

Introduction of the Tahltan People

Introduce Eileen and Rhoda, Iskut First Nation from Iskut, BC.

Suu dii is a hereditary Chief from the Gitxan Nation, of the wolf clan and Richard Wright a Councilor from Gitanmaax who are standing here who are standing in support of our message.

My name is Eileen Doody. I am a member of the Iskut First Nation from Iskut BC. I'm a community liaison within the Tahltan Nation, working to inform our people about resource development on our land.

My name is Rhoda Quock. I am a member of the Iskut First Nation and the spokesperson for the Klabona Keepers. The Klabona Keepers are made up of Iskut Elders, dedicated to protecting the traditional territory of Klappan and Todagin Mountain from resource development.

We'd like to recognize and thank the Nations who's traditional territory we are stand on.

Our culture is organized through matrilineal and clan systems. This system remains our broad governing structure. Tahltan law, culture, and customs were passed on from generation to generation by our Elders who remain a fundamental part of Tahltan governance.

The traditional territory of the Tahltan Nation is located approximately 350 km North of Prince Rupert, BC. We, the Tahltan People have occupied, hunted, fished, trapped, camped, and gathered medicinal plants and berries on our traditional territories since time immemorial. Medicinal plants such as caribou weed, balsam bark, pine tree pitch, and devil's club are collected and utilized to treat ailments from sore muscles, sprained ankles, and broken bones to cancer.

For thousands of years, the Tahltan have mined and shaped projectile points and cutting tools from deposits on Mount Edziza for trade with neighboring Nations. This was one of the earliest mines along the North Pacific Rim. Since then, the Tahltan Nation have been greatly impacted by contact with non-aboriginal people, practices, and increased resource development. The first modern mining projects began in 1861 on Tahltan territory during a small gold rush when gold was discovered along the Stikine River. Since 1861, two more mineral rushes have impacted the Tahltan; the Cassiar Gold Rush and the Klondike Gold Rush in the Yukon in 1903. The 1990's brought larger mines to our territory; Golden Bear, Snip Mine, and Eskay Creek Mine which is the only operating mine in the watershed today.

Closed or abandoned projects on our territory is Golden Bear, Johnny Mountain, Bronson Slope, Cassiar Asbestos Mine, and Snip Mine.

Today the Tahltan are being bombarded with massive proposed resource development projects on our traditional territory.

DURING 2006, 50% OF ALL MINING EXPLORATION ACTIVITY IN NORTHWEST BC IS TAKING PLACE ON TAHLTAN TERRITORY.

There are currently more than 8 mega projects under exploration or development in the Stikine-Iskut region.

There are 11 projects currently under the Environmental Assessment Review on Tahltan territory. These projects are:

Galore Creek Mine proposed by Nova Gold Inc,
Red Chris Mine proposed by bcMetals and Red Chris Development Corp,
Mount Klappan Coal proposed by Fortune Minerals,
Kutcho Creek proposed by Western Keltic Mines Ltd,
Klappan Coal Bed Methan proposed by Shell Canada,
Rok Coyote Eddon proposed by Firesteel Resources,
Gnat Pass, Schaft Creek proposed by Copper Fox Metals Inc,
Forrest Kerr Hydroelectric project proposed by Nova Gold Inc,
Foremore Mine project proposed by Roca Mines Inc,
GJ (Kiniskan) proposed by Canadian Gold Hunter Corp.

Exploration projects in the Stikine:

Foremore Mine Project,
Galore Creek,
GJ (Kiniskan),
RDN,
Schaft Creek.

We are very familiar with the benefits and impacts from mining and we seek to balance justice and protection of our sacred places with economic opportunities for our Nation.

OUR LAND IS SACRED TO US. IT DEFINES US A PEOPLE. THE KLAPPAN AND TODAGIN AREAS ARE THE SPIRITUAL HOME OF OUR ANCESTORS.

The Mount Klappan area is the headwaters and birthplace of 3 great rivers: The Stikine, the Skeena, and the Nass Rivers, all of which flow into the Pacific Ocean. We go to the Klappan and Todagin areas to learn our traditional ways. The Tahltan continue to use and occupy the land in much the same ways we did generations ago. We hunt, trap, fish, and camp in the traditional camp sites our ancestors have used for thousands of years. We call the Mount Klappan area our Sacred Headwaters.

