



NEWS RELEASE

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Tsilhqot'in Nation
Office of the Premier
Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

Tsilhqot'in Nation, B.C. strengthen relationship

NEMIAH VALLEY – The Tsilhqot'in Nation, Premier John Horgan and five B.C. ministers gathered on Tsilhqot'in Title Land to discuss opportunities under the Gwets'en Nilt'i Pathway Agreement to further reconciliation and Tsilhqot'in self-determination.

The agreement is the framework for Tsilhqot'in Nation, B.C. and Canada to bring transformative change to the lives of the Tsilhqot'in people and to the relationship with the Crown. It was signed in 2019, following the historic 2014 Supreme Court of Canada declaration of Aboriginal title for the Tsilhqot'in Nation over 1,900 square kilometres of land in the caretaker area of the community of Xení Gwet'in.

“Overall, we had a very positive few days of meetings with the Premier and cabinet ministers. We have had a long-standing relationship with Premier Horgan that extends well before he was premier,” said Chief Joe Alphonse, Tl'etinqox and Tsilhqot'in National Government Tribal Chair. “In our opinion, he has been one of the better premiers that has led British Columbia. A wide scope of issues was addressed on Title Lands. Governance isn't just about resource extraction – it's about our people. We must keep the social well-being of our people at the forefront of the work we do as leaders.”

Premier Horgan and colleagues travelled to the Tsilhqot'in Declared Title Area on Sept. 21, 2022, to spend two days engaged in discussions on collaboration, shared decision-making, and social and cultural priorities that support the health and wellness of the Nation and the six Tsilhqot'in communities: Tl'esqox, ʔEsdilagh, Yunešit'in, Tl'etinqox, Tšideldel and Xení Gwet'in. The event was held at the Nemiah Valley Lodge, which is an economic initiative owned and operated by the Xení Gwet'in Government. The visit also included cultural activities and community events in the spirit of celebrating the enduring cultural practices of the Tsilhqot'in people. A community dinner was held where Premier Horgan presented repatriated Tsilhqot'in baskets to the Tsilhqot'in people in ceremony. These artifacts are now home with the Tsilhqot'in people.

“For the better part of 150 years, since the Chilcotin War of 1864, the history of the Tsilhqot'in Nation and the Crown has been one of denial of rights and promotion of conflict. I am grateful and humbled to be welcomed to the Title Lands and share in the Tsilhqot'in culture, language, traditions and governance,” said Premier Horgan. “It's been an honour and privilege to be invited to experience Tsilhqot'in 'Nen' (lands, water and resources) first-hand and understand the power and importance of them.”

The purpose of the Gwets'en Nilt'i Pathway Agreement is to bring transformative change to the lives of the Tsilhqot'in people and to the relationship between the Tsilhqot'in Nation, Canada

and British Columbia. It is the first tripartite reconciliation agreement of its kind in the province.

“The T̓silhqot̓in Nation is recognized for its leadership in advancing Indigenous rights,” said Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. “This trip has been an opportunity for our governments to continue this complex work together. It was an honour to be here with the Premier and my fellow ministers to meet with T̓silhqot̓in Nation, including those who participated as witnesses in the historic court case, and to see the lands that the T̓silhqot̓in people have cared for and held dear for generations.”

A core principle of the agreement is to support the self-determination of the T̓silhqot̓in Nation. The agreement is a tangible expression of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which recognizes every Nation has unique and distinct paths to self-determination. It includes a commitment for Canada and B.C. to legally recognize T̓silhqot̓in governance so that the T̓silhqot̓in communities can transition away from the Indian Act on a path toward self-governance.

The agreement commits the Nation and the provincial and federal governments to sustained progress on eight T̓silhqot̓in priorities: T̓silhqot̓in governance; language and culture; children and families; healthy communities; justice; education and training; T̓silhqot̓in Nen (lands, water and resources); and economic development.

