

first nations

[Jimmy Johnny of the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun has travelled extensively throughout the mountainous regions of the Peel River watershed. [CA]

A large part of the Peel River watershed falls within the traditional territories of the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun based out of Mayo, Yukon, and the Tetl'it Gwich'in based out of Fort McPherson, NWT. The western edge of the watershed also falls within the traditional territories of the Tr'on dëk Hwëch'in of Dawson and the Vuntut Gwitchin of Old Crow. A small area surrounding the lower Blackstone River falls within an overlap area of all four First Nations.

Nacho Nyak Dun

The First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun people are descendants of the Northern Tutchone. Their traditional territories and main salmon fish camps were based in the Stewart River watershed to the south of the Peel watershed. However, they would travel from the Stewart River region to hunt and trade in the upper Peel watershed. This was especially common in years that caribou were plentiful in the Peel watershed.

In fall the Nacho Nyak Dun sometimes snared sheep in the Wind River area or even crossed the Mackenzie Mountains to hunt near the Arctic Red River (Gotthardt, 2002). In the winter of 1908-09, when caribou concentrated in the headwaters of the Stewart River and along the upper Bonnet Plume River, a large winter meat camp was set up around Bonnet Plume Lake and was shared between the Nacho Nyak Dun, Tetl'it Gwich'in and Arctic Red River Gwich'in (Slobodin, 1962).

Today, Nacho Nyak Dun people mainly live in Mayo, to the south. The First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun consists of approximately 435 members. Their land claim agreement, which was finalized in February of 1995, gives them ownership over 1830 square miles (4740 km²) of settlement lands (CYFN website). Most of the settlement areas are located south of the Peel watershed, in the Stewart River watershed, but there is one located along Nash Creek in the Wind River watershed. Smaller site-specific

selections (not shown on the map) occur throughout the Peel watershed too. As well, as part of the agreement, the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun was involved in establishing the Bonnet Plume Canadian Heritage River and producing the management plan for this river.

Tetl'it Gwich'in

The Tetl'it Gwich'in are Athapaskan-speaking people who traditionally lived in the upper Peel watershed and its tributaries, though most now live in Fort McPherson, NWT. The Tetl'it Gwich'in were hunters and gatherers, moving extensively across the Peel River watershed. The name Tetl'it Gwich'in translates to "people who live at the head of the waters" and the Gwich'in name for the Peel River, Teetl'it gwinjik, means "along the head of the waters" (Slobodin, 1962).

In the past, the Tetl'it Gwich'in mostly lived in small family groups, following a yearly cycle of





Debbie Buyck on a Three Rivers Journey hike at Corn Creek on the Bonnet Plume. [JP]

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travels on the land. In winter they hunted caribou in the mountains, using snares and small caribou fences, while in summer they set up fish camps along the Peel River and some of its tributaries. Since salmon do not occur in the Peel watershed, the Tetl'it Gwich'in would sometimes travel to the Yukon watershed to fish for this favoured species, or trade with the Northern Tutchone people. When animals were plentiful, several family groups would get together. They would also help each other hunt caribou during the fall migration, using large fence complexes in key locations to intercept the migrating animals. Large meat camps were often set up with these fences. Each year the fences and camps were moved as the caribou changed their wintering grounds (Gotthardt, 2002).

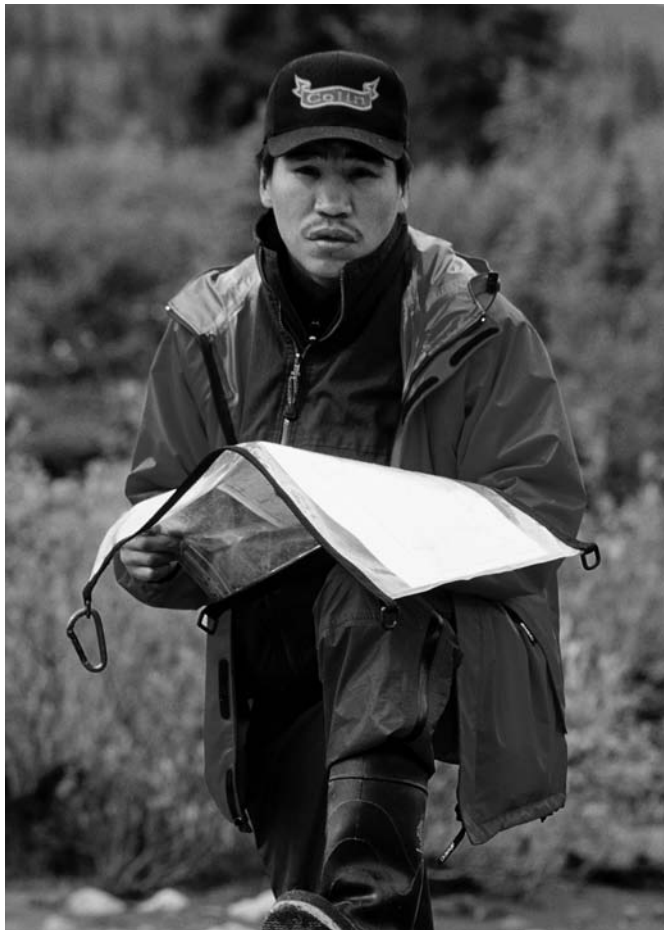
There were numerous trading routes, both river and overland ones, across the Peel River watershed. The Northern Tutchone traveled up from the Stewart River area into the Peel

