

## North West Communities Incident Command Centre (NWC ICC)

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

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#### **Northwest Saskatchewan Leaders Implement Regional Perimeter Check Points**

Asserting the safety of their people as the number one objective, First Nations, Métis and Northern Municipal leaders are implementing a series of regional perimeter check points on the main arteries coming in and out of Saskatchewan's Northwest region.

Together, these leaders have agreed perimeter check points will help minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus by educating and encouraging people to decrease unnecessary and non-essential travel into and out of the Northwest. The Northwest region is a predominantly Indigenous region populated by First Nations and Métis citizens.

"As leaders, it's incumbent on us to look at all available options to secure the safety of our people in our region. We must minimize the spread of COVID-19," says Northwest Municipalities Representative Mayor Duane Favel of Ile a la Crosse. "By establishing a security check point system, coordinated among different jurisdictions, we are responding to this very serious pandemic situation in a responsible way. We cannot afford to be complacent."

Favel adds that the communities in the Northwest region have limited health emergency resources, and not enough to respond to a serious outbreak of COVID-19.

The check points will also serve to educate and remind travellers about individual and family responsibilities in keeping communities safe. Leaders want community members to be able to make informed decisions about avoiding catching and spreading COVID-19, and ways of looking after themselves and their families' mental, emotional and physical well-being during these difficult times. The staff working at the check points will talk with motorists and give them written reminders about good health protocols. The check points will be operated by a long-standing professional security corporation from Northwest Saskatchewan.

The Métis Nation–Saskatchewan (MN-S) has recently declared a state of emergency in response to the pandemic. MN-S President Glen McCallum says he has heard the concerns and anxiety of Métis citizens from across the province, and in the north. "Part of the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan's obligation to our communities be it in the North, Central, or South is to support in any way we can. In this case it is the Northwest Saskatchewan perimeter checkpoint initiative," says MN-S President McCallum. "Our leadership at the local and regional level understand the priorities of the communities, and one of the priorities is to minimize the spread of COVID-19 by having an incident command centre in Beauval and check points in communities. We will move to take care of our Métis citizens. For weeks, we have been holding conference calls with

leadership. We are proud to be a part of this cross-cultural understanding and nurturing partnerships to build and overall plan with First Nations Chiefs, municipal mayors, and federal and provincial government representatives.”

The First Nations communities were prepared for this pandemic due to their previous epidemic and pandemic experiences. They understand the notions of community isolation and containment by implementing rigorous check points into and from their First Nations territories. In some areas, they have shared pandemic planning model to communities which may have not been able develop their own.

Meadow Lake Tribal Council Tribal Chief Richard Ben is quick to point out the significant value of a collaborative effort in dealing with this pandemic. “The fact that we are working together as Métis, First Nations, and Municipal governments in response to this virus is unprecedented. We know this virus does not sleep, nor does it care about political jurisdictions or humankind; as such, it has compelled us to come together to seek solutions to benefit the region.” “Each of our partners have diverse strengths but very similar priorities during this stressful time. We very much appreciate the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan in taking the lead on the perimeter initiative. They see it as a priority, so do our Chiefs, “adds Ben. “The Meadow Lake Tribal Council will continue to support the First Nation initiatives including this collaborative effort against COVID - 19.”

The perimeter initiative will see four check points established at the main transportation arteries in the and from the North West. These will be on highway 155 south of Beauval; 965 and 903 fork at Cole Bay; at the junction of highway 165 and highway 914; and at the Fort MacMurray access road just south of La Loche.

This regional initiative is directed and supported by a Joint Leadership Group created at the beginning of the COVID-19 virus pandemic. Métis, First Nations, and Municipal governments have committed to collaborate to maximize local and regional resources, capacities, and information. This Joint Leadership Group has set up a Regional Incident Command Centre (ICC) in Beauval.

The ICC acts a regional hub to coordinate and support all the region’s emergency teams. The ICC hosts daily conference call briefings for community leaders across the North West. These calls enable communities to explain their issues, share information about needed capacity, and discuss possible solutions from across the region and beyond. These daily briefings include provincial and federal EM specialists, health authority representatives, agency supports, and elected leaders.

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