

Northwest Territories Council of Leaders Meet in Behchokò

Behchokò (June 17-18, 2025) – Indigenous leaders and leaders from the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) gathered for the Northwest Territories Council of Leaders (NWTCOL) meeting on June 17 and 18, 2025 in Behchokò, NT.

Leaders talked about the importance of working together, particularly at a period of uncertainty where the world is changing rapidly.

Leaders discussed a number of key areas of interest related to education and training including:

- work with Aurora College particularly around their interests in strengthening community-level learning opportunities;
- work to plan for the use of Community Learning Centre infrastructure in communities;
- uncertainty with respect to federal Jordan's Principle and the need to work with Indigenous Services Canada to ensure NWT students continue to be supported;
- collaboration to renew the *Education Act*. This effort aims to enhance the structure and governance of the education system to ensure it aligns with the aspirations and cultures of the Northwest Territories; and
- the need to make Indigenous languages a priority and advocate for increased funding from the federal government in support of these languages.

They emphasized the importance of education and housing and discussed the anti-poverty and NGO Stabilization Fund and collaboration to review this funding.

The need to enhance the inclusion of NWT Indigenous businesses and individuals more effectively in GNWT procurement policies was discussed. How the GNWT's new Indigenous Employment Policy can better support Indigenous residents and advance representation in the GNWT was also explored.

Leaders discussed the impacts of climate change and needs related to infrastructure as winter road seasons shorten, water levels are lowering, and as temperatures rise. They also discussed wildfire mitigation and prevention including fire smarting efforts, and the actions and opportunities for collaboration within the 2023 Wildfire after action review.

Leaders discussed both international security and the safety of people within NWT communities. They agreed that Canada's Arctic and northern presence must be rooted in healthy, connected, and prepared Northern communities. Leaders will continue to work together to ensure the NWT is equipped and prepared to respond

to the complex challenges and opportunities emerging across the arctic and north of Canada. These include the impacts of tariffs in NWT communities where the cost of living and of building is already high. Leaders encouraged Premier Simpson to keep the impacts to northerners at the forefront in his participation in discussions at the national level.

Indigenous governments, the GNWT and the RCMP will continue to work collaboratively to address the issue of illicit drugs and illegal firearms and their impacts in the communities and throughout the NWT.

NWTCOL members will continue to advocate for northerners with the Government of Canada together where possible.

The NWTCOL forum offers members the opportunity to discuss territory-wide social and economic issues that are of interest to all member governments and work towards solutions. It continues to be a productive forum and an example of meaningful partnership between the Indigenous and GNWT leaders, consistent with the principles of reconciliation.

Leaders attending the meeting included:

- Sub-Chief Juni Gahdele, Łutselk'e Dene First Nation
- Chief Eugene Hope, Acho Dene Koe First Nation
- ɻekw'ahtɬdá Danny Gaudet, Délı̨nę Got'ı̨nę Government
- Deputy ɻekw'ahtɬ Raymond Taneton, Délı̨nę Got'ı̨nę Government
- Leonard Kenny, DKK Member, Délı̨nę Got'ı̨nę Government
- Gina Dolphus, DKK Member, Délı̨nę Got'ı̨nę Government
- Grand Chief Frederick Blake Jr., Gwich'in Tribal Council
- Chief Elaine Auger, Kátł'odeeche First Nation
- Chief Steve Vital, Nahanni Butte Dene Band
- Councillor Eric Matou, Nahanni Butte Dene Band
- Councillor Marlene Matou, Nahanni Butte Dene Band
- President Marc Whitford, North Slave Métis Alliance
- President Garry Bailey, Northwest Territory Métis Nation
- Vice President Paul Harrington, Northwest Territory Métis Nation
- Chair Charles McNeely, Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated
- Grand Chief Wilbert Kochon, Sahtu Dene First Nation
- Chief Toni Heron, Salt River First Nation
- Grand Chief Jackson Lafferty, Tłı̨chǫ Government
- Chief Doreen Arrowmaker, Tłı̨chǫ Government
- Chief Adeline Football, Tłı̨chǫ Government
- Premier R.J. Simpson
- Deputy Premier Caroline Wawzonek

- Minister Lesa Semmler
- Minister Caitlin Cleveland
- Minister Vince McKay
- Minister Lucy Kuptana

Quick Facts

- The *Northwest Territories Council of Leaders Memorandum of Understanding* was signed by leadership on June 11, 2021. The MOU was signed for a four-year term and will be under review in 2025.
- NWTCOL strengthens intergovernmental relationships between Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations with the GNWT, and enables the advancement of shared priorities.
- Signatories to the NWT Council of Leaders include: Acho Dene Koe First Nation, Akaitcho Dene First Nations, Délı̨nę Got’ı̨nę Government, Gwich’in Tribal Council, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Kátł’odeeche First Nation, Nahanni Butte Dene Band, North Slave Métis Alliance, Northwest Territory Métis Nation, Salt River First Nation, Sahtu Secretariat Inc., Tłı̨chǫ Government, and the Government of the NWT.
- This is the NWT Council of Leaders fourth year of meetings since the inaugural meeting in June 2021.
- The MOU commits the NWT Council of Leaders to meeting annually.

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