

For immediate release

GRAND CHIEF URGES PREMIER TO CHANGE POSITION ON NAHANNI PARK

FORT SIMPSON, NT. – July 10 -- Dehcho First Nations Grand Chief Gerald Antoine is “extremely disheartened” at the recent position of Premier Floyd Roland opposing the expansion of the boundaries of the Nahanni National Park Reserve.

Less than two weeks ago the annual Dehcho National Assembly overwhelmingly approved a resolution a large expansion -- from 3,700 sq km to 42,000 sq km – of the South Nahanni River watershed. The resolution, supported by Parks Canada would protect 95 percent of the entire watershed from resource development and make the park the second largest in Canada.

However, the Premier of the GNWT has expressed opposition, stating yesterday that the expansion could cut off mineral and oil and natural gas development opportunities in the area. “It locks down the whole area. There’d be no potential for an future development,” Roland said.

The DFN grand chief reacted immediately yesterday, sending a stiff letter to Roland:

“I am upset that you have chosen to represent a federal northern development department over the people who will actually live the potential implications of your position.” He wrote.

“The cultural and wildlife values are incomparable with the potential for resource development. With the Dehcho First Nations and Parks Canada boundary, existing mineral developments will be permitted to operate, even though few if any benefits will accrue to us or the territorial government. Although this is a major compromise to our long held position, we recognize these rights. However, we cannot allow any additional resource development in the watershed. Our future is too important to put these values at further risk,” Antoine continued.

Antoine had met with Roland recently and with John Baird, federal minister of Parks and Environment in April regarding the expansion. The Grand Chief noted that while Roland stopped by the annual Assembly, he did not stay for the debate and vote. Baird had also reassured Antoine that Parks Canada endorsed the large expansion.

“We have had an extremely positive working relationship with Parks Canada over the last decade which is moving this initiative towards a very progressive co-management structure as set out in our Interim Measures Agreement and Interim Park Reserve Management Plan. We have been involved in every step of the park expansion process over the past five years and we certainly want to see it through to completion.”

Roland has claimed that his officials are working with the federal departments of Indian Affairs and Natural resources to try and achieve a smaller expansion although he did not state any figures.

Antoine said the premier was out of touch with the wishes of First Nations and most residents.

“I urge to you to become better informed on the issue, consider representing your constituents, and reverse the GNWT’s position publicly.”

Final decisions on the boundaries of the Nahanni Park reserve are expected soon, according to the meeting with Minister Baird. Lobbying against the deal, promoted by the Premier, could provoke a major issue for the three parties at land claims negotiations.

Ends

For further information please contact the DFN office