

# Mackenzie Valley Highway Project (EA1213-01)

## ***Insights into the Tłegóhłı (Norman Wells) Community Consultation Session held by the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board***



**October 21, 2024**

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**Presented to:**

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Review Board

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We appreciate your trust in our team to facilitate the session. Your contributions offer key understandings into the proposed Mackenzie Valley Highway Project that should be considered. We welcome any comments you might have about the report and hope that we have interpreted your words respectfully and accurately. Please reach out to us with any questions or concerns.

DRAFT

## Acronyms

EA	Environmental assessment
GNWT	Government of Northwest Territories
MVH	Mackenzie Valley Highway
IK	Indigenous Knowledge
Review Board	Mackenzie Valley Review Board (short from Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board or MVEIRB)
TK	Traditional Knowledge

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# Table of Contents

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<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Acronyms</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>List of Figures</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>List of Appendices</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>1.0 Background</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Format.....	2
1.2 Agenda .....	6
<b>2.0 Community Perspectives and Observations</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.1 Support for an All-Season Road .....	8
2.2 People and Community (Social) .....	8
11	
2.3 Benefits (Economic) .....	11
2.4 The Land (Environment) .....	12
2.5 Overall Thoughts .....	18
<b>3.0 Recommendations</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>4.0 Closing</b> .....	<b>21</b>

## List of Figures

---

Figure 1: Facilitators used sticky notes to map issues, insights, concerns and recommendations about the Project that were shared by participants.....	5
Figure 2: Agenda .....	6
Figure 3: Tłegóhłı (Norman Wells) community session wordcloud.....	7

# List of Appendices

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Appendix A List of Participants .....A-1

Appendix B Tłegóhtł (Norman Wells) Community Session Issues,  
Recommendations and Support..... B-1

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# 1.0 Background

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) is proposing to build the Mackenzie Valley Highway Project (the Project) to extend Highway #1 from Pehdzéh Kí (Wrigley) to Tulít'a (Tulita) and Tłegóhłı (Norman Wells) in the Northwest Territories (NWT). The Project would connect to other existing and planned roads to create an all-season highway connection between these communities to replace the Mackenzie Valley Winter Road in this area.

The Project is undergoing an environmental assessment (EA) by the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board (Review Board), which hosted community sessions in the Dehcho and Sahtú regions from October 16-23, 2024. Dehcho community sessions were to be held in Łíídlı Kúé (Fort Simpson) and in Pehdzéh Kí (Wrigley). However, the recent passing of an individual in the community meant the Łíídlı Kúé event had to be postponed. Sahtú community sessions were held in Tłegóhłı (Norman Wells), Tulít'a and Délıne (Deline). The Tłegóhłı (Norman Wells) session was held on October 21, 2024.

Throughout the sessions, community members talked about what they saw to be the most important potential impacts of the Project. While the Review Board accepts both scientific and Indigenous Knowledge (IK)<sup>1</sup> sources on an equal footing, most of the discussions within the sessions were grounded in IK. For example, several participants applied IK of unstable clay soils and permafrost melting along the Mackenzie River to existing problems experienced along the winter road and warned against keeping the proposed all-weather road on that route.

Elders, Knowledge-holders, youth and other community members voiced their insights, observations, concerns, issues, and recommendations related to the Project directly to members of the Review Board and the developer (i.e., GNWT). Moving forward, both the Review Board and developer should be better informed on the potential impacts of the Project and thereby equipped to make adaptations to and recommendations on the Project.

The format of an EA generally leans towards siloes whereby impacts are divided into components (e.g., cultural, economic, environmental, social). In reality, and in keeping with an Indigenous knowledge ethic, these impacts are inextricably bound and cannot be easily divided. The authors of this report have tried to highlight areas of overlap within and

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<sup>1</sup> While many northerners prefer saying “traditional knowledge” (or TK), the term “Indigenous knowledge” (or IK) is also used throughout this report as it is features in the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People](#).

between these components. Key interconnected themes and recommendations discussed during the Tłegóhłı (Norman Wells) session are presented.

## 1.1 Format

The Review Board, GNWT (developer), federal and territorial government consultation representatives, and independent facilitators travelled to Tłegóhłı (Norman Wells) to hold the community consultation session face-to-face, with a virtual option available to members of the community, Review Board and government members who were unable to attend in-person. The Review Board retained Joanne Barnaby and Natasha Thorpe as independent contractors to facilitate the community sessions, with support from Hannah Currie. However, for the Tłegóhłı (Norman Wells) session, Joanne Barnaby facilitated as Natasha Thorpe was unavailable to co-facilitate. Dora Grandjambe provided interpretation.

Posters, radio announcements, and social media posts were made in advance. PIDO Productions Ltd. delivered audio-visual support. Notes were taken during the session and later compared with transcripts as the basis of this report.<sup>2</sup>

The event was split into two sessions. The afternoon session was directed towards Elders, knowledge-holders, and Traditional Land Users, and the evening session was a community roundtable discussion (see Agenda in Section 1.2). A community feast was held between sessions.

Elders, Knowledge-holders, Traditional Land Users, youth, community members and local government representatives attended, allowing for a diversity of perspectives to be shared with the GNWT and Review Board. Several Elders and youth from Tulít'a, K'áhbamjtúé (Colville Lake), and K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope) happened to be in Tłegóhłı (Norman Wells) as they were participating in a caribou-related meeting the following day. They chose to attend the Mackenzie Valley Highway community engagement session to gather information and share their concerns. In total, there were just over forty people who participated, and about half listed their community as Tłegóhłı (Norman Wells) (see Appendix A).

The timing of the session conflicted with the municipal election which likely meant that some people were not able to attend. For example, a few participants voiced concern that there weren't many Elders present because they may not have known about the meeting, were uncomfortable sharing their thoughts in front of a group, had difficulty reading, might have mobility issues or required a ride to the event.

