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DENE NATION PRESENTATION ON

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**PROPOSED  
INDIGENOUS  
RIGHTS**

National Chief Norman Yakeleya  
AFN Regional Chief for the NWT



## WE RESPECT THE RIGHT OF ALL FIRST NATIONS TO CHOOSE THEIR PATH

- ▶ I am here to share with you the path forward chosen by the Dene Nation in regards to the proposed Rights Framework process.
- ▶ As Dene we respect the right of all First Nations to choose their path.
- ▶ We have a unique northern reality:
  - ▶ Almost 50% of the population of the NWT is Dene, Métis, or Inuvialuit
  - ▶ We form part of both public and Indigenous government structures
  - ▶ Out of the 30 Dene, there are only 4 reserves (Kátl'odeeche, Salt River, Smith Landing, Sayise Dene).
  - ▶ 5 Dene languages are official languages of the NWT
  - ▶ We have extremely complex governance structures, including control over lands and resources through land claims





## THE DENE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER

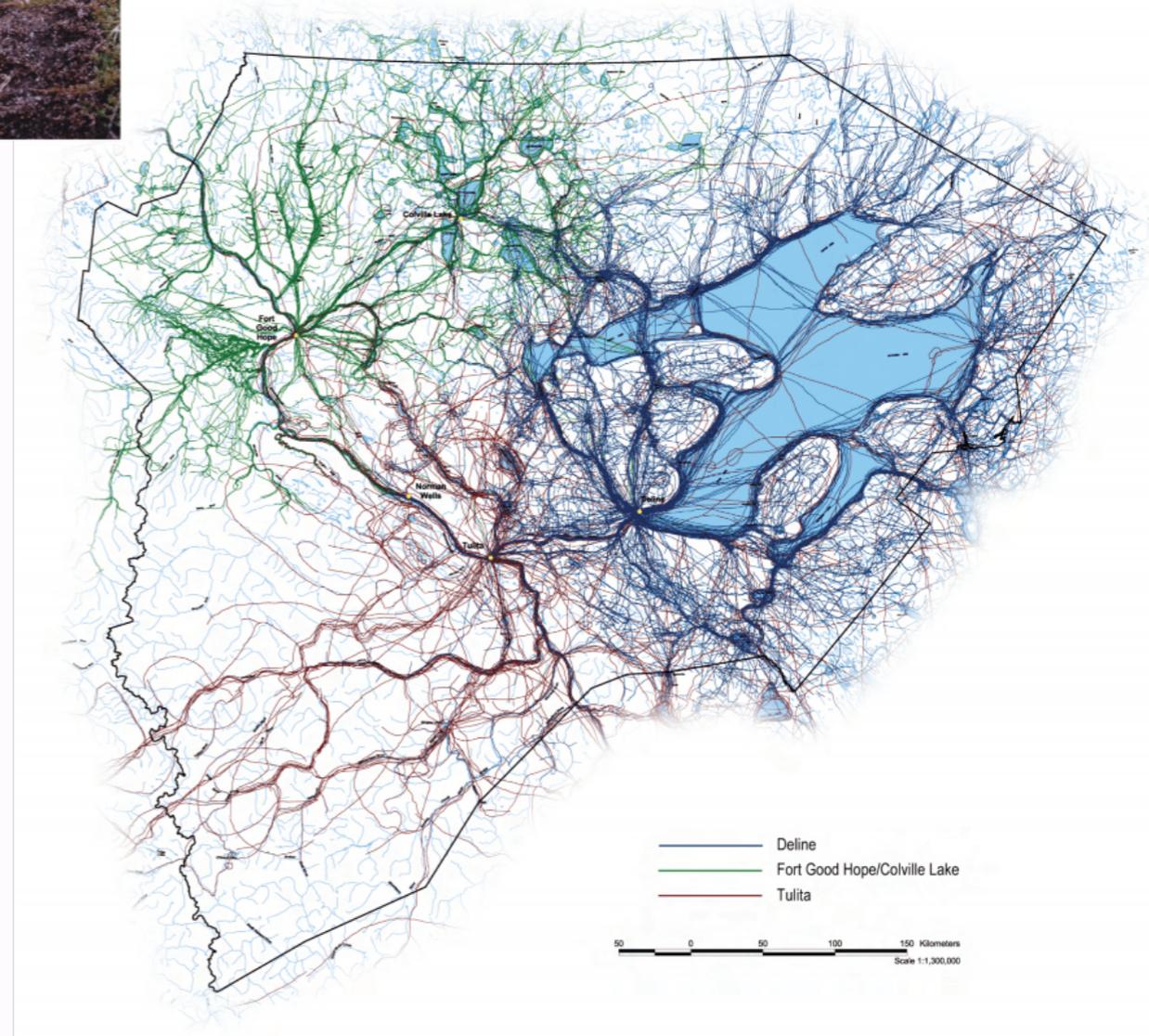
- ▶ Like all First Nations, over many generations, the Dene people of the NWT have persevered despite the repressive laws and policies of the federal government.
- ▶ The Federal rights negotiations processes of the past have divided the Dene Nation for the last 30 years, keeping us fragmented - a Nation divided with no unified voice.
- ▶ Our Elders are reminding us of the history of the Dene people - many voices speaking as one in defence of our lands, waters, resources, cultures, languages rights and our Nations.
- ▶ Our Elders have told us it is time for the Dene to put aside their differences and once again unite, recognizing we are stronger working together. It is the only way forward for us.
- ▶ We are heeding that advice from our Elders.
- ▶ I am here today as National Chief of the Dene Nation, with the support of the Grand Chiefs of the Dene Nation, to tell you and show you the Dene Nation is reuniting.
- ▶ As the Dene of the NWT have learned the critical value and strength that comes from unity, we share that with you.

