

# **Peel Watershed Tourism and Recreation Report**

Submitted to:

**Peel Watershed Planning Commission**

Submitted by:

**Yukon Department of Tourism and Culture**

and

**Yukon Department of Environment, Parks Branch**

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# 1.0 Introduction

## Scope and purpose

The Peel Watershed Tourism and Recreation Report identifies and describes tourism and recreation resources, activities, values, issues and opportunities in the Peel Watershed Land Use Planning Region. The report draws together existing research-based information about tourism and recreation in the Peel Watershed that can be used by the Peel Watershed Planning Commission in preparing their tourism and recreation assessment for the region.

Tourism and recreation activities in the region are similar and are usually based on the same natural, historic, cultural and built resources. However, tourism and recreation research and data, markets, business development, marketing, and economic and social values and impacts are described separately.

This report includes remote and road-accessible tourism and recreation in the Peel Watershed; it does not include recreational or guided hunting, but does include wilderness tourism activities offered by hunting outfitters.

## Report organization

The Peel Watershed Tourism and Recreation Report begins with a tourism and recreation overview for the Peel Watershed region. Next, the report outlines the tourism and recreation history of the area, followed by a description of natural, historic and built resources that support tourism and recreation.

The Yukon's wilderness tourism sector is described in general, followed by a detailed description of current tourism and recreation activities. The report presents tourism and recreation data for the area, including client and operator numbers and rental data for the Peel tributaries and Dempster Highway travel.

The report examines tourism and recreation values in the Peel, with some context from a brief comparison with other international wilderness destinations. The report identifies issues and barriers affecting the continued success and development of tourism and recreation, including identifying specific potential impacts. Key opportunities are identified, including the potential for lodge-based tourism and expansion of existing products and new niches.

Finally, the report identifies important management tools that can be used to help establish a conservation and development regime in the region that supports the wilderness tourism industry and recreational users and the resources on which they depend.

## 2.0 Overview: Tourism and Recreation in the Peel Planning Region

The Peel River Watershed is one of the Yukon's most highly valued wilderness tourism and recreation regions. Prized by Yukon residents, wilderness tourism operators and discerning wilderness travellers from around the world, the Peel offers exceptionally high-quality wilderness experiences. The uniqueness and appeal of trips in the Peel Watershed are on par with experiences in the Yukon's best-known wilderness parks, including Kluane, Tombstone and Ivavik.

From a tourism and recreation perspective, the Peel Basin can be viewed as two sub-regions: two road-accessible watersheds traversed by the Dempster Highway in the west, and four intact, remote watersheds in the east accessible by chartered bush plane.

### **Core Wilderness Tourism and Recreation Activities**

Predominant: Canoeing, hiking  
Other: Rafting, backpacking, horsepacking, wildlife viewing, photography, dog mushing

The Dempster Highway passes through the western portion of the Peel Watershed, crossing both the Blackstone and Ogilvie rivers and weaving north through the scenic Ogilvie Mountains. Touring by vehicle is the main activity in the Dempster Highway corridor, complemented by wilderness-based roadside activities (hiking, wildlife viewing, camping, photography etc.) as well as canoeing trips on the road-accessible Peel tributaries. A major Yukon 'icon', each year the Dempster draws thousands of residents and visitors northward in pursuit of unique roadside wilderness experiences.

The predominant activity in the roadless Peel Watershed (Hart, Wind, Bonnet Plume, Snake) is multi-day wilderness canoeing trips. Some commercial operators also offer their clients the opportunity to raft on some of the Peel tributaries. While exceptional rivers are the foundation of paddling trips in the Peel, associated activities like hiking, wildlife viewing and photography are integral to the Peel paddling experience. The Peel Watershed is known for superior alpine hiking on scenic, open mountain ridges that line the upper reaches of the rivers. Travellers are rewarded with excellent opportunities to view wildlife, including caribou, moose, bears, Dall sheep and peregrine falcons.

Though the number varies slightly from year to year, about ten established wilderness tourism operators run river trips in the Peel River system each summer, and six Yukon companies rent equipment. Mainly Yukon operators use this region, with a combination of local, Whitehorse-based and outside companies. Guided trips on Peel tributaries are high-quality, high-end wilderness tourism products that compete with the best destination-canoeing products in the world. The average commercial trip length is 10 to 14 days, and most are

positioned in the mountains at a headwater lake and picked up on the Peel River by air charter.

Outdoor education programs frequently operate in the Peel wilderness, offering extended canoe and backpacking trips—these expeditions can last for 30 days or longer. National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) is very active in the area, and Outward Bound and Wanapitei (Ontario) also run trips in the Peel.

Other wilderness tourism activities in the Peel region include backpacking, horsepacking and dog mushing trips. Several hunting outfitters in the Peel hold Wilderness Tourism Licenses and offer customized wilderness experiences. Though fewer operators specialize in non-paddling commercial tourism activities, there is strong potential for further development of these products in the Peel.

Increasing numbers of self-guided travellers enjoy river trips in the Peel Watershed. Comprised of Yukon residents and visitors, these travellers rent equipment (mainly canoes, also tents, sleeping bags, stoves, safety equipment), buy supplies and gear, and charter air transport to and from the rivers. The duration of self-guided trips tends to be longer (2 to 3 weeks) than guided trips, and many parties opt to paddle down the Peel to Fort McPherson.

Very little data is available about recreational use in the Peel Watershed. However, it is widely known that Yukoners consider the Peel Watershed to be a choice destination for wilderness recreation including canoeing, hiking, skiing, snowmobiling and Dempster Highway touring.

Current and future tourism and recreation activities in the Peel watershed depend on maintaining wilderness and wildlife values that can support high-quality sustainable tourism products and recreational experiences. Exploration and industrial development of oil, gas or mineral interests and their associated access routes into the watershed could have significant, negative impacts on current and potential wilderness tourism and recreation in the region.

## 3.0 History

### ***Historic Tourism and Recreational Use***

According to Yukoners working and travelling in the Peel watershed in the early 1960s, it wasn't unusual to encounter a few canoeing parties each summer on a Peel tributary. Most of these early wilderness travellers were non-residents, often hailing from Europe. Meeting resident paddlers on these rivers was less common, though many Yukoners are known to have travelled in the area and descended the rivers for recreational purposes in the 1960s and 70s.

In 1963 Yukon trapper and prospector Esa Ekdahl worked in the lower Snake River for an oil exploration company. He recalls meeting four different canoeing parties on the Snake in the summer of '63—these adventure-seeking paddlers were mainly from England, France and Germany. In the early 60s, Ekdahl often travelled in the Wernecke Mountains, sometime paddling the rivers alone—the Snake, Bonnet Plume, Wind, Hart—and he recalled meeting other groups now and then and stopping to share tea on the river. Though he met a few Yukoners, the majority were self-guided visitors from Europe or elsewhere in North America. While trapping in the late 70s and early 80s, Ekdahl continued to meet river travellers in the Bonnet Plume and Wind drainages.

*“Small groups of people have been going down these rivers for over forty years, and they all thought it was amazing country.”*  
*Esa Ekdahl*

The establishment of a float plane base in Mayo gave guided and self-guided paddling parties access to remote areas of the Peel Watershed. Until the completion of the Dempster Highway in 1979, these river travellers had to arrange their return south by air and possibly ship their equipment back from the Mackenzie Delta by barge. By the late 1970s, wilderness tourism operators were an established presence operating trips in other areas of the Yukon, and the Dempster Highway created new possibilities for running tours in the Peel. These rivers were largely unknown to outsiders, and soon a handful of mainly Yukon-based commercial guiding companies were introducing clients to the extraordinary landscapes of the upper Peel watershed.

Though a few non-resident operators periodically ran exploratory or shoestring trips, three Yukon-based operators consistently offered guided river trips on Peel tributaries into the 1990s. Non-resident operators would sometimes team up with Yukon operators, and for some it evolved into a marketing relationship with Outside operators selling on behalf of Yukon-based operators in return for a commission. By the mid-90s, Yukon's wilderness tourism industry had matured, marketing was more sophisticated, and more – and larger – operators were leading river trips in the Peel.

Commercial trips two decades ago were longer than today's 12 or 14-day fly-in/fly-out packages. Clients could often join three or four-week-long journeys down the Snake, Bonnet Plume or Wind, often ending their expedition in Fort McPherson. However, the activities associated with river travel in the Peel haven't changed—paddlers were enthralled by the region's hiking opportunities, abundant wildlife and interesting natural and human history.

While most visitors have historically participated in river trips, over the years some have joined horsepacking trips or explored the watersheds on foot, and some have even chosen alternate routes like travelling overland into the watershed hauling and lining canoes. Though construction of the Dempster Highway began in 1959, the highway was not completed and opened until 1979. Many tourists toured the southern section of the Dempster in the 60s and 70s, and travel on the highway increased steadily through the 1980s and 90s to present levels (approx. 8,000 into the Peel Watershed portion in 2004).

River travel on the Peel tributaries steadily increased in the 1990s, parallel to commercial wilderness travel trends elsewhere in the Yukon and worldwide. Commercially guided trips were more prevalent on the Snake and Wind rivers, while the Bonnet Plume and the other tributaries saw more self-guided travel. These trends have generally continued to the present, with some fluctuations.

In some cases, use of these rivers is still far below that of the Yukon drainage rivers. For example, current commercial canoe and kayak use on the Big Salmon River is around twenty parties per year compared to around eight on the Wind River. Nevertheless, the general trend in commercially guided canoe trips has been towards utilizing more and more remote rivers to obtain a true "wilderness experience". During the same period, self-guided travel in the Peel has increased significantly, to the point where self-guided travellers on these rivers account for approximately three times the traffic as guided travel.

### ***Tourism and Recreation Research***

Significant efforts have been made over the years to document the values for conservation, recreation and tourism in the Peel watershed, recognizing its inherent value for such purposes. Scientific research and surveys conducted by Yukon government and other organizations in the Peel looking at conservation and natural resource values will be described in other submissions.

Yukon Parks commissioned a Recreation Features Inventory for Northern Yukon (1988) that documented the significance of landscape features for outdoor recreation. The Peel watershed stands out in the assessment of the Yukon as a whole as an area of exceptional recreational opportunity having the greatest concentration of high values of any other region of the territory.

The Canadian Heritage River System (CHRS) study which assessed rivers throughout the Yukon for their national and territorial significance focused



attention on the Bonnet Plume River watershed for inclusion in the national system and recommended the Wind River watershed for a territorial system (which did not develop). Further assessment work was done in the Bonnet Plume River for its subsequent nomination in 1993 to the CHRS and then the development of a management plan (1998) required for the designation.

Several published books have highlighted the exceptional canoeing opportunities in the region. *The Wind, the Snake and the Bonnet Plume – Three Wild Northern Rivers* was published by Yukon Wildlands Project in 1988. This slim volume rolled together much of the information that visiting paddlers were eager for, including some technical descriptions of the rivers, but primarily descriptive information about the watershed's natural and cultural history.

First published in 1989 and reprinted several times since, Madsen's *Paddling in the Yukon* is considered a river runner's "bible". Madsen's books – including another title, *Wild Rivers, Wild Lands* – feature detailed descriptions about Peel tributaries, often complemented by personal adventure stories, photographs and journal excerpts.

There are several Yukon-wide tourism research projects that include information on the Peel Watershed. Tourism Yukon recently completed the Wilderness Tourism Status Report, which includes a sub-section on the Peel. Yukon Department of Environment annually collects Trip and Rental Report Data from all operators through the Wilderness Tourism Licensing Act. Tourism Yukon has been working with Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon to produce the Peel Watershed Tourism & Recreation map. The bibliography at the end of this report provides a complete list of tourism and recreation references used to compile the document.

## **4.0 Tourism and Recreation Resources in the Peel Watershed**

The Peel Watershed has a rich endowment of natural resources that support wilderness tourism and recreation pursuits. Many interesting historical and cultural features found in the region also add value to the experiences of wilderness travellers.

This report focuses mainly on natural resources, with some reference to cultural and historic resources. Submissions to the Peel Planning Commission by other stakeholders (e.g. First Nations, communities, outfitters) are expected to provide a greater depth of information regarding cultural, historic and built resources, many of which are relevant to tourism and recreation.

The Peel Watershed, which includes the Ogilvie, Blackstone, Hart, Wind, Bonnet Plume, Snake and Peel rivers, is the Yukon's largest intact remote wilderness area. The Peel watershed is recognized as a world-class wilderness canoeing and ridge hiking destination, offering remote, scenic mountain rivers with a high density of features attractive to paddlers from around the world. Briefly, these resources include pristine wilderness, easy access to ridge hiking, canyons, rapids, alpine lakes, hoodoos and rock towers, hot springs, wildlife viewing, birdwatching, good camping, fishing and historic sites.

Yukon residents and visitors around the world are attracted to the Peel by a unique convergence of high quality natural features and assets:

- Wild and undeveloped landscapes
- Wilderness rivers
- Intact ecosystems
- Wildlife
- Water quality
- Alpine hiking
- Lakes
- Bonnet Plume Canadian Heritage River
- Physical features
- Paleontological features
- Human history
- Dempster Highway
- Horse trails

## ***Remote Resources***

### **Wild and undeveloped landscapes**

The Peel River Basin is one of the largest intact wilderness watersheds in North America. The Peel is the only wild landscape on the continent—and perhaps the world—that combines a unique set of key attributes that are very important for tourism and recreation. There are other intact watersheds in the Yukon, but none are traversed by multiple, challenging and attractive canoeing rivers with easy access to overland hiking, exploration and nature study.

Travellers come to the Peel with the expectation of a high-quality wilderness experience that is increasingly rare in the world. Beyond being excellent paddling rivers, the Peel tributaries are ideal for hiking and other wilderness activities. Wilderness features include exceptional mountain and tundra scenery, varied and interesting landforms, and numerous ridge hiking locations accessible from the river and off-river routes in landscapes that have strong potential for overland trips. The Peel's undeveloped landscapes also deliver beautiful views, wildlife sightings and interesting geological features.

