

Opening Remarks
Honourable Minister David Ramsay
Northwest Territories Tourism Conference
November 2, 2011

Good afternoon. I am honoured that that one of my first official duties as the new Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment is to be with you here today and welcome you to the Northwest Territories Tourism's conference and annual general meeting. I am a firm believer that tourism is a critical part of our economy and that your organization, NWT Tourism is critical to ensuring tourism continued success.

I would like to take the time to formally recognize and thank the members of Northwest Territories Tourism and its Board of Directors, for not only organizing another first-rate conference, but also for your work and input throughout the year.

I would also like to express my appreciation for the ongoing cooperation and support that ITI has received this past year from the Tourism Marketing Advisory Committee.

This Committee is co-chaired by Kelly Kaylo and Richard Zieba. Doug Doan recently retired from the GNWT, and I would also like to recognize his contribution to the Committee over the past few years as co-chair.

As a Government, we rely on the input from both NWT Tourism and the Tourism Marketing Advisory Committee to develop and advance programs and initiatives that are relevant to the tourism industry.

Thanks also to Canadian North and First Air for providing special airfares to our attendees of the conference, Annual General Meeting, and the Marine Safety Workshop this week.

I also want to personally acknowledge the owner operators of the NWT Spectacular product as well as the consultants and service providers. The role you play as the back bone to our tourism sector is critical.

I applaud all of your hard work to make your businesses successful. Without you offering and supporting your tourism product we would not be here today.

Events such as this also give us the chance to re-emphasize how vital the tourism industry is to the Northwest Territories, as well as the GNWT's support for it.

This year's theme, "The Royal Road to Tourism Excellence," is a fitting one. This past summer, all eyes were on the NWT as Prince William and Duchess of Cambridge Katherine Middleton took in the spectacular scenery of our territory, and experienced our vibrant culture. Only a couple of months later, Prince Andrew, Duke of York took in one of our many picturesque rivers on a ten day canoe trip in the Sahtu.

Those royal visits focused the spotlight of international attention on the territory. According to NWT Tourism numbers, the visit generated an impressive \$16 million in media coverage in Canada and US alone.

I'm sure many people from across Canada and the world will want to follow the same road as our royal guests and we hope to see many more visitors who come to the NWT to experience the adventures first-hand.

This is such an ideal time for a tourism conference - on the heels of our “Royal Summer”, and on the brink of our spectacular aurora viewing season.

Tourism is a significant contributor to the NWT economy, and brought in nearly \$100 million this year. Also, more than 65,000 people visited the NWT. With continued investment and continued work with our tourism partners, we are aiming to increase this number.

In fact, tourism visitation numbers are up this past summer compared to last year, and tourism operators around the territory reported they had a good summer.

Of all sectors, tourism presents the greatest likelihood of creating economic opportunities in each region, and for each community – especially in the smaller communities.

This marks the first year of *Tourism 2015: New Directions for a Spectacular Future*, the Government of the Northwest Territories’ five year tourism investment Plan. We will continue to invest \$1 million annually in the tourism industry.

Tourism 2015 focuses on six investment areas: Marketing, Aboriginal Tourism, Community and Industry Engagement, Infrastructure, Skills Development, and Tourism Research and Planning.

I understand this morning Dr Geoffrey Bird spoke about how travel helps a person define themselves in the world and that tourism offers a transformative experience. People want authentic travel experiences.

The NWT provides that experience – a unique travel experience. Our Aboriginal cultures, something we have in abundance, are a wonderful element of our

territory. We have an opportunity to provide people interpretive experiences that Dr. Bird spoke about.

The GNWT is committed to working with the tourism industry and Aboriginal organizations to grow and develop the Aboriginal tourism sector in the NWT. One of the first priorities under the Tourism 2015 Plan was the establishment of an Aboriginal Tourism Champions Advisory Council. The Council was formed this past July and will help set out a clear vision and strategy for Aboriginal tourism development.

Nine members from across the NWT sit on the Council. Members have varied experience and knowledge that will provide a balanced understanding and the guidance needed to help us grow the Aboriginal tourism sector.

In fact, most of the Council are here in attendance today. I would like to introduce the Council to the audience: Jenni Bruce from Yellowknife and Ria Letcher from Fort Simpson are the co-chairs. We also have Knute Hansen from Inuvik, Grant Beck and Kelly Kaylo from Yellowknife, Moise Rabesca from Bechoko and Judith Wright-Bird from Tulita,. One Council member sends her regrets: Margaret Nazon from Tsiigehtchic.

