



Dehcho Land Use Planning Committee

February 24, 2006

Hon. Joe Handley, Premier
Government of the Northwest Territories
P.O. Box 1320
Yellowknife NT, X1A 2L9

RE: Meeting regarding GNWT comments on Revised Draft Dehcho Land Use Plan

Dear Mr. Handley,

I am writing as Chairman of the Dehcho Land Use Planning Committee to seek your assistance in resolving Committee concerns with Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) participation in the Dehcho Land Use Planning Process. The Dehcho Land Use Planning Committee (the “Committee”) was established in May 2001 under the Dehcho First Nations Interim Measures Agreement (IMA).

The IMA states, “The Parties [DFN, GNWT and Canada] will develop a land use plan (the Plan) for the Dehcho territory for lands outside the existing boundaries of local government and Nahanni National Park Reserve. The purpose of the Plan is to promote the social, cultural and economic well-being of residents and communities in the Dehcho territory, having regard to the interests of all Canadians. Taking into consideration the principles of respect for the land, as understood and explained by the Dehcho Elders, and sustainable development, the Plan shall provide for the conservation, development and utilization of the land, waters and other resources in the Dehcho territory.”

The Committee has been working closely over the last four years with Dehcho communities, the GNWT, Canada and other planning partners to develop a land use plan that is acceptable to the three Parties, keeping in mind that it will be reviewed and updated every five years. Our accomplishments include over 100 information and consultation sessions, 4 regional meetings, over 20 distinct research reports, and addressing over 700 comments in Plan revisions.

The first “Working Draft” Land Use Zone Map and Terms was released in March 2005. The first full Draft Land Use Plan was distributed in June 2005, followed by a Revised Draft in November 2005. Each draft has reflected input provided by the Parties and other planning partners through meetings and written comments. The Final Draft was expected to be completed and submitted to DFN, the GNWT and Canada for approval and consideration by March 31, 2006.

The Committee notified the Parties and other planning partners that the November 2005 to January 2006 review and comment period would be the final opportunity for input into the planning process. Deputy Minister Bob Bailey submitted comments on behalf of the GNWT in regards to the Revised Draft Dehcho Land Use Plan on January 31, 2006. We are deeply troubled by the content and direction of these comments, and recent follow-up discussions between our Committee and Environment and Natural Resources staff, which raise substantial 11th hour issues regarding the authority and mandate of the Plan and the role of the Committee without providing clear direction in how we might resolve them.

At our Regional Forum on February 7-9, 2006, attended by communities, governments and other planning partners, we discussed the GNWT comments openly and sought clarification on how the issues might be resolved. We requested a meeting with the Deputy Ministers for the key GNWT departments affected by the Plan – Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), Industry Tourism and Investment (ITI), Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA), and Aboriginal Affairs (AA) – to better understand GNWT concerns and determine a path forward before further work is done by either of us. We followed up this request by phone, and then by a formal letter to Deputy Minister Bailey on February 20, 2006. We were notified today through an email from his program staff that our request has been denied. This is not acceptable.

GNWT participation in this process has appeared slow and uncoordinated from the beginning. At the first Regional Forum, held in March 2005 to review the first Working Draft, only Forestry and Protected Areas Strategy staff came to present comments. There were no coordinated departmental or territorial comments. The Committee asked those representatives to convey the Committee's concern about lack of GNWT comments to the appropriate people. Comments on the June draft were more substantial but not helpful. They identified areas of concern but again provided little direction or detail required for us to begin to understand and address them. The Committee held a follow-up meeting in October 2005 with the various GNWT department representatives to seek clarification and again requested additional detail. No further detail was provided at that meeting or following that time.

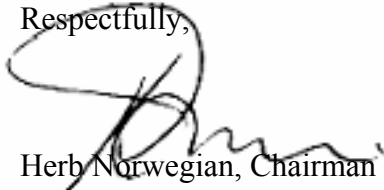
The January comments follow in the same vein, but are more forceful. The comments direct us to delete approximately 75% of the Terms in the plan. This includes many Terms either recommended for inclusion by GNWT staff or where exact wording had previously been agreed to in cooperation with GNWT staff, as well as a number of Terms regarding topics outside the GNWT's mandate (i.e. directed at either Canada or DFN). We are struggling with the apparent contradictions between the written comments and our discussions with staff to date. Furthermore, the comments indicate that the GNWT has not even reviewed the Zoning yet, arguably the most important component of the Land Use Plan.

These types of comments are not appropriate or helpful at any stage in the process, but especially one month before final submission. Our requests to meet with Deputy Ministers to discuss these comments have been denied. The GNWT agreed to certain obligations in signing the IMA, including participation in the development of a Dehcho Land Use Plan.

I am therefore requesting your assistance in setting up a meeting between the Committee, yourself as Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the Ministers for ENR, ITI and MACA, as soon as possible, so that we may move forward in addressing the GNWT's concerns and complete the Plan. We have currently blocked off time on March 13-14th for such a meeting, at a location convenient for you in Yellowknife.

I look forward to your immediate response to this request. Please contact me at (867) 695-2355 to discuss this further and make arrangements.

Respectfully,



Herb Norwegian, Chairman
Dehcho Land Use Planning Committee

Cc: Hon. Michael Miltenberger, Minister, ENR
Hon. Brendan Bell, Minister, ITI
Hon. Michael McLeod, Minister, MACA

Kevin Menicoche, MLA, Nahendeh
Jane Groenewegan, MLA, Hay River South
Hon. Paul Delorey, MLA, Hay River North

Bob Overvold, Regional Director General, DIAND

Chief Keyna Norwegian, Liidli Kue First Nation
Chief Gabe Hardisty, Pehdzeh Ki First Nation
Chief Stanley Sanguez, Jean Marie River First Nation
Chief Harry Deneron, Acho Dene Koe Band
Chief Eric Betsaka, Nahanni Butte Dene Band
Chief Dennis Deneron, Sambaa K'e Dene Band
Chief Berna Landry, Deh Gah Gotie Dene Council
Chief Lloyd Chicot, Ka'agee Tu First Nation
Chief Karen Felker, West Point First Nation
Chief Roy Fabian, Katlodeeche First Nation
President Marie Lafferty, Fort Simpson Metis Local 52
President Albert Lafferty, Fort Providence Metis Local 57
President Ernie McLeod, Fort Liard Metis Local 67
Alison de Pelham, Executive Director, Dehcho First Nations