



DEHCHO FIRST NATIONS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DEHCHO LEADERS SET STRATEGIES IN MOTION FOR KEY JUNE ASSEMBLY

HAY RIVER, NT – April 7 -- With one of the most critical Assemblies in its history coming up in just over two months, the leadership of the Dehcho First Nations (DFN) spent four days here last week planning strategies and actions to prepare the membership for their June Assembly at Kakisa Lake.

“Our most critical task over the next short period of time is to get out to all our communities and meet the people and help prepare for this Assembly which has a number of major issues coming before it about which we much decide, said interim Grand Chief Jerry Antoine.

“These include the election of a Grand Chief, the Dehcho Process of negotiations, the Land Use Plan, the proposed Mackenzie Gas Project and, perhaps above all, the unity and education of our own people,” Antoine told the meeting of about 30 chiefs, Metis leaders and delegates.

The Winter Leadership Meeting was held at the Chief Lamalice Complex on the Hay River Reserve from April 1 to April 5.

The interim Grand Chief reminded the leaders that the Dehcho Declaration was adopted in 1993 and the first Dehcho Proposal for “public government” over Dehcho lands and resources was rejected by Canada as a basis for negotiations that same year.

Antoine detailed a chronology of events since then which led to the Dehcho Process of negotiations in 1999. (*see below*) The chronology set the stage for lengthy discussions at Hay River about of governments’ delaying tactics and barriers to progress. The Grand Chief reminded the Leadership that this many years of talks and negotiations was essential to understanding “how, why and when it all started and how we got to the place we are today. Our history informs our actions in the future.””

Major reports on the Dehcho Process indicated an increasingly wide gap between the DFN positions and those of Canada and the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and will require that negotiators have a strong and clear mandate from the June Assembly on future directions.

The negotiating team explained that it had adhered closely to the June 2007 Assembly's second mandate to continue to "explore" land selection but that Canada was taking a consistently harder line on negotiating an agreement-in-principle (AiP) based on Dehcho acceptance of a land selection model which is Canada's existing comprehensive claims policy.

Similarly, the draft interim Land Use Plan being prepared for presentation to the Assembly by the planning committee will present options on zoning, conformity requirements, protected areas, special resource management zones and infrastructure corridors. The committee presented the leadership with a progress report, stating that it had reached consensus on a number of issues and hoped to present "as much of a completed interim land use plan as possible" to the June Assembly.

The meeting spent many hours debating these issues, sometimes "in camera" and agreed that the highest priority for leadership over the next two-and-a-half months will be community education and information sessions with the leadership, members, negotiating and Land Use Planning teams.

As part of this "listening to the communities", a major week-long "think tank" is planned for mid-May in one of the smaller communities, bringing together chiefs, elders, and Dehcho members to discuss and try to achieve consensus on which strategies and actions DFN must take as it faces an increasingly hardline from both federal and territorial policy-makers.

During the same period, negotiating and DFN leadership teams will visit communities to listen to their concerns and responses to these issues and help to inform and educate people so that delegates to the Assembly will have as much information as possible on which to base their decisions.

The leadership meeting also heard an "in camera" report on the access and benefits of DFN's involvement in the Aboriginal Pipeline Group (APG) in the Mackenzie Gas Project (MGP). Currently DFN does not belong to the APG although some individual chiefs attend APG meetings.

The final recommendations of the Nahanni Expansion Working Group along with maps delineating the various options was presented and discussed. DFN and Parks Canada are currently examining these options, including a preferred option, with a view to making a decision.

The leadership also dealt with budgets and received a report on the Deh Cho Economic Corporation (DCEC).

Two resolutions were approved and, a third, on Nahanni Watershed Protection, was tabled.

- The Dehcho Pipeline Management Limited Partnership of the Liidlii Kue (Ft. Simpson) and Acho Dene Koe First Nation (Ft. Liard) will hold the Dehcho

interest in the APG and recommend to DFN leadership how to manage and distribute any access and benefits which may accrue.

- Down-sized the DCEC board of directors from 13 to five to make better use of limited funds.

Dehcho Process Chronology

- The chronology, outlines the various agreements made: the Framework Agreement of 2001 based on “21 common principles”;
- the Interim Measures Agreement the same year which “builds upon and clarifies existing treaties” and agrees Dehcho government will be “the primary government” for all Dehcho residents in their territory;
- the IMA also established the Dehcho Land Use Planning Committee;
- the Interim Resource Development Agreement (IRDA) and the Interim Land Withdrawal Agreement were signed in 2003 (and expire in October 2008) and give DFN communities a share of control over lands and resources;
- negotiations begin in 2003 towards an Agreement-in-Principle (AiP);
- litigation launched by DFN in 2004 challenges Canada on the imposition of Mackenzie Valley Resources Management Act (MVRMA) on Dehcho and the environmental review process for the proposed Mackenzie Gas Project (MGP);
- a Settlement Agreement ending the litigation was signed in 2005, committing Canada to implementing an approved land use plan as soon as possible;
- negotiations resumed the same year; and Canada rejected Dehcho public government having jurisdiction over the entire Dehcho territory. Canada offered its usual conventional comprehensive claims agreement similar to that of the Gwich'in and Sahtu nations further north down the Mackenzie Valley;
- In 2006, Canada offered 39,000 sq km, about 17 percent of traditional territory, with a possibility of increasing it to 25 percent if negotiations succeeded. Canada subsequently increased this “offer” in late 2007 to 45,810 sq km , calling it the most generous land quantum offer to a First Nations in Canadian history;
- DFN approved the Dehcho Land use Plan in June, 2006 and submitted it to Canada which rejected it outright, claiming it could only be implemented after an AiP based on land selection. Canada also argued the plan “protected” too much land from resource development;
- in November 2006, a DFN Special Assembly reaffirmed its position against land selection in favour of public government and shared stewardship of all lands and resources in the Dehcho, however it did authorize the negotiating team to hold exploratory talks on land selection;
- The Land Use Planning Committee is revamped in 2007 and given a mandate to revise the Plan approved by DFN but Canada still insists on linking implementation to approval of an AiP based on land selection.

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For further details, please see the appropriate links on the Dehcho First Nations website: www.dehchofirstnations.com .