

Regional Economic Development Plan - Sahtú

**Prepared for the GNWT Department of
Industry, Tourism and Investment**

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1. INTRODUCTION



1.1 PURPOSE OF THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The mandate of the Minister of Industry, Tourism, and Investment (ITI) is to promote economic self-sufficiency through funding, support, and marketing initiatives designed to foster a positive economic environment in the Northwest Territories (NWT). ITI is working with various stakeholders and Governments throughout the territory to help diversify regional economies and to increase employment opportunities in the communities.

The purpose of this project, led by ITI, is to identify economic opportunities in each of the administrative Regions in the NWT and develop six Regional Economic Development Plans (REDPs). The development of REDPs is a mandate item under the 19th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories as the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) continues to work towards diversifying the economy of the NWT.

More specifically, this project entailed:

- Developing a list of engagement participants for the Region in association with local facilitators and ITI;
- Engaging with key regional stakeholders, Governments, and participants through surveys, interviews, and group sessions;
- Increasing the understanding of the importance of economic development;
- Identifying economic strengths, constraints, and development opportunities, in the Region; and
- Identifying priorities for action as identified by respondents to take advantage of strengths and opportunities, and to address constraints.

The REDP includes:

- A socio-economic profile of the Region;
- A summary of regional strengths, constraints, and development opportunities; and
- A summary of key economic development priorities for the Region reflecting the results of our research and consultation with key regional stakeholders, Indigenous Governments, Community/Municipal Governments, and participants.

The NWT consists of five administrative regions including the Dehcho, South Slave, Beaufort Delta, Sahtú, and North Slave Regions. A sixth REDP was developed for the communities covered under the Tłıchq Land Claims and Self-Government Agreement. The map in Figure 1 highlights the boundaries and communities located in each Region. As demonstrated in the map, the Sahtú Region is bordered by the Dehcho to the south, Yukon to the west, the Beaufort Delta to the north, and the North Slave Region and Nunavut to the east.

The Sahtú Region encompasses five communities including Tulita, Fort Good Hope, Délı̨ne, Colville Lake, and Norman Wells, the logistical and administrative centre for the Region.

Figure 1: Map of the NWT Administrative Regions



1.2 HOW THE PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

This plan was developed through extensive engagement with key stakeholders as well as an in-depth review of the relevant statistics, reports and existing local and sectoral strategies. The engagement process included:

- **A survey of regional stakeholders, Governments, and other key informants.** The survey was posted online using the "Have Your Say" portal, the GNWT's public engagement website, and was designed to obtain input on identifying opportunities and mitigating

challenges and threats to economic growth and gather recommendations for actions that could be taken to promote development.

- **In-person discussions and focus group in Norman Wells.** The purpose of the sessions was to obtain input on developing the economy, and identify the opportunities and constraints to development, and identify priorities for action as identified by respondents.
- **Interviews with key stakeholders and Governments.** The purpose of the key stakeholder interviews was to give those with interest, expertise, and knowledge applicable to the regional economy the opportunity to share their opinions on the opportunities for development as well as key priorities and actions that should be incorporated into the action plan.

As demonstrated in the following table, a total of 55 stakeholders were engaged in the process of developing the plan for the Sahtú Region, including five key stakeholders who participated in interviews, 20 community representatives who were engaged in the focus group discussion, five regional stakeholders, and 25 sectoral and territorial representatives who participated in the survey.

Table 1: Engagement Activities in the Sahtú Region

Engagement Method	Number of participants
Phone interviews with regional representatives	5
In-person discussions and focus groups	20
Surveys with regional stakeholders	5
Survey of sectoral or territorial representatives	25
Total	55

In preparing the plan, we have also conducted a review of research reports, plans, strategies, profiles, and other documents relevant to the Sahtú Region and more generally, the NWT.

We used inclusive engagement approaches to increase participation by stakeholders from different backgrounds. Participants were provided multiple ways to participate including online surveys, phone or in-person interviews, and group discussions. Multiple phone or email reminders were sent to stakeholders to encourage their participation. We hired local facilitators in the Region who assisted with identifying local stakeholders, organizing group discussions, recruiting participants, promoting the engagement through social media, advertisements, and e-blasts. For example, the in-person interviews and group discussion in Norman Wells was promoted through e-blasts, social media posts, and multiple phone and email reminders. The engagement was also promoted by the GNWT through the ITI website, social media, and direct emails.

1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE PLAN

Chapter 2 provides an overview of current economic conditions and presents a socio-economic profile of the Region. Chapter 3 summarizes the results of the engagement process regarding the economic outlook, the economic strengths on which the Region can build, constraints to development, development opportunities, and finally key priorities for action as identified by respondents.



2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE REGION

2.1 REGIONAL OVERVIEW

The Sahtú Region is in the central part of the NWT and is bordered by the Yukon to the west, the Dehcho Region to the south, the Beaufort-Delta Region to the north, and the North Slave Region and Nunavut to the east.

The Sahtú Region's main administrative centre and largest community, Norman Wells, lies along the Mackenzie River, which flows from Great Slave Lake to the Arctic Ocean. The communities of Tulita and Fort Good Hope are located 70km south and 140km north of Norman Wells respectively. Déḻne is situated on the western shore of Great Bear Lake, while Colville Lake is the most northerly community in the Region located 150km northeast of Fort Good Hope.

2.2 POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

As of 2022, there were an estimated 45,605 people living in the NWT. Of these, approximately 6% lived in the extended communities of the Sahtú Region. As indicated in Table 2, residents are largely dispersed almost in equal proportion among the five communities of the Sahtú Region, except for Colville Lake, home to only 6% of the local population.

Table 2: Sahtú Region Population, 2022

Region and Communities	Population	% of Sahtú Region Population	% of NWT Population
Colville Lake	161	6%	0%
Déḻne	633	24%	1%
Fort Good Hope	628	24%	1%
Norman Wells	704	26%	2%
Tulita	543	20%	1%
Sahtú	2,669	100%	5%
Northwest Territories	45,605		100%

Source: NWT Bureau of Statistics

Between 2009 and 2022, the Sahtú Region experienced a small population increase of 6%, while the NWT grew in population by 5%. This growth was driven primarily by a 22% growth in Déḻne, while Fort Good Hope grew by 12% and the remaining communities experienced low or negative growth over this period.

