

## **Yukon and Alaska News**

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### **You say you want a devolution? In Yukon, it's reality**

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The term “devolution” has recently made headlines, with the draft devolution agreement between the Northwest Territories and Canada.

For Yukoners, devolution has been a reality for a decade and is a cornerstone that our government has built on to make Yukon one of the most exciting and economically thriving areas of the country.

When a new Yukon Act came into effect on April 1, 2003, it gave Yukon a greater variety of province-like powers to control land, water and resources, make laws and form policies. This devolution of responsibility for lands and resources was a turning point in self-determination and resource management for Yukon. It has resulted in significant changes in Yukon that allow us to work even more effectively with Canada to secure a place of leadership and innovation in the circumpolar world.

Since our devolution deal came into effect, Yukon has done very well. We have experienced steady prosperity, with nine consecutive years of real GDP growth, exceeding the national rate in eight of those nine years. Private-sector contributions to our economy have soared. In the mining sector, a pillar of our economy, three mines have gone into production in the past five years; six more are in permitting and 10 in advanced exploration and feasibility stages.

Mining and mineral exploration are at levels not seen since gold seekers flooded the Klondike in 1898 – people call it the “second Gold Rush.” Tourism generates more than \$200-million a year, our work force and population have reached record levels and unemployment has remained consistently lower than the national average.

Devolution gave us the opportunity to expand Yukon's role on national and international stages. Our strong presence in the North is vital for Arctic sovereignty, and Yukon brings to the table decades of international negotiating experience, an intergovernmental accord with Alaska and an active role in organizations such as the Northern Forum and the Arctic Council. We are ready to assist the federal government when it becomes chair of the council in May.

In addition to devolution, 2013 marks a number of key Yukon anniversaries. It has been 20 years since the signing of the Umbrella Final Agreement, which established a template for Yukon first nation land-claim agreements. This year is the 40th anniversary of Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow, a document presented to Pierre Trudeau that began the Yukon land-claims settlement process. As well, 2013 marks 50 years since the founding of Yukon

College, the territory's postsecondary educational institution. These anniversaries are meaningful because they demonstrate Yukon's capacity for leadership, innovation and co-operation. We are at the forefront of land-claims implementation in Canada – 11 of Yukon's 14 first nations have signed modern-day treaties and are self-governing. These agreements provide clarity and mechanisms to guide land management, development assessment and co-operative management of wildlife and renewable resources.

With our small population and remote location, Yukon does face hurdles. But we have developed an infrastructure strategy, a transportation infrastructure framework and an energy strategy to assist in finding solutions. Through Yukon College, we invest heavily in research and focus on climate-change adaptation and cold-climate innovation, which has created a secondary industry through the attraction of leading researchers and institutions.

There's still much work to do. To build on our success, we will continue to work closely with our partners – first nation, federal and other governments, the private sector, and educational and research organizations. Through our focus on economic growth and diversification, our work on devolution and land claims, and our expanding international role, Yukon is positioned for an even more exciting future. We believe that what is good for Yukon is good for Canada.

As more Canadians begin to talk about devolution, it's useful to consider our experience. For Yukon, devolution has really meant evolution, bringing an autonomy and degree of self-determination that has helped us build one of the strongest economies in the country, lead in land-claims implementation and make meaningful contributions to the nation.

Darrell Pasloski is Premier of Yukon.