

EA1415-01 Prairie Creek All Season Road,  
Canadian Zinc Corporation

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**Report on the cultural impacts  
technical session in Nahanni Butte  
July 4, 2016**

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Submitted to: The Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact  
Review Board

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## Background

Technical sessions to discuss the proposed Prairie Creek All Season Road and its predicted impacts on the environment and people were held June 13-16, 2016 in Yellowknife. The Yellowknife technical sessions considered evidence from both scientific and traditional knowledge sources, but focused on scientific data. The Review Board accepts both types of evidence on an equal footing. This technical session seeks to provide opportunity for traditional knowledge holders to submit evidence on the proposed development area in a more appropriate setting, in their own community.

The Review Board retained Joanne Barnaby as an independent contractor to facilitate a technical session on cultural impacts from the proposed Prairie Creek Mine All Season Road in the communities of Nahanni Butte and Fort Simpson. The purpose was to gather information from land and resource users about potential cultural impacts from the proposed Prairie Creek All Season Road. This report focuses on the Nahanni Butte session and was prepared by the Facilitator. Statements made by participants are paraphrased, and in some cases broken into separate topical areas in order to create a report that is most helpful to understanding the issues discussed. Participants are therefore invited to correct any misinterpretations with the author.

## Participants

### **Nahanni Butte Dene Band Members**

Jayne Konisenta

Mike Matou

Jean Marie Konisenta

Raymond Vital

Leon Konisenta

Francis Betsaka

Flora Cli

Elsie Marcellais

Lena Marcellais

Jennifer Konisenta

Brian Ekotla

Stanley Betsaka

Tammy Matou

Pauline Campbell

Earl Hope

Roxanne Konisenta

Chief Peter Marcellais

Maurice Vital

Darrel Betsaka - Interpreter

## Others

Mark Pocklington, SEO Nahanni Butte Dene Band

Adrian Paradis, CANNOR

Marcy MacDougell , ENR, GNWT

Wilbert Antoine, Canadian Zinc

Alan Taylor, Canadian Zinc

Ruari Carthew, MVEIRB

Allison Stoddart, Parks Canada

Andrew Mathews, Lands, GNWT

Jonathan Tsetso, Parks Canada (Nahanni National Park)

Alan Ehrlich, MVEIRB

Stacey Menzies, MVEIRB

Chuck Hubert, MVEIRB

## Agenda and Approach

The following Agenda was designed to provide for the greatest opportunity to community members to actively participate in bringing their traditional knowledge and cultural values forward while providing clarity on the purpose of the session.



The Facilitator, together with a staff member of the Review Board, had spent several hours going from door to door to advise people about the session purpose and encourage their participation. This contributed to a strong turnout and most participants stayed for the full session. A significant number of elders were in attendance as well as many members of the First Nation Council.

A large scale map (see below) was set out on tables to facilitate discussion about specific concerns along the proposed route. The map also enabled traditional knowledge holders to identify key habitat for a number of species and areas of spiritual and resource importance.



Community members were encouraged to sit at the tables which were set up in a semi-circle and visitors (including government representatives) were encouraged to limit their participation to listening and limit any comments to ensure that they did not use up time dedicated to community members. An Interpreter was engaged and provided consecutive services.

Monday, July 4, 2016

Time	Agenda Item	Notes
1:00pm	Opening Prayers	Facilitator will approach an elder to do prayer
1:10	Opening Comments	Chief Peter Marcellais
1:25	Welcome and review of Agenda	Facilitator provides brief explanation of purpose of session and how we will proceed  Participant questions or comments on the Agenda welcomed
1:40	Introductions	Round table
2:00	Mackenzie Valley Review Board	How this session will feed into the Review process
2:15	CanZinc Presentation	Traditional knowledge and cultural values that may be affected by the project and how to address them.
2:30	Health Break	
2:45	Review of project route map  Community Questions	Are there any areas of special concern along the route? Are there rivers or creeks of particular concern? Harvesting? Have concerns previously raised been addressed?
3:30	Are there specific concerns from community members	Are the families who's traditional territory most impacted by this project present? Are there further concerns?
5:00	Dinner served	
5:45	Outstanding issues or questions	Is there a need to bring forward any further traditional knowledge or land use?
6:30	Recommendations	Are there recommendations that you would like to make to reduce impacts?  Do you have solutions to problems identified?
7:00	Priorities	Are there issues that should be identified as priorities?
7:15	Closing Remarks	Board Handout on Next Steps
7:30	Closing Prayers	

## Community Session Introduction

Following an opening prayer lead by Elder Elsie Marcellais and round table introductions of everyone present, the Facilitator provided a brief overview of the Agenda and explained the purpose of the session. She reminded people that the Prairie Creek Mine and the winter road to it had already undergone a review and had been approved. She explained that the focus of this review was on the proposed All Season Road proposal and that this session was dedicated to identifying cultural impacts, traditional knowledge and social concerns.