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<sup>2</sup> Transcripts are available upon request and uploaded to the Review Board website: <https://reviewboard.ca/>

Can I just recommend that for next time, because this is an Elder's session... I saw the post for 3 pm so I came and I'm not an Elder... Can you guys maybe get in touch with our local RRC? They have a list of Elders that are living in the community, and you can provide transportation for them to get here. There's a lot of stories and wisdom you are missing out on. I'd like to hear from my Elders too at these meetings. – Tracy Yakeliya

Is there any door to door [engagement]? I'm just thinking about some seniors that don't feel comfortable speaking in front of people. Their information would be really valuable.  
– Rhea McDonald

Elder Leon Andrew gave an opening prayer followed by a welcome by Ethel Blondin Andrew. Ethel highlighted the importance of the gathering and described some of the many threats facing the community today, including those related to natural disasters and environmental change. With the current state of the environment and the low water levels that have caused an increase in the cost of living, she would like to see this Project move ahead:

It's so important for you to be carrying out these sessions and hear from the people. The impact of things that are happening. ...This summer, you look at the Mackenzie River and you can see the lack of water. The water is so low that we haven't had barges. The cost of living is really impacted. This community, in particular, because we're in this area and we didn't have any barges. It's had a huge impact. Buffalo Air came in, and there has been big planes coming in. [As] you can imagine, that's so expensive. I just wanted to make that particular remark and emphasize how important it is to open the road, how important it is for the work to get done and for the commitments to be made. - Ethel Blondin Andrew

Review Board Chairperson JoAnne Deneron reviewed the agenda, explained the purpose of the meeting, and introduced the Review Board members and staff. She emphasized the importance of hearing from community members.

We need you to clearly share your views on the potential environmental impacts and ability to practice your culture. The Review Board also wants to know how important these impacts are to you. We hope these sessions will provide an opportunity for the GNWT to adapt their proposed project, make commitments, and improve mitigation options prior to the end of the Environmental Assessment. The Review Board will fully consider the views they hear today as well as the other input they hear throughout the process of this environmental assessment. While making its decision on this environmental assessment, we need to understand what you think. We will make every effort to listen carefully to you, get the information we need, and to make the best possible decisions in this assessment. – Review Board Chairperson JoAnne Deneron

The floor was then handed to Clémentine Bouche, the EA Advisor for the Review Board, to play a short video explaining the structure and work of the Review Board. Next, Clémentine gave a short presentation about the EA process. She concluded by reading a list of questions that was prepared by the Review Board and facilitation team and distributed to the community in advance.

Hard copies of the list of questions were given out and displayed on a projected screen. Participants were asked to consider:

1. In what ways could the proposed Project affect the environment (such as wildlife, water) and the people (such as traditional harvesting, community relationships, culture, economy)?
2. What are the most important issues you would focus on if you were on the Review Board? What do you think about the issues the developer identified?
3. What impacts do you currently experience each year when the winter road opens? Please tell us about issues that should be prioritized.
4. Can you tell us about areas of special concern along the proposed route?
5. Can you share your insights into further Traditional Knowledge (TK) or land use (other than through TK studies) that may need to be brought forward? What kinds of recommendations would you like to make to reduce impacts?
6. What are your solutions to any of the issues shared today or otherwise identified?

Seth Bohnet, representing the developer, next outlined the EA process, the Project itself, and the key impacts the GNWT has outlined in the Developer's Assessment Report. He directed community members to provided copies of the non-technical summary of the Developer's Assessment Report<sup>3</sup> and the GNWT website.<sup>4</sup>

Following these presentations, the session shifted into an informal, open-ended discussion guided by an agenda and the facilitators. The facilitation format encouraged an emergent approach. In this way, session participants shaped interests of importance to discuss and explore. The list of questions was interwoven with this approach with the aim of probing deeper into arising issues and making sure that key discussion topics weren't missed.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://reviewboard.ca/upload/project\\_document/MVH\\_DAR\\_Non%20Technical%20Summary\\_final.pdf](https://reviewboard.ca/upload/project_document/MVH_DAR_Non%20Technical%20Summary_final.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.inf.gov.nt.ca/en/MVH>



## 1.2 Agenda

The following agenda was circulated before and during the community session (Figure 2).

### Tłegóhtł (Norman Wells) Legion (Melnyk Hall)

Activity	Time	Details
<b>Elder's Tea and Bannock</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening Prayer</li> <li>• Opening comments by Review Board Chair Joanne Deneron</li> <li>• Opening comments from Chief (or representative)</li> <li>• Review Board presentation</li> <li>• Developer presentation</li> <li>• <b>Open Discussion</b></li> <li>• Closing Prayer</li> </ul>	3:00pm	This session is a focused opportunity for Elders, Traditional Knowledge Holders, and Land Users to share their expertise, insights, questions, comments, concerns, issues and advice with the Review Board. Youth are encouraged to participate. Joanne Barnaby will provide facilitation support.
<b>Dinner</b>	5:00 pm	Everyone is invited to the feast.
<b>Community Roundtable</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening Prayer</li> <li>• Opening comments by Review Board Chair JoAnne Deneron</li> <li>• Opening comments from Chief (or representative)</li> <li>• Review Board presentation</li> <li>• Developer presentation</li> <li>• <b>Questions and comments from the public</b></li> <li>• Closing Prayer</li> </ul>	7:00 pm	This roundtable session is an open opportunity for any community member to share their expertise, insights, questions, comments, concerns, issues and advice with the Review Board. Youth are encouraged to participate.

Figure 2: Agenda



## 2.1 Support for an All-Season Road

Participants focused heavily on the need for the Project, despite the potential impacts that may come with it. Having recently declared a state of emergency, the discussions in Tłegóhtı (Norman Wells) were rooted in finding a solution to the high cost of living.

This highway is no longer a great thing for the future, we need it today. We can't wait any longer. ...We're going through turmoil, mental anguish, and a lot of serious issues in our communities. We're imploring you to see if there is any way possible to speed your process up so the NWT government can speed their process up to build this road. ... Do your job to the best of your ability, as speedily as you can. - Mayor Frank Pope

Participants stressed the importance of having a dependable way for goods and supplies to come into the community. Tłegóhtı (Norman Wells) relies on seasonal barge service on the Mackenzie River. For the last two seasons, water levels have been so low that barges have been unable to navigate the Mackenzie River into Tłegóhtı (Norman Wells). Food, building supplies, gasoline and heating fuel had to be flown in at great costs. In addition to the drop in water levels, people have had to deal with shorter winter road seasons and unstable ice crossings.

