



Consultation Period Extended to Address Misinformation on Caribou Agreements

April 16, 2019 – Dawson Creek. In a meeting with Chief Roland Willson of West Moberly First Nations and Chief Ken Cameron of Saulteau First Nations, Premier Horgan committed to extending the consultation timelines on the caribou recovery partnership agreement until May 31.

Premier Horgan acknowledged that the provincial government needed to do more to address the racism and misinformation that has surfaced in recent weeks. He asked Blair Lekstrom to act as liaison between the provincial and local governments, and to work to dispel the myths that have been circulating in local communities.

Racism

“We denounce racism in every form. That includes “dog whistle” statements in social media posts that promote stereotypes or invite others to imagine that there are some concealed motives lurking behind these agreements,” said Chief Roland Willson.

“The agreements are public documents. They are available online. Everyone can read them and share their comments. There are no hidden agendas, and there is no need to stoke racism in the Peace region. We invite everyone to read the agreements and provided comments in a spirit of respect and friendship,” said Chief Cameron.

Back Country

“We welcome the extra time to dispel myths about the agreements. We also appreciate hearing Premier Horgan say that the provincial government denounces the racist comments and conspiracy theories that have been circulating. There are no backcountry closures,” said Chief Roland Willson.

At the April 10 public meeting in Mackenzie, Conservative MP Bob Zimmer was clearly informed that the agreements contain no plans for backcountry closures. A video of the event is up on Mr. Zimmer’s Facebook page. Yet, the next day Mr. Zimmer posted a statement on Facebook continuing to cite “plans to effectively shut down the back country to not only industry but to all activity... including hikers, mountain bikers, snowmobilers and campers.”

“We hope and expect that Mr. Lekstrom and other local government representatives will provide local people and local governments with the facts. This is about caribou recovery pure and simple. Some politicians will continue to try to use fear to manipulate voters, but it won’t work. People are smarter than that, and the agreements actually reduce the potential for impacts on communities,” said Chief Cameron.

“The agreements place no restrictions on hiking. None on mountain biking. None on camping. Or hunting. Or fishing. And if there are going to be any restrictions on snowmobiling in critical caribou habitat, then there will be new snowmobile areas opened up.” said Chief Willson.

Mining and Pipelines

Contrary to the false claims made before the agreements were released, the agreements will not close any existing mining operations or affect any approved pipelines or other infrastructure.

“It’s another myth we’ll continue to dispel,” said Chief Willson. “You wouldn’t know it from some of the speeches you’re hearing, but the mining industry stands with these agreements,” said Chief Cameron.

In a written statement, the Mining Association of BC has said that “it can’t be overstated that there is universal agreement that these draft agreements are the optimal outcome”.

“Most industry players like the certainty we are giving them about the plans for the future. They understand that change can be a good thing if it’s done right,” said Chief Willson.

Mr. Lekstrom, who has worked for mining companies operating in northeast BC, is well-positioned to identify opportunities for the mining sector and other industry players to support caribou recovery.

Forestry

Contrary to the claims made by some company representatives, the effects on timber supply are limited and manageable. The total reduction in annual allowable cut amounts to about 300,000m³ split between the Mackenzie TSA, Dawson Creek TSA, and TFL 48.

Putting that into context, in recent years, the provincial government actually increased the annual allowable cut in those timber supply areas by over fifty percent to about 7.9 million cubic meters. For example, in 2014, the annual allowable cut for Mackenzie TSA was increased from 3 to 4.5million cubic metres, and in 2017, the annual allowable cut for TFL 48 was increased from 900,000 to 1.55 million cubic metres.

“There is no evidence that the agreements will cost jobs or close mills.” said Chief Cameron.

“We can’t control what Canfor or West Fraser do with their mills. But if they drop a shift or close the doors, it won’t be because of the caribou. It won’t be because of these

agreements. The grandstanding has to stop. It's not factual and it's not productive. The people of the Peace deserve better," said Chief Willson.

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