

NORTHERN LEADERS'
SUMMIT
PROCEEDINGS REPORT

December 13, 2018
Slave Lake, Alberta

March 2019



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3 Letter from the Chair
- 5 Event Summary
- 6 Pre-Event Survey Results
- 7 Summary of Breakout Sessions – By Ministry
- 16 Conclusion

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Thank you to everyone who attended the 2018 Northern Leaders' Summit held on the traditional lands of Treaty 8, in Slave Lake, on December 13, 2018. This event provided an opportunity for government to connect with northern leaders and further understand northern issues, opportunities and challenges. Discussions between Ministers and delegates assist the Northern Alberta Development Council in identifying and better understanding northern Alberta's social and economic development priorities, allowing us to explore practical approaches to addressing northern needs. We are then better equipped to advocate to the provincial government to advance northern Alberta interests.

I would like to thank the Premier and Cabinet Ministers who participated in this event to hear firsthand from northern leaders about living and working in their communities. Your presence demonstrates the Government of Alberta's commitment to working collaboratively toward actions that will continue to help us tap our northern potential.

We look forward to continued engagement with northern leaders and the Government of Alberta through our ongoing work of supporting the growth of healthy northern communities and developing a robust and resilient economy. We hope you find value in this document, and I encourage you to connect with our council members and continue the dialogue on northern Alberta priorities.

Debbie Jabbour, Chair
Northern Alberta Development Council
MLA, Peace River
March 2019



ATTENDEES



Total attendees

158



Northern
Municipalities
Represented:

46



First
Nations:

7



Métis
Settlements:

7

Cabinet ministers in attendance



Premier Rachel Notley



**Economic
Development & Trade
Minister Deron Bilous**



**Agriculture & Forestry
Minister Oneil Carlier**



**Education
Minister David Eggen**



**Municipal Affairs
Minister Shaye Anderson**



**Environment and Parks
Minister Shannon Phillips**



**Energy
Minister Margaret
McCuaig-Boyd**



**Children's Services
Minister Danielle Larivee**



**Indigenous Relations
Minister Richard Feehan**

EVENT SUMMARY

The 2018 Northern Leaders' Summit brought together elected officials from Alberta's northern communities and senior government officials to discuss northern social and economic development opportunities, challenges, experiences and perspectives.

Representatives from all northern municipalities, First Nations, and Métis Settlements within the Northern Alberta Development Council's (NADC) boundary were invited to participate.

The Summit began with an evening reception on December 12, 2018, hosted by the Honourable Shaye Anderson, Minister of Municipal Affairs. The event provided delegates with an opportunity to network and connect with the Minister on key community and municipal issues.

Elder Mary Brown, from the Dene Tha' First Nation, opened the proceedings on December 13, 2018, by welcoming northern leaders, cabinet, and the Premier and offering a blessing for a successful meeting.

Peace River MLA and Chair of the NADC, Debbie Jabbour, also welcomed delegates from across the region and described how the event aligned with the NADC's mandate to advise the Government of Alberta on the development needs of Alberta's northern region.

Economic Development and Trade Minister Deron Bilous then delivered a welcome address, stressing the importance of having face-to-face meetings and creating a forum for leaders to voice recommendations, opportunities and challenges.

Following Minister Bilous' remarks, Children's Services Minister Danielle Larivee kicked off a panel discussion focused on northern success, which included participation from:

- Leanne Beaupre, the Reeve of County of Grande Prairie, who discussed the Tri-Municipal Industrial Partnership;

- Ann Everatt, President and CEO of Northern Lakes College, who discussed innovations at Northern Lakes College; and
- Greg Johnston, General Manager of TOLKO, who discussed his company's commitment to advancing the development of the north.

Following the panel discussion, Premier Rachel Notley delivered a keynote address highlighting the north's importance to Alberta and the government's short, medium and long-term actions to address the challenges facing Alberta's energy sector. Premier Notley addressed delegates a second time during a 'fireside chat' over lunch, discussing strategies to ensure northern Alberta remains attractive and robust.

