

2025 FALL MEMBER FORUM

Truth North, Strong and Free

OCTOBER 29 & 30

CHATEAU NOVA HOTEL, YELLOWKNIFE

Canada's North is at a defining moment—where long-standing aspirations for development, sovereignty, and connectivity must finally translate into action. The 2025 Fall Member Forum will bring together WESTAC members and experts to examine the North's growing strategic relevance to Canada's economic, environmental, and geopolitical future.

Under the theme *True North, Strong and Free*, the Forum will explore how transportation and infrastructure can serve as catalysts for prosperity, how climate change is reshaping risk and opportunity, and how Canada must respond to evolving global threats to assert its sovereignty. With sessions ranging from economic transitions and nation-building infrastructure to Arctic security and permafrost resilience, members will engage with the complex realities and bold possibilities shaping northern development.

This Forum will reinforce that Canada's northern transportation future is not just a regional issue—it's a matter of national importance. Building capacity in the North demands coordinated investments, enduring partnerships with Indigenous communities, and a clear-eyed approach to global realities. Members will leave with a deeper understanding of the opportunities and responsibilities that lie ahead in this rapidly changing frontier.



VENUES

Chateau Nova Hotel

4571 48 Street
Yellowknife, NT

Tel: (867) 766-6682

Meeting Rooms

All meetings and meals will be held on the 3rd floor in the Caribou Room unless otherwise noted.

Aurora Village

4709 Franklin Ave
Yellowknife, NT

Tel: (867) 669-0006

***Transportation will be provided between the Chateau Nova Hotel and the Aurora Village.**

SCHEDULE

Wednesday, October 29, 2025

7:30 am	Hot Buffet Breakfast	Caribou Room
8:30 am	Opening Remarks	
8:45 am	Northern Welcome	
9:30 am	Working Sessions begin	
10:30 am	Break	
11:00 am	Working Sessions (cont.)	
12:00 pm	Lunch	
1:00 pm	Working Sessions (cont.)	
2:45 pm	Break	
4:30 pm	Working Sessions end	
7:00 pm	Shuttles depart the hotel for Aurora Village	
8:15 pm	Dinner	
10:30 pm	Shuttle 1 departs from Aurora Village to the hotel	
11:30 pm	Shuttle 2 depart from Aurora Village to the hotel	

*Yellowknife Cabs: (867) 873-6666

Thursday, October 30, 2025

8:45 am	Hot Buffet Breakfast	Caribou Room
9:30 am	Leaders Council ¹	
11:30am	Break	
11:45 am	Board of Directors Meeting	Lynx Room
12:45 pm	Board Meeting adjourns	
12:45 pm	Lunch for directors	Lynx Room

¹ Each member organization may have one* representative at the Leaders Council. The representative should be a senior executive and a regular attendee at WESTAC.

* Two representatives per sustaining member organization.

2025 FALL MEMBER FORUM

True North, Strong and Free

Wednesday, October 29, 2025

8:30 am

Opening Remarks

Hon. Devin Dreeshen, Minister of Transportation & Economic Corridors, Government of Alberta, and Chair, WESTAC

Lindsay Kislock, President and CEO, WESTAC

8:45 am

Northern Welcome

The Yellowknives Dene drummers will open the Forum.

Speaker:

Hon. R.J. Simpson, Premier, Government of the Northwest Territories

9:30 am

Setting the Stage: Transportation, Economic Corridors and the North's Strategic Moment

Renowned historian and policy expert Ken Coates will explore the intersection of transportation, economic corridors, and northern development. Ken will explore why the North holds the key to Canada's long-term prosperity—and what it will take to finally move from decades of promises to tangible progress.

Ken Coates, Professor Emeritus, Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, University of Saskatchewan

10:30 am

Break

11:00 am

Overcoming Remoteness: Unlocking Economic Opportunities in Canada's North

Canada's remote and northern regions—including the territories and the full northern expanse of the western provinces—are rich in critical minerals, energy, and other natural resources. Yet development continues to be constrained by one central challenge: remoteness. High costs, limited access, and insufficient infrastructure remain persistent barriers to unlocking economic opportunity. We'll explore how to overcome those barriers through a combination of innovative technologies, sound economic policy, and real-world experience.

Speakers:

Hon. Vince McKay, Minister of Infrastructure, Government of the Northwest Territories

Paul Gruner, Chief Executive Officer, Tlicho Investment Corp.

