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June 27, 2022

File: W2022C0004

Mark Cliffe-Phillips  
Mackenzie Valley Review Board  
200 Scotia Centre  
Box 938, 5102-50th Avenue  
Yellowknife NT X1A 2N7

Sent by email

Dear Mark Cliffe-Phillips,

**Re: Tharsis Project – Notice of Preliminary Screening Determination – Application for Land Use Permit – Mineral Exploration – Squalus Lake, NT**

The Wek'èezhì Land and Water Board (Board) met on June 27, 2022 and considered the Application from Voyageur Exploration Ltd. (Voyageur) for Land Use Permit (Permit) W2022C0004 for the Tharsis Project at Squalus Lake, NT (Project) in accordance with the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act* (MVRMA).

The Board conducted a preliminary screening based on the public record for the proceeding. Based on the evidence provided, the Board is satisfied the screening has been completed according to section 125 of the MVRMA and has decided **not to refer** the Project to environmental assessment. The Board's Preliminary Screening Determination and Reasons for Decision, as required by section 121 of the MVRMA, is attached.

If the Board does not receive notice of referral to environmental assessment, it can proceed with issuance of Permit W2022C0004 on **Friday, July 8, 2022**.

The Board and staff look forward to continued communications throughout the pause period. Please contact Ryan Fequet at (867) 765-4589 with any questions or concerns regarding this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mason Mantla', written in a cursive style.

Mason Mantla  
Chair, Wek'èezhii Land and Water Board

BCC'd to: Wek'èezhii Distribution List  
Jared Suchan, Voyageur

Attached: Preliminary Screening Determination and Reasons for Decision



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## Preliminary Screening Determination and Reasons for Decision

Land Use Permit Application	
File Number	W2022C0004
Company	Voyageur Exploration Ltd.
Project	Tharsis Project
Location	Squalus Lake, NT
Activity	Mining Exploration
Date of Decision	June 27, 2022

### 1.0 Decision

In accordance with subsection 124(1) of the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act* (MVRMA), the Wek'èezhì Land and Water Board (WLWB or Board) met on June 27, 2022 to make a preliminary screening determination on the Application from Voyageur Exploration Ltd. (Voyageur)(Applicant) for Land Use Permit W2022C0004 (Permit)<sup>1</sup> for the Tharsis Project at Squalus Lake, NT (Project).<sup>2</sup>

The Board has decided not to refer the proposed Project to the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board (the Review Board) for Environmental Assessment because, based on the evidence, it is the Board's opinion that the proposed Project will not have a significant adverse impact on the environment or be a cause of public concern.

The Board's determination, including reasons for its decision, are detailed in sections [3.0](#) and [4.0](#).

<sup>1</sup>See WLWB Online Registry [www.wlwb.ca](http://www.wlwb.ca) for [Tharsis Project – Land Use Permit Application – May 18 22](#).

<sup>2</sup> The Project is the Tharsis Project, which is the proposed development, where "development" is defined in Part 5 of the MVRMA as:

"any undertaking, or any part or extension of an undertaking, that is carried out on land or water and includes an acquisition of lands pursuant to the *Historic Sites and Monuments Act* and measures carried out by a department or agency of government leading to the establishment of a park subject to the *Canada National Parks Act* or the establishment of a park under a territorial law."

## 2.0 List of Defined Terms and Acronyms

Applicant	Voyageur Exploration Ltd.
Application	The complete application package submitted by the Applicant for Land Use Permit W2022C0004.
Board	Wek'èezhìi Land and Water Board
CRP	Closure and Reclamation Plan
EA	Environmental Assessment
GNWT	Government of the Northwest Territories
GNWT-ENR	Government of the Northwest Territories – Environment and Natural Resources
GNWT-Lands	Government of the Northwest Territories – Lands
MVLWB	Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board
MVRMA	<i>Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act</i>
Minister	Minister of the Government of the Northwest Territories – Lands (GNWT-Lands)
ORS	Online Review System ( <a href="http://www.new.onlinereviewssystem.ca">www.new.onlinereviewssystem.ca</a> )
Party	As per the MVLWB <a href="#">Rules of Procedures</a> , an applicant, a person, or an organization participating in the regulatory proceeding for the Application.
Project	Tharsis Project, which is the proposed development (as defined in Part 5 of the MVRMA). <sup>3</sup>
Review Board	Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board
SCP	Spill Contingency Plan
Standard Permit Conditions	MVLWB <a href="#">Standard Land Use Permit Conditions Template</a>
TG	Tłıchq Government
TK	Traditional Knowledge
WMP	Waste Management Plan
WPP	Wildlife Protection Plan

## 3.0 Background and Scope of Screening

On May 18, 2022, the Applicant submitted an application for a new Type A Land Use Permit W2022C0004 (the Application). In accordance with paragraph 125(1)(a) of the MVRMA, the Board must conduct a preliminary screening of the proposed Project to determine and report to the Review Board whether, in its opinion, the proposed Project might have a significant adverse impact on the environment, or might be a cause of public concern. The details of the Board's analysis are set out in section [4.0](#) below.

