



Blueberry River and Doig River Membership Vote Overwhelmingly in Favour of Treaty Land Entitlement Settlement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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On June 15, Blueberry River First Nations and Doig River First Nation members voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Nations' negotiated Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) settlements. These votes direct each Nation's Chief and Council to proceed with signing settlement agreements with each other, the Government of Canada, the Province of British Columbia and the Province of Alberta.

"This is the culmination of almost 20 years of challenging negotiations with both levels of government", says Blueberry River Chief Judy Desjarlais. "This settlement is a generational opportunity for our Nation, and Chief and Council looks forward to working closely with membership to realize a community-driven vision for the settlement funds and lands".

"Our community has been looking forward to this day since our claim was submitted to Canada in 1999", says Doig River Chief Trevor Makadahay. "It is a time to celebrate but also a time to reflect on the hardships many of our elders went through over the years. This settlement is intended to improve the lives of all our members, both today and into the future."

Blueberry River and Doig River are the descendant Nations of the Fort St. John Beaver Band, the first Nation in BC to sign Treaty 8. One of the solemn promises given by the Crown in Treaty 8 was to set aside reserve land equivalent to 128 acres per member, after consulting with signatory Nations about the location of the reserves – this promise was never fulfilled. In 1916, the Fort St. John Beaver Band received a reserve that was about 13,000 acres less than its entitlement under Treaty No. 8.

Since 1916, the members of the Fort St. John Beaver Band and their descendants have suffered the loss of use and benefit of the promised reserve land, while at the same time Treaty 8 territory was opened for settlement and commercial development, producing enormous financial and other benefits for the Province of BC and industry.

The Nations' TLE Claim was accepted for negotiation by Canada in September of 2004. Negotiations with Canada and the Province of BC have focused on fulfillment of the reserve land promise and compensation for loss of use.

“Our members selected settlement land in both British Columbia and Alberta, reflecting our connection to key cultural areas around our existing community at Doig River and Aláá? ʒaatə də (Petersen's Crossing) and into K'ih ʒsaaʔdze Tribal Park”, says Chief Trevor Makadahay. “We recognized an urgent need to select land for protection when we started this process years ago, particularly given the extensive cumulative impacts in our territory.”

“Blueberry River identified TLE reserve land areas of interest in 2005 based on cultural, spiritual and traditional use values, as well as our community's strong need for new residential settlements - the lands included in our settlement reflect the priorities and values identified by our membership”, says Chief Desjarlais. “I just wish that the Blueberry leaders and Elders that have passed on since 2005, but that contributed so significantly to this settlement over the years, could be here to see the realization of their great vision”.

In the coming weeks, each Nation's Chief and Council will move to sign negotiated TLE settlement agreements in accordance with direction given by membership.

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