



**PEEL WATERSHED**  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
TOGETHER FOR THE PEEL • CHUU T'ITI GEENJIT KHETOK

# ISSUES AND INTERESTS REPORT



**Prepared by the Peel Watershed Planning Commission**

**December 22, 2005**

## **Executive Summary**

Between May and November 2005, the Peel Watershed Planning Commission (PWPC) held public consultation sessions in Mayo, Dawson City, Old Crow, Fort McPherson and Whitehorse for the purposes of gathering interests and issues related to land use planning in the Peel watershed planning region. Over thirty formal presentations and numerous comments were made to the Commission during these sessions.

This report provides the background context to the public consultation sessions, and summarizes and organizes the comments according to common themes. The themes include:

- Mineral Exploration & Development
- Oil & Gas Exploration & Development
- Fish, Wildlife & Habitat
- Water
- Culture & Heritage
- Tourism & Outfitting
- Transportation & Other Related Infrastructure
- Other Potential Development Activities

The issues and interests identified under each theme are a reflection of the comments received from stakeholders. Therefore, this report may not be a comprehensive list, or a balanced list of planning issues and interests. To date, the mineral exploration/development sector has provided very few comments. For this reason, it may appear that this report has not presented all perspectives with equal weight. ***Please note that the opinions expressed under the “Issues and Interests” section of this report do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Commission, but are a listing of comments received during the consultation sessions. No attempt has been made, at this stage in the planning process, to reconcile potential land use conflicts.***

The consultation sessions identified current land use activities and infrastructure in the Peel Watershed planning region, which include: subsistence harvesting, the Dempster Highway, big-game outfitting, wilderness tourism, and mineral exploration. Although no large-scale development is anticipated in the near future (next five years), due in part to the remote and rugged nature of the Peel landscape, the planning region possesses some rich mineral deposits and potential oil & gas reserves which may be economically viable in the future.

The Peel watershed planning region currently has a minimal development footprint. Existing infrastructure includes: a portion of the Dempster Highway, outfitting camps, First Nation cabins, and some mineral and hydrocarbon exploration infrastructure. With respect to current revenue generation, the Peel watershed plays a significant role for the Territory through wilderness tourism excursions – both guided and self-guided. New developments are not anticipated to occur in the near future (next five years); however, the plan will consider long-term (20–50 years) development prospects.

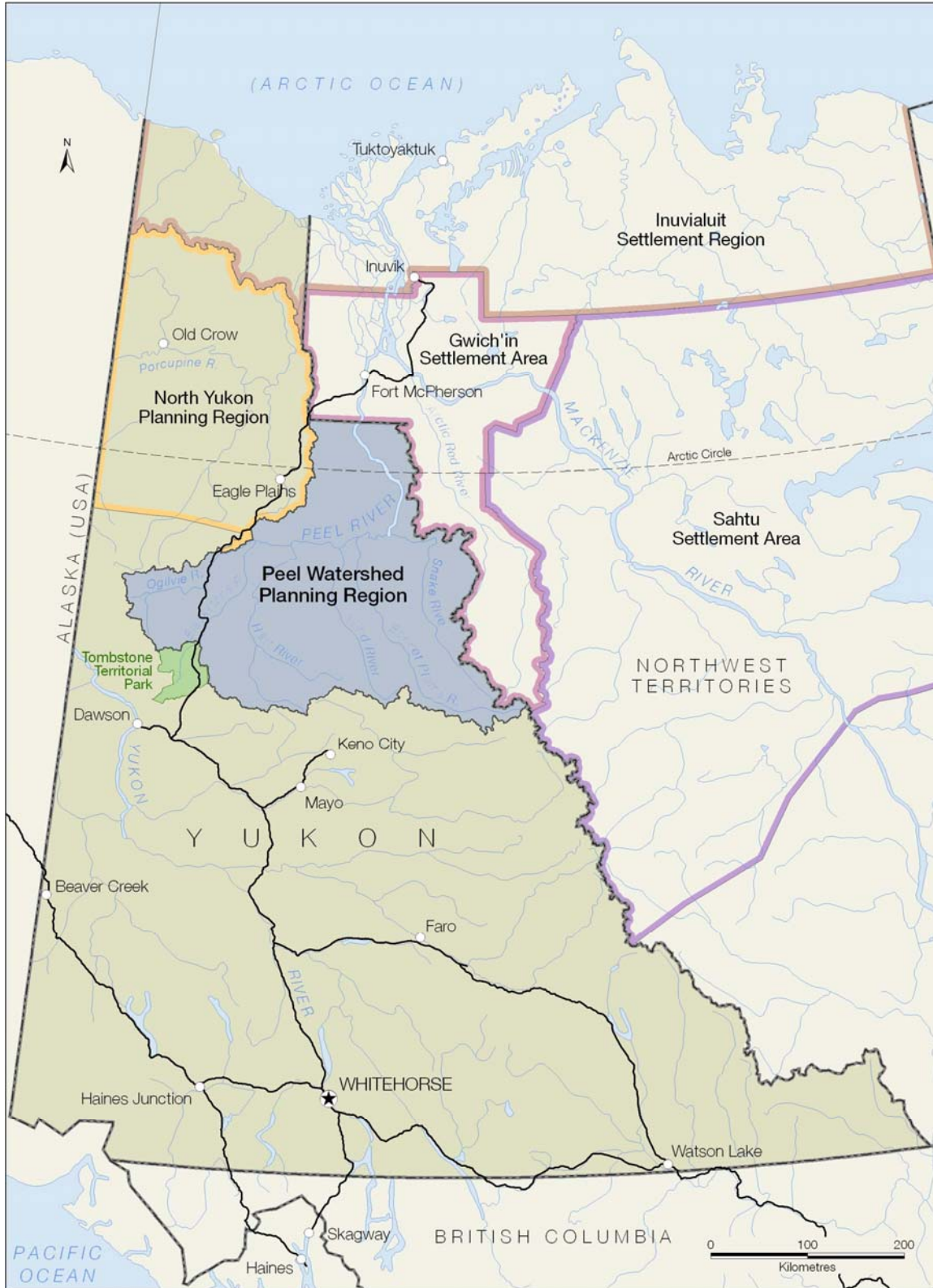
Virtually all of the land and water in the Peel watershed remains in a clean and natural state. Many stakeholders expressed the importance of maintaining the ecological integrity of the watershed's land and water. In addition to its unique landscapes, the region provides key habitat for various woodland and barren-ground caribou herds, moose, grizzly bears, sheep, fish, waterfowl and peregrine falcons. The water and soils of the region are also particularly sensitive to change and disturbance, due to their unique chemical and hydrological qualities.

