

Information Sheet

Placer Mining in the Indian River Area

The Yukon government will be implementing the following interim approach for Class 4 placer projects located in the Indian River area. This approach applies to projects that have not yet received an Evaluation Report by the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board's Designated Office.

Proposed Class 4 placer mining projects with naturally occurring (previously undisturbed) wetlands on claims will be subject to the following:

- mining in undisturbed wetlands must be avoided where possible;
- no mining will be permitted in bogs;
- miners that cannot avoid other wetlands types will be required to submit a wetland protection and reclamation plan, approved by the Chief of Placer Land Use, that leaves intact 40 per cent of the presently undisturbed fens within the mining operation claim block, before commencing work in undisturbed wetlands; and
- for operations licensed for 10 years, the Chief of Placer Land Use, will conduct an interim review at the beginning of the fifth year, in consultation with First Nations, to assess whether any activity carried out under the operating plan is causing or is likely to cause adverse effects that have not been appropriately mitigated (see *Placer Mining Land Use Regulations* section 12-14).

Each proposed Class 4 placer mining project in the Indian River area will be considered by the Yukon government under this interim approach on a case-by-case basis depending on the location and type of activities, the results of the assessment carried out pursuant to the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act* process and consultation with First Nations.

Study & Reclamation Guidelines

The Yukon government and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in are developing guidelines for the reclamation of naturally occurring wetlands affected by placer mining in the Indian River watershed. A study will also be conducted to learn more about the wetlands and inform the development of guidelines.

Until the reclamation guidelines are developed, the guidelines for the Northern Exposures project on Ruby Creek (2015-0120) will be available to operators as guidance for the development of wetland protection and reclamation plans.

Wetland Inventory

The Yukon government conducted an inventory of the wetlands in the area of interest along the Indian River in 2016/2017.

The Indian River Wetlands map and data are resources for determining locations of bogs, fens, and other wetlands areas. This mapping will guide operators, regulators and inspectors to ensure the adequate protection of wetlands in the Indian River area. Individual operators may supplement this information by conducting additional wetland inventory mapping of their claim block.

Operators will be informed if changes or updates are made to the current inventory.

Background

In 2017, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Yukon government and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in committing the parties to work together on the protection and reclamation of naturally-occurring wetlands affected by placer mining in the Indian River watershed.

Placer miners with projects proposed in the Indian River area entering the assessment and licensing process are experiencing uncertainty, including longer timelines and unanticipated additional information requirements. These additional requirements and longer timelines stem from the potential environmental and cultural impacts of placer mining in wetlands identified during the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act* review process, regulatory review and consultation with First Nations.

The Yukon government is aware that the Indian River area is an important gold producing region with established placer mining operations. However, we also recognize there is a need to minimize the effects of placer mining activities in wetland areas, and more effective licensing of placer mining is necessary.

The Yukon government is advancing this approach to strike an appropriate balance between conservation and development interests in this area. This approach will guide how the Mineral Resources Branch, as the decision body, drafts decision documents for placer mining project proposals in the Indian River area. The approach lays out specific requirements (i.e., terms and conditions) that will be included in the decision document for projects operating in undisturbed wetlands. It requires placer mining operators to demonstrate avoidance of the most sensitive wetland types, mitigations that eliminate or reduce impacts to all wetland types and details how reclamation of wetlands will be undertaken during operations. These requirements are intended to address some of the concerns raised by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and issues under consideration during licensing by the Yukon Water Board.

This interim approach will apply while Yukon government works with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in on a study of the Indian River wetlands and development of wetlands reclamation guidelines. The Yukon government will revisit this approach once the study is completed and the guidelines are finalized.

Who will this apply to?

This initiative will apply to proposed Class 4 placer mining projects within the watershed covered by the 2016/17 Indian River Wetlands Inventory, which can be accessed here:

<https://open.yukon.ca/data/dataset/indian-river-wetlands>

For more information on how this might affect your particular placer mining operation please contact the Mineral Resources Branch directly.