

Government Discards Citizen Rights As Secret Land Claims Negotiations Continue

Chilcotin, BC. Provincial and Federal negotiators have placed thousands of square kilometers of British Columbia territory on the table, including private properties, businesses, and whole communities, as secret land claims negotiations continue with the Tsilqhot'in First Nation in central British Columbia.

A land owner near Nimpo Lake, 150 km west of the Tsilqhot'in Title Lands where multiple tourism businesses, ranchers, and guiding operations are being pushed towards insolvency, received a map from the British Columbia Ministry of Forests, Lands & Natural Resources in response to a request to establish the boundaries of his lands. This map was dated April 2020, and revealed that all the lands on the map were subject to "Tsilqhot'in First Nation Civil Claim", and showed boundary lines portioning off "Tsilqhot'in Category A Lands" (full Tsilqhot'in control) from "Tsilqhot'in Category B Lands" (joint control with the Province).

Upon realizing their error, Ministry staff stated in an email that "somebody forgot to turn off the Consultation Layer" when the map was printed, and that the information stamped onto the map was "not for public" consumption.

This slip-up unequivocally confirmed that the secret negotiations taking place in the Chilcotin are in the process of ceding thousands of square km of central British Columbia, far beyond the 2,000 sq km comprising the 2014 Title Lands, to Tsilqhot'in control. This is being done without any input from the non-Indigenous property owners, business owners, and communities that stand to be affected.

The creation of the Tsilqhot'in Title Lands in 2014 has resulted in a range of increasingly contentious issues as business owners find themselves unable to get operating permits, guide-outfitters have had guiding permits recinded, and ranchers have been denied grazing rights. Tens of millions of dollars in private investment is being wiped out as neither the Federal nor Provincial governments show any interest in living up to their obligation to defend the rights and livelihoods of Canadian citizens that find themselves living on or near these lands.

The underlying message from the Tsilqhot'in First Nation is that they do not want non-Indigenous people on lands that are now under their control. Heightening stakeholder concern is the assertion on the Tsilqhot'in National Government website that the Title Lands are only a "starting point" for the transfer of lands to full Tsilqhot'in ownership and control, and that they expect that any remaining lands across their claimed territory will be jointly governed with the Province.

Canadians For Fairness and Transparency group (canadiansforfairnessandtransparency.ca) spokesperson Petrus Rykes stated, "It is clear that nobody is representing the rights of non-Indigenous residents and business owners at these critical negotiations. Both levels of government have failed miserably to address the issues that arose from the creation of the Title Lands in 2014, and have done absolutely nothing to assure residents that any better outcome will result from current negotiations."

The secret negotiations, and signed agreements that grant law-making, taxing, and judicial authority to the First Nation as the Provincial and Federal authorities withdraw from the area, have resulted in demands from local residents and stakeholders that their voices be heard, and their concerns

addressed. “They are negotiating away our properties, businesses, communities, and life savings all at once, and seem to think that this is the price of 'reconciliation'”, said Rykes. “It's time for transparency to come to these negotiations, and for local representatives to have a seat at the table. Otherwise all our rights as Canadian citizens will be gone as they create this new sovereign state.”

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