A critical feature of the Peel is that most of the region remains roadless. The Dempster Highway across the western portion of the Peel Watershed is the only permanent road in the watershed, and the Hart Winter Road is essentially a rough trail that allows limited motorized access. To the east of the Dempster corridor, there is currently no motorized access into the region, except by snowmachine.

In summary, key attributes of this natural resource (wild and undeveloped landscapes) are:

- Pristine, intact and roadless wilderness
- Visually stunning, varied landscapes
- Nationally and internationally significant wilderness
- One of the Yukon's largest intact wilderness areas

### **Wilderness rivers**

#### **Snake River**

The headwaters of the Snake, Bonnet Plume and Wind rivers begin in the remote and scenic Mackenzie and Wernecke mountains. Towering peaks in excess of 2,100 m line these rivers, varying from rugged faces to eroded scree slopes and alpine meadows and ridges suitable for hiking and horse travel.

After a portage from Duo Lakes, Snake River trips begin in a broad, lush scenic valley that offers excellent hiking and wildlife viewing. The upper river is narrow, fast and clear, with boulder rapids and intimate canyons. Reptile Creek is a popular campsite, and the hike to Painted Mountain is one of the best alpine

hikes in the North. The river has beautiful campsites, good fishing opportunities and outstanding hiking most of the way to the Peel Plateau. Lower reaches become more braided and increasingly silty.

One of the most striking features of the entire Peel region is the Mount MacDonald massif with its towering limestone walls, hanging glaciers, tarns, alpine meadows, waterfalls, weeping walls and resident sheep and caribou. Mount MacDonald is a dominant and exceptionally beautiful peak frequented by Snake River travellers. In spite of the forested valley bottom and rugged appearance, Mount MacDonald is easily accessible. The predominantly limestone bedrock ensures well-drained ground, good footing and easy access to high elevations in the immediate vicinity of the main peak within a day's hiking from Snake River campsites.

The appeal of the Snake is its combination of moderately challenging canoeing and alpine ridge hiking in a breathtakingly beautiful setting. The river has fewer rapids than the Bonnet Plume, but higher and more rugged mountains that extend further downstream than other Peel tributaries before reaching the lowlands. Wildlife sightings are frequent, and the river has several salt licks.

### Bonnet Plume River

The Bonnet Plume Canadian Heritage River has an international reputation as a whitewater wilderness canoe trip. The watershed is vast with little evidence of human activity. With land claims in the watershed finalized, Nacho Nyak Dun encouraged the pursuit of CHR designation for the Bonnet Plume to help protect the river's "inheritance values".

The traditional landing spot for Bonnet Plume river trips is Bonnet Plume Lake, surrounded by high peaks, ridges and slopes attractive for hiking and wildlife viewing. The whitewater features and high natural history values of the Bonnet Plume River help make it a favourite among canoeists. The upper river is fast flowing with class II and III rapids, followed downstream by more challenging class III and IV rapids and chutes and class V portages. A centuries-old rockslide and canyon creates significant whitewater, and paddlers find waterfalls, beautiful campsites, a gorge and a number of enjoyable whitewater sections. The colour of the water ranges from translucent to clear green to turbid green and finally opaque brown as it enters the Peel.

Like the Snake valley, the Bonnet Plume is noted for its superb wilderness character, exceptional hiking and healthy wildlife populations including sheep, caribou, moose and grizzly bear. Refugia for plants and fish species that escaped the last Ice Age are found in the watershed.

### Wind River

McClusky Lake is used as a landing site, and at approximately \$350 per person one way, the Wind River is one of the most economically accessible of

equivalently ranked rivers. The surrounding Wernecke Mountains offer exceptional scenery, rewarding hiking, wildlife sightings and interesting landforms (eroded mountain slopes, talus and scree).

The Wind River is less technically demanding than either the Snake or Bonnet Plume rivers. Though the river is challenging (class II and limited class III), it is accessible to groups with moderate canoeing experience. As a result, many novices and self-guided groups paddle the Wind. With no major rapids, the upper Wind pours through chutes and around sharp bends, and stretches of the upper and middle reaches also have long sections of quiet water with deep clear pools and side channels.

The Wind River has superior water quality with clear blue-green waters, and the river flows quickly over colourful cobble beds and braided channels. Hiking in the Wind is more accessible and less rugged than its sister rivers. In recent years Yukon recreational users have recognized the high quality off-river environment of the Wind River watershed and chosen to travel there for overland backpacking trips. The river is lined by several open tundra benches that make for excellent camping, nature explorations and wildlife viewing. Wildlife values are high throughout the corridor, with caribou, Dall sheep, moose, grizzly bears and wolves all found in the valley.

The Wind River is also notable for a strong presence of human history, which adds significantly to interpretive opportunities on river trips. The history of First Nations people in the area is extensive; many Gwich'in elders have spent time in the watershed and recall hunting, trapping and fishing in the Wind and Little Wind valleys. This corridor was a historic patrol route of the North West Mounted Police, and the winter route of the ill-fated Lost Patrol. Wind City was a turn-of-the-century gold rush community.

#### Little Wind River

The Little Wind River joins the Wind as the river leaves the mountains and flows to the Peel plateau. The Little Wind begins in the beautiful high mountain country between the Wind and Hart rivers.

This is a storied river with much cultural and historic significance, having been frequented by the Gwich'in and used as a travel corridor by the NWMP. The Little Wind is infrequently used by wilderness travellers; however, this watershed has good potential for wilderness tourism due to its rich natural and cultural features and scenic values. A key factor is the suitability of an upper lake, located 10 km southeast of Mount Fitzgerald, for floatplane landings. The paddling quality is unknown, however overflights indicate good potential.

#### Hart River

The Hart is less travelled, but at least two operators lead commercial trips on the river and several other operators advertise Hart trips. In recent years, the Hart

River has seen significant increases in private, self-guided travel. The Hart is considered easier than the Bonnet Plume, but more challenging than the Wind and Snake. It flows through spectacular landscapes in the transition between the stained and colourful Wernecke Mountains and the dramatic features of Ogilvie Mountains (limestone, canyons and jagged peaks).

The upper Hart features moderate to challenging river flows (class II to III) past beautiful mountain scenery and interesting rock formations. The river is interesting to paddle, alternating between slow sections, heavily braided sections and very fast sections with tight corners. The river has numerous rapids, with at least one class III ledge.

Geological features in the Hart valley include a dramatic canyon, sheer rock faces, tors and exposed strata, as well as significant fossil finds. Scenic vistas and varied terrain continue downriver, where flows are mellow and mainly class II canoeing. On the Hart, travellers enjoy good fishing and excellent wildlife viewing of caribou, sheep, moose and other species.

### Peel

The Hart and Ogilvie/Blackstone rivers converge above scenic Aberdeen Canyon, a series of falls and cataracts that are impassable to canoeists. There is a strenuous 10 km trail adjacent to the canyon, but the difficulty of the portage discourages most parties from continuing down the Peel.

Just downstream from the Bonnet Plume confluence is the second Peel River canyon, a striking section of river featuring high, striated rock cliffs and swifter flows. The stretch through the canyons is a highlight for many Bonnet Plume and Wind paddlers, and many parties camp on gravel bars in the canyon. As the Peel broadens and gains velocity, it passes through areas of historical and cultural significance for the Gwich'in. The lower reaches of the Peel were also used by traders, explorers, NWMP and prospectors travelling to the Klondike.

Most commercially guided parties are picked up by air charter on a wide, slow stretch of the Peel at a gravel bar known as Taco Bar. Some paddlers opt to continue down the Peel for a few more days to connect with vehicle shuttles at Fort McPherson. Another option is to arrange for pickup by boat somewhere along the Peel for a quicker trip downstream to Fort McPherson. There is potential for more formal establishment of boat shuttles, possibly with an outpost and scheduled service by boat downriver. The opportunity to travel with the Gwich'in on the Peel adds significant value to the experience.

In summary, the key attributes of this natural resource (wilderness rivers) are:

- canoeable mountain rivers of longer trip duration and varying degree of difficulty through pristine wilderness—a highly unusual combination of features—and,

- multiple rivers each with distinctive and attractive natural, cultural and historic features

## **Alpine hiking**

The mountainous headwaters of the Peel tributaries are highly valued for outstanding alpine hiking. Paddlers gain access to peaks and viewpoints by hiking up lightly forested slopes and along open ridge trails. High quality hiking is a key aspect of Peel canoeing trips, with recreational and commercial parties frequently planning layovers at sites where they can spend an extra day exploring, watching wildlife and gaining spectacular views of the river valley. These mountains are also becoming more known for destination hiking. Though some rivers have more notable hiking areas, all six mountain rivers have excellent opportunities for alpine hiking.

## **Intact ecosystems**

Healthy and intact ecosystems contribute significantly to the appeal of these valleys and river corridors for wilderness tourism. The notable wildlife viewing opportunities enjoyed by paddlers depend on the continued health of the surrounding ecosystem. Fully functioning ecosystems play a critical role in supporting predator-prey relationships, migratory and resident birds, and species that concentrate in the region such as Dall sheep and wintering Porcupine caribou.

While the intactness of an ecosystem is a complex concept to showcase, thriving natural systems are especially important to wilderness tourism and recreation because they sustain wildlife, birds, fish and other features that hold the greatest appeal for wilderness tourists and recreationists.

## **Wildlife**

The Peel Watershed is home to Yukon's largest woodland caribou herd, wintering Porcupine caribou, moose, Dall sheep, waterfowl, raptors, bears, wolves, songbirds and much more. Wildlife stories of interest nationally and internationally include peregrine falcon recovery, issues related to potential drilling in ANWR and the potential impact on the Porcupine caribou herd.

Naturally regulated ecosystems are increasingly rare in the world, making these watersheds particularly interesting and valuable. The wild, natural character of the Peel Watershed supports exceptional wildlife viewing, nature study and guided hunting.

## **Water quality**

The superb quality and clarity of the water in the Peel is a key feature of Peel Watershed rivers. In the upper watershed, paddlers can look forward to a perfect view of the rainbow of rocks lining the riverbed. They can spot fish and watch the underwater landscape pass beneath, and enjoy different hues depending on weather and conditions. Rivers and creeks in the watershed can range from

sparkling aqua blue in bright sunlight to deep teal on a cloudy day to milky greens from glacial silt. The aesthetic value of these clean waters is significant for river travellers.

Having regular access to high quality drinking water is invaluable for wilderness travellers, and it translates into positive experiences, healthy travellers and time saved. Access to clean water is particularly important for groups travelling in the backcountry for two weeks or longer, which is frequently the case in the Peel watershed.

Clean water also supports healthy freshwater fish populations, which in turn helps maintain healthy ecosystems, creates interpretive opportunities and presents opportunities for fishing.

## **Lakes**

The upper Peel Watershed has many large, scenic mountain lakes such as Bonnet Plume, Pinguicula and Duo Lakes. Many of the 1 km-long lakes already provide access for canoeing and hiking trips, and are fished and enjoyed by watershed travellers. Lakes of the Upper Peel, especially clusters of sub-alpine lakes, hold great potential as future sites of land-based wilderness tourism and recreation activities such as lodges, base camp hiking, hut-to-hut hiking and as starting points for day, multi-day and continuous hiking journeys.

## **Bonnet Plume Canadian Heritage River**

The presence of a Canadian Heritage River in the Peel watershed contributes to the region's appeal because visitors see the CHR status as an indication that the Bonnet Plume River is special. This adds value to its appeal as a tourism and recreation destination. However, CHR status carries little weight in terms of protection.

The Bonnet Plume was designated a Canadian Heritage River in 1998 to conserve the river's natural and heritage values, allow for interpretation of these values and to provide recreational and heritage appreciation opportunities. A unique aspect of the Bonnet Plume nomination was the decision to propose including the entire watershed rather than just the main stem of the river.

## **Physical features**

The rich variety of the physical landscape of the Peel is a main attraction of trips in the region. River travellers are interested in the topography and geological origins of the Peel watershed, and they are captivated by its physical beauty. They want to learn about natural processes, and they are keen for information that interprets the region's geological history. Dramatic scenery and visible evidence of complex geological history adds tremendous value to the visitor experience and creates many opportunities to interpret the surroundings for clients.



The southern part of the watershed is the Wernecke Mountains, where the Wind, Bonnet Plume and Snake have their headwaters. The Werneckes are a visually beautiful and rugged range characterized by steep cliffs, talus slopes, small alpine lakes, cirques and intimate alpine valleys. Glaciated Mount MacDonald dominates the eastern flanks of the Wernecke Range.

A vast terrain of undulating plateaus and low hills sprawls north from the Werneckes. The Peel Plateau has striking features like dramatic rock canyons, permafrost features and wetlands complexes, all of which enrich the wilderness experience and add interpretive value for travellers.

### **Paleontological features**

Seeing fossil specimens of extinct animals and plants is a very unique aspect of hiking and river journeys in the Peel region. Paleontological features are found throughout the watershed, and particularly on the Blackstone and Hart rivers. Such unique features have the potential to be the focus of specialty learning and educational trips.

### **Human history**

Relationships between people and the landscape—especially the ancient and historical relationships between First Nations people and the land—is a significant recurring theme that river travellers want to learn about, witness and experience. While evidence of human activity in the Peel is minimal by some standards, the region has a long and interesting human history which greatly adds to the interpretive value of wilderness trips. Archaeological finds in the region add significant interest to wilderness experiences.

