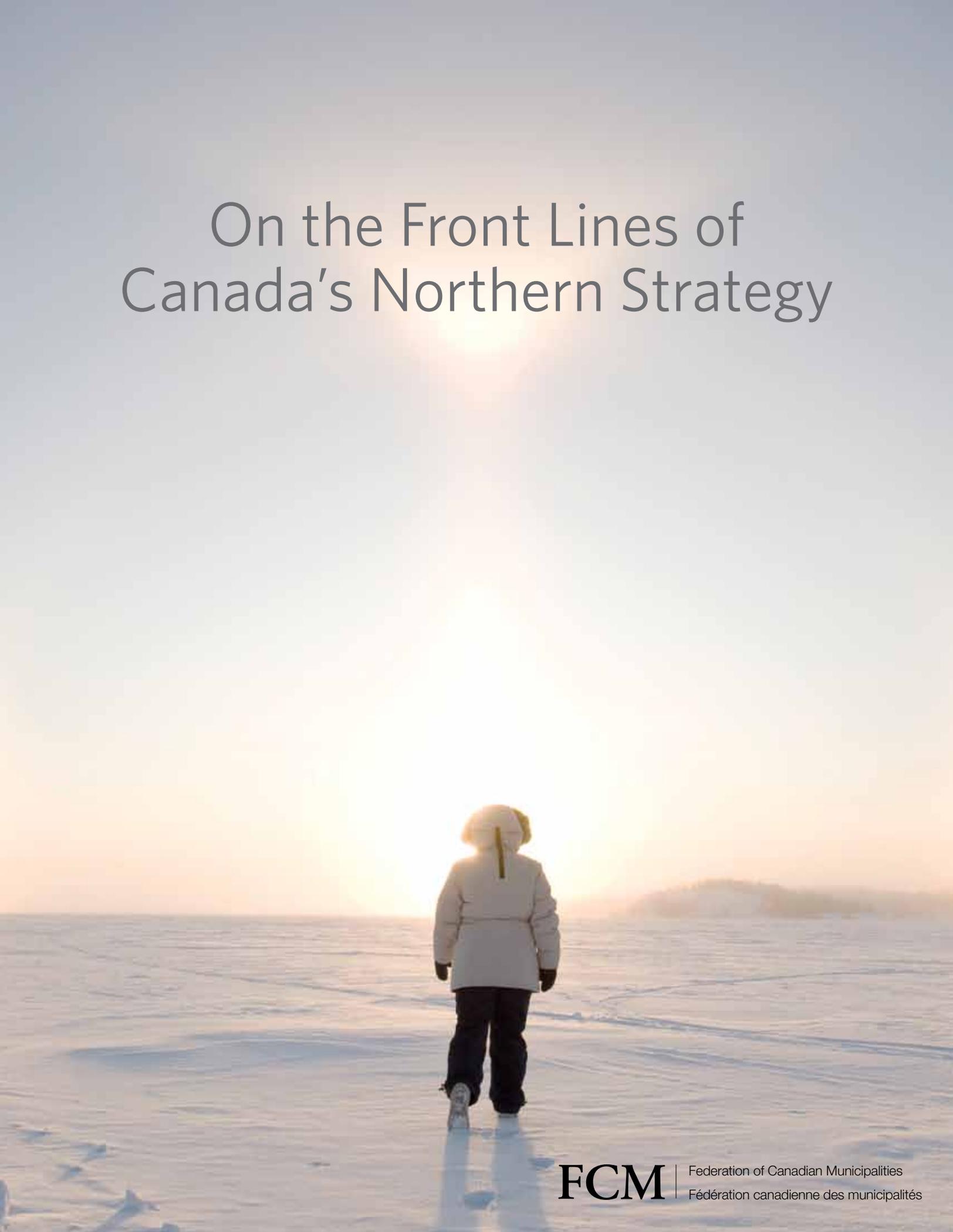


# On the Front Lines of Canada's Northern Strategy



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**FCM** | Federation of Canadian Municipalities  
Fédération canadienne des municipalités

# Message from the President of FCM

The North is essential to Canada's identity, security and economic development, but somehow we have failed as a country to invest in a long-term vision of its future.

To this day, thousands of Northerners remain trapped in almost Third World living conditions, lacking the infrastructure and services to support Canada's growing economic, military and environmental priorities in the region. As this report shows, nowhere are the destructive effects of short-term, ad-hoc policy decisions clearer than in Canada's North.

A strong Canada starts with strong communities. As mayors and councillors, we know that building communities does not happen overnight. It takes a long-term vision – and sustained investments – to build the basic public services Canadians need to raise their families and expand their businesses. These investments are necessary to support national priorities from defense to trade to environmental protection.

The Government of Canada's Northern Strategy provides an excellent starting point for building a new vision for the North. Now the federal government must work closely with front-line municipal leaders to develop a long-term plan to build the infrastructure necessary to sustain northern communities. This plan must also be driven by the imperative to adapt to a changing climate. We must make the most of every dollar invested in the region, particularly by leveraging the billions of dollars in military investments to lay the foundation for sustained growth and prosperity in northern communities. This can only be achieved through greater partnerships between governments.