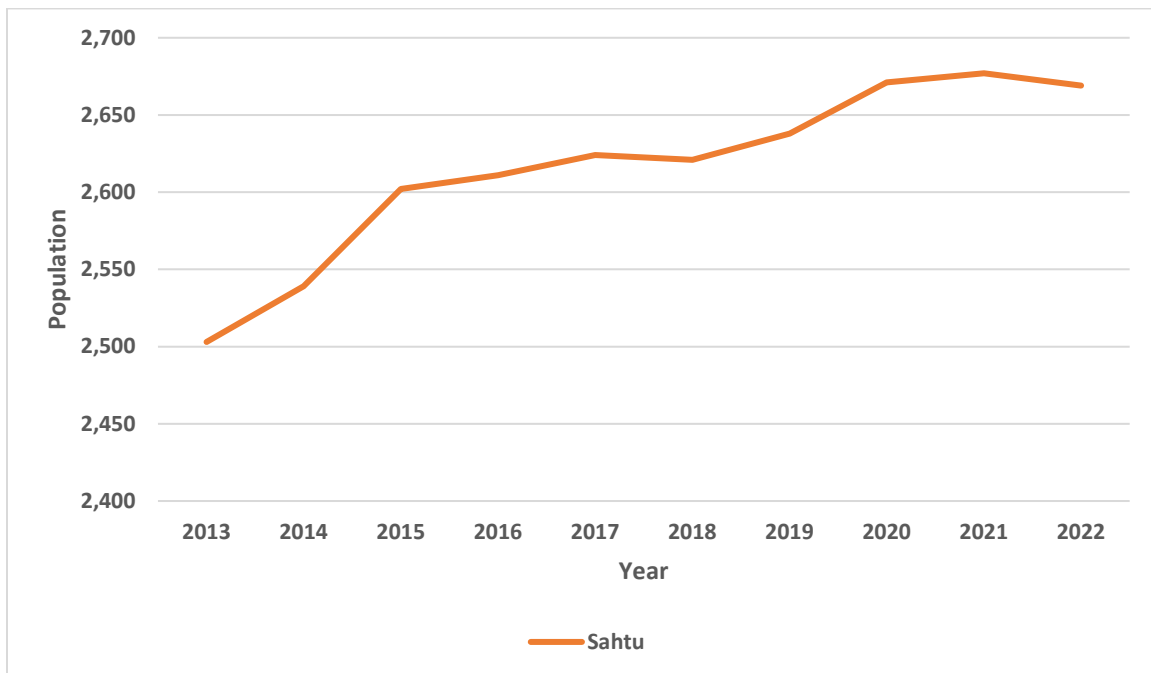
Table 3 : Sahtú Region Population Change, 2009-2022

Region/Community	2022 Population	2009 Population	% Change
Colville Lake	161	153	5%
Déline	633	519	22%
Fort Good Hope	628	560	12%
Norman Wells	704	779	-10%
Tulita	543	512	6%
Sahtú	2,669	2,523	6%

Source: NWT Bureau of Statistics

Chart 1 shows that the Sahtú Region's population increased gradually from 2013 to 2022, with slight population drops observed in 2018 and 2022.

Chart 1: Total Population in Region, 2013 to 2022



Source: NWT Bureau of Statistics

In 2019, the NWT Bureau of Statistics developed population projections for the territory to 2035. According to these projections, the population of Sahtú Region is forecasted to shrink by approximately two percent, from 2,637 in 2018 to 2,585 by 2035. During this same period, the population of the NWT overall is forecasted to grow from 44,541 in 2018 to 45,676 (an increase of 1,353 residents), which represents an increase of more than two percent (equal to 0.1% per year which is well below the national average of 1.2%).

Table 4: Projected Population of the Sahtú Region in 2035

Location	2018 Actual		2035 Projected		% Change 2018-2035
Colville Lake	142	0.3%	178	0.4%	25%
Déline	576	1.3%	624	1.4%	8%
Fort Good Hope	570	1.3%	482	1.1%	-15.0%
Norman Wells	818	1.8%	844	1.8%	3.0%
Tulita	531	1.2%	457	1.0%	-14%
Sahtú	2,637	5.9%	2,585	5.7%	-2%
NWT Total	44,541	100.0%	45,676	100.0%	2.5%

Source: NWT Bureau of Statistics projections

Most of the Sahtú Region's population (76%) identifies as Indigenous, well above the territorial average of 51%. As seen in the following table, the percentage of the population who are Indigenous is relatively consistent across the Sahtú communities, with the notable exception of Norman Wells, where only 39% identify as Indigenous.

Table 5: Indigenous Population

Location	Indigenous Population	% of Indigenous language speakers
NWT	51%	33%
Sahtú	76%	46%
Colville Lake	89%	42%
Déline	91%	74%
Fort Good Hope	91%	31%
Norman Wells	39%	27%
Tulita	92%	41%

Source: NWT Bureau of Statistics

The population of the Sahtú Region is closely aligned in age distribution with the territorial population, with 67% being over the age of 25 compared to 68% across the NWT; 65% of the Sahtú Region's population is of working age¹ same as that of the NWT.

¹ Working age defined as those between 15 and 59.

Table 6: Population by Age Group, 2021

Age Group	NWT		Sahtú Region	
	#	%	#	%
0 - 4 Years	2,794	6%	172	6%
5 - 9 Years	2,992	7%	187	7%
10 - 14 Years	2,997	7%	159	6%
15 - 24 Years	5,964	13%	371	14%
25 - 44 Years	14,328	31%	866	32%
45 - 59 Years	9,263	20%	507	19%
60 Yrs. & Older	7,267	16%	407	15%
Total	45,605	100%	2,669	100%

Source: NWT Bureau of Statistics

According to the 2016 Census, the median age in the Sahtú Region is somewhat lower than that of the NWT at 33.2 and 35.6 years, respectively, while both are significantly lower than the average age of the Canadian population at 41.6 years.

Table 7: Sahtú, NWT, and Canada Population Age, 2021

2021 Census Data	Sahtú	NWT	Canada
Average Age	35.6	36.4	41.9
Median Age	33.2	35.6	41.6

Source: Statistics Canada (Data is from the Statistics Canada website for the City of Yellowknife and the Northwest Territories)

The percentage of the Sahtú population with a high school diploma or higher education increased in the Region from 48% to 56% over the 1991 to 2001 period but has since plateaued. Individually, some communities experienced increases and others decreases over this period. While Norman Wells had a higher-than-average rate of high school completion compared to the rest of the NWT in 2021, the other communities within the Region ranged from 12% in Colville Lake to 52% in Tulita – all well below the NWT average of 74%.

Table 8: Percentage of Population with High School Diploma or Higher Education

Location	1991	2001	2011	2021
NWT	60%	65%	69%	74%
Sahtú	48%	56%	53%	56%
Colville Lake	44%	31%	12%	12%
Délne	29%	41%	41%	45%
Fort Good Hope	39%	49%	40%	46%
Norman Wells	79%	86%	82%	82%
Tulita	38%	38%	42%	52%

2.3 ECONOMIC SECTORS

The sectors of the economy that have historically dominated the Sahtú economy include the public sector, oil and gas, construction, and education. In addition, there are several emerging sectors in the Region that have potential for growth, including tourism, agriculture and country food, the traditional economy, and remediation and site reclamation activities.

