

*P.A.N.P. Cottage Owners' Association Inc.
1500 – 410 22nd Street East
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S7K 5T6*

Honourable Harry Van Mulligen
Minister of Government Relations
Room 315, Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, Saskatchewan
S4S 0B3

May 14th, 2007

Dear Minister Van Mulligen:

Re: Municipal Governance in Waskesiu, Prince Albert National Park

I am writing in my capacity as President of the P.A.N.P. Cottage Owners' Association Inc. (the "**Cottage Owners Association**"). The Cottage Owners Association is a non-profit corporation established to represent the interests of cottage owners in Waskesiu, Prince Albert National Park.

I have been instructed by the Board of our Association to write to you and express our profound disappointment with your Government's recent decision not to introduce the statutory amendments necessary to permit the incorporation of a municipality in Waskesiu.

We concur with the position already advanced by the Waskesiu Cabin Owners' Association, and we are aware that they have already written to you regarding this matter. As is the case with the Waskesiu Cabin Owners' Association, our Board supports the Waskesiu Community Council in its efforts to establish a local municipal government in Waskesiu.

Put succinctly, we believe that you have allowed your office, and your Government, to be influenced by a lobby group that represents a clear *minority* of voters in our community. Despite allegations to the contrary, the will of the majority of Waskesiu voters was evidenced by a fairly conducted community referendum held during the summer of 2006. It should also be pointed out that, following that same referendum, every one of the members of the Waskesiu Community Council that supported the municipal option, and who sought re-election, was returned to office.

What has since transpired appears to be democracy at its worst. A politically connected lobby group - through “back door” politics, fear mongering, and the dissemination of misleading or inaccurate information – has somehow managed to derail a legitimate democratic process – a result that is nothing less than shameful. Moreover, the very same group, despite numerous offers to appear before a duly elected Council to present their case in an open and respectful forum, consistently refused to do so.

Furthermore, we know for a fact that our Community Council members were repeatedly reassured by provincial government officials that matters were proceeding, to the point in fact that draft legislation had been prepared by Government of Saskatchewan officials and had been circulated, reviewed and approved by representatives (and even by legal counsel) on behalf of Parks Canada Agency and the Waskesiu Community Council. As a result, informed members of our community were stunned by your abrupt decision not to introduce the requisite legislation during the spring 2007 sitting of the Legislature. As was the case with the Cabin Owners Association, we too were told too late to allow for an opportunity to provide meaningful input, or support, for the Waskesiu Community Council. In the interim, a vocal minority and their lobbying activities had clearly managed to create a small political firestorm among certain MLA’s that, despite its lack of merit, apparently proved too much for the Government to face down.

For the record, we completely agree with your statement that the policy decision to permit the incorporation of a municipality in Prince Albert National Park is “*not necessarily linked*” to the “*provincial policy respecting levying and collection of the education portion of property tax in provincial and national parks*”. In fact, it can be argued that the attempt to “link” these two policy decisions has been an intentional ploy on the part of opponents of municipal governance in Waskesiu for some time, and is now simply being used as an expedient political cover.

To be blunt, if the Government of Saskatchewan was being forthright on this issue it would clearly acknowledge the following points:

- First, if the Government of Saskatchewan wanted to permit the levying and collection of the education portion of property taxes in Waskesiu this year, it could do so - ***whether or not Waskesiu was a municipality*** - by simply making the Park part of a school division in the Province. In reality, therefore, these issues are not “linked” at all.
- Second, Prince Albert National Park has been in existence since 1928 and, during that entire time, it has never been included in a school division, for reasons that are obvious, logical, equitable and numerous.
- Third, it would not take significant political will to formally recognize that our situation is unique in Saskatchewan, and should remain so, such that our community need not be sucked into an unrelated political vortex relating to education taxes in *provincial* parks.

Significant portions of our local infrastructure have deteriorated to deplorable levels over the last decade, to a point where it is embarrassing for local residents and visitors alike to see a Canadian National Park in this state. A solution to that problem had been identified pursuant to an Agreement in Principle, was then voted on, and a carefully negotiated agreement was finalized that, from our community's perspective, actually improved on the terms of the Agreement in Principle. Local municipal taxes would have been levied and collected in an equitable fashion, and an elected local council would have had control over the expenditure of those taxes within our community – not a frightening concept given that it takes place in literally hundreds of municipalities throughout Saskatchewan many of which have tax bases considerably smaller than Waskesiu's.

What is the result of your Government's decision not to make a decision? Millions of dollars of funding promised by Parks Canada Agency have been withdrawn, and our community's future has been put at risk. In addition, we are left with:

- ✓ Deteriorating infrastructure and no funding to correct it;
- ✓ A "land rent" regime that is highly inequitable as between cabin owners, cottage owners, and business owners;
- ✓ Annual land rent that projections show will prove more costly to our residents as a whole than municipal taxation;
- ✓ No meaningful control over local priorities or local governance;
- ✓ Absolutely no connection between land rent paid by residents and the expenditures that take place in Waskesiu; and
- ✓ No guarantee that one cent of the land rent will ever be spent by Ottawa in, or for the benefit of, the Waskesiu community.

In conclusion, to indicate that we are extremely displeased with your decision not to introduce legislation enabling the formation of a municipality in Waskesiu would be an understatement.

As such, we hereby formally request that you do the following:

- (1) Formally introduce and pass, during the next sitting of the legislature, the proposed amendments to existing Saskatchewan municipal legislation in the form already prepared by your department; and
- (2) Find the political courage necessary to formally recognize and affirm that the Waskesiu Townsite - as the only community located within a National Park in Saskatchewan and which for virtually 80 years has not been part of any school division in the Province - is unique, and should therefore not be engulfed in your Government's policy reviews surrounding the levying and collection of the education portion of property tax in *provincial* parks.

We look forward to your prompt reply.

James S. Kerby
President, P.A.N.P. Cottage Owners' Association Inc.

Cc: Honorable Lorne Calvert, Premier of Saskatchewan
Brad Wall, Leader of the Saskatchewan Party
David Karwacki, Leader of the Liberal Party of Saskatchewan