The five ministers who attended were:

- Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation;
- Mitzi Dean, Minister of Children and Family Development;
- Bruce Ralston, Minister of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation;
- Mike Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General and Minister Responsible for Emergency Management BC; and
- Katrine Conroy, Minister of Forests.

Quotes:

Chief Otis Guichon, T̓sideldel and vice-chair –

“I am grateful to see the commitment shown by the B.C. NDP in meeting as leaders and seeing how we can work together, but also to learn about our people and way of life. The baskets that were presented back to the Nation are a visible representation of the strength and resourcefulness of our people. I am hopeful to see our Nation’s strength and self-determination grow in the years to come.”

Chief Francis Lacey, Tl̓'esqox –

“We applaud the B.C. NDP in implementing the UN Declaration on the Right of Indigenous Peoples. Having the Premier and cabinet ministers join us on Title Lands signified to myself that the B.C. government is moving forward in UNDRIP. We encourage all provincial and federal governments to visit our lands and experience the culture and traditions. I am proud to say that the community dinner held on Thursday evening was made possible by the harvesting of food directly from our lands.”

Chief Troy Baptiste, ʔEsdilagh –

“It was a very powerful and inspiring few days on Title Lands with the B.C. government. I am hopeful for discussions to continue as we work toward culturally specific and appropriate solutions for the challenges our communities face.”

Chief Jimmy Lulua, Xení Gwet’in –

“The visit to Title Lands by the Premier and B.C. ministers means a lot to our community and Nation. All levels of government have worked together closely over the past years through the wildfires and COVID-19. This visit signifies a rejuvenation of our relationship. The Premier has shown great leadership and will be greatly missed by the Nation. His work has set an example on how to build relationship in Indigenous communities. Our community members gathered in the evening to share a meal with the Premier and B.C. ministers. They were honoured by the gift presented to the Nation. There is still a lot of work to do through the transition of the title lands. We hope to have a shared vision in common with everyone in the area.”

Quick Fact:

- T̓ìlhqot’in is pronounced Tsill-COAT-teen.

Learn More:

T̓ìlhqot’in National Government: <https://www.tsilhqotin.ca/>

Gwets’en Nilt’i Pathway Agreement: https://www.tsilhqotin.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2019_08_Agreement_gwetsen_nilti_pathway_agreement_signed.pdf

Photos: <https://flic.kr/s/aHskZCEeeq>

A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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T̓silhqot̓in decision, Gwets̓'en Nilt̓'i Pathway Agreement

Following the 2014 Supreme Court of Canada T̓silhqot̓in decision, which established a declaration of Aboriginal Title for the T̓silhqot̓in Nation, the T̓silhqot̓in Nation and British Columbia signed a Letter of Understanding on Feb. 10, 2014, followed by the Nenqay Deni Accord (the Accord) on Feb. 11, 2016. The accord was a five-year road map for negotiations leading to long-term reconciliation between the Province and the T̓silhqot̓in National Government (TNG).

In August 2019, TNG, British Columbia and Canada signed the Gwets̓'en Nilt̓'i Pathway Agreement, which continues the provincial commitments from the accord and brings Canada into the reconciliation process as a fully vested partner. The agreement creates a framework for TNG, British Columbia and Canada to work together through the Declared Title Area transition process, provide a clear pathway for T̓silhqot̓in management and control, and to benefit from the declared Title Lands, while providing certainty to British Columbia, Canada and third parties about respective roles, rights and responsibilities.

The agreement lists eight pillars of reconciliation and describes milestones for progress in each of these areas:

- T̓silhqot̓in governance;
- strong T̓silhqot̓in culture and language;
- healthy children and families;
- healthy communities;
- justice;
- education and training;
- T̓silhqot̓in Nen (lands, waters and resources), including Declared Title Area Transition; and
- sustainable economic base.

Learn More:

2014 Supreme Court of Canada T̓silhqot̓in decision: <https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/14246/index.do>

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