Chief Eugene Hope
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December 18, 2025

DELIVERED VIA EMAIL

Dear Chief Hope:

Response to 'Review of Mitigation Options Summary Tables for the Mackenzie Valley Highway Project Environmental Assessment' – Mackenzie Valley Highway (EA1213-02)

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) has reviewed Acho Dene Koe First Nation's (ADKFN) August 15, 2025, letter titled *'Review of Mitigation Options Summary Tables for the Mackenzie Valley Highway Project Environmental Assessment (EA1213-02)'*. The GNWT appreciates the comments raised by ADKFN and has provided responses below.

Consultation

Where GNWT is both the proponent and the decision maker, there are dual consultation obligations. The GNWT, in its role as the Project Developer, formally initiated consultation with ADKFN on the Mackenzie Valley Highway Project in August of 2023 (see attached). This response is provided by the GNWT in its role as the Project Developer.

The GNWT will consult with ADKFN on any matters or issues that ADKFN identifies as having the potential to adversely impact the asserted or established Aboriginal and/or Treaty rights of ADKFN. The ADKFN has outlined that the project lies within an area historically used by ADKFN members for harvesting and travel and has identified concerns about the potential impacts of the highway on wildlife and harvesting. The GNWT would like to meet with ADKFN to further discuss these concerns, clarify any outstanding issues, and work together to identify effective mitigation measures.

Please note that the GNWT and the Government of Canada, in their role as decision makers under the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act*, also initiated joint consultation with ADKFN in November of 2023[1].

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[1] Initiation of Consultation by the Government of the Northwest Territories and Canada on the Environmental Assessment of the proposed Mackenzie Valley Highway Project (MVEIRB File EA1213-02)

Procurement Strategy Detail

While the GNWT has committed to a 50% target for hiring employees from the NWT (Developer's Assessment Report [DAR], Section 9.16), the procurement and contracting methods specific to the Project have not yet been established as these are dependent on the type and amount of funding received. In developing procurement methods for the Project, the GNWT will consider community feedback provided through engagement on the proposed socio-economic mitigations. This includes factoring in commitments made regarding northern hiring targets, while abiding by northern hiring standards on non-governmental contractors covered by the Contractor Employment and Training Plan under the Community Readiness Strategy.

The GNWT's intent is to provide opportunities for all NWT businesses and contractors to participate equitably, maximize employment, and develop capacity throughout the regions. Instruments that may be used to maximize contracting opportunities for NWT businesses include the Business Incentive Policy (BIP) and the Northwest Territories Manufactured Products Policy. The BIP, when used in competitive procurements, provides a bid adjustment that is based on the amount of local and NWT goods, services, or labour. Any commitments made by businesses relating to the BIP will be consistently monitored and enforced throughout the terms of subsequent contracts. Any procurement under the Project will follow the Key Principles listed in the GNWT's Procurement Guidelines.

Wildlife Monitoring Indicators and Response Triggers

The GNWT wishes to clarify the distinction between "Monitoring Indicators" (Column 5 of Table 2[2]), and "Management Response/Triggers to Change/Amend Proposed Mitigation" (Column 6 of Table 2). Monitoring indicators are parameters that can be measured, counted, or otherwise empirically quantified to detect a change in a valued component (e.g., measuring number of moose-vehicle collisions to determine if the highway is resulting in increased direct mortality of moose from vehicle collisions). A trigger is a value, which if exceeded for the indicator, prompts an action to be taken (e.g., if there are repeated collisions in the same area, additional signage or speed reductions may be implemented). Often, the first response action is to review and assess the monitoring results to determine why incidents have occurred.

Monitoring indicators and specific examples of triggers/responses have been included in Table 2 for Caribou and Moose, and Fish and Fish Habitat. As noted in footnote 1 of Table 2, monitoring indicators provided in the table are examples only. ADKFN's specific reference to "monitoring indicator to be determined" pertains to caribou response and behavior as based on analysis of data.

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[2] Table 2 - Biophysical Mitigation Table (for predicted Significant Effects) for the Mackenzie Valley Highway Project (EA1213-02)

The behavioral response may be able to be quantified through statistical methods but should also be evaluated with input and observations by monitors and co-management organizations (as is the case with the Tłı̨chǫ Highway Wildlife Management and Monitoring Plan[3]).