Stories range from First Nation people who hunted, foraged and travelled to seasonal camps in the region to modern stories of guide outfitters and trappers that use the landscape. The Tetlit Gwich'in of Fort McPherson and the Northern Tutchone people of Nacho Nyak Dun in Mayo have used travel route, trade routes and special sites in the region for generations. The Peel was used by explorers, fur traders and the North West Mounted Police, and even by hopeful prospectors looking for a route to the Klondike. Stories of the Wind River Trail and the tragic tale of the Lost Patrol captivate travellers journeying down the Wind River corridor.

First Nation subsistence harvesting, hunting and active fish camps on the Peel Plateau provide tangible links to Yukon's past. Tetlit and Northern Tutchone people who join wilderness journeys in the region as guides, guests and travel companions, or meet travellers in the Lower Peel, make a significant contribution to the experience with their stories, perspective and local knowledge.

### **Horse trails, other human-made resources**

Networks of horse trails were established throughout the Peel decades ago for outfitting, and these trails are increasingly being used for horsepacking trips and

destination hiking. Though the trails were built in areas that serve the needs and clients of outfitters, they similarly serve the needs of other wilderness travellers in the region. Accessible, attractive and hikeable trails are an invaluable wilderness tourism asset that can create exciting new opportunities in the Peel.

As river or land-based opportunities continue to develop in the region, this trail network could become very valuable with the potential for trail linkages between high value areas used for tourism and recreation. Trail infrastructure is extensive in the upper Snake, Bonnet Plume, Wind and Hart watersheds, with some in the upper Blackstone and few trails in the lower Blackstone and Hart. The region also has many established campsites.

## ***Road-accessible Resources***

### **Dempster Highway**

The Dempster Highway is a unique touring route that is considered an attraction itself. Renowned for crossing the Arctic Circle, the highway has an international reputation as one of the last wilderness highways in North America. The Dempster provides road access to spectacular and unique subarctic landscapes and wildlife, with extensive viewsapes and hiking opportunities.

Dempster travellers participate in multiple highway-based activities including hiking, nature walks, photography, birdwatching, camping, mountain biking and wildlife viewing. The road provides access to two Peel tributaries and the western backcountry of the Peel watershed.

Of particular interest is that the Dempster enables viewing and study of tundra landscapes, arctic ecology, birds and wildlife that are not accessible by road elsewhere in Canada. These natural features, in combination with the cultural experiences and history of the local First Nations and other intriguing themes and stories (eg. Lost Patrol, construction of the Dempster, exploration and fur trade, Mad Trapper), are a rich recipe for learning tours, cultural tours and other value-added tourism products.

The Dempster passes through three land use planning regions, but from a traveler's perspective, the highway is viewed as a whole. The Dempster's signature viewsapes – mountain ranges and open expanses of colourful subarctic tundra – draw thousands of visitors each year up the highway. Cooperative efforts are needed to protect and manage these viewsapes along the highway to ensure that the values that attract visitors are maintained.

## **Road-accessible wilderness rivers**

### **Blackstone River**

Beginning in the subarctic tundra plains of the Blackstone Uplands, the Blackstone River crosses the Dempster Highway north of Tombstone Park and weaves along the east side of the highway into the Ogilvie Mountains. The

Blackstone headwaters are renowned for excellent birdwatching and wildlife viewing, including large groups of wintering Porcupine caribou. Highway travellers enjoy river views and opportunities to fish and explore along its banks.

Eroding slopes, canyons and castellations are among the unique features of a canoe trip on the Blackstone, as well as significant fossil finds. It's a clear and swift river all the way to the confluence with the Ogilvie, with class I to II canoeing through braided, rocky shallows surrounded by outstanding scenery. The upper sections near the highway are used regularly, and because the Blackstone is road-accessible, it may become more popular as the cost of air access rises. Rather than continue to the Peel and the Aberdeen Canyon portage, it is possible to line canoes about 40 km up the Ogilvie to return to the Dempster.

### Ogilvie River

Distinctive landforms resulting from the absence of glaciation are a major feature of the mountains lining the Ogilvie River. The river crosses the Dempster Highway three times over a distance of 50 km in an area of particularly striking scenery and unusual landforms. Special natural features of this area include rare butterflies and moths, denning wildlife and nesting falcons, and extensive rock formations like those at Sapper Hill near the Engineer Creek campground.

The Ogilvie offers several possibilities for short and long canoe trips. Much of the river has class II to III canoeing, though sections upstream from the highway can be challenging. Because of its proximity to the road and multiple access points, most canoeists do one or two-day trips on the Ogilvie starting from the Ogilvie River bridge to points further north on the Dempster. The long journey down the Ogilvie to the Peel is a challenging, scenic canoe trip that involves a portage around Aberdeen Canyon.

### **Hart River Winter Road**

The Hart River Road starts near North Fork Pass and heads 100 km east to a mineral exploration site abandoned in the late 1960s. Developed for winter use only, the road has continued to be accessed for motorized use by ATVs to support hunting, recreational snowmobiles and some limited 4-wheel drive access. The road is a dirt trail with a fairly level grade, good vistas and easy walking that provides access to lands east of Tombstone Park. Hikers sometimes see Hart River caribou from the road, as well as sheep on nearby peaks.

### **Physical features**

The western part of the watershed is the Ogilvie Mountains and the headwaters of the Peel, Hart, Blackstone and Ogilvie Rivers. The Ogilvies feature both glaciated and unglaciated landscapes, with rugged mountains, talus slopes and rolling tundra uplands in the north, and rolling sedimentary hills with bare scree slopes and dramatic erosion features in the south.

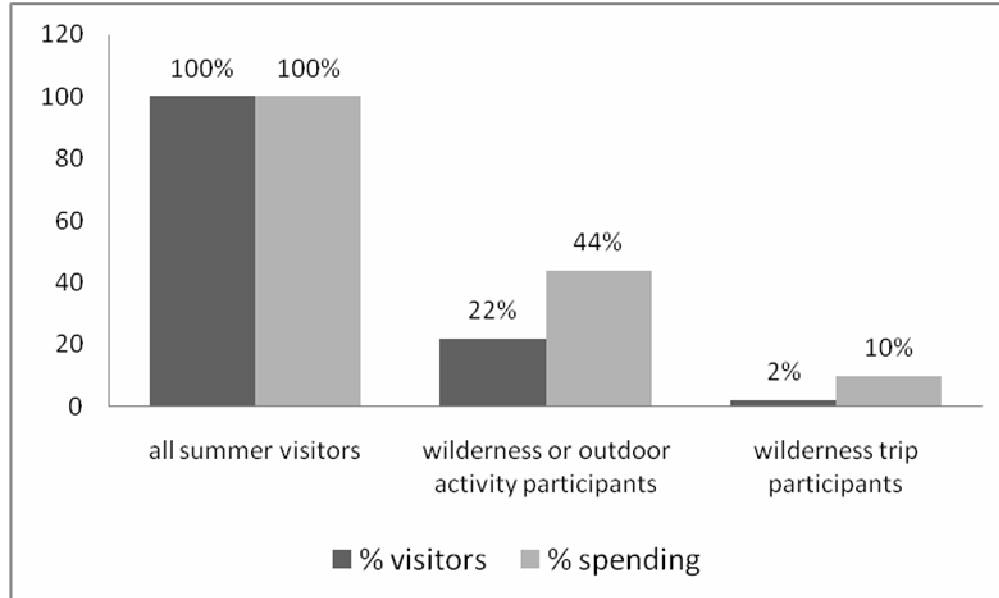
## 5.0 Yukon's Wilderness Tourism Sector

### *Industry Overview*

Over the past 40 years, wilderness tourism has developed into one of the most organized and progressive sectors of Yukon's tourism industry. Growth in Yukon's wilderness tourism sector is steady, products are expanding, and the season is becoming year-round. The Yukon is now one of the world's pre-eminent wilderness destinations. Each year, thousands of guided and self-guided travellers come here — mainly from Canada, the United States and Europe — for wilderness adventures and to experience Yukon's outdoors, wildlife, cultural history and natural phenomena.

The wilderness tourism sector is a significant contributor to the Yukon's economy. In 2004, about 57,000 of Yukon's 251,704 summer visitors participated in a wilderness or outdoor activity and spent almost \$34 million during their Yukon visit. Though they represented 22 per cent of all visitation, visitors who participated in wilderness experiences accounted for 44 per cent of all visitor spending. Visitors who included wilderness or outdoor activities stayed longer and spent more, and they reported a very high level (93 per cent) of value-for-money satisfaction. (2004 Yukon Visitor Exit Survey)

**Figure 1: 2004 summer wilderness/outdoor visitor spending**



Licensed wilderness tourism operators guide and accommodate tourists on the land and water year round and rely on the Yukon's large wilderness areas to maintain their livelihood. Of the 81 operators licensed in 2004, over 75 per cent were Yukon-based and employed up to 400 staff annually. About six Yukon companies rent equipment – mostly canoes and kayaks – to self-guided

travellers. Operators guided over 35,000 clients for 45,000 user days in 2004. (Wilderness Tourism Licensing Act Trip and Rental Report data)

Known for beautiful scenery and vast open spaces, the Yukon provides visitors with opportunities for adventure and challenge and the chance to unwind surrounded by pristine wilderness. Yukon's wilderness has a reputation for providing outstanding adventure activities. Yukon rivers provide some of North America's longest wilderness canoe trips, hikers and horseback riders look forward to uncrowded trails, and most wilderness travellers expect to see wildlife and are rarely disappointed.

Wilderness landscapes are the foundation of the sector, and the quality of Yukon's wilderness is an important factor for travellers choosing the Yukon as a wilderness destination. Less tangible but important wilderness qualities are the freedom to relax and reconnect with nature. Wilderness tourists also identify with the Klondike Gold Rush and want to learn about First Nations cultural experiences and Yukon's natural, cultural and ancient history.

Iconic natural features also draw visitors to experience the Yukon wilderness. Travellers come to view the jagged ridges of Tombstone Park and colourful fall tundra along the Dempster Highway, find unparalleled wilderness in the Peel River watershed and Kluane National Park, explore the deep blue waterways of the Southern Lakes and experience spectacular winter mountainscapes.

Yukon has unique market advantages over other remaining wilderness regions in the world. The territory is readily accessible by air and road, yet few places are so pristine and remote and offer so many adventurous landscapes.

Yukon also has a progressive and well-planned wilderness tourism licensing regime. The Wilderness Tourism Licensing Act is a conservation management and public safety tool, and it is also responsive to the demands of a discerning market seeking high-quality wilderness experiences. Few other jurisdictions in Canada have such a comprehensive licensing system for wilderness tourism operators outside of parks. Yukon's wilderness tourism operators have a reputation as skilled and knowledgeable professionals who deliver outstanding wilderness activities throughout the territory.

As wilderness areas diminish worldwide and the pace of daily life continues to quicken, travellers increasingly seek destinations that can offer active experiences in high-quality wilderness, surrounded by inspiring scenery, nature and wildlife. More travellers are also looking for environmentally responsible destinations.

### ***Canoeing and Rafting***

River travel was the mainstay of Yukon's commercial wilderness travel during the early years and remains so today. The territory has over 70 canoeing rivers, most

offering one to seven-day trips often passing near communities, roads, historic sites and other signs of development, and some offering wilderness journeys up to three weeks long.

A variety of outdoor activities are an important part of multi-day wilderness river trips. Operators incorporate day hiking, wildlife viewing, birdwatching, historic sites, photography, fishing and other activities into the river itinerary.

Many of the territory’s wilderness canoe rivers are in mountain country, an unusual and appealing Yukon feature because mountain rivers are typically whitewater class IV or higher, with a fast gradient, difficult whitewater and suitable only for covered canoes, rafts or kayaks. These key characteristics – longer trip duration, pristine wilderness and canoeable mountain rivers – are present in the six tributaries of the Peel.

A standard format for commercially guided, fly-in canoe trips emerged in the Yukon based on the capacity of a Single Otter floatplane with canoes nested and strapped on as exterior loads. One load was a 3-canoe party (5 clients and 1 guide), and two loads was a 6-canoe party (10 clients with 2 guides). Using this format, the Peel River and the Upper Liard became economically attractive for guided canoe trips. Rafting was established on whitewater rivers that were too difficult for canoes (e.g. Tatshenshini, Alsek, Firth) and on some canoeable rivers that attract clients who prefer the comfort of raft travel (e.g. the Peel tributaries).

Many Yukon wilderness travel companies have focused on economical and road-accessible rivers (e.g. Yukon, Teslin, Big Salmon, South Macmillan), and more specialized companies have featured fly-in trips (e.g. Hess, Coal, Wolf, Peel). Most guided and self-guided canoeing trips take place on the Yukon River and its major tributaries, the Big Salmon and the Teslin, with many trips ending at Dawson City. Other important wilderness canoe rivers include the Snake, Bonnet Plume, Wind and Hart in the Peel River basin, the Beaver and Hess tributaries of the Stewart River, the South Macmillan and Ross Rivers in the Pelly basin, the Wolf and Nisutlin tributaries of the Teslin, and the Coal and Beaver tributaries of the Liard. Occasional trips occur throughout the Yukon on rivers such as the Porcupine and Yusezyu.

**Table 1: Yukon-wide guided canoeing clients 1999-2006**

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Canoeing	860	730	576	1,356	2,115	1,535	826*	555*

*\*Several operators with high client numbers did not operate in 2005 and 2006*

### **Highway Touring**

Endowed with over 4,000 km of well-maintained highways and roads, a scenic network of communities and an ever-changing backdrop of wilderness landscapes, Yukon ranks with Alaska as one of the great road-touring regions in

North America. Most of Yukon's 300,000 annual visitors take to the road in a vehicle to explore the territory, whether coming north on the Alaska or Stewart-Cassiar highways or flying to the Yukon and touring in a rental RV or car.

