



LAKE BABINE NATION

Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The T̓silhqot̓'in Nation, Lake Babine Nation and Carrier Sekani First Nations call for critical revisions to British Columbia's Forestry Intentions Paper

T̓silhqot̓'in, Lake Babine & Carrier Sekani Territories: On July 6, 2021, British Columbia wrote to First Nations across the Province outlining its plans for Indigenous engagement to move forward with a new initiative called Modernizing Forest Policy, building off of a similarly titled Forestry Intentions Paper released by Minister Conroy in June 2021.

Our Nations call on the Province to significantly rethink and revise the Forestry Intentions Paper content that is intended to address Crown Indigenous reconciliation, and commit to a process to co-draft a revised version of the Paper with our Nations, other interested First Nations, and the First Nations Forestry Council. The revised version of the Paper must set out how forestry laws and policies will be changed to address our Aboriginal title and rights in a manner consistent with the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (the "Declaration") and BC's own *Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* ("DRIPA").

The Forestry Intentions Paper was developed without Indigenous participation. This contravened the Province's own best practices, and the requirements of s. 3 of DRIPA, of co-developing legislation and policies with Indigenous peoples that deeply affect our Aboriginal title and rights and futures as Indigenous nations.

The outcome of this lack of process is an impoverished take on Crown Indigenous reconciliation, one that falls far too short of the Province's own stated and legislated commitments. The Forestry Intentions Paper also fails to identify the necessary measures that the Province will need to take with Indigenous nations to change forestry laws and policies in British Columbia so that they are consistent with, and implement, the minimum legal standards set out in Declaration. For example, the Forestry Intentions Paper only contemplates increasing the share of Indigenous participation in the forest sector without addressing the following more fundamental changes that are required:

- shifting from longstanding denial of Aboriginal title to actively implementing Aboriginal title and jurisdiction, including through the transition towards land returns to Indigenous peoples and joint Crown-Indigenous forestry management;

- managing forestry in a way that protects and enhances the ability of Indigenous nations and our members to be able to meaningfully exercise our rights and uphold our cultural values, including by understanding and taking into account cumulative effects; and
- significantly improving forestry revenue-sharing with affected Indigenous nations.

The Forestry Intentions Paper does not commit the Province to this transformative work. It does not consider, let alone address, Aboriginal title, cumulative effects, or revenue-sharing. By refusing to plan for a thoughtful and orderly transition to implementing title, rights and UNDRIP, the Paper will promote conflict, litigation, and economic uncertainty. We call on the Minister Conroy, the Premier and Cabinet to rethink this flawed approach and begin working with our Nations to co-develop a substantially revised Forestry Intentions Paper that takes into account the issues outlined above. We know that we can do better. We look forward to working with the Province to help develop a shared and prosperous future that is truly reflective of Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in British Columbia.

Quotes:

Nits'il?in (Chief) Joe Alphonse, Tribal Chair, T̓silhqot'in National Government

“We are a Nation with recognized Aboriginal rights and title and yet the province continues to fail to get with the times and start working with us to ensure that Indigenous voices and priorities are considered and accounted for in the modernization of forest policy in BC. The province likes to boast about its adoption of UNDRIP and yet we don't see it reflected in this Forestry Intentions process to address longstanding and fundamental issues that were at the heart of our Supreme Court decision. The secrecy and rush to make changes to forest policies while our Nations are busy dealing with wildfires and COVID is unacceptable. We call on Minister Conroy and the Premier to show leadership and commit to addressing the tough issues head-on and in meaningful collaboration with us.”

Chief Murphy Abraham, Lake Babine Nation

“We are at a defining moment in the development of relations between the Crown and Indigenous Peoples in British Columbia – one that is shaped by the historic Supreme Court of Canada's *Tsilhqot'in Nation* decision on Aboriginal Title in 2014, and the Province's commitment under the *Declaration Act* to implement UNDRIP. British Columbia's forestry regime and economy must significantly transform in response to these developments, but the recently published Forestry Intentions Paper flat out ignores them. This is not a roadmap for a more just and robust future together that we expect the Premier and Minister Conroy to build with us, but rather a ringing endorsement of the status quo that ensures continuing conflict and uncertainty in our forests.”

Learn more:

Modernizing Forest Policy in British Columbia

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/forestry/competitive-forest-industry/modernizing_forestry_in_bc_report.pdf

Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia – Tsilhqot'in Title Decision:
<https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/14246/index.do>

Tsilhqot'in National Government
<https://www.tsilhqotin.ca/>

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