

PASSAGES FROM THE Peace

COMMUNITY REFLECTIONS ON BC'S CHANGING PEACE REGION



David
Suzuki
Foundation

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— May Apsassin, Dane-zaa oral historian/elder

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— Ken and Arlene Boon,
Farmers/loghome builders,
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“The land feels dead as if there is no life. It may not be the case, but that is what it looks like and feels like — like the spirit of the land is injured, or on its last legs.”

— Art Napoleon, former Saulneau First Nation Chief, musician, historian, hunter

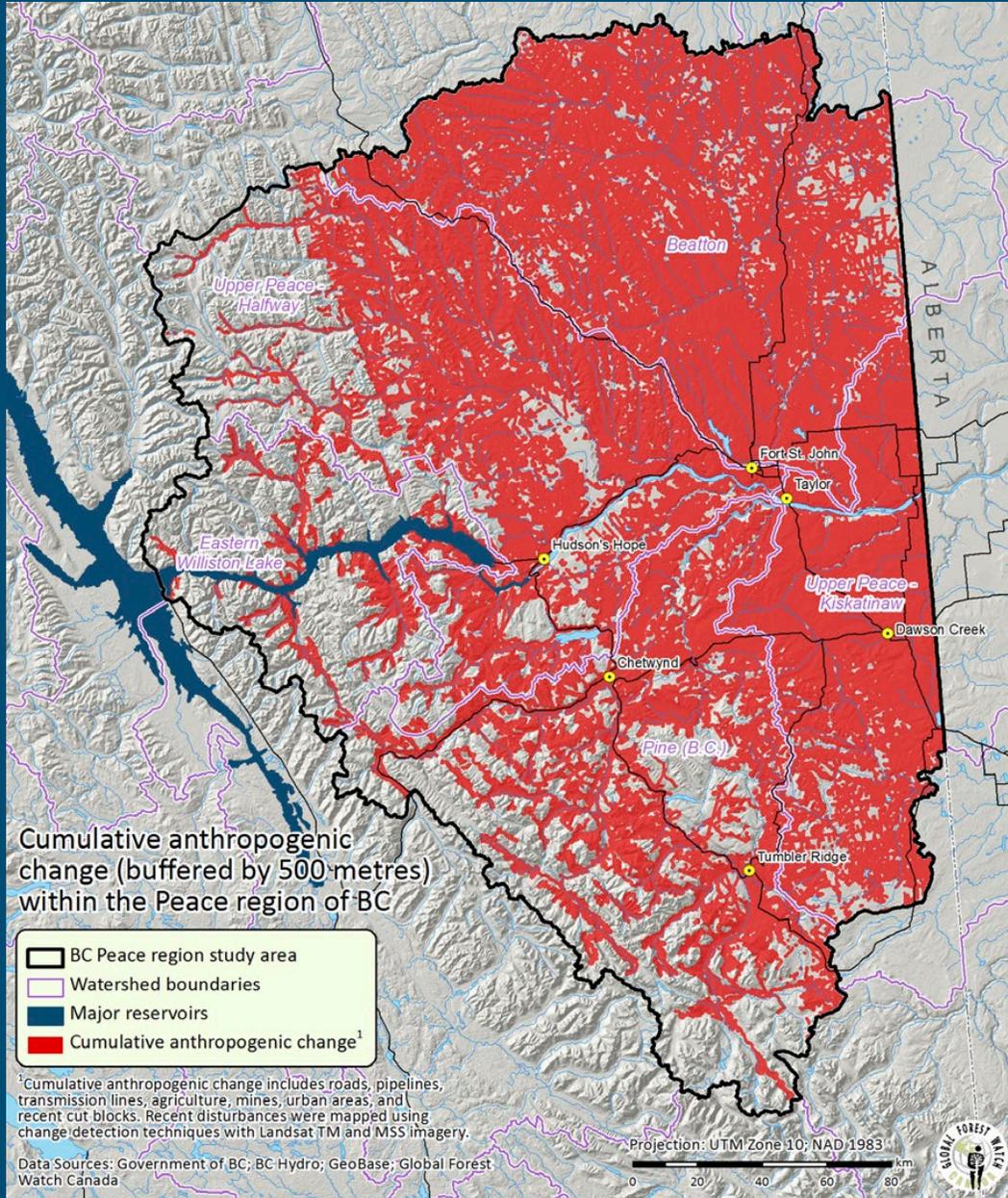
BRITISH COLUMBIA'S PEACE REGION has experienced rapid widespread changes as industrial interests aggressively converge on this once remote northern region. The physical changes from logging, mining, oil and gas development (this includes conventional methods as well as unconventional methods such as fracking), water withdrawals, stream crossings, large-scale hydro development (e.g., W.A.C. Bennett Dam), urban and agricultural conversion takes up one fifth of the landscape. When the zone of influence of these changes on wildlife populations is calculated, over two thirds of the region is what Dane-zaa elder May Apsassin calls 'broken' country for wildlife and the communities that rely on them. In two of the five watersheds of this region, the percentage of broken country is over 90 per cent.

