

BACKGROUND NOTES TO BUDGET NEWS RELEASE RE NORTHERN SASKATCHEWAN

The 2007-08 Budget provides \$6.43 million in new budget initiatives:

- \$10.2 million in revenue sharing to northern municipalities, an increase of \$2.4 million;
- An Increase of approximately \$290 thousand for various Department of Justice initiatives, including the addition of sites in La Ronge and Buffalo Narrows to enhance the northern component of the Children Who Witness Domestic Violence Program and the addition of two Legal Aid lawyers;
- \$80 thousand from Corrections and Public Safety for Gang Strategy Community Care;
- \$36 thousand for a northern construction careers project and for additional seats to expand the Bachelor of Northern Studies program to build on the \$4.5 million northern training investment in 2006-07 as part of the Labour Market Strategy;
- \$100 thousand to establish a district Labour Standards Office in La Ronge to enhance education, awareness and support to employees and employer groups, and \$50 thousand for a Northern Women's Forum through the Status of Women's office;
- \$2 million in new funding for a First Nations and Métis Consultation Capacity Fund to facilitate the engagement of Aboriginal people in consultations with the Government on any action that may adversely affect Treaty Rights on traditional lands and to facilitate the participation of Aboriginal people in the economic benefits of development activities;
- \$1 million as a grant to the Saskatchewan Forest Centre to backfill for federal budget cuts; and
- Increased funding to Northern Affairs.

Several department northern spending is detailed below, including some ongoing initiatives announced in the previous year.

Northern Affairs

Northern Affairs' budget will increase \$322,000 to \$6,038,000, allowing for improvements in the delivery of the department's programs:

- The Northern Development Fund (NDF) loan program, which again will be authorized to provide up to \$2.5 million in loans for businesses and primary producers (fishers, trappers, wild rice growers). The loan fund itself is not reflected in the budget, but we budget \$500,000 as a loan loss provision;
- \$205,000 for the NDF grant program to support business skill development, marketing and research, and youth entrepreneurship;
- \$295,000 to Regional Development Corporations (RDCs) for locally-directed business development;
- \$385,000 for the Northern Commercial Fish Transportation Subsidy in support of nearly 700 licensed northern fishers;
- Continued support for delivery of the Northern Saskatchewan Environmental Quality Committee (NSEQC)/Northern Mines Monitoring Secretariat program.

Northern Affairs also administers the Northern Development Agreement (NDA), a federal-provincial cost-shared program with the aim of promoting development in the North. Northern Affairs will budget \$300,000 for administration of the NDA and its contribution to projects this fiscal year.

Northern Affairs will continue to assist entrepreneurs with business advice and planning, and consult with development organizations and northern RDCs. The department will continue to link northern interests with industry to promote training and employment opportunities.

Outside of the Northern Affairs budget, the government has allocated \$7M to support the expansion of natural gas service up to Weyakwin and La Ronge. It has also allocated \$300,000 to help First Nations train and prepare for local emergencies.

Transportation

Highways and Transportation will provide \$23.1 million in 2007-08 toward the Northern Economic Infrastructure Strategy (Roads to Prosperity), a \$65.5 million plan to improve key economic and community access roads, and build new all-weather roads. The project co-ordinator for NEIS continues to work with communities to maximize local training and business opportunities on the projects.

NEIS work this year will include:

- Beginning to upgrade the Athabasca road (Points North to Black Lake) from seasonal to all-season;
- Finishing clearing on the La Loche-Fort McMurray link;
- Securing approval of the Environmental Impact Assessment for the new Wollaston Lake road;
- Doing a location study for a new road from Stony Rapids to Fond du Lac, and starting on environmental approvals;
- Surfacing a section of Highway 155 north of Beauval;
- Consulting with local officials and identifying priorities to improve Highway 911 near Deschambault, Highway 918 near Patuanak, and Highway 908 near Ile-a-la-Crosse.

In addition to the NEIS, \$18.3 million is budgeted for northern highway maintenance.

Government Relations

Unconditional revenue sharing to northern municipalities will rise by \$2.4 million to total \$10.2 million this fiscal year. Furthermore, Government Relations will spend \$3.7 million for northern water and sewer improvements through a number of provincial and federal-provincial programs, and additional funding will flow from the Northern Revenue Sharing Trust Account.

Industry and Resources

A \$1 million grant will be given to the Saskatchewan Forest Centre to backfill for federal government budget cuts. It will help enhance the existing program for value-added forestry, and create a new program targeted at competitiveness and innovation.

Environment

Environment will spend \$17 million on a variety of initiatives:

- \$10.6 million for the aerial fleet renewal plan to replace aging aircraft;
- \$2 million (an increase of \$650,000) to support the Forestry Secretariat, created to facilitate the growth of the Saskatchewan forest industry. It will also become a unit separate from Saskatchewan Environment;
- \$1.5 million (up by \$200,000) to contract with First Nations to provide type 2 fire fighting services, which can be called into action as required;
- The budget for fire observation towers has increased \$200K to a total of \$1 million;
- \$3.2 million will go towards reforesting sites deemed "not sufficiently regenerated".

Health

Base funding for the northern regional health authorities of Keewatin Yatthé, Mamawetan Churchill River and Athabasca will increase by \$2.4 million to \$38.3 million.

Education

Advanced Education and Employment is funding two new initiatives:

- \$160,000 for a Northern Construction Careers Project to train 40 northerners;
- \$200,000 to help the University of Saskatchewan, Northlands College and the University of the Arctic expand a program into a Bachelor of Northern Studies (Public Administration), with 21 seats to train northern administrators.

The department also allocates \$2.3M for the Northern Health Access Program and \$2.4 million for northern skills training, both slight increases.

The Department of Learning will provide \$46.4million in operating grants for the three northern school divisions (an increase of \$3.4 million), and \$2.1 million to deliver KidsFirst in the North.

Justice and Corrections and Public Safety

Justice will increase northern spending through two new initiatives:

- \$200,000 for two additional Legal Aid lawyers;
- \$90,000 to bring the Children Who Witness Domestic Violence Program to La Ronge and Buffalo Narrows.

The northern portion of the First Nations Policing Policy will cost about \$2 million The Northern/Aboriginal Crime Prevention initiative will receive funding of \$200,000, and \$300,000 will expand community justice and alternative measures.

Corrections and Public Safety will direct \$80,000 toward a gang strategy worker in northeast communities.

First Nations and Métis Relations

\$2 million will go to a new fund to help First Nations and Métis groups across the province consult in a meaningful, informed fashion with government and industry about activities that might affect Treaty and Aboriginal rights on traditional lands. One aim is to help Aboriginal people participate in the economic benefits from development activities.

Labour

The Labour department will budget \$100,000 to establish a new district office in La Ronge with the primary goal of public education of labour standards (an objective recommended in the recent report on amending the Northern Overtime Exemption).

Labour will also provide \$50,000 to consult with northern women, ensuring their perspectives are integrated into policy development.

Culture, Youth and Recreation

\$2 million in new funding will be allocated to the North from the Building Communities Program, which was created to improve recreational and cultural facilities.