### 3.1 Scope of Screening:

The proposed activities for the Project include:

<sup>3</sup> "development" is defined in Part 5 of the MVRMA as:

"any undertaking, or any part or extension of an undertaking, that is carried out on land or water and includes an acquisition of lands pursuant to the *Historic Sites and Monuments Act* and measures carried out by a department or agency of government leading to the establishment of a park subject to the *Canada National Parks Act* or the establishment of a park under a territorial law."

- Diamond drilling and Reverse-Circulation drilling;
- Use of equipment, vehicles, and machines;
- Use and storage of fuel;
- Construction, operation, and maintenance of a temporary camp and potential satellite camps; and
- Establishment and maintenance of winter-access trails within the property.

These proposed activities will occur on 2 mineral claims owned by Voyageur Exploration Ltd. in the vicinity of Squalus Lake (traditionally known as Saàhmjiti). The mineral claims total an area of 2,500 hectares, and up to 100 drill holes are expected per year with 15 drill holes expected for the first year. The Tharsis campsite will tentatively be located at the following coordinates: 63 54' 34.8"N and 113 09' 19.7"W, the exact locations for the potential satellite camp, fuel cache, drilling locations, and associated water sources have yet to be finalized, though it is expected that Squalus Lake will be the primary source of water for the camp and drilling activities. The capacity for the camp will be a maximum of 30 people with the average being around 15 people for the majority of the exploration program. The Applicant also stated that there is a potential for ground access via a winter road to the site via the Tłıchq Community of Wekweètì or the Tibbit-Contwoyto Winter Road.

### **3.2 Public Record and Regulatory Proceeding**

To assist the Board in its preliminary screening determination for the Project, the Board distributed the Application and a draft Permit for public review on May 19, 2022, inviting reviewers to provide comments and recommendations on the Application and the preliminary screening (e.g., on impacts and mitigation measures) using the Online Review System (ORS). Comments were due June 9, 2022, with responses from the Applicant due June 16, 2022. The Board received comments and recommendations from the:

- Government of the Northwest Territories Department of Lands - North Slave Region (GNWT-Lands)-Inspector;
- Government of the Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (GNWT-ECE – PWNHC);
- Government of the Northwest Territories Environment and Natural Resources – Environmental Assessment and Monitoring (GNWT-ENR – EAM);
- Wekeezhii Renewable Resources Board (WRRB); and
- Tłıchq Government (TG).

Board staff also submitted comments on June 9, 2022.<sup>4</sup>

Since there were no requests to extend the reviewer comment deadline, the Board is satisfied that a reasonable period of notice was given to affected communities and First Nations, as required by subsection 63(2) of the MVRMA. The Board is also satisfied that notice of the Application was provided to the Tłıchq Government (TG) and that a reasonable period of time was provided for the TG to make representations to the Board in accordance with section 63 of the MVRMA.

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<sup>4</sup> See WLWB Online Review System (ORS) for [Tharsis Project – New Land Use Permit Application – June 16, 2022](#).

#### **4.0 Potential Impacts and Proposed Mitigations**

A draft Permit was circulated for review during the regulatory proceeding and all Parties were given the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations on the draft conditions. In finalizing the conditions, the Board will consider all of the evidence provided through the regulatory proceeding.

Table 1 below summarizes:

- the potential impacts of the proposed Project;
- the concerns that were identified during the regulatory proceeding and how the Applicant addressed those concerns;
- the proposed and potential mitigations for the potential impacts; and
- the Board's analysis of the potential impacts and proposed mitigations.

