



For immediate release

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BUSINESSES ASKED TO SAVE PARKS CANADA TOURS ON SHORT NOTICE

WHITEHORSE – The Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon (TIA Yukon) is concerned by the short timeline that the federal government has given the private sector to take on the responsibility of some of the Parks Canada front line services that were affected by last year's cuts. The government announced Friday that its process of granting business licenses for tours of the S.S. Klondike and Dredge #4 would only provide six weeks for businesses to properly prepare for the 2013 season.

“TIA Yukon could have supported a plan to transition Parks Canada sites and services to the private sector if adequate time was given for the industry to properly prepare”, says TIA Yukon Chair Neil Hartling. “While we have the utmost confidence in the ability of the industry, business owners should not have been put in this position so close to the start of the season. Usually a successful transition like this would take about two years, not two months. This shows a real lack of planning by the federal government and is incredibly unfair to the operators who have been looking for certainty on this issue since the cuts were announced almost a year ago.”

Hartling says that operators have to start planning their seasons eighteen months in advance. They tailor their marketing and staffing decisions to the products that they plan to offer. Some operators may see opportunity in conducting tours of the S.S. Klondike and Dredge #4 for the 2013 season even at this late juncture, but as many have already said, “the devil is in the details”. If this model of operation continues beyond this summer, the 2014 season may offer more opportunities once the industry has had a chance to adjust, but for the 2013 season it will be a testament to the adaptability of individual operators to be able to make these tours a success on such short notice. It remains to be seen if any operators will come forward to try to work a miracle for the 2013 season with this tight timeline.

Despite the MP's assurances that good news about Parks Canada would be delivered by the end of February, Friday's announcement came at least a week later than expected with news that according to Hartling, was “light on substance and heavy on sugarcoating”. Private sector tours on the S.S. Klondike and Dredge #4 were something that Parks Canada authorized in the past and something that many believed it would authorize again. The fact that this was the crux of Friday's announcement left many wondering, “where's the beef?”

In May, TIA Yukon became the first of many to call attention to the ramifications that the cuts to Parks Canada in the Yukon would have on the territory. TIA Yukon has consistently stated that the ideal resolution to this issue would be for the federal government to acknowledge its mistake and reinstate the funding to Parks Canada so that services affected by the cuts could continue to operate as before. When it became clear that this was unlikely to happen, TIA Yukon stated that it would be open to supporting alternatives to prevent gaps in service, such as private sector

involvement, but that at the very least, temporary funding would need to be given to Parks Canada to get the Yukon through the 2013 season so that the industry and other stakeholders would have the proper time to put these alternatives in place. TIA Yukon reiterated this message in separate meetings with Yukon MP Ryan Leef, Yukon Tourism Minister Mike Nixon and federal Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism, Maxime Bernier.

TIA Yukon acknowledges that the federal government is making reductions all across the public service and that it wouldn't be realistic to expect Parks Canada to be immune to these changes. The problem is, Parks Canada was hit especially hard by these changes, and the cuts that affected Parks Canada in the Yukon were among the worst in the country. In terms of dollars and cents, the economic impact that Parks Canada services provide in the Yukon have a major impact on the tourism revenue that is generated in the territory and the local economies of communities like Dawson City and Haines Junction. If these services were identified as a cost that the federal government was unwilling to bear, the government should have worked to set up an alternative plan before these cuts were announced last year. TIA Yukon believes that good planning saves money, whereas poor planning leaves people scrambling and usually results in lost revenue, or at the very least, the inability to maximize profits.

“If the federal government had come to TIA Yukon soon after the cuts were announced with a plan outlining how a successful transition of product could be achieved, TIA Yukon could have worked to help the plan come to fruition”, says TIA Executive Director Blake Rogers. “If the Yukon’s MP was able to convince his government to reverse the cuts to Parks Canada in the Yukon, or at least provide temporary funding to get the Yukon through the 2013 season, TIA Yukon would be the first to give praise for this achievement. These are things that needed to happen to ensure a successful 2013 season. Neither of these things happened.”

Aside from the questions about the S.S. Klondike and Dredge #4, TIA Yukon is also worried about the management of the territory’s more than 250,000 cherished archival documents and artifacts overseen by Parks Canada. All of the local curatorial and conservation staff responsible for caring for these collections were eliminated as a result of last year’s cuts to Parks Canada, but Friday’s announcement says that these services would be provided “as required”. This is an ambiguity that raises questions and concerns.

Mr. Leef also said that all of the artifacts in the territory would now remain in the territory – on the conference call after the announcement he declared this as a ‘small victory’. As it turns out though, there was never any plan to have any of these artifacts shipped out of the Yukon.

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