



DEHCHO FIRST NATIONS

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Dehcho First Nations Sue Canada to Protect Edehzhie

On November 1, Canada unilaterally terminated the protection of the ecologically sensitive Edézhíe (Horn Plateau) in the heart of the Dehcho Territory. The area, which is known to contain valuable minerals, had been protected from mining and exploration since 2002 under an agreement between the DFN and Canada.

The Minister of INAC's unilateral decision to open the Horn Plateau, known in Dene as Edehzhie, is illegal and will not be tolerated. The Plateau was slated to become a National Wildlife Area under the Protected Areas Strategy. The Dehcho First Nations have been working since 1999 with Canada and other partners towards an Agreement to protect the area.

Today, the Dehcho First Nations filed an Application for Judicial Review in Federal Court. Grand Chief Sam Gargan says, "We cannot stand by and allow sacred ancestral lands and the watershed to be destroyed. We will protect our land."

Many Dehcho harvesters rely on the Edehzhie for their livelihood. Jonas Antoine, former Chair of the Edézhíe Working Group says, "The Horn Plateau is a sensitive ecosystem. We have been working with Canada to protect it for years. Now Canada has just made a mockery of their whole Protected Area Strategy. Any development could destroy this unique area. We must do everything we can to protect it for our ancestors and for our grandchildren."

Legal Counsel for Dehcho First Nations was directed to challenge Canada's decision in court.

-Ends-

Further Info contact: Grand Chief Samuel Gargan - 867.695.2355
Or: DFN legal counsel, Chris Reid – 416-909-4531.

Additional Information:

The proposed Edézhíe National Wildlife area is awaiting final designation. The negotiations around boundaries concluded in 2009 and the formal request to protect over 14,250 square kilometers were submitted to government in June 2010. The interim withdrawal expired October 31, 2010 before the national wildlife area could be designated officially.

Edézhíe, also known as the Horn Plateau, is an undulating plateau rising over 400 m over the surrounding boreal plains and lowlands. West of Great Slave Lake, it is one of the natural jewels in the Mackenzie Valley of the Northwest Territories. An area of cultural and ecological significance for the Dehcho and Tlicho peoples, this area figures prominently in Dene legends. Wildlife such as caribou and moose are abundant, it has rich wetlands and is a continental bird flyway.

The NWT Protected Areas Strategy (PAS) is a process where Aboriginal communities propose new protected areas of ecological and cultural significance, with the participation of conservation organizations and industry. It is supported and enabled by both the federal and territorial governments. Since 2006, over 31 million acres in the NWT have been slated for protection through either the PAS or Parks Canada processes.