



Finding Balance: The Proposed Mackenzie Valley Pipeline

Do you use natural gas in your home? Many Canadians use it to heat buildings and to run their stoves, fireplaces, and barbecues. But where does natural gas come from? Like coal and oil, natural gas is a fossil fuel, found deep underground. We mine natural gas and carry it to cities and towns through pipes that can be hundreds of kilometres long.

People in the Northwest Territories have been using fossil fuels for a long time. The Dene, a northern people, used oil to waterproof their canoes. In the twentieth century, companies began mining fossil fuels in the Northwest Territories. They even had a plan to build a pipeline that would carry natural gas all the way along the Mackenzie River to Alberta.

The companies considered the Mackenzie Valley the perfect spot to build the pipeline, but many northerners protested. They feared that the pipeline would threaten the **habitats** of plants, animals, and people who lived there. They also wanted to make sure that their people would benefit from profits made from the natural resources on their land. The government of Canada agreed.

The government decided that the pipeline could not be built until the companies and communities worked together to find a **compromise**. Together, with help from conservation groups like WWF-Canada, they are trying to create a plan that balances development with conservation. One part of this plan is called the *Northwest Territories Protected Areas Strategy (NWT PAS)*.

Exploring Fossil Fuels

Fossil fuels are formed from the remains of plants and animals that were buried millions of years ago. Over time, these plants and animals were covered by sand and rock, and slowly **decomposed**.



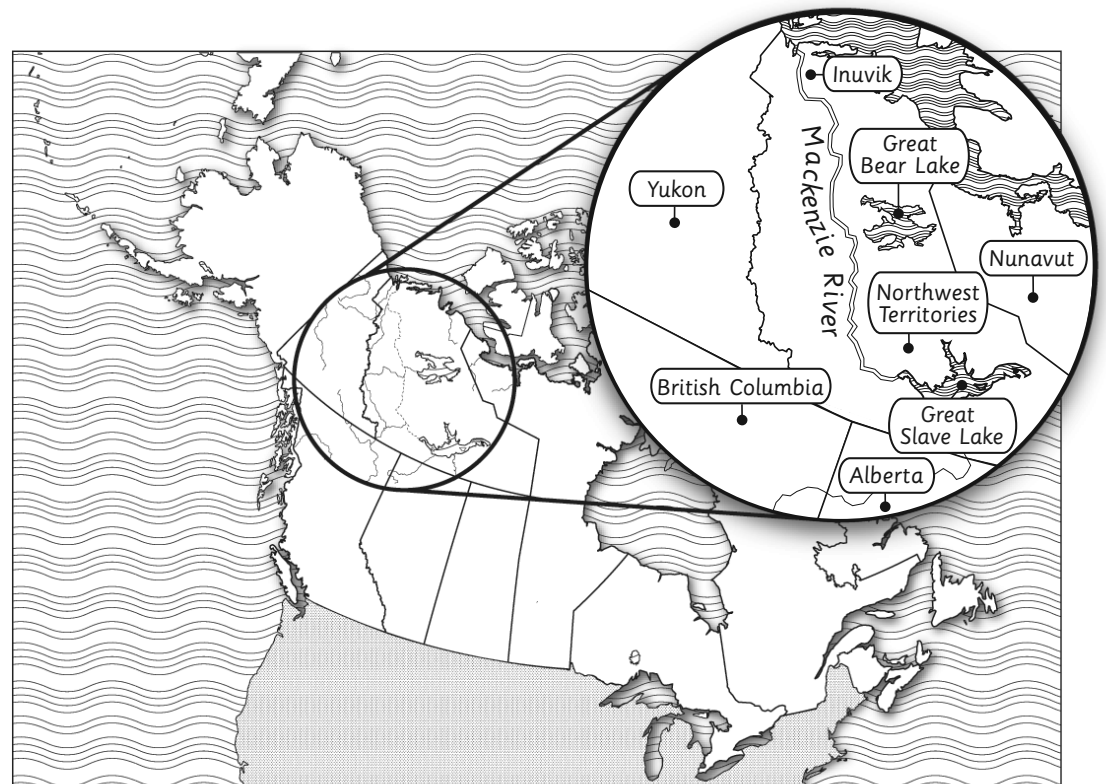


The pressure and heat from many layers of sand and rock squeezed the material together, eventually producing oil, coal, and natural gas.