The greatest impact is in the east of the region, which now appears from air as a fractured landscape of clearcuts, seismic lines, petroleum and natural gas well sites and facilities, mineral developments, roads, transmission lines, pipelines and fragmented fields. Tenures held by industry wallpaper the region and are often multilayered in the same geographic area. If future developments proceed as proposed, including the flooding of the Peace River for the Site C dam project, the result will be even greater cumulative changes in the region.

Local First Nations and many non-aboriginals are concerned that further expansion and intensification of the industrial footprint in the region will cause irrevocable harm to the wellbeing of their communities. First Nations have presented a joint declaration to the British Columbia Government identifying the problem of cumulative impacts of these disturbances — drawing special attention to the plight of key threatened wildlife species such as caribou and grizzly — and call for research into the cumulative impacts.¹

¹ First Nations Declaration Concerning the Proposed Site C Dam, September 17, 2010, wildernesscommittee.org/sites/all/files/Paddle_to_the_Premier_FirstNations_Declaration_0.pdf

CUMULATIVE ANTHROPOGENIC (HUMAN-CAUSED) CHANGE IN PEACE REGION



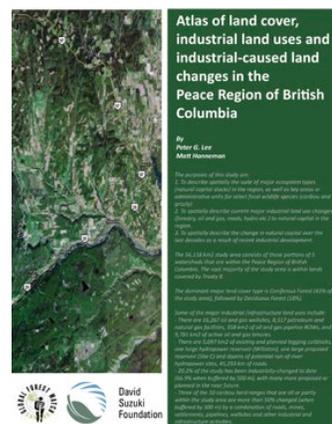
CUMULATIVE IMPACTS: The total impact when changes are added together — when all industrial and infrastructure activities on the land that may degrade natural ecological conditions are seen as a whole.

PHOTOS COURTESY JURİ PREPREE



As a result of these concerns, Global Forest Watch Canada, supported by the David Suzuki Foundation and West Moberly First Nation, mapped the cumulative changes of the region by overlaying the maps of mines, transmission lines, roads, pipelines, reservoirs, clearcuts, wind farms, urban and agriculture areas. Seismic exploration changes were not mapped due to unreliability of the data, nor do the maps include proposed impacts like the Site C dam on the Peace River.

Even with this conservative dataset, the stories of the maps and testimony from the residents of what this means on the ground provide a vivid portrait of a landscape besieged by industrial development.



For the complete *Atlas of land cover, industrial land uses and industrial-caused land changes in the Peace region of British Columbia* by Peter Lee and Matt Hanneman go to <http://tinyurl.com/bvy6uyn>



May Apsassin



“We are getting low on the moose. I see some moose in a city and I say look at him, he come to town because he got no home, their home is all broken. I talk to other elders. They feel very hurt about oil-rig, road, logging. It is destroying for these animals.”

