

Sahtu ready to negotiate land claim with feds

Patricia Saunders
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The federal government will begin land claim negotiations with Dene in the Sahtu this fall, Indian Affairs Minister Tom Siddon said Friday.

Siddon's announcement to negotiate a second regional Dene claim came less than a week after the Gwich'in ratified a \$75-million land claim in the Mackenzie Delta.

"We'll negotiate the same way the Gwich'in negotiated their settlement — chapter by chapter," said George Cleary, chief negotiator for the Sahtu Dene and newly-elected president of the Sahtu Tribal Council.

The council represents the bands and Metis locals of Colville Lake, Fort Good Hope, Norman Wells, Fort Norman and Fort Franklin.

Negotiations over the proposed 310,800-square kilometre settlement area — the largest of the five Dene-Metis areas — is expected to start in November. Like the Gwich'in claim, it will be based on the comprehensive agreement that a joint Dene-Metis assembly rejected last July.

Cleary, who is also a regional vice-chief of the Dene Nation and speaker of the Shihta Regional Council, said the decision to negotiate a separate land

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George Cleary is chief negotiator for the Sahtu Dene.

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claim does not mean the Sahtu is severing ties with the national office.

“We still have ties in terms of cultural and environmental issues but we agreed at a tribal council meeting to make our own

decisions on political matters.”

Siddon has appointed David Osborn as the federal negotiator on the Sahtu claim. Osborn was Ottawa's negotiator on the Gwich'in claim as well as on the original Dene-Metis agreement.