watershed. The Tetl'it Gwich'in traveled along the Wind, Snake and Bonnet Plume Rivers. Some followed the Little Wind River to the Hart River and then crossed the divide to the Blackstone River to trade with the Han (now Tr'on dëk Hwëch'in). Others traveled over the Richardson Mountains. However, before the 1840's, the Tetl'it Gwich'in seldom traveled as far north as what is now Fort McPherson and the mouth of the Peel River, because their enemies, a group of Inuit, lived there. Once the Hudson's Bay post was established at Fort McPherson, the Tetl'it Gwich'in gradually started trapping more and moved closer and closer to Fort McPherson. Today, most Tetl'it Gwich'in live in the vicinity of Fort McPherson. Fish camps are still common along the main stem of the Peel River south of Fort McPherson.

Tr'on dëk Hwëch'in

The Tr'on dëk Hwëch'in, meaning "people of the

In recent years, CPAWS trips have provided youth like Elaine Alexie (left) and Dempster Collin (right) a chance to see places in the watershed where their ancestors lived and travelled. [CA]



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river", belong to the Han linguistic group. Their traditional territory includes parts of the Hart River watershed and the entire Ogilvie and Blackstone River watersheds. In summers they used to fish on the Yukon River and its tributaries, but then in fall move up to the mountainous regions, including those in the western part of the Peel watershed, to pick berries and hunt. They wouldn't return to the Yukon River watershed until they had dried enough meat for winter (Locke, 2000).

The Tetl'it Gwich'in would travel to the Blackstone River and on to Dawson to trade with the Han people. The Tetl'it Gwich'in would provide ochre, used in paints, in exchange for salmon that the Han caught in the Yukon River watershed. Black City, a settlement near the junction of the East Blackstone River and the Blackstone River, was a common stopping point for traders and hunters. Today, there are traces of dwellings still found at this site (Locke, 2000).

Today the Tr'on dëk Hwëch'in mainly live in the area of Dawson City. In 1998 they signed a Land Claims and self-government agreement, which included ownership of approximately 1,000 square miles (2590 km²) of land within their traditional territory (CYFN website). Their land selections include a small area along the Blackstone River and the Dempster Highway, including the area where Black City was located.

Vuntut Gwitchin

The Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation is based out of Old Crow, a community of ~ 300 people on the banks of the Porcupine River. They are known as "people of the lakes" and have the oldest known residence in the Yukon, according to archaeological finds (CYFN website).

The entire way of life of the Vuntut Gwitchin is dependent on the Porcupine caribou. For thousands of years the Vuntut Gwitchin have

