



Arctic Development
Library

***Conservation Advisory Committee On The
Northern Mineral Policy - Thelon Game
Sanctuary Report
Type of Study: Reference Material
Date of Report: 1990
Author: Canada - Indian & Northern Affairs
Catalogue Number: 6-3-94***



CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE
NORTHERN MINERAL POLICY - THELON GAME
SANCTUARY REPORT
Sector: Mining/Oil/Energy

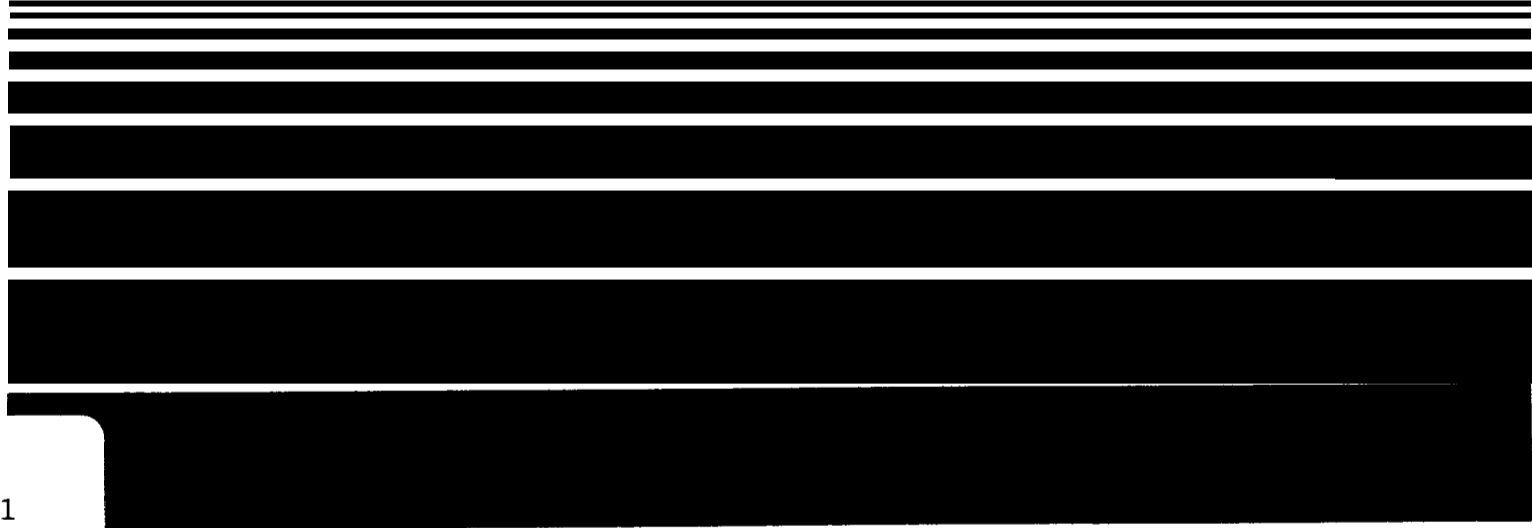
6-3-64

Reference Material

Conservation Advisory Committee on the Northern Mineral Policy

Thelon Game Sanctuary Report

December 1989



1

12
90



December, 1989

CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ON THE

NORTHERN MINERAL POLICY

THELON GAME SANCTUARY REPORT

Government Library
Government of N.W.T.
Laing #
Yellowknife, N.W.T.
X1A 2L9

Published under the authority of the
Hon. Tom Siddon, P.C., M.P.,
Minister of Indian Affairs and
Northern Development,
Ottawa, 1990.

QS-8451-000-BB-A1

1990/07/14
1991/01/08
1991/01/08
1991/01/08
1991/01/08

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	INTRODUCTION	
1.1	Purpose	2
1.2	The Northern Mineral Policy	2
1.3	Origins of the Thelon Game Sanctuary	3
1.4	The Review Process	3
2.0	KNOWN RESOURCE VALUES OF THE THELON GAME SANCTUARY	4
2.1	Introduction	4
2.2	Geography	5
2.3	Renewable Resources	5
2.4	Non-Renewable Resources	8
2.5	Archaeological, Historical and Cultural Resources	8
2.6	Land Use	9
3.0	MAIN ISSUES IDENTIFIED DURING THE REVIEW	10
3.1	Introduction	10
3.2	Information for Decision Making	10
3.3	The Thelon Sanctuary as a Wilderness Area	11
3.4	Unsettled Land Claims and the Boundary Dispute	11
3.5	Native Hunting within the Thelon Game Sanctuary	11
3.6	National and International Implications	12
3.7	Management Framework	12
4.0	PUBLIC RESPONSE	13
4.1	Introduction	13
4.2	Summary of Responses	13
5.0	OPTIONS: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	15
5.1	Introduction	15
5.2	Opening the Sanctuary to Mining	15
5.3	Adjusting the Boundaries	16
5.4	Improving the Management Regime	17
5.5	Maintain the Status Quo	17
6.0	RECOMMENDATIONS	18
	SUPPORTING DOCUMENT (Available on request in English): Known Resource Values of the Thelon Game Sanctuary	