Because of the current situation with the Mackenzie River being low on water, the cost of living is atrocious for our residents and businesses. - Mayor Frank Pope

I think we definitely need it today because of the water issue there. Now they have to fly fuel into Norman Wells and Fort Good Hope, and all the groceries are being flown in. – John Louison (From K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope))

In addition to the key issues outlined above, participants in the Norman Wells community session spoke to matters which have been grouped under the following themes: social impacts and the Land. Finally, participants' recommendations are presented. Each of these impacts and issues should be considered as interconnected rather than in isolation.

## 2.2 People and Community (Social)

In general, potential social impacts of the Project were the focus of sessions. People spoke to their concerns about an all-season road accessing the community and the dangers this may pose in terms of safety and the influx of drugs and alcohol.

## Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

During the afternoon, the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was raised. Community member Tracy Yakeliya expressed concern regarding the potential increase in threats to girls and women from the area once the highway is operational. She talked about the need to see continued collaboration with the GNWT on how to best prevent tragedy, and to ensure accountability if issues should arise.

As soon as that highway comes, it just opens us up to a bunch of problems. The lack of care and accountability can easily come up this way. You know the 'Highway of Tears' in B.C. and the lack of accountability? I guarantee it will be up here. We care about our people up here and we want them to be safe. - Tracy Yakeliya

Rhea McDonald also expressed her concern with non-community members taking advantage of the remoteness of the Mackenzie Valley Highway to harm young or vulnerable travellers. She shared her niece's experience of being followed by a black SUV, and how she feared the driver of this unknown vehicle may have been out to cause harm to the young woman. Rhea stated that in her years of travel across the remote highways of the NWT, she has only come across highway patrol once.

Thankfully I never had a problem with it, but there was other women and other vehicles that were getting pulled over by these black SUV's and whatever. One of my nieces that lives in Yellowknife went for a ride on the highway and on their way back, her and her friends were followed all the way to the city. I've heard that whoever are in the SUV's are either there to rob you or, God forbid, rape you. They are looking for vulnerable people. - Rhea McDonald

Rhea and Tracy both stressed the importance of safety and want to see mitigation measures in place to avoid potential violent encounters along the remote highway. The Project may open the door for increased violence, related not only to people's physical safety, but also to addictions and tragedy associated with drugs and alcohol.

## Drugs and Alcohol

Drugs and alcohol and their associated impacts are already causing substantial harm within Tłegóhtı (Norman Wells) and other northern communities. If the Project were to move forward, community members fear that this problem will only worsen. Participants expressed the need for increased support, such as counselling and treatment.

A visiting community member from Tulít'a, Frederick Andrew Jr., shared that a young man had recently passed away due to the toxic drug crisis:

Look what happened in my community yesterday: we lost one young person. Overdosed at dinner time. It was a shock to the community. He was a young guy, only 20 years old or 29 years old. Stuff like that happens and we really need counselling and treatment. We must be prepared before the highway goes through. No matter how you look at it from all different angles, we definitely need a highway. Like I said, its good and bad, but we really have to work hard with it. - Frederick Andrew Jr., Tulít'a

There is concern that with an all-season highway, more people from large cities would come to the community to distribute drugs. These people have no regard for the wellbeing of individuals and are only interested in financial gain. With this, there may be a subsequent increase in violence.

We care about our people up here and we want them to be safe. With drugs and alcohol, It's pretty bad up here. There are people dying now. There's the fear of a family, a man, a drug dealer, he can't pay up the big dealer in Yellowknife and they come up here and take his children and wife away because he can't pay up. Those are fears that we have up here. Those are real. -Tracy Yakeliya

Dakota Orlias, a youth visiting from K'áhbamítúé (Colville Lake), expressed that there is a lack of positive role models in his community. With a highway, there is fear that social issues will worsen, and future generations of youth will also lack strong mentors and role models. He went on to share that he feels very sad to see people in his community suffering because of drugs and alcohol. He feels that the outsiders selling drugs and alcohol to members of his community lack sympathy and empathy.

When the winter road opens, we have newcomers bringing alcohol and drugs, selling it to people. Especially people that have kids. They don't care what they bring the community; they just want to make money off the locals. They come in for a day or night and then leave. It's very sad seeing people suffering. - Dakota Orlias, Youth from K'áhbamítúé (Colville Lake)

He offered some ideas to prevent some of the influx of drugs and alcohol. One suggestion he made was for locals to be hired as security to check newcomers coming into and out of the community and what they might be carrying. He also thought that people should speak up to leadership when they see problems so that the person could be asked to leave the community.

We hired locals as security to monitor on the winter road and stop and check who's coming into the community and see if they're bringing anything in. If not, they would turn them away. Especially for events during the winter road season. Other than that, I'm not too sure. If someone knows then they would talk, they would bring it up to the leadership. We would make a motion to have this person dismissed or leave the community. - Dakota Orlas, Youth from K'áhbamjítúé (Colville Lake)



Figure 4: Participant speaking to the Review Board

### 2.3 Benefits (Economic)

There was some discussion about the direct economic benefits that the Project could bring to the community. Participants highlighted that during both the construction and ongoing maintenance of the Mackenzie Valley Highway, there should be employment opportunities for local people, as well as sub-contracts for community-based companies.

These [highway construction] contracts should be put out to large contractors with opportunities for all the smaller communities to be working with them. – Frank Pope, Mayor

Frank T'Seleie, visiting from K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope), pointed out that youth are looking to potential opportunities associated with an all-season road:

The other thing I see happening, I was with some young people today who were applying for a Class 1 driver's license. Those young people were thinking about the roads today, and what employment they could get out of it, I saw that as a positive thing. – Frank T'Seleie, K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope)

### Summary

- Highway patrols must be done on a more regular basis to keep people safe and drugs and alcohol out of the community
- There needs to be more innovative ways of making it safe to use the highway, especially for young women and girls
- Steps must be taken to stop the transportation of drugs and alcohol on the highway
- Stronger support is needed in the community and region for people fighting their addictions
- One of the most important things we can do to combat the potential social impacts of the Mackenzie Valley Highway is to work on prevention strategies. Education on potential negative impacts and long-term collaboration with the GNWT will be vital.
- Construction and maintenance contracts should go to large contractors that partner with smaller communities.