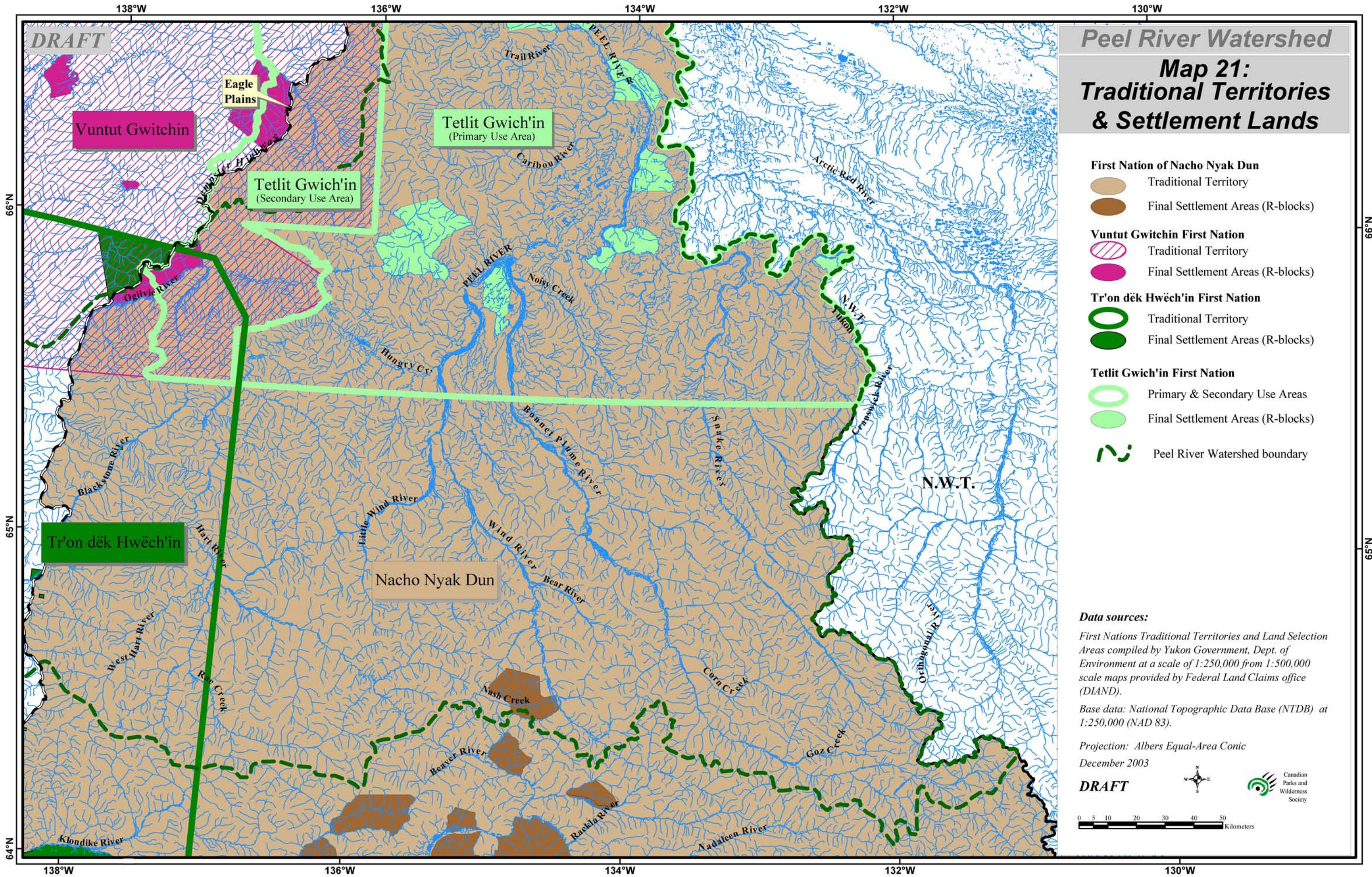
hunted the caribou and relied on the animals for food, clothing and tools. Their culture is based on this caribou herd. The main calving grounds of the herd are located on the north slope of Alaska in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. However, each year in the fall the herd moves into the Yukon, traveling through Vuntut Gwitchin territory, crossing the Porcupine River and heading towards the Ogilvie Mountains and the Peel River watershed, where they spend the winter. In the spring they head back north and west to their calving grounds. The Vuntut Gwitchin people have always hunted the herd during migration and while wintering in the Peel watershed (Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, 1999).

In recent years, the United States government has tried to introduce legislation to open up the calving grounds in ANWR to oil exploration and development. The Vuntut Gwitchin have been very outspoken in their opposition to this development plan (Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, 1999).

Preparing a moose for the feast at the Gwich'in gathering, Three Rivers Journey, 2003. [JP]



The Vuntut Gwitchin signed their land claim agreements in 1993 and with that gained ownership of approximately 2990 square miles (7744 km²) of land. One of their land selections in the Peel River watershed is along the north side of the Ogilvie River, between the river and the Dempster Highway.



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Peel River Watershed
Map 21:
Traditional Territories & Settlement Lands

- First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun**
 - Traditional Territory
 - Final Settlement Areas (R-blocks)
- Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation**
 - Traditional Territory
 - Final Settlement Areas (R-blocks)
- Tr'on d'ek Hw'ech'in First Nation**
 - Traditional Territory
 - Final Settlement Areas (R-blocks)
- Tetlit Gwich'in First Nation**
 - Primary & Secondary Use Areas
 - Final Settlement Areas (R-blocks)
- Peel River Watershed boundary

Data sources:
 First Nations Traditional Territories and Land Selection Areas compiled by Yukon Government, Dept. of Environment at a scale of 1:250,000 from 1:500,000 scale maps provided by Federal Land Claims office (DIAND).
 Base data: National Topographic Data Base (NTDB) at 1:250,000 (NAD 83).
 Projection: Albers Equal-Area Conic
 December 2003

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