

# Protect the Peel

Yukon's great boreal wilderness

## Peel River Watershed

The Yukon's Peel River Watershed is one of the largest and most beautiful intact natural areas left in North America. Industrial development threatens to fragment this stunning landscape and harm its delicate ecological balance. The Peel watershed is the northern anchor of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, and part of the Canadian and international campaign to protect the boreal forest.

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### Conserving the Peel Watershed is important for all of North America.

The watershed is critical to the survival of wide-ranging wildlife, it's an ancient cultural landscape for First Nations, and the region supports a burgeoning tourism industry. The pristine wild rivers, valleys and mountains of the Peel will become even more important as a sanctuary for wild species as the impacts of climate change are felt. By conserving it, we will protect one of the finest remaining mountain boreal ecosystems in the world.



## Water, Unspoiled Splendor

Located at the northern end of the Rocky and Mackenzie Mountain Chain, the Peel River Watershed is a spectacularly rugged region defined by the Peel, Ogilvie, Blackstone, Hart, Wind, Snake and Bonnet Plume rivers. One of Canada's most striking and pristine mountain river watersheds, the Peel is the heart of a great mountain ecosystem with a long cultural history, free-ranging wildlife and a rugged northern beauty. Sprawling over 26,000 square miles, or 16 million acres, the Peel Watershed dwarfs more famous landscapes, such as Banff and Yellowstone national parks—in size, unspoiled splendor and ecologic integrity.



Photo: © Peter Mather

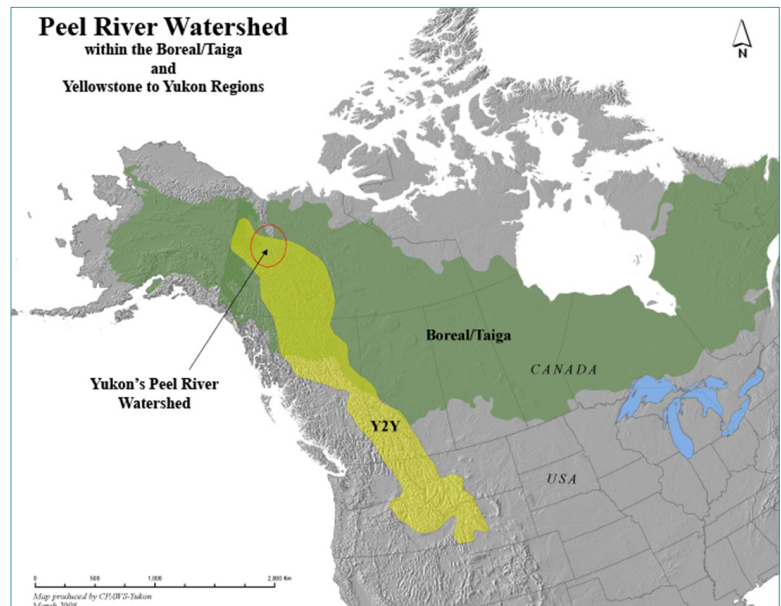
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### Photos of the Peel watershed

[Photos available on Flickr.com](#)

## Globally Significant Ecological Value

The Peel Watershed is one of North America's largest intact ecosystems—a region of mountains, deep canyons, plateaus, wetlands and rolling hills laced by rivers. The watershed is the northern anchor of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, a broad-based international project to protect ecosystem connections for wildlife.



- Wildlife include a host of high-profile species, such as grizzly bears, wolverines, wolves, Dall sheep and caribou that are at risk elsewhere.
- The watershed provides essential winter range to the Porcupine Caribou Herd—the same animals that spend their summer raising calves in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.
- It's also home to the Yukon's largest herd of woodland caribou—along with several other notable populations of woodland caribou, a species in decline elsewhere.
- Extensive wetlands are significant as migratory waterfowl nesting and staging areas, along with necessary habitat for peregrine falcons and other birds of prey and a host of nesting shorebirds and neotropical songbirds.
- Portions of the Peel Watershed remained ice-free through the Pleistocene Ice Age, a factor contributing to the remarkable plant and animal communities found there today. As the earth faces a new phase of climate change, the Peel Watershed could again become what scientists call a "refugia"—a large, connected and naturally functioning ecosystem providing survivable conditions for species likely to become imperiled elsewhere.