Dr. April Hayward, Chief Sustainability Officer, Li-FT Power

12:00 pm

Lunch

2025 FALL MEMBER FORUM

True North, Strong and Free

Wednesday, October 29, 2025

1:00 pm

Securing the North: Sovereignty in a Shifting World

This session explores the evolving landscape of Canada's defence and security capability in the North at a time when both the public and government have recognized the need to "up our game." As geopolitical tensions escalate and climate change accelerates access to the Arctic, Canada faces rising pressure to assert sovereignty, protect and open new transportation corridors, and serve as a credible security partner. Evolving threats—from increased foreign activity to cyber vulnerabilities—are reshaping our understanding of risk and readiness. Dr. Lackenbauer will examine national security priorities, defence investments, and the strategic importance of transportation infrastructure in protecting a *True North that is strong and free*.

Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in the Study of the Canadian North and Professor, School for the Study of Canada, Trent University

1:45 pm

Shifting Ground: Climate Change and the Future of Northern Transportation

Climate change is transforming the North, with profound implications for transportation infrastructure, supply chains, and economic development. This session will explore how thawing permafrost, shifting weather patterns, and reduced sea ice are disrupting traditional modes of transport and increasing operational risks. At the same time, these changes are creating new possibilities for Arctic shipping and infrastructure development.

Speakers:

Dale Beugin, Executive Vice-President, Canadian Climate Institute

RAdm. Nigel Greenwood, Principal Consultant, Greenwood Maritime Solutions Ltd.

Jim Coates, President, Kryotek Inc.

2:45 pm

Break

3:15 pm

Nation Building in the North: Infrastructure for the Next Century

Strategic infrastructure is key to advancing the economic potential of Canada's North. This session explores major northern transportation projects that could reshape regional and national trade flows—from the revival of the Port of Churchill as an export gateway, to the proposed Gray's Bay port and road system linking Nunavut to the NWT, to the Arctic Economic and Security Corridor connecting rich mineral deposits to global markets. The Canada Infrastructure Bank is emerging as a key catalyst and impact investor in advancing such nation-building initiatives. What is needed to move these bold projects from vision to reality?

Speakers:

Hillary Thatcher, Managing Director, Investments, Canada Infrastructure Bank

Michael McNair, CEO, Arctic Economic Development Corporation

Chris Avery, CEO, Arctic Gateway Group

Brendan Bell, CEO, West Kitikmeot Resources Corp.

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Wednesday, October 29, 2025

4:30 pm	Free Time
7:00 pm	Aurora Village Dinner and Viewing Aurora Village is an entirely Aboriginal-owned facility that offers world-class aurora-viewing and outdoor recreation paired with a commitment to top-notch customer service. Guests will enjoy a hearty buffet dinner, followed by an aurora viewing from one of the Village's many teepees. This activity, including travel, is included with registration. A bus will transfer guests between the hotel and Aurora Village. Shuttles will return to the hotel at 10:30 pm and 11:30 pm.

GUEST SPEAKERS



CHRIS AVERY

Chief Executive Officer
Arctic Gateway Group

As CEO of Arctic Gateway Group, Chris oversees critical transportation infrastructure that connects northern communities to the rest of Canada. His strategic leadership and vast industry knowledge have driven the success of the Arctic Gateway, enhancing economic opportunities in the North while ensuring essential services reach remote areas.

Prior to his current role, Chris was President and CEO of Canadian North and First Air, where he successfully led the airline through its merger and integration, as well as navigating the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under his leadership, Canadian North was recognized as one of Canada's Best Managed Companies and was awarded Regional Airline of the Year in 2022 by Air Transport World. Chris also held senior positions at WestJet and brings a wealth of experience from other top-tier travel and transportation companies, including Alaska Airlines and Canadian Airlines.

Chris holds a Bachelor of Economics from Western University and an MBA from Concordia University's John Molson School of Business.



BRENDAN BELL

Chief Executive Officer
West Kitikmeot Resources Corp.

Brendan Bell is an experienced leader in Northern mining. He is a former CEO of Dominion Diamond Corporation. Mr. Bell served as Minister of Industry, Tourism & Investment, as well as Minister of Justice, in the Government of the Northwest Territories. He is also a Director of the Robert Gannicott Foundation.