2.4 EMPLOYMENT, INCOME, AND LABOUR MARKET

Employment

As demonstrated in table 9, employment, income, and education levels in much of the Sahtú Region fall short of the territorial average, though Norman Wells over-performs in these respects, bringing up the regional average rates.

Table 9: Selected Regional Statistics

Selected Characteristics	Sahtú Region					NWT
	Colville Lake	Déḻne	Fort Good Hope	Norman Wells	Tulita	
Employment rate (2021)	47%	44%	51%	75%	47%	65%
Unemployment rate (2021)	0%	24%	16%	5%	20%	9%
Average personal income (2020)	-	\$52,197	\$48,591	\$93,441	\$47,800	\$69,802
Average family income (2020)	-	\$112,643	\$105,208	\$187,167	\$96,708	\$149,197
% with high school diploma (2021)	12%	45%	46%	82%	52%	74%

Source: NWT Bureau of Statistics

The following table provides labour market participation rates for all communities in the Sahtú Region. As demonstrated in the table, in 2021, of the total of 1,785 people in the Region over the age of 15 years, 975 (55%) were employed, 165 (9%) were unemployed, and 635 (36%) were not in the labour force. The percentage of those employed was the highest in Norman Wells (75%) and significantly lower in the neighboring communities, ranging from 44% to 51%.

Table 10: Labour Market Participation, 2021

Labour Force Activity	Colville Lake	Déłıne	Fort Good Hope	Norman Wells	Tulita	Sahtú
Population 15 & Over	85	435	395	530	340	1,785
Employed	40	190	200	395	160	975
Unemployed	0	60	40	20	40	165
Not in the Labour Force	45	185	145	120	135	635
% of Employed	47%	44%	51%	75%	47%	55%

Among those employed, the percentage of those who had full time jobs ranged from 87% in Norman Wells to 72% in Colville Lake, while Déłıne, Fort Good Hope, and Tulita all fall in the range of 76-78%. In line with the trends across the territory, large employment gaps exist across education levels and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The territorial average employment rate for those without a high school diploma was only 38%, while the employment rate of those with a high school diploma or higher education was 78%. As shown in the table below, a similar discrepancy exists across the Sahtú communities.

Table 11: Employment Data by Characteristic, 2019

Employment Profile (2019)	Colville Lake	Déłıne	Fort Good Hope	Norman Wells	Tulita	NWT
Employment Full/Part Time						
% Full-Time	72%	76%	78%	87%	78%	83%
% Part-Time	28%	24%	22%	13%	22%	17%
Education Level and Employment						
Employment Rates for Those with Less than High School Diploma	34%	29%	34%	54%	39%	38%
Employment Rates for Those with High School Diploma or Greater	80%	58%	68%	89%	75%	77%
Gender and Employment						
Males	41%	39%	44%	83%	53%	66%
Females	51%	53%	57%	82%	57%	65%
Indigenous Background and Employment						
Indigenous	41%	43%	46%	73%	49%	50%
Non-Indigenous	100%	72%	79%	87%	93%	80%

Source: NWT Bureau of Statistics

Labour Market

The Sahtú Region's labour market is dominated by the public sector, with 28.4% of the workforce being employed by the government – approximately four times the national average according to the 2021 Census. Other major employment industries are education services, retail trade, health care and social assistance, and transportation and warehousing.

Table 12: Labour Force by Industry, 2021

Labour Market Profile (2021)			
North American Industry Classification System (NAICS)	Sahtú	NWT	Canada
91 Public administration	28.4%	27.4%	6.2%
61 Educational services	10%	8.1%	7.3%
44-45 Retail trade	8.7%	9.0%	11.1%
62 Health care and social assistance	8.7%	10.8%	12.7%
48-49 Transportation and warehousing	8.3%	5.9%	5.1%
23 Construction	7.4%	6.1%	7.6%
Industry not applicable	5.7%	2.8%	2.5%
54 Professional, scientific and technical services	3.5%	4.3%	8.1%
72 Accommodation and food services	3.5%	4.7%	5.6%
53 Real estate and rental and leasing	3.1%	1.2%	1.8%
21 Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	3.1%	4.3%	1.2%
56 Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	2.6%	3.3%	4.1%
71 Arts, entertainment and recreation	1.7%	1.8%	1.8%
81 Other services (except public administration)	1.7%	3.2%	4.1%
22 Utilities	1.3%	1.4%	0.8%
11 Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	1.3%	0.8%	2.3%
41 Wholesale trade	0.9%	1.3%	3.2%
51 Information and cultural industries	0.9%	1.6%	2.1%

Source: Statistics Canada Census 2021

The NWT Bureau of Statistics projects future labour demand across the NWT and its regions using the NWT Occupational Demand Model, which estimates future demand for 140 occupations using three-digit National Occupation Classification (NOC) codes. As seen in the following table, the NWT is anticipated to have 13,700 job openings between 2021 and 2030. However, those job openings are not evenly distributed across regions with the majority (61%) expected to occur in Yellowknife. Only 4% of anticipated job openings are expected to happen in the Sahtú Region.

Table 13: Labour Market Outlook, 2021-2030

Region	Employment (2019)		Expected Job Openings (2021-2030)		Avg. Annual Job Openings
	#	%	#	%	#
Sahtú	1,335	6%	500	4%	50
Yellowknife	12,550	54%	8,400	61%	840
NWT	23,240	100%	13,700	100%	1,370

Source: NWT Bureau of Statistics

Replacement demand is expected to represent the majority of job openings as current jobs are vacated due to retirement, deaths, or emigration. With industries such as diamond mining expected to reduce employment levels in the coming years, job growth is expected to be minimal.