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE

The federal Northern Mineral Policy, released by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) in December 1986 is “designed to provide the mining industry with the atmosphere of stability and certainty it requires” and to “establish the environment necessary for this industry to maintain and expand its significant contribution to the well-being of the territorial economies and northern residents”.

In response to the contention that one of the principal areas of uncertainty is access to land, the Policy commits the federal government to “enhancing the level of certainty with regards to land in three areas; native land claims settlement, conservation initiatives and northern land use planning”. The three conservation initiatives identified in the Policy are reviews of: the boundaries of the migratory bird sanctuaries, the resource utilization in the Thelon Game Sanctuary and the disposition of (IBP) International Biological Programme sites.

This report summarizes the result of the review process undertaken to fulfill the commitment regarding the Thelon Game Sanctuary.

1.2 THE NORTHERN MINERAL POLICY

The prime objective of the Northern Mineral Policy is to encourage investment in northern mining and help the industry remain competitive by:

- o providing the industry with an atmosphere of **certainty as to the federal government’s intentions**;
- o increasing industry **competitiveness** by providing improved geoscientific services and by minimizing federal government-imposed costs; and
- o encouraging a **dialogue** among the mining industry, the public and both levels of government.

The Northern Mineral Policy contained several undertakings relating to conservation initiatives, all designed to remove or ease uncertainties for the mining industry in conservation areas. The specific wording regarding the Thelon is to “review resource utilization in the Thelon Game Sanctuary with the objective of ensuring the widest range of activities compatible with the original goal of musk-ox protection”.

1.3 ORIGINS OF THE THELON GAME SANCTUARY

The Government of Canada sponsored a scientific expedition to the Thelon River area in 1924 and 1925 led by J. Critchell-Bullock and J. Hornby. Following the expedition Hornby stated that “the results of the trip show that there is a large area where musk-ox are plentiful, swans and geese nest, and caribou have their young undisturbed by man. This area possesses no minerals, containing only sandstone and sand, consequently can afford no inducement or excuse for men to go on a prospecting trip. If it is desired to protect the game in this part of the country, it is essential to take measures to prevent traders from encouraging natives to hunt in this district. A few years, perhaps, and it will be too late”.

The government acted on Hornby's recommendation and established the Thelon Game Sanctuary on July 15th, 1927. The original objective of the Sanctuary, as set forward by Hornby was the conservation of wildlife in general. This objective was reiterated in the 1930 Order-in-Council which legally created the Sanctuary for the purposes of wildlife conservation. However, the preservation of musk-ox was an important issue at that time, leading to the perception that the original objective was limited to musk-ox preservation.

Regulations immediately prohibited all hunting or trapping in the Sanctuary, and in 1930 it was withdrawn from disposal under the Territorial Lands Act. This meant that all surface and subsurface dispositions were withdrawn and that mining claims and prospecting permits could not be issued. Responsibility for the management of wildlife and game sanctuaries was transferred to the Territorial Government in 1948, and the Game Ordinance issued the following year prohibited entry to the Sanctuary except by licence.

Pressure from mining companies to permit prospecting in the southwest portion of the Sanctuary began almost immediately, and led to a boundary change in 1956 (the change did not legally come into effect until 1972). New areas added to the Sanctuary were larger than the area removed, so that its size increased from 39,000 square km to 56,000 square km. In 1978 the NWT Game Ordinance was replaced by “An Ordinance Respecting Wildlife” which eliminated the requirement to obtain an entry licence to facilitate use of the Sanctuary for recreational purposes.

1.4 THE REVIEW PROCESS

The Conservation Advisory Committee for the Northern Mineral Policy was formed to facilitate work on the three reviews, and to provide advice/recommendations to the appropriate federal and territorial Ministers. The Conservation Advisory Committee consists of representatives from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, from

Environment Canada, from GNWT Renewable Resources, GNWT Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources, and from Land Use Planning.

