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**UNIQUE GROUP FROM JAPAN TO CANOE THE YUKON RIVER**

WHITEHORSE –Tourism and Culture Minister Elaine Taylor is delighted to welcome a unique group of outdoor enthusiasts to Yukon. Twenty-two Japanese individuals including four wheelchair bound participants and Japanese media are paddling the Yukon River on an eight-day canoe trip.

The Department of Tourism and Culture provided \$8,000 and the Canadian Tourism Commission provided \$8,000 toward the media familiarization tour in partnership with Earth Works Society and the Canoe Association for the Disabled in Japan.

“On behalf of the Yukon government it is a pleasure to welcome all those participating in this distinctive outing,” Taylor said. “Their vision to see a dream come true will certainly be an inspiration to others as they embark on a rewarding challenge sure to be catalogued as a lifetime achievement.” The media coverage of this unique adventure will be documented by Japanese media, giving international exposure about Yukon to a growing market, Taylor added.

Eiho Otani is the organizer of the trip and founder of Earth Works Society. As a highly acclaimed news station documentary reporter, his work has focused on nature, giving increased public awareness toward the conservation of global environments.

Tomosuke Noda contributed to the founding of the Canoe Association for the Disabled in Japan. He is dedicated to supporting related activities both in Japan and abroad. As an accomplished canoeist and novelist, Noda has visited Yukon on several previous occasions.

“The Yukon River is a haven for all canoeists in Japan,” Otani said. “Every Japanese canoeist, physically disabled or not, has a dream to visit Yukon to canoe. Noda-san and I want to help make that dream come true.”

The organizers used the \$16,000 in financial assistance from the Yukon government and the Canadian Tourism Commission for travel and outfitter expenses, including professional guides to accompany the group on their excursion.

The group left Whitehorse Aug. 21 and is scheduled to arrive in Little Salmon Village on Aug. 29.

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