



NEWS RELEASE

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Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Calls for Meaningful Partnership at Our Arctic Summit

On February 23, 2026, Chief Pauline Frost of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (VGFN) addressed delegates at the *Our Arctic Summit* in Whitehorse during a panel focused on First Nations leadership, rights, and stewardship in building a secure and sovereign Arctic. Chief Frost emphasized that decisions about Arctic development, infrastructure, and security must fully include the Indigenous governments who live on and carry responsibility for these lands.

VGFN is a self-governing First Nation with Final and Self-Government Agreements that affirm our authority to make laws, manage resources, and protect our culture, language, and traditions within our Traditional Territory in the North Yukon. Respect for these agreements and for Indigenous governance is essential to effective Arctic policy.

Chief Frost underscored that Arctic security begins with strong and resilient communities, including food security rooted in the health of the Vadzaih (Porcupine Caribou) and Łuk Choo (Salmon) populations that sustain our people. While investments in defence and infrastructure are important, long-term security also depends on housing, healthcare, education, emergency preparedness and local capacity.

Old Crow, home to approximately 250 year-round residents and accessible only by air, illustrates how these priorities are interconnected. During spring breakup flooding in 2025, the temporary closure of the Old Crow airport disrupted access to medevac services. Events such as this highlight the need for integrated planning that considers community infrastructure, climate impacts and emergency response systems together.

Partnership is a central pillar of sovereignty. VGFN's collaboration with northern military exercises, including Canadian Ranger patrols through VGFN Traditional Territory to Herschel Island, demonstrates how Indigenous leadership and land-based knowledge strengthen Canada's Arctic presence. On the day of the Summit, a group of Canadian Rangers departed Old Crow as part of a patrol travelling east toward Churchill, Manitoba.

Chief Frost also highlighted VGFN's investment in Air North, Yukon's airline, as an example of economic partnership that strengthens long-term resilience. With no road access, Old Crow relies entirely on-air transport for essential goods and services. Through this transformative investment made over 30 years



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ago in Air North, VGFN has helped secure reliable service, a voice in decision-making, and economic returns that supports Old Crow.

This approach to partnership was further demonstrated in 2024, when VGFN and the Government of Yukon received the Emergency Management Exemplary Service Award from Public Safety Canada. The award recognized coordinated efforts to protect Old Crow from potential flooding caused by record snowpack and ice jamming on the Porcupine River. The Unified Command Incident Management Team combined traditional knowledge, forecasting tools, and on-the-ground observation to make consensus-based decisions that safeguarded the community.

VGFN and Chief Frost reaffirmed at *Our Arctic Summit* that Arctic sovereignty is built through empowered communities, respected Indigenous governance and meaningful partnership. The Vuntut Gwitchin have safeguarded our territory for thousands of years and remain committed to protecting the land and contributing to a secure and resilient North.

Quotes

“Nothing about us without us. Indigenous governments must be full partners in decisions about Arctic security, development, and sovereignty. Our rights and our knowledge strengthen Canada’s presence in the North. Arctic security begins with healthy and resilient communities. Investments must support housing, healthcare, emergency preparedness and local capacity alongside infrastructure and defence.”
— Chief Pauline Frost, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

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