
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Indigenous Relations and
Reconciliation
Xeni Gwet'in First Nations Government

B.C., Xeni Gwet'in continue working together on long-term management of title lands

WILLIAMS LAKE – As part of ongoing work to implement the historic Supreme Court of Canada Tsilhqot'in Nation decision, Chief and Council of Xeni Gwet'in First Nations Government (Xeni Gwet'in) and provincial government representatives held a working session on May 29 to reaffirm the commitment to a strong partnership for ongoing management of the Declared Title Area, which is being transitioned to Xeni Gwet'in and the T̓silhqot'in Nation.

"We are working hard together to be able to provide clarity and certainty for all those living and working in the Declared Title Area, and we are committed to transparency in this work to keep everyone who is affected informed about progress," said Scott Fraser, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. "As the first declaration of Aboriginal title awarded in Canada, the T̓silhqot'in decision raised unique and complex new questions, and there is no question that over the past six years this has been a challenging transition in uncharted waters for all of us."

A landmark 2014 Supreme Court of Canada ruling confirmed Aboriginal title over T̓silhqot'in Nation lands now known as the Declared Title Area. The T̓silhqot'in National Government, Xeni Gwet'in and the provincial and federal governments continue to work together to create long-term certainty for everyone affected by the decision.

"Xeni Gwet'in has made huge sacrifices over the past five years to try and make sure that the declaration of Aboriginal title did not disrupt people's livelihoods, or access to parks and campsites. We have met extensively with our non-Indigenous neighbours and operators to understand their interests and explain our intentions for the Declared Title Area. We hope these working sessions reflect a true commitment from B.C. to support Xeni Gwet'in as we manage the Declared Title Area and work together to find practical solutions for residents, operators and users. But, we are also ready to move beyond these issues to establish the Declared Title Area as a world-class showcase of Indigenous governance, according to our laws, our values and our aspirations as T̓silhqot'in peoples," said Chief Jimmy Lulua of Xeni Gwet'in First Nations Government.

Friday's session was the first in a series of high-level meetings to strengthen partnerships and achieve long-term certainty and clarity for the T̓silhqot'in Nation, Xeni Gwet'in, residents and businesses about management of the Declared Title Area. Senior provincial officials from the Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations and Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation have been working with Xeni Gwet'in leadership in charting the next steps as the transition of governance continues.

Since the Supreme Court of Canada decision, B.C. has been working with the T̓silhqot'in on an orderly transfer of the practical management, benefit and control of title lands. This work included addressing existing provincial tenures in the Declared Title Area in the short term through bridging agreements. These agreements allowed people with tenures for tourism and ranching operations, on what was formerly Crown land, to continue their business as usual until longer term plans for Xeni Gwet'in management of the Declared Title Area are developed and in place. The bridging agreements expired May 31, 2020.

"We recognize the extraordinary circumstance and opportunity we have in front of us as the bridging agreements expire," said Doug Donaldson, Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations. "Both our governments and tenure holders are now coming together to advance this important work. It may not be an easy path, but through respectful partnership, I am confident we can build lasting clarity for those who live and work in the Declared Title Area."

The working session held on May 29, 2020, addressed topics on the practical considerations of T̓silhqot'in management of the Declared Title lands, with a particular focus on tenure management transition.

In August 2019, the T̓silhqot'in Nation and the governments of Canada and B.C. signed the Gwets'en Nilt'i Pathway Agreement (Towards it, We are Striving). This first-of-its-kind tripartite agreement supports the T̓silhqot'in Nation in its path to self-determination and includes specific commitments on transition planning for Xeni Gwet'in's management of the Declared Title Area.

Learn More:

Link to the Gwets'en Nilt'i Pathway Agreement news release:

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2019IRR0048-001670>

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