

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 70-19(2): THAIDENE NENE STATUS

February 13, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, responsible for protected areas, including Thaidene Nene. The Protected Areas Act was brought into force on June 20, 2019, over seven months ago, and there is still no public registry as required under this legislation. Can the Minister explain why there is no public registry and when one will finally be established? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The protected area registry has been available on the ENR website since June 20, 2019, as the Member said. It includes all the material currently required under the Protected Areas Act. As the management boards are established for the new Indigenous and territorial protected areas, additional information will be posted on the registry.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that, and I would suggest that he actually look at the so-called public registry. The act itself requires about 18 different kinds of information to be posted. The establishment agreements for Thaidene Nene are not found there. A better model is to look at the Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board or the review board's public registries. I am happy to talk to the Minister or the staff about this, but that is not a public registry, and I do not think it even meets the basic minimum requirements of the legislation. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I want to go on to my question. While for Thaidene Nene there are the regulations set out to establish the boundaries, there is no regulation that sets out an establishment agreement or management in any way. Can the Minister tell us if there is an establishment agreement and when it will be set out in regulation?

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: I am more than willing to meet with the Member and look at this, because we are trying to do what is best for all of the residents of the Northwest Territories. On to his question: the Thaidene Nene territorial protected area was established in 2019 through regulations under the Protected Areas Act. There was not enough time during the 18th Assembly to complete all of the regulations. Work is under way on drafting complete regulations and is expected to be completed by 2021, as agreed in the establishment agreements.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. I am not sure what agreements were signed in August of last year to establish this, but, presumably, one of them should be at least posted to our public registry. I want to move on. Part of Thaidene Nene is an area to be set aside and established as a wildlife conservation area under the Wildlife Act. Can the Minister tell us whether the wildlife conservation area will include a permanent surface and subsurface land withdrawal, and when will the area be established by regulation?

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: The surface and subsurface rights for Thaidene Nene wildlife conservation area were withdrawn on April 1, 2019. Thaidene Nene wildlife conservation area lands withdrawal is not intended to be permanent and could be removed when there is an approved land use plan, when the land claims are settled. The GNWT aims to establish the Thaidene Nene wildlife conservation area under the Wildlife Act in regulations by February 2021.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President, and I want to thank the Minister for that. I think there might be a little bit of a misunderstanding, here. My understanding is that the wildlife conservation area is going to be permanently protected and that the surface/subsurface is not going to be open for exploration, so I will be very curious to follow this along, because I don't think that's what the Minister said. However, earlier today, I said that the only public commitment of GNWT funding toward Thaidene Nene seems to be an annual appropriation of \$290,000. The federal government has even committed to fund some of our costs. Can the Minister tell us: what specific capital and operations funding has our government committed toward Thaidene Nene moving forward in the future?

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: To the previous question, I'll be willing to sit down with the Minister and the department to look at the thing, there. To answer his question, Environment and Climate Change Canada natural funding has provided \$5.8 million over three years for the Thaidene Nene territorial protected areas. In addition, Parks Canada is providing \$1 million in funding over the same three-year period. The Government of the Northwest Territories is committing \$8.12 million of in-kind funding to the three protected areas identified under the nature fund. This in-kind funding is made up of operation, maintenance, and salaries. The GNWT is exploring operations to ensure stable funding beyond 2023 for the territorial protected areas, including an endowment fund and other natural base funding sources. When I said "the thing," I apologize; "the protected areas," so I would be more than willing to sit down with the Member. Thank you.