

Investing in World-Class Parks

Mr. Speaker, our territory has no shortage of spectacular sights for visitors and residents to enjoy. Our territorial parks are the starting point for many looking to experience these world-class wonders.

Through the life of this government, and in-line with our mandate, we have invested in enhancing these vital assets for the benefit of the growing contingent of tourists choosing the NWT, and our residents seeking to enjoy their recreational time.

With the construction season in full swing, many NWT residents are already seeing those investments in action. Today, I would like to highlight our work to invest in world-class parks infrastructure throughout this mandate, and what that has meant for the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, this summer alone there is almost \$7.3 million in work planned.

Some of the bigger projects include campsite enhancements in the Dehcho at Blackstone Territorial Park, new camping loops and structural improvements on our waterfalls route in the South Slave. And smaller improvements that make these parks that much more enjoyable, like kitchen shelters, sports areas, and road repairs.

Throughout this government, we've dedicated more than \$3.5 million annually to keep that momentum going, meaning our parks users come back to better facilities at their favourite spots year-after-year.

But Mr. Speaker, we invest in more than just infrastructure.

We have invested in planning: like the work underway to enhance North Arm Park to become an even more vital part of our parks infrastructure; or to lay the groundwork for a future where the NWT/British Columbia boundary crossing gets social media coverage like the 60th Parallel.

We have invested in better service: by revolutionizing our online service delivery and consistently delivering a better experience for our users; and by upping our staff presence at our parks to keep them clean and safe for our users.

And we have invested in marketing our parks to new audiences, reaching road travelers at conferences using targeted advertising for these world class assets.

Mr. Speaker, these investments have led to big improvements in our parks indicators across all of our regions. At the beginning of this government, we welcomed just over 28,000 overnight visitors in a season. As of last season, we're getting close to 37,000. We have also reached a point where more of these visitors are coming from outside the Northwest Territories, a reflection of how our spectacular parks are reaching new audiences. In fact, some regions see almost 70% of their traffic arriving from beyond our boundaries.

Mr. Speaker, early indications are that it will be another good season. From record-breaking opening-day bookings on our website, to packed parking lots and the posts I see across social media, I know residents and visitors alike are enjoying our parks, and our investments in making them better.

We committed to investing in world-class parks and the next Legislative Assembly is in a good position to make continued improvements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.