
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2024IRR0036-001016
June 26, 2024

Tsilhqot'in Nation
Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada

Tsilhqot'in Nation, Canada and B.C. celebrate 10-year title anniversary with renewal of agreement

Updated on June 27, 2024

XENI GWET'IN (NEMIAH VALLEY) – Today marks 10 years since the historic Supreme Court of Canada judgment, known as the Tsilhqot'in Decision, which resulted in the first declaration of Aboriginal title in Canadian history, recognizing the Tsilhqot'in Nation as the owners of a portion of their traditional territory in the interior of British Columbia.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau attended the celebration on title lands to witness the recognition of Elders and other Tsilhqot'in witnesses who courageously testified at trial during the title-and-rights case. Also attending the celebration were: Gary Anandasangaree, federal Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations; Patty Hajdu, federal Minister of Indigenous Services; Arif Virani, federal Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada; Murray Rankin, B.C. Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation; George Heyman, B.C. Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy; and many other dignitaries, Indigenous leaders and allies.

As a commitment to continued progress, the Tsilhqot'in Nation, the Government of Canada and Province of British Columbia signed a five-year renewal of the Gwets'en Nilt'i Pathway Agreement (GNPA).

The GNPA was initially signed in August 2019 between Canada, B.C., and the Tsilhqot'in Nation. The first-of-its-kind agreement commits the parties to bring “transformative change” to the lives of the Tsilhqot'in people and communities and to their relationship with government. Through the GNPA, the Tsilhqot'in Nation has taken significant strides in Nation building, continually working to improve all aspects of life for Tsilhqot'in communities, including governance initiatives, such as the Ts'iqi Dechen Jedilhtan (Women's Council), Indigenous-led emergency management, new homes and renovations in all communities, world-class fisheries and ranger programs, community and family support programs, and steps to reclaim jurisdiction for Tsilhqot'in children and families.

Along with new funding that is being provided by Canada and British Columbia to the Tsilhqot'in Nation, the GNPA confirms the parties' commitment to advancing reconciliation and building a prosperous future founded on mutual respect, recognition of rights and true partnership. Together, we continue to forge a path towards a more inclusive and equitable society for all people living in Canada.

To see photos from the celebration on June 26, 2024,
visit: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/bcgovphotos/shares/ayV14Y2m23>

A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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What people are saying about the 10-year anniversary of the Tsilhqot'in Decision

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada –

“Today, we commemorate a decade since the landmark Tsilhqot'in Decision, a pivotal moment in Canadian history that affirmed Aboriginal title and recognized the Tsilhqot'in Nation as the holder of title within their traditional territory. This anniversary emphasizes our ongoing commitment to reconciliation and partnership with all Indigenous Peoples. The renewal of the Gwets'en Nilt'i Pathway Agreement reflects our collective dedication to building a future based on mutual respect, rights, recognition and prosperity for all Canadians. Together with the Tsilhqot'in Nation and the Province of British Columbia, we are forging a path of shared success for all generations.”

The Honourable David Eby, Premier of British Columbia –

“A decade after the landmark Tsilhqot'in Decision, we continue to work with Elders and leaders to find a new way forward in British Columbia based on reconciliation, respect and recognition of rights. B.C. is committed to a progressive and deepening government-to-government relationship with the Tsilhqot'in Nation because we see time and time again that a rising tide lifts all boats.”

The Honourable Gary Anandasangaree, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations –

“As we commemorate the 10th anniversary of the historic Supreme Court decision affirming the Tsilhqot'in Nation's Aboriginal title, we celebrate a decade of continued strength and progress. This landmark ruling has had a real impact and heralded change for the Tsilhqot'in people in exercising their rights and self-governance, and has set a precedent for title recognition elsewhere. Through the Gwets'en Nilt'i Pathway Agreement and ongoing collaboration between the Tsilhqot'in Nation, British Columbia and Canada, we have achieved meaningful milestones in nation-to-nation governance, land management, cultural preservation, and community development. Congratulations on the 10-year anniversary.”

The Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Indigenous Services Canada and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario –

“The Tsilhqot'in Decision paved the way for the Nation to reclaim ownership, jurisdiction and governance, including over children and family services. It allowed for transformative change and for the community to take back their future into their own hands. I also look forward to reaching a contribution agreement so that children can grow in their community, be immersed in their culture, and be surrounded by loved ones. This is essential for every child to have a fair chance to succeed.”

The Honourable Murray Rankin, B.C. Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation –

“Today, on the 10th anniversary of the Supreme Court of Canada decision, the T̓silhqot̓’in Nation, British Columbia and Canada are continuing to take strides to implement the decision by renewing the Gwets’en Nilt’i Pathway Agreement. When children are safe and cared for in the community, when parents have access to meaningful employment training, when the T̓silhqot̓’in language is being spoken, and when we have strong government-to-government relationships, everyone benefits.”

The Honourable Josie Osborne, B.C. Minister of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation –

“The landmark T̓silhqot̓’in Decision set a precedent that has changed our government’s consultative and engagement processes and shaped many of our initiatives and policies. While we celebrate a milestone today, we know there is much more to do in this generational work. Our government remains committed to continued partnership with T̓silhqot̓’in leadership to address long-standing grievances over mining operations and ensure that First Nations’ interests are protected for the benefit of all British Columbians.”

The Honourable George Heyman, B.C. Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy –

“Since 2014, T̓silhqot̓’in communities have been at the table informing and shaping the decisions that impact them and their ancestral territories. This includes working on land-use plans for the T̓silhqot̓’in Nēn (lands, waters and resources), which is protecting the declared title lands. The pathway agreement includes a commitment by the parties to work collaboratively to support strong stewardship collaborations. Our provincial government values and applauds this transformative work.”

Nits’il?in (Chief) Joe Alphonse, O.B.C., LL.D. (hon.), tribal chair, T̓silhqot̓’in National Government –

“Today is a day to acknowledge the shift in Indian country. We are the original peoples of this land with this being the first case to fully recognize that on the ground in the form of title. Our case gives hope to Indigenous peoples nationally and internationally. The Nation has been working with Canada and B.C. to secure respect and recognition for our role within this country in determining the future for our people.”

Nits’il?in Otis Guichon, vice-chair, T̓silhqot̓’in National Government –

“We are here today to continue the fight of our War Chiefs that were wrongfully hanged after the Chilcotin War of 1864. Our people, way of life and language unite us as a Nation. Our work is not done. Every day we are building strength as a Nation to overcome the impacts of colonization in our communities and stand up the power of our culture and way of life. The T̓silhqot̓’in Decision and the Gwets’en Nilt’i Pathway Agreement have empowered our people to focus on healing and improving the lives of our families and communities.”

Nits’il?in Roger William, Xenī Gwet’in Nits’il?in –

“June 26, 2014, was the day that title to our land as Indigenous Peoples was finally recognized. Ten years later we are reflecting on the struggle and sacrifice of our journey to title. Our Elders

testified in a foreign court system and a foreign language. Their stories were cross-examined over and over, but in the end, the strength of the Elders’ knowledge – of our truth – was unbreakable. This strength carries on with us today as we celebrate as a Nation and a country the impact that the Tsilhqot’in Decision has made on Indigenous rights and title.”

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