Sub-committees or "working groups" were formed for each of the three reviews. The primary role of the Thelon Game Sanctuary Working Group was to develop terms of reference for two consultants' studies on the Sanctuary and to act as advisors to, and supervisors of, the consultants while work was in progress.

The consulting work was carried out by Delta Environmental Management Group Ltd. in collaboration with Lutra Associates Ltd. *Known Resource Values of the Thelon Game Sanctuary: A Preliminary Review* is commented upon in section 2 of this report. The consultants also completed a review of public responses received since release of the Northern Mineral Policy, up to December, 1988.

The first draft of the "Known Resource Values" report was circulated to the public, then revised and published based upon the public feedback.

This report relies heavily upon the consultants' studies for factual information. However, this report and the opinions and recommendations contained within it are entirely the responsibility of the Conservation Advisory Committee.

2.0 KNOWN RESOURCE VALUES OF THE THELON GAME SANCTUARY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Thelon Game Sanctuary Working Group engaged consultants to review and report upon the known resource values of the Thelon Game Sanctuary. More specifically the consultants were asked to review:

1. the establishment of the Sanctuary and its legislative and management framework;
2. the renewable resources of the Sanctuary;
3. the non-renewable resources of the Sanctuary;
4. the cultural, archaeological and historical resources of the Sanctuary; and
5. land use activities within and around the Sanctuary.

It should be noted that no original research or field work was completed. A draft report was submitted in April 1988 and distributed to the public, to interest groups, and to government agencies for review and comment. Valuable feedback was received on inadequacies of the draft report and drawing attention to new or overlooked sources of information. The consultants were then asked to incorporate this feedback into a revised report *Known Resource Values of the Thelon Game Sanctuary* (December 1988). The following sections present some of the salient points from the report.

2.2 GEOGRAPHY

Covering approximately **56,000** square kilometers, the Thelon Game Sanctuary is slightly larger in area than the Province of Nova Scotia. It is located in the central continental portion of the NWT, some 300 air miles east of Yellowknife, and 120 air miles west of Baker Lake. The size of the sanctuary and its isolated location are important factors for wildlife preservation.

Situated to the northeast of the tree line, most of the Sanctuary is covered with low arctic tundra vegetation. However the valley and the lower portion of its tributaries contain islands of forest with substantially different vegetation. This productive habitat is often referred to as an "Arctic Oasis". See Map 1 for the location and major geographic features of the Sanctuary.

2.3 RENEWABLE RESOURCES

The Thelon Game Sanctuary is important to the large Beverly caribou herd. A substantial body of recent information is available on caribou use of the Sanctuary as a result of the Beverly and Kaminuriak Land Use Monitoring and Controls program. The Sanctuary is important to caribou because they use the area for spring migration, with calving recently occurring just outside the northeast boundary, and for post-calving summer range. There are three designated "Major Crossing Sites" for caribou water crossings within the Sanctuary during post-calving and late summer-fall movements.