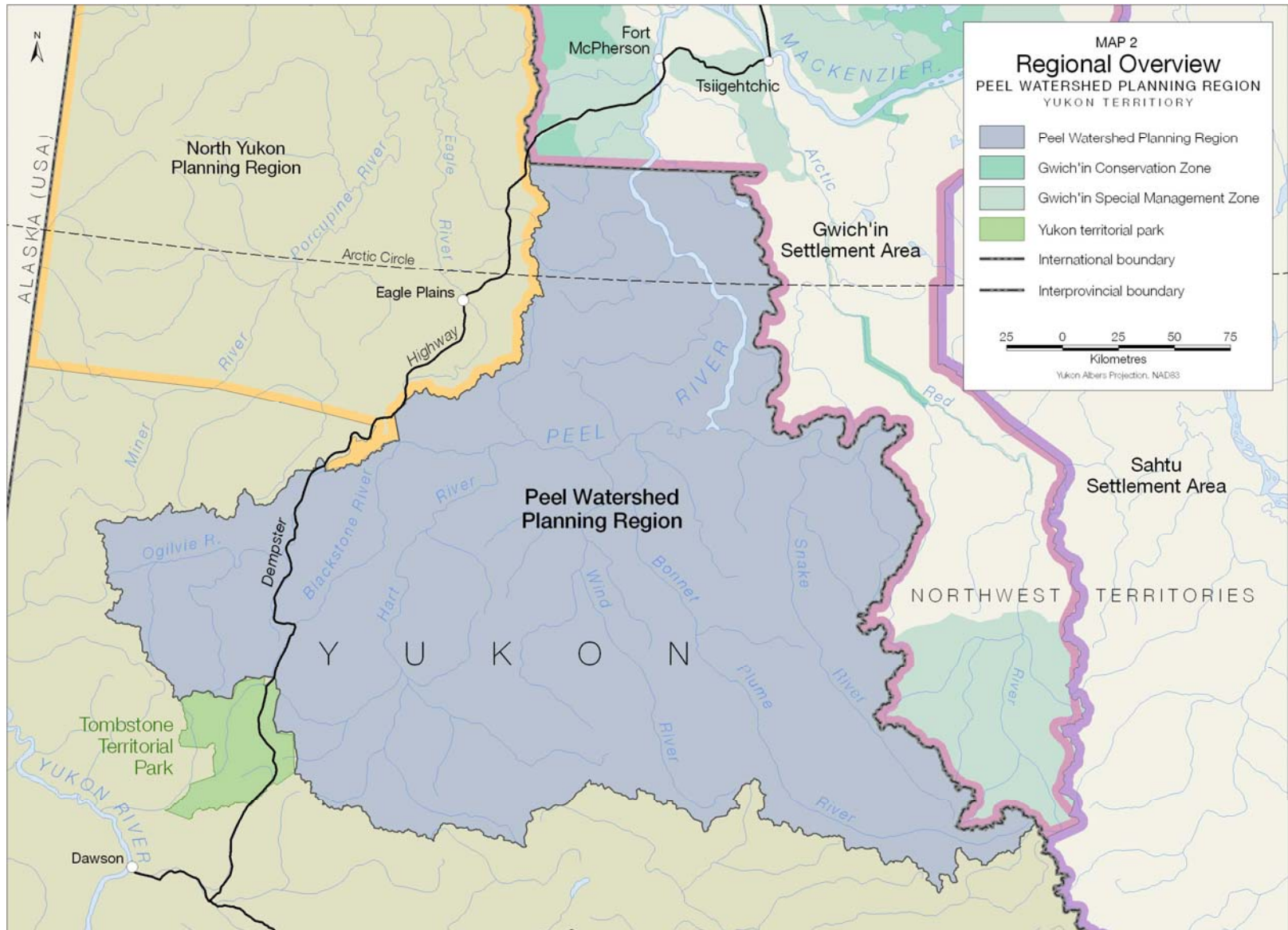
As a watershed, the Peel watershed has played – and continues to play – an important cultural role for First Nations. The region has provided subsistence to the Tetlit Gwich'in, Nacho Nyak Dun, Tr'ondek Hwech'in and Vuntut Gwitchin for centuries. The harvesting rights of these First Nations are entrenched in the Yukon land claim agreements and must be adhered to in the regional land use plan. Three of the four First Nations possess surface rights to land blocks in the planning region.