— May Apsassin,
Dane-Zaa oral historian/elder

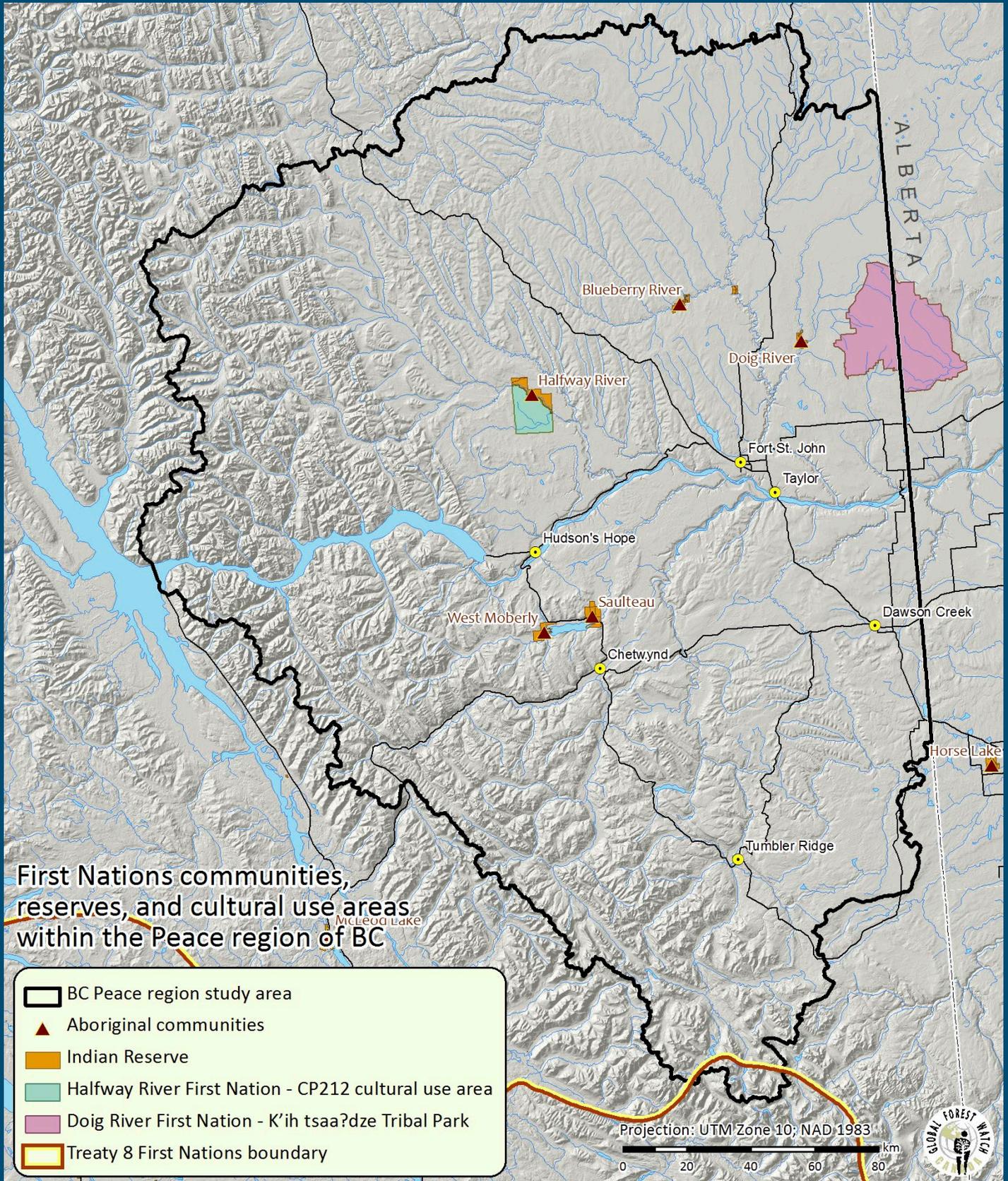
May Apsassin, Dane-zaa oral historian, is a respected elder of the Blueberry River First Nation and maintains strong family ties to the Doig River First Nation. May has extensive knowledge and experiences of Gat Tah Kw’ Suunéch’ii Kéch’iige region and shares her knowledge through the Dane Wajich Project for oral history.

NOW TODAY WE SEE SO MUCH OIL-RIG, roads, logging — everything they destroy in our hunting area. What about all these animals living in the bush? What do they think?

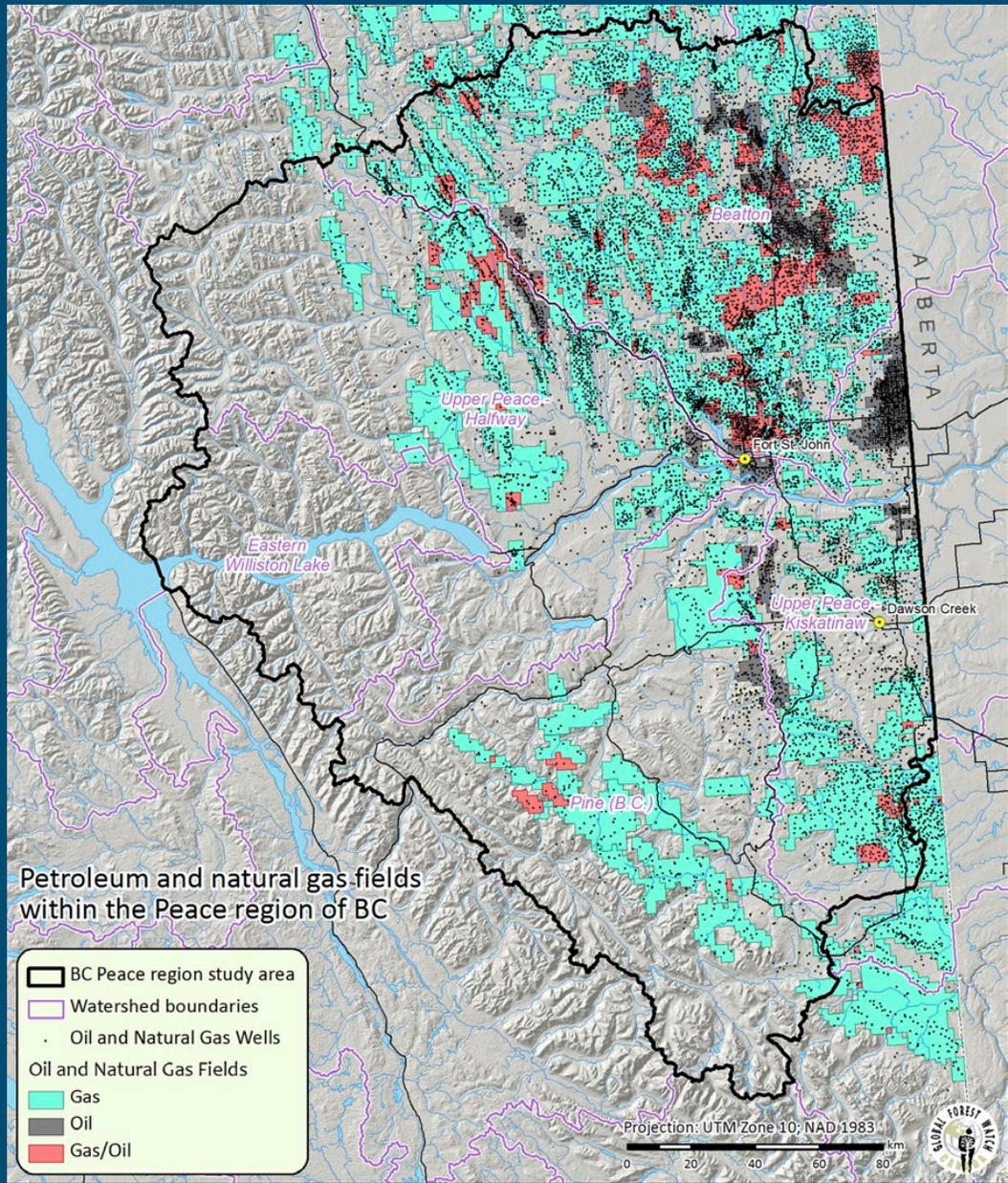
In 1950, there is no oil-rig. We are poor but no oil-rig, and we were happy and our animals are safe in their home. They weren’t run over on the road. The other day we come back from town and we see dead moose and her calf on road and not too far another dead one on the road. “Oh, you poor things.” We are getting low on the moose. I see some moose in a city and I say look at him, he come to town because he got no home, their home is all broken. I talk to other elders. They feel very hurt about oil-rig, road, logging. It is destroying for these animals. What about owl? What about eagle? We never see eagle who is special to us. What they do is kill them on the road.

