

# **Check Against Delivery**

## **Speaking Notes**

**APEGGA President Jim Smith, P.Eng., FEC**

**Memorandum of Agreement Signing Ceremony**

**Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta**

**APEGGA Lindberg Conference Centre**

**Thursday, January 26, 2012**

Wow, that is quite the impressive and inspiring opening to what I can only describe as both an exciting and an historic ceremony.

Thank you Elder Twin and also the Driftpile Drum Group. I understand we'll be hearing more from you later this morning.

I have lived and worked for many years in Grande Prairie and have had the pleasure of working with individuals from many First Nations and so I welcome this opportunity to meet Grand Chief Richard Kappo and our other Treaty 8 guests with us here at APEGGA this morning.

You've heard it said already this morning that this is an historic event. The signing of an agreement between a self-regulating professional association, in this case, The Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta, or APEGGA, and a group of First Nations, again, in this case, Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta, is, as far as we know, a first.

And it is not an agreement that either party enters into lightly. We have both done our due diligence. We are both realistic about what can be achieved with the resources

available. But more importantly, we share a common vision of what can be accomplished, indeed, what must be accomplished here in Alberta, today, tomorrow and into our children's and grandchildren's and great-grandchildren's future.

The purpose of the Memorandum of Agreement that will be formally signed this morning is to commit to working with Treaty 8 First Nations to leverage our respective strengths.

Our strengths lie in our human and financial resources and experience with the content and logistics of science outreach to youth.

Alberta's First Nations are very youthful populations. First Nations have both the desire and the ability to encourage their youth to engage in science outreach initiatives.

I find it uniquely satisfying and motivating to be allowed to share in the First Nations' vision of "Education is our buffalo" for these are powerful words that evoke a powerful recognition of how we may move forward together.

As the official Memorandum of Agreement document states:

- Education is central to a rewarding and fulfilling life and will enable First Nations youth to contribute fully to society
- Working together to identify and employ best practices to remove barriers and create strategic opportunities that foster successful First Nations learners
- Addressing Alberta's skilled knowledge worker shortage, both Treaty 8 and APEGGA feel an obligation to inform First Nations youth of career opportunities in engineering and geoscience
- Aboriginal youth must be encouraged to stay in school and study math and science to make the pursuit of a career in engineering and geoscience a viable option

It is important to note that this Memorandum of Agreement is not just a list of good intentions. Both parties have been actively seeking opportunities to cooperate and work together towards these now officially stated goals.

For example, it has been APEGGA's privilege to have been recently invited by Treaty 8 First Nations to visit a number of schools including:

- Driftpile First Nation School
- Bigstone School
- Swan River First Nation School
- Sturgeon Lake First Nation School

Ruby Littlechild, APEGGA's Aboriginal Lead, has been working with Treaty 8 Special Education Projects Manager, Esther Giroux.

In addition to a full time staff person, APEGGA has an Aboriginal Affairs Committee staffed with Member volunteers many of whom are self-identified Aboriginals.

We have an active Mentoring program and we work closely with industry and boards of education in Calgary and Edmonton to mentor elementary and junior high school Aboriginal youth.

We also support educational outreach in science, math and technology to Aboriginal youth through a wide range of partners including:

- Science Alberta Foundation's Aboriginal Ways of Knowing crates
- the TELUS World of Science Edmonton and their Science in Motion program
- the Canmore Museum and Geoscience Centre's Stone and Bones Aboriginal youth outreach
- the UofC's Schulich School of Engineering's Minds in Motion summer camps
- the UofA Faculty of Engineering's Discover E program where thanks to support by APEGGA, science outreach has occurred in communities including:
  - Beaverlodge, Edmonton, Goodfish Lake, the Kikino Metis Settlement and St. Paul

As a Treaty 8 partner, APEGGA wants to help provide mentoring and outreach resources for First Nations youth as they study math and science.

We believe that the way to do this is by working in partnership. By working with those who have invited us into their community and with those who wish to work with us and accept the gifts of experience and knowledge that our Members have to share.

I am told that it is currently estimated that there are approximately 300,000 Aboriginal children and youth who could enter the labour force in the near future and many of them will be right here in Alberta.

APEGGA'S goal then, is to build momentum for the promising successes we've seen and to help close the gap in educational experiences and outcomes for First Nations students so that those students will have fulfilling and productive lives.

APEGGA has also been active outside the province on a national task force which was instrumental in signing a similar agreement with the Assembly of First Nations.

Our participation at the national level led to being asked to take a leadership role in developing print material and a website to encourage kids of all kinds, but particularly young girls and Aboriginal youth, to consider careers in engineering, through gaming, a popular past time for kids and youth.

APEGGA staff also has plans to attend and support the Traditional Science Celebration to be held, March 20-21st in Driftpile.

APEGGA believes that, as Professional Engineers and Geoscientists, Treaty 8 First Nations youth would enrich the nature and delivery of professional engineering and geosciences services as well as provide fresh perspectives on the challenges and solutions facing our society.

APEGGA wants Treaty 8 First Nations' youth to stay in school, continue on to post-secondary education, and consider the rewards and satisfaction to be found in a career in professional engineering or geoscience where protection of public safety and well-being and the environment the Creator has given us is paramount.

Thank you to APEGGA's membership for having the foresight to support this relationship.

Thank you to APEGGA Council and Staff for your leadership.

And thank you Grand Chief Kappo for your support and for Treaty 8's confidence in APEGGA!