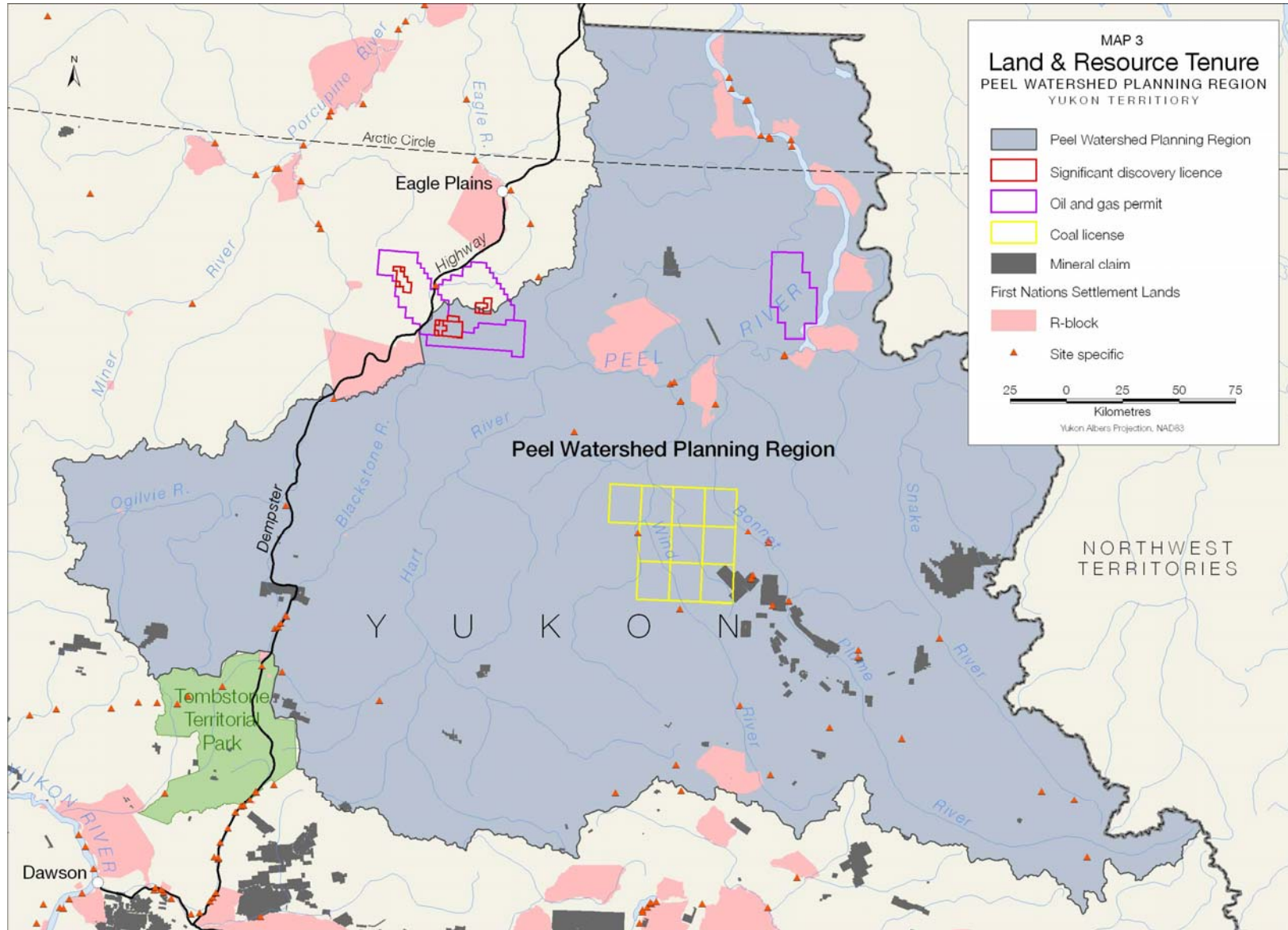
Sustainable development will be a cornerstone of the regional planning model, whereby social, cultural, economic and environmental policies will be applied to the management, protection and use of the land, water and resources in an integrated and coordinated manner.

*The Commission welcomes further comments from the public throughout the planning process. Public participation is vital to the success of this exercise, and to the implementation of ultimate product, the Regional Land Use Plan.*

**Map 1. Regional Overview: Yukon/NWT**







# **ISSUES AND INTERESTS REPORT**

## **Planning Process**

### **Backgrounder: Goals and Issues**

Upon its establishment, the Peel Watershed Planning Commission (PWPC) was given a mandate to provide direction in addressing the planning issues of the region. The mandate and general goals flow from chapter 11 of the UFA, and the General Terms of Reference which was developed by the Parties. The commission has further refined its mandate and goals through: the development of its 3-year work plan or Precise Terms of Reference (PTOR); review of existing policy framework governing the planning region; and initial public meetings.

The purpose of this backgrounder is to reiterate and summarize the goals and their sources.

### **Mandate and Goals of the Peel Watershed Planning Commission**

The Peel Watershed Planning Commission (PWPC) is responsible for developing and recommending a draft regional land use plan for the Peel Watershed Planning Region. This report represents a portion of Phase II, of a five-phase planning process:

- I Commission establishment and Start-up (*complete*)
- II Issues and Information Gathering
- III Resources Assessment
- IV Planning Scenarios Development
- V Drafting of Regional Land Use Plan

The PWPC is composed of six public members appointed by the responsible government parties whose jurisdictions include interests in the Peel watershed. The parties are: Na-cho Ny'ak Dun First Nation (NND), Tetlit Gwich'in First Nation (TGFN), Yukon Government (YG), Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (VGFN) and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Han Nation (THHN). Under their final agreements the First Nation Parties and the Yukon Government established the PWPC with the following Mandate and goals which are stated in The General Terms of Reference (GTOR) for the PWPC:

- **Mandate of the Commission**

The Commission will develop and recommend a regional land use plan in a manner consistent with Yukon settlement agreements and the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement (in particular, Appendix C – Yukon Transboundary Agreement)

- **General Goals for the Regional Land Use Plan**

The Commission will work towards the development of a plan for Settlement Land, Non-Settlement Land and Tetlit Gwich'in Yukon land that is consistent with, and achieves the objectives of Chapter 11 of Yukon First Nation Final Agreements, and:

- Promotes the well being of the affected First Nations, other residents of the planning region, the communities and the Yukon as a whole, while having regard to the interest of other Canadians (UFA, 11.4.5.7);
- Recommends measures to minimize actual or potential land use conflicts throughout the planning region (UFA, 11.4.5.4);
- Recognizes and promotes the cultural values of the affected First Nations and other affected Yukon Indian People (UFA, 11.1.1.3);
- Ensures that social, cultural, economic and environmental policies are applied to the management, protection and use of land, water and resources in an integrated and coordinated manner so as to ensure sustainable development (UFA, 11.1.1.6);
- Promotes sustainable development (UFA, 11.4.5.9);
- Takes into account that the management of land, water and resources, including fish, wildlife, and their habitats, is to be integrated (UFA, 11.4.5.8);
- Recognize all economic potential of the planning region, including, but not limited to sub-surface resources; (PTOR, Pg. 1)
- Provides for enhanced opportunities to have ongoing cooperative land use planning activities between the Peel Watershed Planning Commission and the Gwich'in Land Use Planning Board. (GCLCA, 7.1.3). Any Regional Land Use Planning Commission, or other planning agency described in (GCLCA, 7.1.1.), shall consult with the Gwich'in Land Use Planning Board in order to make use of planning that has been done with respect to the Peel River watershed by the Mackenzie Delta Beaufort Sea Land Use Planning Commission, and to discuss ongoing co-operative land use planning activities.

In addition, the GTOR states that “land and resource use decisions will be made concurrent with the preparation of the plan (12.6)”.

### **Existing Policy Goals applicable to the Peel Watershed**

Other goals to guide the Commission in its work stem from the Yukon-Northwest Territories Transboundary Water Management Agreement and the recommendations of the Peel River Watershed Advisory Committee.

Under the Yukon-Northwest Territories Transboundary Water Management Agreement the Yukon government agreed to “*cooperatively manage, protect and conserve the ecological*



*integrity of the aquatic ecosystem of the Mackenzie River basin common to Yukon and the Northwest Territories while facilitating sustainable use of the Transboundary waters.*

Under the GTC and NND final agreements, government created the Peel River Watershed Advisory Committee. The committee was asked to make recommendations respecting management of the Peel River watershed, the establishment of a planning commission for the Peel Watershed, and the need for Special Management Areas (SMAs) or protected areas within the Peel watershed. The recommendations of the advisory committee were received by the Federal Government. No commitment was made by either the Federal Government or the Territorial Government with respect to the implementation of these recommendations.

### **Goals from the PTOR**

In addition to the above goals, under the PTOR the Commission has committed to a planning process based on the principles of sustainable development. Under the UFA, sustainable development is considered to be “*beneficial socio-economic change that does not undermine the ecological and social systems upon which communities and societies are dependent*” (UFA Chapter 1). For this reason a major goal of the Peel Watershed regional land use plan will be to promote the principles of sustainable development through an integrated landscape management framework.

### **Public Consultation: Objectives and Issues**

The commission held public meetings in four communities to identify issues to be addressed. In addition to issues, the commission also heard many desired objectives for the planning region. The objectives can be defined as targets for the commission to achieve in addressing issues under its mandate and goals. The Commission is committed to achieving the following objectives, as identified below with their corresponding goal:

#### *Goals:*

- *Apply economic, social and environmental policy in an integrated resource management to land and water resources.*
- *Recognize all ecological values – their components and their integrated function*

#### *Actions*

- Manage (and protect where required) fish and wildlife populations and habitat.
- Identify conservation values.
- Rivers: protect and preserve the quality and flows of water for downstream users.
- Manage and protect woodland caribou herds and the Porcupine Caribou herd, as well as sheep, moose and grizzly bear populations.
- Regional conservation values such as special ecological features and wilderness and cultural values require evaluating and addressing by the land use plan.
- Identify and clean up existing solid waste sites and identify which ones may be contaminated sites.

*Goal:*

- *recognize all economic potential of the planning region, including, but not limited to sub-surface resources;*

*Actions*

- Identify potential access corridors for future resource development which do not isolate potential resource values or isolate and fragment wilderness values.
- Make recommendation on short term access for exploration (winter roads, airstrips etc).
- Identify and provide a suitable land base for resource development (considerations are economies of scale, access, compatibility of adjunct activity)
- Recognize and support the big game outfitting industry. Acknowledge past contribution to the regional economy and recommend options for the industry's future growth.
- Recognize and support the wilderness tourism industry in the Peel Watershed.
- Provide land status certainty.

*Goal:*

- *recognize and promote the cultural values of the affected First Nations*

*Actions*

- Protect and provide opportunities for a subsistence lifestyle and harvest (fish and game, berries, timber).
- Protect heritage and cultural sites.

*Goal:*

- *Promotes sustainable development through an integrated landscape management framework*

*Actions*

- Improve land use decision making by improving knowledge on resource capability, environmental sensitivity and existing and potential land use activities.
- Make land use recommendations which take into account economic, environmental and social costs and benefits.
- Account for cumulative effects.

It is anticipated that the commission will identify more objectives in the information gathering and regional assessment phase of the planning process.

## **ISSUES AND INTERESTS: SUMMARY**

The following is a reflection of the issues and interests that were presented to the commission through public consultation sessions, stakeholder presentations and written submissions to the Commission. The presentations occurred between May and November 2005 in Mayo, Dawson City, Old Crow, Whitehorse and Fort McPherson. *Please note that the opinions expressed under the “Issues and Interests” section do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Commission.* Copies of the presentations and public session notes are available upon request.

