



# DEHCHO FIRST NATIONS

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## Report on Dehcho Process

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### Summary

Negotiations on harvesting, governance issues, and other subjects to be included in an AiP, have proceeded slowly but steadily, but no negotiations on anything related to the management of lands and resources or land ownership have yet occurred.

The draft Interim Land Use Plan will soon be submitted to the main table for negotiations on several important items. The new draft Plan has been revised to reflect the demands of Canada and the GNWT and is very different from the Plan approved by the DFN in 2006.

### AiP Negotiations

#### Certainty

There would be no “extinguishment” of Treaty or Aboriginal rights or title in the Dehcho AiP or final agreement. However, Canada expects the DFN to either agree that all the rights and jurisdiction which the Dehcho have are fully set out in the Dehcho Agreement, or that they will not assert or exercise any rights not set out in the Agreement.

Canada has proposed Certainty clauses based on the Tlicho model. If the Tlicho certainty model is used, the DFN would agree that if there are any Aboriginal or Treaty rights which are not set out in the final land claim and governance agreement, they will not be exercised. The agreement will be binding on all DFN members. This is known as the “non-assertion” model. If the non-assertion model is used, DFN must also agree that if a court declares that the non-assertion clauses are not legally effective any rights, DFN will cede, release and surrender any rights which are not set out in the final Agreement.

We have tabled an alternative Certainty chapter which would *modify* existing Treaty and Aboriginal rights so that they are fully set out in the Dehcho Agreement. This model would not require any commitment to cede, release and surrender, since it is clear that all DFN s. 35 rights are fully set out in the

Agreement. However, it should be noted that if this Certainty model is used, Canada may not agree to include “faint hope” provisions which allow for the remote possibility of later amending the final agreement to include “new” rights not related to lands or resources.

#### Land and Water Management – DCRMA or MVRMA?

The DFN have proposed that the Dehcho Government and Canada would have shared management and administration of surface and subsurface lands and resources throughout the DFN traditional territory, called the Dehcho Settlement Area. This would include joint land use planning, environmental assessment, and regulatory approval. The management and administration of lands and resources within Dehcho Ndehe and off Dehcho Ndehe will be the responsibility of the Dehcho Resource Management Authority (DCRMA). The DCRMA would operate independently of the *MVRMA* and consolidate land use planning, permitting and environmental assessments in a single body.

For transboundary purposes, the functions of the DCRMA would be harmonized with the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board (MVEIRB) and the Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board (MVLWB), established under the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act*.

In the 2005 Settlement Agreement which ended the DFN legal challenge to the *MVRMA*, Canada committed to negotiations on the powers and responsibilities of a stand alone DCRMA. In 2009 the Minister of INAC agreed to give his negotiators instructions to explore the DFN proposal for a consolidated system of resource management based on the DCRMA model. However, Canada refused to begin any negotiations on a DCRMA until INAC completed an internal review of Neil McCrank’s 2008 report on the NWT regulatory system and INAC completes internal discussions.

Early in 2010 the Minister of INAC announced that Canada had finished its’ review of the McCrank report and would implement most of McCrank’s recommendations. INAC appointed John Pollard to hold consultations with First Nations and the GNWT. Those discussions are now underway, however they will not address any of the issues which the DFN have identified as crucial to governing land and water in the Dehcho. The Pollard discussions will not address the DFN demand for a stand-alone *MVRMA* because they are concerned only with merging the existing regional land and water boards into a single NWT Land and Water Board under the *MVRMA*. Furthermore, the Gwichin, Sahtu and Tlicho final land claim agreements all state that Canada has the right to merge the current regional land and water boards into a single NWT Land and Water Board.

As I said in my reports to you last year, if the DFN remain intent on establishing a DCRMA which is not governed by the *MVRMA*, it is not in the interests of the DFN to participate in the Pollard process or any other parallel process

addressing the management of natural resources. Any discussions with Canada on resource management outside of the MVRMA must take place within the Dehcho Process. In our view, the DFN should insist that Canada honour the commitments made in the 2005 Settlement Agreement, and by the Minister in 2009, and immediately begin negotiations on a stand alone DCRMA.