## THE DENE ARE GOVERNMENTS IN OUR TERRITORY.

- ▶ We are governments: we are treaty people, some Dene have settled land claims, some have self-government agreements and some are still negotiating - but all are governments.
- ▶ As governments, the Dene have negotiated and worked in nation-to-nation and government-to-government processes for a long time:
  - ▶ We have 2 historical treaties (8 and 11), 3 modern land claims (Sahtu and Métis, Tlicho, Gwich'in) and 2 more in negotiation (Dehcho, Akaitcho)
  - ▶ We have MOUs setting out our ongoing G2G processes with the territorial government
  - ▶ We have co-drafted critical territorial legislation (Wildlife Act, Species at Risk Act)
  - ▶ We negotiated territory-wide resource revenue agreements between the GNWT and all Dene
- ▶ **We see these processes as consent-based processes.**
- ▶ **We accept the existence of other Canadian governments and Dene governments have chosen to work with these governments.**

## BUT WE DO NOT FULLY BENEFIT FROM DENE LANDS & RESOURCES

- ▶ Nationhood is tied to territories.
- ▶ Dene have deep connection and knowledge to vast lands and waters...our traditional territories are over 1 million square km across NWT, BC, AB, MB, SK. These lands are resource rich.
- ▶ We do not currently benefit fully from our own lands and resources because – even with our land claims and self-government agreements - we do not have full self-determination and self-government over lands and resources.
- ▶ Our priority is to change this.



Sahtu Dene & Metis land use mapping project. The network of interconnecting trails provides access to a Sahtu land use area encompassing some 300,000 km.



## IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS DENE GOVERNMENTS TO EXPLORE THIS OPPORTUNITY.

- ▶ Our history with the Federal and the Territorial governments has been generally adversarial defined by protracted, hugely expensive negotiation processes built on the concept of extinguishment of rights in exchange for some land and money.
- ▶ Now, after 151 years, the Federal government says on the record that the Rights Framework process is proposing to acknowledge inherent rights, remove the extinguishment requirement, work with us to develop an accelerated negotiation process, and switch from loans to grants for negotiations. These are of critical interest to the Dene.
- ▶ **However, the Rights Framework must go further and include *full self-determination and self-government* over the land and resources (not just recognition of languages and cultures as Canada has currently proposed).**
- ▶ We must seize the rapidly closing window of political opportunity. We must push that the remaining 300 days to the next election result in real progress.
- ▶ We also know that if there is a change in government after the election, that the opportunity presented through this Rights Framework process will likely be lost.



# THE DENE HAVE QUESTIONS.

- ▶ Like many of you, the Dene have many questions about the proposed Rights Framework process, including:
  - ▶ Our nations, governments and rights pre-exist Canada. Recognition legislation can make this explicit and help facilitate re-emergence of all aspects of our jurisdictions, especially control over lands and resources:
    - ▶ *Will the Rights Framework include full self-determination and self-government over lands and resources?*
    - ▶ *RCAP called for this, and it a fundamental goal of all Dene*
  - ▶ How will the proposed Rights Framework affect Treaty 8 and 11, and our land claims and self-government agreements, and existing collaborative governance structures?
  - ▶ We do not want to create yet another lengthy process that delays justice for our people even longer.
- ▶ *We want to engage in discussions with Canada to see if the Rights Framework is something the Dene can work with to achieve our goals.*



## WE MUST WORK TO ADVANCE THE INTERESTS OF THE DENE.

- ▶ There is much to work out and issues we will disagree about with the Federal government, but that is what governments do - they negotiate.
- ▶ We want to advance discussions to address Dene issues, and **work to secure a full co-drafting process for any proposed Rights Framework legislation** should this government get another mandate.
- ▶ There are also policy issues that need to be worked on and the Dene will work with all parties to make as much progress as possible on policy reform in the life of this federal government.
- ▶ As the Dene Nation, with the support of the Grand Chiefs, we believe that it is our responsibility, as governments, to take full advantage of the Rights Framework process to – if possible - advance the lands, resources and governance interests of the Dene people.



## THE DENE WAY FORWARD



- ▶ The darkness of the last 151 years should not blind us to the light that shines in the window of opportunity presented by the offer for a Rights Framework process.
- ▶ We must bring the Federal government along every step of the way of this process to ensure they honour the long overdue commitments they have made and implement them fully in a timely way
- ▶ **As Dene we have chosen our path and we respect the right of all First Nations to choose theirs.**