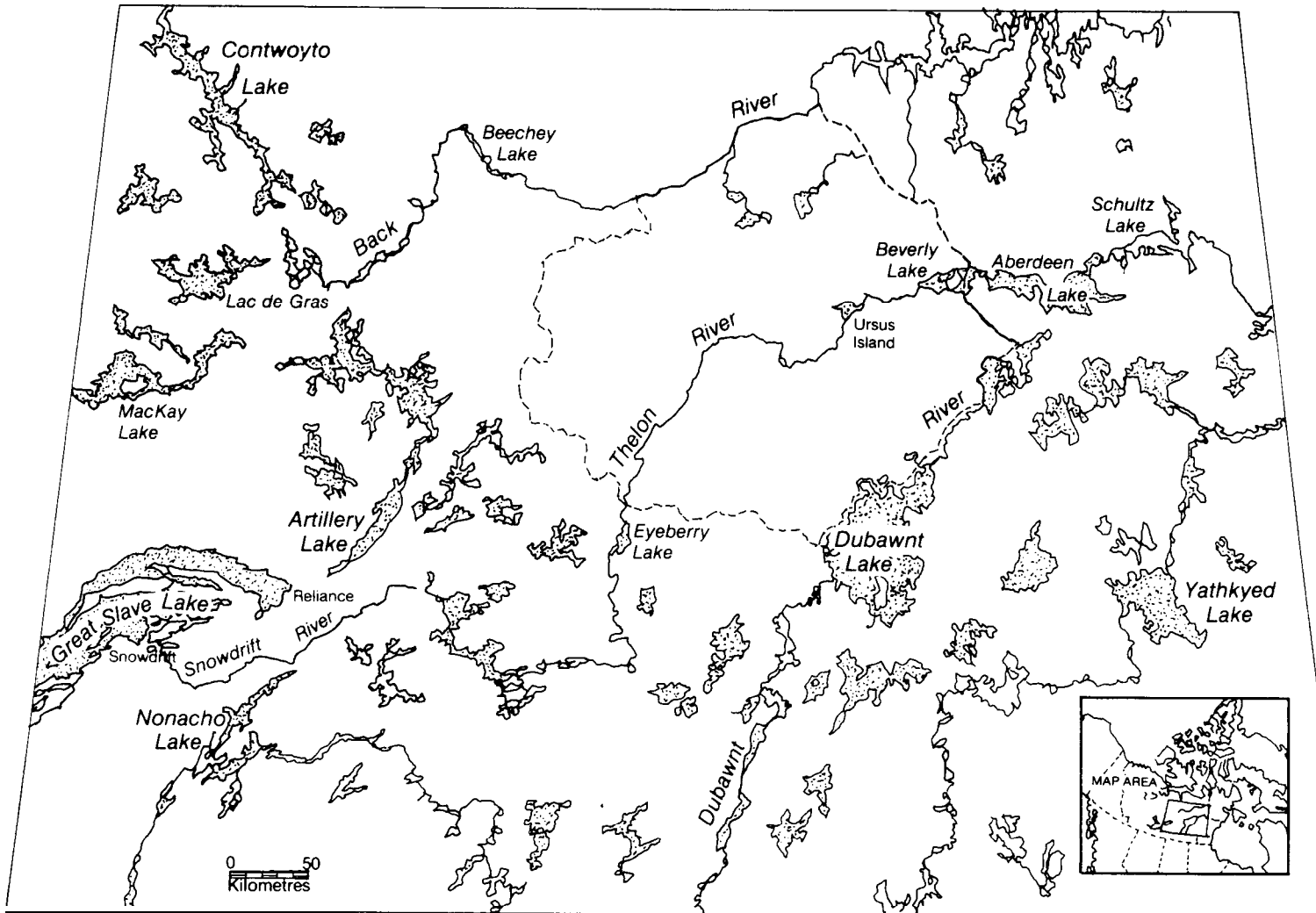
One of the principal reasons for establishing the Thelon Game Sanctuary was protection of the musk-ox population. At the time the herd, estimated at approximately 250 animals, was thought to represent 50% of the mainland population of North America. The Thelon population has since increased to a current estimate of 600, but this no longer represents a significant percentage of the mainland population. However, the last population survey was carried out in 1966, and one biologist believes that there now may be as many as 2000 to 3000 musk-ox in the Sanctuary, underlining the need for a new population survey. Musk-ox population densities are rated as

“high” or “moderate” for approximately 50% of the area of the Sanctuary.

The moose population of the Sanctuary is important because it is the only such population that live north of the continuous tree line. Other mammal populations such as arctic wolves, barren ground grizzly bears, arctic foxes and red foxes also are significant as scientific control groups because they have experienced virtually no hunting or trapping for over 60 years. Here again, little information on mammal resources, other than caribou, has been collected since the 1960s. The abundance and diversity of mammals in the Sanctuary attests to its importance.

MAP 1

THE THELON GAME SANCTUARY



Raptors and waterfowl are common in the Thelon Game Sanctuary. Much of the Thelon River and Beverly and Aberdeen lakes, which straddle the eastern boundary, are of international significance because they support sizeable concentrations of moulting large Canada Geese. These geese represent a critical concentration of the international population of large Canada geese. The Thelon and Back river valleys support breeding populations of 5 species of raptors, with the Thelon valley probably containing the highest density of breeding raptors of any place in the arctic barrens. Little is known about the current population and breeding status of the avifauna in the Sanctuary, since few surveys have been done in the area since the late 1970s.

The vegetation of the Thelon River valley is unique and of international significance. It is the only place on the arctic tundra where relatively large stands of white spruce and black spruce exist. The vegetation of the river valley results in the occurrence thereof many species of mammals and birds that are normally only found south of the tree line. Unfortunately there is no detailed information on the exact nature and distribution of the plant communities in the Sanctuary.

2.4 **NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCES**

Mineral exploration is prohibited within the Thelon Game Sanctuary. The lack of mineral exploration data and detailed geological information on the area makes it impossible to fully evaluate the mineral potential. However, some inferences can be drawn based upon mineral exploration around the edge of the Sanctuary, and knowledge about the mineral potential of similar types of formations found in Northern Saskatchewan. This suggests that the Sanctuary, especially the southern half, has excellent potential for the discovery of unconformity associated uranium deposits.