While many Yukon highways are "pass-through" routes to neighbouring jurisdictions, the Dempster Highway is unique as a top road touring destination. Many travellers come to the Yukon specifically to drive the Dempster, valuing it for exceptional mountain scenery, wildlife viewing, accessible wilderness, adventure experiences, and the very unusual opportunity to cross the Arctic Circle and drive through unspoiled subarctic tundra and boreal landscapes.

## **Markets**

Tourism is a 'market-driven' industry. Product development is guided by what current and future visitors want to see, do and experience. Tourism development is also guided by the needs and priorities of the people who live in the region. Industry and governments use research and market intelligence to identify product development opportunities that match market demand and meet local interests and priorities.

The wilderness tourism sector's target markets are visitors who have the interest, time, disposable income and motivation to choose the Yukon as a wilderness destination. Wilderness adventure could be their main activity, or an important part of their Yukon visit. These visitors are looking for challenging trips in high-quality wilderness with skilled guides as well as more accessible, leisurely wilderness activities. They are drawn to parks and protected areas in environmentally responsible destinations, and they want to have hands-on learning and experiential journeys.

## **Target Segments**

Recent Department of Tourism and Culture research identified two priority tourism market segments for the Yukon: Adventure Changers and Scenic Outdoor Travellers. While traditional highway segments like RV and coach/group tour travellers will likely remain Yukon's largest markets, adventure changers and scenic outdoor travellers have more potential for growth and provide a higher return-on-investment.

Adventure Changers are active and want to travel to places that offer a range of wilderness and adventure travel activities. Their primary motivation is to escape and have a physically demanding experience in the wilderness. Visitors who seek wilderness experiences in the Peel Watershed are Adventure Changers. Along with a handful of other Yukon wilderness destinations (i.e. Kluane, Tombstone, Ivvavik), trips in the Peel are a particularly strong fit for these markets.

Scenic Outdoor Travellers seek a beautiful outdoor destination where they can relax. They are interested in local history, traditions and real, down-to-earth

experiences and are more comfortable with leisurely wilderness experiences. While this segment is probably not interested in a remote Peel canoeing trip, they may be interested in fixed-base (i.e. lodge) wilderness experiences in a beautiful setting. Scenic Outdoor Travellers are interested in the scenery, wildlife viewing and roadside experiences of the Dempster Highway.

The top interests of both segments include wilderness adventure trips and activities like hiking, camping, canoeing, rafting and kayaking. Many are interested in visiting places few others have seen, and they want to reconnect with nature and learn about First Nations culture. Both segments express a strong attraction to natural phenomena like northern lights and the midnight sun.

### **Geographic Markets**

Yukon's three primary geographic markets are the Canada, the U.S. and Europe (Germany and U.K.). Secondary markets for wilderness tourism include Australia, Japan and France.

Recent market research reveals several promising trends. In the U.S., there is increasing interest in outdoor activities, nature and self-improvement, and 'unspoiled wilderness' appeals to environmentally-aware travellers. Growth in domestic travel is strong, with Yukon opportunities to build on awareness generated through the 2007 Canada Winter Games in Whitehorse. While worldwide tourism is growing at four per cent, adventure/eco-tourism is growing at about 10 per cent per year.

Meanwhile, environmentally responsible destinations and tourism products are gaining importance in decision making, particularly among Europeans. Visitors are looking for beautiful scenery, connection with nature, stress-release and rejuvenation, and they are interested in parks and wildlife.

### **Economic Profile**

A vital part of the Yukon economy, tourism is the territory's largest private sector employer. About 80 per cent of all Yukon employees work for businesses that report some tourism revenue. In 2000, 890 Yukon businesses reported revenue generated from tourism and 1,900 jobs were directly dependent on tourism. In 2000, it was estimated that \$164 million in revenue was directly attributable to non-resident tourism.

Businesses in all Yukon communities feel the impact of tourism in the economy. Most Yukon tourism businesses are small, localized businesses that provide stability, diversification and job creation, throughout the territory.

The wilderness tourism sector is a strong contributor to the Yukon economy. Visitors who included a wilderness or outdoor activity on their Yukon trip comprised less than one-quarter of all Yukon tourists, yet they represented almost half of all tourism spending in the territory (\$34 million). Wilderness



travellers stayed longer and spent more, and they reported a very high level (93 per cent) of value-for-money satisfaction. Expenditures were split fairly evenly between Canadians (32 per cent of total spending), Americans (32 per cent) and overseas visitors (36 per cent). (2004 Yukon Visitor Exit Survey).

The wilderness tourism sector includes business operators, guides, support staff, rental outfits and travel professionals. In addition to Yukoners, the sector employs Canadians and other nationalities and serves an international clientele.

Wilderness tourism benefits almost every sector of the economy including hotels and restaurants, airlines, media and advertising, vehicle rentals and gas stations, supermarkets, air charter companies, local entertainment, artists, craftspeople and retail stores.

**Table 2: 2004 Yukon visitor characteristics, activities and spending**

	A. All Yukon summer visitors in 2004	B. Wilderness or outdoor 'participants' (sub-group of A)	C. Wilderness adventure 'travellers' (sub-group of B)
Visitors	251,704	56,652 22% of all visitors	5,119 2% of all visitors
Origin	77% US (32% Ak) 14% Canada (28%BC; 22% Ont.) 9% other countries (31% Germany)	54% US 32% Ak 27% Canada (10% each Ont; BC; AB) 19% other countries (50% Germany)	43% US 32% Canada 25% other
Length of stay	24% less than 1 night 57% 1 – 5 nights 18% over 5 nights	62% 1 – 5 nights 38% over 5 nights	38% 1 – 5 nights 62% over 5 nights
Primary destination	17% Yukon	34% Yukon	58% Yukon
Wilderness/ Outdoor Activities	22% w/outdoor wildlife/bird viewing walking/hiking fishing	37% w/outdoor wildlife/bird viewing walking/hiking fishing	43% w/outdoor wildlife/bird viewing walking/hiking canoeing/rafting
Guided	Not available	18% Yes 71% No	51% Yes 49% No
Spending	\$75.8 million \$396 per visitor party \$77 per day	\$33.9 million \$83 per day 44% of all visitor spending	\$4.9 million \$1,536 per visitor party 6.5% of all visitor spending
Enjoyment	80% rated visit as 7 out of 10 or better	80% rated visit 8 out of 10 or better	95% rated trip as 7 out of 10 or better
Value	70% felt they received value for money	93% felt they received value for money	92% felt they received value for money
Experience Sought/found	scenery 20%/30% wildlife 15%/14% outdoor 6%/5%	scenery 25%/25% wildlife 15%/14% outdoor 10%/10%	
Images before trip	40% scenery 17% wildlife 7% history	41% scenery 9% wildlife 11% history	
Images 1 year later	41% scenery 9% wildlife 7% history	40% scenery 9% wildlife 5% natural attractions	

(Source: 2004 Yukon Visitor Exit Survey).

## 6.0 Tourism in the Peel

Current tourism activities in the Peel generally fall into three categories:

- Multi-day fly-in wilderness trips in the Snake, Bonnet Plume, Wind and Hart watersheds (mainly canoeing, and also rafting, backpacking and horsepacking, with associated activities including hiking, wildlife viewing, nature study, photography and fishing);
- Day and multi-day hiking, dog mushing, horsepacking and other roadside activities (wildlife viewing, nature study, photography, fishing) in road-accessible front country and backcountry areas along the Dempster Highway; and
- Day and multi-day canoeing on road-accessible rivers (Blackstone and Ogilvie rivers) along the Dempster Highway, with associated activities.

### *Fly-in Wilderness Trips*

Guided and self-guided river trips in the Peel watershed have grown steadily since 1999. The Snake is the most popular of the Peel Basin canoe routes, and the Wind is the most technically easy and least costly to fly into. The Bonnet Plume has the most difficult whitewater and is more popular with experienced self-guided canoeists than with commercially guided parties. Recently, the Hart, Blackstone and Ogilvie rivers (latter two accessible from the Dempster Highway) have become more popular among paddlers.

Most operators in the Peel are Yukon-based and use Whitehorse and local suppliers for canoes, supplies and equipment, air transport, pre- and post-trip accommodation and activities. Twelve- to 20-day trips on these rivers incorporate adventure, challenge and learning in a remote wilderness setting. Several wilderness schools operate extended field-based learning tourism packages in the Peel Basin. Most operators, including those who offer trips on other Yukon rivers, consider Snake, Bonnet Plume, Wind and Hart trips as their 'top of the line' Yukon river tours.

About six Yukon companies rent equipment, provide air access and expedite for self-guided parties travelling in the area. Most of the region's remote rivers are accessed by air from Mayo. Other air access points include Inuvik, Whitehorse and Norman Wells. Other wilderness tourism activities in the area include multi-day horseback riding, backpacking and sport fishing. To date there has been little commercially guided hiking; however, a fair number of self-guided hiking trips occur in the upper watershed. Backcountry winter activities like skiing and snowmobiling are small-scale and infrequent.

Wilderness tourism operators build their products around many natural features, such as a river corridor, wildlife and beautiful campsites. However, remoteness and the exceptional quality of the Peel's wild and undeveloped landscapes are the foundation of tourism activity in the region. Compared to the rest of North

America or the densely populated continents of Europe or Asia, the Yukon is the kind of destination most people only dream about visiting. For an increasing number of travellers, the unroaded, wild landscape of the Peel Watershed is the ultimate fly-in wilderness destination.

### **Exceptionally high-value river trips**

Rivers that flow through mountain country and offer moderate grade II or III canoeable water are uncommon. Mountain rivers typically have a steep gradient and difficult whitewater and are often suitable only for covered canoes, rafts or kayaks. Canoeing rivers that flow through high-quality wilderness areas and offer opportunities for expedition-length canoe trips are also unique.

Wilderness canoe trips coupled with extensive opportunities for alpine hiking are also a rare combination. Furthermore, it is rare that a region the size of the Peel Watershed hosts not one or two, but half a dozen mountain rivers that offer exceptional canoeing and hiking opportunities. In some ways the Peel and its six tributaries are alike, but in many ways these rivers are surprisingly different from each other. These differences often draw visitors and recreational paddlers back to the Peel to explore a new river route. The varying landscapes, features and levels of paddling difficulty also give wilderness tourism operators a unique opportunity to sell clients a future trip on a different Peel tributary.

Together, the tributaries of the Peel are a remarkable package of immeasurable value to wilderness tourism. They have an international reputation for outstanding wilderness adventures and offer a wide range of activities, scenery and challenge. Natural features include dramatic mountains, picturesque vistas, waterfalls, alpine lakes and glacial features. These river trips are not 'just another paddle'—they also feature hiking, wildlife viewing, fishing, photography, nature study and interpretation in a remote and beautiful setting.

### **Strong market demand**

From a tourism marketing perspective, the Peel landscape has icon value. The mountain and river scenery is breathtaking, and the region has some of the Yukon's most special features. This distinctive landscape is capable of attracting not only wilderness adventure travellers who seek a remote experience in the Peel, but also capturing the interest of others who identify with the landscape. The Peel's icon value is evidenced by frequent use of panoramic photographs of the Snake River valley featured in a variety of tourism marketing campaigns in recent years.

Peel Watershed trips offer very high 'badge value' to tourists. Today's wilderness adventure travellers are discerning. They care about the environment, and they want to travel with knowledgeable guides. They want to travel to places less visited by others and they want to have rare and special experiences. They hope to return home personally and culturally enriched, with lasting memories of thrilling adventures, and the feeling of having reconnected with nature. If they are

planning a trip in the Peel, they are likely already aware of the very high natural values in the Peel Watershed.

Wilderness operators in the Peel offer very high quality, competitive wilderness tourism products for specialized, reachable niche markets. The sustainability of wilderness tourism in the region depends on the continued integrity of the resource and its icon value.

### ***Dempster Highway***

The Dempster Highway is more than a road—it is a world-famous tourism attraction and adventure drive enjoyed by thousands of travellers each year. This 750 km gravel road is Canada's only highway to the Arctic. The Dempster provides access to rivers and backcountry along the western portion of the Peel Watershed from Tombstone Park to the Richardson Mountains near the Northwest Territories border.

Dempster Highway travel is mainly independent motorists touring in RVs or cars, and tour operators offer guided highway tours in vans and buses. Travellers stay in campgrounds along the highway and in Dawson City, Eagle Plains and the Mackenzie Delta communities. They enjoy nature study, wildlife viewing, birdwatching, photography and learning about the First Nations, exploration and fur trade, and NWMP history of the area.

Almost the entire length of the highway traverses wild open landscapes with little sign of human activity beyond the highway corridor. Key natural features include mountain ranges, rivers and lakes, arctic and subarctic tundra that changes colour in late summer, and excellent opportunities for wildlife viewing. Northern culture and history are also important themes for visitors.

North of Eagle Plains, the Dempster crosses the Arctic Circle, an important destination for many travellers. Approximately 8,000 people travel the Dempster Highway within the Peel Watershed (to Eagle Plains or beyond) between May and September.

## 7.0 Recreation in the Peel

The recreation significance of the Peel River is outstanding scenic canoe routes with various levels of difficulty along the Snake, Bonnet Plume, Wind, Hart and Blackstone rivers, with high quality hiking and wildlife viewing opportunities in headwater areas. The Werneckes are unusual and rugged mountains interspersed by accessible valley routes with important wildlife habitats. These mountains have high scenic values suitable for a wide range of wilderness recreation activities, and they currently attract and receive recreational use for canoeing, backpacking, nature appreciation and wildlife viewing. The Dempster corridor offers excellent landscape viewing and high wildlife values.

Very little data is available about recreational use in the Peel Watershed. However, it is known that many Yukoners choose to recreate in the region, enjoying extended canoeing and hiking trips, wintertime activities like snowmobiling and skiing, activities like fishing, hunting and nature study, and Dempster Highway touring. The Peel also incorporates a range of key recreation values of interest to residents seeking primitive recreational opportunities, including diversity of opportunity, challenge, and the importance of self-reliance in the absence of facilities.