Todagin Mountain on Tahltan traditional territory is a unique ecological area that contains the largest lambing area in the world for Stone Sheep. The fate of the Stone Sheep and the traditional trapping and hunting areas of the Tahltan on Todagin Mountain are threatened by proposed dams and tailings pits.

The Sacred Headwaters is a highly traditional use area valued by many Nations that depend on it for their very survival. The Gitksan, Wet'sewet'an, Tlingit, Haida, Haisla, are concerned that negative impacts from mining, coal and oil and gas development will destroy the land, wildlife, and rivers that they have occupied and that have sustained them for thousands of years.

NO INDIGENOUS CULTURE COULD SURVIVE THE COMBINED IMPACTS OF ALL OF THE PROPOSED PROJECTS. OUR LAND, OUR TAHLTAN PEOPLE, AND THE WILDLIFE WILL BE DEVASTATED.

Our culture will not survive this onslaught of development. Our culture and traditional language is threatened with extinction.

Historical, oral stories recall a time when Tcheskiacho (Raven) put the first Tahltans on our homeland to protect it for future generations. We exercise our right to protect our land, resources, culture, and language for future generations.

Our people are acting to protect our future.

In February 2005 the Tahltan Elders declared a moratorium on all resource development within their territory. The moratorium prohibits any future resource development on Tahltan Territory until certain conditions about governance sustainability, shared decision making and revenue sharing are dealt with.

In June 2005 Shell Canada was asked to leave Tahltan land by the Tahltan Elders, Iskut First Nation and TI'abanat'in Clan because we do not want development in the Klappan area. Our people do not want coal bed methane development in our Sacred Headwaters.

Also in June 2005 Fortune Minerals was granted tenure to their claims on our land without consulting with the Tahltan Nation. The families that have lived on and used these lands for time immemorial served notice on Fortune Minerals that their proposed open pit coal mine infringes on TI'abanot'in Aboriginal Rights and Title.

In July 2005 the Iskut Nation erected a road blockade to prevent all mining companies from bringing heavy equipment into our Sacred Headwaters in the Klappan. We are protesting against too many projects being proposed for development in our territory at one time.

In September of 2005 9 of our Elders and 6 supporters were arrested and taken away in handcuffs. They were charged with contempt of court for protecting their land. Fortune Mineral dropped the charges the morning of the court hearing in Terrace to avoid negative publicity.

In October 2005 we held a gathering to support the protection of our Sacred Headwaters. United in solidarity over 200 members from the Haida, Gitksan, Wet'suwet'en, Tlingit, Tsim shian, and Haisla Nations joined the Tahltan and our non-aboriginal allies to support the brave people who were arrested defending their land and future.

A DECLARATION WAS ISSUED STATING THAT FUTURE DEVELOPMENT WILL ONLY PROCEED WITH FIRST NATION'S FREE, PRIOR, AND INFORMED CONSENT.

In November 2005 the BC Supreme Court rejected Fortune Minerals application to extent the court injunction against the protestors for another year.

In August 2006 the Iskut Nation hosted a gathering of all Nations who hold territory from the headwaters to the ocean along the great Northern rivers to support the protection of the Sacred Headwaters. We gathered at the traditional camp of my father, the highly respected Elder Robert Quock in the Klappan. We were joined by the Hereditary Chiefs of the Haida, Gitksan, Wet'suwet'en, Taku River Tlingit, and Haisla Nations and our non-aboriginal allies. We celebrated our connection with this land, acknowledged that this is the spiritual home of our ancestors and had a traditional sacred ritual to mix the waters from our Nations rivers. This is symbolic of our dedication to the protection of our Sacred Headwaters.

The Iskut and Tahltan communities are having difficulty coping with the problems associated with the existing mines. No indigenous culture could endure or survive the impacts if the proposed projects were to occur simultaneously. This would be cultural genocide. Our land, our Tahltan People and the wildlife would be devastated.

Each of the 10-15 development projects proposed on Tahltan traditional territory will employ between 150-400 people, at a minimum. There are approximately 350 people in each community of Telegraph Creek and Iskut. Dease Lake has a population of over 450 people. With the current populations of these three communities, there are approximately 375 employable people.

