

Nahanni Butte pushes for more control over traditional lands

Band wants to pursue co-management agreement on Nahanni National Park Reserve

by April Hudson

Northern News Services

Tthenaago/Nahanni Butte

The Nahanni Butte Dene Band will be withdrawing from the Naha Dehe Consensus Team after more than a decade of participation and pushing for a co-management agreement.

Chief Peter Marcellais said the band has been dissatisfied with its role on the consensus team and said the band feels Parks Canada has recently been undertaking studies and making decisions without properly consulting the band.

"We want more of a direct role," he said.

"We want to deal directly with Parks (Canada) for ourselves, not going through the consensus team."

The hope is that the proposed arrangement would give the band more say in how the Nahanni National Park Reserve is run.

The consensus team was created in 2000 to aid in planning the expansion of the park.

On Jan. 30, the band council signed a resolution to withdraw from the team immediately. The resolution received the support of four councillors and six elders, as well as Marcellais.

"We want to have a say in the (Nahanni National Park Reserve) because we have given up so much land to protect our watershed that substantially expanded the size of



photo courtesy of Peter Marcellais

Proud youth graduates and staff of Nahanni Butte's GPS land navigation course stand in front of their mobile youth camp. In the back, from left, are Dale Moses, Steve Vital, Trevor Timbre, John Paul Tonka, Brandon Konisenta, Joshua Bertrand, Mike Matou, Qualin Matou, Nahanni Butte Chief Peter Marcellais, instructor Adam Woogh, Leonard Timbre, Nathan Betsaka and band manager Mark Pocklington. In the front, front left, are Helen Ekotla, Roxanne Konisenta, Jayne Konisenta and Lory Ann Bertrand.

the park," Marcellais said.

"Now, we just want to be engaged with all matters concerning the future use of the Nahanni National Park Reserve and are convinced that a modern co-management agreement is the way of the future."

The band's decision to leave the consensus team was made in part because of Nahanni Butte's belief Parks Canada's impact and benefit agreement

with the Deh Cho region does not reflect the vision of the band's elders or the objectives of its membership, Marcellais said. He added the band believes the consensus team should be abolished.

Marcellais said the band hopes to have "a meaningful conversation with Parks Canada" regarding the Nahanni National Park Reserve and want to explore a potential co-management agreement with

the federal department on the park.

The agreement would be similar to one the band is currently negotiating with the Canadian Zinc Corporation in regard to an all-season road to Prairie Creek Mine, which Marcellais described as a "relationship-centred" agreement.

"We have a spiritual connection to our traditional land," he said.

"We are confident the federal government will also appreciate our need to be self-sufficient and will recognize the potential of co-managing the economic resources on Nahanni Butte traditional lands adjacent to the Nahanni National Park Reserve."

When contacted for comment, Nahanni National Park Reserve superintendent Jonathan Tsetso said in an e-mail that Parks Canada "remains

committed to continuing to work together to address matters pertaining to (the Park Reserve's) management."

"The Naha Dehe Dene Band is an integral partner for Parks Canada in the co-operative management of Nahanni National Park Reserve," he added, although he did not address whether Parks Canada would be willing to pursue a co-management agreement with the band.

Council asked to cut \$400,000 from budget

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A surplus in Fort Simpson's water and sewer fund combined with a deficit in the general operating fund means Fort Simpson's village council will have to revisit its budget.

The two funds are separate and cannot be used to offset each other, according to senior administrative officer Bill Bennett. In addition, the village is supposed to break even on

its water and sewer fund each year.

On Feb. 6, Bennett told councillors if the issue goes unaddressed the 2017 fiscal year would see the general operating fund incur a \$700,000 deficit, while the water and sewer fund would see a \$700,000 surplus.

In order to balance the books, he told councillors they need to slash \$400,000 from the village budget.

Bennett said one of the contributing fac-

tors to the budget discrepancy could be that some costs involving water and sewer were incorrectly attributed to the general operating fund.

"I suspect ... that not 100 per cent of all direct and indirect water and sewer (costs) is in water and sewer. That is a huge task to go through, even for just the last year," he said.

He suggested the village, which has already directed a rate review and review of the cost to make water be done, take a comprehensive look at all water and sewer costs at the same time.

need to get rid of," she said.

Office lease debated

If left unaddressed, the general operating fund deficit could also pose problems for Fort Simpson's decision to acquire a 20-year lease with the Liidlii Kue Society for office space.

In January, councillors passed the first and second readings of a bylaw for the long-term lease, which would cost the village nearly \$178,000 each year beginning in the fall of 2018.

Senior administrative officer Bill Bennett said he has received some negative feedback from the GNWT's Department of Municipal and Community Affairs about the lease.

Since the cost for the lease would come out of the village's operating budget, Bennett said the department would require village council to show where Fort Simpson can come up with the

money. Additionally, a cost-benefit analysis of the lease was rejected by the department, he said, for not including enough detail on what benefits the lease would provide.

A new cost-benefit analysis will be produced with the appropriate information.

Councillors also suggested Mayor Darlene Sibbeston and Bennett take the issue of the lease directly to Caroline Cochrane, the minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, due to concerns from Bennett that departmental staff were against the lease.

Mayor suggests freeze on spending

Although a decision on spending was not voted on during the meeting, Mayor Darlene Sibbeston suggested the village halt expenditures.

"What I'm going to recommend is that ... we just put a temporary freeze on all spending, with the exception of necessary items," she said.

She also said councillors should also discuss a water and sewer access fee the village introduced a few years ago.

"That also accounts for part of this (water and sewer) surplus. That's something we need to look at and (decide) if we need to keep it there or if it's something we

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with April Hudson



Membership Contact Information Update



Liidlii Kue First Nation and Métis Nation Local 52 are working together to update all members on the Dehcho negotiations and current events.

If you are a member, we need your phone number, email, and mailing address.

Please contact your respective membership office to ensure your information is up to date.

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