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July 29, 2011

Honourable Mel Knight
404 Legislature Building
10800-97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
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Dear Minister Knight,

I am writing in response to your July 14, 2011 letter in which you announce the adoption of the provincial government's new Woodland Caribou Policy. While this is an important policy that recognizes the immediacy of the woodland caribou problem, and the need to take specific action to aid in the recovery of their populations, the Mikisew Cree First Nation (MCFN) and Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) are jointly disappointed at the process which led to the policy's design and operating procedures.

It comes as a surprise to both First Nations that you would characterise First Nation input on the Woodland Caribou policy as "significant". As you are aware, many First Nations, including MCFN and ACFN, expressed grave concern and frustration with the fact that Alberta provided no funding to


support Traditional Knowledge work which could have been used to inform the creation of this policy. To ensure First Nation input is meaningful, the collection of such data is essential and therefore funding needs to be provided for such important initiatives.

The April 18th information session on the proposed Woodland caribou policy, was labelled by Alberta as consultation. However, in the view of both MCFN and ACFN this meeting can be characterized as nothing more than an information session, which is not tantamount to meaningful consultation. In fact, during this meeting it was clearly articulated by the First Nations that this meeting would not constitute consultation and that acknowledgment and approval of this by the Government of Alberta was a prerequisite for the First Nations to stay. There were no follow-up meetings, and in addition the timeline for review and response was imposed and excessively short. As with many other consultative processes that Alberta undertakes, this process was unilaterally imposed on First Nations by Alberta. Voiced discord at the process, while documented, was ignored. At the meeting, both MCFN and ACFN noted that more time for preparation and more information about the policy was needed to inform participants so that they could better identify and characterize their concerns. Alberta's response to this was unsatisfactory. Instead of acknowledging and trying to address systemic flaws in its consultation approach for this policy, Alberta chose to defer its engagement to meaningfully consult at a later date during the implementation phase of the policy. Finally, it is not clear what First Nation specific information was incorporated into the policy due to the fact that the policy itself cannot be found on the SRD website.

While it is encouraging that SRD intends to have MCFN and ACFN assist in the development and implementation of a customized plan for each caribou range, a more formal commitment is required. When considering the possibility of more formal collaboration, several questions arise. First, will Alberta be providing funding to assist in the collection of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) data on the caribou ranges that are of importance to MCFN and ACFN? As noted above, the funding of studies is required to ensure that the best available First Nation specific data and IK feeds into decision making. Second, what assurances will be provided to MCFN and ACFN that the data generated from such IK studies will actually translate into positive action on the ground? Considering the importance of woodland caribou to MCFN and ACFN's practice of treaty rights, livelihood and culture, such assurances are necessary. This is especially true considering that, as SRD has acknowledged, accomplishments under the 2005 caribou recovery plan have been modest. Since most woodland caribou populations are in decline, a more robust policy needs to be instituted which provides assurances to MCFN and ACFN that woodland caribou numbers will be sustained or increased, so as to ensure the continued practice of Aboriginal and treaty rights. Thirdly, the July 14th letter, written by Minister Knight, claims that First Nation input aided in the development and design of the new policy. While this is positive, both MCFN and ACFN would like to know what First Nation specific information was included, and specifically why certain information provided by MCFN and ACFN to Alberta was excluded during the drafting process. Finally, it is unclear to both First Nations how collaboration during the implementation will unfold, and what timelines are in place for the implementation phase to occur? We would appreciate if the Government of Alberta could clarify this.

Considering the importance of this initiative, MCFN and ACFN would like to further discuss with Alberta any logistical considerations while moving forward. Therefore, we are jointly requesting that a meeting take place here in Fort McMurray, so we can discuss the preceding issues. Please propose a date and we will confirm if it suits us.

Best Regards,



Lisa King

ACFN IRC Director



Melody Lepine

GIR Director

cc. Chief and Council, MCFN
Chief and Council, ACFN
Linda Aidnell, Land Use Coordinator, MCFN GIR
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