The GNWT will engage with Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, and other affected parties such as renewable resources councils and co-management boards through the establishment of a Wildlife Working Group to further develop details of the Wildlife Management and Monitoring Plan (WMMP) that are specific to the Mackenzie Valley Highway (MVH) Project. The boreal caribou monitoring methods, and proximity thresholds and actions identified in the Tłı̨chǫ Highway WMMP may not be appropriate for the MVH based on different habitat conditions, and limited interactions with the existing winter road. The role of the Wildlife Working Group and Fisheries Working Group will be to confirm the suitability of proposed monitoring indicators, identify additional indicators, and to determine the trigger values that will signal the need for an action or management response for each monitoring indicator. The Working Groups will also be tasked with identifying such potential management actions.

Wildlife Incident Reporting and Action Framework

In Table 2, the GNWT has listed the following monitoring indicators for change in mortality risk for caribou and moose during construction:

- All wildlife incidents (as defined in Section 5.1.5 of the draft WMMP) need to be summarized in annual reports.
- Wildlife injuries or accidental mortalities need to be reported to an officer within 24 hours.
- Number of caribou or moose killed or injured due to Project construction activities.

The trigger/management response is identified as:

- Any caribou or moose killed or injured because of construction activities will trigger an immediate review of the WMMP mitigation measures and incident investigation.

Examples of additional mitigations that the Wildlife Working Group may consider for inclusion in the WMMP include:

- Follow-up on all wildlife incidents and investigate all wildlife injuries or accidental mortalities to identify and implement corrective actions.
- Others to be determined following the annual review of monitoring results.

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[3] The Tłı̨chǫ Highway Wildlife Management and Monitoring Plan can be accessed at: w2016e0004 - tasr - wildlife management and monitoring plan - version 6.2 - jun 12 23.pdf

It is the GNWT's view that assigning thresholds for actions related to all wildlife incidents is premature. The GNWT needs to collect project-specific data on incidents (such as wildlife collisions, wildlife damage to property, deterrent actions, defense kills) to establish if additional mitigations are needed. For example, a single vehicle-wildlife collision during highway operation should not trigger the need for a review or additional mitigations, but if there is a pattern of collisions (for example in a specific area) identified over time, this may warrant consideration of further actions (such as signage).

The GNWT is confident that the Wildlife Working Group will provide knowledgeable and meaningful input into identifying additional appropriate thresholds and response actions, beyond what has been identified in Table 2, which reflects best available information.

Role of the Government of Northwest Territories' Environment and Climate Change Renewable Resource Officer

The Renewable Resource Officer position would have the same jurisdiction and role in enforcement as other Renewable Resource Officers employed by the GNWT and would be funded through the GNWT's operating budget. Job descriptions for Renewable Resource Officers are publicly available on the GNWT Department of Finance webpage[4]. It should be noted that there has not been a decision made on the level of the renewable resource officer (RRO I, II or III) or whether the position will be located in the Sahtú or Dehcho region.

Harvest Management Triggers

The GNWT has committed to the following in Table 2:

- If there is evidence that boreal caribou harvest levels in the NWT Hunting Areas intersected by the Project are increasing towards or exceeding unsustainable levels, the GNWT Department of Environment and Climate Change (ECC) and co-management organizations will consult on the implementation of additional mitigation measures necessary to keep boreal caribou harvest in the region within sustainable levels.

- If there is evidence that moose harvest levels in the NWT Hunting Areas intersected by the Project are increasing towards or exceeding unsustainable levels, ECC and co-management organizations will consult on the implementation of additional measures necessary to keep moose harvest in the region within sustainable levels.

As such, the GNWT agrees with ADKFN that harvest management should be done in collaboration with relevant resource managers.