The issues and interests have been organized according to a set of themes:

- Mineral Exploration & Development
- Oil & Gas Exploration and Development
- Fish, Wildlife & Habitat
- Water
- Culture & Heritage
- Tourism & Outfitting
- Transportation & Other Related Infrastructure
- Other Potential Development Activities

The “Tools / Products” bullets represent some of the resources available to the Commission so that it can be as informed as possible when making planning recommendations. Once planning scenarios are considered in the planning process, a potential tool that could address all the above themes is computer modeling. Currently, the North Yukon Planning Commission is exploring planning scenarios through the ALCES (A Landscape Cumulative Effects Simulator) modeling program. Upon review of their experience, the PWPC may also consider using ALCES as a scenario tool.

The section titled “Potential Management Direction” offers some suggestions regarding the potential direction that the Planning Commission could take in order to address the relevant issues. These suggestions are merely points of discussion at this stage. The planning process is just getting underway and information gathering and resource assessments have yet to be completed. The management direction will evolve as the Commission and staff gain a greater understanding of the resources and land use issues in the planning region.

## **SUMMARY OF ISSUES AND INTERESTS**

### **MINERAL EXPLORATION / DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Background:**

- As of April 2005, there are 2,277 active quartz claims totaling approximately 633 km<sup>2</sup>. These claims are predominantly in the alpine complexes and include the area of the Crest iron deposit in the Snake River watershed. There are also numerous claims

in the Bonnet Plume and Hart River watersheds as well as along the Dempster Highway.

- There is a high probability of finding significant mineral deposits in the region.
- Economic viability for mineral development will partially depend on access roads to the resources.
- Compared to other regions of the Yukon, there is a high degree of uncertainty with respect to the mineral potential of the Peel watershed. The reasons are:
  - The area is under-explored;
  - Some key data (e.g. regional geophysics) is missing; and
  - Gaps exist in detailed geology.
- There are 11 known mineral deposits in the planning region. The Bonnet Plume coal deposits and the Crest iron deposit are considered to have the most significant economic potential.
- In order to identify a sustainable land base for resource development, considerations include: economies of scale, access, and compatibility of adjacent activity.
- Several quartz claims in the region are being promoted by their owners for their uranium component, given the current value of the commodity. Any uranium mining in the region would likely be done as a byproduct of mining the host mineral such as copper. Any proposal for uranium mining would be subject to mining, lands, YESSA, and various other legislation

#### **Issues and Interests:**

- Avoid fragmenting and/or limiting access to areas of mineral potential.
- Exploration access for oil and gas and minerals will require temporary access to the Dempster, winter roads and air strips.
- Continued exploration and future development in the region is dependent on short-term exploration access and long-term access and infrastructure corridors to potential development projects.

#### **Tools & Information Products:**

- Yukon Geological Survey mineral assessment map
- Mineral reconnaissance surveys
- GSC regional stream geochemical surveys

#### **Potential Management Direction:**

- The most viable multi-use corridors will be identified and given consideration when zoning.
- Multi-use corridors should be determined in such a way as to minimize environmental impact.
- Zoning provisions should accommodate future development of the Crest iron deposit and the Bonnet Plume coal deposit.
- Mineral development should not be permitted in the most sensitive habitats.

## **OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION / DEVELOPMENT**

### **Background / Considerations:**

- A significant percentage of Yukon's oil and gas potential is found in the Peel Watershed.
- Oil and gas basins in the planning region include: Eagle Plains, Bonnet Plume, Kandik and Peel Plateau. They contain significant undiscovered oil and gas potential. Petroleum resource assessments are completed for these areas.
- Best Practices guidelines have been developed to assist with regulating oil and gas exploration.
- The Yukon Government intends to conduct oil and gas dispositions on a regular basis, due to commercial interest in the resources.
- The timing of oil and gas development in the Peel Watershed will be driven by world demand for petroleum products and the development of the required infrastructure to transport the product to market, such as the Mackenzie Valley pipeline.
- Infrastructure and transportation pipelines, such as feeder lines and the Dempster Lateral Pipeline option or the Mackenzie Valley pipeline, are necessary for oil and gas industry development in the Peel watershed. Consideration must be given to access oil and gas resources by road and/or pipeline.

### **Issues and Interests:**

- Exploration access for oil and gas and minerals will require temporary access to the Dempster, winter roads and air strips.
- Identify and provide a suitable land base for oil and gas exploration from which investment prospects can be selected by industry.
- Cumulative effects of seismic exploration, drilling, pipelines, compressor stations, feeder pipelines and access roads.
- Current application from Hunt Oil for seismic exploration in the Turner Wetlands: not proposing to follow established "best practices".
- Remediation must be built into development applications.

### **Tools & Information Products:**

- Bedrock geology map
- Oil and gas potential map
- Synthesis of historical and current hydrocarbon exploration results
- Historical seismic lines map

### **Potential Management Direction:**

- Oil and gas exploration is an immediate and short-term activity. Oil and gas development in terms of prospects is a long-term activity. The costs and benefits between these two activities are different. For this reason they should be assessed as separate activities.
- If oil/gas development is going to be viable in the Peel region, then economically sufficient tracts of land must be open to exploration and development.
- The most viable multi-use corridors and pipeline routes will be identified and given consideration when zoning.

- Multi-use corridors should be located in such a way as to minimize environmental impact.
- Oil/gas exploration and development should not be permitted in the most sensitive habitats.