Other exploration targets with good economic potential include polymetallic vein deposits in Dubawnt Group volcanics and uranium concentrations in Amer Group sediments. Gold showings have not been found in potentially favorable areas that have been explored adjacent to the Sanctuary. Hydrocarbon resources are not known to exist within or adjacent to the Sanctuary, and the potential for such discovery is extremely low.

2.5 **ARCHAEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Several archaeological reconnaissance surveys have been carried out in the Sanctuary, with most of the discovered sites occurring along the Thelon River. Five pre-contact cultural phases have been identified, and indicate that the area was not inhabited until after 3000 B.C. All of the occupations were seasonal, based on summer hunting of caribou by both Indian and Inuit peoples.

Historical records begin with Samuel Hearne in 1770. His and subsequent records of expeditions document use and occupancy of the area by Chipewyan Indians and by Caribou Eskimos, with overlapping ethnic boundaries. The Land Use Information Series of maps identifies three non-native historical sites within the Sanctuary. Cultural resources cannot always be identified by a physical structure or a specific area. Rather, the use of the resources of the Sanctuary is seen as symbolic and valuable to Dene/Metis and Inuit traditions and lifestyles.

Not surprisingly, the information base for these resources is incomplete and deficient. Archaeological surveys have been limited to specific sections of major waterways, and oral histories of the cultural and historical significance are not available.

2.6 LAND USE

There is a lack of publicly available research on land use in the Sanctuary over the past 25 years. Dene/Metis land use and occupancy within and in proximity to the Sanctuary has been recorded by the Dene/Metis themselves, but the information is proprietary in nature and is not available for use in this report. There is also a great reluctance to discuss Dene/Metis land use within the Sanctuary, as hunting and trapping is prohibited. Other information on present or recent land use by the Dene/Metis is fragmented, but sufficient to confirm that it does occur.

The Inuit Land Use and Occupancy project documented Caribou Eskimo land use in the vicinity of the Sanctuary from 1916-1974.

They lived in the Sanctuary in both summer and winter camps, depending upon caribou and fish for survival, and gathering wood for tools and for fuel. By 1956, most Inuit had relocated to coastal communities, but continued to use traditional camps on a seasonal basis.

Recreational land use in the Sanctuary is highly focused on the Thelon and Hanbury rivers during the summer. Two licenced tourism operators (based in Yellowknife and Fort Smith) are active in the Sanctuary outfitting and guiding canoe expeditions. The recreational and natural values of the Sanctuary are deemed extremely valuable by the commercial operators as well as by groups dedicated to assessing and preserving wilderness areas.

3.0 MAIN ISSUES IDENTIFIED DURING THE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

During the course of this review, many individuals and organizations took the opportunity to express their opinions on issues associated with the Sanctuary. In this section, the Working Group summarizes the essence of the main issues.

3.2 INFORMATION FOR DECISION-MAKING

The outdated and patchy nature of existing data on the Sanctuary's natural resources means that a proper assessment of management options cannot be made without upgrading field information. This limitation applies to both biological and geological data.

Information on musk-ox distribution and habitat use is relatively detailed but outdated. No reliable information is available on the abundance and distribution of carnivores in the sanctuary. Habitat use information is largely anecdotal. A relatively detailed and up-to-date data source exists for the Beverly Caribou herd as a result of the Beverly-Kaminuriak Monitoring and Land Use Controls program.

Virtually no information exists on the composition, abundance and distribution of the plant communities on the tundra or within the Thelon River valley. Accurate and detailed vegetation mapping is a basic requirement for studies of the sensitivity of ecosystems to disturbance and to most types of wildlife research. None of these areas has been surveyed for rare or unique plant communities or species.

As mineral exploration is prohibited within the Thelon Game Sanctuary, geological information documenting the extent and economics of mineralization is not available. Existing information drawn from dated reconnaissance surveys identifies geological formations but not their mineral potential.

Information on tourist visitation to the Thelon Game Sanctuary is poor and would require further study in order to determine the economic significance of recreational land/water use within the Sanctuary.

A complete historical and archaeological survey of the Thelon Game Sanctuary has not been undertaken. Surveys have concentrated on specific areas along the Thelon River corridor.

3.3 THE THELON SANCTUARY AS A WILDERNESS AREA

Wilderness conservationists from around the world know about, and occasionally visit, the Sanctuary. To them, the sanctuary represents a nationally and internationally significant wilderness area. It is perceived as one of the few Canadian sites that is large enough to preserve wildlife populations. Most of the public concern about the sanctuary has focused on its wilderness values and the need to protect them. The sanctuary is one of the few large areas in the N.W.T. that has not experienced any land use related disturbances for the past 60 years.

