

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE
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P.O. Box 245
Hay River, N.W.T.
May 11, 1970

Mr. D. Stewart
Member of the N.W.T. Council
Hay River, N.W.T.

Dear Sir:

Going into the 3rd year now we have been operating a trading post on the Talsson River or better known as Rocher River. We have been catering to a number of natives who have been wholly self supporting up until now, in the oldest profession of trapping. These people have done very well at this and they have been able to laugh at welfare. During the past summer these people have done considerable commercial fishing so this helped alot.

Most of these people have their homes in Fort Resolution where the Government put them, so that is where most of their families stay. Those that have their families at Rocher River live in old shacks and their kids get no schooling. So it is getting now that more and more of these people are moving to Fort Resolution to be with their families and consequently will live completely on welfare. Last year these same people received approximately \$60,000 for furs they caught.

Due to the situation, it is getting so that we will be unable to keep the Trading Post open under the present conditions.

The people all say they want to live at Rocher River and they want to trap for a living, but they do not want to live fifty miles from their families. Also the ones, mostly the same people who fish commercially, feel the same.

As you are well aware I have tried, unsuccessfully, for the last two years to have the school rebuilt at Rocher River, and have at least one community in the north that is not dependent on welfare.

The new Fish Marketing Board now contributes greatly to these people, as from Rocher River they can fish daily with small boats that they have or can afford to buy, and still operate safely as from there they all have the protection of the island in storms.

N.T.C.L. will go into Rocher River anytime as it is a good harbour and there is no water problem.

Homes for the natives would be no problem to build as there is an abundance of logs available up the Talsson River, or in Fort Resolution the Government has a surplus of new Indian homes that are not being used that could be moved by barge to Rocher River, or these could be skidded across the ice in winter. Either way would be at a very low cost.

The land itself at Rocher River is good, as you are likely aware, and the school that they had there which burned, was on a cement foundation and gave no frost problems, to my knowledge.

Last year the Game Management did a certain amount of conservation work, in putting in extra dams to increase the water level above Rocher River. I understand from the natives that this has been a good start and has already shown its value in increased fur in the area.

Last winter we built a winter fish packing plant for packing frozen fish and shipping these by truck from Rocher River over forty miles of winter road to Fort Resolution and into Edmonton. The natives that did not trap constantly took this opportunity to fish and processed their fish through this plant. This past winter other fisherman also took advantage of the harbour at Rocher River and did some fishing from there.

A year ago a part wanted to lease a large amount of land at Rocher River for a large market garden, that would have added to the native payroll. I understand the Government was doing a study on all that area. Consequently the people then obtained land near Mills Lake on the MacKenzie River and are presently gardening there with help from Alberta.

The point is, do we want to make the native people self supporting or do we want to force or herd them into welfare villages such as Fort Resolution?

One native, being at Rocher River, told me he asked the Administrator at Fort Resolution to give him some lumber to repair his home at Rocher River and was told to move into Fort Resolution and we will give you a whole house and put you on welfare. Another native from Rocher River had to have dental work done. The welfare at Fort Resolution sent him to Yellowknife to have it done and on his return to Fort Resolution was told by the welfare people that he would have to pay his own transportation to Yellowknife and return as he was not a steady welfare recipient and was not intitled to any benefits. He says he was told to stop this Rocher River foolishness and move into a welfare house in Fort Resolution.

With this sort of cooperation from the Government I don't just know where anybody stand. I am quite aware that the natives will need some help from welfare, such as homes, at least in part, and medical expenses, but aside from that they can be mostly self sustained.

From Fort Resolution it is to far to trapping areas, and there are not the fish within an economical distance of Fort Resolution either for commercial fishing or for their home consumption and very little game. (game birds)

At Rocher River you have: 1. Fishing both commercial and home use, at their door step. 2. Trapping in the immediate area. 3. Hunting for moose and buffalo in the immediate area. (Last year 2 moose were shot right in the village). 4. Game birds are in abundance within one mile of the village. 5. Some employment in mining interests within 8 miles of Rocher River.

In Fort Resolution the Government buys cull fish. The commercial fisherman haul cull fish by abundance to Fort Resolution to sell to the natives for dog feed. And this is all welfare money paying for dog feed for dogs that never go on the trap line. Possibly you can tell me what the hell this is all about.

However it is hardly any use to tell you any more in this letter as I think you are well aware of the rest.

Right now the trappers are still out on the spring hunt, so it will be near the end of May before they are all in. So near the first of July we expect to be closing down

the Trading Post at Rocher River, unless developments take place to warrant keeping it open. The only thing I can see would be a school and homes.

Our plans are to send a boat in approximately July first and move all stock to Hay River. At the same time we will bring out any natives that are left there, together with their belongings to Fort Resolution.

Yours truly,

R. Steiner

C.C. Mr. Bud Orange, M.P.

Mr. Quaterowski, Superintendent of Game