## **FISH, WILDLIFE AND HABITAT**

### **Background / Considerations:**

- There is limited information on fish, wildlife and their habitat in the Peel. Regional ecosystem and land cover mapping is currently proceeding for the Peel watershed.
- While the northern half of Tombstone Territorial Park is in the Peel Watershed, the land use planning region boundary follows the north and east boundary of the park, thereby excluding the park. As a result, there are currently no protected areas within the planning region.
- The planning region contains ecosystems of international significance, numerous important ecological features and portions of six ecoregions (North Ogilvie Mountains, Eagle Plains, British-Richardson Mountains, Fort McPherson Plain, Peel River Plateau and Mackenzie Mountains).
- Numerous significant conservation values have been suggested in the Peel watershed. They range in size and complexity from traditional campsites to complete watersheds and mountain ranges.
- Climate change may significantly alter habitat and the associated fish and wildlife populations.
- The region's terrain is sensitive due to the high water table and permafrost.
- There is limited water (low flow) for human use, especially in winter.
- Much of the region is sensitive to disturbance due to the acidity of the soils and potential for impact on water chemistry.
- There are numerous industrial sites in the Peel region that may require clean-up. The sites are not necessarily contaminated but contain solid waste such as old fuel drums.
- Yukon Government has assumed responsibility for the clean up of contaminated sites and has a program in place for identifying, ranking and cleaning up sites.
- Water flow and water quality data are very sparse and site-specific. Water Survey of Canada (Environment Canada) operated five river gauging stations in the Peel River basin from 1961 to 1995, measuring water flow. Two stations were reactivated in 2005: Peel at Canyon River, and Blackstone near Chapman Lake.

### **Issues and Interests:**

- Identify and clean up solid waste and contaminated sites.
- Wetlands of interest are the Turner, Caribou and Vittrekwa wetlands.
- Primary ecological values are the intact watersheds.
- Conservation values include: Blackstone Uplands, Wernecke Mountains, Peel Plateau, Turner Lakes, Fort McPherson Plains, Peel Canyon, Peel River Main Stem, Wind River, Bonnet Plume and Snake watersheds, Beringian zones, raptor habitat, Aberdeen Canyon, Blackstone and Hart river corridors, and the Dempster Highway "scenic corridor".

- Bonnet Plume caribou herd's range should be protected.
- The integrity of the watersheds, river corridors and overall water quality should be a priority.
- Intact large mammal ecosystems should be a priority.
- Special Management Areas (SMAs), including a Territorial Park, should be considered for the protection of the Wind, Bonnet Plume and Snake watersheds.
- SMAs must be part of a larger system of management that ensures that the terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems remain largely intact.
- First Nation and non-First Nation harvesting rights must be acknowledged and protected.

**Tools & Information Products:**

- Local harvesting data / workshops
- Fish Report
- Wildlife key area database and maps
- Satellite-based land cover classification map
- Bioclimate / bioterrain map
- Wildlife habitat suitability map
- Fish distribution map
- Focal species distribution maps
- Change-in-vegetation data
- Climate data

**Potential Management Direction:**

- Protected areas will be considered in the planning region.
- Zoning for protected areas will consider: the integrity of the watershed, connectivity / corridors, adjacent ecosystems, key habitat, ecological sensitivity, ecological importance and local/traditional subsistence harvesting priorities.
- Zoning will not be based on the designation of representative ecoregions.
- Zoning may also consider temporal options, such as seasonal closures.
- Zoning will incorporate various degrees of protection, or restrictions of human activities, including core areas and buffer zones radiating out from the core.
- The management plan will recommend that clean-up of contaminated sites and industrial waste be a plan implementation priority for responsible agencies.
- Data collection will involve the selection of focal species, based on: available data, merits as an ecological indicator, ecological sensitivity of the species or its habitat, or species habitat representing a significant portion of the planning region.
- Focal species in the land use plan should include: caribou, sheep, moose, grizzly bear and peregrine falcon.

## **WATER**

### **Background / Considerations:**

- Yukon Government is committed to protecting the flow and quality of the Peel River as reflected in its signature on the Mackenzie Valley Transboundary Waters Master Agreement.
- Water rights of Yukon First Nations (UFA, 14.5.0), and those of other parties (UFA, 14.7.0), will be upheld in the land use plan.
- Climate change could significantly alter flow regimens.
- Due to the acidity of the soils, disturbance of the soils has the potential to impact on water chemistry.
- The long winter and limited flow regimen severely limits the dilution of contaminants.
- Water flow and water quality data are very sparse and site-specific. Water Survey of Canada (Environment Canada) operated five river gauging stations in the Peel River basin from 1961 to 1995, measuring water flow. Two stations were reactivated in 2005: Peel at Canyon River, and Blackstone near Chapman Lake.
- The use of historical hydrometric data (there is little current data) for design purposes could result in inadequate design.
- Several preliminary hydro power sites were identified in the Peel watershed. An assessment of hydro potential has not been done and currently there are no plans to develop hydro in the Peel watershed.
- Future industrial demand for water is unknown and the availability of water for future industrial use is unknown.

### **Issues and Interests:**

- Managing land uses so that the integrity of the watersheds, river corridors and overall water quality, is not compromised.
- Ecological connectivity between aquatic regions should be a priority.
- The Wind, Bonnet Plume and Snake watersheds area, and the Blackstone and Hart river corridors are conservation values.
- Potential industrial demand for water.
- Potential export of water.
- Concern over the impact of unregulated river travel on water quality.
- Potential hydro electric power projects.

### **Tools & Information Products:**

- Water flow data
- Water quality data
- Climate data

### **Potential Management Direction:**

- The integrity of the watershed should be the cornerstone of the land use plan.



## **CULTURE AND HERITAGE**

### **Background / Considerations:**

- The identification of heritage values in the Peel is very preliminary. Almost no information is available on the heritage values in the Mackenzie Mountain ecoregion.
- Four First Nations have heritage and cultural interests in the planning region.
- Much of the Peel Watershed lies within the traditional land use area of the Tetlit Gwich'in. In recognition of their strong cultural tie to the Peel watershed, the Tetlit Gwich'in First Nation has an application before Parks Canada to designate a portion of the Peel River as a National Historic Site.
- Significant Pleistocene fossils and rare Paleozoic and Mesozoic fossil remains have been reported in the Peel River watershed.
- The Dawson / Ft. McPherson Trail is significant in Yukon's most recent history as a route to the Klondike Gold Rush and important in the early RCMP history of the Yukon.