Summit delegates were later divided into three groups for breakout sessions, which were loosely defined by the following regions¹:

- northwest
- northcentral
- northeast

Ministers rotated through the groups to participate in the discussions and address items relevant to their ministry portfolios.

All discussion items were recorded and have been summarized in this proceedings report.

¹ Based on registered delegates, groups were developed based on key trade and service areas.

Group A – North-Northwest Region including: High Level area, Fairview and Peace River area, Northern Sunrise County and select communities in Smoky River region, MD Greenview area.

Group B- Northcentral-East Region including: Wood Buffalo area, Athabasca area, Lac La Biche area, Cold Lake/Bonnyville/St. Paul area.

Group C- Northwest-Central/South Region including: County/City of Grande Prairie, Whitecourt/Swan Hills area, High Prairie area, Slave Lake area.

PRE-EVENT SURVEY RESULTS

Northern leaders were given the opportunity to identify their communities' top priorities and challenges through an optional survey that was made available to participants who pre-registered for the event. The following survey results reflect the responses received from 53 delegates.

The top three northern development priority areas for northern leaders were:

- economic diversification;
- transportation and infrastructure; and
- investment attraction.

Other priority areas identified include:

- Indigenous relations;
- social and community development;
- health care;
- post-secondary education;
- tourism;
- environment; and
- workforce development.

On challenges that impact their community's development potential, northern leaders identified the following:

- infrastructure maintenance and development (such as broadband, railway, roads, bridges, water, and sewer);
- investment attraction;
- lack of funds to support municipal initiatives;
- economic volatility; and
- adverse impacts of government policies and regulations.

Other challenges mentioned were:

- access to services for small- and medium-size enterprises;
- addiction and crime;
- high cost of living;
- housing;
- population shifts;
- competition pressures with surrounding counties;
- environmental concerns;
- lack of health care providers;
- Indigenous consultation; and
- realities of living in remote locations.

SUMMARY OF BREAKOUT SESSIONS – BY MINISTRY

Below is a summary of the topics discussed throughout the day and across all three discussion groups.

Delegates' responses have been aggregated and categorized to support a comprehensive view of northern issues by government ministry.

Delegate responses reflect both issues raised directly with the attending Ministers, as well as other items that were shared with Ministers so that they could bring them back for follow-up with their colleagues in government who were not present at the Summit.

Education

Key themes:

- Build and renovate schools in northern, particularly remote, communities.
- Recruit and retain program-specific teachers.
- Revisit the funding model for public education.
- Rethink education as an investment rather than as a cost.

Northern leaders relayed the need for government to build and/or renovate schools in their communities, as some students travel as much as three hours by bus each day to get to and from school, negatively impacting success rates. There was a suggestion to use local talent to build new schools, and that proper design and planning be utilized. School closures and decreased busing were also mentioned.

Delegates also identified the need for qualified teachers and teachers' aides in schools. Leaders described how students are sent to other schools to receive instruction in certain subjects due to a lack of qualified, program-specific teachers in their own schools. They described challenges with teacher turnover and the lack of consistency. A suggested solution was to collaborate and build capacity within communities to retain teachers.

Additionally, delegates requested that government revisit the funding model for education. There was a suggestion that funding for additional school supports for children should be available from the Ministry of Education rather than the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

There was a call to rethink education, so that it is viewed as an investment in the future rather than as a cost in the present, while recognizing that educational challenges are cross-ministry.



Economic Development and Trade

Key themes:

- Diversify industry.
- Maintain funding for Regional Economic Development Alliances.
- Construct a refinery.
- Streamline red tape that hinders economic development.

Northern leaders discussed economic diversification, including opportunities beyond oil and gas, such as geothermal and tourism.

A question about the effect of foreign trade on regional economies, and whether Canada's southern neighbours realize that Canadian products have value, was also raised.