Ms. Bruce and Ms. Letcher will be doing a presentation on Aboriginal Tourism later on in the conference.

Another major success in attracting people to the Northwest Territories and creating world-class tourism products is the Tourism Product and Marketing Diversification Program. In 2010/11, the Product Diversification and Marketing Program supported businesses and organizations throughout the territory, providing nearly \$5.6 million in funding. The program has been highly successful in creating and expanding tourism products that attract visitors and increase visitor spending in the NWT.

The GNWT also doubled its investment in the Sport Hunt Outfitter Marketing Program from \$300,000 to \$600,000 in 2010/11 and 2011/12. We realize that many barren ground caribou and polar bear outfitters continue to experience significant challenges, due to events beyond their control.

This funding will assist them to diversify their markets, and the GNWT will continue to work with the NWT tourism industry to explore ways to make this industry sustainable in the future.

I also want to take this opportunity to announce some new funds available for tourism training this year. We know the importance of having a well-trained tourism workforce.

The new Tourism Training Fund provides assistance for people employed in the tourism industry to take short-term training. This could be in the form of courses or workshops, as well as distance education.

Not only will this training fund help to increase the number of people with the skills necessary to obtain work in tourism, it will also help to provide NWT tourism employers with a workforce trained to meet their needs.

Applications are now being accepted and are accessed monthly, so contact your regional ITI office for more information on eligibility. Regional staff can also help you put an application together, so be sure to contact them before the start of the training.

We have also invested in improving the infrastructure in many of our parks facilities. These include refurbishments to visitors' centres and facilities, new or improved hiking trails, better signage, improved RV service, and more. By making these improvements we are encouraging visitors to stay longer and explore the tourist opportunities the NWT has to offer.

One of the most visible improvements is the brand new Visitors Centre at the 60th Parallel. This new facility provides an excellent first impression for visitors entering the Northwest Territories on Highway #1. Information provided at the centre will encourage people to explore our smaller northern communities.

The Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment has repeatedly heard concerns from tourism operators who are mandated by Transport Canada to take marine safety training courses. Operators are concerned that these training courses are not geared to the realities of operating in the North. In March 2011, ITI consulted with the tourism industry in the NWT, Yukon, Nunavut, northern Saskatchewan and northern Ontario on the course content to discuss issues all jurisdictions had with these courses.

The GNWT produced a paper addressing the effectiveness of the current approach, implications for the industry and the GNWT, and options for future courses of action.

I am pleased to report that as a result, we are now working with Transport Canada and NWT Tourism to look at options for the Marine Safety training standards for NWT tourism operators. These standards will be discussed at the Marine Safety workshop on Friday morning.

We were also extremely pleased with the Federal Government's commitment of \$3.4 million to a pan-territorial marketing campaign. Called simply, "Canada's North", this campaign launched in March 2011 and will position Canada's North as a unique and dynamic place to visit. We have already had great success working in partnership with the territories on Canada's Northern House, and we anticipate this funding will continue to help us bring more tourists North.

And just this past month, the federal government released the Federal Tourism Strategy. The main goals of the Strategy are to help position Canada to take advantage of tourism growth opportunities, to increase tourism revenues, and to create jobs in all regions of Canada.

This integrated strategy will be a boon to building Canada's tourism brand internationally.

For the NWT, the Strategy includes tactics to promote Aboriginal tourism experiences by working with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and Parks Canada.

It is this kind of support and spirit of co-operation that allows us to grow the tourism industry in the Northwest Territories.

Few travel destinations in the world can equal the diversity, exhilaration, and wonder of our territory's tourism product. The combination of our landscape, people, culture, attractions and experiences provide a travel package that is hard to match.

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the privileges I can now enjoy as the Minister of ITI – and one I will especially enjoy – is the chance to work with you to champion our territory and your industry.

Our tourism industry is successful because of the efforts of many of the people in this room - our tourism operators, service providers and dedicated individuals who pride themselves on excellence. I have great confidence in our tourism sector, and look forward to all of us reaping the royal rewards of a sustainable, successful and spectacular tourism industry.

Thanks again to all of you and I hope you enjoy the rest of the conference.