



14 First Nations accept final agreement

Federal land claims negotiators look forward to the day when they can leave the Yukon

By Sara Darling
Yukon News Reporter

for good.

"There will be a time when there won't be a requirement for Indian Affairs staff in the Yukon," said Mike Whittington, one of Ottawa's top land claim negotiators.

And now, after almost 20 years of talks, that goal is one step closer to becoming a reality, he said.

After an intensive week of meetings, the 14 First Nations in

the Yukon have accepted the Umbrella Final Agreement and an accompanying self-government deal.

"We can't begin to say how happy we are," Whittington said at a news conference. "It's a switch that clicks on so many things."

Council for Yukon Indians negotiators Vic Mitander, Dave Joe and Rick Salter couldn't agree more.

"This is a major step to determining our own future," said Mitander.

Doug McArthur, director of self-government for YTG, called the achievement "remarkable and historic."

"The affirmation for First Na-

tions to govern themselves is a challenge for all governments to make sure that it all works.

"But I think we have set a framework for something that is very do-able."

The land claims agreement gives 41,000 square kilometres of land, about 8.6 per cent of the total in the territory, to the First Nations.

In addition, the First Nations will get about \$230 million and a \$25-million buy out of native exemption from taxation on reserve lands.

Details of the model self-government agreement have also been released. They include:

- * Institutions and structures

of government will be defined by the First Nations themselves through constitutions which will not be subject to approval by other levels of government.

- * First Nations will have law-making powers on settlement lands, including zoning and land development, environmental protection, as well as licensing and regulating business, trades and professional people.

- * First Nations will have select powers over their citizens, on and off settlement lands, in such areas as health, native language programs and education.

- * Federal laws, such as the Criminal Code, will continue to apply.

- * Laws of the Yukon government will continue to apply until a First Nation passes its own laws to replace them.

- * Funding for first Nations governments will be provided through multi-year funding agreements from the federal government.

- * The federal government has

agreed to negotiate arrangements on taxation three years after the proclamation of self-government legislation.

- * First Nations have agreed not to exercise law-making powers during a five-year transition period.

During that time, offences will be prosecuted by Yukon prosecutors and terms of imprisonment will be served in Yukon corrections facilities.

- * All parties must negotiate on how the agreement will be implemented to ensure that there are no future misunderstandings.

The federal government hopes to complete the text of the self-government agreement over the next few weeks.

After this work is finished, says copies will be made available to the public.

It hopes the agreement will be ratified next summer by the federal cabinet, the various First Nations and the Yukon government.

