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Geo-mapping for Energy and Minerals: A “For Northerners, By Northerners” approach to indigenous engagement activities

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The Geo-Mapping for Energy and Minerals (GEM) program is the Government of Canada’s \$100 million initiative to significantly improve the geoscience of the Canada’s North. GEM activities provide the fundamental, regional geoscience knowledge that northerners and industry can use for land use planning and responsible resource development decisions. With northern energy and mineral resources potentially being as abundant as those in the South, an opportunity exists to create prosperity for Northerners by supporting the development of a sustainable, vibrant northern economy.

GEM activities target areas of the North where critical geoscience knowledge gaps exist. The data and knowledge collected by GEM activities are all made available to the public at no cost. By accessing and using the knowledge GEM produces, northerners and industry are better positioned to balance resource development with other considerations when they collectively develop policies and make investment and sustainable land use decisions.

The GEM program leverages its constitutionally required duty to consult indigenous peoples to achieve program objectives. Strategic engagement of Northerners through the GEM program is occurring through innovative approaches, such as by soliciting advice from our Advisory Group of Northerners, by launching a multidisciplinary grant call and by undertaking extensive engagement with communities across the North throughout a project’s lifecycle – before, during and after field work occurs. Community visits represent an opportunity to discuss the history of the local geology and preliminary activity results with community members and these experiences can help them be engaged and active in decisions affecting land-use and resource development.

Where feasible, GEM provides job opportunities and training for northerners in a field setting in its field camps. In some cases, pre-field training is offered to community members to lower barriers for hiring. Even in positions that do not require geoscience expertise, the experience and skills gained by actively participating in a GEM activity also helps to develop the communities’ familiarity with and understanding of geoscience initiatives.

The program is building on lessons learned throughout the years and works with northern collaborators to explore new opportunities for collaboration that increase relevance and accessibility of GEM results to Northerners. Success to-date includes the integration of GEM results with existing spatial data

repositories to support a “by Northerners for Northerners” approach to regulatory, resource development and land-use decisions.

