

Public Land Act – Public Engagement

Mr. Speaker, the *Public Land Act* received assent on August 21, 2019, at the end of the 18th Legislative Assembly. The new *Public Land Act* consolidates the existing *Northwest Territories Lands Act* and the *Commissioner's Land Act* into one cohesive land management regime. To bring the Act into force, new regulations must be developed.

The Department of Lands is taking a phased approach to regulation development. Phase one is focused on the essential regulations necessary to bring the *Public Land Act* into force in the first quarter of fiscal year 2022-2023. These regulations will address public land grants and dispositions such as leases and licences of occupation, quarry administration, security requirements and restoration, and general rights to use public land. With the *Public Land Act* in force, phase two will then commence and focus on evolving the regulatory model to address policy approaches and needs. As the Minister responsible, I am committed to having these regulations in place as soon as possible. With that said, the process and timelines must allow for meaningful involvement of Members of this Legislative Assembly, Indigenous and community governments, leaseholders, stakeholders, and the public.

Mr. Speaker, the first round of engagement, which began on December 10, 2020, introduces the project, and invites comments and ideas for developing the regulations.

As of January 22nd, the online engagement platform has seen over 1200 visits and over 105 people engaging with the content. Lease fees are a key topic of discussion on the engagement platform. Lease fees are calculated differently under the two existing acts. The new regulations will create consistency around public land valuation and pricing which is a key objective of the new regulations. The Department of Lands will also be reviewing the types of leases that can be issued with the objective of providing greater clarity for residential and commercial land users, including those in the agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, Northwest Territories residents have the opportunity to shape legislation that supports our decisions on how land and resources in the Northwest Territories are administered and used, both for current residents and our future generations. I encourage all residents to visit the Department of Lands website and click on the Have Your Say section, to provide input on how the Government of the Northwest Territories regulates public land. This first phase of engagement will be open until February 12th.

As you know, the Government of the Northwest Territories is looking at a proposed approach for how Standing Committees could be more involved in the development of regulations. The Department of Lands will follow the process and plan once it is developed. In the interim, I would invite Committee Members to engage in this work over the coming months.

A second round of public engagement is targeted for the Fall of 2021 and will provide an opportunity for public comment on the proposed regulations.

It is important to emphasize that we are all users of public land. Developing new tools for managing land and natural resources is an ongoing commitment since devolution. These regulations are part of that ongoing work. This engagement is an opportunity for Northwest Territories residents to contribute to decisions about Northwest Territories land and resources according to their own priorities.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important milestone for the Department of Lands and the Government of the Northwest Territories. Residents can be part of the history of land management in the Northwest Territories by participating in the public engagement to develop the *Public Land Act* regulations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.