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[4] Renewable Resource Officer position job descriptions: https://www.fin.gov.nt.ca/en/services/position-and-salary-information/search/renewable%20resource%20officer

Baseline Data for Fish Populations

The GNWT has committed to monitoring of non-Indigenous fish harvest. Monitoring will determine if there are established patterns of fishing that can focus further monitoring efforts (such as for certain species). The GNWT will also support voluntary and confidential reporting of Indigenous fish harvest. Indigenous harvest monitoring in the project area should ideally be led by Indigenous organizations, which may be facilitated by the Fisheries Working Group. The GNWT does not plan to study fish populations on a regional scale, as it is not within its management jurisdiction to do so, and the GNWT believes it is not necessary at this time. As stated, data from fish harvest monitoring can be used by resource managers (such as Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board) to determine if there is a concern about overfishing that might warrant fish species population studies.

Restoration Commitments for Access Roads and Borrow Sites

While Table 2 references reclamation of temporary access roads and borrow sources, there is no commitment to timelines, standards for revegetation, or long-term monitoring of restored sites. With regard to revegetation of access roads and borrow sites, there is no single revegetation method that will be appropriate for all sites. Prior to determining the revegetation method to be used in a specific case, each area will be evaluated to determine the best method for reclamation or revegetation. The appropriate selection of revegetation method depends on factors such as the type of disturbance being reclaimed, soil type, soil compaction, moisture characteristics, and whether the site is permanently altered from the natural condition.

Soil stripping operations will be conducted for the Project generally, and in borrow areas specifically, and salvaged soils will be set aside for use during reclamation. Where the disturbed site retains the natural soil characteristics, natural regeneration methods are appropriate. Natural regeneration results in regeneration of the original forest type with the same plant community characteristics as before. It provides relatively rapid site recovery, and the area is typically revegetated within one season and restocked with the original tree species within 5 years.

Where higher levels of disturbance have occurred, ingress of natural plant types may be slower, or the returning vegetation may be characteristic of a different forest type than the original type. Site recovery may be augmented with active revegetation methods, including site preparation, seeding, or planting. At disturbed sites subject to erosion and ground instability, it may be desirable to re-establish vegetation through direct seeding or planting with species that establish quickly. Erosion and sedimentation control measures will be maintained until disturbed areas are revegetated or until such areas have been permanently stabilized by other effective measures.

Each Quarry Management Plan will include proposed progressive and final reclamation of the site, consistent with the GNWT's Northern Land Use Guidelines[5]. Closure and reclamation of each site will be completed to the satisfaction of the ECC Land Use Inspector. The WMMP may identify additional methods of revegetation considerations specific to wildlife and wildlife habitat. These were identified in the GNWT's response to Round 2 information request MVEIRB-32.

As a result of differences in observed effectiveness of revegetation among sites identified during the first two years of post-construction monitoring, remedial measures will be implemented in areas where deficient revegetation is resulting in erosion or sedimentation issues. Remedial measures may include one or more additional erosion and sediment control methods, hydroseeding, seeding, or willow staking, in accordance with the GNWT Northern Land Use Guidelines and GNWT's Erosion and Sedimentation Control Manual[6].

Social and Human Health Impacts
The Safety and Security Plan for Vulnerable Community Members, along with the Well-Being Adaptive Management Plan, will be developed by the respective sub-working groups of the MVH Corridor Working Group. The input of those communities in the Local Assessment and Regional Assessment Areas of the Project (DAR Section 8.2.1) identified as impacted for the purposes of the assessment of the effects of the Project will be incorporated into the plans.

The GNWT thanks ADKFN for your continued interest in the MVH project and remains open to further discussions to clarify or address any outstanding matters. If you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at (867) 767-9082 ext. 31035, or by email at Michael_Auge@gov.nt.ca. Alternatively, you can reach out to Patricia Coyne, Manager of the Mackenzie Valley Highway Environmental Affairs team at (867) 767-9082 ext. 31033 or by email at Patricia_Coyne@gov.nt.ca.

Sincerely,

Mike Auge
Director, Strategic Infrastructure

Attachments
c. Distribution List

[5] List of available GNWT Land Use Guidelines located here:
https://www.gov.nt.ca/ecc/en/resources?search_api_views_fulltext=northern+land+use+guidelines&sort_by=field_resource_publication_date&sort_order=DESC
[6] GNWT. 2013. Erosion and Sediment Control Manual. Department of Transportation. January 2013. Available at:
https://www.inf.gov.nt.ca/sites/inf/files/resources/dot_erosion_and_sediment_control_manual_-_mar_31_16.pdf

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