

Community Involvement – On the Land

Mr. Speaker, the land, water, air, wildlife and plants of the Northwest Territories play a critical role in the lives of Northerners. They are part of our heritage, identity and way of life. They provide for us in many ways as food for our families, traditional clothing, and transportation routes. The land sustains our livelihoods through hunting, trapping and gathering. It is the basis for our arts and culture.

The Government of the Northwest Territories has made a mandate commitment to develop country food programming as well as enhance existing programming and build new partnership initiatives to support healthy and sustainable traditional lifestyles. Together, we work continuously to support our residents' ability to go out on the land.

Mr. Speaker, in an effort to meet this commitment, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources recently established a new On the Land Unit to address the needs and challenges of our communities regarding land-based activities.

We have heard from our residents about the unique needs and challenges faced by communities in accessing country foods, sustaining a vibrant traditional economy, and maintaining opportunities for land-based learning that involves Elders and youth.

Our new On the Land Unit is working to address these important issues by engaging our Indigenous partners, communities, land-users, renewable resource boards and other stakeholders to discuss and prioritize ways to support community-driven sustainable livelihoods programs and initiatives.

Starting this month, representatives from the Department will be holding open houses in communities across the territory to get input on the challenges, needs, opportunities and priorities linked to country foods, the traditional economy, land-based learning, Guardian programs and traditional knowledge.

The information gathered through this public engagement process will be used to shape an ENR action plan for supporting sustainable livelihoods, and help us as a government to better ensure traditional knowledge directly informs our decision-making.

Mr. Speaker, our new On the Land Unit will also oversee the existing programming we have been partnering on successfully with communities for many years, including the Take a Kid Trapping Program, the Genuine Mackenzie Valley Fur Program, our Community Harvesters Assistance Program, hunter education and training, and public education and outreach initiatives, to name a few.

Ongoing education and outreach, community engagement and support for community-driven research are foundational to the Department and our collaboration with our partners. The new On the Land Unit represents the strong commitment ENR has to supporting programs and services that position northern knowledge, livelihoods and culture as central to the work we do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.