There was a recommendation that Regional Economic Development Alliances be put on the Treasury Board's list of organizations to fund because of the important economic development work that they do.

Other suggestions included building a refinery in the north, the necessity of more businesses, money to build infrastructure, and the need to streamline red tape because it negatively affects economic development and tourism.

Environment and Parks

Key themes:

- Address impacts of caribou conservation on industry, the economy and workforce.
- Address challenges in developing municipal water systems.
- Alleviate red tape in the fishing industry.

Northern leaders are concerned about the impact that Caribou Range Plans will have on the forestry industry, and by extension the economy and workforce. Questions regarding the impact of Range Plans on forestry cut lines, stumpage fees and forest management agreements were raised. Northern communities are concerned that a federal commitment to protecting green space may further impact industry and local economies.



Delegates also mentioned the challenges they face when developing municipal water systems and providing clean water to residents, as well as the bureaucratic red tape that exists in the fishing industry.

Agriculture and Forestry

Key themes:

- Remedy difficulties in getting both agricultural and forestry products to market.
- Consider the emerging potential of growing hemp in northern Alberta.
- Address concerns with fiber sharing, forest fire prevention and the mountain pine beetle.

Delegates expressed concern that purchasing more rail cars to transport oil will not remedy the backlog in getting both agriculture and forestry products to market due to competition with other commodities and the lack of staff, lines and loading facilities.

Other key issues identified included the emerging opportunity to grow and process hemp in northern Alberta and concerns over the mountain pine beetle on forests, fiber sharing and forest fire prevention.

The ministry was thanked for their support in building a bee diagnostic centre in Beaverlodge, a huge success for the region.

Participants also raised a variety of other topics including:

- agricultural grants;
- cannabis micro growing operations;
- the carbon tax on grain dryers;
- mowing and spraying schedules;
- regulated rights for agricultural property assessment;
- the impact of NAFTA on softwood lumber negotiations;
- stumpage fees used for training and programming;
- forest management agreements and the Species at Risk Act;
- achieving a balance with nature and profit; and
- lack of consultation on a potential seed royalty program.



Energy

Key themes:

- Remedy challenges in getting oil and gas to market.
- Encourage development in the north by building a refinery.
- Alleviate delays in projects due to lengthy consultation processes and jurisdictional restrictions.
- Address natural gas and electricity utility constraints.



Delegates raised concerns about getting oil and gas to market, and the need to get a pipeline built to coastal waters.

Northern leaders would like to see more energy investments staying in the north, stating that building a refinery in the region could be an anchor for additional development in the north.

Concerns around electricity and natural gas shortages in northern regions were mentioned. Leaders also raised concerns over energy project delays due to lengthy Indigenous consultations and jurisdictional restrictions.

Children's Services

Key themes:

- Place Indigenous children in care in homes within their communities.
- Provide more training for operating kinship homes.
- Hire support workers familiar with Indigenous traditions.
- Implement 25 dollar a day childcare across the north, and in smaller day homes.

Accessibility was a dominant theme that emerged during discussions involving services for children. Northern leaders raised concerns about placing Indigenous children in care in homes far away from their home communities. Delegates stated children need to be placed in their home community and that facilities should be available not only in urban centres, but also in rural and remote communities.

Concern was expressed about kinship homes that lacked trained care providers, as placing children in these homes can create dangerous situations.

The need for Métis workers who are aware of Métis traditions was also identified, as well as the assertion that the power of Indigenous and Métis communities to respond to child welfare issues has been diminished since the 1990s.

Leaders also questioned whether 25 dollar a day childcare would be implemented across the province, and in smaller day homes in northern Alberta.

Indigenous Relations

Key themes:

- Streamline consultation processes on collaborative projects between municipalities and First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities.
- Encourage collaboration between governments to reduce red tape.
- Implement reconciliation in education, consultation processes and agricultural activities.

