

mining

Mining has a long history in the Yukon. The first people to mine in the Peel watershed were probably the stamperers that tried the Peel River route to reach the Klondike during the famous Gold Rush of 1898. None of these stamperers found gold, the metal they were most interested in finding.

Hulstein and Emond (1994) reviewed the history of mineral exploration in the Bonnet Plume Basin and adjacent areas. Their findings are summarized below.

In 1929 air reconnaissance prospecting was used to explore the area, with 6 prospecting parties sent out. By 1931, there were 10 groups prospecting in the region north and south of Mayo, including at Bonnet Plume Lake.

Geological maps of the Bonnet Plume coal were made in 1944. When oil and gas exploration accelerated during the 1950's and 1960's, road construction boomed. The Wind River Trail or Amerada Road was bulldozed from Mayo to Eagle Plains as a result of this boom in the winter of 1959/1960. This was a winter trail only, designed to bring a drilling rig, camps and geophysical equipment to Eagle Plains. Some people in Mayo tried to propose this route as the best route for a road to Aklavik too, however it was superseded in this function by the Dempster Highway, which was built between

1959 and 1979 (Hulstein and Emond, 1994). The Crest Iron Formation in the Snake River watershed was described in 1959 and explored intensively from 1962 to 1964, when Chevron standard bulldozed an airstrip and roads and built a camp. The remoteness of the area made further work prohibitively expensive and the camp was abandoned.

Reputed to be one of the largest iron deposits on the continent, the property has been held since 1963. Access to the property was along the Amerada Road and a trail heading east to the claim (Hulstein and Emond, 1994).

By 2001 some 136 mineral occurrences were recorded in the Peel River watershed, with 30 or more companies exploring in the Bonnet Plume watershed alone over the decades. Uranium, copper, iron, lead, zinc and silver have been the sought after metals. Currently there are approximately 1,935 active claim blocks in the entire Peel River watershed (see map). Most of these are concentrated along the Bonnet Plume River and in the vicinity of the Dempster Highway.

A copper-cobalt discovery in 1967 instigated an extensive exploration program near Fairchild Lake in the late 1960s. An 80 kilometre winter road was bulldozed to connect with the Wind River Trail and an airstrip was built, providing

access to many other properties (Hulstein and Emond, 1994).

In the early 1990s, Westmin Resources was still actively exploring in the Bonnet Plume watershed. The company set up numerous drilling pads in the area, all accessible by helicopter only. In 1996 paddlers visited the Westmin camp beside the Bonnet Plume River and found it deserted, though airplanes were still using the 1300-metre airstrip the company had bulldozed near the river. They photographed leaking oil drums, stacks of drilling chemicals torn open by animals, and an open garbage dump. In 1997 Westmin reopened and then abandoned their camp, leaving the airstrip, bulldozed road, buildings, and a few fuel drums behind.

