

**Economy, Environment and Climate Change**

Mr. Speaker, in a couple of weeks, the Department of Lands will mark its third anniversary. Tasked with managing and administering 1.15 million square kilometres of land in the NWT, the Department has been working to serve residents in a way that reflects NWT interests and priorities.

Our work takes us across the entire Northwest Territories and our staff works with various partners, governments and landowners to ensure we are managing land and resources in a fair and transparent manner.

Much of the way in which we engage, and a standard this government is working to achieve for land management, is set out in the Land Use and Sustainability Framework.

The GNWT has made a commitment in its mandate to create a defined set of collective land use and sustainability objectives. Lands is working with other GNWT departments on this commitment by looking at how they apply to land management strategies and frameworks. Taken together, this will give us the baseline information to develop an approach to ensure the objectives figure significantly in our decision processes.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT has also made a commitment in its mandate to evolve our land and resource management legislative, regulatory and policy systems. In support of this goal, the Department of Lands is currently working on administrative and technical amendments to the GNWT's two land acts- notably the *Northwest Territories Lands Act* and the *Commissioner's Land Act*.

With two land administration systems now under one government, this initiative supports consistency in administrative application and enhanced clarity for land users. Engagement and consultation activities will occur at various stages of this initiative. This summer we will have a discussion paper ready to share with Aboriginal governments and with the general public.

As part of a separate initiative, the Department of Lands has proposed regulatory changes to fee schedules that would affect those accessing services from document preparation and application fees to royalty collection and permit fees for quarrying.

We have also reviewed lease rent minimums with the objective of better aligning the two land administration systems. Updates to these fees have been proposed based on a number of factors, including inflation.

In addition to this work, the GNWT has committed in its mandate to work to improve the NWT integrated resource management regime to ensure it reflects NWT interests and priorities. The Department of Lands coordinates the GNWT's input into amendments to the federal *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act* and regulations, a key feature of the NWT's integrated resource management regime. We have started engaging with Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada on changes to the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act* to reverse amendments that would have resulted in restructuring of the land and water boards in the Mackenzie Valley. In addition, the Department has been actively involved in coordinating the GNWT's input in the Expert Panel for the Review of Federal Environmental Assessment Processes. As part of our input, we continue to voice the need for participant funding for environmental assessment processes in the NWT.

As Minister of Lands I am responsible for nominating members to various boards created under the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act* concerned with environmental review and land use planning as well as appointments to the Surface Rights Board. The Department has established a screening process and related procedures to ensure board vacancies are filled in a timely matter with the most qualified nominees available for each position.

The Department continues to help the government meet a high standard for environmental assessment and improve our integrated resource management system. Mr. Speaker, we recently collaborated with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and MVRMA boards to host resource co-management workshops in Hay River and Norman Wells. These workshops support the mandate commitment to ensure that residents have meaningful opportunities to participate in the assessment of potential benefits and risks associated with resource development.

The government's mandate commits it to developing an integrated, comprehensive approach to the management of contaminated sites. The Department of Lands is supporting this commitment through work the Securities and Project Assessment Division is doing to address how we handle and process securities and assess risk. Consistent with the strategic direction in the Land Use and Sustainability Framework, our Shared Services Informatics Centre is working with the securities division to develop enhanced information-management capacity for tracking securities and assisting in evidence-based decision-making.

Further to that, the Department is collaborating with ENR and other departments through an interdepartmental working group to build and implement an inventory of securities and tracking system over the next several months.

Mr. Speaker, creating certainty around land use is critical to the environmental and economic future of the NWT. Regional land use plans are the primary instrument to define where certain activities can and cannot take place in a specific region or area, and land use planning is a collaborative process that requires strong relationships between communities and governments.

To help create greater certainty for all land users, the GNWT has made a commitment in its mandate to complete land use plans in all areas, in collaboration with Aboriginal governments. The Department's work on meeting this mandate item includes the development of regional land use planning guidelines to clarify the GNWT's role in land use planning.

In addition, the Department will host its Third Annual Land Use Planning Forum in March 2017. We have invited Aboriginal governments and land use planning partners to share information and perspectives on how the current and planned approaches, tools, and activities of planning partners can contribute to advancing land use planning in areas without completed land use plans.

We have also initiated work with the Tlicho Government to develop a planning mechanism for public lands within the Wek'ezhìi Management Area. Any final land use plan that is developed through the planning mechanism is directly linked to the provisions of the Tlicho Agreement and those provisions will also make the plan legally binding on all governments.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the Department is close to completing work to develop a framework that will articulate the GNWT's goals and priorities for managing recreational leasing on public lands in the NWT, another commitment of our mandate.

The Department also recognized the need for targeted recreational management planning for the public lands outside and around Yellowknife, N'Dilo and Dettah. Public engagement sessions and online surveys were held last year, giving residents and stakeholders several opportunities for input into the development of the plan for the Yellowknife Periphery Area. The draft Plan is expected to be released for public comment this summer. The GNWT will ensure section 35 consultation responsibilities are met prior to finalizing the Plan.

This work will ensure that Northerners continue to have diverse opportunities to experience and enjoy northern land and waters in ways that are most meaningful to them.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, the Department of Lands takes its commitments to help this government achieve all of its priorities seriously. We will continue to work toward improving the NWT integrated resource management system while meeting our land use and sustainability objectives and the aspirations of NWT residents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.