## 2.4 The Land (Environment)

During the evening community session, a few participants spoke to current environmental change impacts to the Land.<sup>7</sup> Drawing from IK and lived experiences, people connected low water levels, increased wildfire activity, habitat loss and more effects of climate change that they are witnessing. They talked about how these threats, considered together, meant that the need for the road was strong.

Right now, [climate change] is really affecting the environment. Still, we can have the highway. - Frederick Andrew Jr. (Tulít'a)

### Environmental Change

Traditional knowledge teachings have long predicted environmental change.

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<sup>7</sup> It is noted that many of these speakers are not from the Tłegóhtı (Norman Wells).

Back in the early 1970s ... there was lots of wildlife, lots of caribou, lots of beaver dams. Then in the early '80s, the Elders start talking about the climate change that's going to take place. They prophesized 50 or 100 years ago, and it wasn't time yet. How they knew and they start talking about it. They talk about all the things that are coming, that's going to affect wildlife and water and air and everything. We didn't really listen at that time. Now when I look back, I know they were right. - Frederick Andrew Jr. (Tulít'a)

The Elders prophesized that lower water levels would be coming:

I have been hearing that were going to be losing water, but I think it's starting right now. The only water we're going to have is right in front of the Port Radium on Great Bear Lake. I don't know what the rest of the community is going to be like. In front of Port Radium, it's the deepest part of the lake. The whole lake is going to be sand and mud, that's all. We are talking about the highway, but we got to think about the water. That's all. ... I think we could still build a highway, but what are we going to do if we keep running out of water? It's going to stay dry for seven years, that's what I've heard. That was way back when I first got to Dél̄n̄ę (Deline), the old man was talking about losing water. He mentioned Port Radium, that's where there will be a little open water. The people will be putting up their camp around the water, and later the water is going to come up and wreck all their places. That's what I've heard, that's all. – Edward Oudzi

Participants talked about how the community has experienced shortening winter road seasons because of rising temperatures. In addition, ice crossings along the winter road have become noticeably less safe as ice is becoming thinner.

Times change, climate change is real, the [Mackenzie] River is dry. Climate change is affecting everything. Ice is not safe anymore in the wintertime. We can't drive in some places, it's not safe anymore. - Frederick Andrew Jr. (Tulita)

Many participants spoke about lower water levels and the cost of living while others linked more wildfires to decreased habitat requiring the Project to be even more careful with their footprint.

## Water Levels

With the low water levels, two summers have passed where barges are unable to navigate the river. Without regular barge service, Norman Wells has been flying in all goods, fuel, and building supplies. For the community, participants explained that barge service is an essential lifeline and the community has suffered without it (see Section 2.2).

We used to get everything barged in. I remember as a kid growing up there used to be a lot of barges on the river. In fact, there was 3 barge companies. We used to get everything on the barge, now that's not the case anymore. Climate change is having a real drastic effect.  
- Frank T'Seleie, K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope)

It's the second summer in a row with no barge, no winter road. - Frederick Andrew Jr. (Tulita)

## Wildfires

Due to extensive wildland fires in the summer of 2023, a large portion of wildlife habitat has burned. Participants explained that this is especially damaging to the woodland caribou, whose main diet is lichen, as lichen is slow to grow. The landscape looks much different after the fires raged across the NWT. Frederick Andrew Jr. shared that many of the newborn wild animals like ducks and martens had also burned in the fire. These high-intensity wildfires have greatly impacted wildlife populations and critical habitats across the Sahtú region.

All the habitat is all burnt. No caribou. It takes 40 years before it likely grows again. ... Right now, wildlife habitat is all burned and there's nothing much we can do about it. Woodland caribou have to move away in order to survive because everything is burnt out. They have to go where the habitat is. - Frederick Andrew Jr. (Tulita)

With increasing temperatures and wildfire activity, participants have noticed an increasing rate of permafrost melt, resulting in landslides, and increased slumping. Grounded in IK, these observations tell of reduced stability of the land on which the proposed all-season road would be built.

The changes also have a dramatic effect on the Land. The melting of the permafrost, the slumping starting to happen. We have a lot of history on our land regarding that.  
- Elder Frank T'Seleie, K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope)

Similar concerns expressed in Pehdzéh Kí (Wrigley Wrigley) were repeated here: the road route should be moved further away from the Mackenzie River to avoid unstable areas and reduce maintenance challenges.

I experienced and saw some of those impacts on the winter road. One year there was a lot of snow and the snowbanks on both sides of the winter road were high. The wildlife in the area had one certain path they use over and over, and the snowbanks were blocking the path. I saw moose and caribou wandering back and forth looking for a place to climb over. I also once saw a muskox, they have short legs, he couldn't get over it. There were some vehicles coming, and the muskox started charging the vehicles and the muskox damaged at least one vehicle. - Frank T'Seleie, K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope)

As a Knowledge-holder, Fred elaborated that monitors could be on the road to observe whether people were bothering any wildlife:

If somehow some of those impacts can be mitigated by monitors. If you have monitors out there to monitor the road, they should have some authority where they can give tickets to whomever who may be infringing on the rules. I think that would probably mitigate a lot of the impacts. - Frank T'Seleie, K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope)

Finally, Rhea McDonald expressed her concerns around the effect of the quarries:

In the future, after you make the quarries, is there any kind of follow up on how that will affect the mountain formations? Because you're most likely getting the rocks from the base of the mountains if not higher. I'm just wondering if has there been any significant changes to those formations? How many quarries will remain open for maintenance?  
- Rhea McDonald

### *Summary*

- Elders have long prophesized the environmental change that is happening today.
- Community members' observations of environmental change impacts (e.g., permafrost melting) need to feed into the Project (e.g., around route alignment)
- The impacts of environmental change (e.g., lower water levels) mean that there is an urgent need for the road to secure a reliable transportation network other than a barge system.
- Increased wildfire activity has damaged wildlife populations and critical habitat.
- Monitors patrolling the road could observe whether all rules are being followed on the road to protect wildlife and wildlife habitat

## Sacred Sites

Frederick Andrew Jr. visiting from Tulít'a (Tulita) shared several stories about key sacred areas including Bear Creek, Jungle Creek, Canyon Creek, Little Smith Creek, and Cloud Mountain. Elders and Knowledge-holders know key places throughout the Land, some of which has been documented in TK studies. Layered into these stories were lessons around the safety of places grounded in lived experience and TK passed between generations.

