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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
2012ARR0009-000682  
May 17, 2012

Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation  
Kaska Dena Council

### **Agreement boosts economic certainty in the Northwest**

VICTORIA – A new strategic engagement agreement (SEA) with the Kaska Dena First Nations in northwestern B.C. provides greater certainty about how resource development can proceed in more than 10 per cent of the province.

B.C. and the Kaska Dena Council developed the SEA together. The agreement sets out government-to-government decision-making structures and processes that establish a co-operative approach to reviewing proposed development activities with the Kaska Dena in their traditional territory. These will guide how government and Kaska engage with northern communities, and environmental and industry stakeholders.

This agreement sets out agreed-to levels of engagement regarding resource permits and helps B.C. and the Kaska Dena Council work efficiently together, including achieving timely turn-around objectives for reviewing resource permits. Where the end result is a positive decision, this will allow industry to get shovels in the ground faster, creating more jobs and other economic benefits for both the Kaska Dena and the Province more quickly in the North, and making sure that Kaska Dena First Nations are involved in shared decision-making.

The Kaska Dena Strategic Engagement Agreement complements the Dease-Liard Sustainable Resource Management Plan (SRMP) signed in January, which confirms that the majority of the SRMP area is available for sustainable development. The direction provided in the management plan will enable more meaningful discussions between the Province and Kaska on resource development and is facilitated by the SEA.

As well, the Strategic Land Use Planning Agreement will help guide future land use discussions across the remainder of Kaska Dena traditional territory. This helps provide the stability needed for investors to explore and invest in northern B.C. The Dease-Liard SRMP encompasses approximately a quarter of the Kaska Dena traditional territory in B.C.

The strategic engagement agreement provides the Kaska Dena Council with up to \$1.3 million over three years to implement the agreement.

The Kaska Dena SEA encompasses 9.8 million hectares, or 10 per cent of the province, from the Fort Nelson area to the Cassiar Mountains down to Mackenzie. The SEA covers mineral exploration, forestry, tourism, guide outfitting, parks, wildlife, oil and gas related land sales and most major projects.

Treaties and non-treaty agreements generate jobs for families and provide opportunities for First Nations and non-First Nation communities alike. They bring greater certainty to the land base, facilitate investment and build economic independence for First Nations.

Strategic engagement agreements with First Nations encourage a positive and respectful government-to-government relationship, strengthen B.C.'s investment climate and establish mutually agreed upon procedures for consultation and accommodation. For those First Nations that choose to also enter the treaty process, SEAs can help to build the mechanisms to support shared decision making in a post-treaty environment.

#### **Quotes:**

##### **Mary Polak, Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation –**

“The Kaska Dena Council and B.C. have achieved an agreement that sends a clear signal to both industry and other stakeholder groups that this is a place where government and First Nations can work together toward a stronger economy for all British Columbians. This strategic engagement agreement will decrease the consultation workload and processing timelines for both the Province and the Kaska Dena in B.C.”

##### **George Miller, Chair, Kaska Dena Council –**

“The Kaska Dena would like to commend the Province in entering into this agreement of shared decision-making in order to advance our shared interests in a government to government relationship in an open and respectful manner.”

##### **Lorne Waldman, corporate secretary, Silvercorp Metals Inc. –**

“Silvercorp actively and successfully negotiated a framework agreement with the Kaska aimed at advancing an environmentally and culturally responsible mining project in Kaska traditional territory. We approached the Kaska as a Nation, with respect, and our approach was reciprocated with their supportive relationship. As a result, we are hopeful that the Silvertip Mine project in northern B.C. will proceed and provide solid socio-economic benefits to the Kaska nation and other stakeholders.

“We encourage the B.C. government in their efforts to work with the Kaska on shared decision making – because when government and First Nations are able to get along, when there is equitable sharing of benefits, a positive environment for responsible economic development flourishes.”

**Learn More:**

- Complete copies of the plan are available at:  
[http://www.newrelationship.gov.bc.ca/agreements\\_and\\_leg/engagement.html](http://www.newrelationship.gov.bc.ca/agreements_and_leg/engagement.html)

A backgrounder follows.

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# BACKGROUND

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## **Kaska Dena Strategic Engagement Agreement**

- In July 2011, the Province signed the Taku River Tlingit Land and Resource Management and Shared Decision-Making Agreement, which included a strategic engagement agreement, a land use plan and established government-to-government decision-making structures and processes. It was the first of its kind in British Columbia.
- The Kaska Dena and Taku River Tlingit SEAs together cover approximately 14 million hectares (140,000 square kilometres), or an area four times the size of Vancouver Island, providing increased economic certainty and streamlined processes for reviewing proposed development activities in northwestern B.C.
- Collectively the Taku River Tlingit and Kaska SEAs encompass approximately 14 per cent of B.C., over which the Province and First Nations will work co-operatively on land and resource matters.
- The Dease-Liard Sustainable Resource Management Plan, concluded with the Kaska Dena in January, covers more than 2.4 million hectares in the Dease-Liard region. It provides the forestry, minerals, tourism, and energy sectors with the stability they need to explore and invest in the region.
- 91 per cent of the Dease-Liard SRMP area is available for sustainable development. The Dease-Liard SRMP established a protected area of approximately 200,000 hectares, referred to by Kaska as Ne'ah.
- The agreement with the Kaska Dena is the fifth strategic engagement agreement to be signed between the Province and First Nations in B.C. The earlier agreements are with Taku River Tlingit First Nation (2011), Nanwakolas Council Society (2010), Ktunaxa Nation (2010), and Tsilhqot'in Nation (2009).
- The Kaska Dena Council represents the Kwadacha First Nation, Daylu Dena Council and Dease River First Nation. The Kaska Dena Council was a full partner in developing the plan, with all decisions made by consensus.
- B.C. now has seven strategic agreements with First Nations in B.C. that include decision-making frameworks. These include agreements with: Tsilhqot'in National Government, Nanwakolas Council, Ktunaxa Nation Council, Council of the Haida Nation, Coastal First Nations, Taku River Tlingit First Nation, and Kaska Dena Council.

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