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DENE NATION DELIVERS A YEAR OF RESULTS FOR DENENDEH AND SETS THE COURSE FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Strong advocacy on water, children and families, housing, public safety and Treaty rights defined 2025–26, and the Chiefs of Denendeh have given clear direction for 2026–27 at the 56th Dene National Assembly

[OCTOBER 7, 2026 -YELLOWKNIFE, DENENDEH] — Dene Nation delivered a full year of advocacy on the priorities set by the Chiefs of Denendeh in 2025–26: water, children and families, housing, public safety and the Treaties. The year-end report was presented to delegates at the 56th Dene National Assembly, hosted by Kát’odeeche First Nation, where the Chiefs set direction for the year ahead.

“Our Chiefs and Elders gave us clear direction, and our staff delivered on it,” said Dene National Chief George Mackenzie. “The results this year reflect the hard work and commitment of the people in this organization, and the relationships we have built with our funders and partners by delivering value for the Dene.”

A year of results for Denendeh

Water remained a top priority. On July 29, 2026, the Dene National Chief and Treaty 8 Grand Chief Trevor Mercredi signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Water between Dene Nation and the Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta, covering the shared waters that flow north into Denendeh.

Acting on the direction of the Chiefs, Dene Nation also advanced a Dene-led approach to child and family services, establishing a working committee with Dene Elders at its centre and securing additional federal funding for the work. Improving the lives of Dene children, and of the generations to come, remains a core priority.

Dene Nation also carried the Dene position to the national stage. At the Assembly of First Nations Special Chiefs Assembly in December 2025, Chiefs from across Canada passed Dene Nation’s resolution calling for direct federal funding to Dene Nation and the NWT Region for all fiscal transfers, including child welfare compensation and long-term reform, so that Dene communities receive funding directly, without intermediaries. It built on the Dene Nation resolution the Assembly passed in December 2024 to ensure the fair and equitable inclusion of the Northwest Territories in the child welfare compensation and long-term reform final settlement agreement. Canada has since said it welcomes the opportunity to work with rights holders in the Northwest Territories who wish to exercise jurisdiction over child and family services.

Dene Nation’s Housing Report documented the housing crisis across Denendeh, and the Dene National Chief called for federal housing dollars to flow directly to Dene communities. Dene Nation carried forward the Chiefs’ direction on the drug crisis, pressing for Dene-led policing, treatment and healing, while its Jordan’s Principle and Non-Insured Health Benefits staff worked directly with families in communities from Aklavik to Fort Smith.

On June 2, 2026, the Dene National Chief was received by His Majesty King Charles III at Buckingham Palace, where he reminded the King that the Treaties are living agreements and invited him to visit the Northwest

“Upholding and Protecting the Rights and Interest of the Dene Nation”

Territories. Closer to home, Dene Nation stood firm against the Alberta separation referendum, pushed back when funding for residential school survivor counselling was cut, and welcomed its reinstatement.

Managing rising costs in the North

The cost of operating in the Northwest Territories has climbed steeply in recent years. Airfares, accommodation, rent, freight and the price of goods and services have all risen across Denendeh. The National Assembly of Remote Communities' Phase 1 study, completed in March 2026, found that the Northwest Territories has the highest remoteness-driven funding need in Canada, and that the four highest-cost communities in the country are all in Denendeh.

Despite these pressures, Dene Nation closed 2025–26 with a year-end surplus, the first that a Dene National Chief has been able to report in a very long time, and enters 2026–27 in a stronger financial position. Federal funders — including Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, Indigenous Services Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada — along with the Assembly of First Nations and the First Nations Information Governance Centre have renewed, and in some cases expanded, their agreements with Dene Nation. That includes new funding for the Dene-led child and family services work.

“We are a small organization with a big mandate, and we punch above our weight,” said Dene National Chief Mackenzie. “Finishing the year in surplus, with costs rising across the North, is a testament to the responsible management of every dollar entrusted to us. Dene Nation is in a good position, and we are ready to build on it and keep delivering for the Dene.”

Direction from the Chiefs for the year ahead

At the 56th Dene National Assembly, delegates set direction for the coming year through resolutions that establish the Dene Water Council, explore Dene jurisdiction over child welfare and family services, oppose the release of oil sands tailings into the waters flowing into Denendeh, and support the Dene Cultural Institute's transition and the rebuilding of the facility it lost to wildfire in 2023. Delegates also resolved to establish a Dene Think Tank, improve medical travel for patients, strengthen education in Dene communities, and assert Dene knowledge and data sovereignty.

Delegates further resolved to support the Yellowknives Dene First Nation in obtaining a conservation area to protect the Bathurst caribou herd while it is in Chief Drygeese Territory, established under Dene law and Dene knowledge and led by the Yellowknives Dene.

“This has been the best year yet. We leave the 56th Dene National Assembly with a clear mandate from our Chiefs and a stronger foundation to carry it out, and we look forward to doing even more for our people in the year ahead,” said National Chief Mackenzie. “Mahsi cho to Kát'odeeche First Nation for hosting us.”

Mahsi



George Mackenzie,
Dene National Chief, Regional Chief AFN-NT Region

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