It is also known that Yukoners place a very high value on recreational opportunities. The *Importance of Nature to Canadians* (2000) report assessing the social and economic value of nature-related activities to Canadians showed that Yukon residents spent \$1,298 on outdoor activities in natural areas, almost twice the national average (\$704) and well above the next-highest provinces (BC \$902; AB \$836 ). Expenditures on wildlife viewing is even more pronounced, with Yukon residents spending \$1,494 per person compared to a Canadian average of \$297.

Though recreational use data is scant, there is good understanding of the recreation features and values of the Peel region. In 1988, the Department of Renewable Resources (Environment) completed a *Recreation Features Inventory for Northern Yukon*, a vast area of the territory (260,000 km<sup>2</sup>) between Beaver Creek, Carmacks and the North Canal Road in the south to the edge of Ivvavik National Park in the north. The study built on recreation features mapping conducted across Southern Yukon in 1986, 1987 and 1988, providing a complete picture of recreation features for the entire Yukon outside national parks. In the Peel, many of these features are also highly valued by wilderness tourism operators, hunting outfitters, First Nations, ecologists, conservation organizations and others.

## 8.0 Regional Tourism and Recreation Data

Under the Wilderness Tourism Licensing Act, the Yukon Department of Environment has collected eight years of trip data from the Peel tributaries. Table 3 summarizes all *guided and canoe rental activity* in the Peel Watershed.

**Table 3: All Peel Watershed: 1999 – 2006**

	Guided Trips			Canoe Rental Clients	
	Operators	Clients	User days	Clients	User days
1999	6	49	540	20	340
2000	4	27	344	36	616
2001	6	60	719	37	639
2002	10	98	1,434	26	486
2003	11	157	1,949	54	1,216
2004	7	124	1,792	20	316
2005	8	129	1,697	83	1,062
2006	10	84	1,131	73	1,228

Most trips occurred on the Snake and Wind rivers—tables 4 and 5 break down *guided trip and rental data* from these two rivers. A few operators offered trips on the Hart and Bonnet Plume rivers, and the Ogilvie and Blackstone rivers tended to attract recreational paddlers (Yukoners) and self-guided tourists. Almost all canoe rentals are by self-guided non-residents.

However, patterns of use can be expected to change as markets (paddlers' preferences) shift and the cost of air charters continues to rise. Canoe rental data shows that self-guided river travel, using rental equipment, could meet or exceed guided river travel in the coming years.

### **Wilderness Tourism Licensing Act**

Administered by the Department of Environment Parks Branch, the WTLA requires licensed operators and businesses that guide clients and rent equipment for wilderness tourism activities (e.g. canoes, kayaks, motorboats) to report their trips and rentals at the end of each summer and winter season. Statistical information from trip and rental reports is used to track the type, location and level of wilderness tourism activity and help monitor the sector's impact on Yukon's environment and economy. Any identifying information about a business remains confidential. This means that in locations where fewer than three operators conduct tourism activities, data on those activities cannot be presented (shown as N/A).

**Table 4: Snake River: 1999 – 2006**

	Guided Trips			Canoe Rental Clients		
	Operators	Clients	User days	Canoe rental operators	Canoe rental clients	Canoe rental client user days
1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2000	3	19	259	3	26	424
2001	4	31	394	3	28	470
2002	4	30	438	3	6	124
2003	5	63	709	3	24	618
2004	4	30	384	NA	NA	NA
2005	4	35	525	3	39	528
2006	3	20	274	3	29	389

**Table 5: Wind River: 1999 – 2006**

	Guided Trips			Canoe Rental Clients		
	Operators	Clients	User days	Canoe rental operators	Canoe rental clients	Canoe rental client user days
1999	4	22	266	NA	NA	NA
2000	NA	NA	NA	4	8	156
2001	3	14	168	NA	NA	NA
2002	6	53	718	3	10	152
2003	3	23	399	3	18	304
2004	4	47	585	NA	NA	NA
2005	3	15	188	3	33	426
2006	7	34	377	6	73	828

WTLA data is an accurate reflection of predominantly non-resident (tourist) travel in the Peel, capturing both travellers on guided trips and self-guided tourists who rented equipment for their journey.

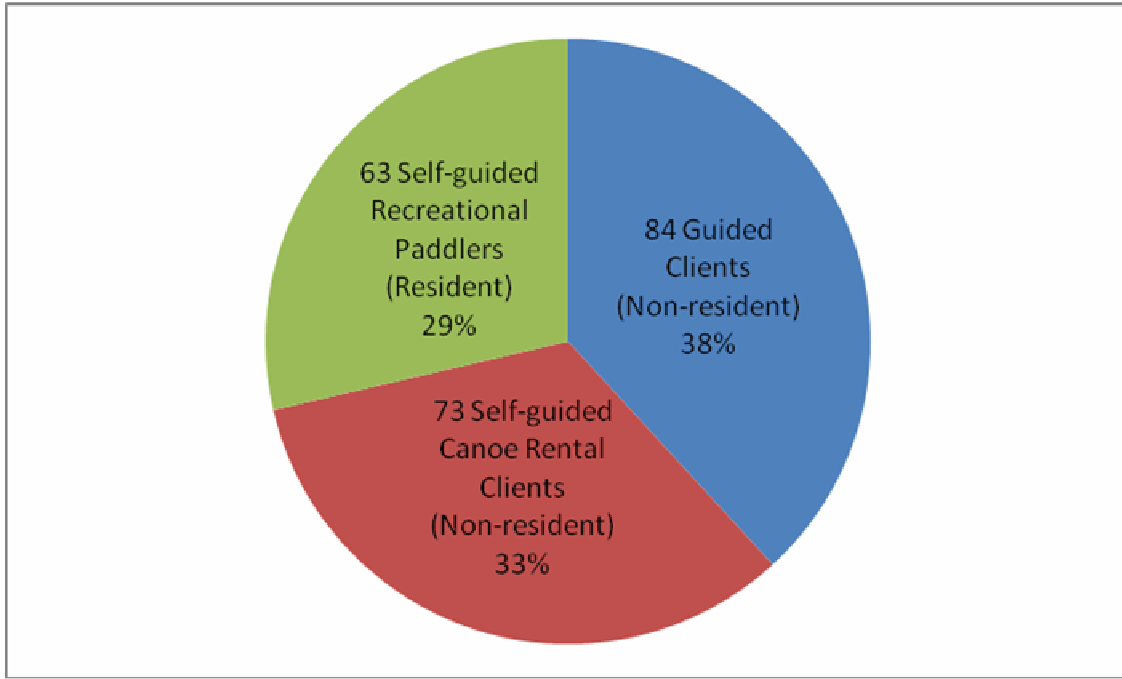
The Peel watershed is important to many Yukon residents who enjoy spectacular recreation opportunities in the area. It's known that Yukoners paddle the Peel tributaries every summer, often returning in subsequent years to experience other rivers in the watershed (see Recreation section). There is no official mechanism to count these recreational travellers.

To aid in the compiling of this report and present a more complete picture of tourist and recreational use in the Peel, passenger numbers and origins for 2007 were obtained from air charter companies operating in the Peel Watershed. Based on 2007 air charter and WTLA data there were 84 guided tourists, 73 self-guided tourists and 63 recreational paddlers (mostly Yukoners) who accessed



remote Peel watershed rivers that year. Figure 1 shows the proportion of non-resident (guided and self-guided) to resident paddlers in the Peel.

**Figure 2: Tourist and recreational paddlers on remote Peel Watershed rivers, 2007**



In terms of employment, between six and 11 wilderness tourism operators that ran river trips in the Peel from 2001 to 2006 employed between 16 and 29 guides each summer in the Peel.

Tables 6 and 7 show estimated expenditures for guided and self-guided tourists on remote rivers in the Peel Watershed. While this data presents a clearer picture of tourism spending in the watershed, these estimates are conservative and incomplete. Given the limited information and data available, we cannot reliably estimate recreational and tourist spending for the Peel Watershed as a whole. Several important conditions apply when evaluating these tables:

- For guided and self-guided tourists, the data does not include pre- and post-trip spending on souvenirs, gear and clothing, and it doesn't include any Yukon travel before or after their Peel trip. Operators indicate this spending can be substantial, but there's no way to estimate it.
- The data does not include spending by self-guided recreational paddlers (mostly Yukoners), which would include air charter, ground transport, pre- and post-trip accommodation, canoes, gear and food. Air charter cost is the only reliable data available—other costs are too variable to estimate. Self-guided recreational paddlers account for approximately one-third of all paddlers on the remote tributaries of the Peel.

- The data does not include self-guided and recreational spending for river, hiking and winter trips accessed from the Dempster Highway or elsewhere into the region.
- The data is an estimate of in-Yukon *direct spending* by guided and self-guided tourists who paddled remote Peel Watershed rivers—it does not represent their *economic value*. For example, the data does not include air or ground access to the Yukon, economic spin-offs, employment earnings and many other variables that contribute to economic value.

The following definitions apply to tables 6 and 7:

Guided Clients

Number of Users: Total number of guided clients

Number of User Days: Total number of user days

Cost per day: Average cost per day based on average trip cost divided by average number of user days

Total Trip Spend: Number of user days multiplied by cost per day

Average Hotel Cost: Average per night hotel cost

Average Hotel Spend: Average hotel cost multiplied by 3 nights and divided by 2 (based on shared accommodation)

Total Hotel Spend: Average hotel spend multiplied by number of users

Self Guided Clients

Number of Users: Total number of self guided clients

Air Charter from Mayo: Based on average cost air charter (\$6,000) divided by 6 (average of 6 per group). Rate increases by 5% each year from 2001 - 2006.

Ground transport to Mayo: Average cost per person for ground transport between Whitehorse and Mayo

Canoe Rental: Cost of 2 week canoe rental divided by 2 (2 people per canoe)

Gear Rental: Cost of 2 gear rental for 2 weeks divided by 2 (2 people sharing gear)

Total Trip Spend: Number of users multiplied by the sum of air charter, ground transport, canoe rental and gear rental

Average Hotel Cost: Average per night hotel cost

Average Hotel Spend: Average hotel cost multiplied by 3 nights and divided by 2 (based on shared accommodation)

Total Hotel Spend: Average hotel spend multiplied by number of users

**Table 6: Estimated tourist expenditures in the Peel, 2001 – 2006**

<b>Total Peel 2001 - 2006</b>	
<b>All Travelers</b>	
Number of Users	938
Total Trip Spend	\$3,471,540
Total Hotel Spend	\$196,042
<b>TOTAL SPEND</b>	<b>\$3,667,582</b>

**Table 7: Est. guided and self-guided tourist expenditures, 2001 – 2006**

Total Peel 2001-2006 - Guided Clients							
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2001-2006
Number of Users	60	98	157	124	122	84	645
Number of User Days	719	1434	1949	1792	1571	1131	8596
Cost per day	\$350	\$350	\$350	\$350	\$350	\$350	\$350
Total Trip Spend	\$251,650	\$501,900	\$682,150	\$627,200	\$549,850	\$395,850	\$3,008,600
Average Hotel Cost	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139
Average Hotel Spend	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209
Total Hotel Spend	\$12,540	\$20,482	\$32,813	\$25,916	\$25,498	\$17,556	\$134,805
<b>TOTAL SPEND</b>	<b>\$264,190</b>	<b>\$522,382</b>	<b>\$714,963</b>	<b>\$653,116</b>	<b>\$575,348</b>	<b>\$413,406</b>	<b>\$3,143,405</b>

Wind River 2001-2006 - Guided Clients							
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2001-2006
Number of Users	14	53	25	47	15	34	188
Number of User Days	168	718	373	585	188	337	2369
Cost per day	\$356	\$356	\$356	\$356	\$356	\$356	\$356
Total Trip Spend	\$59,808	\$255,608	\$132,788	\$208,260	\$66,928	\$119,972	\$843,364
Average Hotel Cost	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139
Average Hotel Spend	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209
Total Hotel Spend	\$2,926	\$11,077	\$5,225	\$9,823	\$3,135	\$7,106	\$39,292
<b>TOTAL SPEND</b>	<b>\$62,734</b>	<b>\$266,685</b>	<b>\$138,013</b>	<b>\$218,083</b>	<b>\$70,063</b>	<b>\$127,078</b>	<b>\$882,656</b>

Snake River 2001-2006 - Guided Clients							
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2001-2006
Number of Users	31	22	63	30	35	20	201
Number of User Days	394	438	709	384	525	274	2724
Cost per day	\$308	\$308	\$308	\$308	\$308	\$308	\$308
Total Trip Spend	\$121,352	\$134,904	\$218,372	\$118,272	\$161,700	\$84,392	\$838,992
Average Hotel Cost	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139
Average Hotel Spend	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209
Total Hotel Spend	\$6,479	\$4,598	\$13,167	\$6,270	\$7,315	\$4,180	\$42,009
<b>TOTAL SPEND</b>	<b>\$127,831</b>	<b>\$139,502</b>	<b>\$231,539</b>	<b>\$124,542</b>	<b>\$169,015</b>	<b>\$88,572</b>	<b>\$881,001</b>

Total Peel 2001- 2006: Self-Guided Travellers							
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2001-2006
Number of Users	37	26	54	20	83	73	293
Air Charter from Mayo	\$750	\$800	\$850	\$900	\$950	\$1,000	\$875
Ground transport to Mayo	\$124	\$124	\$124	\$124	\$124	\$124	\$124
Canoe Rental	\$273	\$273	\$273	\$273	\$273	\$273	\$273
Gear Rental	\$308	\$308	\$308	\$308	\$308	\$308	\$308
Total Trip Spend	\$53,835	\$39,130	\$83,970	\$32,100	\$137,365	\$124,465	\$462,940
Average Hotel Cost	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139	\$139
Average Hotel Spend	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209	\$209
Total Hotel Spend	\$7,733	\$5,434	\$11,286	\$4,180	\$17,347	\$15,257	\$61,237
<b>TOTAL SPEND</b>	<b>\$61,568</b>	<b>\$44,564</b>	<b>\$95,256</b>	<b>\$36,280</b>	<b>\$154,712</b>	<b>\$139,722</b>	<b>\$524,177</b>

## Dempster Highway Touring

In the summer of 2004, just over 8000 tourists visited the North Yukon Tourism Region (including the northern portion of the Dempster Highway) – almost double the number who visited in 1994.

