



**Media Release
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Yukon Government 'Principles' are Unprincipled

Tuesday, February 14

WHITEHORSE, YUKON - CPAWS Yukon and the Yukon Conservation Society condemn the Yukon government's attempt to hijack the land-use planning process and open the Peel Watershed to industrial development.

Today, at a meeting with its First Nation partners in the Peel planning process, government imposed eight new principles designed to allow roads, uranium, coal and hard rock mining, and oil and gas development in one of the last intact boreal ecosystems on the continent.

These arbitrary pro-development principles, produced behind closed doors by Yukon government, replace principles developed co-operatively by government and First Nations representatives in 2008.

Those guiding principles, which met the goal of sustainable development required by the Umbrella Final Agreement, shaped years of thorough research and consultation, and resulted in the Final Recommended Peel Watershed Land Use Plan.

It isn't clear who Energy, Mines and Resources officials consulted when drafting these new orders.

"We hoped for more from the Pasloski government, but it is following the same unilateral approach used by the previous Fentie government," said Mike Dehn, Executive Director of the Yukon Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. "The government says it listens to the public, but then tosses out seven years of sound work and does what it wants.

"It is a reckless approach that puts government and the mining industry at odds with the wishes of the public and First Nations. That just provokes protests and, potentially long, drawn out lawsuits, which is poison to potential investors in the territory. This approach is not good for anyone."

It also runs counter to Treaties signed with First Nations 17 years ago today.

"The government says it respects the First Nation final agreements, but this makes a mockery of that assertion," said Dehn. "The original six principles were drafted collaboratively and were based upon the UFA. They have shaped the discussion so far. Now, the government has concocted new principles, without any discussion with its partners, to simply gut a plan it doesn't like."

The final Peel Watershed land-use plan reflects Yukoners' overwhelming desire to see the region protected while allowing some economic development. The plan sets aside 55 per cent of the Peel Watershed as protected areas. Another 25 per cent of the region is assigned less secure interim Wilderness protection that could be developed in the future. Twenty per cent of the region, an area more than twice the size of the Province of PEI, would be open to development.

" Yukon government talks about balance, but the land-use planning commission has already produced a balanced plan," said Karen Baltgailis, Executive Director of the Yukon Conservation Society. "It not only balances interests in the Peel, but counterbalances rampant development happening throughout the territory."

The final Peel watershed plan represents a historic compromise that recommends road access in Integrated Management Areas and keeps another 25 per cent of the wilderness open to possible future development. In the previous draft of the plan, roads were not allowed in most of the IMA's and the wilderness area was recommended for permanent protection.

"Rather than balance, the government's sole focus seems to be exploration and development," said Baltgailis. "They aren't looking to the future and they certainly don't respect all sectors of the economy. How are wilderness tourism and outfitting businesses supposed to co-exist with industrial development in the Peel?"

"The public has been waiting for government to respond to the final Peel plan for months. Now, in the face of widespread public support for a wild Peel, government is trying to gut the process in an underhanded way," said Dehn. "In doing so, the government threatens to undermine the established land-use planning process, which, in turn, would damage investor confidence in the territory as a safe place to invest."

"It's clear the government does not want to be honest with the public about its intention to develop the Peel," said Baltgailis. "Instead, it is hiding behind a set of arbitrary principles it has concocted to dupe the public. This is nothing more than an attempt to gut the recommended plan and to start the whole process from scratch. I don't think that Yukon people will be fooled."

CPAWS Yukon and the Yukon Conservation Society will hold a media conference to discuss this and other issues related to the Peel on Wednesday Feb. 15th at 2 p.m. at the CPAWS-Yukon office at 506 Steele Street.

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