### **Issues:**

- Location and size of proposed National Historic Site Designation along the Peel Canyon (Ft. McPherson)
- Sensitive and significant cultural sites should not be disturbed by development projects. Development should also avoid enabling undesired access to the sites.
- First Nation and non-First Nation harvesting rights must be acknowledged and protected.

### **Tools & Information Products:**

- Tr'ondek Hwech'in Heritage Dept data
- Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute data
- Tetlit Gwich'in proposal submission to Parks Canada for a National Historic Site.
- Community workshops

### **Potential Management Direction:**

- An appropriate buffer of protection should be applied to sites deemed sensitive and of cultural importance.
- An assessment of heritage values should be conducted prior to development in areas that are likely to have undiscovered heritage resources.

## **TOURISM AND OUTFITTING**

### **Background / Considerations:**

- The tourism sector in the Peel Watershed currently consists of: travelers utilizing the Dempster Highway; adventure tourists (i.e. commercial and private paddling parties); commercial outfitting clientele; and recreational hunters.
- Tourism currently represents the largest private sector industry in the Yukon.
- Most tourism activity currently occurs along the Dempster Highway and the Hart, Wind, Bonnet Plume and Snake river corridors.

- The Mackenzie Mountain portion of the Peel watershed has high recreation and tourist potential values.
- In 2003, there were 11 *wilderness tour* operators, 157 clients, and 1,949 person days on the waters of the Peel Watershed.
- In 2004, there were 7 wilderness tour operators, 124 clients, and 1,792 person days on the waters of the Peel Watershed.
- Six outfitting concessions are located all or partially in the Peel Watershed.
- The Yukon Government recently approved, and is now implementing, an interim Big Game Outfitting Land Application Policy.
- Recreation tenure may be established in the planning region by the Yukon Government, with respect to cabins and cottages.

#### **Issues:**

- Identify zones for Wilderness Tourism: A sizable land and water base for wilderness tourism is required to provide a true wilderness product.
- Carrying capacity of rivers and land for ecotourism. Unregulated river travel has the potential to degrade the wilderness values of the river corridors, the quality of the water, and diminish the wilderness tourism experience.
- Potential Land Use Conflict: Road and pipeline developments could potentially impact wilderness tourism if it were to devalue the scenic views and wilderness experience.
- Sport hunting industry requires large tracts of intact ecosystems.
- Local economies: local communities play a limited role in tourism in the Peel Watershed.
- There is the potential for over-fishing from wilderness tourism activities on land-locked lakes— especially the lakes that act as launch points for paddling parties.

#### **Tools & Information Products:**

- Yukon Government data/analysis
- Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon presentation
- Interviews and workshops with outfitters and tour operators

#### **Potential Management Direction:**

- Carrying capacity limits may need to be identified for wilderness tourism activities in key areas, such as along the river corridors.
- Through land designation, the land use plan can facilitate the potential regulation of private and commercial wilderness travel, to be enforced by the Yukon Government.
- If wilderness tourism and outfitting industries are to continue to thrive, then it will be necessary to maintain healthy and intact ecosystems and water corridors.

## **TRANSPORTATION AND RELATED INFRASTRUCTURE**

### **Background / Considerations:**

- Transportation considerations include: Dempster Highway, all-season roads, winter roads, float plane access and airstrips.
- The Dempster Highway traverses the western portion of the Peel Watershed. It is the only all-season road in the planning region.
- Older transportation routes include the Wind River Trail and winter roads to access mineral exploration properties in the Mackenzie Mountains. A winter road was more recently established to access and clean-up the staging area for the historic J-21 well, located on the east shore of the Peel River.
- Potential needs for road building and maintenance materials include: borrow pits, gravel quarries, rip rap sources. Sources for these materials in the planning region are not well known.
- An assumption can be made that, once access roads are developed for a particular industry, it will generally result in greater access by hunters, fishers and recreational users to regions that had previously been unvisited.
- Water usage can be a factor in the construction of roads, especially winter roads.
- A rough-scale study was conducted by the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources to assess potential transportation routes throughout the Yukon, including the Peel planning region.
- Certain travel routes are considered by the Yukon Government as rights of way under the *Highways Act*. The Department of Highways & Public Works is responsible for management of these assets including environmental assessment of work in these areas which exceeds defined thresholds.

### **Issues and Interests:**

- Development and management of the Dempster Highway corridor: the type, intensity and location of development in the Dempster corridor will influence land use in the Peel watershed. This includes providing enough space within the corridor for future linear developments such as a pipeline and a transmission line.
- Exploration access will rely on viable temporary access routes such as winter roads and air strips.
- Construction of roads and trails can cause fragmentation of wildlife habitat, thereby putting wildlife, especially caribou and moose, at risk by enabling greater predation.

### **Tools & Information Products:**

- Potential access routes map
- Map of designated rights-of-way

### **Potential Management Direction:**

- Potential access routes for mineral and oil/gas development will need to be identified, based on the most likely/viable sites for development.

## **OTHER POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

### **Background:**

- The following bullets represent additional issues that were raised at public consultation sessions.

### **Issues:**

- Coal bed methane development is not an appropriate activity for the Peel Watershed.
- Morel mushroom industry should be regulated to control unrestricted camping by the pickers.
- Hydro-electric dam projects should not be allowed in the Peel Watershed.
- Spot rural residential expansion along the Dempster Highway has the potential for habitat loss, diminished hunting access, and disturbance to fish and wildlife.

### **Potential Management Direction:**

- Coal bed methane development is not considered to be a prospective development in the near future (next five years). Specific concerns with such projects can be addressed through other planning themes: mineral exploration & development, water, wildlife and habitat.
- The morel mushroom industry is not currently considered to be a high planning priority. Regulatory matters are not within the mandate of the Commission.
- Yukon Government has not identified any prospective hydro-electric development in the Peel watershed. Economic viability makes the Peel watershed a low priority for development for the foreseeable future. Water resources of the watershed are a central to the planning and, as a specific planning theme, will address the integrity of the watershed.
- To date there has been limited interest in rural residential developments along the Dempster in the planning region. The Commission may consider identifying general zoning for future rural residential development. The Dempster Highway Development Area Regulations is a possible tool to guide development within the Dempster corridor.

