



DEHCHO FIRST NATIONS

PO BOX 89, FORT SIMPSON, NT X0E 0N0

Toll Free: 1-866-995-3748



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Federal Candidates Respond to DFN Questions on Edehzhie

The Dehcho First Nations are a tribal council representing nine Dene communities and two Metis communities in the south-west part of the NWT.

The government of Canada has frequently proclaimed that its commitment to protecting ecologically sensitive parts of the Arctic is demonstrated by its commitment to the Protected Areas Strategy (PAS), a partnership between Canada, First Nations and the Government of the Northwest Territories.

In October, 2010, after years of cooperative work towards the protection of the Edehzhie, the “Jewel of the Dehcho,” as a National Wildlife Area under the PAS, the federal government suddenly decided to terminate the protection of Edehzhie and open this pristine area to mining, without any warning to the Dehcho First Nations.

On April 15, 2011 Grand Chief Gargan wrote to the three main candidates in the federal election, asking them to state both their positions, and their respective parties’ positions, on whether the Edehzhie should be protected from industrial development. All three candidates have responded.

The incumbent, Dennis Bevington (NDP) and Liberal candidate Joe Handley both responded that they and their respective parties are committed to immediately restoring the protection of Edehzhie. Conservative Sandy Lee said: “I respect the ecological and cultural importance of Edehzhie to the people of the Dehcho. I believe there must be balance between the sustainable development and conservation of our lands.” However, Ms. Lee did not answer our specific questions concerning the protection of Edehzhie.

Grand Chief Gargan said: “We thank the candidates for their responses and we trust that our members will use this information in deciding who they will vote for on May 2.”

The full statements of the candidates are available from the DFN upon request.

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Further Info contact:

Grand Chief Samuel Gargan Cell - 867.695.6678

Additional Information:

The Edehzhie (also known as Horn Plateau) is the jewel of the Dehcho. In the Dene language Edézhíe means “source waters”. It contains the source waters of three major drainage basins. The Edézhíe has traditionally been an area that could be relied upon during times of food scarcity in the Mackenzie Valley. We Dene continue to rely upon the Edézhíe for hunting, trapping and harvesting.

In 1998 we began working through the Protected Areas Strategy to achieve permanent protection for Edehzhie. The PAS is a joint program in which Canada, the government of the NWT, and First Nations work cooperatively to identify and protect ecologically important areas in the NWT. Since 2002 Edehzhie has been a Candidate Protected Area, protected from development through a series of interim land withdrawals. It had been understood that at least part of the Candidate Area would be permanently protected as a National Wildlife Area.

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.

However, on November 1, 2010, Canada unilaterally terminated the protection of Edehzhie, in order to make the valuable minerals in the area available for prospecting and mining. We had no warning and we were not consulted. The federal government opened Edehzhie to exploration and mining after making a publicly funded mineral assessment of the area available to the mining industry.

The Dehcho First Nations have filed an Application for Judicial Review in Federal Court seeking an order re-instating the protection of Edehzhie. It is expected that the case will be heard in the Fall of 2011.