GUEST SPEAKERS



DALE BEUGIN

Executive Vice President

Canadian Climate Institute

Dale Beugin is Executive Vice President of the Canadian Climate Institute, Canada's leading independent climate policy research organization. An expert in environmental policy and economics, Dale oversees the Institute's research. He has previously worked as Executive Director and Research Director of Canada's Ecofiscal Commission, as an independent consultant providing analysis and advice to governments and organizations across Canada and internationally, and as a policy advisor with the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy.



JIM COATES

President

Kryotek Inc.

Jim combines his passion for climate science with an extensive background in permafrost, mineral exploration, geohazard mitigation, and artificial intelligence to solve some of the world's most significant problems amid a changing ecosystem. He's a nimble thinker who thrives under pressure and values the mistakes and discoveries made during development as much as the finished product.

GUEST SPEAKERS



KEN COATES **Professor Emeritus**

Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy
University of Saskatchewan

Ken Coates is a professor emeritus and Canada Research Chair in Regional Innovation in the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy. He is also the Macdonald-Laurier Institute's Senior Policy Fellow in Aboriginal and Northern Canadian Issues.

He has served at universities across Canada (UNBC, UNB and Waterloo) and at the University of Waikato (New Zealand), an institution known internationally for its work on Indigenous affairs. He has also worked as a consultant for Indigenous groups and governments in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, as well as for the United Nations, companies, and think tanks. Ken has also served as the past president of the Japan Studies Association of Canada and was inducted into the Royal Society of Canada in November.

Ken recently published a book titled *From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation* with Greg Poelzer. He has previously published on such topics as Arctic sovereignty, Aboriginal rights in the Maritimes, northern treaty and land claims processes, regional economic development, and government strategies for working with Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Ken contributes regularly, through newspaper pieces and radio and television interviews, to contemporary discussions on northern, Indigenous, and technology-related issues.



RAdm. NIGEL GREENWOOD **Principal Consultant**

Greenwood Maritime Solutions

Nigel Greenwood completed a 37-year naval career as the Commander of Canada's Pacific naval forces. In this role, he was responsible for the defence of Canada's western maritime approaches, the generation of ready forces for deployment to international maritime operations, Search and Rescue in the Pacific Northwest and over the landmass of BC and the Yukon, assistance to civil authorities for domestic emergencies and law enforcement, and maintenance of Canada's maritime defence relations in the Pacific.

In earlier appointments, RAdm Greenwood served as Deputy Commander of the Royal Canadian Navy, Commander of the Pacific Fleet, Base Commander of Canadian Forces Base Halifax in Nova Scotia, and Captain of HMCS OTTAWA (FFH 341).

Greenwood's initial BSc in Oceanography and Physics was supplemented throughout his career with diplomas in command and staff duties, executive business management, and Asia-Pacific affairs. In 2006, he completed an MA in International Relations (with Distinction) at King's College London while attending the Royal College of Defence Studies. He holds a current Certificate of Competency as a Master Mariner, and is a Fellow of both the Royal Institute of Navigation and the Nautical Institute. He is also licensed as a security consultant and qualified as an Ice Navigator.

GUEST SPEAKERS



PAUL GRUNER

Chief Executive Officer

Tlicho Investment Corp.

Paul Gruner joined the Tlicho Investment Corporation in October 2023 as the Chief Executive Officer.

Paul is a senior executive leader with 15 years of experience in delivering business results in partnership with Indigenous stakeholders. He has a dynamic range of experience in strategic leadership, mergers and acquisitions, business development, strategic partnerships, financial management, project management, corporate governance, contract negotiations, capacity building and job creation for citizens, and environmental, social, and corporate governance.

Paul has experience in transformation strategy that strengthens organizations and builds them into sustainable, profitable entities with the leadership and resilience to operate for generations.



DR. APRIL HAYWARD

Chief Sustainability Officer

Li-FT Power

Dr. Hayward's career has been dedicated to leading sustainable development in the mining industry of northern Canada for over a decade. She has a proven track record of developing collaborative working relationships with key stakeholders and successfully navigating projects through the regulatory system to obtain operating permits in the Northwest Territories, leveraging her managerial and executive roles at the Ekati mine and Mountain Province Diamonds.

Dr. Hayward brings a unique combination of operational and corporate experience, technical expertise, and over 25 years of diverse experience in environmental sustainability across the public, private, and academic sectors to the Company.