Success in the North is attainable, but we must start today.

Our sincere thanks to FCM'S Northern Forum, the authors of the report, and all those who supported and assisted in its preparation.

Hans Cunningham

President, Federation of Canadian Municipalities

**Ken Coates** is the Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Waterloo. He was raised in Whitehorse, Yukon, and completed his PhD in Canadian history at the University of British Columbia. He is a well-known historian specializing in the history of the Yukon and the Canadian North. He has worked at universities across Canada and around the world, including the University of Victoria; University of Northern British Columbia; University of Waikato, New Zealand; University of New Brunswick; and the University of Saskatchewan.

Ken has written and spoken widely on Arctic and Aboriginal issues, serving as a consultant for governments, Aboriginal organizations and international agencies. He is the author and co-author of numerous books on the North, most recently *Arctic Front: Defending Canada in the Far North*, which won the 2009 Donner Prize for books on Canadian Public Policy.

For almost 20 years, **Greg Poelzer** has been an enthusiastic advocate for northern and international post-secondary education and research. His passion for northern politics and development grew out of his experience as a doctoral student at the University of Alberta where he taught political science in aboriginal social work programs. In 1991, he spent four months in Siberia working in remote Indigenous communities, and has been to Russia more than 20 times since. Prior to his current position at the University of Saskatchewan, Poelzer was chair of the Department of Political Science at UNBC and served as the founding chair of the first bachelor's degree program in northern studies in Canada.

In 2003, Poelzer joined the Department of Political Studies at the University of Saskatchewan and was appointed the inaugural dean of undergraduate studies of the University of the Arctic (UArctic), an international consortium of 110 learning institutions from the eight Arctic states. He provided visionary leadership in the development of the circumpolar studies curriculum which has grown from 66 students internationally in 2003 to more than 5000 by 2008.

This September, Poelzer was appointed interim director of the International Centre for Governance and Development of the University of Saskatchewan.



## Executive Summary

Throughout its history, Canada has had an on-again, off-again fascination with the North. These sporadic and short-lived periods of interest were usually sparked by international military endeavors or the chance to profit from the North's vast natural resources.

In Ottawa, one government after another failed to turn any one of these episodes into a sustained vision for the North. As a result, Canada never developed a long-term strategy to protect its national interests in the region or improve the almost Third World living conditions that persist in many communities to this day.

The northern territories of Canada are often perceived as empty, with little in the way of cultural and economic life; the reality could not be more different. The Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut are home to a growing population of over 100,000 Canadians. Most communities are well over 100 years old, with rich social and cultural histories. The three territories and the provincial North are also the site of major natural resource industries, including mining and energy, as well as important manufacturing and tourism centers. Canadians in the North contribute more than \$7 billion to the Canadian economy.

Now the North is back in the spotlight, and there's reason to hope this time the fascination may be longer lasting. The question is whether we will put the opportunity to better use.

The severe impact of climate change and the growing desire of countries to access the North's key trade routes and untapped natural resources have fueled an international debate about the North's future. In Ottawa, parties across the political spectrum have made northern issues a priority, and the current federal government has put more emphasis on the North than any other in recent memory.

What Ottawa needs now is a true partnership with northern communities. It needs a concrete plan and timetable for investing in northern infrastructure. And it also needs a direct role for locally-elected municipal leaders in its agenda for the North. The federal government needs to work more closely with front-line municipal

leaders to build the infrastructure necessary to sustain their communities and support new industry, tourism, research, and military activities.

Without adequate fiscal tools, northern municipalities are struggling to provide the quality roads and bridges, clean drinking water, and community facilities that are the backbone of a strong economy and a decent quality of life. Municipal infrastructure is increasingly under assault by climate change, which is:

- destroying the ice roads that are a life-line for many remote communities
- eroding shorelines in front of households, businesses and public structures long protected by pack ice that is now breaking up earlier and earlier every season
- melting the permafrost that sits below local streets, bridges, and community buildings

Recent federal investments are helping, but they are not enough to build the modern infrastructure and transportation linkages northern communities need to grow stronger and more secure over the long-term. Given its current fiscal constraints, it is at best uncertain whether or not the federal government will increase these investments in the near term.

The surest way to jumpstart the long-term infrastructure investments needed in northern communities is to leverage the billions of dollars in new military spending intended to bolster Canada's northern sovereignty. This would in fact be consistent with the federal government's 2007 Northern Strategy, which laid out a vision for the North that integrates an increased military presence with building healthier communities, protecting the environment, and diversifying the regional economy.

It's time Canada caught up. We need to make the most of every dollar we invest in the North.

In the past, military investments in Canada's North were made hastily, usually under the pressures of war or the prodding of our American ally. The current situation – without the threat of imminent invasion or attack, and with a broader sense of Canada's northern interests and responsibilities – holds better prospects for long-term planning.