Towards my area, there are a lot of places that I know with berries — high-bush cranberries, low-bush and blueberries — and they pull up berries where they put these rigs and wells standing up. I think about all these berries that we use. My grandpa [Succona], chief of Doig used to say: “There is lots of medicine there.” I share my feelings with my younger elders in Doig. How do you people feel about these things? They say: “It is no good but they fool our family with a little of the green paper. They pay a little but then go out and do all those things.”

We tried and set our trap line area: two cabins. “Oh, my dear, I wish they don’t log too much around my traplines.” This is how I feel: I want to go to Doig and talk with my other elders. If we can keep barking, barking, barking about this thing maybe they can hear that this is what I was thinking.



PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS FIELDS IN THE PEACE REGION



TOP AND BOTTOM PEACE REGION
PHOTOS COURTESY JURII PREPREE

Middle photo:
May Apsassin with her
granddaughter, Winona
PHOTO COURTESY ROBIN RIDDINGTON



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Ken and Arlene Boon



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— Ken and Arlene Boon,
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IN THIS COUNTRY, WE ARE JUST GETTING LAMBASTED FROM EVERY DIRECTION.

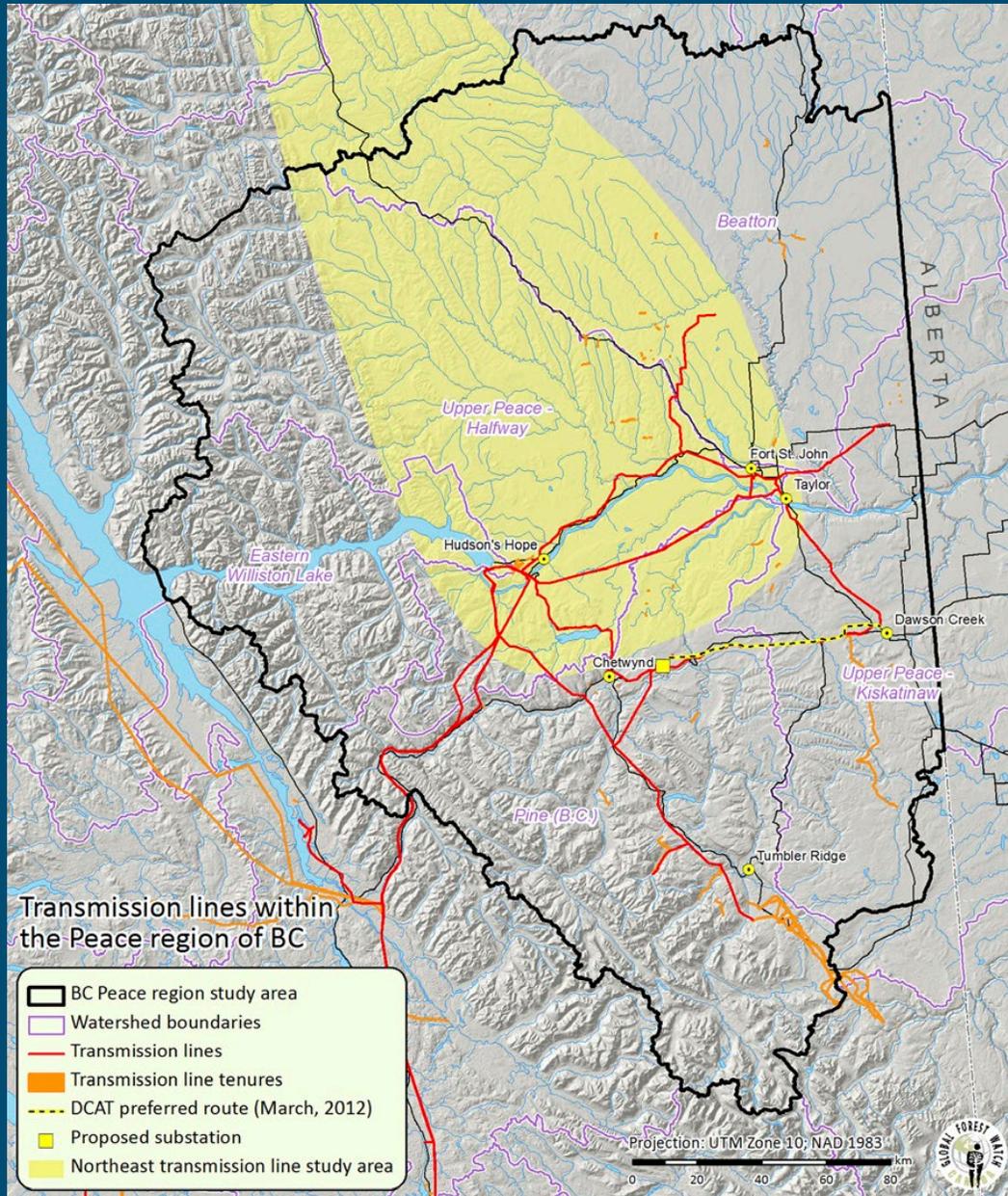
It is unreal what is going on here. We farm in the Peace Valley, which we can’t emphasize enough is a unique place. To give you a sense of what that means, whenever a massive spring storm hits, the songbirds all show up in our fields because it is the only low elevation land with a milder microclimate. We will have bare ground down here and up top, they’ll be under 8 inches of snow. There were so many songbirds last spring, the traffic on the Highway 29, which goes through our place, had to slow down for them. This is the valley they want to flood for Site C—the only low elevation valley! Where will the wildlife go? Where will the farmers go?

With all the new roads, lines and pads, we don’t even recognize some areas anymore. The big pipeline crossing proposed that will end up in Alberta is just above us. Then there is shale gas extraction, which is marching closer every day. The increase in industrial traffic is already phenomenal on Highway 29; huge convoys going by of fracking and drilling equipment and the chemicals going into the wells that you know is having an impact in wilderness areas. If LNG [liquefied natural gas] goes ahead, this will triple the impact. I can’t imagine what this country is going look like in twenty years.

Technology has got way ahead of the science in an environmental sense. We already have 16,000 holes punched in the ground and we don’t know what the existing impacts are to the groundwater. Who is monitoring the disposal wells where they dump the toxic wastewater? As a farmer you know that water goes from high country to low country so when you fracture, bad water can travel to good. Then what about the quantity of water used, which once it goes into the fracking process, you are saying good-bye to it forever?

We are asking for monitoring and a comprehensive land use plan, but BC isn’t doing that. We are like mushrooms in the dark. We hear rumours, like wells being contaminated or companies paying ‘hush money’ but by the time you find out these problems it is too late. The crazy thing is this activity is mostly speculative and dependent on LNG going ahead. The feeling you get up here is that the Peace region is the sacrificial lamb for bailing out the economic troubles of the province. For many people, we are out of sight, so out of mind, but even people in industry up here are thinking: “this is getting crazy.”

TRANSMISSION LINES IN THE PEACE REGION



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Art Napoleon



“When I was 15, Upper Moberly was called wild country. You only got so far by road and then it was wild and you continued on horse. You had to watch out for grizzlies and wolves would be around. Now it is: “I wonder if we’ll see anything.” After three days of hunting last year, we found one skinny yearling moose.”

— Art Napoleon, former chief Sauteaux Band, musician, broadcaster whose home territory is a shared territory of Sauteau and West Moberly of the Upper and Lower Moberly watershed

HUNTING AS A WAY OF LIFE IS DYING. THERE IS NO POLITE LANGUAGE FOR IT.

