

FOR RELEASE
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Yukon government and Kaska Nation sign milestone agreements to advance reconciliation and resource development discussions

Joint news release

VANCOUVER—The Government of Yukon and the Kaska Nation are pleased to announce the signing of a framework agreement aimed at establishing collaborative land and resource management, facilitating economic opportunities and capacity development, and addressing social and cultural impacts from land and resource development. In addition, four other government-to-government agreements aimed at improving intergovernmental relationships have been signed.

"These agreements are a milestone towards reconciliation and a renewed relationship between the Yukon government and the Kaska Nation," Premier Darrell Pasloski said. "By signing these agreements we are committing to building partnerships and cooperation between our governments and increasing certainty and opportunities for economic and mineral development in southeast Yukon."

The agreements are a result of the reconciliation discussions that have been taking place with the Kaska Nation since March of last year, and the discussions with Ross River Dena Council, Kaska Dena Council and Liard First Nation on how to implement the court declarations related to mineral exploration.

"The Kaska territory in the Yukon is one of the richest in timber, minerals, gas and other resource potential, and we want to benefit in a meaningful way from resource developments in our traditional lands," Liard First Nation Chief Daniel Morris said. "We welcome this government-to-government framework agreement as a real opportunity to achieve a future agreement that ensures we are full partners in all stages of any development and receive our rightful share of the benefits."

"These framework negotiations will address far more than development. We have always lived here and will continue to after projects end and others move on. Our participation in decision-making is essential as we have a sacred obligation to protect our lands for future generations so we are working towards agreements that will ensure that Kaska values inform land and resource decision-making," Ross River Dena Council Chief Jack Caesar said. "This is not an either-or situation. The resource options are so vast that we believe, with careful planning, selection, development, monitoring and application of best practices, it will be possible to identify and benefit from appropriate projects while respecting our culture, protecting the environment and building partnerships."

"We are optimistic because this framework seeks to achieve what increasingly all sides across Canada say they want – certainty, agreements that respect indigenous title and rights, projects that respect the environment and benefit sharing that is fair to everyone," Chief Morris added. "We recognize that developments in our traditional lands that are carried out with our meaningful involvement will benefit not only Kaska - but all Yukoners."

The agreements include:

- a framework for a government-to-government agreement with the Kaska Nation, including Ross River Dena Council, Liard First Nation, and Kaska Dena Council representing Daylu Dena Council, Dease River First Nation, and Kwadacha First Nation;
- a consultation and accommodation agreement with Liard First Nation regarding the Campbell Highway reconstruction; and
- mineral agreements with Ross River Dena Council, Kaska Dena Council and Liard First Nation that outline a process for addressing the Yukon government's consultation obligations regarding mineral exploration that were clarified by the Ross River Dena Council court case.

"We welcome the Yukon government's commitment to this process as a positive sign that it recognizes not only that the Kaska must benefit from resource development but also that our full partnership at all stages is essential to successful resource development," Kaska Dena Council Chair George Miller said.

The Kaska Nation and the Yukon government look forward to working together and making progress on issues related to land and resources development.

The Mineral Agreements and Consultation and Accommodation Agreement are confidential. The Framework Agreement is available upon request at aboriginal.relations@gov.yk.ca.

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Learn more:

Access photos and an audio recording of the event

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Backgrounder

Framework for a Government-to-Government Agreement with Kaska

The Framework Agreement commits the Yukon Government and the Kaska to working proactively towards improving intergovernmental relationships, establishing collaborative land and resource management, facilitating economic opportunities and capacity development, and addressing social and cultural impacts from land and resource development. The intent of the Framework Agreement is to begin discussions towards a collaborative relationship with regards to land and resource development.

The Framework Agreement formally outlines a process for substantive negotiations on a list of subject matters agreed to between the parties, and provides funding for Kaska to participate in these discussions.

Mineral Agreements with Ross River Dena Council, Kaska Dena Council and Liard First Nation

In *RRDC v. Yukon* (2012 YKCA 14), the Yukon Court of Appeal made two declarations.

- The first declaration, related to potential Aboriginal title, states that Yukon government has a duty to consult with RRDC in determining whether mineral rights are to be made available to third parties.
- The second declaration, related to potential Aboriginal rights, states that Yukon government has a duty to notify and, where appropriate, consult with and accommodate Ross River Dena Council before allowing any mining exploration activities to take place within the Ross River Area, to the extent that those activities may negatively affect Aboriginal rights claimed by Ross River Dena Council.

Yukon government and Kaska First Nations have signed 3 mineral agreements (one each with Ross River Dena Council, Liard First Nation and Kaska Dena Council) that outline a process to continue discussions on the implementation of these declarations in the southeast Yukon.

The three mineral agreements outline the subject matter to be discussed and provide funding for Kaska to participate in the discussions to address the impacts of mineral claims and exploration on Kaska territory in the Yukon.

Consultation and Accommodation Agreement with Liard First Nation on the Campbell Highway Reconstruction

This Agreement is intended to increase Liard First Nation's capacity to participate in consultation related to the Campbell Highway Reconstruction, and provides Liard First Nation with the opportunity to participate in some of the economic opportunities arising from the project.

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