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I. A. & N. D.	
CENTRAL SERVICES REGISTRY	
SEP 12 1969	
FILE No.	318-1
CORR. No.	
REFER TO	

Dr. Paul Yewchuk, M.P.,
Member for Athabasca,
House of Commons,
O t t a w a.

Ottawa 4, August 20, 1969

Dear Dr. Yewchuk:

You will recall that the Minister wrote you on June 23 informing you of the proposed meeting between members of the Athabasca Cree Band and the Superintendent of Wood Buffalo National Park. This meeting had been arranged to discuss the complaints by the Band against Warden [redacted] who is responsible for enforcing regulations in the Fort Chipewyan area of the Park.

Mr. Chrétien will be out of town for some time and has asked me to inform you of the results of that meeting. As I shall be referring on occasion to specific complaints, I am attaching a copy of the original petition for your reference.

After reviewing the case, I can readily say that, for the most part, the complaints are unfounded. During the meeting it was difficult to determine the exact nature of each complaint and the number of times incidents like this had occurred. This observation particularly applies to complaints 1, 2, 5, 7 and 8. Number 7, for example, was based on a second-hand complaint and the person who submitted it was not sure of the details but it apparently referred to an incident involving one of the warden patrol cabins in the Park. Several hunters had gained access through a window and the items they cached there were ordered removed by the Superintendent.

Complaints 3 and 4, which referred to the same case, are especially interesting because of the contrast between what was charged and the truth of the matter. [redacted] were not charged for snaring rabbits but one was charged and convicted for taking muskrats out of season and trapping fisher, which is a protected species. [redacted] the actual complainant, [redacted]. He has been charged by the Alberta Provincial authorities for buying illegal furs. The case comes up in September.

[redacted] the complainant in number 6, was in town but did not attend the meeting. However, the details of the incident were available from an R.C.M.P. constable who was with [redacted] at the time. [redacted] had set a net across a creek completely blocking boat access. The Park Warden quite properly asked him to reset it so boats could pass. When the Warden later returned, the floats had been removed but the net had been left. Thus, the Warden ran over the net before he noticed it. He informed [redacted] at the time and was told that since it was an old net, the loss of it did not matter.

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The Band members present admitted that the petition had been drawn-up, and circulated by three people, none of whom were present at the meeting and two do not have hunting or trapping privileges in the Park. One of the three is [redacted] referred to above. His motives are easily perceived but those of the other two could not be determined.

The previous record of [redacted] indicates he is an able and conscientious warden. In fact, his appointment to Wood Buffalo National Park was based on his previous very satisfactory record with us and with the Alberta Forest Service. While serving with the latter, he had considerable experience in dealing with the Indian people in the north. Unfortunately, the previous warden at Fort Chipewyan had been lax in enforcing the Park regulations with the result that [redacted] appears severe by comparison. About the only attribute [redacted] may have lacked is the very large amount of tact needed to deal with this unusual and sensitive situation.

At the meeting it became clear that the petition was actually a manifestation of a very complex problem facing the Indians in the Fort Chipewyan area today. This problem is basically one of economics and cannot be solved by not enforcing the Park regulations or by transferring a conscientious warden. The situation obviously requires more study and more dialogue with the Band. The essential point is that the area does not produce sufficient fur bearing animals to support the increasing numbers of Indians who are trapping and it is necessary to ensure that certain species of fur bearing animals in Wood Buffalo National Park are not depleted below the optimum level for reproduction purposes. This is done by limiting the number of certain species that can be taken in each trapping area, complete prohibition from taking endangered species and enforcement of our Game Regulations to ensure that our game management aims will be realized. Quite naturally some of the Indians find it difficult to understand policies which appear to be depriving them of a portion of their livelihood. Further discussions with the Cree Band should help to clear up any misconceptions about our policies. Hopefully such discussions will also serve to obtain the co-operation of the Band in seeking a permanent solution to the basic problem of the imbalance of hunters and trappers versus supply of game and fur bearing animals in the Park.

Desirous as I am, Dr. Yewchuk, to ensure that the rights of the Indians are not infringed upon, it is clear that the enforcement of the Park Game Regulations is necessary to preserve the resource which benefits the trappers. To remove [redacted] from the area merely because he is carrying out his assigned duties, would neither solve the problem nor be fair to him. The Regional Director of the National and Historic Parks Branch in Calgary has informed the Athabasca Cree Band that their request for [redacted] removal cannot be met.

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I appreciate your bringing this matter to my attention as it has certainly led to a close look at our game management policies in Wood Buffalo National Park. Our present Game Regulations appear to be best suited to serve the aims of this National Park and the current special interests of the Indians. I can assure you that we will work closely with the Cree Band on any problems that may affect the economic situation of the Indian trappers in the Fort Chipewyan area.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. GORDON

J. H. Gordon,
Acting Deputy Minister