It is dying, not because of our desires; it is the reality of what’s happening which is devastating. I have had to turn off my ‘feelers’ because I can’t look at it and simply accept it. To us it is not Crown land, it is the land we were raised on, our ‘multi-purpose institution’ that we went on to get this and that, depending on the season — huckleberry or bull moose seasons — now you just can’t do it. The land feels dead as if there is no life. It may not be the case, but that is what it looks like and feels like — like the spirit of the land is injured, or on its last legs. There are no more tracks or much interaction and many of the animals that were once all over the place are hard to find. When I was 15, Upper Moberly was called wild country. You only got so far by road and then it was wild and you continued on horse. You had to watch out for grizzlies and wolves would be around. Now it is: “I wonder if we’ll see anything.” After three days of hunting last year, we found one skinny yearling moose.

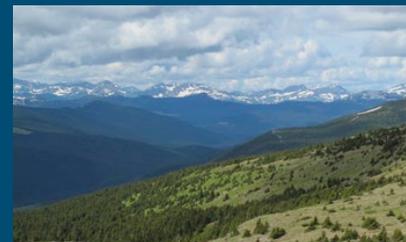
It was really noticeable last summer, the hunt really went downhill quite drastically. It is largely because of the huge clearcuts of beetle kill forest that did not have to meet any codes, because they say the only way to get rid of it is to clearcut. So the moose have no cover and numbers are down. The oil wells are getting closer to the ‘rez’ [reserve]. Some of the traditional hunting sites have already been decimated by oil wells, flare pits and seismic lines. There are a lot of proposed coalmines up Johnson Creek. They would build a road so that through-traffic would be created directly from Prince George on the back roads. That would completely open it up even more, yet it is already devastated. The whole Burns property is private and how did they get private property in the middle of nowhere? They clearcut the whole thing and it is huge.

Seismic lines start getting used as wildlife travel corridors. If you have a few it’s not so bad, but when they are everywhere the traditional land users know there is an impact. It is easier for the wolves to get around. Old wildlife trails are kind of useless now. Some of them used to lead us to traditional hunting camp spots but we don’t use them anymore, it doesn’t make any sense. Following those trails you’ll come across a new road with heavy traffic cutting across it and you say, “Oh shit, I might as well have drove here.” It makes no sense to ride anymore, so people have stopped using horses. There is a lot of traffic and it isn’t our private playground anymore. The communities need to be patrolled, but people are afraid that they’ll be hassled. You’re sharing it with all these strangers who don’t have the same connection to it that you do. Some of those people vandalize it. They see a cabin and they burn them down or steal from them. Not to mention irresponsible hunters who shoot at anything.