Photo: © Courtney Milne

## First Nations, First Priority

The Peel Watershed is the cultural homeland of four First Nations:

[First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun](#)

[Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation](#)

[Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation](#)

[Tetlit Gwich'in Council](#)

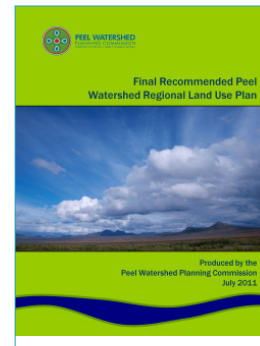
- First Nations have found physical and spiritual sustenance in the watershed for thousands of years and continue to keep those traditions strong as they balance their traditions with modern development.
- Canadian land-claim settlements involving Canadian, Territorial and First Nation governments established strong native rights to use and protection of traditional lands.
- First Nations, engaged in formal consultations with the territorial government, seek protection for 100 percent of the watershed.

These First Nations are asserting their rights. These rights were spelled out in land-claims agreements, settled in the early 1990s. These agreements led to creation of the [Peel Watershed Planning Commission](#). Representing both territorial and First Nations governments, the commission prepared—with extensive public input—a recommended land-use plan for the watershed in 2011.

## Planning for the Future

In July 2011 the Peel Watershed Planning Commission released its final recommended land-use plan calling for protection of 80 percent of the watershed. The Commission recommends permanent protective, Special Management Area designation of 55 percent of the watershed, with the further 25 percent in interim wilderness zones. This reflects the strong local and national support for conserving the Peel. But that does not mean the Peel is safe.

The recommended plan is the product of extensive study and public comment. Click the link to the right for the executive summary. For a four-page synopsis of the plan's highlights, [click here](#).



[Click Here for Plan Summary](#)



*The social, economic and environmental values - together with very few roads and little industrial development in the region – make this area unique at a territorial, national, and even global level.*

**Peel Watershed Planning Commission**



## What's Next?

The Yukon government, in consultation with the First Nations, will approve, modify or reject the plan. Third-party interests in the Peel Watershed, such as multinational corporations, are subject to the terms of the plan. However, third-party interests are also governed by laws of general application, and, in the Yukon, mining laws and regulations have usually trumped other land-use laws or plans.

Negotiations between the affected First Nations and the Yukon government are under way. The Yukon government is expected to make a final decision about the future of the Peel Watershed in 2011.

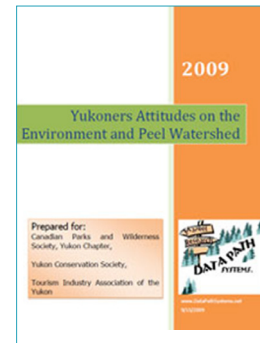


Photo: © Juri Peepre

## Overwhelming Support for Protection

In a 2009 Datapath survey of Yukoners' attitudes on the environment and the Peel Watershed:

- **78 percent** of people in the Yukon want the majority of the Peel Watershed protected from industrial development.
- **75 percent** say protecting the environment, its wildlife and its wilderness values should be the top priority for the Peel Watershed.
- **91 percent** say roads should not be allowed in any river corridors or important wildlife and wilderness areas in the Peel Watershed.
- **75 percent** of Yukoners want most of the Peel Watershed to remain without roads or industrial development.
- **85 percent** of people in the Yukon say protecting areas like the Peel Watershed helps protect their way of life and the values they hold dear.
- A strong majority (**61 percent**) of Yukoners in the private sector who say they value economic opportunity also say protecting the Peel Watershed's wilderness quality, wildlife and overall environment deserves top priority.



[Click here to read the survey](#)

For more information, please contact:

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