3.4 UNSETTLED LAND CLAIMS AND THE BOUNDARY DISPUTE

Archaeological sites along the Thelon River system attest to the historic occupation of the area by native people. The "Inuit Land Use and Occupancy" project documented Inuit land use activities within the Sanctuary from 1916-74. This included both summer and winter camps that were occupied on a regular basis for harvesting wildlife and gathering wood. The area of the Sanctuary has also been used traditionally by Chipewyan peoples from north and south of 60 degrees North as well as the present-day Dene/Metis.

Both the Inuit and the Dene/Metis are currently negotiating comprehensive land claims with the Government of Canada. As their areas of traditional use overlap within the Sanctuary, much of it is being claimed by both groups. The boundary dispute presumably will be resolved prior to the settlement of the two land claims.

3.5 NATIVE HUNTING WITHIN THE THELON GAME SANCTUARY

Although native peoples have traditionally hunted within the Thelon Game Sanctuary, that legal right was withdrawn when the sanctuary was established. The present NWT Wildlife Act does not allow for hunting and trapping within the Sanctuary.

Despite this prohibition, an undetermined amount of hunting and trapping appears to occur within the Sanctuary. Baker Lake residents hunt waterfowl and gather eggs at the Dubawnt River delta and hunt caribou around Wharton and Beverly lakes. Snowdrift residents have recently requested permission to hunt musk-oxen within the Sanctuary.

3.6 NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Considerable feedback on the importance of this wilderness area has been received from national and international conservationists since the announcement of the Northern Mineral Policy. The Thelon Game Sanctuary is internationally and nationally acclaimed as an important wilderness area, one of the few large enough to properly preserve wildlife populations. The river valley is an International Biological Programme (IBP) site and in June 1989, the river was named to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. However, these initiatives do not provide any legal basis for conservation or protection.

Canada has taken a strong position in opposition to hydrocarbon development on the "10.02 Lands" of Alaska's North Slope. This opposition is based on the anticipated impacts of such development upon the Porcupine Caribou Herd. Options for the Thelon Sanctuary must be considered in light of this position. It could weaken the Canadian position regarding the "10.02 Lands" if, concurrently, mineral exploration and other development is allowed to proceed in the Thelon Sanctuary -an area closely identified with the Beverly Caribou Herd.

3.7 MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Thelon Game Sanctuary currently has the status of a "wildlife sanctuary" under the authority of the Department of Renewable Resources' Wildlife Act and its regulations. This Act prohibits hunting and trapping by any person in the Sanctuary.

In addition to the protection afforded to wildlife by the Northwest Territories Wildlife Act, the land within the sanctuary has also been withdrawn from disposition pursuant to the Federal Territorial Lands Act. The withdrawal means that any land use requiring a surface or subsurface disposition under the Act is not permitted. This effectively prohibits mineral exploration, oil exploration, resource extraction and building development.

The withdrawal of land from disposition in no way affects the Department of Renewable Resources' primary authority in all matters with respect to the management of wildlife in the Sanctuary.

To date, the Department of Renewable Resources has not developed a management policy or plan for the Sanctuary. With complete protection provided for wildlife, the development of anything but a "hands-off" approach to wildlife management has not been necessary.

In addition to growing interests in mining exploration, potential pressures from increased tourism activities, commercial fishing on Beverly Lake, and native and sport hunting indicate that a comprehensive management plan for the Sanctuary may be required. Under the current management regime, the responsibility for coordinating the development of a management plan rests with the GNWT Department of Renewable Resources.

4. PUBLIC RESPONSE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The public release of the Northern Mineral Policy informed the general public that a review of resource utilization in the Thelon Game Sanctuary would take place. This prompted a public response from people and organizations concerned about the Sanctuary. As well the Conservation Advisory Committee distributed copies of the draft "Known Resource Values" report to a list of interested organizations and solicited feedback. The consultants who prepared the above report also prepared a draft report summarizing responses received up to December 1988.

The Conservation Advisory Committee has interacted with the public through dissemination of reports, through correspondence and through participation at meetings of interest groups. TFN, the Dene/Metis Negotiations Secretariat, numerous non-government organizations and individuals have expressed the desire for increased public involvement in the review process through such means as hearings, workshops, land use planning, or expanded membership on the Conservation Advisory Committee.