INTACT FOREST LANDSCAPES IN THE PEACE REGION



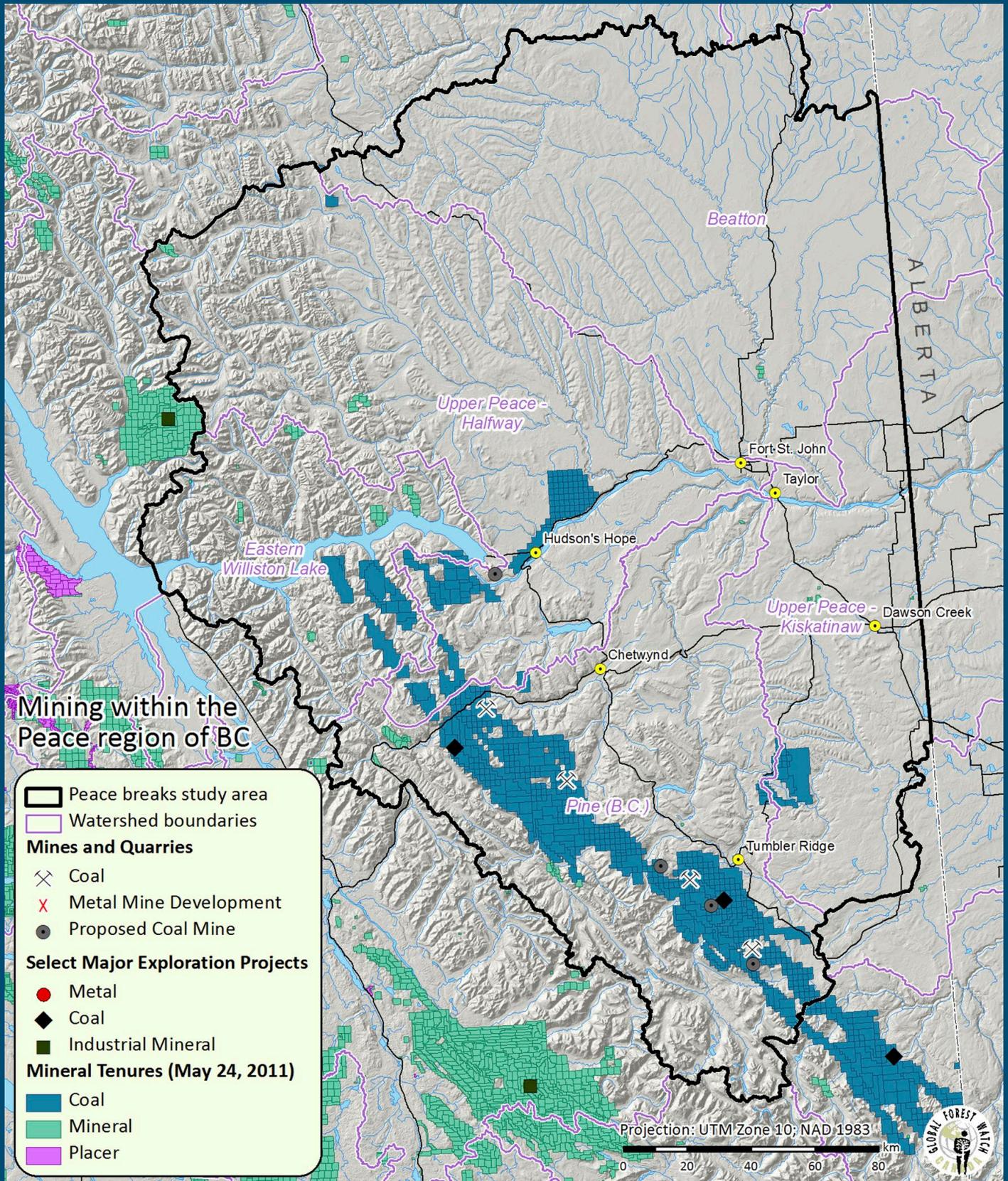
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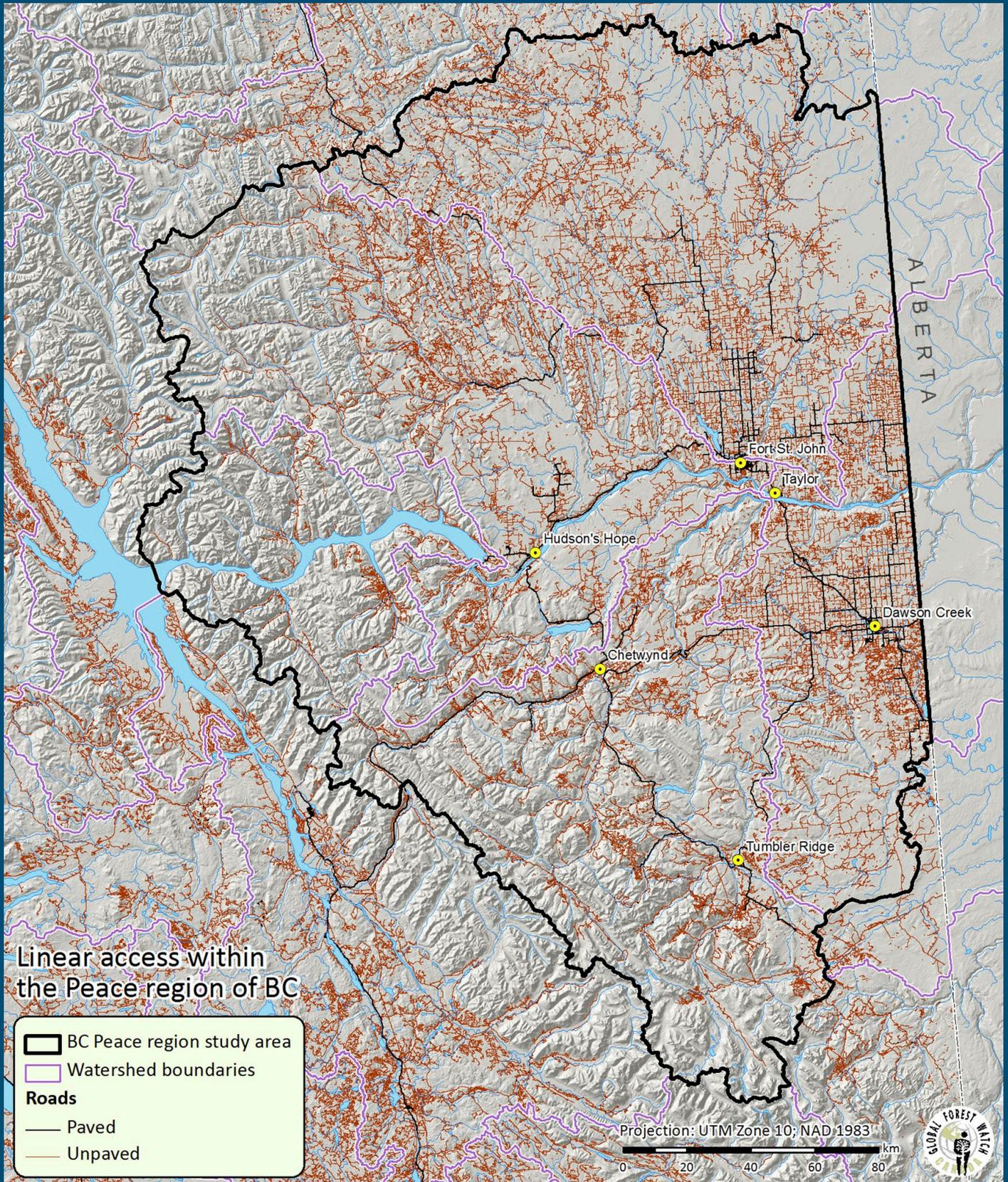
Pre-dam [W.A.C. Bennett Dam and Williston Reservoir] the caribou herds were huge and roamed freely. The dam cut off the migration route and other factors diminished the numbers to the point that they are considered endangered. They don't hang out in the places they used to. People never got compensation for the old flood yet they want to proceed with a new flood. It is unjust. That whole beautiful valley would be put underwater and the road would be put around it into some beautiful country. It is just more loss of land, loss of calving areas of the moose and pristine farmland — A1 agricultural land. It could be one of BC's fruit baskets. The fish are already all contaminated by mercury, so it is just going to continue. Moberly, that river of ours, could back up a ways and become