**Table 1: Potential Impacts and Proposed Mitigations for the Proposed Project**

Potential Impact	Activity	Proposed Mitigations <i>Description of measures to reduce potential impacts, including consideration of cumulative impacts and climate change.</i>	Board Analysis and Determination
Land Use Area	Drilling activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Applicant proposed the following mitigations in the Application:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Drilling operations will be restricted to a very small footprint which will subsequently be reclaimed to its natural state using CCME and industry best practices.</li> <li>○ Applicant will remove or cut off and seal each drill casing at ground level.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Board has standard permit conditions that are typically used to mitigate the described impacts. These standard conditions include:<sup>5</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ LOCATION OF ACTIVITIES</li> <li>○ DRILLING NEAR WATER OR ON ICE</li> <li>○ DRILLING WASTE</li> <li>○ DRILLING WASTE DISPOSAL</li> <li>○ DRILLING WASTE CONTAINMENT</li> <li>○ FLOWING ARTESIAN WELL</li> <li>○ DRILL LOCATIONS</li> <li>○ SUMP SETBACK</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Based on the described mitigations, it is the Board’s opinion that the proposed activities will not have a significant adverse impact on the environment or be a cause of public concern.
Land Disturbance; soil contamination	Drilling activities; contamination to groundwater and waterbodies due to drilling or fuel spills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Applicant proposed the following mitigations in the Application:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Follow an approved spill plan and procedure.</li> <li>○ Spill kits and equipment will be in place and readily available.</li> <li>○ Regular inspection of fuel caches and transfer areas.</li> <li>○ Personnel will be trained in proper spill procedures.</li> <li>○ Sealing of any drill holes that encounter artesian aquifers.</li> <li>○ Proper waste management practices.</li> <li>○ Secondary containment for fuel caches.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Based on the described mitigations, it is the Board’s opinion that the proposed activities will not have a significant adverse impact on the environment or be a cause of public concern.

<sup>5</sup> See the WLWB Policies and Resources webpage to access the MVLWB [Standard Land Use Permit Conditions Template](#).

