

Correction

In the Jan. 19 edition, an article ("Village says water usage not an environmental concern") misstated the reason former councillor Leah Keats resigned from council in 2015. The issue that precipitated Keats' resignation was that anyone with appropriate hook-ups could obtain bulk water from the water treatment plant. We apologize for any confusion or embarrassment this error caused.

NEWS Briefs

Researchers pursue contaminant study

Researchers from the University of Waterloo will be at the Snowshoe Inn boardroom in Fort Providence on Jan. 26, 27 and 30 to conduct a study on contaminants and human health.

Dr. Brian Laird and Dr. Mylène Ratelle are inviting community members over the age of six to participate.

The study will help to answer questions about current levels of contaminant exposure in the body, sources of contaminant exposure to people in the Northwest Territories and the balance between risks and benefits from country food.

Participants can take a voluntary 24-hour food recall survey, a food frequency questionnaire, a hair or urine sample or a blood sample, which would be collected by a nurse.

Economic forum announced

Dehcho First Nations and the Dehcho Economic Corporation will host a regional Dehcho Economic Readiness Forum in Fort Simpson from March 27 to 30, Dehcho First Nations has announced.

The forum aims to augment the Deh Cho region's business knowledge and is expected to draw leaders, youth and aboriginal business representatives.

Education pilot projects announced

The GNWT Department of Education, Culture and Employment announced on Jan. 23 it would run a series of pilot projects throughout the 2017-18 school year with the goal of improving training and resources for teachers.

The initiative is a collaboration between the department, the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association and the Northwest Territories Superintendents' Association.

It aims to address the fact that the education system "is not meeting the needs of learners," according to the announcement, and will allow education boards to spend 100 hours on improved teacher planning, assessment, collaborative practice and ongoing professional development.

Air show preps for the Deh Cho

The Canadian Arctic Aviation Tour, a volunteer-run project bringing air shows to 97 Northern communities, has plans to stop in the Deh Cho.

Although exact dates were not available at press time, spokesperson Nancy McClure stated in an e-mail the project would bring "wheels on the ground" shows to Fort Liard and Fort Simpson, with above-community shows in Fort Providence, Wrigley, Nahanni Butte, Jean Marie River and Sambaa K'e.



The Nahanni Butte Dene Band says it's flagging and cutting a trail for a 184-kilometre all-season access road to Prairie Creek Mine after criticizing the Mackenzie Valley Impact Review Board. The project has not yet been approved but Chief Peter Marcellais says he is "tired of waiting."

Nahanni Butte strikes out alone on first stages of road

As project remains before Mackenzie Valley Impact Review Board, chief talks plans to move ahead with flagging, cutting trail

by April Hudson
Northern News Services
Nahanni Butte

The Nahanni Butte Dene Band will be moving ahead with plans to begin the first stage of construction on an all-season road to Prairie Creek Mine.

The project, which would see a 184-kilometre all-season access road constructed from the mine site to the Liard Highway, is currently before the Mackenzie Valley Review Board with the Canadian Zinc Corporation as its proponent.

While the project remains before the review board, Nahanni Butte Chief Peter Marcellais said on Jan. 24 the band isn't waiting for the review board's approval.

"It goes through our (Indian Affairs Branch) lands, so we're just going to get it on its way. No matter what the review board or anyone else says, it's on our own land," Marcellais said.

"We're just going to do it on our own. We're not going to wait – we're tired of waiting."

Blazing a trail

Nahanni Butte senior administrative officer Mark Pocklington stated in an e-mail the band is moving ahead with the "first stage of the road" and has a crew in the field slashing and flagging a trail in order to allow surveyors to go in.

"The cutting of trails on (Nahanni Butte Dene Band) traditional lands does not to our knowledge require a permit," he stated.

Widening the trail, he added, is another matter.

"Once they access their (Indian Affairs Branch) lands, which is a special land area between the access road and the Liard River, the permitting process to widen a trail to a gravel road needs to be defined by the federal government and not the GNWT," he wrote.

The Nahanni Butte Dene Band has been working on an agreement with Canadian Zinc Cor-

poration to co-manage the project but delays at the review board have been a source of frustration for chief, council and elders in the community.

Most recently, in late 2016 the review board had a third-party consultant, Oboni Riskope, conduct a risk assessment for the road – a decision Marcellais says the band wasn't brought in on. He said the band didn't know the study was necessary until it was already posted to the review board.

Marcellais says the board's decision to bring in an outside party to do the risk assessment overlooks the wealth of traditional knowledge and on-the-land experience the band has to offer.

Board criticized as being unrepresentative

In a Jan. 20 e-mail to the board, he stated the current governance structure of the board appears to mean it isn't accountable to people who are on the land, allowing for the "arbitrary appointing of third-party consultants to conduct risk assessment studies on traditional lands without prior consultation" with the band.

"The environmental assessment process should be modernized to reflect public sentiment toward addressing the social priorities of First Nations communities," he stated.

"This would require preference given to the engagement of local qualified personnel to conduct baseline or risk assessment studies in advance of surface disturbance but within practical timelines."

Speaking with the *Deh Cho Drum* on Jan. 24, Marcellais said Nahanni Butte's elders, all of whom are consulted on band decisions, are frustrated as well.

"To them, it's not done right," he said.

In a Jan. 16 letter to Marcellais, review board chair JoAnne Deneron said the decision to con-

tract Oboni Riskope for a risk assessment was made after the board decided Canadian Zinc Corporation's risk assessment was inadequate.

The Oboni Riskope assessment, she wrote, was based on evidence already on the review board's public record for the road project.

Chief talks first steps

Marcellais said the first thing band members will be doing is walking the land, followed by cutting a trail and widening it into a road.

Although a map of the plan was not available at press time, Marcellais said the road will run down the middle of Indian Affairs Branch lands.

"Once we build it, it's going to be a complete road. So there you go, you'll have a main street even after the mine closes," he said.

When contacted for comment, the Mackenzie Valley Review Board directed inquiries toward the Department of Lands and federal Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

In an e-mail, Canadian Zinc Corporation's chief operating officer and vice-president for

exploration Alan Taylor stated the company is bound by the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act and the regulatory processes that accompany that. "Nahanni Butte Dene Band (has) been very supportive of the project and we work closely together," he stated, noting the project is currently in its third year of environ-

mental assessment before the board.

"Nahanni grows impatient with the long process, and what they decide to do on their own initiative is entirely up to them, but we can understand their frustration with the process."

"The cutting of trails on traditional lands does not to our knowledge require a permit."

Mark Pocklington