Given the close relationship to the natural environment of the Nahanni Butte Dene, such cultural impacts would include impacts on their way of life and the wildlife and other natural resources that the people depend on.

Chief Peter Marcellais welcomed everyone to the session and spoke about the importance of having this session in the community. He indicated that there had been extensive meetings with Canadian Zinc and that further work was being done to negotiate an Impact Benefits Agreement.

Following presentations by the Review Board staff on the mandate of the Board and the decision to hold community sessions focused on culture and traditional knowledge, Canadian Zinc made a presentation on the proposed All Season Road project. A series of questions of clarification were addressed related to the route in relation to the winter road. It was clear that community members were very familiar with the winter road and kept referring back to it to get a frame of reference.



Canadian Zinc clarified the color coding used on the map which depicts the existing winter road route as well as sections that the proposed all season road would be re-aligned or diverted from it.

## Concerns

The session was then opened to community members to identify issues of concern to them based on traditional knowledge and culture. These concerns have been highlighted below with an explanation of each concern and any recommendations or ideas to mitigate the problem that was put forward that related to it.

### Fish and Fish Habitat

A number of concerns about fish and fish habitat were raised. Concern about flash flood and spring flood areas could wash out the road. Grainger Gap is an area in particular is known to flood regularly and should be avoided completely. Bluefish Lake is an important source of grayling. There is a general concern that the road could act like a 'large beaver dam' and cut off water flow. This should be prevented as should risk of the road getting washed out.

Further studies should be done to determine how to protect fish and fish habitat.

There was a general concern expressed that culverts may freeze and plug up with ice, preventing fish from migrating on small streams. Very large plastic culverts or culvert alternatives such as dome shaped creek covers<sup>1</sup> should be used on certain creeks and streams so that the creek bed is not disturbed.

Specific sites were identified on the map as being important sites to protect. One such area is west of Grainer Gap where there is a creek important as fish habitat (between KP 124-125).

**Summary:** *The community was interested in assessing specific water crossing proposals and being involved in environmental monitoring.*

### **Caribou**

Concerns related to caribou and moose in the area included disruption to their range from noise (construction and traffic), dust coating their food and greater access by outside hunters and tourists. It was noted that the new alignment (in yellow) avoids at least some of these areas (Km 101 to 123). One particular area of concern was related to a recent and unusual observation of caribou on the river between Nahanni Butte and Swan Point.

*This past winter, caribou were spotted at the Liard River - right where the road is going to go. The spot where caribou were seen was near Swan Point along the river where the road will cross the Liard river...this is the first time I have seen them there, I'm asking you to stay away from that area as it's an important trail for moose and caribou . Earl Hope*

Further areas where caribou have been observed or harvested along the proposed road were identified by Darrel Betsaka.

*I personally have harvested caribou on the Nitla River (sp?) ...and on the Poplar and Matou River. Darrel Betsaka*

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.envirospan.ca/> as an example of such an alternative to culverts



### Trap-lines, trails and cabins

General concern related to protecting trails was expressed. As much as possible people want to ensure that the proposed road does not infringe on these values. Often these trails were established because they lead to important traditional resources including, moose, fish, berries and medicines. They also lead to cabins and trap-lines which were drawn on the map below.



*They (caribou) come from Arrowhead once or twice a year around Lindberg, they don't really hang around, they pass through Jean Marie Konisenta*



**Summary:** *The community requested a larger map of new alignments with better contours to better understand how close new alignments are to important areas (e.g. trap-lines, gravesites, important moose and caribou habitat) and to advise on more precise road routing.*

## Public access

There was a clear consensus in the community that people do not want non-residents using the road. It should be a 'mine only' road. There is a concern that hunting and fishing pressures could reduce the wildlife that the community is dependent on. There is also concern about safety if people are allowed to hunt from the road.

Alan Taylor, Canadian Zinc representative, explained that they were exploring ideas with the First Nation leadership to limit public access. While a decision has yet to be made, it is clear that the community wants to find a way to exercise full control over access.

*We don't really want other people out there. It's a working road.* Earl Hope

**Summary:** *The community of Nahanni Butte wants full control over road access.*

## Social Issues

It became evident that community members, particularly women, wanted an opportunity to consider social impacts within the community first before making any public statements. While it was obvious that some aspects of the project had been discussed extensively and that the leadership had decided to support it in favour of the economic opportunities, it was less clear that questions such as how to mitigate potential social impacts had received much time. Several women indicated that they would like to have a workshop focused on social issues such as controlling drug and alcohol and limiting interaction between outside workers and young girls.