Delegates expressed frustrations with jurisdictional red tape and bureaucracy as well as slow consultation processes when municipalities, Indigenous communities and industry collaborate on projects in the north. Northern leaders mentioned that inter-municipal and Indigenous collaborations are important and have promising potential, and jurisdictional bureaucracy can pose a barrier and create delays.

Many northern communities, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, would like to see the provincial government work with the federal government to reduce red tape that impedes important projects. Specific funding for cooperative projects, and the implementation of quicker, more efficient Indigenous consultation processes, were also requested. Delegates expressed concerns that all jurisdictions need to communicate more, and all groups need to be brought into decision making on issues of treaty agreements, royalties and industry revenues.

Concerns were also raised about reconciliation processes at the community level, education for Indigenous students, the involvement of Métis groups in consultations, and opportunities for Indigenous communities to get involved in agriculture activities on Indigenous land. One participant thanked the ministry for the work it has done with the Northlands School Division, and recognized that communities need to collaborate and build their own capacity.



Health

Key themes:

- Provide senior-focused health care and long-term care facilities.
- Improve access to services in home communities.
- Develop a new framework for physician recruitment.
- Address concerns about children's health in areas of addiction and legalized cannabis.

Delegates identified a variety of health challenges in northern Alberta – namely the need for senior health care and a plan for access to a long-term care facility in their community. Leaders noted that residents are required to travel long distances to access services even though there are hospital facilities in communities. Some services, such as palliative care, have been removed from communities with no strategy to fill the void.

Participants also identified that a new framework is needed for physician recruitment as some physicians do not work in their community full time, and retention remains a challenge.

Concerns about children's health, specifically signs of addiction, dental problems, and the effects of legalized cannabis and edibles on young people were also raised.

Transportation

Key themes:

- Remedy challenges encountered in getting products to market.
- Address safety concerns related to moving products by rail.
- Improve highway safety.

Transportation discussions centered on rail capacity, train safety concerns and issues with various highways across northern Alberta.

Delegates expressed concern that purchasing more rail cars to deliver oil to market will not alleviate the backlog in getting commodities to market, asserting that more staff, infrastructure and loading facilities are also required. Some rail cars coming off line was also cited as a barrier to getting products to market.

Leaders mentioned difficulties with long trains moving through their communities, noting that blocked traffic at crossings makes it difficult for first responders trying to enter or exit villages and towns. Leaders expressed renewed interest in an East-West connector highway that would connect the Peace Country with the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Delegates also described highways that pose safety concerns (Highway 881 requires widening, pullouts, and paving), require finishing (Highway 663 to Atmore), or require designation (Highway 881 at Highway 36).

Finally, the importance of small airports allowing for access to emergency services is of concern to northerners.

Municipal Affairs

Key themes:

- Stable, predictable funding for municipalities.
- Building local infrastructure.
- Modernize the Municipal Government Act (MGA) by decreasing rules and regulations.
- Develop a social policy framework to deal with the urban/rural divide.

Many delegates raised concerns about stable and predictable municipal funding. Northern municipalities wanted to know when a new agreement would be signed with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Rural Municipalities of Alberta, and if municipalities can be given notice regarding changes made to Assessment Year Modifiers and Municipal Sustainability Initiative funding. This funding is imperative to the services that northern municipalities provide for their residents and businesses, and predictable funding models are needed to help communities plan for the future.

Delegates also raised concerns about a lack of municipal funding for local infrastructure that is needed to connect the north to the rest of the province, as well as to combat rural crime, which is negatively impacting northern residents and communities. Delegates suggested modernizing the MGA by decreasing rules and regulations, and providing business opportunities for the private sector.

Leaders mentioned the rural and urban divide in Alberta, specifically that rural areas generate most of the wealth, but are not valued or heard. A social policy framework that deals with this issue was suggested.

Community and Social Services

Key themes:

- Increase funding for Family and Community Support Services (FCSS).
- Provide funding for support services in local organizations.
- Address challenges in attracting and retaining community services professionals.
- Provide more services and supports to address domestic violence and impacts on children.