GUEST SPEAKERS



DR. P. WHITNEY LACKENBAUER

Tier 1 Canada Research Chair, Study of the Canadian North Professor
Trent University

P. (Paul) Whitney Lackenbauer is Canada Research Chair (Tier 1) in the Study of the Canadian North and Professor in the School for the Study of Canada at Trent University. He was the Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel of the 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group, based in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, from 2014 to 2020, and was reappointed to this position from 2022 to 2025. He is also a Fellow with the Bill Graham Centre for Contemporary History at the University of Toronto; the Arctic Institute of North America; the Centre for Military, Security and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary; and an adjunct professor with the Brian Mulroney Institute for Government at St. Francis Xavier University and the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management and the Center for Arctic Security and Resilience, School of Management, University of Alaska Fairbanks. Whitney specializes in Arctic security, sovereignty, and governance issues, as well as modern Canadian military and diplomatic history, and Indigenous-state relations.

Whitney has (co-) written or (co-) edited more than sixty books and more than one hundred academic articles and chapters. His recent books include *The Joint Arctic Weather Stations: Science and Sovereignty in the High Arctic 1946-72* (2022); *Lines in the Snow: Thoughts on the Past and Future of Northern Canadian Policy Issues* (2021); *On Thin Ice? Perspectives on Arctic Security* (2021).



MICHAEL MCNAIR

President & CEO
Arctic Economic Development Corporation

Michael McNair is President and Chief Executive Officer of Arctic Economic Development Corporation, Canada's dedicated Arctic infrastructure and logistics services provider.

Previously, he served as Global Managing Director at the Tony Blair Institute, where he led the worldwide expansion of the company's operational footprint to over 125 projects, primarily focused on delivery, across 45 developing and advanced countries.

He has worked as a strategy consultant at McKinsey & Company, Deloitte and independently. His career began in corporate finance at CIBC World Markets. Michael worked well over a decade at the Canadian parliament and government, including many years as Policy Director for the Prime Minister of Canada.

He is currently an Affiliated Researcher at the University of Cambridge in Public Policy. His graduate studies were in Advanced Economic and Policy Analysis at Columbia University and Global Economic History at the London School of Economics, following undergraduate studies in History at Queen's University in Canada.

GUEST SPEAKERS



HON. R.J. SIMPSON

Premier

Government of the Northwest Territories

R.J. Simpson was elected to the 20th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly, representing the constituency of Hay River North. On December 7th, 2023, Mr. Simpson was elected Premier of the Northwest Territories.

Premier Simpson was formerly acclaimed to the 19th Legislative Assembly and first elected into the 18th Assembly in 2015.

He was Deputy Speaker of the 18th Assembly, Deputy Chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations, and the Chair of the Special Committee on Transition Matters. Mr. Simpson was also a member of the Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning and the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment.

Premier Simpson is a lifelong resident of Hay River. After graduating from Diamond Jenness Secondary School in 1998 Mr. Simpson went on to obtain a Bachelor of Arts from MacEwan University and a law degree from the University of Alberta.

He has previously worked with the Government of Canada, Northern Transportation Company Ltd, Métis Nation Local 51, and Maskwa Engineering.



HILLARY THATCHER

Managing Director, Investments

Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB)

Hillary Thatcher is Managing Director of Investments, leading the CIB's Indigenous Infrastructure team. In her role, Hillary is responsible for the CIB's engagement with Indigenous communities, advancing investments in Indigenous infrastructure projects consistent with key priority areas.

Previously Director General of Innovation and Services at Indigenous Services Canada, Hillary spent 15 years with the Ontario government in senior roles across Indigenous Affairs, Energy and Infrastructure, and Natural Resources. Hillary has a proven track record of building linkages among Indigenous, government and industry interests.

Hillary is Métis and has been an active member of Toronto's urban Indigenous community through her volunteer roles at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, Red Sky Performance, and the Downie Wenjack Fund.

Hillary graduated from Concordia University with an Master of Arts in Political Science, Indigenous Governance and has a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Government from the University of Victoria.

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Brendan Bell

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Executive Vice President,
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MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

WESTAC Spring Member Forum

April 16 & 17, 2026

Hotel Saskatchewan, Regina, SK

WESTAC Fall Member Forum

November 18 & 19, 2026

Morris J. Wosk Centre and
The Delta Hotel, Vancouver, BC