I know that when we look at the proposed highway, it goes to the east side of Bear Rock. We went there and it has to go on the other side. Bear Rock is a really sacred place, and we need to respect that. .... At the east end of Bear Rock where it goes into the Mackenzie River, that rock is right into the water and there's no way around. - Frederick Andrew Jr. Tulít'a (Tulita)

Other areas noted included Jungle Creek and Canyon Creek:

... An Elder was telling me that the east end and base of the north end there used to be a serpent that stayed in the area. Somehow, they would move somewhere, I think it was somewhere in the 1920s, the serpent came down onto the side of Bear Rock. They came out of Jungle Creek, and it looks way different than the other creeks. Canyon Creek is lots of rocks and willows, all the creeks are like that. Jungle Creek is different. It's like when a giant beaver or snake goes through the muskeg, you see the slither. It's like that, there are no rocks. That creek is like a beaver channel. It's steep – five to six feet deep and that's where they came out and down the Mackenzie. That's a very important spot. Bear Rock, we don't want the highway to go through here.- Frederick Andrew Jr. Tulít'a (Tulita)

Little Smith Creek was also mentioned:

Then there's Little Smith Creek where our cabin is, where the creek comes out, not too far, there's a really strong current and it forms a whirlpool. That area has a gigantic fisher in there sleeping. When the time is near, he will come out. But right now he is sleeping. When you go around there it will start to make a whirlpool with you and drag you down. - Frederick Andrew Jr. Tulít'a (Tulita)

Frederick elaborated on the importance of respect for sacred places like Cloud Mountain and how critical it is to share stories with the youth.

Cloud Mountain is a weather station: we can tell the weather by the clouds on it. Because of the gigantic fisher in the water, lots of marten go there for two weeks then they're gone. We asked an Elder and he told us that the fisher in the Mackenzie River where he was sleeping... that's his gigantic lice, that's a marten, every once in while hangs out below big Cloud Mountain. We need to respect that. I just wanted to bring it up because some of you don't know nothing about stories like that. Young people, it's good for them to know. Down the road, they can respect that, especially in the Mackenzie River where the giant fisher is. My dad was telling me lots of people would go out spring hunting for ducks, and way back in early '30s, a paddle boat came down and got caught in there and was gone. A white person with a boat, he got caught went in there that's it. My uncle got caught in there and they would pull the motor and slowly would come out. Back then it was really active but now it's sleeping; it's resting. – Frederick Andrew Jr., Tulít'a (Tulita)

Participants expressed the importance of applying TK related to sacred sites, and traditional travel routes in routing the all-season road. Previous studies carried out as part of governance initiatives and early work on the highway were mentioned as important to consider in current routing.

As you know, some of the communities in the Sahtú region are currently negotiating governance. It would be wise to keep that area open in the event that the topic of highway will eventually be negotiated. Keep an open mind about that. Secondly, way back when the first survey happened, one of the engineers was Victor Cook. He's a civil engineer and he was doing this survey and we have traditional trails that are thousands of years old on our land. This is access to fish, lakes, and where the wildlife resources are. He said he came onto a trail, one of the traditional trails, and he recalled travelling on it as a child. He was an engineer. I remember him specifically stating that those trails should be marked. They should be notes on a map, and wherever they cross the highway should be marked. - Frank T'Seleie, K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope)

### *Summary*

- There are multiple sacred sites along the proposed route of the Project that must be avoided. These may include Bear Creek, Jungle Creek, Canyon Creek, Little Smith Creek, and Cloud Mountain.
- Sacred areas must be documented and avoided.
- TK studies carried out in the past as well as today must be accessed to provide guidance on the Project, particularly around routing.

- Stories about these sites are as sacred as the places themselves: layered into stories are critical cultural references, safety lessons and more. The telling of stories of these sacred sites allows for intergenerational knowledge transfer.

## 2.5 Overall Thoughts

Participants in the Tłegóhtı (Norman Wells) sessions expressed support for the Project and urged the Review Board and GNWT to accelerate the environmental assessment and construction processes. Community members from Tłegóhtı (Norman Wells) as well as visitors who dropped into the sessions, similarly expressed conditional support for the road construction.

We have got to get this thing built as soon as possible so the Sahtú communities, all five of our communities, can survive. – Frank Pope, Mayor

## 3.0 Recommendations

Throughout the sessions, Tłegóhtj (Norman Wells) participants made several recommendations ranging from accelerating construction to ensuring traditional trails are marked to increased engagement with Elders. Recommendations are listed below. Key issues, recommendations, and support for these recommendations are detailed in Appendix B.

1. Provide door to door engagement as well as transportation for Elders to participate in future events.
2. Share information on the impacts of similar highway development projects with community members in a summary pamphlet for reference at future sessions.
3. Work together cooperatively and demonstrate accountability over time by following through on commitments: increase collaboration between governments and communities.
4. Accelerate the necessary processes (e.g., EA) to begin construction of the Project.
5. Reduce the cost of living for residents by advancing the Project.
6. Train and build capacity for locals to monitor the road for drugs and alcohol, potentially screening who is coming into and out of the community and what they are carrying.
7. Invest in drug and alcohol abuse programs for community members, including highway workers.
8. Ensure that there are employment opportunities for local people plus contracts for community-based companies during both the construction and ongoing maintenance of the all-season road.
9. Provide support to community members looking for employment related to the Project.
10. Apply knowledge of traditional travel routes marked in the past as well as in recent TK studies so that these areas can be avoided.
11. Document and apply IK of environmental changes to Project design (e.g., routing) and mitigating any effects.
12. Establish monitoring programs on the road so that habitat is protected, and wildlife are not harmed, for example, by vehicles charging wildlife.

