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BUDGET 2021: A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION FOR THE YUKON'S TOURISM INDUSTRY

Whitehorse: A clear path to tourism recovery in the Yukon remains unseen, but the newly unveiled 2021 federal budget provides a step in the right direction for the territory's hard-hit tourism industry.

With \$1 billion over three years earmarked for tourism, extensions to critical relief programs, and the announcement of new recovery measures such as the Canada Recovery Hiring Program, the budget provides a strong base for the recovery of the Yukon's beleaguered tourism industry.

Many Yukon tourism businesses have depended on federal and territorial relief to keep their businesses afloat as the pandemic continues to decimate the industry. Without the continuation of these funds the future of tourism in the Yukon is uncertain.

"We are happy to see that the federal government is acknowledging this with the continuation of the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and the introduction of the Canada Recovery Hiring Program", TIA Yukon Chair, Neil Hartling said. "The Yukon's tourism industry needs to hit the ground running when tourism can safely return and part of this is ensuring employers can build back their staff teams without taking a significant financial hit."

The new budget also includes \$82.5 million this year for Transport Canada to help large airports invest in COVID-19 testing, something that TIA Yukon has long been saying is the key to safely restarting travel. "Testing, along with vaccination, is one of our greatest tools for the Yukon's safe reopening and we are encouraged to see a federal commitment to testing travelers", Hartling said.

Beyond continued funding for relief and recovery programs and COVID-19 testing investments, the 2021 federal budget included many Northern climate change and environmental commitments, including \$25 million specifically for the Yukon. Hartling said he is pleased to see such targeted support for Northern environmental issues and highlights the need for the Yukon's tourism industry to "prioritize sustainability as we move towards recovery by striving to protect and better our land and communities".

The budget stands to greatly assist tourism's recovery in the Yukon, but more federal funding is needed to protect and promote indigenous tourism: one of the fastest growing sectors of the industry in the Yukon and in Canada before COVID-19. Despite the much needed supports that the budget provides, the tourism industry's fight against the worst crisis it has ever faced is far from over. More help will be required in the months and years ahead if the industry is to have the tools it needs to endure and to rebuild.

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