
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2019IRR0036-000704
April 17, 2019

Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
Cheslatta Carrier Nation

Cheslatta Carrier Nation, Province sign agreements to address historic wrong

VICTORIA – More than 65 years after their lands were flooded to make way for the creation of the Nechako Reservoir, the Cheslatta Carrier Nation have signed agreements with the Province of British Columbia that provide restitution and redress for impacts suffered by their community and their peoples.

In 1952, the Cheslatta Nation peoples were evicted from their homes on two weeks' notice and forcibly resettled outside their traditional lands. Their lands, villages, cultural and spiritual sites were then flooded as the newly built Kenney Dam filled what is now known as the Nechako Reservoir.

At a private ceremony in Victoria, Chief Corrina Leween and Councillors Ted Jack and Hazel Burt of Cheslatta Nation, along with Scott Fraser, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, signed a Settlement Agreement and an Interim Reconciliation Agreement. Together, these agreements will provide the Cheslatta Nation with funding and lands to create a base for future community, social and economic development.

Under the terms of the Settlement Agreement, Cheslatta will propose certain lands for transfer and tenures. A period of extensive engagement with neighbouring First Nations and stakeholders will proceed before final land parcels can be determined.

Community support for a final settlement has been strong, with unanimous endorsement of the Settlement Agreement from Cheslatta voters in a ratification process concluded on March 14, 2019. Cheslatta Nation has requested that terms of the agreement remain confidential for one year pending their negotiations with other parties.

Quotes:

Corrina Leween, Cheslatta Carrier Nation Chief –

“This historic agreement with the Province of B.C. will help address long-standing issues that have adversely impacted our traditional territory since the construction of the Kenney Dam and creation of the Nechako Reservoir. For 67 years, the Cheslatta people have worked tirelessly to achieve resolution and reconciliation to this historic wrong. This agreement honours the justice our ancestors and previous leadership spent their lives fighting for. Now, we are positioned to begin the healing process and to advance the social and economic standing of our people for generations to come.”

Scott Fraser, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation –

“Reconciliation demands we reckon with the truth of our shared history and address the past.

The devastation experienced by the Cheslatta people 67 years ago continues to this day. We are committed to doing what we can to redress this wrong. The Settlement Agreements provide the Cheslatta community with lands, funding and support for community healing.”

Quick Facts:

- In 1952, Cheslatta members were forced from their lands and forcibly resettled outside their territory on two weeks’ notice.
- Their lands, villages, cultural and spiritual sites were flooded by the creation of the Nechako reservoir, following the construction of the Kenney Dam and nine smaller dams. The associated hydroelectric station provides power to Rio Tinto’s smelter in Kitimat.
- During the past 67 years, Cheslatta regularly recover skeletal remains of their ancestors on the shore of Cheslatta Lake, following spring freshet discharges from the Nechako Reservoir and estimate that more than 60 Cheslatta graves have been destroyed.
- On March 14, 2019, the Cheslatta held a vote for all members of the Cheslatta nation, including those not living in the nation. There was a 60% voter turnout and 100% voted yes to the Settlement Agreement.

A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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Agreements between Cheslatta Carrier Nation, Province of B.C.

On March 28, 2019, Cheslatta Carrier Nation and the provincial government signed a Settlement Agreement to address the impacts of the Kenney Dam and Nechako Reservoir on the Cheslatta people. The Settlement Agreement, along with a forward-looking Interim Reconciliation Agreement, will support Cheslatta's social and economic well-being and cultural revitalization.

Settlement Agreement

The Settlement Agreement provides payments to Cheslatta over a 10-year period and a commitment from the Province to future land transfers and tenures. In return, the agreement constitutes a full and final settlement of Cheslatta claims against B.C. related to impacts of the Nechako Reservoir on their rights and title interests.

The payments, land transfers and tenures will provide a base for future economic, social and cultural purposes to support Cheslatta Carrier Nation's healing journey.

Cheslatta has requested that details of the Settlement Agreement remain confidential for one year to protect ongoing negotiations with other parties.

Land transfers and tenures under the Settlement Agreement

The Settlement Agreement does not contain commitments to transfer or tenure specific parcels of Crown land. Cheslatta will identify lands for consideration, which will then be subject to detailed analysis and extensive engagement with neighbouring First Nations and stakeholders before any decisions are made by the Province.

The Province will consider the full range of public interests, including public access to existing recreation opportunities and access to lands beyond those proposed by Cheslatta, both of which will be maintained.

Land transfers and tenures acquired by Cheslatta will be subject to provincial and local government laws, including applicable zoning, land use, land development and property tax laws.

A map of "lands under discussion", shared publicly in 2018, highlighted areas where Cheslatta may identify lands for transfer and tenure, but it is not part of the Settlement Agreement. The process for land selection – which includes identification of specific parcels, consultation with neighbouring First Nations and stakeholders, approval of specific parcels, survey and transfer of lands – is expected to take several years.

Interim Reconciliation Agreement

The Interim Reconciliation Agreement is for a 10-year term and contains a number of provisions:

- Funding of \$200,000 per year for jointly agreed upon projects to support an increased role for Cheslatta in the collaborative management of both protected areas and fish and wildlife within Cheslatta's traditional territory.
- Funding of \$200,000 per year for jointly agreed upon watershed and heritage restoration projects.
- A commitment for the parties to work together to support Cheslatta's cultural rejuvenation and language revitalization.
- Specific forestry opportunities where feasible, such as licences for harvesting wood within the Nechako Reservoir.
- A commitment to discuss opportunities for further reconciliation including focusing on mutually agreed process and priorities.

For a copy of the Interim Reconciliation Agreement, visit:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/first-nations-negotiations/first-nations-a-z-listing/cheslatta-carrier-nation>

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