13. Monitor the effect of quarries on the stability of mountains.

14. Re-route the highway around sacred areas such as Bear Rock, Bear Creek, Jungle Creek, Little Smith Creek, and Cloud Mountain.

The community session created space to listen to and learn from one another as Knowledge-holders to scientists, Elders to youth, community members to Review Board members, and more.

The first time the oil and seismic companies went on to our land they were blading everything right down to the ground and removing the top layer. In some places they even uprooted trees. The Elders recognized that right away, the impact. I remember them saying that the tree roots hold the land together: if you remove that everything will go. If you take off the permafrost, it will melt, and slumps start happening. That concern I think was put forward and governments at that time changed the rules, putting shoes under the bulldozer blades so that its off the ground. So, I think we can learn from those kinds of experiences. - Frank T'Seleie, K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope)

As Frank T'Seleie pointed out, there are strong examples where such exchanges have led to innovation and improvement. If the Project moves forward, it should be so with the meaningful incorporation of TK and community directives.

## 4.0 Closing

The community sessions held in Tłegóhtj (Norman Wells) closed with Catherine Fairbairn, Senior EA Advisor with the Review Board, summarizing the themes discussed throughout the day. She referred to the sticky notes along the wall that captured key concerns and recommendations put forth by participants. She asked for participant feedback to check that their thoughts were captured accurately.

I think the strongest message I heard was that everyone knows the road will bring both good and bad. People want to limit the bad as much as possible, but there's a strong message that people need the road and want the road. - Catherine Fairbairn, Review Board

Seth Bohnet thanked participants for their attendance and thoughtful discussion. He emphasized that this was not the only opportunity for people to voice their concerns and ask questions about the Project.

Chairperson JoAnne Deneron thanked community members for sharing their issues, concerns, insights, and expertise. Frederick Andrew Jr. offered a closing prayer.



*Figure 5: Aerial photo of the Sahtú*

# Appendix A List of Participants

## Community Members

- Leon Andrew
- Ethel Blondin Andrew, The Norman Wells Renewable Resource Council
- Suzanne Hall
- Harold Harris, Norman Wells
- Wayne Kakfwi
- Kelly Louison
- Lynda MacCauley
- Calvin MacCauley
- Todd McCauley, The Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated
- Rhea McDonald
- Lisa McDonald
- Beverly McNeely
- James McPherson, Norman Wells
- Bruce McPherson
- Edward Oudzi, The Norman Wells Renewable Resource Council and Norman Wells Land Corporation
- Frank Pope, Mayor of Norman Wells
- James Pope
- Richard Popko
- Bill Pratt
- Martin Rojeck
- Jaiden Stevens
- Loretta Wiley
- Tracy Yakeliya
- Shutah Yakeliya

## Visitors

- Frederick Andrew Jr.
- Walter Bezha
- Fred Clement
- Jimmy Dillion
- Jayden Kochon, Behdzi Ahda First Nation

- Jimmy Kochon, Behdzi Ahda First Nation
- Miranda McNeely, Fort Good Hope
- Charlie Neyelle
- Dakota Orlas, Behdzi Ahda First Nation
- Frank T'Seleie
- Leon Taueau
- George Wrigley, Tulita Renewable Resource Council

## Review Board Members and Staff

- Clémentine Bouche
- Camilia Chocolate-Zoe
- Mark Cliffe-Phillips
- JoAnne Deneron
- Jim Edmondson
- Alan Ehrlich
- Catherine Fairbairn
- Brenda Gauthier
- Kate Hearn
- Chuck Hubert
- David Krutko
- Malorey Nirlungayuk
- Donna Schear
- Simon Toogood

## Territorial Government

- Sufiyan Bharucha, Government of Northwest Territories Department of Infrastructure
- Seth Bohnet, Government of Northwest Territories Department of Infrastructure
- Brian Boyes, Government of Northwest Territories Department of Municipal and Community Affairs
- Kelly Bourassa, Government of

Northwest Territories Department of Infrastructure

Patricia Coyne, Government of Northwest Territories Department of Infrastructure

- Andrew Lirette, Government of Northwest Territories Department of the Environment and Climate Change
- Nancy Njere, Government of Northwest Territories Department of the Environment and Climate Change, Project Assessment Branch
- Anita Ogaa, Government of Northwest Territories Department of Infrastructure  
David Oh-George, Government of Northwest Territories Department of Infrastructure
- Melissa Pink, Government of Northwest Territories  
Daminder Singh, Government of Northwest Territories Department of Municipal and Community Affairs
- Ash Varghese, Government of Northwest Territories Department of the Environment and Climate Change
- Zoe Zwaigenbaum, Government of Northwest Territories Department of Health and Social Services

### **Federal Government**

- Chantal Grey, Northern Project Management Office  
Anna-Maija LaFlamme, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Tatiana LeClerc, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Melissa Pinto, Environment and Climate Change Canada
- Jennifer Sabourin, Environment and Climate Change Canada

### **Observers**

- Erica Bonhomme, K'alo Stantec
- Jennifer Heneberry, DPRA Canada
- Annalee Kornelsen, Drawing Change  
Timm Rochon, DPRA Canada
- Anne-Marie Whittaker, EcoPlan

### **Facilitators and Support**

- Joanne Barnaby, Joanne Barnaby Consulting
- Hannah Currie

### **Interpreter**

- Dora Grandjambe

*Note: This list is as it appeared on the sign-in sheet. In some cases, people did not list their affiliation.*

