

## **Businesses at risk, investors deterred, as government remains silent on secret land title negotiations in Chilcotin**

**Chilcotin, BC** - The Harris Ranch in Tatlayoko Valley has been in operation since 1972, grazing cattle in ranges on both sides of Tatlayoko Lake. However, despite having valid grazing permits that extend into 2022, the Harris family has been told by the Provincial government that their permit on range-lands falling into the Tsilqhot'in Title Lands will be cancelled.

"We are not sure what the future holds now", says ranch owner Sabina Harris. "The government has arbitrarily cancelled our valid permit, and offered no secure alternative to allow us to continue our business. Without appropriate range land our ranch is not viable, and so far nobody seems willing to address our problem."

Harris is among hundreds of business owners and residents who are feeling the vice tighten on their businesses and livelihoods as secret land claims negotiations between the Federal and Provincial governments and the Tsilhqot'in First Nation steadily erode their rights. The lack of certainty and protection for property owners has deterred business investment and shaken faith in Canadian democratic values.

Phil Huston is a businessman who fell in love with the Chilcotin 20 years ago, investing over US\$10 million into building a beautiful resort on Chilko Lake, bringing good local jobs and millions in tourism dollars into the area. Now he is unable to get operating licenses from either the Provincial Government or the Tsilqhot'in First Nation and feels unwelcome in the area.

"I've had absolutely no help from government officials", he says. "In my opinion British Columbia has become a very dangerous place to invest, and I would certainly advise anyone against it until circumstances significantly change."

The Canadians for Fairness and Transparency ([www.canadiansforfairnessandtransparency.ca](http://www.canadiansforfairnessandtransparency.ca)) group has been working to expose the damage being done to Canadians across the region and has appealed multiple times to Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Carolynn Bennett, Lead Negotiator Paul West, and BC Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation Scott Fraser. Their lack of interest in dealing with any issues raised by non-Indigenous stakeholders in the region has been stark, and many now fear that their governments cannot be relied upon to protect their rights as Canadian citizens.

Petrus Rykes, President of the West Chilcotin Tourism Association and a founding member of the group, says that all they are asking for is a seat at the negotiating table to raise legitimate concerns as the future of communities throughout the region is being put on the chopping block.

"We are asking for what any reasonable person would expect in these circumstances. To have our position heard and considered, to be part of the discussion and to be recognized in a meaningful way by our government".

Contact:

Petrus Rykes

chilcotinlife@xplornet.ca