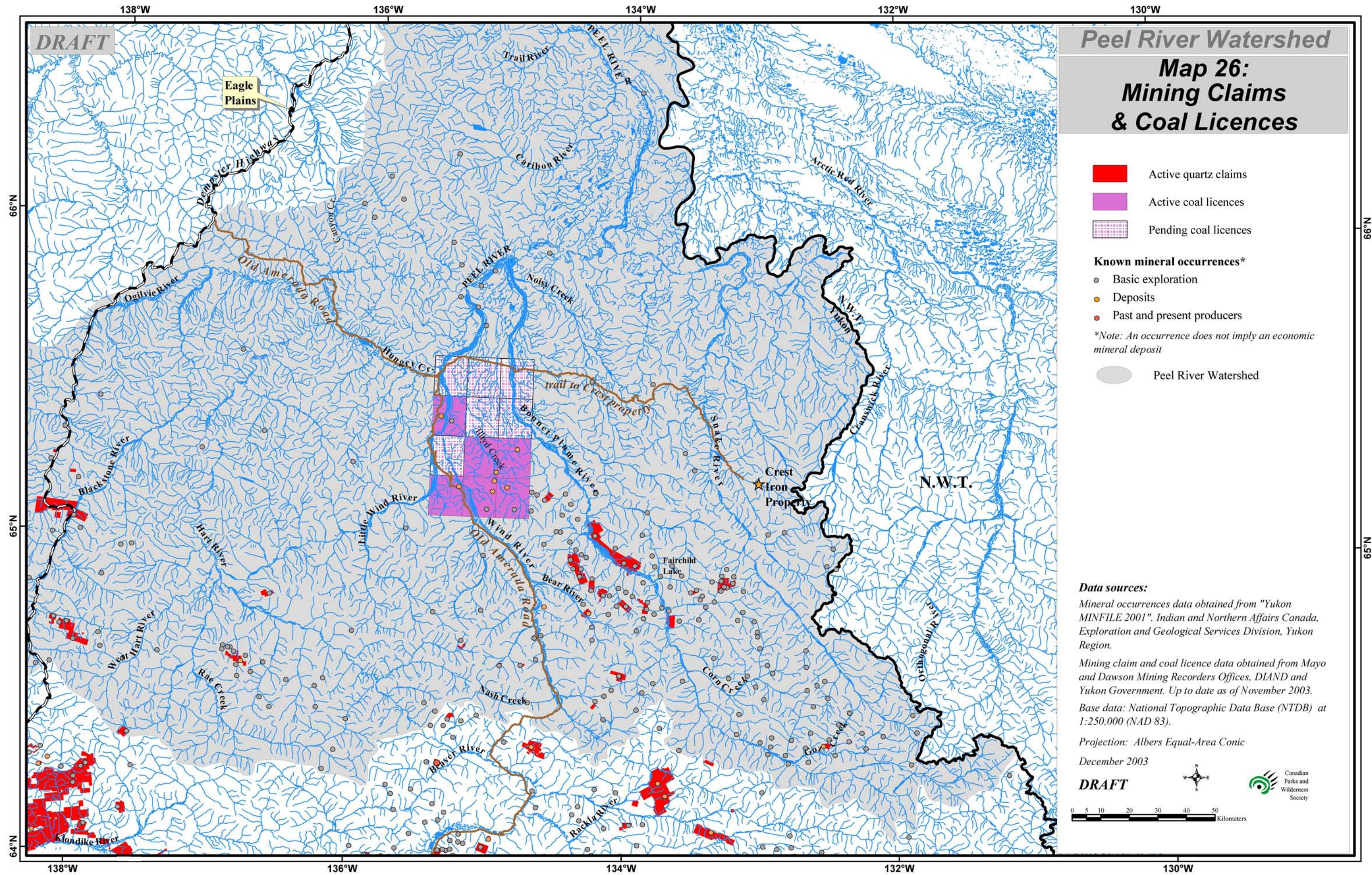
A number of coal exploration licenses are also held on the study area by various companies (Hulstein and Emond, 1994). The Bonnet Plume Formation contains some of the most extensive of Yukon's coal deposits, estimated at 1.4 billion tonnes (PRP, 1992). Pan Ocean Oil considered developing an underground coal mine, 200 megawatt thermal generating plant, transmission line, access road, and slurry pipeline in 1980 in the Wind River region (PRP, 1992). This project was abandoned due a lack of demand for the electricity (Hatch Associates Ltd., 2002)

Airstrip built by Westmin Resources in the Bonnet Plume valley, in the early 1990s [JP]



More recently, Promithian Inc. applied for funding to do a feasibility study of an extensive development scenario for the region (Hatch Associates Ltd., 2002). Promithian envisioned a coal mine at Illtyd Creek followed by a coal-fired electricity-generating plant, transmission lines hooking up this facility to the existing grid system in Mayo and a year-round access road up the Wind River as well as over to Eagle Plains. Further phases would involve iron ore extraction and processing at the Crest Iron Formation, slurry pipelines between the sites on the Snake and Wind River, a smelting plant and ultimately a steel pipeline manufacturing plant. These pipelines would be used for hooking up to Eagle Plains and the future Mackenzie Delta pipeline (Hatch Associates Ltd., 2002). Hatch predicted that upwards of 100, 40-tonne capacity tractor-trailer units would travel the Wind River road per day.

The economic feasibility of Promithian Inc.'s plan has not been demonstrated.



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Peel River Watershed
**Map 26:
 Mining Claims
 & Coal Licences**

- Active quartz claims
- Active coal licences
- Pending coal licences

Known mineral occurrences*

- Basic exploration
- Deposits
- Past and present producers

*Note: An occurrence does not imply an economic mineral deposit

Peel River Watershed

Data sources:
 Mineral occurrences data obtained from "Yukon MINFILE 2001". Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Exploration and Geological Services Division, Yukon Region.
 Mining claim and coal licence data obtained from Mayo and Dawson Mining Recorders Offices, DIAND and Yukon Government. Up to date as of November 2003.
 Base data: National Topographic Data Base (NTDB) at 1:250,000 (NAD 83).
 Projection: Albers Equal-Area Conic
 December 2003

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Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society

0 5 10 20 30 40 50 Kilometers