

Ranchers' Concerns Ignored by Federal Government, Negotiations About Future Continue in Secret

Chilcotin, BC - Uncertainty surrounding secret land claims negotiations between the Federal and Provincial Governments and First Nations is causing anxiety and deep concern for local ranchers in the Chilcotin region. Neighbourly relations are being strained by the federal government's refusal to engage with the broader group of area residents.

Appeals to the federal and provincial governments by area ranchers and other residents to be welcomed to the land ownership negotiations table are stubbornly and continuously being ignored by both governments.

"We have invested lifetimes and generations of hard work, personal financial resources and the agrarian knowledge of centuries in the support of making the Chilcotin a place of progress with infrastructure, steady employment opportunities and amenities for everyone who live and visit here to enjoy. We provide the highest quality protein harvested from grass to the people of our province, to our country and beyond", says longtime rancher and business owner Felix Schellenberg of Rafter 25 Ranch and Pasture to Plate Natural Products.

Chilcotin ranchers Schellenberg, Satre, Miller and Bayliff have written to Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and the Prime Minister to cease negotiations during the 2020 pandemic so area stakeholders have the opportunity to join discussions after pandemic restrictions. They received no response but were surprised to learn through the media that Minister Bennett has been actively negotiating with other first nations groups, including the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, despite the unprecedented and world crisis. Now, the ranching industry's ability to continue is threatened by uncertainty.

Residents, businesses and business organizations, all taxpayers, and community organizations in the Chilcotin have been pleading with the government to be invited to the table where their very livelihoods are being decided upon. And yet there has been no response from federal or provincial governments.

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