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Conservation High Priority for Yukon Voters:
Voters looking for action on protected areas and other issues

Whitehorse. A recent public opinion poll shows that environmental issues rank high on Yukon voters' list of concerns. For supporters of all three major political parties, environment concerns could be the issue that determines their voting choice when they go to polls this fall.

The survey findings are a signal to all political parties that voters will be looking for a stronger focus on the environment, including a major commitment to increase protected areas, before choosing the next government. Key findings include:

- **91%** of respondents agree (including **66%** strongly agree) that the next territorial government should ensure that land use and conservation planning happens before large-scale industrial development.
- **73%** support increasing protected areas to **30%** or more of the Yukon.
- **88%** agree (including **67%** strongly agree) that the Yukon government should act to protect key portions of the Porcupine Caribou Herd winter habitat in Yukon.
- **93%** agree (including **66%** strongly agree) that the territorial government should implement a climate change action plan, including a strategy to promote renewable energy sources and energy conservation.

“These findings are clear in their implications,” said Jim Pojar, Executive Director of the Yukon Chapter of Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS-Yukon). “Yukoners want and expect a government that will take decisive action to protect the Yukon environment now and for future generations.”

Support for increasing the amount of protected land in the Yukon has continued to grow in recent years. In a 2001 Pollara poll, support for creating new protected areas was indicated by 61% of Yukoners, half of whom thought 26% or more of the Yukon should be protected. In the recent

Stratcom poll, 78% supported creating new protected areas and **73%** supported increasing protected areas to 30% or more of the Yukon.

“We are very encouraged with the strong support Yukoners have shown for creating protected areas to safeguard critical habitat and the places that we value,” said Pojar. “For example, conservation of the Peel watershed, including protection of the Three Rivers watersheds in their entirety, is consistent with the public’s interest in conservation.”

Most Yukoners want their government to protect wilderness and encourage sustainable community economic development, even if this means controlling the growth of the resource sector in Yukon. “The results from this survey indicate that Yukoners believe we should protect the environment as a first priority and plan carefully for resource development. We all want a strong economy and at the same time we understand that our future economic security and northern way of life depend on protecting the environment, not damaging it,” said Pojar.

With a fall election looming, CPAWS will circulate the survey findings and provide information briefings to the political parties and candidates with the message that they cannot afford to ignore environmental issues during the election campaign. “Yukoners expect their government to make serious progress on key environmental issues, starting with creating new protected areas. Political parties that fail to make strong conservation commitments could suffer on voting day” said Pojar.

Environmental issues are likely to have an effect on the vote count for candidates from all parties. “Our findings indicate that conservation issues are important to supporters of all three parties,” said David Kraft, Senior Consultant with Strategic Communications. “These issues will be relevant to each party in securing their existing voting base, and they may be decisive when it comes to reaching the undecided voters – almost 20% of the electorate. In a close race that is where the outcome will be decided.”

The poll, a representative sample of 402 eligible Yukon voters, was conducted by Strategic Communications from June 20-25, 2006. Results are accurate to $\pm 4.8\%$, 19 times out of 20.

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