

We have been guiding canoe trips in the Peel watershed for nearly 20 years, including trips on the Wind, Snake, Bonnet Plume, Hart and Blackstone Rivers.

We have studied the Peel watershed draft plan in detail and feel it does not address the many important issues we have been trying to bring to the commission's attention since this process began in 2004.

We appreciate the hard work done by the planners and commission members to date and recognize that they are faced with multiple pressures, in addition to government interference and suppression of vital information.

For whatever reason, it seems that our issues and concerns have been virtually ignored in this draft plan.

We have said from the beginning that a large protected area and additional protection for all the river corridors outside of protected areas is required for the tourism industry yet the plan lacks both. The submission from Environment Yukon that the government held back from the commission, and which we now hope it hands over for consideration, would have lent more weight to our position that the region is of international significance and should be preserved. We hope the commission receives that information from the Yukon government before proceeding forward with a recommended land use plan.

More importantly, we hope the commission will consider the strong support it received, from the First Nations, the majority of stakeholders and the general public, for a large protected area such as was proposed in Scenario Two during the options phase of this process.

We, along with 94 per cent of all the respondents at this stage, supported Scenario Two. It protected about half of the watershed from industrial development and limited access. Although we would have preferred to see even greater protection, we realize the commission had to consider other interests, primarily the vocal mining exploration industry, the only stakeholder opposed to the protection proposal.

Given the public's desire for conservation in the Peel, we feel the commission should revisit Scenario Two before drafting another version of the plan. It seemed to offer the certainty required for our company to grow and prosper as well as reducing the potential for many future land use conflicts.

We need a plan that considers first and foremost the land, the water and the wildlife of the Peel River watershed. It is the commission's job to recommend protected areas and it is the government's job to figure out how to accommodate those recommendations.

We want to see a plan that includes a large protected area, including the upper Hart, Wind, Blackstone, Snake and Bonnet Plume Rivers; that bans access from the south; that recognizes the significance of the river corridors for wildlife and tourism; and that reflects fair and equal consideration has been given to the position of all stakeholders, not just the mining industry.

We look forward to continued participation in this process.

Blaine and Mary Walden

Walden's Guiding www.waldensguiding.com