### Preamble and Recognition of Dehcho Metis

We have prepared a draft Preamble which is based on the Dehcho Declaration of 1993. In addition to outlining the DFN position on treaties and the inherent right of self-government, the draft includes wording which would note the special circumstances and history of Dehcho Metis.

### Harvesters' Compensation

This chapter would provide a "strict liability" regime for compensating harvesters who are negatively impacted by industrial development. In other NWT land claim agreements only trappers have access to the compensation provisions of this chapter. In the draft tabled by the DFN, all harvesters, including those who harvest berries and other plants, would have access to the streamlined compensation process.

The DFN proposal also provides for the establishment of a *Traditional Activities Advocate* who would assist harvesters in making compensation claims and issue annual reports on the state of harvesting and traditional activities in the Dehcho Settlement Area. The reports would identify threats and potential threats to harvesting activities and will make recommendations to Developers and the appropriate Governments for reducing, mitigating or eliminating such threats.

Canada and the GNWT continue to take the position that the range of harvesting activities covered by this chapter should be narrowed to cover trapping only. They oppose our proposal for a Traditional Activities Advocate, on the grounds that the Dehcho Government alone should represent harvesters. The GNWT has recently indicated that it would agree to a TAA who would make recommendations to all governments, as long as the position is created and fully funded by the Dehcho Government.

### Wildlife Harvesting and Trapping

The Dehcho Agreement will recognize the right of all Dehcho Dene to hunt, fish, trap and gather plants throughout the entire traditional territory of the Dehcho First Nations, not only on selected lands. The draft AiP chapter on Wildlife Harvesting says:

- W.1.1 Dehcho Citizens have the right to Harvest all species of Wildlife, including Furbearers, throughout the area shown in the map attached as Appendix A at all times of the year.
- W.1.2 Dehcho Citizens have the exclusive right to harvest Furbearers in Dehcho Ndehe and Dehcho community lands at all times of the year. This right does not preclude others from harvesting Furbearers in Dehcho Ndehe or Dehcho community lands with the consent of the Dehcho Government.

The map which will be attached as Appendix A will show that harvesting rights continue throughout the entire Dehcho traditional territory. In addition, Dehcho Dene will have the exclusive right to trap on selected lands (Dehcho Ndehe).

As for jurisdiction over wildlife management and harvesting, the DFN have proposed that the Dehcho Government will have exclusive jurisdiction over wildlife on selected lands (Dehcho Ndehe). The GNWT (supported by Canada) suggests that it should have jurisdiction throughout the NWT, including the Dehcho. Their rationale is that since animals migrate, it is essential that a single central government manage wildlife throughout the NWT.

- W.1.5 Within Dehcho Ndehe the Dehcho Government retains the authority to manage and conserve Wildlife and will exercise that authority in a manner that is consistent with the Dehcho Agreement. On Dehcho community lands, local Dehcho community governments retain these authorities.<sup>1</sup>

### Tree Harvesting

The GNWT tabled a draft which has been discussed by both the LTC and the main table. Under the draft chapter the Dehcho Government would own trees on Dehcho Ndehe and would have the right to harvest trees for personal and subsistence use throughout the Settlement Area outside of Dehcho Ndehe.

Canada and the GNWT oppose setting out any commercial harvesting rights in the Dehcho Agreement. If any commercial tree harvesting rights are protected they will be addressed in a separate chapter.

We are also awaiting feedback and direction from the DFN leadership as to what further concerns should be expressed from our side.

### Governance

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<sup>1</sup> GNWT prefers co-management throughout the Dehcho Settlement Area.

In 2010, DFN tabled a lengthy chapter on Governance which outlines the structures and authorities of the Dehcho Government. It has been briefly and will be the subject of further discussion.

DFN negotiators require direction on the structure of the Dehcho Government (DG.1.3), particularly whether the Dehcho Government should have an equal number of representatives from all communities, or weighted representation, which would give larger communities more representatives than smaller communities, or an electoral district (riding) system in which regional government representatives are directly elected to represent their constituents.

