

# Government ‘undermining’ land-use planning, commission argues

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By Rhiannon Coppin *News Reporter*

On May 16, the Yukon government angered conservationists and planners by prematurely opening 18 oil and gas parcels in Eagle Plains and the Peel Watershed to work bids.

In an April 27 letter to Natural Resources Minister Archie Lang, CPAWS-Yukon called the government’s decision to issue work bids in advance of filing a land-use plan a “throwback to old-style, cowboy oil and gas development.”

CPAWS also accused the Yukon government of choosing to consult the oil and gas industry exclusively, rather than opting to consult Yukoners about how and where to award oil and gas rights to industry.

“There is no completed land-use plan for the North Yukon. There is no completed plan for the Peel watershed. There is no Yukon climate change plan. There’s no Yukon energy plan. Not much in the way of planning has been happening here,” said CPAWS-Yukon campaigner Mac Hislop.

“We just believe that it’s unfair and wrong for multinational oil companies to decide the future of the North Yukon and Peel watershed before Yukoners have had their say,” Hislop said.

The Yukon government was not only permitting development, but was “actively promoting it” in regions that hadn’t yet been fully assessed by the commission, wrote Peel Watershed Planning Commission chair Albert Genier in an April 25 letter to deputy minister Angus Robertson.

“By inviting bids for oil and gas exploration in the Peel watershed, Yukon government is potentially undermining the regional planning process,” the commission wrote.

The government’s promotion of oil and gas development suggests two things: “ a) Yukon government does not recognize regional land-use planning as a high priority; and b) Yukon government is presupposing what is a legitimate land-use priority in various portions of the Peel planning region,” Genier wrote.

“I don’t think it jeopardizes regional and use planning at all. In point of fact I think it can provide really valuable information to the planning commission,” said oil and gas resources division assistant deputy minister Greg Komaromi.

The commission asked the Yukon government to come clean with other parcels it may have already earmarked for industrial development on the assumption the government is using the bidding process to suggest that some blocks ought to be given priority to oil and gas development over other land-use interests.

The commission also claimed that many planning stakeholders wanted a moratorium on development in the Peel planning region until a land-use plan has been finalized and implemented.

“It’s always been the view of the government and the four First Nations governments that started the land-use

planning process that responsible development could occur concurrently with regional land-use planning,” responded Komaromi.

The parcels open for bids are posted online on the oil and gas branch website.

The call for work bids closes June 27th. And even then, a successful bidder is only granted a right to explore, said Komaromi.

Additionally, the bidding process will assist the planners.

“This will provide a better understanding of the actual oil and gas resources and should be invaluable to the commission in completing its work,” Robertson wrote in response to the Peel Watershed Planning Commission.

The North Yukon Planning Commission’s completed land-use plan has been sitting with the government for two weeks.

Officials say it has not yet been finalized.

Shirlee Frost wrote a letter to the oil and gas division expressing concern that sensitive wetlands that had been identified as conservation priorities in the Yukon North Land Use Plan were included in the original oil and gas disposition process.

As a result, the Whitefish Lake Wetlands near Old Crow were removed from the available parcels up for bid.

“Just so you know, all of this stuff (correspondence, public input) is going to be posted on the website,” said Komaromi.

“As soon as we can get it organized.”