Some of this gas rises through the ground and is released into the air. However, some fossil fuels get trapped between layers of rock, where it's contained. These can be mined by companies and sold as fuel.

Life in the Mackenzie Valley

The Mackenzie Valley is one of the least developed places left on Earth. It's a place of clean air, unpolluted water, and healthy wildlife. The river that runs through the valley is the longest in Canada. It's known by many names. On maps, it's often called the Mackenzie River. Most Dene people call it Dehcho which means "big river" or "flowing much". A very fitting name because it provides clean water to wildlife and communities across the Northwest Territories.





The river is also bordered by the second largest wetland in Canada. Wetlands are areas next to rivers, lakes, or oceans where the soil is very moist. They include swamps, marshes, or bogs that are home to hundreds of **species** of plants and animals. In the past, we drained or filled many wetlands to create space for farms, towns, and cities. We didn't realize how important wetlands are for all living creatures, including people. Sadly, even though we're learning more about them, we're still losing many of them to development.

Wetlands help provide clean drinking water for animals and humans. Water flows through the rich soil and lush plants that grow in wetlands. The soil and plants soak up pollutants and waste like a sponge.

Wetlands are also breeding areas for hundreds of species of birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, and insects. The still water and shady areas provide a safe spot for many species to lay eggs. About half of the bird species in North America rely on wetlands to nest, feed, and live.

We have drained so many wetlands, populations of ducks, fish, and many other species in Canada have declined. So, before we allow the pipeline to be built in the Mackenzie wetlands, we need the *NWT PAS* to protect the habitats of the creatures that live there.

The *NWT PAS* will also protect animals that **migrate** through and live in the Mackenzie Valley. Caribou, wolves, lynx, grizzly bears, and moose all call the valley their home. Caribou pass through the Northwest Territories on their migration routes every year. New highways and the pipeline will disturb their habitat and disrupt their migration routes. This would also affect the many Dene, Inuit, and other northerners who rely on caribou as their main source of food.





The Dene Nations: Laws of the Land

The Dene Nation includes the Chipewyan, Dogrib, Slavey, Cree, and Gwich'in people of the Northwest Territories. The Creator gave the Dene laws to live by. These rules were created to keep peace in the land.

The first Dene law is to share, and not use more from the land than you need. Another law says that you must not harm others with your actions. Under these laws, the Dene nations have lived in harmony with nature for thousands of years.

The *NWT PAS* is in partnership with groups like WWF-Canada, the Canadian Government, the Northwest Territories government, Aboriginal governments, industry, and most importantly, the communities. The Dene are working with these groups to decide which areas of the Mackenzie Valley should be protected by the *NWT PAS*. Areas that are set aside through the *NWT PAS* will ensure that the Aboriginal people maintain their rights to continue their traditional way of life. The *NWT PAS* will also work to protect burial grounds, wetlands, caribou migration routes, and **sanctuaries** for birds and animals.

The *NWT PAS* is an important example of how developers, communities, and the government can work together to achieve balance. The government must balance land development with conservation to protect places like the Mackenzie Valley. Oil and gas companies must balance what they take with what they give back to the community. They can do so by creating jobs for local people, and by respecting the **ecosystem**.

Plans like the *NWT PAS* provide us with the opportunity to learn from our past mistakes and work toward a more **sustainable** future.



Glossary

habitat: the natural environment of a plant or animal

compromise: a settling of differences agreed to by two or more people

decompose: to break down into smaller parts; to rot

fuel: anything that is burned or consumed as a source of energy

species: a single type of plant or animal

migrate: to move from one place to another, usually in different seasons

sanctuary: a natural area where animals or plants are protected from human activities

ecosystem: a community of living things that interact with each other

sustainable: able to continue without using up or causing damage to resources