Cost of Living

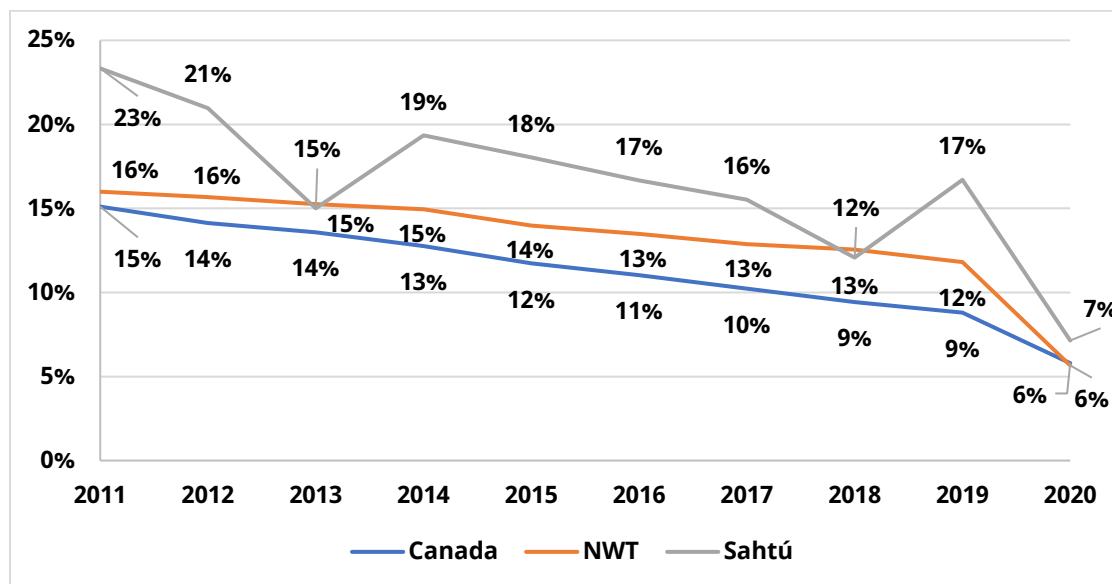
The NWT Bureau of Statistics uses Federal Isolated Post Living Differentials to determine the relative cost of living across communities in the NWT. The differentials are benchmarked to the cost of living in Edmonton (Index=100). In 2018, communities of the Sahtú Region received differentials ranging from 162.5 in Norman Wells to 177.5 in Fort Good Hope and Déłı̄ne, indicating an inflated cost of living. Yellowknife, by contrast, sits at an index value of 122.5.

Table 14: Cost of Living Differential

<i>Cost of Living</i>	Colville Lake	Déłı̄ne	Fort Good Hope	Norman Wells	Tulita
2018 Living Cost Diff. (Edmonton = 100)	..	177.5	177.5	162.5	172.5

The rate of families that are considered low income decreased in the Sahtú Region from 21% in 2011 to 7% in 2020, which is closely aligned with the territorial average (at 6% of all NWT families in 2020). By comparison, Statistics Canada reported that 6% of Canadian families were considered low-income in 2020, considerably lower in comparison to 15% reported in 2011.² The data from 2020 was impacted by government support provided in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chart 2: Low-Income Families as Percentage, 2011-2020



Source: NWT Bureau of Statistics

² Distribution of total income by census family type and age of older partner, parent or individual.
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=1110001201>

Across the Sahtú Region, food prices were significantly higher than the reference point in Yellowknife, averaging an additional 76%. Moreover, the percentage of families who reported difficulties in making ends meet ranged from 14% in Norman Wells to 29% in Colville Lake and Délı̨ne, relative to a baseline of 16% in Yellowknife. The percentage of homes in these communities that have access to internet ranges from 50% to 60%, except for Norman Wells, where 93% of homes have access to internet.

Table 15: Cost of Living

Community	2019 Food Price Index (YK = 100)	% of Homes with Internet	Difficulty Making Ends Meet
Colville Lake	183.8	52%	29%
Délı̨ne	170.7	51%	29%
Fort Good Hope	182.7	51%	29%
Norman Wells	170.5	93%	14%
Tulita	174.5	60%	18%



3. STRENGTHS, CONSTRAINTS, DEVELOPMENT — OPPORTUNITIES, AND PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

During the interviews, focus groups, and the limited survey that was conducted involving residents, participants noted that the economic outlook for the Sahtú Region will largely depend on the ability of Imperial Oil to continue its operations in the Region. Focus group and interview participants identified other opportunities to grow the local economy related to remediation, education and training, tourism, agriculture, and traditional economy. If they proceed, large infrastructure projects such as construction of the Mackenzie Valley Highway, the Bear River Bridge, new housing, improvements to existing roadways, and construction of a waste management facility with Imperial Oil are expected to have major impacts on the regional economy.

Of the five representatives who were surveyed from the Region, three viewed the outlook as somewhat positive and two as neutral. In comparison, only seven of the 27 sectoral or territorial representatives who were surveyed viewed the economic outlook as positive over the next five years.

Table 16: Perceived Economic Outlook

<i>Looking forward over the next five years, do you think the economic outlook for this region is?</i>	Regional		Sectoral or Territorial	
	#	%	#	%
Very positive	0	0%	0	0%
Somewhat positive	3	60%	7	28%
Neither positive nor negative	2	40%	4	16%
Somewhat negative	0	0%	11	44%
Very negative	0	0%	2	8%
Not sure	0	-	1	4%
Total Participants	5	100%	25	100%

Tempering the level of optimism is the potential shutdown of Imperial Oil's operations in Norman Wells as production volumes decline as well as concerns regarding declines in population. Workers and employers are leaving the Region because there are not enough job opportunities or new projects in the immediate future.

3.1 ECONOMIC STRENGTHS

Some of the strengths on which the economy can build include:

- **Large infrastructure projects.** Should they proceed, proposed new investments in large infrastructure projects have the potential to create immediate employment and benefits as well as open many new business opportunities for the Region. Participants stated that the Region's natural resources have been a key source of revenue and income for the government and now is the time for the government to invest some of those funds back into communities in the Region to help rejuvenate the economy. Participants highlighted:
 - *The Mackenzie Valley Highway project* which has been proposed to extend Highway 1 from its current terminus at Wrigley, north, connecting to Tulita and Norman Wells with an all-season gravel road, to make the current seasonal connections more resilient to

- the effects of climate change, reduce the cost of living, and create future economic opportunities in tourism and natural resources. Work to advance an environmental assessment for the Mackenzie Valley Highway project continues and includes extensive community and public engagement.
- *The Great Bear River Bridge project*, which proposes the construction of a permanent bridge across the Great Bear River supporting the current Mackenzie Valley Winter Road and the future all-season Mackenzie Valley Highway. Improved access between communities will improve access to health care facilities and economic opportunities as well as family, recreation, and sporting interactions.
 - Other projects such as the building and upkeep of community centres, arenas, family recreational centres, camping sites, housing projects, local roads, and bridges as possible infrastructure projects that government could support.
- **Settled, modern, and comprehensive treaty.** The *Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement* was completed in 1992 and came into force in 1993. This modern comprehensive treaty established and provided for participation by all Sahtú Indigenous people in the co-management of land and resources within the Sahtú Region. Many Sahtú communities are currently negotiating their own individual community-based self-government agreements.
 - **Diverse natural resources across the Region.** The Region has vast oil reserves and natural gas resources. In fact, the Region has produced oil in Norman Wells since the 1920s. Although production has been declining over the last decade, the Region still has significant reserves that could be developed should the right economic conditions arise. The Region also has known deposits of tungsten, zinc, lead, and copper. Participants also highlighted available renewable resources on which the economy can further develop such as big game hunting, wild meats, and fish.
 - **Outstanding natural landscape and scenery.** The Region features a diverse landscape, from the Mackenzie Mountains in the west, barren lands in the east at the Nunavut border, a boreal forest covering most of the Region including along the shores of one of the world's longest rivers, the Mackenzie, and one of the world's largest freshwater lakes, Great Bear Lake.
 - **The high level of government employment provides for greater economic stability.** The GNWT is the leading single employer, employing over 300 people in the Sahtú Region.³ As such, the public administration sector serves as somewhat of a steadying force for the economy, to the extent that any economic downturn does not result in a decline in population.

