, the Yukon will be far from closed to mining. Sixty-seven per cent of the Yukon would still be open to exploration by the mining and energy sectors.

A large chunk of that is NND traditional territory.

In the parts of our traditional territory outside of the Peel watershed where mining and other extractive industry have access, we work with others to minimize footprints and reclaim land.

For example, for the last three years we have partnered with Canada and Alexco to build a reclamation plan for the Elsa and Keno areas.

Our traditional territory has world-class mineralization, and we expect world-class industrial standards for environmental protection, impacts mitigation and restoration.

Our environment is not for sale, and we expect those who benefit from it now not to do so at the expense of our generations of grandchildren.

We are in a territorial election. This is a critical time for the Peel watershed and for the vision we are working to achieve for our territory.

If you agree with our vision, please help us to achieve it.

We ask you to learn the platforms of the parties in this election and vote for candidates who support protecting special places like the Peel River watershed while allowing for responsible development in already impacted or less environmentally sensitive areas.

I believe that all Yukoners can embrace this vision and proudly pass a healthy land and strong economy to future generations.

By Chief Simon Mervyn