*I do have some questions...it would be good if we had a chance to discuss it (social impacts) as a community. A 50 man camp that close to the community, if they were to come into the community, I would be very concerned* Jayne Konisenta

The idea of building a camp to teach youth traditional knowledge and skills was supported by all. It is not clear if the community requires financial support to build this facility or if this is part of the Impact Benefits Agreement currently being negotiated. Its location is still also under discussion but is a consideration for what the community would like to see done in relation to the removal and reclamation of the road once mining is complete.

**Summary:** *The community expressed interest in holding a community workshop to consider mitigative measures in addressing social impact concerns. A workshop will assist Canadian Zinc in establishing policies and workforce guidelines that have community support, and promote respect for the culture and lifestyle of Nahanni Butte residents.*

*The community desires a youth camp along the road where they can teach their traditional knowledge and develop the skills required to practice their traditional lifestyle. The community sees this as an outcome of the road and seeks support in its construction.*

### Road Closure and Reclamation

The discussion around road closure and reclamation shifted once the community was informed that the current proposal includes the complete removal and reclamation of the road after mining is complete. It was evident that the leadership in particular were concerned that to require Canadian Zinc to remove the road may make the project un-economical. After it became clear that this responsibility was already established and budgeted for, people became focused on what it is they wanted in the long term. While still under discussion, it is evident that most members are favoring the removal and reclamation of the majority of the road to maintain the integrity of their traditional territory. Concerns about creating access to their hunting, gathering and trapping areas after the mine closes were expressed.

The idea of retaining a small portion of the road to create community access to the proposed youth cultural camp was discussed.

**Summary:** *The community was not familiar with how the road would be reclaimed, or that its removal was part of the proposed project. Most community members favored the removal of the road, with options discussed on retaining a portion of the road for long-term community use.*

### Analysis

While it is clear that Nahanni Butte continues to rely heavily on their traditional land based economy, it is also clear that the current leadership is in support of the economic opportunities this project would bring. Community members are very concerned about protecting their natural environment. The challenge will be to provide such economic opportunities while ensuring that they can continue to rely on traditional harvesting activities long into the future and well beyond the life of this project. The nature of the traditional economy requires a healthy and productive natural environment. Drawing from both traditional knowledge and science and the strengths of each, the Review Board has an important role in meeting this challenge.

Traditional knowledge holders are often able to identify links between seemingly unrelated components of the environment. Factual knowledge about the environment, such as that shared at this community session for example, includes specific observations experienced first-hand or shared from generation to generation through stories. As people share their observations and experience they may also interpret these and identify patterns. This knowledge of specific places is cross-referenced with the experience of other family members, other families, and through conversations with people in other regions. So, for example, people in this session drew from the experience of their neighboring regions who have experience with diamond mining and roads. They talked about how the barren land caribou have disappeared in that area and cautioned that they must not allow this to happen in their area in relation to this project.

People are also conscious about how they use the environment and about how they manage their relationship with the environment. Cultural practices, often spiritual in nature, such as 'feeding the land' and preparing for harvesting activities through prayer when picking medicines or going hunting are important aspects of maintaining a respectful relationship with nature.

Traditional Knowledge also consists of peoples' values and preferences, and what they consider significant within their environment. It includes what they know that has an impact on the environment and how it has a 'ripple effect'. Aboriginal spirituality and culture plays a strong role in determining such values. This element of traditional knowledge includes moral and ethical statements about the environment and about the relationships between humans, animals, and the environment; the "right way" to do things.

It would appear that the most effective approach to finding the "right way" to mitigate impacts is to facilitate a direct role for the community in the detailed decisions around routing of the road and finding solutions to addressing such problems as flash floods and protecting rivers and streams. Their request for more detailed maps is indicative of their interest in that level of project planning. Road access was a topic that generated a lot of interest and discussion in both communities. Communities should collaborate with each other to make sure their respective knowledge and traditional uses are respected, and work with Canadian Zinc to assess the options for limiting public access to the road.

## Conclusions

The Review Board has opportunities presented by its' decision to host this traditional knowledge session in the community to put into force its' mandate in a manner that is meaningful to the people most directly affected by this project. By focussing on culture and traditional knowledge, the Board has the opportunity to empower people to find solutions to their own challenges. This community has expressed a desire to do just that. How much support they get to take this on may well affect the quality of the outcome. Taking the time to foster community solutions to social impact concerns is one concrete step that the Board can take by engaging partners to sponsor the opportunity requested. Simple actions like following up on their request (to Canadian Zinc) for larger scale

maps so that they can provide further guidance on routing and mitigation measures, can make a difference to the level of environmental protection the community can offer. And finally, supporting the community in their efforts to establish a culture camp for teaching youth, will have benefits for generations to come.

On a procedural matter, I recommend that the Board find a way to accommodate people, especially elders, who wish to make their views or share their knowledge in the privacy of their home. As long as it is recorded and there is consent to publish the results, I believe that the Board will receive important information germane to identifying concerns as well as helpful solutions.