**Appendix B Tlegóhtı (Norman Wells) Community  
Session Issues, Recommendations and  
Support**

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## B.1 General

Issue	Recommendation	Support
<p>More Elders are needed at community sessions to provide their stories, wisdom, and expertise: Elders may be uncomfortable sharing their thoughts in front of a group, have difficulty reading, suffer from mobility issues or require a ride to the event.</p>	<p>Provide door to door engagement as well as transportation for Elders to participate in future engagement events.</p>	<p>Is there any door to door [engagement]? I'm just thinking about some seniors that don't feel comfortable speaking in front of people. Their information would be really valuable. – Rhea McDonald</p> <p>Can I just recommend that for next time, because this is an Elder's session ... Can you guys maybe get in touch with our local RRC? They have a list of Elders that are living in the community, and you can provide transportation for them to get here. – Tracy Yakeliya</p>
<p>People want to know more about the impacts of similar all-season roads in the North by reading a pamphlet in advance rather than going to a website.</p>	<p>Share information on the impacts of similar highway development projects to community members in a summary pamphlet for reference at future sessions.</p>	<p>Can I request that we get information on other highways - the environmental impacts or socioeconomic impacts it has had on different communities like the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk highway or elsewhere? Having evidence or things like that so we can review and do our due diligence. For further meetings, can we have this information available to us so that we know what we're getting ourselves into here? ... But for the future, I'm requesting this. I'm from here. I'm requesting for this to be available for people to read right in front of their faces, instead of being recommended to go on a website after we go home from the meeting. At the table, discussed. It would be really good, I recommend highly. - Tracy Yakeliya</p>

Issue	Recommendation	Support
		<p>Can you share any information on the effects that the [Tłıchq All-Season Road] has had in regards to permafrost degradation, fish, birds and so on and so forth. I know there's a report out there, but not everyone can read that report or know where to look, sometimes it's just easier to hear it. – Rhea McDonald</p>
<p>Meaningful partnerships between the community and developer must be based on fulfilled commitments and accountability.</p>	<p>Work together cooperatively and demonstrate accountability over time by following through on commitments: increase collaboration between governments and communities.</p>	<p>I'm hoping there will be a lot of cooperation and consideration for the fact that if there's too much conflict, things don't happen. I'm hoping that if we work together, we can do better and eventually we will have a highway – Ethel Blondin Andrew</p> <p>I just feel like that down south there is not a lot of accountability. I hope that when the highway is built it's not just like a... you know you go to the car dealership, and you buy a car. The dealer doesn't even notice you as soon as you buy the car. I hope it's not the same scenario as soon as the highway is built, and we don't hear from you guys or work with you closely to address these concerns. People spoke to the many opportunities that the road will provide, the businesses that could be started. – Tracy Yakeliya</p>
<p>Community members want the Project and would like to see a shorter timeline to completion.</p>	<p>Accelerate the necessary processes (e.g., environmental assessment) to begin construction.</p>	<p>The town of Norman Wells has challenged the NWT government to get the funding and highway completed before the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> assembly, four years from now. ... We have got to get this thing built as soon as possible so the Sahtú communities, all five of our communities, can survive. – Frank Pope, Mayor</p> <p>We're imploring you to see if there is any way possible to speed your process up so the NWT government can speed their process up to build this road. – Frank Pope, Mayor</p> <p>I just wanted to ... emphasize how important it is to open the road, how important it is for the work to get done and for the commitments to be made. – Ethel Blondin Andrew</p>

Issue	Recommendation	Support
		<p>I'm just wondering what's the hold up with the Mackenzie Valley Highway, the environmental assessment, all of it? As Dene people we know naturally how to get with it. We know you guys have to go through all these processes or whatever which is ok, but like Fred said, we really need you. – John Louison K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope)</p>
<p>Environmental change is leading to lower water levels such that the barge cannot operate, and a shorter period where the winter road can be safely opened. Together, this requires the community to fly-in goods, makes the cost of living too high, and puts financial strain on community members.</p>	<p>Reduce the cost of living for residents by advancing the Project.</p>	<p>This highway is no longer a great thing for the future: we need it today. We can't wait any longer. ...We're going through turmoil, mental anguish, and a lot of serious issues in our communities. We're imploring you to see if there is any way possible to speed your process up so the NWT government can speed their process up to build this road. ... Do your job to the best of your ability, as speedily as you can. – Frank Pope, Mayor</p> <p>Because of the current situation with the Mackenzie River being low on water, the cost of living is atrocious for our residents and businesses. – Frank Pope, Mayor</p> <p>I know the government says another ten years but that's too much, it can't wait that long. Look at Whatì, they got a road within two years. Maybe they had a partnership with Diavik Mine and that's good too. Up here in the North, we have everything in place, we need to find the money. I don't want to wait another five years or ten years. No. I'm 74 years old and I slashed from Blackwater over 50 years ago and I'm still talking about it. That's half a century ago. I think that's a record breaking wait to get a highway done. Holy man. I'm still sitting here talking about it. I'd say within two and a half to three years. I know there's money out there. That's all we need, money. I know there's impacts to the land, but there's not much we can do, everything burned out. We're just trying to balance everything best we can. – Frederick Andrew Jr., Tulit'a (Tulita)</p>

Issue	Recommendation	Support
		<p>There was no highway, and nobody talked about it. I think we definitely need it today because of the water issue there. Now they have to fly fuel into Norman Wells and Fort Good Hope, and all the groceries are being flown in. You go to Good Hope and see the prices, you even go here see the prices they are high, you go to Fort Good Hope and they are higher. Keep that in mind to help our communities. You guys are sitting in your high offices up in Yellowknife and Ottawa not even worried about that. You don't do very much. We need your help; you guys are holding offices, and you can do it. I know you can do it. Thank you.</p> <p>– John Louison, K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope)</p>

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## B.2 People and Community (Social)

Issue	Recommendation	Support
<p>There are not enough monitors patrolling the roads to mitigate the effects of drugs and alcohol currently, let alone with an all-season road.</p>	<p>Train and build capacity for locals to monitor the road for drugs and alcohol, potentially screening who is coming into and out of the community and what they are carrying.</p>	<p>If somehow some of those impacts can be mitigated by monitors. If you have monitors out there to monitor the road, they should have some authority where they can give tickets to whomever who may be infringing on the rules. I think that would probably mitigate a lot of the impacts. – Frank T’Seleie, K’ahsho Got’ine (Fort Good Hope)</p> <p>We hired locals as security to monitor on the winter road and stop and check who’s coming into the community and see if they’re bringing anything in. If not, they would turn them away. Especially for events during the winter road season. Dakota Orlas, Youth from K’áhbamjítúé (Colville Lake)</p>
<p>There must be more investment in drug and alcohol abuse programs for community members, including highway workers.</p>	<p>Invest in drug and alcohol abuse programs for community members, including highway workers.</p>	<p>I worked on Simpson Highway back in ‘68 and ‘69, so I have a fair bit of knowledge on what to expect from the land, the water, the creeks, the rivers. So, I would say trust the process of this whole thing. I remember our camp was on the other side of Liard River in Fort Simpson ... The community had an agreement with construction company that nobody could come into town, none of the workers anyway ... Some of them will be looking for programs, like AA meetings. That you should be aware of, make that available for them. That’s my thoughts. – John Louison, K’ahsho Got’ine (Fort Good Hope)</p>

