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Northern Lighthouse Project Shines New Light on Space Weather and Geomagnetic Storms

(YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES) On Friday night an array of five Northern Lighthouses will illuminate in the capital of the Northwest Territories, marking the official launch of the Northern Lighthouse Project, a community outreach initiative dedicated to raising local awareness of space weather, geomagnetic storms and the science and splendor of the Northern Lights.

A Northern Lighthouse is a specially-designed rooftop beacon equipped with a colour-changing LED lighting system. Standing just 48 inches tall, these little lighthouses have a big job to alert the community when active space weather is in the forecast.

“What a phenomenal way to celebrate the peak of the Solar Cycle” says James Pugsley, President of the Astronomy North Society and a proud Northern Lighthouse keeper. “Yellowknife is the first community in the world to install an early warning system for active space weather.”

Northern Lighthouses communicate tonight’s space weather forecast using three colours: blue indicates overnight geomagnetic field conditions will be calm; green indicates conditions will be quiet with unsettled periods (which is normal, and good for auroras), and when the beacon glows red, watch for geomagnetic storms in the hours ahead.

Geomagnetic storms are large but brief magnetic field disturbances known to spark vibrant displays of Northern Lights across the North and across Canada for many hours. Most storms occur following the impact from a Coronal Mass Ejection, a high-speed gust of solar wind that slams into the geomagnetic field 2-4 days after an Earth-directed solar eruption.

“Northern Lighthouses will benefit residents and visitors alike,” says Colin Dempsey, President of the Northern Frontier Visitors Association. “Raising awareness about geomagnetic storms and the conditions that cause auroras will improve everyone’s chances of seeing active space weather events in the skies above Yellowknife.”

The Northern Lighthouse Project is led by Astronomy North, in partnership with the Northern Frontier Visitors Association and the NWT Mining Heritage Society. With the help of local partners and sponsors, Northern Lighthouses will raise \$20,000 over five years to support the design and construction of two commemorative Northern Lighthouses in Yellowknife – the Con Lighthouse, and the Giant Lighthouse – structures that will support local tourism, commemorate mining history and serve as iconic attractions in the capital of the Northwest Territories.

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“This is a great way to celebrate the past as we build Yellowknife’s future,” says Walt Humphries, President of the NWT Mining Heritage Society. “As iconic symbols go, headframes and lighthouses definitely have a lot in common.”

Northern Lighthouses have been installed at the Gallery of the Midnight Sun (Old Town), Sushi North (Downtown), Northland Utilities (Range Lake), Kingland Ford (Old Airport Road) and the Northern Frontier Visitors Centre (Frame Lake).

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