



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CHIEFS SPEAK ABOUT PEEL WATERSHED PLAN

The Chiefs of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Teet'it Gwich'in, and First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun are unhappy with the draft Land Use Plan released by the Peel Watershed Planning Commission.

“We had hoped the united views of the affected First Nations and strong expressions of public support would inspire the Commission to put forward a plan that ensures the Peel Region is managed for the benefit of future generations,” said TH Chief Eddie Taylor. “Unfortunately, the level of protection we expected is not there.”

“It has to be recognized that our people’s way of life is directly tied to the well-being of the Peel Watershed,” stated NND Chief Simon Mervyn. “This is a unique area. It has been our place of refuge for generations. It is one of the last bastions of real wilderness in our traditional territory.”

The Chiefs emphasized they are not opposed to mining and resource development. “Just look around our territory—there have been hundreds of mines,” said Chief Taylor. “Many TH citizens own mines and work in the industry. We support mining. But we don’t want to see mining in the Peel. Some places are best left as they are.”

The Chiefs expressed considerable frustration with the process to date. In January, the Commission came to Mayo and Dawson and presented two potential scenarios, one of which envisioned a large multi-watershed protected area and a suite of smaller protected areas and historic sites designed to maintain natural and cultural resources. Less than a week later, after the Commission had departed the First Nation communities, a third scenario was introduced, with emphasis on all-season access and resource development.

In May, the draft Plan was finally released. Shortly afterward it was revealed the department of Energy, Mines and Resources has been directing the show for the Government of Yukon. The views of the department of Environment were suppressed and never made known to the Commission.

“Obviously there’s been political interference,” said Chief Mervyn. “It’s time to take the gloves off and get down to business.”

“I’m prepared to fight to the bitter end on behalf of my citizens,” stated Chief Taylor. “The best approach might be to make this area a national park.”

“Our ancestors left the watershed untouched and ecologically intact, and we intend to keep it that way forever for the benefit of all nations and communities,” stated Chief Wilbert Firth. “This is a special place that needs the strongest protection regime.”

The Chiefs point out that land-use planning is an integral part of the land-management system arising from the Final Agreements.

“This process is meant to protect the cultural values of our people,” stated Chief Mervyn. “It’s time to start to respect the spirit of our Agreements.”

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