

Yesno also gave an overview of NAN's Geo-Spatial Database Project and Content Management System, essential tools for community and regional planning that will build capacity and empowering First Nations to move forward in the resource-based economy. The project will allow all NAN First Nations and First Nation Councils access data related to infrastructure, resource development, environmental assessment and monitoring, as well as related health and socio-economic information. This will assist communities with planning at the local level and allow them to contribute to a collaborative, integrated approach to regional infrastructure planning.

Colonial and paternal approaches by government and industry have relegated many First Nation communities to unprecedented levels of poverty. Yesno outlined NAN's new strategic direction where development will be First Nation-led and approached from the foundation of the Treaties.

"NAN First Nations have made it clear that they are the decision-makers about our lands, and the days are long gone when industry or government can exploit our land and the resources it contains. All development in our territory will be First Nation-led, and our First Nations must give free, prior and informed consent to any activities," said Yesno. "There are many challenges ahead, but our First Nations are rising to the occasion and we look forward to building, maintaining and owning infrastructure, working with resource companies, and developing and expanding our local economies. We will create partnerships with industry, government and international organizations so that our people have the information and tools they need to plan and succeed."

Bill 191: *The Far North Act* will relegate NAN territory to a welfare state and do nothing to create certainty for investment in the North, explained Yesno. Instead of flawed legislation, he called for the creation of a NAN-Ontario-Canada Infrastructure Build Fund to support regional infrastructure needs and energy capacity.

First Nations' rights to control development in their traditional territories have been upheld by several Supreme Court of Canada decisions, sending a clear message that message that Aboriginal title must be recognized and respected by government and industry. NAN First Nations have made it clear that they will be active participants in any development in their traditional territories and will and not be limited to merely providing input on plans developed by industry and government without consultation.

NAN is comprised of 49 First Nations organized into seven First Nation Councils and independent First Nations across a traditional territory of approximately 338,000 square kilometers (210,000 square miles). NAN has a population of 45,000 people on-and-off reserve, and is one of the fastest growing sectors of the population in Canada.

For more information please contact: Michael Heintzman, Director of Communications – Nishnawbe Aski Nation (807) 625-4965 or cell (807) 621-2790 or by email mheintzman@nan.on.ca