### Community Governance

DFN negotiators have prepared a draft AiP chapter on the governance of community lands. In some ways it is similar to the Tlicho model, but in other ways is unique. For example, while Tlicho community governments are implemented through GNWT laws, the Dehcho proposal would recognize community governments through the Dehcho Agreement and through implementation legislation, not through ordinary territorial legislation. The draft chapter would also recognize the right of Dehcho communities to choose their leadership through traditional Dene customs rather than through elections.

DFN communities will each have their own constitution, which can be developed with the assistance of DFN staff.

### Edézhzhíe

The DFN entered into the PAS in the 1990s on the understanding that it would lead to the permanent protection of at least part of the Edézhzhíe. Since 2002 an Order-in-Council had protected Edézhzhíe from mineral staking and exploration through a withdrawal of the subsurface. The OiC was renewed in 2007 and renewed again in 2008. However, on October 28, 2010 Canada allowed the subsurface withdrawal to expire, leaving the entire Edézhzhíe open to mineral staking, exploration and mining.

After Canada failed to respond to letters asking for protection to be continued, the DFN launched an application for judicial review in November, 2010. The application asks the court to rule that Canada broke its agreement with DFN when it unilaterally terminated subsurface protection and opened Edézhzhíe to mining.

In December, 2011 Canada issued a new OiC which restored subsurface protection for the part of Edézhzhíe which would form the permanent NWA boundaries under the recommendations of the EWG, which the DFN leadership approved in 2009. This area is approximately 57% of the Candidate Area.

In January, 2012 Canada served a motion to dismiss the case on the grounds that it is moot. The Oct., 2010 OiC which is challenged in the case was

rescinded and replaced by the December, 2011 OiC which restored sub-surface protection to that part of Edézhíe which would form the permanent NWA boundaries under the recommendations of the EWG, which the DFN leadership approved in 2009. Since the 2010 OiC has been repealed, the federal motion to dismiss for mootness may succeed.

The GC has instructed DFN lawyers to consent to Canada's mootness motion, which would end the litigation, on condition that Canada agree to pay all or some of the costs incurred by DFN in litigation to date. Canada refused this offer and the mootness motion was argued on March 5. We are awaiting the Court's decision.

If the judicial review application is terminated, the portion of Edézhíe which remains outside of the current OiC would not be legally protected from exploration or mining. However, it can still be protected through other means. For example, DFN could issue a statement that it will not permit any staking or exploration without the consent of affected communities, and will take both legal action and direct action (ie. removing claim stakes) to prevent any such exploration. Similar declarations by DFN in the past have been effective in deterring staking.

### **Land Use Plan**

The Planning Committee continues to work on very significant revisions to the Interim Land Use Plan, but their work is almost complete. Most of the revisions have been proposed by Canada and the GNWT to permit industrial activity in conservation zones, change "special management zones" into "special development zones" which permit industrial activity, and generally make the Dehcho more open to development than it would be under the Plan approved in 2006.

Issues which cannot be resolved by the Committee will soon be brought to the Main Table for negotiation. The LUPC have indicated that they will soon be sending the draft Interim Plan to the Main Table with several very important issues still to be resolved by negotiators. Federal negotiators have said that the draft ILUP will go through an extensive internal review before they will be prepared to discuss it with DFN.

### **ADK**

In July 2008, Canada, the Acho Dene Koe First Nation and the GNWT signed a framework agreement to enter into comprehensive land claim negotiations outside of the Dehcho Process. It quickly became clear that ADK intends to select lands from within the primary use areas of SKDB and NBDB.

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SKDB and NBDB attempted to negotiate a boundary agreement with ADK, and sought consultations with Canada before the ADK process results in the signing of an AiP. The attempt at negotiations stalled because of ADK intransigence and Canada's refusal to consult prior to the signing of an AiP. SKDB and NBDB took legal action seeking an order requiring Canada to consult with them before signing an AiP. The case was heard in Federal Court in Calgary in November.

The Court has now ruled in favour of SK and NB and ordered Canada to consult with them before finalizing the AiP with ADK.

### **Next Steps**

The next negotiation sessions will be held April 16-19 in Yellowknife and will include a workshop on governance issues.