Other countries, including Russia, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Greenland and the United States, have used military investments to improve northern community infrastructure. Properly directed, these investments can underpin economic development and provide a foundation for stabilization and growth.

It's time Canada caught up. We need to make the most of every dollar we invest in the North. We need to define success as more than a short-term increase in drilling, mining and projecting military power. We need to lay the foundation for sustained growth and prosperity in northern communities to lift northerners out of poverty while supporting Canada's long-term economic and military interests in the region.

The first step is for the federal government to sit down with its provincial, territorial and municipal counterparts to define local needs and search out opportunities

where coordination between governments would benefit communities and support our national interests.

This would foster local support for new economic and military initiatives and save tax dollars by eliminating duplication and overlap in federal, territorial, and municipal investments.

The second step is to develop a coordinated, long-term strategy for protecting, improving and expanding the infrastructure necessary to build secure, sustainable communities in a secure, sustainable North.

By acting now and acting together, governments can leverage new investments and public attention to protect our long-term interests in the North and give the next generation of northerners the future they deserve. It's too important an opportunity to waste.

## Recommendations

Looking specifically at opportunities for northern communities, and building a more comprehensive view of what Canada needs to do in the areas of quality of life, infrastructure, sovereignty and defence, three key recommendations emerge. Underpinning all of these recommendations, however, is a realization that Canada must revamp its approach to the North, to create a new northern vision.

While we applaud ourselves for being a northern nation and while a significant portion of Canada's past and future prosperity rests on northern resources, we lag behind the rest of the world in developing and incorporating the North into the nation. There is a great deal to be done – but it must be done as part of an aggressive, assertive and proud national strategy to rediscover our collective northern obligations, and to build a North ready for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### 1. Develop a long-term plan to invest in northern infrastructure

Canada needs a precise statement of the infrastructure needs and local aspirations of northern communities, and then a long-term plan to meet these identified needs.

The Government of Canada must work with its provincial, territorial and municipal partners to undertake this inventory and then develop and fund a long-term plan to improve core infrastructure in the North that will support community, military and commercial needs, and ultimately support and strengthen our sovereignty claims over the region.

This plan should not take the form of a community-by-community shopping list, but rather a description of the needs and requirements of northern communities, a set of standards connected to what southern Canadians take for granted and consistent with international circumpolar standards.

## 2. Make Canada's North the world leader in climate change adaptation

Many needs are driven by the imperative to adapt to a changing climate. A long-term infrastructure plan for the North would make Canada a world leader in developing the strategies, technologies and financing needed to adapt to climate change – lessons that could be shared and exported to the rest of the globe.

Canadians need to know – in detail – what is required to bring northern services and infrastructure up to national and international standards, and to do so with climate change as a key and new driver.

## 3. Use smart military investments as the backbone for building the New North

Once (or if) the Government of Canada decides that it must actively and aggressively project its sovereignty over the North through military presence, it must recognize the logistical challenges of protecting the North and should undertake a major infrastructure initiative in Northern Canada.

Protecting Canada's northern sovereignty has been tied to billions of dollars in new military investments. In order to implement and measure the progress of the Northern Strategy, the federal government must provide a full accounting of all investments intended to support the strategy across federal departments.

These investments should be developed with civilian and private sector interests in mind and should therefore form the foundation for long-term development in the region. Some of the projects – like the Dempster Highway before it – could drive integrated strategies supporting military training operations, human capacity building and infrastructure development at the same time.

### *Information technology*

It is always assumed that major infrastructure investments begin with huge ticket items, like roads and railways. Led or supported by the Canadian Forces and local municipalities, the Government of Canada should begin instead by building a world-leading information technology infrastructure for remote regions, focusing in particular on service access and bandwidth improvement. Doing this with Canadian business could help produce a global business opportunity. Creating a next generation information technology network to provide a wide range of services – e-government, e-entertainment/e-culture, e-health, e-education, remote work, etc. – will improve the quality of life in the North, and connect the region to the country and the world very effectively. The effective provision of IT services across the North should become a hallmark of Canada's 21<sup>st</sup> century commitment to the country's remote citizens, as well as any military stationed there.

*Make partnership official policy*

The Canadian Forces are strongly committed to working closely with communities. Properly empowered by the Government of Canada, the

Canadian Forces would collaborate with local and regional authorities on the development of shared strategies for regional development. This already happens on a minor community-level scale, with generally good results. There is little doubt that the Canadian Forces would embrace a northern-wide responsibility for building the tools of northern defence and northern nation – and community-building at the same time. It is important the northern communities understand, in full, the military's plans for infrastructure and development in northern regions and that these aspirations are coordinated with the needs of communities in the North. If nothing else, such coordination will ensure that northern people are not surprised by military announcements and that any Canadian Forces spending is designed to maximize the benefits for the North.

There are great opportunities for Canadians, including the military, to learn from northerners. The Canadian Rangers, which draw heavily on Indigenous participants in the North, provide an exemplary illustration of the national benefits of calling on northerners for help. This model can be expanded for military and strategic purposes, providing additional opportunities for northerners to engage with their country and for the nation to benefit from northern experience.

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