

Purpose

This briefing provides an overview of the proposed **First Nation Survey Authority (FNSA)**, a new First Nations-led body that would assume legal authority to approve land surveys on First Nation Lands governed under a Land Code or participating Self-Governing First Nation. This initiative is designed to remove long-standing barriers in land development, support self-determination, and improve alignment between land governance, surveys, and registry processes.

Background and Rationale

Under current federal processes, First Nations must obtain survey instructions and approvals from the Surveyor General of Canada before proceeding with most land development, housing, or leasing projects. These steps often delay timelines, increase costs, and are not well aligned with the governance and operational realities of self-governing First Nations.

In response, the Lands Advisory Board is proposing to establish an FNSA modelled after provincial examples like the Land Title and Survey Authority of British Columbia. The FNSA would work alongside the new First Nation Land Governance Registry (FNLGR) to create a fully integrated, Nation-governed land system.

Vision and Mission

- Vision: A trusted First Nations-led authority with the legal mandate to approve surveys, enabling faster, culturally grounded, and legally recognized land development.
- Mission: To modernize how survey approvals are handled, reducing delays, building professional capacity, and supporting economic development on First Nation Lands.

Key Benefits for First Nations

- **Faster Project Delivery:** Federal survey instructions are no longer needed on most internal parcel boundaries (e.g., subdivisions, leases, housing lots).
- **Improved Accuracy:** Ensures parcel boundaries in survey plans align with the Registry, reducing legal risk and administrative confusion.
- **Cost Efficiency:** Reduces reliance on federal staff, with projected savings equivalent to three full-time federal surveyors annually.
- **Simplified survey standards:** Streamline the standards for surveys while allowing for flexibility.
- **First Nation-Specific Standards:** These standards allow First Nations to shape how survey standards are applied to their lands while upholding professional standards.
- **Capacity Building:** Work with the Association of Canada Lands Surveyors (ACLS) to allow for provincially licensed surveyors a fast track option to obtain the legal authority to work on First Nation Lands while being regulated by the ACLS.

Governance and Legal Framework

The FNSA would operate independently, under the oversight of the Lands Advisory Board, with shared administration and infrastructure alongside the FNLGR. Legal authority would be established through:

- Amendments to the Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management Act, enabling the FNSA to be a regulatory body alongside the FNLGR.
- Targeted amendments to the Canada Lands Surveys Act, allowing the FNSA's Director of Surveys to approve plans and issue instructions on First Nation Land.

The Surveyor General would continue to manage the Canada Lands Survey Records (CLSR) where all plans would still be recorded.

Next Steps

1. Confirm Legal Path: Finalize legislative and regulatory amendments.
2. Engage Nations: Identify pilot communities for staged rollout of FNSA services.
3. Formalize Partnerships: With the Association of Canada Lands Surveyors and federal departments.
4. Build Capacity: Support First Nation based survey training and professional development.

Closing

This is a First Nation driven opportunity to remove systemic obstacles and take control over how our lands are surveyed, mapped, and developed. The FNSA will ensure that land governance systems work for First Nations, not against them, by embedding our values, timelines, and priorities into the foundation of land management.

For more information or to discuss how your First Nation can participate in the rollout of the FNSA, please contact:

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