The need for more funding and resources was identified during the discussions about community and social services.

It was suggested that support services offered by local organizations be budgeted into provincial contracts, as some organizations are experiencing compassion fatigue. FCSS funding was also discussed, including how the \$25 million increase was considered inadequate to help communities during not only an economic downturn, but also when the economy is doing well.

Delegates also noted that attraction and retention of community services professionals in the north needs improvement. Longer terms for contracts were requested, as continuity is compromised when contracts are only one year in duration.

The prevalence of domestic violence in northern Alberta, and the impact it has on children, was also mentioned. Participants stressed that more people and services are needed to address this issue.

Seniors and Housing

Key themes:

- Provide more seniors housing and affordable housing solutions.
- Provide funding and supports to address homelessness in northern communities.

Delegates identified that key challenges and priority areas for housing in northern Alberta include housing facilities and supports for seniors as well as more affordable housing solutions. High quality and specialized services and facilities reduce stress, promote community sustainability and help seniors age in place.

Delegates stated government funding and supports are required to address homelessness in northern and rural communities. While urban centres have been the focus of government initiatives on homelessness, rural and northern communities are also dealing with this issue but with fewer resources.



Service Alberta

Key themes:

- Ensure high speed, reliable and affordable internet connectivity for northerners to access services, training and operate businesses.
- Collaborate with other ministries and jurisdictions to provide access to broadband.



Delegates were clear that broadband is a necessary service that is vital to the northern economy as well as resident attraction and retention. A reliable, high-speed and affordable internet connection is needed for northerners to run their businesses, access online services, and attend and complete post-secondary courses and other types of training. Participants stressed that broadband is a cross-ministry issue, and government direction and cross-jurisdictional collaboration is required. While some municipalities, Indigenous communities and other groups, including industry, have begun to work together to bring broadband to their northern communities, government involvement in these collaborations is critical to their success. NADC was recognized as being a great champion for broadband in the north.

Advanced Education

Key themes:

- Provide local training options.
- Address shortage of skilled trades personnel.
- Improve access to advanced education for Indigenous communities.
- Build a pipeline training centre.

Delegates are concerned about a lack of local training options for students in the north. Local education options are vital to workforce development and the attraction and retention of professionals in northern communities. Northern institutions would like to be able to offer more programming options and qualifications for their students. When local students have access to training opportunities in their communities, they are more likely to stay in the north and be part of the local workforce.

Of particular concern to delegates is a shortage of skilled trades personnel in the north. A lack of apprenticeship positions is contributing to this shortage. To improve access to advanced education, Indigenous communities are also requesting more education facilities be located within their communities.

There was a recommendation that the pipeline training centre project, a partnership between Portage College and the Village of Boyle, be realized.

Infrastructure

Key themes:

- Provide funding to replace infrastructure.
- Build an East-West highway connector.
- Provide funding for small airports and airstrips for emergency landings.

Northern leaders outlined several infrastructure needs for their communities. Delegates requested funding for municipalities to replace infrastructure, pointing out that infrastructure is needed to move resources. They outlined how the neglect of building much needed infrastructure over past few decades combined with the use of poor quality construction materials have resulted in municipalities shouldering the cost of building or replacing infrastructure.

There was a renewed call for an East West connector highway and utility corridor that would connect the Peace Country with the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, with leaders questioning how to get interested parties around the table.

Other needs that were identified included funding for small airports and gravel airstrips for emergency landings, bridge construction with target dates, and new utilities and roads for residents to support pipeline construction.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of the Summit was to engage northern leaders and provide an opportunity for them to share their experiences and priorities with each other and the Alberta government.

The information captured in this report reflects the conversations and thoughts of delegates. This information will help inform northern communities and government, and support future strategic planning and action by the NADC.

The priorities identified at the Summit will support the NADC in its contribution to building a stronger northern Alberta for the benefit of all Albertans.

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... a stronger Alberta through a stronger north

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