4.2 SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

Many letters were received from the general public, with more than half coming from outside Canada. A large percentage of the writers have personal experience in the Thelon Game Sanctuary through recreational canoeing trips. Without exception every writer supported preservation of the Sanctuary. The basic message was that the Sanctuary is a highly valued wilderness area for wildlife and for recreation: leave it alone.

Letters were received from special interest groups, which included native organizations, tourism operators and conservation groups, that were opposed to the review and expressed concerns regarding a potential conflict with land claims negotiations and the lack of native involvement in the decision-making process. Letters from tourism and conservation organizations stress the importance of the resource values of the wilderness

area. Several groups called for comprehensive studies to document the ecological importance of the Sanctuary.

The NWT Chamber of Mines was kept informed of the review. The two letters received from the mining community (from the NWT Chamber of Mines and from Cominco Ltd.) expressed strong support for the Northern Mineral Policy but made no specific reference to the Thelon Game Sanctuary.

Resolutions/motions regarding the Sanctuary were received from the Canadian Nature Federation, the Canadian Wildlife Federation, the Beverly Kaminuriak Caribou Management Board, the Denendeh Conservation Board, the Indian Governments of Saskatchewan, Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, the Municipality of Baker Lake, the NWT Wildlife Federation, and the South Slave Regional Council. All resolutions/motions supported preservation of the Sanctuary.

The Inuit Tapirisat of Canada supported the Tungavik Federation of Nunavut's position that the entire Northern Mineral Policy should be withdrawn and called on government not to issue mining leases until land claims are settled. Most of the resolutions/motions specifically opposed any consideration of mining exploration in the Sanctuary.

The Canadian Nature Federation called for independent studies to document the ecological importance of the Thelon Game Sanctuary. It expressed the opinion that there is no point in continuing the present review of the Sanctuary because the information base is inadequate for a proper assessment of management options. If the information base were improved, then there would be a demand for a full public review of the options as part of any decision making process.

The Canadian Arctic Resources Committee (CARC) received some 1950 cards back from individuals on its' mailing list, seeking assurance from the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development that the Thelon Game Sanctuary will be preserved. Their covering letter to the Minister stated that "CARC is categorically opposed to any course of action that would open up the Thelon Game Sanctuary to mineral exploration or development, or that would re-define the sanctuary's boundaries so as to delete areas from its protection".

In summarizing the above responses, the consultant listed the following reasons for opposition in decreasing order of frequency of occurrence:

1. philosophical opposition to degradation of the environment;
 2. opposition to changes because the writer uses or used the area for recreation;
 3. available information base is inadequate for decision making;
-

4. inadequate public involvement in the process;
5. conflicts with native land claims;
6. loss of income by tourism operators; and
7. negative impact on the Beverly caribou herd.

5.0 OPTIONS: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The Conservation Advisory Committee studied the basic options available for a review of resource utilization in the Thelon Game Sanctuary and reached its own conclusions. It should be noted that the study of options was hampered by the poor quality of the resource information base, both within and adjacent to the Sanctuary, and that some of the options cannot be considered properly without a better information base for resource management decision making.

5.2 OPENING THE SANCTUARY TO MINING

The Northern Mineral Policy calls for a review with the objective of ensuring the widest range of activities compatible with the Sanctuary. The Conservation Advisory Committee, therefore, considered the option of opening the Sanctuary to mineral exploration and development.

Most sanctuaries and conservation areas in the NWT are not closed to mineral industry activities. The main exceptions are National Parks and the Thelon Game Sanctuary. Additional conditions may be applied to activities at specified sites or times of the year, but the mineral industry and conservation interests have demonstrated that they can co-exist. As well, most conservation practices do not place undue hardships on the mineral industry. The logical conclusion is that mining and conservation might be able to co-exist in the Thelon Game Sanctuary.

The opinion of the Conservation Advisory Committee is that they could co-exist in some portions of the Sanctuary, but not in others. The high resource values of the Thelon River valley might be placed in jeopardy by mineral exploration and development activities. However, this opinion is based upon circumstantial information, and its validity cannot be tested with the existing information base.

Public opinion is directly opposed to this option. The public perception is that opening the Sanctuary entirely, or in part, to mining would threaten its' wilderness and wildlife preservation values. Implementation of this option would draw a strong adverse reaction from the general public, from conservation interests, and from native organizations.

Despite the opinion that mining and conservation could co-exist in some portions of the Thelon Game Sanctuary, the overwhelming public opinion leads the Conservation Advisory Committee to recommend against opening the Sanctuary to mining.

