



image courtesy of Google Maps

The Salmita airstrip, about 250 kilometres northeast of Yellowknife, was first constructed to service a now-closed gold mine. The federal government has quietly decided to dismantle a significant portion of the 5,000-foot runway, a move that concerns Gary Vivian, president of the NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines.

Plundered airstrip comes as a shock

In a territory that suffers from the largest infrastructure deficit in the country, the move by the federal government to plunder the Salmita airstrip comes as a shock.

Southern Canada and other developed jurisdictions have benefited from continuous development of infrastructure over their history, and it is the cumulative effects of this infrastructure that has served Canada's economic growth since the railway was built across Canada in the 1800s.

In contrast, the NWT and Nunavut suffer the largest infrastructure deficit in Canada, with a dearth of roads, ports, airports and power grids. It's this deficit that contributes to the higher cost of living and doing business here in the North.

That's why addressing high costs with infrastructure investment has risen to become a priority of all governments in Canada, and especially the North.

Thus it comes with great surprise to learn that the federal government – without any consultation – made the decision to dismantle a significant portion of an airstrip located in the mineral rich area around Courageous Lake, about 250 kilometres northeast of Yellowknife. The Salmita airstrip was first constructed to service a now-closed gold mine. It has continued to be an important staging point to support exploration and project development in the northeast NWT and western Nunavut.

At 5,000 feet long, the Salmita airstrip matched the length so commonly built across the North to allow efficient and safe use by large transport aircraft like the Hercules or Boeing 737.

Salmita has become an essential link in an exploration supply chain into the NWT and Nunavut's hinterland, with companies able to transport freight to the airstrip by aircraft year round, or by truck over our seasonal ice road. From Salmita,

smaller aircraft can ferry essential goods and supplies further afield into even more remote and rugged regions. It also provides a landing strip for emergencies.

It has been shocking to learn that Indian and Northern Affairs Canada is in process of removing significant portions of the airstrip, and are on a path to reduce its length to a mere 3,500 feet. This will prevent use by larger, more cost-efficient aircraft and, with access now relegated to smaller aircraft, will increase the landed cost of freight and thus exploration costs in this mineral rich area of the North.

The damage to the existing airstrip carries other consequences. The NWT government is working to advance an all-weather road through the Slave Geological Province.

The strategic location of the Salmita airstrip – within a stone's throw of that proposed road alignment – makes the strip a critical piece of infrastructure for the construction phases on that road to assist in bringing in supplies and equipment as needed, and adding to safety as well.

In addition, the removal of a prime piece of infrastructure reduces the value of mineral properties in the surrounding area, as their logistical costs will now be higher.

At a time when the North is trying to build its own economic future, infrastructure investment is critical.

Having one directorate within government removing critical infrastructure when others within the same government are acknowledging the importance of new infrastructure investment is nonsensical.

This policy and practice of erasing the positive advances we have made needs to stop. This type of poor decision-making will affect investment in the NWT and Nunavut.



**GUEST
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