3.2 CONSTRAINTS TO DEVELOPMENT

The regional and sector/territorial representatives who were surveyed were asked to rate the extent to which various issues constrain economic development in the Sahtú Region, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all, 3 is somewhat and 5 is to a great deal. The results are summarized below.

³ GNWT, Public Service Annual Report 2021/2022

Table 17: Constraints to Development

<i>On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is no constraint at all, 3 is somewhat of a constraint, and 5 is a major constraint, how much of a constraint to development are the following issues?</i>	Regional	Sectoral / Territorial⁴
Number of Respondents	5	25
Access to skilled workers	4.6	4.6
Cost of living (e.g., housing, food, energy)	4.6	4.4
Cost of business operations	4.4	4.2
Development processes, permitting issues and other regulatory issues	4.4	4.1
Transportation access	4.4	3.9
Access to markets	3.8	3.8
Energy infrastructure	3.6	4.2
Access to land and resources	3.6	3.9
Internet connectivity	3.4	3.6
Access to capital	2.2	3.4
Access to business support	1.8	3.0

The major constraints include:

- **Access to workers.** Accessing workers, particularly skilled workers, is a major challenge for businesses given the high wages and benefits provided by the government, lower education levels in the NWT relative to other jurisdictions, and limited access to education and training programs. Employers report difficulties in filling positions, from entry positions to more senior and skilled positions. It is also difficult to bring labour from outside of the community due to lack of adequate housing. Due to labour shortages, communities often lack basic services in areas such as restaurants, cafes, pet shops or pet services, barber shops, and hair salons.

Another factor contributing to the shortage of workers is the lack of affordable childcare in the Region. During discussions, participants mentioned knowing at least 10-15 people in their circles who are not able to work outside of their homes because they need to take care of their children in lieu of a proper daycare facility. Proper childcare services could allow more people to enter the workforce and boost the economy.

- **High cost of living and doing business.** Expenditures on food, shelter, transportation, utilities, fuel, and electricity are significantly higher than the Canadian average and levels in Yellowknife. Due to the Region's isolation, products must be flown or barged into the communities, increasing their cost. Many people lack proper access to necessities. An attending member of the Norman Wells Town Council estimated that 20% of households in the town are users of the local Food Bank. The Region has been particularly hard hit by the rising cost of energy, which has been further impacted by the carbon tax. Participants noted that households may pay between \$300 and \$900 per month for heat.
- **Regulatory environment.** Participants expressed concern about what they see as overly

⁴ Sectoral and territorial representatives were responding of the sector which they represent (e.g., tourism) and/or for the NWT as a whole rather than specifically for the Sahtú Region.

complex regulatory processes that are not business friendly. There are lengthy and costly processes in place for new developments. Businesses in sectors ranging from tourism to oil and gas expressed frustration regarding difficulties in accessing operating permits and licences. For example, participants noted that there used to be a local marketplace where people could sell their own produce, which was recently closed because they were not able to meet strict food safety regulations.

- **Transportation access/access to markets.** All communities in the Sahtú are located quite a distance from larger population centres and, at present, there is no year-round road accessibility. Goods are transported by ice road during winter and by barge during summer. The ice road is open for several months, but exclusively during winter; the capacity of the barge is limited, with freight costing significantly more. The only reliable way to travel to the community or bring goods or services, regardless of season, is by air, which is extremely expensive. Tickets for those wishing to travel one-way from Edmonton into the Region are usually more than \$1,500 per person. For goods shipped within the NWT, prices can range from several hundred dollars for a single pallet, to several thousand dollars for a shipping container.⁵ As a result, the overall cost of goods and services in the Region are very high.

Local businesses face challenges in accessing markets given the small and declining local population base as well the cost of transporting goods to southern markets. The Region's natural isolation also creates mental health and wellness problems among the population leading to depression, domestic violence, and suicide. As noted by participants, there is a sense that the Region was like being on an island in the north, separated from everyone else and therefore not given the same consideration.

- **Access to capital and business support.** Due to the anticipated departure of Imperial Oil, it is difficult to raise capital and businesses are reluctant to make new investments into the local economy. Representatives also noted that the local economy is primarily driven by the public sector; the presence of well-paying jobs in the government is viewed as a disincentive to entrepreneurial development and new business development. Access to business support services, capital for growth, investment, and other resources are a key challenge. There is a need to create more of an entrepreneurial culture and an environment that is supportive of businesses (e.g., provide infrastructure, access to financing and professional development resources, and other programs to support businesses).

Other challenges that were identified included:

- **Climate change.** Climate change is rapidly affecting the Region and is expected to accelerate changes in the growing and hunting seasons. According to participants, animal harvesting, produce farming, fishing, and general access to a winter road are all dependent on the climate, and these practices are becoming more unpredictable due to climate change. Climate change has also led to milder winters in the North and an increase in average temperatures. This has led to melting of the permafrost, and this has had negative impacts on existing infrastructure including roads, bridges, and houses and buildings. As a result, costs to maintain, repair, and

⁵ Marine Transportation Services 2022 Cargo Rates, Government of the Northwest Territories.
https://www.inf.gov.nt.ca/sites/inf/files/mts_cargo_rates_-_2022_4.pdf

replace infrastructure are likely to increase in the future.

- **Lack of impact benefit agreements (IBA) with local communities.** According to participants, Imperial Oil has worked in the Region but has not made IBAs with all Sahtu communities. As a result, some communities in the Region have not received compensation or royalties related to operations from Norman Wells.

3.3 OPPORTUNITIES

The surveyed representatives were asked to rate how much of a priority the government and others should place on promoting various sectors on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is no priority at all, 3 is some priority, and 5 is a major priority. The average ratings of the regional representatives as well as the sector and territorial representatives are provided in the table below. As indicated, remediation and site reclamation, agriculture and country foods, education and training, tourism, research, oil & gas exploration and development, and small business development were of utmost importance to those who were surveyed.