Most visitors (87%) were independent motorists touring in cars, trucks, vans or RVs. About five percent traveled by bus. Over half of North Yukon visitor parties were from Canada (54 per cent), and the rest were from the United States (28 per cent) and overseas (18 per cent). Most Canadian visitors came from Ontario (28 per cent), B.C. (26 per cent), NWT (17 per cent) and Alberta (13 per cent). The most frequently mentioned U.S. states of origin were Alaska, Texas, California, Florida and Missouri. The most frequently mentioned country of origin for overseas parties were Switzerland, France, Germany, Czech Republic, Italy and United Kingdom. (2004 Yukon Visitor Exit Survey).

These visitors enjoyed a range of outdoor and nature-based activities and many shared an interest in native culture and arts. Scenery was the most frequently mentioned motivator for visiting the region and the most positive aspect of visiting the North Yukon region. Visitors ranked wildlife as the third most positive aspect of their trip.

Currently, about ten mostly Yukon-based operators offer summer van and camping tours and several offer winter adventures. Activities include hiking, wildlife and bird viewing, nature study and photography.

Though a significant number of Dempster travellers complete the entire journey to Inuvik, many focus their explorations on the southern half of the highway between Tombstone Park and the Arctic Circle. Tombstone Campground and Eagle Plains Lodge are the two focal points for most commercial tourism activities. Though the vast majority of tourists on the Dempster pursue day activities within the highway corridor, some self-guided adventure travel parties hike in the Wright Pass area and ski or snowmobile in the western foothills of the Richardson Mountains.

In the past decade, there has been a growing interest in experiencing aboriginal cultures, learning about natural history and the environment, exploring interesting topics in history and participating in scientific research. These learning vacations need high-quality, authentic and interactive learning activities. The Dempster Highway presents excellent opportunities to develop products for these emerging markets, such as themed learning tours and short guided tours and interpretation of the landscape and culture with First Nation escorts.

## **9.0 Tourism and Recreation Potential**

The Peel Watershed (including the Ogilvie, Blackstone, Hart, Wind, Bonnet Plume and Snake rivers) is the Yukon's largest intact remote wilderness area, and the watershed is recognized as a world-class wilderness canoeing and ridge hiking destination. The wilderness tourism sector is well-established in the area, and the watershed is actively marketed as a wilderness destination.

With outstanding tourism values that support about 20 Yukon-based businesses that guide, transport and expedite guided and self-guided wilderness adventures, the Peel watershed has excellent potential for managed growth of wilderness adventure product, and the potential to add First Nation, learning travel and lodge-based products to the mix. These same values support outstanding recreation opportunities for Yukoners in the Peel watershed.

New and expanded tourism products in the Peel Watershed would increase tourism benefits for the wilderness tourism sector and create new economic opportunities and benefits for regional communities.

### ***Growth of existing product***

With effective management tools in place, there is considerable potential for sustainable growth of commercially guided river trips in the Peel watershed. This growth can come from increasing the number of trips and clients on more popular rivers (eg. Wind, Snake), delivering more commercial product on lesser-travelled rivers (eg. Hart, Bonnet Plume, Blackstone) and diversifying and attracting more niche river products (eg. extended educational expeditions, themed river trips).

To maintain the high quality experiences that are expected on river trips in the Peel, management tools are needed to manage and monitor environmental carrying capacity (examples: clean drinking water, garbage, wildlife impacts, campsite overuse) and social carrying capacity (examples: avoid sightings of other parties, minimize overflights). Management measures must apply to all river travellers, whether commercially guided tourists, self-guided tourists, or self-guided Yukoners, in order to protect the experience for all users.

### ***Lodge-based tourism***

The potential for sustainable remote lodge and cabin-based wilderness tourism in the Peel watershed is significant. An example might be a small fly-in lodge with a main building and/or cabins situated on an alpine lake. Primary activities could include hiking, birdwatching, fishing, photography and wildlife viewing. Another example might be a series of cabins strategically located along a hiking route for "hut to hut" hiking or skiing, which is a well-established product in Europe, the Canadian Rockies and New Zealand.

In addition to attracting new markets, lodge infrastructure can create opportunities for winter and shoulder season visitation. Lodges in neighbouring

destinations have successfully packaged 'off-season' products to extend the operating season and increase profitability. In the Yukon, these winter and shoulder season products include aurora viewing, dog sledding, skiing and wildlife viewing, all of which have good potential in the Peel.

### ***Destination alpine hiking***

Hiking and backpacking occurs throughout the Yukon, and while most parties are self-guided (both tourists and residents), guided trips are more common in remote and rugged areas like the Wernecke Mountains. Destination hiking usually involves remote positioning by air charter, and it often involves a stay at a backcountry lodge or cabin. The primary activity is backpacking, usually over days or weeks, on a one-way traverse or a return loop route.

In the Peel watershed destination hiking occurs in open, scenic and hikeable alpine valleys and ridges and along the well-established network of horse trails that crisscross the upper watershed. In recent years, more local recreational users have recognized the high quality off-river environment of the Peel, often choosing to travel into the mountainous upper watershed for overland backpacking trips. Future development of commercial hiking will depend on floatplane access, trail networks and some infrastructure (e.g. backcountry lodge, hut-to-hut, base camp).

### ***Winter tourism***

Wintertime tourism is growing throughout the Yukon. Primary activities are dogsledding, snowmobiling and aurora viewing as well as snowshoeing, backcountry skiing and ice fishing. Winter tourism activity has been low in the Peel, in large part due to its remote location and lack of land-based infrastructure, though more operators are developing winter products along the Dempster Highway. Remote accommodation is critical to the development of new winter product in remote parts of the Peel watershed.

Guided dog mushing is Yukon's primary winter activity. Multi-day dog mushing trip formats include camping expeditions, hut-to-hut itineraries and cabin-based trips. Some dogsledding operators already offer multi-day tours from the Dempster Highway, and there is promising demand for an expansion of these offerings.

### ***Niche products***

A promising type of tourism development in the Peel is operators that offer specialty products in new growth niches such as learning and cultural tourism. Opportunities include learning and themed tours in wilderness settings with activities like photography, birdwatching and learning about intact ecosystems.

The Dempster Highway offers ways to provide products—such as half and full-day learning and adventure tours—to tourists who travel by road. Experiencing aboriginal cultures, learning about natural history and the environment, exploring

interesting topics in history and participating in scientific research are gaining market share. Popular day adventure activities include hiking, snowmobiling and mountain biking in the Ogilvie and Richardson mountains. Wildlife viewing day tours are popular, and the Dempster is ideally located for birdwatching and caribou viewing (resident woodland caribou, migrating Porcupine herd). The highway traverses several traditional territories, presenting opportunities for cultural and historic-themed tours.

### ***Long-term opportunities***

As wilderness diminishes and the appeal of intact wilderness grows for many Yukoners and visitor markets, long-term opportunities will arise in regions like the Peel that remain wild and offer unique wilderness experiences. Rare experiences demand higher prices, and over the long-term these destinations will reap the rewards of careful stewardship and protection. These places will also become increasingly important to local residents who choose to live in the Yukon because of the proximity to special places like the Peel and the recreation opportunities they provide.

The more remote and the more pristine it is, the more a wilderness product can earn: for example, a Snake River trip sells for \$5,000 while a Big Salmon River trip of comparable length costs \$2,000. The more remote and pristine commercial lodges also command higher prices: in an Ontario valuation study, a fly-in lodge costs \$120/day and a drive-to lodge costs \$57/day. Furthermore, the presence of nearby resource developments reduced the value of a fly-in lodge by two-thirds.

New protected areas in the Peel are likely to contribute significantly to long-term opportunities in the region. Protected areas are important to wilderness tourism because they provide operators with certainty that high-quality wilderness landscapes will be maintained. Park designations can also increase the marketability of tourism products because visitors expect parks to contain special or significant features.

### ***Recreation Potential***

The *Recreation Features Inventory for Northern Yukon* is the only comprehensive recreation inventory coverage available for the Yukon – and the Peel specifically – that identifies recreation potential. The main objective of the study was to provide recreation features mapping for use in integrated resource planning in the Yukon. The inventory identified recreation features (eg. angling, beach, canoeing, alpine-tundra, camping, viewing, wildlife) and assigned significance ratings for the recreation features (very high, high, low, very low). Approximately three per cent of the Yukon was evaluated at “very high”, 25 per cent at “high” and the remainder at “low” or “very low.”

The Upper Peel Watershed (MacKenzie Mountain ecoregion) exhibited the highest concentration of “high” significance potential to attract recreational activity

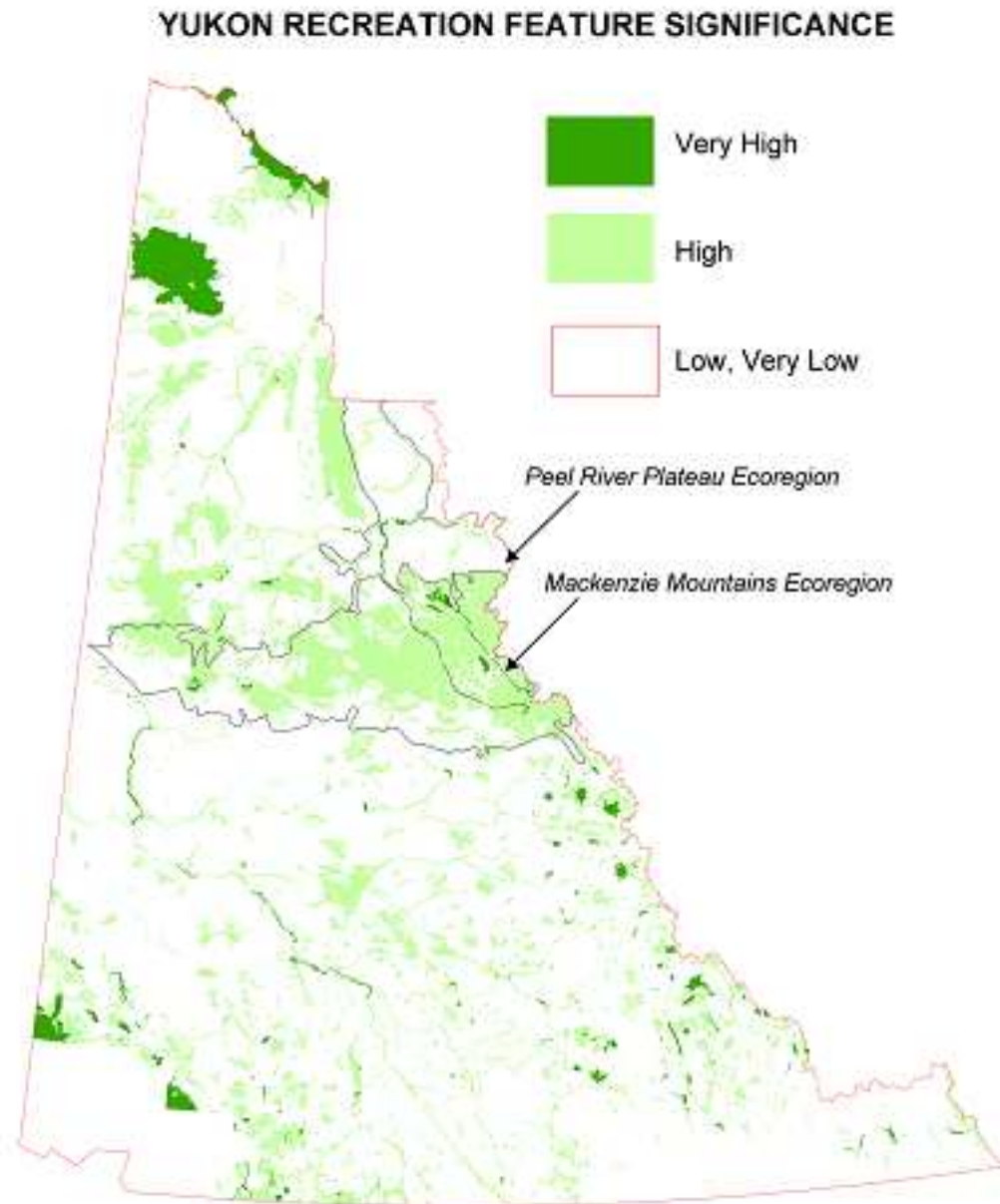
of anywhere in Yukon (see Figure 2). The concentration of “high” recreation feature significance in the Upper Peel is unmatched in the territory.

The Northern Yukon inventory short-lists nine outstanding recreation features, three of which lie within the Peel planning region: the Peel River and its tributaries, the Wernecke Mountains and the Dempster Corridor. Examples of other outstanding wilderness and recreation resources on the North Yukon list are the Yukon River, Herschel Island and the Coastal Plain, Tombstone and the Richardson Mountains.



### Figure 3: Yukon Recreation Feature Significance Map

The Yukon recreation feature significance map highlights the concentration of high significance features in the Upper Peel watershed and recreation potential for the region.



