Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada | Affaires autochtones et Développement du Nord Canada

APR 2 1 2017

Student
Ian Bazalgette School
3909 – 26 Avenue SE
CALGARY AB T2A 3R1

Your file - Votre référence

Our file - Notre référence

Dear

Thank you for your letter dated February 23, 2017 and for your keen interest in the drinking water quality on First Nations' reserves.

As you correctly noted, the Government of Canada, in Budget 2016, committed $1.8 billion over five years to support clean drinking water and the treatment of wastewater on reserve. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), regional offices are each allocated a portion of that money based on priorities to address water and wastewater concerns for First Nations living on reserve across the country. As of January 2017, the Alberta Region of INAC committed $50.2 million in the 2016/17 fiscal year towards 28 projects to prevent and address long-term drinking water advisories and improve capacity and reliability of water and wastewater systems. This includes two projects aimed at addressing long-term drinking water advisories on reserve. These two projects will be completed prior to 2021.

In response to your specific questions:

According to the 2016 budget you are being given 1.8 billion dollars to improve water and infrastructure over the next 5 years. Which nations do you plan to help with that money?
INAC Alberta Region currently has 28 water and wastewater projects. For a list of First Nations that have been funded for water and wastewater projects in Alberta please see our website at https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1487103242230/1487103314534#AB.

How are you going to remove the blue-green algae from the water in Kehewin First Nation?
Of course untreated water with blue-green algae can be quite dangerous so it has to be handled very carefully. Having said this, it is possible using modern water treatment systems to treat this type of water to meet the Canadian Drinking Water Quality Guidelines published by Health Canada. In this case, an engineer has recommended to the Kehewin First Nation Chief and Council the design of a treatment system which will remove the algae. This will include a process to first clarify the water, followed with membrane filtration, and then will finish with ultraviolet treatment for primary disinfection. We are waiting for further direction from the First Nation.

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Canada

When are you going to help Kehewin, Gregoire Lake and Whitefish Lake?
There are ongoing projects at Kehewin Cree Nation and Whitefish Lake to address their long-term drinking water advisories. The Fort McMurray First Nation (Gregoire Lake) does not have a water treatment plant and instead receives water from a regional water system in partnership with the Rural Municipality of Wood Buffalo that also supplies water to Anzac, Alberta.

How are you going to do it? Are you 100% sure it will be safe after you're done?
During the design process, issues with water quality are identified and appropriate treatment systems are designed and constructed to ensure that potable water is produced that will meet the Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality. Once the system is in operation, Health Canada does ongoing water quality monitoring and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and Health Canada work together with First Nations to take corrective action when there is a risk to a water system.

Do you think the government and Justin Trudeau are going to keep their promise?
Yes. In Budget 2016, the federal government committed $1.8 billion over five years to support clean drinking water and the treatment of wastewater on reserve. With the help of the investments made in water and wastewater infrastructure in Budget 2016, the Government has lifted 18 long-term drinking water advisories in First Nations communities across Canada. The Government is on track to eliminate more than 60 per cent of remaining long-term advisories within three years and all long-term drinking water advisories by March 2021. To ensure that these investments continue to serve communities well, the Government is also investing in training for community members, so that they can manage and maintain this important infrastructure.

Further, the Government of Canada, in Budget 2017, proposes to invest an additional $4 billion over 10 years, starting in 2018–19, to build and improve housing, water treatment systems, health facilities and other community infrastructure.

Do you think the government is going to give the money to the nations?
All of these funds are managed by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada through funding agreements with First Nations. The Alberta Region provides funding to First Nations for water projects and works in partnership with First Nations to ensure that projects are initiated and completed according to all applicable policies, standards and guidelines.

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Thank you again for your interest in this very important topic. I encourage you to continue to take a leadership role to advocate for First Nations rights and work together with Indigenous Peoples on our shared journey of reconciliation. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada works in coordination with First Nations, Health Canada, and Environment Canada and remains committed to addressing water and wastewater issues on reserve in a timely and sustainable manner.

I trust that the above information will be of assistance.

Sincerely,

Jim Sisson
Regional Director General
Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada
Alberta Region
630, 9700 Jasper Avenue
EDMONTON AB T5J 4G2

c.c: Leah Hirshmiller, Director, Community Infrastructure and First Nations Relations Treaty 7
Mervin Clarke, Manager, Water Strategy
Adam Kuehnbaum, Senior Engineer, Water
Naman Boodram, Manager, Capital Agreement Management

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APR 21 2017

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Dear

Thank you for your letter dated February 23, 2017 and for your keen interest in the drinking water quality on First Nations' reserves.

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), Alberta Regional office works to ensure that the condition of the water treatment systems across the First Nations in Alberta is properly communicated to the Government of Canada.

The Government of Canada, in Budget 2016, committed $1.8 billion over five years to support clean drinking water and the treatment of wastewater on reserve. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, regional offices are each allocated a portion of that money based on priorities to address water and wastewater concerns for First Nations living on reserve across the country. As of January 2017, Alberta Region of INAC had committed $50.2 million towards 28 projects to prevent and address long-term drinking water advisories and improve capacity and reliability of water and wastewater systems. This includes two projects aimed at addressing long-term drinking water advisories on reserve. These two projects will be completed prior to 2021.

For a list of First Nations that have been funded for water and wastewater projects in Alberta please see our website at https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1487103242230/1487103314534#AB. Further, the Government of Canada, in Budget 2017, proposes to invest an additional $4 billion over 10 years, starting in 2018–19, to build and improve housing, water treatment systems, health facilities and other community infrastructure.

I note your concern that the Canada 150 project may divert scarce resources from important priorities such as safe drinking water on reserve. I want to encourage your critical thinking and I would like to suggest that you have touched on a key challenge to any Government – how to balance many priorities. The Prime Minister has said that "no relationship is more important to me and to Canada than the one with Indigenous Peoples." Reconciliation is key to the Government's priority to improve the Nation to Nation relationship. Reconciliation is an important word; it has to include access to safe drinking water, health care, education, housing, etc. Also, it is a process that celebrates the values of diversity and the contributions that all of Canada's peoples make. In this context, the Canada 150 project can be pretty important. This could be something worth thinking about.

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