

Reconciliation or Bust: A Tale of Two Communities in the Chilcotin

Chilcotin, BC - Harris Ranch in the Tatlayoko area of the western Chilcotin received the curt letter from the Provincial Government in early January, informing them their longtime grazing permit that overlapped the new Tsilqhot'in Title Lands had been cancelled as of December 31st, 2020. Even though they were told it might be coming, it still hurt. "We've been here since 1972, operating our ranch and living peacefully in this beautiful environment, but now I don't know what the future holds", said Sabina Harris. "We can't graze our herd on the lands we have left, and if we reduce the herd the ranch is no longer viable. So far, the government has shown no interest in addressing our problem."

Since the Supreme Court decision of 2014 that dedeed 2,000 hectares of land back to the Tshilqhot'in First Nation, this is hardly a unique story. Ranchers, tourism businesses, agriculture and guiding operations are all on the brink, trapped inside the Title Lands and facing stiff opposition from the Tsilhqot'in, who want to run their own show by and for their own people, and with complete indifference from the Governments of British Columbia and Canada who managed this situation into a crisis and have shown no inclination to address any of the disasterous fallout from their failed policies.

Brian McCutcheon, owner of an award-winning lodge now engulfed by the Title Lands, says his business has been hamstrung. "Even if we could get operating licenses for our business there is no long-term security", says McCutcheon. "The Tsilhqot'in First Nation clearly does not want us on their new lands, and we've been hung out to dry by the indifference of our own government, making them complicit in the collapse of multiple businesses."

Phil Huston fell in love with the Chilcotin 20 years ago, investing millions of dollars into building a beautiful resort on Chilko Lake. Now he is unable to gain permissions to operate the resort 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."

This represents is a dangerous breaking of trust between Government and its people. You cannot achieve "reconciliation" with one group while simultaneously subjecting another group to a new round of hardships and bitterness. That ensures that the reconciliation process will fail.

Canadians For Fairness and Transparency spokesperson Petrus Rykes made it clear, "A new sovereign state is being created in central British Columbia at the expense of non-Indigneous citizens and communities. Government is negotiating away our properties, businesses, communities, and life savings all at once, and seem to think that this is the price of 'reconciliation'".

"Local residents and stakeholders are demanding that their voices be heard, and their concerns addressed", said Rykes. "There must be a joint negotiation that includes all stakeholder groups in the region to ensure the success of the proccess. In order to achieve that, we insist upon a seat at the table to directly represent local interests, fair compensation for all businesses and properties adversely impacted, and our rights as Canadian citizens protected. Reconciliation with First Nations can be successfully achieved, but not with the callous disregard of non-First Nations communities that are caught in the cross-fire."

Contact:
Petrus Rykes
chilcotinlife@xplornet.ca