Key recreation features in the Peel planning region are listed by map sheet:

106-B Bonnet Plume Lake: Key recreation features include Bonnet Plume Lake, an attractive alpine lake that serves as the traditional access for canoeing trips on the Bonnet Plume River. Highlights along the Bonnet Plume River include prominent rock towers, glaciated summits along both sides of the border with climbing and viewing potential and small alpine lakes. The upper river features open vistas and wildlife observation.

106-C Nadaleen River: The scenic upper Snake River, the majestic and rugged Mount MacDonald range, and various features along the Bonnet Plume River dominate this map sheet. Duo Lakes is the traditional access for canoeing trips on the Snake River. Other important features include Fairchild Lake, Gillespie Creek, Corn Creek, Kohse Creek, Reptile Creek and Goz Creek.

106-D Nash Creek: This map sheet is dominated by the scenic Wernecke Mountains and the Wind River, an attractive low-volume canoeing river with historic significance. Other key recreation features include thermal springs at Nash Creek, Elliot Lake, Braine Pass, McQuesten Lake and Hanson Lakes.

106-E Wind River: Continuing north from the Werneckes, this map sheet features a series of canyons on the Peel River, including a series of difficult rapids and cataracts at Aberdeen Canyon. Other recreation features include the Knorr Range, Margaret Lake, Peak 2803, Little Wind River and Rapitan Creek.

106-F Snake River: The lower Snake River features rapids, eroding bluffs and beautiful scenery. The rugged Knorr Range has alpine meadows and lakes and high wildlife and scenic values. This map sheet also includes the attractive Backbone Ranges, with small alpine lakes, prominent ridges and significant recreation potential.

106-L Trail River and 106-K Martin House: This area of the Peel River is a major drainage with heavy local fishing and hunting use, and a significant recreation route for canoeists. The nearby Richardson Mountains are gentle and scenic with good hiking and wildlife viewing. Trail River is a large burn and Caribou River is a good fishing area.

116-H Hart River: The dramatic, rugged terrain of the Ogilvie and Wernecke mountains dominate this region. The Hart, Blackstone, and Ogilvie rivers begin in the mountains among scenic features and distinctive landforms and flow north to the Peel lowlands. The Dempster Highway provides access to areas with outstanding scenery and recreation including hiking and paddling.

## ***Peel Watershed in a Global Context: A Brief Comparative Review***

There is little doubt that the Peel Watershed is a rare landscape. Its high density of natural, cultural and historical features distinguishes the Peel from many other wilderness destinations. A cursory review of competing international wilderness destinations reveals that the Peel Watershed indeed offers a particularly unique package of highly valued features to wilderness tourism markets.

### Northwest Territories and Nunavut

NWT and Nunavut have numerous wilderness rivers that are suitable for canoeing/rafting. Most are tundra rivers with slow flatwater paddling with stretches of whitewater across open tundra landscapes, such as the Horton, Coppermine, Burnside and Thelon rivers. Almost all river trips in the NWT and Nunavut involve long air charters, adding significantly to trip costs. NWT has a handful of mountain rivers, including the Mountain and Keele and the Nahanni. In terms of remoteness and wilderness quality, rivers in the NWT and Nunavut are perhaps on par with the Peel.

### British Columbia

While B.C. has numerous mountain rivers, most are rafted because they are too technically difficult for canoeing (e.g. Taku, Kicking Horse, Thompson, Nahatlatch). The wilderness quality of river travel experiences in B.C. are diminished due to greater numbers of communities and people, fragmentation from logging and other developments, and higher incidence of encountering other travellers on the river. Because forests are denser and mountains are less accessible, few river trips in B.C. can be combined with alpine hiking.

### Alaska

Like B.C., Alaska's mountain rivers are generally too difficult for canoeing and river rafting is often favoured. Like the NWT and Nunavut, Alaska has several slower tundra rivers (eg Hulahula). Alaska and B.C. rivers share other traits: both are more impacted by communities and populations along river corridors, and both attract many more visitors into certain river corridors. U.S. aviation regulations for carrying external loads on certain classes of floatplanes means that Alaskan operators have tended to focus on road-accessible rivers, rafting, and flatwater paddling. Remote mountain rivers often must be accessed with folding canoes or rafts in smaller floatplanes.

### Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec

Canoeing is a strong tradition in Ontario and Quebec, and many Yukon operators attract clients from Eastern Canada. Both provinces are well-known for paddling opportunities on plentiful lakes and rivers, many of which are accessible by road and train. Yukon rivers are very different from those in Ontario and Quebec. Eastern rivers don't flow through mountain landscapes or offer extensive hiking, and many rivers are impacted by development (roads, trains, towns and cities, hydro, bridges, etc). Paddlers in Eastern Canada are very likely to encounter

other river travellers, and journeys are much shorter and often involve portages.

#### Northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan

Like Ontario and Quebec, river travel in Manitoba and Saskatchewan is a very different experience than canoeing in the Yukon. Landscapes are flat, rivers are slower and easier with more road access and human impacts.

#### Western USA

Mountain rivers in the Western USA are more technical and steep, and almost all river travel involves rafting and kayaking. Canoe journeys are shorter and more impacted by human activities.

#### Eastern USA

Like Northern Ontario, canoeing is very popular in Minnesota (e.g. Boundary Waters Canoe Area) and surrounding states. Canoe trips tend to emphasize flatwater paddling and portaging, rivers are slow and the landscape is flat.

#### Norway

Norway has some remote mountain rivers, but they are quite short (a few days) and the landscape is generally not intact.

#### New Zealand and Australia

Canoeing is not common, and rivers are mainly floated in rafts. Distances are short (a few days) and landscapes are heavily impacted (farms, roads, logging etc).

#### Asia

Canoeing is not common, and most mountain rivers (e.g. in the Himalayas) are rafted or kayaked. Landscapes are significantly impacted and journeys are shorter.

In summary, nowhere can we find multiple, continuous, canoeable mountain rivers over such a distance through wilderness with no impacts. In almost every case, one or more key criteria is missing—canoeability, longer trip length and/or exceptional wilderness quality.

## 10.0 Tourism and Recreation Values Statement

Phrases such as ‘world-class’, ‘internationally significant’ and ‘unparalleled’ are often used to describe the wilderness quality and tourism and recreation opportunities in the Peel Watershed. Global comparisons aside, the watershed remains one of the Yukon’s largest intact wilderness regions, an asset that is increasingly rare in the world.

A growing number of resident and non-resident travellers come to the Peel Watershed seeking a high-quality wilderness experience that includes challenge, adventure, learning and the opportunity for solitude. While the natural, cultural and built resources that draw visitors can be considered separately, it is the aggregation of these special features in one destination that makes the region so valuable. These converging environmental, economic and social values are significantly more valuable collectively than apart.

### Environmental values

- High wilderness values and wilderness quality support high quality tourism products. Wilderness tourism operators build and market their products around wilderness features, but it is the remoteness and exceptional quality of the area’s wild and undeveloped landscapes that make Peel watershed trips especially attractive. Travelers come seeking a high-quality wilderness experience, and Peel trips consistently meet or exceed their expectations.
- The Peel has strong conservation and recreation values. Yukon Parks Branch is conducting *Peel Watershed Significance Study* to assess the significance of the Peel watershed for parks and conservation purposes. Potential for protection-oriented designation adds to the potential value of the watershed for tourism.
- The Bonnet Plume, as a Canadian Heritage River, is a central and important element of the Peel watershed area that is significant for its wilderness potential. ‘Wilderness’ is not a single watershed entity and, in the case of the Peel, depends heavily on the integrity of a system of watersheds, including the main stem of the Peel River which is the terminus for most river trips.
- Natural integrity of the entire watershed is still intact, which is becoming rare in an international context. The combination of intact river corridors and sizable tracts of undisturbed landscapes is important to support existing activities and tourism growth.

### Economic values

- Operators have made significant investment in developing and marketing their products, and their ability to grow and contribute to the local and

Yukon economy depends on maintaining the wilderness qualities that their businesses depend on.

- Tourism products in the Peel are high-end products based on high quality, remote resources and a unique highway experience. Target markets for these kinds of products stay longer and spend more.
- There is significant potential for new product development with opportunities for local investment, involvement and economic benefit.
- Economic benefits are also associated with recreational activities in the Peel Watershed.

### **Social values**

- Tourism activity in the Peel provides employment opportunities for many Yukoners and generates revenues that contribute to community health, diversity, stability and growth.
- Wilderness and wildlife are important to the Yukon way of life, values that are very strong in the Peel.

## **11.0 Potential conflict and cooperation with other land users**

The Peel Watershed is an area of high wilderness value that is used extensively by outdoor enthusiasts, wilderness tourism operators and hunting outfitters. A snapshot of current tourism activity in the Peel Watershed shows dozens of established Yukon businesses delivering a range of products and services to high-yield markets with long term growth potential. The continued success and enjoyment of these tourism and recreation users – and significant future economic opportunities for wilderness tourism – depend on a number of important conditions:

- Maintain remote intact wilderness landscapes and river corridors.
- Respect existing infrastructure that supports wilderness tourism.
- Awareness of activities that can have significant impacts on tourism and recreation activity and potential.
- Respect and maintain natural, cultural and historical features important for tourism.
- Minimize conflict between the tourism industry and competing land and resources users.
- Encourage a healthy and collaborative relationship between the tourism industry and other sectors.

### **Impacts on identified values**

Diminishing wilderness quality resulting from increasing development and cumulative effects on wildlife, viewsapes, ecosystem health, trip quality and visitor experience have the potential to significantly impact tourism and recreation activity/potential and reduce the appeal of the watershed as a wilderness-based tourism destination. Potentially impacted users include existing wilderness tourism operators, wilderness travellers, hunting operators and other businesses that support wilderness tourism and recreation.

Wilderness character and associated recreational opportunities depend on the character of the natural features of the region, in particular the presence of abundant wildlife populations. Detrimental affects to populations of species within the region will have a direct impact on not only the viability of representativeness of ecosystems but of maintaining the integrity of the wilderness experience for users of the area.

A diversity of geological, scenic and cultural features contributes to the wilderness character of the watershed. Viewsapes are especially important—paddlers, hikers and climbers seek views of the landscape from river level and from ridges and peaks, and intrusions by significant developments such as roads leads to the perception of wilderness being lost and a diminished experience.

This helps explain why the distance threshold for wilderness values is by necessity large.

Intact wilderness regions such as the Peel offer unique opportunities for solitude, which is a special feature of wilderness trips. The measurable components of solitude include the size of area, topographic and vegetative screening from auditory and visual noise, distance from core to perimeter and presence of human intrusions.

Visual and aesthetic impacts (especially noise) from industrial developments can be immediate and long lasting. Impacts on wildlife habitat and ecosystem health may be delayed but can also be long lasting. Ground access is a major concern for tourism and recreation values due to direct impacts resulting from fragmentation of natural systems.

### *Road Access*

The development of ground access has the most significant impact on wilderness values of any form of development due to its character, permanence, the range of uses it fosters, and the level of human use it supports. With the introduction of road access, the nature of the area changes and the tourism and recreational opportunities also change. Mitigation is not possible when it comes to maintaining roadless wilderness values. The backcountry experience can still be relatively natural, but the essence of wilderness will be lost.

Mitigation is possible when the presence of a road is not the fundamental concern and impacts on a variety of specific landscape characteristics such as fish and wildlife values or landscape aesthetics can be minimized. The portion of the Peel Watershed bisected by the Dempster Highway results in different forms of use and a different clientele than the roadless areas to the east.

In both a global and national context, roadless areas with high recreational value like the Peel are increasingly changing with the development of roads, impacting the values and features that support high quality wilderness tourism and recreation and reducing opportunities for these activities. The Yukon is already well endowed with road-accessible rivers and landscapes. The integrity of large, wild landscapes and the absence of road access and significant development activities in the Peel differentiate the region's high quality resource values and high potential, high return tourism products

### **Increases in tourism and recreation activity**

As the Peel Watershed becomes more popular and its intact landscapes become more attractive to wilderness tourism and recreation users, increases in these activities can place new stresses on the landscape. The carrying capacity of the resource base and the river's ability to sustain use is a key consideration. Social carrying capacity, which is perceptual and dependent on visitor attitudes and expectations in a wilderness setting, is also an important consideration.



Other Yukon rivers are already exhibiting the stresses associated with increasing use including garbage and sanitation problems, habitat degradation and crowding. In a wilderness environment, the limits of acceptable change are by nature less tolerant. Proactive management tools can help mitigate environmental and social impacts resulting from increases in river and air traffic. Impacts of tourism on subsistence and traditional land use can also be anticipated and addressed. To date, tourism and recreation impacts on river corridors, landscapes and other users are modest and manageable.

### **Potential for cooperation**

The wilderness tourism industry and wilderness recreation users often share the same landscape with mining, oil and gas, forestry and other industrial users of the land. At a minimum, tourism and recreation users need early communication with resource developers and good information that accurately identifies potential adverse effects from proposed development. Tourism and recreation users need opportunities to work with proponents to determine appropriate mitigation measures in advance and take potential impacts on tourism, recreation and other uses into account. Continued collaboration to develop and communicate best practices for resource users is also an important opportunity for cooperation.

## 12.0 Legislation, Policies and other Management Tools

Effective management tools and industry best practices are essential if we are to realize the tourism and recreation potential of the Peel Watershed. Existing legislative mechanisms, regulatory controls and zoning are all possible tools that can support tourism and recreation development in the region. This section summarizes existing legislation and policies that can play an important role in shaping future land use in the Peel.

Responsibility for the management of tourism activities in the Peel Watershed falls primarily to the Yukon Government. Yukon Department of Environment manages and enforces the *Wilderness Tourism Licensing Act*, which governs activities carried out by licensed guides.

Yukon Department of Tourism and Culture is responsible for promoting tourism opportunities in the territory. Through cooperative marketing agreements with Yukon Government, the Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon actively promotes visitation to the Peel Watershed. The Northwest Territories promotes tourism activity on the Dempster Highway to increase visitation to Mackenzie Delta communities and the surrounding area. Private operators and companies also promote tourism opportunities and activities in the region.

