



June 05, 2020

MS. JULIE GREEN
MLA, YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

Oral Question 271-19(2) Impacts of Camping Outside of Campgrounds

This letter is in follow-up to the Oral Question you raised on June 01, 2020 regarding camping outside of campgrounds.

The COVID-19 pandemic requires the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) to adapt and collaborate to effectively respond to the increased use of public land, while respecting peoples' right to access public land.

Camping and the ability to get out on the land is something that Northerner's value. The Department does not discourage the short term responsible use of public land which includes activities like camping. At the same time, we ask campers and all users of public land to clean up after themselves and to avoid negatively impacting the experience of other campers, cabin owners and the general public.

In the midst of a global pandemic, the use of public land has increased in the Northwest Territories (NWT). In response to this increased demand and the current restrictions on access to Territorial Parks, the Departments of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), Lands, Industry, Tourism, and Investment, and Infrastructure are working collaboratively to ensure people are aware of the rules both with respect to the Public Health Orders and the responsible use of the land.

The cooperation between GNWT Departments includes the deployment of enforcement staff to educate the public on the rules associated with the use of public land as well as the requirement to comply with the Public Health Orders currently in place. The vast majority of campers are responsible, but I am aware that it only takes a small number of irresponsible campers to cast a negative image on a generally low impact activity. Where education has not been effective in modifying behaviours, the GNWT does have enforcement authority that can be used to deter irresponsible behaviour and encourage compliance.

GNWT departments with land management responsibilities are also considering approaches to deal with increased pressure on the land. These considerations include the impacts on infrastructure, the risk of waste being deposited, the risk of wildfires, and the timing of parks opening which will help ease the pressure of camping on the land.

Departments have some Officers and Inspectors that are cross appointed between departmental programs for compliance and enforcement under land and resource management legislation. These Officers and Inspectors carry out ongoing inspections and respond to any complaints brought forward, while also providing education on how to enjoy public lands responsibly. If required, ENR is able to carry out enforcement actions regarding the release of contaminants to the environment under the *Environmental Protection Act*.

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In addition to public information currently on the Department of Lands' website ("Leave No Trace"), the GNWT has delivered public messaging largely but not exclusively, through social media channels, to promote respecting the land when residents are on the land. Messaging targets land users in all regions, and has been tailored to seasonal activities, regional differences, and highlighting appropriate behaviors. Social media is the primary delivery system through our Departmental Twitter feed. Radio ads in select regions will be used to promote broader aspects of the campaign, using Indigenous languages where possible. Print materials will be another primary delivery channel through our Regional Offices, Government Service Offices. Web content will be service-based and new content drafted to support the social, print and radio campaigns.

The use and care of public land is a shared responsibility and I encourage the public to notify their local Lands office if they feel that public land is being used irresponsibly.

Thank you for raising this important issue.



Shane Thompson
Minister
Environment and Natural Resources

- c. Minister, Industry, Tourism and Investment
- Minister, Lands
- Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
- Legislative Coordinator
- Deputy Minister, Environment and Natural Resources
- Deputy Minister, Lands