
From: Ministre des Affaires du Nord, ministre responsable de Développement économique Canada pour les Prairies et ministre responsable de l'Agence canadienne de développement économique du Nord / Minister of Northern Affairs, Minister responsible for Prairies Ec

Sent: Friday, February 3, 2023 2:36 PM

To: jackson.lafferty@tlicho.ca

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Subject: Correspondence from the Minister of Northern Affairs, Minister Responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada and Minister Responsible for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency

Ministre des Affaires du Nord, ministre responsable de Développement économique Canada pour les Prairies et ministre responsable de l'Agence canadienne de développement économique du Nord



Minister of Northern Affairs, Minister Responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada
Minister responsible for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0H4

February 3rd, 2023

Grand Chief Jackson Lafferty
Tłı̨chǫ Government
127 Donda Tili
P.O. Box 412
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Dear Grand Chief Lafferty:

I would like to thank you again for your letter of June 7, 2021, requesting a regional study in the Slave Geological Province of the Northwest Territories, pursuant to Part 5.2 of the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act*.

I understand that the workshop held in Yellowknife on June 22–23, 2022, was successful at bringing subject-matter experts and interested parties together to talk about the merits, concerns, and ideas of a regional study in this area. Following the workshop, we received and reviewed written responses from workshop participants. These submissions, along with the discussions from the workshop itself, have been considered in my response to your request.

Overall, northern parties have expressed interest and support for moving forward with a regional study in this area. Partners also shared a wide array of recommendations on how best to move forward with this study. The importance of cooperation and collaboration, along with fairness and transparency, cannot be understated—partners emphasized these elements as critical to the study’s success.

To that end, I support the recommendation to initiate a regional study of the Slave Geological Province under Part 5.2 of the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act*. Furthermore, I support a collaborative approach to the design and implementation of the study.

Regional studies (sometimes referred to as Regional Strategic Environmental Assessments), offer a decision-aiding framework that can be used to systematically evaluate the impacts of multiple developments in a region. They are increasingly used throughout the world to identify the benefits and risks of development in a region in a way which reflects the complexity and the variety of issues that need to inform decisions. Cumulative effects issues are increasingly central to communities

experiencing the increasing pressure of multiple developments on important resources and community values over time. A clear understanding of these effects and options to address them are often important elements in regional studies.

The Slave Geological Province is an area rich in critical minerals, with the potential for mineral and infrastructure development. It is also a region that is important to cultural well-being, way of life, and caribou; and not immune to the impacts of climate change and cumulative effects. Partners have spoken about the importance of reconciling these values with development that is ongoing and anticipated in the region by assessing options, impacts, and benefits on a regional scale, outside of any specific project proceeding. A regional study would help inform and support responsible resource management, such as land use planning and regulatory/impact assessment processes, by working with partners to establish a common vision for the region and by identifying the information needed to make good decisions and recommendations. This collaborative approach should help to create certainty for developers, avoid delays in regulatory processes, minimize negative impacts on wildlife and the environment, and support economic opportunities, while considering the interests and priorities of local communities and regional organizations.

A regional study of the Slave Geological Province should also help to alleviate the pressures that are often borne by proponents to produce a wealth of regional information during regulatory processes on a project-by-project basis. It would also support parties that participate in these processes who often lack the capacity to collect and consider the broad array of regional information needed to form positions and recommendations or to alleviate concerns.

In accordance with the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act*, I shall appoint one or more persons as members of a committee to conduct the study, and, after seeking and considering the advice of northern partners, establish the committee’s terms of reference. Prior to doing so, I will be seeking recommendations from partners that align with the following criteria:

- The regional study governance structure shall be designed to foster a fair and transparent process over interest-based outcomes; committee member recommendations should reflect the characteristics (such as number of committee members and expertise of committee members) required to oversee a successful process. The study itself shall involve opportunities to maximize meaningful public participation.

- The protection of caribou in this region is a priority that has been raised by partners. The regional study shall specifically consider the impacts to caribou and strategies for mitigation of cumulative effects and caribou protection (such as the Recovery Strategy for Barren-ground Caribou in the Northwest Territories, and the Bathurst Caribou Management Plan).
- The regional study shall also consider other priorities of our northern partners, including objectives to:
 - protect and promote the social, cultural, and economic well-being of residents;
 - support the responsible advancement of climate change adaptation and mitigation, cumulative effects, and the green economy; and,
 - contribute to the objectives of the Critical Minerals Strategy, such as the responsible advancement of critical minerals projects and supporting infrastructure development in the North.
- The regional study shall focus on the Mackenzie Valley (Northwest Territories) portion of the Slave Geological Province at this time. However, consideration must be given to how potentially impacted organizations, communities and knowledge holders will be involved in the study regardless of geographic location (particularly given the broad range of caribou migration routes that include areas in Nunavut). Participation in the study, including recommendations on committee membership, will not be limited to parties in the Northwest Territories.
- The regional study shall be designed so that outcomes can be considered for near-term anticipated development and planning processes. The study shall aim to be completed within a two- to three-year timeframe. However, consideration must be given to how the outcomes can be meaningful and useful into the future, rather than focus on outcomes that are only relevant for a short period of time. The study shall be designed in a manner that would permit an expansion into Nunavut, if deemed a priority, following this initial phase in the Northwest Territories.
- The regional study shall not interrupt existing and ongoing regulatory and planning processes. Regulatory and planning proceedings, such as land and water regulation and impact assessment processes for project applications and management, can continue to advance throughout the duration of the study.

Departmental officials will be reaching out to partners to discuss a process to establish recommendations on the committee and the committee's terms of reference. I look forward to receiving recommendations in the near future to support the efficient and successful advancement of this regional study.

If you have any questions, please reach out to Joanna Ankersmit, Director General for Natural Resources and Environment at joanna.ankersmit@rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca.

Sincerely,



Hon. Dan Vandal, P.C., M.P.

c.c.: The Honourable Caroline Cochrane, M.L.A.
The Honourable Shane Thompson, M.L.A.,
The Honourable Diane Archie, M.L.A.
The Honourable Caroline Wawzonek, M.L.A.
Chief Edward Sangris
Chief Ernest Betsina
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President Kitikmeot Inuit Association
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