more stagnant than it is already. The water could flow backwards for some distance, it will be higher with more backwaters. All the wildlife will be impacted.

It is dangerous to say that it is too late because it is an argument the industries will jump on: “Well, if it is destroyed anyway, we aren't adding additional damage.” That will probably be one of their tactics. It is a fine balance to show that we still use the land, but it's harder to use the land the way we once did. We will, however, continue to harvest the bounty of our territory for as long as we can so that our children can at least catch a glimpse of what remains of our way of life.



LINEAR ACCESS IN THE PEACE REGION





PEACE REGION BY THE NUMBERS

Area in hectares of the five watersheds in British Columbia's Peace region: 5,611,800

Number of oil and gas wells: 16,267

Number of potential run-of-river hydro developments: 247

Number of water crossings by oil and gas industry: 2,296

Kilometres of roads: 45,293

Kilometres of transmission lines: 1,163

Area of land potentially to be flooded and impacted by Site C: 6300 hectares

Area of active petroleum and natural gas tenures and pipeline right of ways: 18%

Area of coal and mineral mine tenures: 7.3%

Area with recent and planned cutblocks: 9.1%

Area of windpower tenures: 6.1%

Area of agricultural lands: 9.2%

Total area of cumulative changes (with buffer of 500 metres): 66.9%
(>90% for Upper Peace Kiskatinaw and Beatton watersheds)

Area set aside for aboriginal use: 1.6%

Area that is protected for parks: 4.2%

Area of intact forests in the Beatton watershed: 0.9%

Percentage of caribou herd range impacted: 46.6%
(85% of Chinchaga herd range)

What can you do to help?



Ultimately, the decision on whether to proceed with the Site C dam is a political one. You can help influence this decision by informing your British Columbia member of the legislative assembly about the issues surrounding Site C and letting them know that you are opposed to it.

THE SCIENCE CONFIRMS WHAT FIRST NATIONS, farmers and other community members in the Peace Region have been witnessing for many years now – north-eastern BC is being significantly impacted by intensive and overlapping industrial activities on the land base, like logging, mining, oil and gas development and hydro. In light of these cumulative impacts, as well as planned and potential new large-scale industrial projects, such as the Site C dam, the David Suzuki Foundation is urging the BC government to:

1. Expand recovery efforts for threatened species such as woodland caribou through the protection and restoration of wildlife habitat in low-elevation areas that are threatened by industrial activities.
2. Expand the existing network of protected areas in the region, including the establishment of K'ih tsaa?dze Tribal Park. K'ih tsaa?dze (meaning “old spruce” in the Dane-za language) is located within the traditional lands of the Doig River First Nation and has been used for generations by the community as an important place for hunting, camping, fishing and spiritual renewal.
3. Ensure that existing and future industrial activities in the Peace Region are better managed through cumulative impacts land-use planning that addresses the growing human footprint of logging, mining, oil and gas development, hydro and other activities.
4. Protect the Peace River Valley by not proceeding with the Site C dam.

Ultimately, the decision on whether to proceed with the Site C dam is a political one. You can help influence this decision by informing your British Columbia member of the legislative assembly about the issues surrounding Site C and letting them know that you are opposed to it. Visit your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) in person or take a few minutes to send key British Columbia ministers a letter using an easy letter writing tool at www.stopsitec.org.



Global Forest Watch Canada provides access to more complete information about development activities in Canada's forests and their environmental impacts. We are convinced that providing greater information about Canada's forests will lead to better decision-making on forest management and use, which ultimately will result in forest management regimes that provide a full range of benefits for both present and future generations.

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Global Forest Watch and the David Suzuki Foundation thank the interviewees for their contributions. Opinions are those of the interviewees alone.



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The David Suzuki Foundation works with government, business and individuals to conserve our environment by providing science-based education, advocacy and policy work, and acting as a catalyst for the social change that today's situation demands.

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