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Proper labeling and positioning of fuel drums.</li> <li>• The Board has standard permit conditions that are typically used to mitigate the described impacts. These standard conditions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ FLOWING ARTESIAN WELL</li> <li>○ CHEMICALS</li> <li>○ CLEAN UP SPILLS</li> <li>○ CLEAN WORK AREA</li> <li>○ DRILLING WASTE DISPOSAL</li> <li>○ DRILLING WASTE CONTAINMENT</li> <li>○ DRIP TRAYS</li> <li>○ FUEL CACHE SECONDARY CONTAINMENT</li> <li>○ FUEL CONTAINMENT</li> <li>○ FUEL ON LAND</li> <li>○ INSPECT LOCATIONS</li> <li>○ LOCATION OF ACTIVITIES</li> <li>○ MARK CONTAINERS AND TANKS</li> <li>○ MARK FUEL LOCATION</li> <li>○ MAXIMUM FUEL ON SITE</li> <li>○ RECLAIM NON-OIL AND GAS SUMPS</li> <li>○ REPAIR LEAKS</li> <li>○ REPORT FUEL LOCATIONS</li> <li>○ REPORT SPILLS</li> <li>○ RESPONSIBILITY FOR REMEDIATION COSTS</li> <li>○ SEAL OUTLET</li> <li>○ SECONDARY CONTAINMENT REFUELING</li> <li>○ SEWAGE DISPOSAL – PLAN</li> <li>○ SPILL CONTINGENCY PLAN</li> <li>○ SPILL RESPONSE</li> <li>○ WASTE CHEMICAL DISPOSAL</li> <li>○ WASTE MANAGEMENT</li> <li>○ WASTE PETROLEUM DISPOSAL</li> <li>○ DOGLEG APPROACHES</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
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<p>Water table alteration, changes in water quality</p>	<p>Contamination of waterbodies due to drilling waste</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Applicant proposed the following mitigations in the Application: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Both depositing drill-cuttings in a natural depression and locating sumps at least 100 metres from the highwater mark of any water course will limit potential for contamination.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Board has standard permit conditions that are typically used to mitigate the described impact. These standard conditions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ SUMP SETBACK</li> <li>○ DRILLING NEAR WATER OR ON ICE</li> <li>○ DRILLING WASTE</li> <li>○ RECLAIM NON-OIL AND GAS SUMPS</li> <li>○ CAMP SETBACK</li> <li>○ PARRALLEL WATERCOURSE SETBACK</li> <li>○ FUEL STORAGE SETBACK</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Based on the described mitigations, it is the Board's opinion that the proposed activities will not have a significant adverse impact on the environment or be a cause of public concern.</p>
<p>Soil compaction</p>	<p>Setting and erosion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Applicant proposed the following mitigations in the Application: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Disturbed sites will be re-vegetated and the disturbed land will be returned as close to the original condition as possible.</li> <li>○ Will ensure the ground is capable to support vehicle movements so that the land is not disturbed.</li> <li>○ Backfilling and restoring sumps following their use will limit potential for localized erosion.</li> <li>○ Provide adequate insulation of the ground surface beneath all camp structures to prevent vegetation from being removed, the melting of permafrost, and the ground from setting/eroding.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Board has standard permit conditions that are typically used to mitigate the described impacts. These standard conditions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ DETOURS AND CROSSINGS</li> <li>○ OFF-ROAD VEHICLE TRAVEL</li> <li>○ SUSPEND OVERLAND TRAVEL</li> <li>○ VEHICLE MOVEMENT FREEZE-UP</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Based on the described mitigations, it is the Board's opinion that the proposed activities will not have a significant adverse impact on the environment or be a cause of public concern.</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ ARCHAEOLOGICAL BUFFER</li> <li>○ MARK FUEL LOCATION</li> <li>○ PERMAFROST PROTECTION</li> <li>○ NATURAL DRAINAGE</li> <li>○ PROGRESSIVE EROSION CONTROL</li> <li>○ REPAIR EROSION</li> <li>○ FLOWING ARTESIAN WELL</li> <li>○ PREVENTION OF RUTTING</li> <li>○ CONSTRUCT ICE BRIDGES SNOWFILLS</li> <li>○ REMOVE ICE BRIDGES / SNOWFILLS</li> <li>○ MINIMIZE APPROACH</li> <li>○ REPORTS BEFORE FINAL REMOVAL</li> <li>○ NATURAL VEGETATION</li> <li>○ TRAILS RESTORATION</li> <li>○ FINAL CLEANUP AND RESTORATION</li> <li>○ EXCAVATED MATERIAL TEST PITS</li> </ul>	
	Damage to vegetation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Applicant proposed the following mitigations in the Application: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ During the winter portion of the land-use operation Voyageur will ensure there is adequate snow pack to support vehicle movements so that vegetation is not disturbed.</li> <li>○ Any campsite will be located on durable land or another previously cleared area so as to limit the amount of vegetation disturbed.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Board has standard permit conditions that are typically used to mitigate the described impacts. These standard conditions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ WINTER ROADS</li> <li>○ STORAGE ON ICE</li> <li>○ LOCATION OF ACTIVITIES</li> <li>○ CAMP SETBACK</li> <li>○ OFF-ROAD VEHICLE TRAVEL</li> <li>○ PREVENTION OF RUTTING</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Based on the described mitigations, it is the Board's opinion that the proposed activities will not have a significant adverse impact on the environment or be a cause of public concern.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ SUSPEND OVERLAND TRAVEL</li> <li>○ VEHICLE MOVEMENT FREEZE-UP</li> <li>○ CONSTRUCT ICE BRIDGES SNOWFILLS</li> <li>○ REMOVE ICE BRIDGES / SNOWFILLS</li> <li>○ MINIMIZE APPROACH</li> </ul>	
	Impacts to wildlife and fish habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Applicant proposed the following mitigations in the Application: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Abide by all applicable legislation so as to prevent damage to fish habitat and impacts to wildlife.</li> <li>○ No feeding willdife.</li> <li>○ Minimize erosion, properly-manage drilling wastes, prevent obstruction of natural drainage, proper waste management practices so as not to attract wildlife, and respond to spills.</li> <li>○ Will not commence any drilling or movement of equipment within 500 metres of caribou.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Board has standard permit conditions that are typically used to mitigate the described impacts. These standard conditions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ HABITAT DAMAGE</li> <li>○ MIGRATORY BIRD NEST DISTURBANCE</li> <li>○ NATURAL DRAINAGE</li> <li>○ PROGRESSIVE EROSION CONTROL</li> <li>○ REPAIR EROSION</li> <li>○ WASTE MANAGEMENT</li> <li>○ GARBAGE CONTAINER</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Based on the described mitigations, it is the Board’s opinion that the proposed activities will not have a significant adverse impact on the environment or be a cause of public concern.
Change to or loss of cultural integrity, loss of heritage resources	Disturbance of Archaeological sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Applicant proposed the following mitigations in the Application: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Making workers aware of what to do if they suspect they have encountered an archaeological site and following the <i>Voyageur Chance Archaeological Find Procedure</i> document.</li> <li>○ Working with government bodies that have documented Archaeological and Cultural Heritage sites and ensure that they are being avoided.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Board has standard permit conditions that are typically used to mitigate the described impacts. These standard conditions include:</li> </ul>	Based on the described mitigations, it is the Board’s opinion that the proposed activities will not have a significant adverse impact on the environment or be a cause of public concern.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ ARCHAEOLOGICAL BUFFER</li> <li>○ SITE DISTURBANCE</li> <li>○ SITE DISCOVERY AND NOTIFICATION</li> <li>○ ARCHAEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW</li> <li>○ AIA – HIGH POTENTIAL</li> </ul>	
Direct loss or removal of habitat, dens, or nests, disturbances of key lifecycle stages: breeding, feeding, nesting, staging	Increases in noise levels, drilling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Applicant proposed the following mitigations in the Application: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ No mitigation is proposed for the noise generated from the camp facilities, by the drilling operations or helicopter use.</li> <li>○ The project will be discontinuous, short term, and limited to smaller individual areas.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Board has a standard permit conditions that are typically used to mitigate the described impacts. These standard conditions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ HABITAT DAMAGE</li> <li>○ MIGRATORY BIRD NEST DISTURBANCE</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Based on the described mitigations, it is the Board’s opinion that the proposed activities will not have a significant adverse impact on the environment or be a cause of public concern.
Soil contamination, soil compaction	Construction and use of a winter road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Applicant proposed the following mitigations in the Application: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ If access to property via Wekweeti or the Tibbit-Contwoyto Winter Road Voyageur will conduct an Archaeological Impact Assessment to guide the routes of these access trails/roads.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Board has a standard permit conditions that are typically used to mitigate the described impacts. These standard conditions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ WINTER ROADS</li> <li>○ PARALLEL WATERCOURSE SETBACK</li> <li>○ PARALLEL ROADS</li> <li>○ FUEL ON LAND</li> <li>○ MARK CONTAINERS AND TANKS</li> <li>○ CLEAN UP SPILLS</li> <li>○ OFF-ROAD VEHICLE TRAVEL</li> <li>○ PREVENTION OF RUTTING</li> <li>○ SUSPEND OVERLAND TRAVEL</li> <li>○ VEHICLE MOVEMENT FREEZE-UP</li> <li>○ CONSTRUCT ICE BRIDGES SNOWFILLS</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Based on the described mitigations, it is the Board’s opinion that the proposed activities will not have a significant adverse impact on the environment or be a cause of public concern.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ REMOVE ICE BRIDGES/SNOWFILLS</li><li>○ MINIMIZE APPROACH</li></ul>	
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#### 4.1 Consideration of Potential Impacts

