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Conversation: Joanne Deneron on the Condition of the Infamous Liard Trial
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**Joanne Deneron on the Condition of the Infamous Liard Trial
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JOSLYN OOSENBRUG, CBC: The infamous Liard Trail is finally getting a much needed makeover. People who have driven the road describe it as being in such bad condition that it actually feels like you're driving through a war zone. Weight restrictions on trucks make it difficult for cheaper groceries to make their way into the community and when the region has a bout of torrential downpour like it did over the weekend; well the road becomes impassable unless you've got a 4 x 4 that is. Well this morning we've reached Joanne Deneron in Fort Liard. She owns the Liard Valley General Store and she joins us on the line this morning. Good morning, Joanne.

DENERON: Good morning, Joslyn.

CBC: So we know of course the weather has a huge impact on dirt roads throughout the Territory. What has it been like driving on the road lately?

DENERON: Well I just came from Hay River there a few days ago and I did have to use 4 x 4, but it was because they had so much gravel dumped on the road that it was so soft. So the only way that you could get through it was to put it in 4 x 4 and then even then you were slowly going on the road itself. When I was going though I met about six vehicles that were tourists and they had, one was actually a pretty big motor home and the rest were pulling trailers. So I was just wondering, like, how they made it, you know. Like one of them was just a regular truck. I couldn't tell if they had four-wheel drive or not, but you know, definitely for the huge motor home I just wonder what happened, but there has been cases on it where the people that are doing the construction on the road have had to pull the vehicles through when, I guess, they're there. They weren't stuck because I was on my way to Hay River when I saw those vehicles. So coming back about three days later there wasn't any vehicles stuck on the road.

---Laughter

CBC: Slowly, but surely I guess they made it down the highway. So I mean you mentioned that it's the gravel on the road right now that's causing the problem, but the road generally is not in great shape. How long has it been, you know, full of potholes and really difficult to drive?

DENERON: Well it's probably been about, you know, it's always had the potholes there and soft spots and it's probably been that way for over five years and then what they would normally do is just dump more gravel to fill in the soft spots and just leave it. Well at this time, you know, it just couldn't take any more and there were really big sinkholes is what was happening to it. So they've dumped all that gravel and the sinkholes just sort of seem to be getting bigger and more gravel on top of it until, you know, some vehicles had gotten stuck there. The big trucks, there used to be two carriers into Liard, Robinson Trucking and Northwest Transport. Then when Robinson Trucking came that way they got stuck really bad and that was the end of the haul for them. It's not worth their time, it's hard on their vehicles, you know. They had restrictions on the road so they decided not

to come into the community any longer. So it's just the one transportation company, Northwest Transport, or Rainbow, or Manatoulin, or whatever they call themselves, comes into the community.

CBC: So what has that meant for the community then?

DENERON: Well it was an increase in prices because their freight rate was different. So we had no choice in the community but to go with that company.

CBC: And I'm also wondering, I mean if tourists are plugging away, you know, slow going on the highway, whether you've seen any kind of impact on the tourist traffic?

DENERON: Well it's definitely detrimental because tourists are...(inaudible)...like, when they're travelling, and you know, for the people to come into Liard and just say what a road, you won't believe what we've been on, you know, and thinking that we never travel north, you know, but we do. So we know what it's like, but it's a sad state of affairs because if the government is trying to increase tourism and we've had that setback for so long there and then to try to increase it now and then we have the road condition like this, and those people talk to each other. Like, we're Twittering, we're Facebooking or whatever, but in this day and age the word gets out there about that road, don't ever go that way, you know, as you mentioned it was a war zone, and those people that called it that were very upset about it. In fact, when they got into the community of Fort Liard they stayed here for two days and decided that they didn't want to even get back in the vehicle and the only thing they did was they went across to the carwash and washed their vehicle off as good as they could and decided to stay for a couple of days before they trudged on. Now the road going south of us here to Fort Nelson is turning into a godsend because they've decided to pave more of that highway there into Fort Nelson. So we're telling them, you know, like the worst is over, it will be the 43 kilometres to the B.C. border and then things pick up because they've been working diligently on the B.C. side. So definitely there's good and bad on this road.

CBC: I understand there is some work being done on the highway though. What kind of difference is that going to make for the community?

DENERON: Well definitely it should increase the tourism rates, you know, the people should be able to have access to the community. So doing that route, you know, if they're coming in from the Alberta, Hay River way and then to come this way then make that great big loop, you know, the Dehcho connection I think it's called, then it would be worth it's while. But I think that that connection right now is sort of broken and at a standstill. You know, the few people that travel that road are probably too far gone and say well I've got no choice, we can't go back that way, you know, this is the way, or they haven't heard about the road in the rough condition it is.

CBC: Well I've got a bit of bad news for you, Joanne. It does look like there's more showers in the forecast for today. So it is going to be a bit of a soupy mess out there.

DENERON: Yes, Joslyn, that's too bad you can't hear, but we've got thunder rolling on as we speak right now. Yesterday was a beautiful day though. It was supposed to have showers and it was just a few sprinkles in the evening, but during the day it was extremely hot and humid. So we've got overcast skies, grey skies and now it looks like more rain.

CBC: It really is a mixed bag of weather for you guys, sorry to say. Alright, thank you for joining us, Joanne, and telling us a little bit about the highway and how the weather conditions have affected it. Thank you.

DENERON: Alright, well thank you.

CBC: That's Joanne Deneron in Fort Liard.