Table 18: Priority Sectors for Development

<i>Given the opportunities available in this region, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is no priority at all, 3 is some priority, and 5 is a major priority, how much of a priority do you think government and others should place on promoting the following sectors:</i>	Regional	Sectoral / Territorial
Number of Respondents	5	25
Remediation and site reclamation	5.0	3.6
Agriculture	4.8	3.5
Country foods	4.4	4.0
Education and training services	4.4	3.9
Tourism	4.4	3.7
Scientific research	4.3	3.8
Oil & gas exploration and development	4.2	3.8
Small business development	4.0	3.4
Manufacturing	3.8	3.9
Renewable or alternative energy	3.8	3.1
Arts and culture sector	3.8	3.0
The tech sector and innovation	3.8	2.8
Traditional economy	3.4	3.0
Commercial fisheries	3.2	3.3
Other renewable resources	3.0	2.9
Mineral exploration and mine development	2.8	3.3
Film Sector	2.6	2.7

A further discussion of the priority sectors is provided below:

- **Remediation and site reclamation.** It is estimated that there are over 500 sites in the NWT that require or will require assessment, remediation, clean up, and monitoring, and it is estimated that remediation activities in the NWT would be worth approximately \$4.8B over the

next 30 years with just under 90% of spending likely to occur in the next 15 years. The annual spend is estimated to be roughly \$291M per year for the next 15 years, generating approximately \$151M per year in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to the NWT in that timeframe.

In the Sahtú Region there are ongoing remediation and reclamation projects with Imperial Oil. Although there are currently no producing mines, the Sahtú Region has a history of mining for silver, copper, bismuth, uranium, and radium prior to World War II. There are properties that need remediation, particularly in the area east of Great Bear Lake, and discussions are underway between the federal and local governments to develop remediation plans for these properties. The Great Bear Lake Remediation Project, a partnership between the Government of Canada and the Délı̨nę Got'ı̨nę Government, will consist of reclaiming several now-abandoned mining and exploration properties which are currently the responsibility of the Government of Canada. These include Silver Bear Mines (including the Terra, Northrim, Norex and Graham Vein, and Smallwood sites), Contact Lake Mine, El Bonanza/Bonanza Mine, and Sawmill Bay. Other projects for remediation in the Region may include the removal of artificial islands in the Mackenzie River and removal of the Enbridge Line 21 Oil Pipeline.

Participants also noted that, to be able to benefit from the remediation economy, local communities will need training and skills-building efforts to prepare both the local labour force and businesses to participate in these projects. Training should include some of the basic skills to teach young people how to work on job sites as well as trades training and technical and project management skills. The communities also need equipment and infrastructure to benefit from these opportunities.

- **Agriculture and Country Foods.** Despite short growing seasons (July to September), potatoes and barley have been productively grown in the Region. The fertile soil and near 24-hour sunlight during the summer provide excellent conditions for growing a wide range of crops during the season, and produce can also be grown year-round in greenhouses. Further development of the sector will enhance overall food security and help to reduce the high cost of food. There are community gardens in each Sahtú community except for Délı̨nę. Many individuals have taken up agricultural activities as a hobby, to lower the cost of living, for food security, and to access fresh, locally grown food. There are six major producers including three in crop production, two in animal production, and one in mixed. In addition, Norman Wells, Tulita, and Fort Good Hope have had successful community markets.

According to participants, small family gardens and farms (e.g., produce, poultry, bees) or community greenhouses as well as 'cottage industries' (e.g., bakeries, etc.) are potential components to develop within this sector. In addition, some traditionally preserved food products (e.g., wild meats, fish, bird, plant products, berries, etc.) can be sold online via e-commerce platforms.

A key issue with this sector has been a general lack of skilled labour. One representative, who grew potatoes in the past, noted that he himself had to stop his production because he couldn't attract the help his farm needed. The Region also does not have food inspectors who can approve the commercial sale of farmed produce.

Participants also noted that the Sahtú Region is well known for its abundance of wildlife,

including caribou, mountain sheep, and muskox. In recent years, the population of muskox have grown rapidly, and this creates challenges for the other wildlife. Muskox do not have special status in local culture, Elders are not against them being harvested. Therefore, participants noted that there is an opportunity to harvest local muskox as a source of meat for local people, which will help to offset the high cost of meat products in the Region. Furthermore, muskox wool can be treated to create clothing, as it is of high value (similar to cashmere), and their skin can be used by local artists. Participants also mentioned an opportunity to commission a processing facility for muskox meat, producing jerkies, steaks, sausages, etc., which could be sold locally and potentially outside of the Region. The key challenges with harvesting include obtaining proper permits and the high cost associated with the processing and production of marketable meat products.

- **Education and training.** Given the lack of skilled labour combined with difficulties in accessing local education and training, participants placed a high priority on expanding the education and training sector. The GNWT Department of Education, Culture, and Employment (ECE) is leading work to strengthen and expand the NWT post-secondary education system. A key element of that work is the GNWT's commitment to transition Aurora College into a polytechnic university by 2025, which will be linked to a series of community learning centres in communities across the NWT.
- **Tourism.** There are 17 tourism operators in the Region. There are a few rivers in the Region that are popular with canoeists, and several companies in the Region organize multi-day guided and self-guided canoe trips on these rivers. In addition, the Region is known for its wildlife and is an excellent location for trophy hunters. There are five outfitters which operate in the Region that bring trophy hunters from outside the Region to hunt various animals such as muskox, mountain sheep, caribou, and moose.

Features such as the Mackenzie River, the Bear River, Great Bear Lake, the Canol Trail, Mackenzie Mountains, wildlife, the local culture, and even fossil hunting could enable tourism operators in the Sahtú Region to provide adventure, cultural, and ecotourism packages. Great Bear Lake is the largest lake entirely in Canada, has exceptional clarity, and is historically important to the Dëjıne peoples' identity, laws, and culture. The Northwest Territories Tourism (NWTT) 2025: Roadmap to Recovery also has a strong emphasis on developing Indigenous tourism businesses and Indigenous tourism products and services. The Canol Heritage Trail is a 350-kilometre-long trail running from Norman Wells through the Mackenzie Mountains to the Yukon border that is still being developed. Because of its remoteness, length, and river crossings, it is considered one of the most challenging trails in Canada. The Canol Trail is also popular amongst sports hunters for big game including moose, caribou, muskox, and Dall sheep. Great Bear Lake is world-renowned for its pristine waters and amazing fishing opportunities. There are opportunities to create cultural tourism products for visitors who wish to experience local culture and traditions. Construction of the Mackenzie Valley Highway would open the area up and have a tremendous economic impact on the Region. Until that occurs, issues related to accessibility (there is no existing year-round road access) and the high cost of travel (a return ticket from Yellowknife may cost over \$1,000), the flow of tourists will likely continue to be slow (mostly those who want to hunt, or canoe tend to visit the Region). The impact of existing tourism is also limited by a lack of quality services (e.g., restaurants, hotels, etc.) that it can offer for visiting tourists. Most of the tourists who visit the Region stay in

lodges (not local hotels), and do not shop in local stores. Tourism attractions and hotels are mostly owned by people from outside of the Region.