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

The Commission has heard a wide variety of comments from a wide variety of perspectives, but some common themes and issues are evident. Stakeholders and the general public recognize that the future land use plan needs to find a balance between the various land use interests.

Sustainable development will be a cornerstone of the regional planning model, whereby social, cultural, economic and environmental policies will be applied to the management, protection and use of the land, water and resources in an integrated and coordinated manner.

It is worth reiterating that the issues identified under each theme are a reflection of the comments received from stakeholders. Therefore, this report may not be a comprehensive list, or a balanced list of planning issues. To date, the mineral exploration/development sector has provided very few comments. For this reason, it may appear that the report has not presented all perspectives with equal weight.

The Peel watershed planning region currently has a minimal development footprint. Existing infrastructure includes: a portion of the Dempster Highway, outfitting camps, First Nation cabins, and some mineral and hydrocarbon exploration infrastructure. With respect to current revenue generation, the Peel watershed plays a significant role for the Territory through wilderness tourism excursions – both guided and self-guided. New developments are not anticipated to occur in the near future (next five years); however, the plan will consider long-term (20–50 years) development prospects.

Virtually all of the land and water in the Peel watershed remains in a clean and natural state. Many stakeholders expressed the importance of maintaining the ecological integrity of the watershed's land and water. In addition to its unique landscapes, the region provides key habitat for various woodland and barren-ground caribou herds, moose, grizzly bears, sheep, fish, waterfowl and peregrine falcons. The water and soils of the region are also particularly sensitive to change and disturbance, due to their unique chemical and hydrological qualities.

As a watershed, the Peel watershed has played – and continues to play – an important cultural role for First Nations. The region has provided subsistence to the Tetlit Gwich'in, Nacho Nyak Dun, Tr'ondek Hwech'in and Vuntut Gwitchin for centuries. The harvesting rights of these First Nations are entrenched in the Yukon land claim agreements and must be adhered to in the regional land use plan. Three of the four First Nations possess surface rights to significant land blocks in the planning region.

The issues identified in this report will help to frame the Information Gathering exercise that is now underway, and stakeholders will continue to have an opportunity to comment throughout the planning process. Over the next several months, the Commission will be gathering a broad range of existing information to help assess the resources and land uses of the Peel planning region. A resource assessment report will then be drafted. Following the resource assessment, the Commission will consider various planning scenarios and explore the implications of those scenarios, with respect to potential land use conflicts, and environmental and economic impacts. The final step will be the drafting of a regional land use plan that recommends a particular path and vision for the region. It is anticipated that the

Commission will submit a draft plan to the approval bodies (Yukon First Nations and Yukon Government representatives) by June 2007.

*The Commission welcomes further comments from the public throughout the planning process. Public participation is vital to the success of this exercise, and to the implementation of ultimate product, the Regional Land Use Plan.*

## **APPENDIX I: CONSULTATION CHRONOLOGY**

**April 15, 2005:** Invitation packages were sent by mail to contact list. Invitees were given until May 9<sup>th</sup> to respond.

**April 20: Mayo.** Pre-consultation meeting with Nacho Nyak Dun First Nation's Lands Office, Fish & Wildlife Department and Yukon Government regional biologist

**April 21: Dawson City.** Pre-consultation meeting with Tr'ondek Hwech'in Han Nation Chief & Council

**May 4 – June 8:** Newspaper advertisements ran Wednesdays and Fridays in the Yukon News.

**May 10:** Follow-up phone calls to 18 stakeholders who had not yet responded to invitations.

**May 12 to June 8:** Radio advertisements ran twice daily (once during Gwich'in hour) on CHON FM.

**June 20:** Follow-up letters and invitation packages to industry stakeholders and Canadian Wildlife Service

**June 24:** Follow-up letters and packages sent to key industry agencies and Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon

**June 25:** Presentation to the Tr'ondek Hwech'in Han General Assembly.

**August 8:** Follow-up phone calls to industry associations

**August 25:** Additional stakeholder presentations were made to the Commission.

**September 14:** Commission Senior Planner briefed the Yukon Government Internal Working Group on the planning process.

**September 21:** Commission shared a trade booth at the Opportunities North Conference.

**November 8:** Additional stakeholder presentations were made to the Commission.

**December 7:** Public consultation with residents of Aklavik, regarding status report on Peel watershed land use planning.

**December 8:** Public consultation with residents of Fort McPherson, regarding status report on Peel Watershed land use planning.

## **APPENDIX II**

Presentations to the Commission include:

- Anderson Mining Company Ltd.
- Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (Written Submission)
- Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society
- Ducks Unlimited
- First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun
- Gwich'in Land Use Planning Board
- Gwich'in Tribal Council
- Hunt Oil (Written Submission)
- Mayo District Renewable Resource Council
- Pembina Institute
- Teetlit Gwich'in National Historic Site Steering Committee
- Tr'ondek Hwech'in Han Nation Heritage Resources Office
- Tr'ondek Hwech'in Han Nation Lands Office
- Vuntut Gwitchin Government Natural Resources Department
- Widrig Outfitters Limited (Written Submission)
- Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon
- Yukon Conservation Society
- Yukon Government: Dept of Highways and Public Works
- Yukon Government: Dept of the Environment
- Yukon Government: Dept of Tourism & Culture
- Yukon Government: Mineral Development Branch
- Yukon Government: Oil and Gas Management Branch
- Yukon Government: Parks Branch
- Yukon Government: Yukon Geological Survey