### B.3 Benefits (Economic)

<p>Construction and maintenance employment contracts should go to local people and community-based companies.</p>	<p>Ensure that there are employment opportunities for local people as well as contracts for community-based companies during both the construction and ongoing maintenance of the all-season road.</p>	<p>These contracts should be put out to large contractors with opportunities for all the smaller communities to be working with them. – Frank Pope, Mayor</p>
<p>Young people are starting to explore highway-related training and need to be supported.</p>	<p>Provide support to community members looking for employment related to the Project.</p>	<p>The other thing I see happening, I was with some young people today who were applying for a Class 1 driver’s license. Those young people were thinking about the roads today, and what employment they could get out of it, I saw that as a positive thing. – Frank T’Seleie, K’ahsho Got’ine (Fort Good Hope)</p>

## B.4 The Land and Sacred Areas

Issue	Recommendation	Support
Some traditional travel routes and trails have been marked in the past, and through the recent Traditional Knowledge studies.	Apply knowledge of traditional travel routes marked in the past as well as in recent Traditional Knowledge studies so that they can be avoided.	He's a civil engineer and he was doing this survey and we have traditional trails that are thousands of years old on our land. This is access to fish lakes, and where the wildlife resources are. He said he came onto a trail, one of the traditional trails, and he recalled travelling on it as a child. He was an engineer. I remember him specifically stating that those trails should be marked. They should be notes on a map, and wherever they cross the highway should be marked. – Frank T'Seleie, K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope)
Environmental change impacts are affecting water levels, wildfires, wildlife populations, and critical habitat.	Document and apply IK of environmental changes in designing the Project (e.g., routing) and mitigating any effects.	The changes also have a dramatic effect on the Land. The melting of the permafrost, the slumping starting to happen. We have a lot of history on our land regarding that. – Elder Frank T'Seleie, K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope)  I experienced and saw some of those impacts on the winter road. One year there was a lot of snow and the snowbanks on both sides of the winter road were high. The wildlife in the area had one certain path they use over and over, and the snowbanks were blocking the path. I saw moose and caribou wandering back and forth looking for a place to climb over. I also once saw a muskox, they have short legs, he couldn't get over it. There were some vehicles coming, and the muskox started charging the vehicles and the muskox damaged at least one vehicle. – Frank T'Seleie, K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope)
Monitoring programs are needed to help keep roads safe and mitigate impacts for both people and wildlife.	Establish monitoring programs on the road so that habitat is protected and wildlife are not harmed, for example, by vehicles charging wildlife.	If somehow some of those impacts can be mitigated by monitors. If you have monitors out there to monitor the road, they should have some authority where they can give tickets to whomever who may be infringing on the rules. I think that would probably mitigate a lot of the impacts. – Frank T'Seleie, K'ahsho Got'ine (Fort Good Hope)

Quarries may affect mountains.	Monitor the effect of quarries on the stability of mountains.	In the future, after you make the quarries, is there any kind of follow up on how that will affect the mountain formations? Because you're most likely getting the rocks from the base of the mountains if not higher. I'm just wondering if has there been any significant changes to those formations? How many quarries will remain open for maintenance? – Rhea McDonald
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<p>The highway cannot go through Bear Rock, Bear Creek, Little Smith Creek and Cloud Mountain as these are sacred places steeped in legend.</p>	<p>Re-route the highway around Bear Rock, Bear Creek, Little Smith Creek and Cloud Mountain.</p>	<p>I know that when we look at the proposed highway, it goes to the east side of Bear Rock. We went there and it has to go on the other side. Bear Rock is a really sacred place, and we need to respect that. .... At the east end of Bear Rock where it goes into the Mackenzie River, that rock is right into the water and there's no way around. ... An Elder was telling me that the east end and base of the north end there used to be a serpent that stayed in the area. Somehow, they would move somewhere, I think it was somewhere in the 1920s, the serpent came down onto the side of Bear Rock. They came out of Jungle Creek, and it looks way different than the other creeks. Canyon Creek is lots of rocks and willows, all the creeks are like that. Jungle Creek is different, it's like when a giant beaver or snake goes through the muskeg, you see the slither. It's like that, there no rocks. That creek is like a beaver channel. It's steep – five to six feet deep and that's where they came out and down the Mackenzie. That's a very important spot and Bear Rock, we don't want the highway to go through here. ... Then there's Little Smith Creek where our cabin is, where the creek comes out, not too far, there's a really strong current and it forms a whirlpool. That area has a gigantic fisher in there sleeping. When the time is near, he will come out, but right now he is sleeping. When you go around there it will start to make a whirlpool with you and drag you down.</p> <p>Cloud mountain is a weather station, we can tell the weather by the clouds on it. Because of the gigantic fisher in the water, lots of marten go there for two weeks then they're gone. We asked an Elder and he told us that the fisher in the Mackenzie River where he was sleeping... that's his gigantic lice, that's a marten, every once in while hangs out below big cloud mountain. We need to respect that. I just wanted to bring it up because some of you don't know nothing about stories like that. Young people, it's good for them to know.</p> <p>Down the road, they can respect that, especially in the Mackenzie River where the giant fisher is. My dad was telling me lots of people would go out spring hunting for ducks, and way back in early 30s, a paddle boat came down and got caught in there and was gone. A white person with a boat, he got caught went in there that's it. My uncle got caught in there and they would pull the motor and</p>
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		slowly would come out. Back then it was really active but now its sleeping, its resting. I just wanted to bring it up, Mahsi. – Frederick Andrew Jr., Tulít'a (Tulita)
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