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KASKA, YUKON GOVERNMENT SIGN BILATERAL AGREEMENT

WHITEHORSE – The Kaska Nation and the Yukon government have signed a bilateral agreement to pursue economic development opportunities in southeast Yukon.

“I am extremely pleased that we’ve been able to sign this agreement today,” said Premier Dennis Fentie. “While it would be ideal for the Kaska to have a final land claim agreement, this interim business agreement still creates the economic foundation that we need for development in the southeast Yukon. We will continue to work with industry, business, public and all other stakeholders to ensure benefits for all Yukoners.”

“This allows First Nations and the Yukon government to become full partners in the economy and to promote resource development within our traditional territory,” said Tribal Chief Hammond Dick of the Kaska Tribal Council. “The Kaska territory is rich in resources. In addition to forestry and oil and gas potential, we have deposits of minerals such as silver, gold, copper, zinc, lead and barite. Now we are better prepared to discuss the opportunities that stand before us.”

The agreement was signed at a ceremony today in Whitehorse by Premier Dennis Fentie, Liard First Nation Chief Daniel Morris, Ross River Dena Council Chief Jack Caesar, Daylu Dena Council Deputy Chief George Miller, Dease River First Nation Chief Frank Dennis, Kwadacha First Nation Chief Emil McCook, Kaska Dena Council Chair Dave Porter and Kaska Tribal Chief Hammond Dick.

The 24-month agreement allows the Kaska to ensure their rights are being protected while development proceeds. It also stipulates that the Kaska will not challenge the validity of the Yukon Devolution Transfer Agreement or the legislation giving effect to the Yukon Devolution Transfer Agreement.

“The agreement does provide the certainty needed to lay the groundwork for future development,” True North Gems Chief Executive Officer Andrew Smith said. “It can create opportunities that will help bring investors to all areas of the Yukon.”

The agreement will be reviewed prior to its expiry in 2005.

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Attachment: Highlights of the Bilateral Agreement

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**HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BILATERAL AGREEMENT
BETWEEN
THE GOVERNMENT OF YUKON
AND
THE KASKA**

PARTIES AGREED:

- ◆ Yukon will provide the Kaska with subsurface rights to Ross River Dena Council land selection R15 on reasonable commercial terms.
- ◆ Yukon shall not agree to any significant or major dispositions of interests in lands or resources, or authorizations for exploration work and resource development in the Kaska traditional territory without consulting and obtaining the consent of the Kaska. A working group with equal representation from both parties shall be struck and given the task of establishing a process for this consent requirement.
- ◆ Yukon will meet all common law obligations to consult with the Kaska and accommodate their interests respecting all other dispositions and authorizations for land use within their traditional territory.
- ◆ As soon as practical, upon the coming into effect of the DTA, Yukon will amend the forms upon which quartz and placer claims or leases are recorded to ensure claimants are given timely notice that any mining claims within Kaska traditional territory are subject to unsettled aboriginal land claims.
- ◆ Sharing in revenues and benefits resulting from exploration and resource development within Kaska traditional territory will be established.
- ◆ Whenever the Yukon proposes successor legislation, it shall, in conjunction with the Kaska and other Yukon first nations, establish a working group to consider options and make recommendations for the new legislation.
- ◆ Yukon and Kaska shall develop a process of resource planning that takes into account an integrated strategy for all social and economic values with Kaska traditional territory.
- ◆ The Kaska will not challenge the DTA or the legislation giving the DTA effect while the bilateral agreement is in effect. The adjournment of Kaska Dena Council proceedings against devolution is a condition required prior to this agreement coming into effect and that condition has already been met.
- ◆ Yukon and the Kaska Dena Council shall enter into negotiations with a view to finalizing an agreement on the elements of a fair and equitable transboundary agreement.

- ◆ Yukon and the Kaska will foster an economic partnership respecting the development and promotion of development of lands and resources within Kaska traditional territory prior to final and self-government agreements for the Kaska being signed.