5.3 ADJUSTING THE BOUNDARIES

A second option which could serve the objectives of the Northern Mineral Policy would be to adjust the boundaries of the Sanctuary, so that areas officially removed from it could be opened to mining activity. This was done once before in response to requests from mining companies to allow them to enter the southwestern portion of the Sanctuary.

It is possible that adjustments to the boundaries could enhance the resource values of the Sanctuary as well as providing benefits to the mining industry. For example, the resource values of the Sanctuary might be enhanced by expansion to the northeast and east to include the important caribou calving area, and the waterfowl habitat in the vicinity of Aberdeen Lake. It might be possible to exchange these for areas in the northwest or southern portions of the Sanctuary which are far from the Thelon Valley and its tributaries.

However, the present information base is inadequate as a basis for decision making on matters related to boundary adjustments and resource management. Comprehensive ecological and resource studies (probably requiring something in the order of two years work and \$500,000) would have to be completed before boundary adjustments are contemplated. In addition, a complete public review of the options would be required, possibly by the Denendeh and Nunavut Planning Commissions. Care must be taken not to prejudice land claims negotiations.

Public opinion does not presently support this option, but it is possible that public opinion would change if potential improvements to the resource values to the Sanctuary were understood.

The Conservation Advisory Committee concludes that this option has considerable merit, but that it requires an improved information base and a public review process before it could be considered.

5.4 IMPROVING THE MANAGEMENT REGIME

Land within the Thelon Game Sanctuary is withdrawn from disposition by the Territorial Lands Act, thereby excluding mineral exploration. Wildlife is managed by the Territorial Government which prohibits hunting and trapping in all game sanctuaries. Entry to the Thelon Game Sanctuary was prohibited without a permit prior to 1978 when "An Ordinance Respecting Wildlife" provided that a permit was no longer required, in order to facilitate use of the sanctuary for recreational purposes.

The renewable resource management regime presently begins and ends with the land withdrawal. That the renewable resources and wilderness characteristics of the sanctuary are so exceptional is almost entirely attributable to its remote location.

There is no management plan for the Thelon Game Sanctuary, nor is there enough information about its resource values to develop one. Native people make some use of the Sanctuary, yet this activity goes unmanaged and undocumented. Recreational activity is unmanaged and problems are likely to develop with increased usage.

Improvements to the management regime will not be acceptable if they are perceived as a threat to land claims negotiations. This point is underlined by the fact that there is a boundary dispute between TFN and Dene-Metis negotiators in the vicinity of the Thelon Game Sanctuary. Traditional rights to and use of the area by the Inuit, Dene and Metis may have to be reconsidered when developing a management plan for the Sanctuary.

There will be significant public interest in improving the management regime and developing a management plan. Once again this will require a public review process with representation from native organizations and other interest groups.

Similarly to the previous option, the Conservation Advisory Committee concludes that this option has considerable merit, but that it requires an improved information base and public review process before it could be implemented.

5.5 MAINTAIN THE STATUS QUO

The Thelon Game Sanctuary has retained its resource values over the past 60 years primarily by being left alone. Although human use is increasing it does not seem to be placing undue stress on these resource values.

Public opinion is opposed to any change in the status of the Sanctuary. In fact there is fairly strong opposition to even conducting a review of its

status, apparently because some people are concerned that it might lead to an undesirable change.

The Conservation Advisory Committee concludes that this is the best option available at this time.

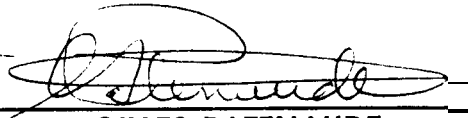
6.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Conservation Advisory Committee recommends that:

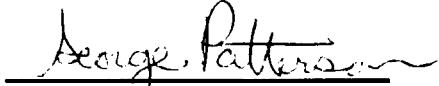
1. The Thelon Game Sanctuary should not be opened to mining activity;
2. The two governments should initiate a research program to update the resource information base within the Sanctuary, and in areas adjacent to the Sanctuary; and
3. Consideration should be given to creation of a better Sanctuary through boundary adjustments only after the information base is improved through field research, and a public review of management options is completed.



JAMIE BASTEDO
GNWT RENEWABLE RESOURCES



GILLES PATENAUDE
DIAND MINERALS AND
ECONOMIC ANALYSIS



GEORGE PATTERSON
GNWT ENERGY, MINES AND
PETROLEUM RESOURCES



KEVIN MCCORMICK
CANADIAN WILDLIFE SERVICE



HAL MILLS
LAND USE PLANNING



RANJIT SONIASY
DIAND
ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION

DECEMBER 19, 1989