Based on the potential impacts and proposed mitigations identified above in Table 1, the Board considered whether the Project might have a significant adverse impact on the environment. In general, impacts of the Project on the environment can be mitigated through the use of standard permit conditions and/or project-specific conditions established by the Board as per the MVLWB [Standard Process for Creating New Conditions](#). These conditions may include requirements for management and monitoring plans that provide detailed information regarding the implementation of mitigation measures and the evaluation of their effectiveness.

A draft Permit was circulated for review during the regulatory proceeding, and all Parties were given the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations on the draft conditions.<sup>6</sup> In finalizing the conditions, the Board will consider all of the evidence provided through the regulatory proceeding.

#### 4.2 Consideration of Public Concern

In addition to considering the potential impacts of the Project, the Board considered whether the Project might be a cause of public concern. Based on the evidence provided during the regulatory proceeding, the Board did not identify any comments or issues that indicate that the Project is a cause of public concern.

#### 5.0 Conclusion

The Board has reviewed all the evidence received during the regulatory process with respect to the Preliminary Screening of the proposed Project. Based on the evidence, it is the Board's opinion that the proposed Project will not have a significant adverse impact on the environment or be a cause of public concern, as set out in paragraph 125(1)(a) of the MVRMA. The Board has therefore decided not to refer the proposed Project to Environmental Assessment. If the Board does not receive a notice of referral to environmental assessment by July 7, 2022, the Board can issue the Permit on July 8, 2022.

SIGNATURE



June 27, 2022

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**Mason Mantla, Chair**  
**Wek'èezhii Land and Water Board**

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**Date**

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<sup>6</sup> See WLWB Online Registry for [Tharsis Project – Draft Permit – May 19 22](#).