### ***Best Practices***

#### **WTAY Code of Conduct**

WTAY is very active working with tourism operators and other parties to encourage environmental best practices. The Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon encourages its members to embrace guidelines set out in the WTAY Code of Conduct. These best practices guidelines were prepared by WTAY in consultation with Yukon operators, First Nations people, non-government groups, and government departments involved in managing and protecting the Yukon's natural and cultural resources. The following is a brief summary of the complete guidelines which can be downloaded from the WTAY website ([www.wtay.com](http://www.wtay.com)).

*Conservation of wilderness and biodiversity* – Wilderness tourism operators have a responsibility to minimize the potential negative impact of wilderness tourism on the environment and people of the Yukon, and to maximize the positive. Contributing to the work of conservation initiatives is one way to do this.

*Wildlife viewing* – Wildlife viewing is an important component of wilderness trips. Operators need to recognize the potential for negative impact on the wildlife species they encounter and take precautions to minimize these.

*Leave no trace* – Tourism operators have a responsibility to maintain the wilderness quality of the Yukon in the areas in which they operate. WTAY

supports the No Trace Yukon Camping Principles established by the Department of Environment.

*Cultural respect* – Acknowledge and respect First Nations' culture and traditional activities as well as their concerns regarding visitors to First Nation cultural sites.

*Historic and archaeological sites* – Visiting archaeological and historic sites can be a significant aspect of a wilderness trip.

*Guide standards* – Guides are the front line for companies in the field. The qualifications and temperaments of the guides relate directly to the quality of experience guests will have on their excursions into Yukon wilds.

*Wilderness etiquette* – The Yukon's backcountry is perceived as an area of true wilderness where people expect to see few signs of human activity. Residents also expect visitors to behave respectfully in the backcountry as well as in their communities.

*Local benefits* – To support the local economy and people of the Yukon, operators should make every effort to buy supplies locally, hire locally and inform clients of local events and opportunities to purchase local goods.

*Visitor safety* – Recognizing the need to conduct safe trips for visitors, guides are recommended to follow recommendations on trip preparation, communications, emergency contingency planning, First Aid, staff qualifications and wildlife awareness.

*Bear safety* – Travelling in the Yukon wilderness involves certain risks, including the possibility of a bear encounter. Guides should be knowledgeable about appropriate bear safety protocols based on bear ecology and behavior.

### **Oil and Gas Best Management Practices for Wilderness Tourism**

Wilderness tourism operators guide and accommodate tourists all year round and rely on the Yukon's large wilderness areas to maintain their livelihood. Best practices that help reduce conflict with wilderness tourism operations include identifying and avoiding key wilderness tourism travel corridors, providing buffers and setbacks between exploration and development projects and seasonal variation in activities.

Yukon Energy, Mines and Resources, Tourism Yukon and Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon worked together to develop best practices guidelines for the oil and gas industry. Oil and gas practices must strive to minimize conflict and encourage a healthy and collaborative relationship between the tourism industry and the oil and gas industry.

The document outlines a range of potential issues along with practices that can reduce the time, intensity or duration of the footprint on the land base. The following is a brief summary of the complete guidelines which can be downloaded from the EMR website (<http://www.emr.gov.yk.ca/oilandgas>).

- Identify active tourism use areas and values.
- Consult with operators and industry on potential areas of development.
- Carefully use existing trails to prevent damage or negative effects. Maintain wilderness quality around existing trails. Avoid the construction of new trails.
- Restrict access and use of remote fly-in lakes.
- Respect wilderness tourism infrastructure (lodges, trails, cabins, camps).
- Help prevent future negative consequences of human and wildlife interactions through careful practices.
- Protect river corridors from increased access, noise and disturbance, overfishing, contamination, loss of fish and wildlife habitat, visual scarring of the landscape and other negative impacts on the wilderness tourism experience.

### ***Bonnet Plume Canadian Heritage River***

The Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS) is a co-operative program that gives national recognition to rivers with outstanding natural heritage values, cultural heritage values, significant recreational and tourism opportunities, or general integrity values. The Bonnet Plume River was nominated for CHRS status in 1993, and in 1998 a management plan was signed by three levels of government: Nacho Nyak Dun First Nation, Yukon Government and the Government of Canada.

CHRS designation establishes a 'higher duty of care' and provides a means for First Nations to influence decision making involving both settlement and non-settlement lands in the watershed. The selection of a watershed boundary was intentional and reflects both First Nations' desires for a holistic and ecological perspective on land and water management. CHRS designation relies on cooperation and consensus among stakeholders rather than outright regulation. As such, the management plan provides a focus for discussion of resource management issues on a watershed basis.

The Bonnet Plume Heritage River Management Plan was designed to contribute to the larger regional planning framework that is now underway in the Peel watershed. The plan is consistent with implementation obligations under the Nacho Nyak Dun Final Land Claim Agreement and accommodates the overlap interests of the Tetlit Gwich'in. It is also consistent with both First Nations' desires to ensure that the water quality and wilderness values of the entire Peel River watershed are respected.

According to the Bonnet Plume management plan, CHR status itself does not have legislative powers to protect the watershed's resources, but rather relies on

other mechanisms such as land use planning and development assessment to determine land use suitability and the limits of acceptable change. The management plan provides a framework for co-ordination and co-operative action.

Heritage river status implies an inherent conservation focus in management planning priorities. Loss of the wilderness characteristics for which the river was nominated could bring about a review of the river's heritage river status.

### ***Draft North Yukon Land Use Plan***

The Draft North Yukon Land Use Plan was released in November 2007 for public review. The southeastern part of the North Yukon planning region adjoins the northwest part of the Peel Watershed planning region. This area is dominated by the Dempster Highway, the Richardson Mountains and other resources that are important to tourism and recreation in the Peel Watershed.

The following passage is excerpted from the Draft North Yukon Land Use Plan:

*The most important land use issues affecting wilderness tourism are expected to be visual quality and impacts resulting from industrial land uses. Maintenance of visual quality and ecological values in a relatively intact landscape is an important consideration for wilderness tourism activities. Priority areas for maintaining visual quality are the Dempster Highway and Major River Corridors.*

### ***Environment Act – Wilderness Management Areas***

The objectives of this *Act* are:

- (a) to ensure the maintenance of essential ecological processes and the preservation of biological diversity;
- (b) to ensure the wise management of the environment of the Yukon;
- (c) to promote sustainable development in the Yukon;
- (d) to ensure comprehensive and integrated consideration of environmental and socioeconomic effects in public policy making in the Yukon;
- (e) to recognize the interests of Yukon residents in regional, national and global environmental well-being;
- (f) to utilize fully the knowledge and experience of Yukon residents in formulating public policy on the environment; and
- (g) to facilitate effective participation by Yukon residents in the making of decisions that will affect the environment.

The *Environment Act* contains a potential mechanism for managing wilderness lands for conservation purposes under Section 74 of the *Act*:

- (1) The Commissioner in Executive Council may establish, amend or revoke wilderness management areas for the purposes of preserving the wilderness resource in the Yukon.

(2) Prior to the establishment of a wilderness management area, the Minister shall prepare and submit to the Commissioner in Executive Council a wilderness management plan.

(3) The Commissioner in Executive Council may establish, amend or revoke a wilderness management plan for a wilderness management area established pursuant to subsection (1) and for that purpose consult, where appropriate, with a Yukon First Nation, the Government of Canada, a municipality and the public.

(4) The Commissioner in Executive Council shall prescribe by regulation a selection process, selection standards and management standards for wilderness management areas.

A *wilderness management area* designation may be an appropriate and effective land management tool for the Peel watershed. From the perspective of the wilderness tourism sector, this designation could address gaps between other land use tools and designations.

For example, while the *Wilderness Tourism Licensing Act* is an effective tool to manage the activities of wilderness tourism operators in the Peel region, the *WTLA* cannot address carrying capacity issues that may result in part from increasing numbers of self-guided river expeditions on Peel tributaries. A management plan for a *wilderness management area* in the Peel could establish tools for monitoring and managing river travel by all users in order to maintain ecological integrity and high-quality wilderness experiences.

*Wilderness management area* designation in the Peel watershed could help protect areas of high natural and wilderness tourism value that are outside the scope of other management tools. In the event that a territorial park is created in the Peel, a *wilderness management area* management plan for the broader Peel ecosystem could help protect natural and wilderness tourism assets outside the park boundaries such as river corridors, lakes, wildlife areas and other key features.

### ***North Yukon Tourism Strategy***

Prepared by Tourism Yukon with assistance from Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, the Draft North Yukon Tourism Strategy is designed to help VGFN reach their region's tourism potential. The strategy is the outcome of a planning process that involved workshops, meetings, consultation and research with a wide range of stakeholders.

The plan set out three guiding principles: focus on tourism development that respects the Vuntut Gwitchin way of life; develop tourism at a pace and level that the community is comfortable with; and VGFN should develop and benefit from tourism in their traditional territory. Using these principles, the plan established

three goals: first, establish local support for tourism; avoid mass tourism; and measure and monitor tourism benefits and impacts.

### ***Parks and Land Certainty Act***

The purpose of this *Act* is to establish parks:

- (a) to implement obligations under settlement agreements;
- (b) to provide for the protection and management of representative areas of territorial significance and other special places in the Yukon;
- (c) to provide recreational opportunities for Yukoners and visitors; and
- (d) to encourage public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the Yukon's natural environment as a legacy for future generations.

Parks are important to wilderness tourism for several reasons. Formal park protection provides operators with certainty that a high-quality wilderness landscape will be sustained. Designated park areas often increase the marketability of wilderness tourism products because the public expects that protected park areas contain lands and resources that are unusual or special. Wilderness tourism can also thrive in unprotected landscapes, especially when efforts are made to recognize and mitigate potential impacts of development.

With its iconic features, wild and varied landscapes, ecological riches, exceptional beauty, international reputation for wilderness canoeing and future potential for sustainable tourism development.

### ***Wilderness Tourism Licensing Act***

The purpose of this *Act* (*WTLA*) is to help sustain the wilderness quality of Yukon lands and waters, to require operators to obtain a license to conduct wilderness tourism activities, and by so doing, enhance the quality of the wilderness tourism sector. This *Act* does not apply to wilderness tourism activities in National Parks, as defined in the *National Park Act* (Canada) and to outfitter and guide activities as defined under the *Wildlife Act* for guided hunting only.

Anyone who takes clients into the Yukon wilderness in return for any kind of fee or reward needs to have a Wilderness Tourism License. The license conditions include worker's compensation coverage for employees, public liability insurance for clients and valid First Aid and CPR certification for guides, as well as mandatory trip reporting requirements and complying with no-trace wilderness camping practices.

The *WTLA* contains a potential mechanism for managing or limiting wilderness tourism activities in specific areas. Under Section 14(1) of the *Act* (Regulations):

“For the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this *Act* according to their intent, the Commissioner in Executive Council may make regulations it deems necessary, ancillary to and consistent with this *Act* and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, may make regulations... (c) limiting the type of use, volume, location and duration of wilderness tourism

activities for conservation purposes or sustainability of the wilderness resource.”

Under Section 14(2) the *Act* states that:

“Substantive regulations will be developed or amended in consultation with tourism industry, wilderness tourism activity representatives, Yukon First Nations, governments, other affected parties and the public.”

The *WTLA* applies to guided wilderness tourism activities—self-guided wilderness travellers are not subject to regulations under the *Act*. Should the affected parties seek to limit wilderness tourism activities in the Peel watershed to help preserve the resource and protect the quality of wilderness experiences, regulatory measures established under the *WTLA* would only apply to commercial wilderness tourism activities.

Given the increasing popularity of the Peel tributaries among self-guided travellers and the expectation that self-guided river traffic will soon meet or exceed guided river traffic on these rivers, a regulation under the *WTLA* that limits commercial activities may not be an adequate tool to manage carrying capacity issues.

## **YESAA**

Commercially guided river rafting, horseback riding and motorized boating where more than 10 guides are employed, and off-road vehicle tours where more than five guides are employed, are the only activities subject to an assessment under YESAA. Other guided activities and all self-guided tourism activities are not included in the regulations and are not subject to assessment.

Recommendations concerning wilderness tourism activities and mitigation actions for activities which may impact resources are made by YESAB during the development assessment process. Government decision bodies consider these recommendations and are ultimately responsible for setting terms and conditions for operators.



## Glossary

**Cumulative effects** – Cumulative effects are changes to the environment and/or society that result from a land use activity in combination with other past, present and future activities. Cumulative effects may be positive or negative. Negative effects are called cumulative impacts. An example of negative effects is the increased harvest and displacement of caribou that can result from road construction and new access routes. This definition recognizes that while one activity may have only a small impact, the combined effect of a number of activities may have a significant impact. Sustainable Development cannot be achieved without managing cumulative impacts.

**Markets and marketing** – Markets are the prospective visitors that tourism businesses want to sell to, while marketing refers to the sales campaigns and tools (websites, brochures, media, industry and consumer shows) used to promote and sell tourism products and destinations.

**Operator** – Companies that offer guided trips, equipment rentals and other products to visitors are tourism operators.

**Sustainable tourism** – Tourism that can be sustained over the long term by actively fostering appreciation and stewardship of the natural, cultural and historic resources of special places by residents, industry, governments and visitors.

**Tourism product** – Product is a term used in the tourism industry to describe a service or experience a tourist can buy. Examples of product: a meal in a restaurant, a place to stay, art, a wilderness tour. To clarify the relationship between tourism resources and products: the Snake River is a tourism resource, and a guided canoe trip or a rented canoe is a product.

**Wilderness** – An area that remains in a largely natural condition, and may include areas of human activity that don't detract from wilderness tourism.

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