- **Oil & Gas.** The Sahtú Region has the NWT's only producing oil field, linked to markets through the 870-kilometre Enbridge Norman Wells - Zama Lake (Alberta) pipeline where it connects with the Alberta oil pipeline network. Imperial Oil, Canada's second-biggest integrated oil company, majority-owned by ExxonMobil, has been operating in Norman Wells since 1920. It operates producing wells which drill from natural and artificial islands and oversees a central processing facility located in the town of Norman Wells. According to the company website, the operation employs 70 people on a full-time basis and an additional 50 contractors.

The Region has vast natural gas resources, which have not been utilized to benefit local communities or the country. According to stakeholders present, the world is moving towards low-carbon energy, and natural gas is considered much greener due to its low carbon footprint; there exists a huge opportunity to develop the gas potential in the Region, sell to communities in the south, and heat homes in the north. For example, most houses and public buildings in the Sahtú Region use oil for heating, which is very expensive and comes with a very high carbon footprint. According to participants, the complex regulatory and permitting procedures and lack of government support or incentives is a key issue affecting the development of the natural gas industry.

NWT oil & natural gas production totaled \$125.4 million in 2021. While the oil field is still producing, production has been in decline for more than a decade and is expected to cease production in a few years. While other large deposits have been discovered, development is constrained by factors such as the lack of infrastructure, distance to markets, and the cold weather. Respondents felt more could be done through government support, incentives, and policies to facilitate the development of the industry (some attribute the lack of government support to environmental concerns). No new exploration activities are being planned, and no new wells are being drilled. With the overall decline of the oil economy, stakeholders are concerned that the population of the Norman Wells will shrink, which will affect all other economic sectors and the livelihood of community members.

According to stakeholders, to invest in the Region, oil companies need faster permit approvals from the government, better tax incentives, and increased road accessibility. Otherwise, they would prefer to invest in other regions or countries with a more rewarding and competitive work/business environment.

- **Renewable or alternative energy.** Communities in the Region are examining options to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels and improve local air quality. Those who participated in the discussions noted a need to switch to clean energy sources, such as solar, wind batteries, and hydrogen. There is already one company operating in the Region (Green Energy NWT) that supplies and installs boilers that use wood pellets instead of heating oil. According to a representative of the company, using wood pellets is much cheaper and more environmentally friendly. Therefore, an increasing number of households and public buildings are switching from heating oil to using wood pellets. According to the representative, there is huge potential to grow the industry in the Region, replacing the more expensive heating oil.

- **Arts and crafts.** Local artists and artisans sell their work on social media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook), locally by word of mouth, or through the museum in Norman Wells. The museum is a focal point, buying artwork from local artists and selling them to visitors in person or online on e-commerce platforms.

While there is significant potential for this creative industry to grow, participants noted that support is needed to help artists access raw materials, technology, equipment and training (e.g., on operating machines) and market their products more effectively online. A major constraint is the high cost of raw materials and time involved, which makes it difficult for artists to sell their products for a price that reflects the time and effort that went into the making of the art or product (e.g., simple slippers can cost over \$100). Some participants recommended opening an arts and crafts store in the community.

- **Small business development.** Further development of infrastructure and the regional economy creates opportunities for small business development. Representatives noted that much more could be done to create awareness of the potential development opportunities among businesses and entrepreneurs, create more of an entrepreneurial culture, and build an environment that is more supportive of businesses (e.g., provide infrastructure, access to financing, training and professional development resources, and other programs to support businesses).
- **Mineral development.** The Sahtú Region hosts large known deposits of tungsten, zinc, lead, and copper, although development has been constrained by cost, transportation, and market issues. The Selwyn project, owned by Selwyn Chihong, is a proposed zinc-lead mine in Howard's Pass on the Yukon-NWT border featuring one of the largest zinc-lead deposits in the world. Also, MacTung, owned by Fireweed Metals, is also located along the Yukon/NWT border in the Selwyn Mountains, and is the world's largest tungsten deposit.

Table 19: Economic Strengths, Constraints, and Opportunities for Development

SAHTU	
STRENGTHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation infrastructure • Settled, modern, and comprehensive treaty • Diverse natural resources • Outstanding natural landscape and scenery • Government employment provides stability
CONSTRAINTS TO DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to workers • High cost of living and doing business • Regulatory environment • Transportation access/access to markets • Access to capital and business support • Climate change • Lack of impact benefit agreements (IBAs)
OPPORTUNITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remediation and site reclamation • Agriculture and country foods • Education and training • Tourism • Oil & Gas • Renewable or alternative energy • Arts and crafts • Small business development • Mineral development

3.4 Priorities for Action

The Sahtú regional representatives who were surveyed as well as those representatives who were surveyed about sectors or the NWT overall were asked to select, from a list, up to ten actions that should be a high priority for the government and others in promoting economic development. As demonstrated in Table 20, the most identified priorities were to attract more tourists to the Region, attract workers and residents, improve transportation access, increase access to youth entrepreneurship training, implement business and investment attraction, address regulatory issues, further develop energy infrastructure, and increase access to fast, reliable, and affordable internet.

The representatives were then asked, given the priorities that they identified, what the three most important actions that the government could take to support economic development in the Region. The most common recommendations were to:

- Focus on attracting and retaining residents and workers into the area who will help to bolster existing businesses and encourage growth and development of new businesses. Proposed actions included implementing an investment attraction strategy, improving access to housing and recreational activities, prioritizing quality of life improvements, and helping to combat the high cost of living.
- Encourage and promote post-secondary and entrepreneurship programs for youth.
- Provide funding and support for infrastructure projects (e.g., the Mackenzie Valley Highway).
- Address regulatory issues (e.g., reduce licensing barriers) that are hindering investments or the development of essential infrastructure and businesses within the Region.
- Help to further develop the capacity of Indigenous governments and development corporations.

**Table 20: Recommendations Regarding Economic Development
Priorities for Government and Others**

<i>Recognizing that government and others can focus on only so many priorities, which of the following potential actions would you consider to be a high priority for your respective region? (Please select your top 10 choices)</i>	Regional	Sectoral / Territorial
Number of Respondents	5	25
Attract more tourists to the region	80%	48%
Attract workers and residents from other parts of Canada	80%	44%
Improve transportation access	60%	44%
Increase access to youth entrepreneurship training	60%	32%
Implement business and investment attraction initiatives/business incentives	60%	20%
Address regulatory issues	40%	72%
Further develop energy infrastructure	40%	72%
Increase access to fast reliable and affordable internet	40%	64%
Strengthen connections between education and business	40%	60%
Attract workers and residents from outside of Canada	40%	36%
Encourage development of strong industry associations and sector partnerships	40%	24%
Help grow local and regional markets for products	20%	40%
Increase access to post-secondary education and training programs	20%	40%
Improve pathfinding services linking businesses to funding programs and support	20%	32%
Make more strategic use of government procurement to promote economic development	20%	32%
Increase access to business mentorship programs and related small business education and training for entrepreneurs and businesses	20%	28%
Transform Aurora College into a polytechnic university	20%	24%
Stage events and other mechanisms that provide opportunities for networking	20%	4%
Facilitate e-marketing and use of digital platforms and social media to market products and services from the NWT	-	32%
Further incorporate Indigenous traditional and local knowledge into education programs	-	32%
Increase access to early-stage capital	-	32%
Invest in coworking spaces makerspaces arts & craft centres and incubators	-	24%
Increase access to loan financing	-	16%
Increase access to business support services	-	8%

