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Kaska leadership applauds Province's commitment to protecting an important part of Dena Kayeh

(DENA KAYEH, B.C.) – The Chiefs of the Kaska Nation have called the B.C. government's land use planning announcement today a significant milestone in their decades-long effort to protect their ancestral territory.

The Province has announced it is moving forward with long-awaited land use planning in partnership with five First Nations, including the Kaska, which it aims to complete within one year. In the meantime, it has put a pause on all new mineral staking within the Kaska's proposed Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) known in the Kaska language as *Dene K'éh Kusān*.

The land use planning process will allow the Kaska to clearly define areas of their territory where cultural and ecosystem values will be protected and other areas where future resource extraction such as mining may take place. The name *Dene K'éh Kusān* means "the people's way we follow," which refers to the Nation's vision of restoring Kaska values to the land and making the area a world-class protected area for all to explore and enjoy.

"The Kaska have a long-held vision for the protection of our ancestral lands, consistent with our values and laws, and we're eager to see the provincial government affirm that vision through collaborative land-use planning," said Harlan Schilling, Deputy Chief of Daylu Dena Council. "Safeguarding the heartlands of our territory in B.C. and building a thriving conservation economy will benefit future generations of Kaska and all people of the region."

"We aim to ensure our ancestral territory doesn't suffer the devastating effects of climate change and biodiversity loss we're seeing across B.C. and around the world," said Dease River First Nation Chief Myles Manygreghorses. "Keeping this special place intact is key to preserving the Kaska people's material, cultural and spiritual lives. Our vision will protect vital species like caribou and create new economic opportunities for Kaska and others in northern communities."

"This is a world-class landscape and holds tremendous potential for a conservation economy based on outdoor recreation, tourism, research, ecosystem restoration and other sustainable activities. Across Canada, Indigenous people are taking responsibility for the future of their lands and communities, and our work is an important part of that movement," said Stephen Charlie Chief of the Liard First Nation.

According to the B.C. government, approximately 20 percent of land in B.C. currently falls under some kind of protection designation. The federal and provincial governments have both committed to expanding that to 30 percent by 2030, which the Kaska support.

"Ours is a sacred responsibility. The elders teach us that if we take care of the land, the land will continue to take care of us," said Dylan Loblaw, Chief of Ross River Dena Council. "Protecting the land will help us build healthy, thriving communities for our kids and grandkids. They deserve nothing less."

“The Kaska have waited a long time for this moment. We hope that our optimism in the government’s process is well placed and that they follow through on their commitments,” said Darryl McCook, Chief of Kwadacha First Nation.

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