Participants in the focus group and interviews and surveys also provided a range of recommendations on how the economic development of the Region can be grown and supported, including:

- **Ensure money spent in the Region for large contracts stays in the community, contributing to economic activity.** According to participants, most infrastructure, government, and oil & gas contracts are awarded to southern contractors, which affects the local economy. They estimated that the majority of every dollar spent locally on such contracts leaves the local economy because contractors are from outside of the Region. Participants provided a wide range of recommendations as to how the government can ensure more funds spent in the Region remain circulating in the local economy. These recommendations are summarized as follows:
 - *Revising the Business Incentive Policy (BIP) processes to build monitoring and accountability mechanisms.* According to participants, BIP does not have monitoring or enforcement capabilities in the Region. As a result, southern contractors who win extra points because they promised to hire locals, can replace local contractors easily without any fear of punishment. They recommended strict control systems, awards for adherence and punishments for breaking the rules. The participants also recommended that southern contractors should be required to submit a report describing how their work contributes directly to the local economy. It was mentioned that many other jurisdictions have similar systems that require local spending and are an example that should be followed. The NWT needs to conduct a jurisdictional scan for similar initiatives and learn lessons and best practices that can be applied in the NWT.
 - *Breaking down large projects into smaller pieces.* Stakeholders noted that large infrastructure projects are often awarded to southern contractors due to a lack of capacity in the Region itself. However, there are many components of these large projects that can be handled by local contractors. Therefore, there is a need for the government to break down large assignments, when possible, into smaller more manageable pieces and award some work to local contractors. They noted that many infrastructure projects (e.g., bridge or road construction) can be split into sections or components. With road construction as an example, local companies can do the brushing and clearing work as opposed to awarding those tasks to outside companies.
 - *Provide incentives for businesses to train and hire local people.* According to participants, there is a smaller talent pool in the Region (for many reasons as outlined earlier). Therefore, most outside contractors often prefer to bring their own outside labour and skilled workers. There needs to be additional incentives (e.g., government programs, tax benefits, etc.) for businesses to hire and train people local to the area as opposed to outside workers.
- **Support education and training.** Participants reported a strong need to train local community youth for local jobs. According to participants, there is a need for trades training, co-op programs, vocational programs, and training for service jobs (e.g., customer service, bank tellers, etc.). The industries that exist in the community including transportation, healthcare, the public sector, the service sector, and oil and gas all need skilled employees.

The community needs welders, electricians, machinery operators, plumbers, nurses, social workers, etc. Some participants also noted a need to integrate training programs with local culture and traditions. For example, creating a skills cultural camp where youth can learn from their culture alongside necessary vocational trades could be an effective initiative. The participants also noted that it is essential to implement programs that can match a student's talent with their education and career path. Career modelling based on interests and talent is important to make sure that students can pursue the right type of education. According to participants, many talented youths are required to participate in school curriculum when their talent is actually in hands-on craftsmanship or trades. Education and support for obtaining trade certifications and diplomas are necessary to build confidence and prepare youth for local jobs. Youth must be engaged in the economy, and it is necessary for the government to make an increased effort in ensuring that these individuals have a clear pathway to education, training, and certification. Furthermore, youth must also be supported to engage in sports, land-based activities, and guardian programming.

- **Implement a guardian program.** Participants noted that a guardian program has been successfully implemented in other regions (e.g., Haida Gwaii) and can be reproduced in the Sahtú Region. The program involves training Indigenous youth to learn and protect local nature and the general environment. The guardians can also be recruited by tourism companies to provide information about local flora and fauna for visitors and organize cultural tours. An initiative like this would encourage Indigenous youth to participate in the local economy in a way that is meaningful to them and could also contribute to an increase in tourism traffic.
- **Establish remediation and reclamation training centre in the Region.** Remediation could be the key economic driver during the next few years. Strong concerns were expressed that without a competent, locally trained workforce, benefits would not materialize for local communities. According to participants, the governments need to ensure every effort is made to press for and support a well trained competent northern workforce.
- **Attract the mining industry into the Region.** Participants noted that the Sahtú Region is rich in rare earth minerals, and other proven mineral deposits which can be explored that have potential and could lead to increased economic activity. However, there are currently no mines in commercial production in the Region. They recommended local communities and the government work with mining companies to invest in further exploration and developing the mining industry in the Sahtú Region.
- **Support local businesses.** Representatives of small businesses noted that local industry is the backbone of the regional economy and holds the key to bringing new investments, products and services, and people to Sahtú communities. Therefore, there needs to be more robust support for local businesses. Preferential treatment in awarding government contracts, better accessibility to government loans and funding opportunities, as well as access to basic business support services (e.g., drafting of business plans, preparation of financial statements, accounting, etc.) are suggested methods to support the growth of small business in the Region.
- **Increase access to government sponsored loans.** A representative of one local company mentioned that they were able to grow their business largely due to low-interest loans that they received from the Northwest Territories Business Development and Investment

Corporation (BDIC). Once they reached a certain threshold, however, they were no longer eligible for assistance, and had to obtain loans from chartered banks, which are often extremely costly. They suggested changing BDIC loan terms to widen eligibility, at least for businesses in isolated communities, so they can benefit from such programs.

- **Promote available government grants and programs.** Several representatives of local businesses noted that they lack adequate knowledge of the government programs and services available to them as business owners. There needs to be more promotion of existing support programs to facilitate participation.
- **Designate a representative who can advocate for the oil and gas industry in the Region.** Some participants noted that the industry is not well represented locally by either the federal or territorial governments, and thus is not getting enough attention. They suggested hiring a representative who would reside in the Region who can advocate specifically on behalf of the petroleum industry.
- **Address issues around food inspectors.** The community lacks food inspectors and local producers struggle to sell their products within or beyond the community. There is a need to work with the Department of Health with the aim of streamlining Food Inspection Regulations to encourage and promote cottage industry.
- **The longer-term vision for economic development in the Region is to create a community where people choose to live for generations in prosperity.** When asked to identify their vision for economic development, participants indicated:
 - Creating a healthy community where people want to, and can, live comfortably for generations to come;
 - Fostering sustained economic development, resulting in more prosperity for the community that will attract investment and people (as tourists or residents); and
 - Some participants also noted that in addition to creating five-year plans, a longer-term (20 or 50 year) vision is necessary for sustained economic development in the Region.