Each one of the large proposed mines on Tahltan territory has an estimated minimum mine life of 20 years. Each of the proposed mines can supply employment for 250 to 400 people. One of these large mines will adequately provide employment for the 150 employable Tahltan people from the communities of Iskut, Dease Lake, and Telegraph Creek.

With mining development on our territory there will be a large increase in population of foreign workers and their families who have different lifestyles and behaviors. This could create resentment and racism within our community. With a large increase in population, there will be greater exposure to diseases, harder drugs, non-traditional recreation and economic activities, increased crime rates, loss of language and cultural practices, and increased demands on existing social infrastructure such as medical and policing resources.

OUR PEOPLE WILL BE A MINORITY IN OUR OWN TERRITORY.

We are losing our traditional language and family structures which make us Tahltan.

We are losing our Elders teachings

Our families are losing their traditional structures as we take mining jobs

The fly in fly out 2 week rotation disrupts traditional family structures by a loss of male role models because one parent, often the father, is in camp for 50% of the child's life, often both spouses are working which limits caretaking of children and Elders, increases family stress and stress related illnesses, increased marital breakdown, increased single parent households, and continuous partying.

Impacts from the sudden influx of money from large salaries leads to many negative impacts for individuals who don't have well developed coping, parenting, and life skills. Some of these impacts are a disruption in traditional family structures, increased drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, increased incidence of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and social and community problems.

Many of our youth are employed in mines. Most youth try to attain the modern lifestyle. This jeopardizes their ability to appreciate and participate in the traditional culture and receive the teachings of our Elders. Our Elders become marginalized and this results in an increased generation gap within the community.

Mining jobs pull students out of high school and into high paying entry level jobs which result in low levels of attained education. This hinders former students from advancing in the mining industry to higher skilled technical jobs. When the mines close they do not have skills to transfer to other jobs because they never finished school. Higher paying jobs often go to foreign workers. Mining companies and Tahltan representatives have opportunities to encourage youth to stay in school so that they could qualify for better paying technical positions.

Fly in fly out camps and foreign workers facilitate drugs from out of the region. This makes drugs and alcohol more available in our communities.

Increased alcohol and drug abuse leads to an increase in domestic violence, child abuse, suicide, and accidental deaths.

The small populations of Hwy 37 unincorporated communities are more sensitive to population changes because the existing programs and facilities are not large. The huge influx of outsiders will increase the pressure on the limited infrastructure, health, and social services of these communities.

The impacts of colonization and assimilation have taken its toll on the Tahltan language, culture, and heritage. There is concern about the impacts of the social and economic pressures put on communities that are trying to heal from years of abuse and despair. Mines did not create all of these problems but they make the existing problems worse. Mines contribute to the erosion of the Tahltan traditional way of life and culture. The pace of exploration and development does not give communities enough time to adapt to the sudden changes and to put programs in place to deal with the negative social impacts of mining development. Mining companies are not contributing to Band programs to mitigate the social problems. All of the impacts are compounded by historical and current

effects of colonization, residential school syndrome, racism, and inadequate social, health, and education services currently available to the Tahltan.

All of the impacts from all of the mines will destroy our environment. One of the greatest concerns to Aboriginal People is that roads increase access to traditional hunting areas and access for resource development into traditional territories. The Tahltan People have a deep connection to the land in which we live. The alteration and destruction of our land on Tahltan territory represents a personal, spiritual, traditional, and cultural loss to the Tahltan.

NO INDIGENOUS CULTURE COULD SURVIVE THE IMPACTS OF ALL OF THESE PROJECTS BEING DEVELOPED ALL AT THE SAME TIME.

Our people want a future, good jobs and to protect our lands and culture for generations to come. WE CAN DO THIS BY DEVELOPING ONE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT AT A TIME IN THE RIGHT LOCATION.

A good policy within Tahltan traditional territories is “sequential regional mining operations” so that the next 7 generations of Iskut, Dease Lake, and Telegraph Creek communities can still mine for copper, gold, and silver. Sequential mining will ensure that our resources will not be depleted within our life time.

TAHLTANS ARE FACING CULTURAL EXTINCTION.

OUR ELDERS HAVE CHARGED US TO PROTECT THE KLAPPAN AND TODIGAN AREAS FOR OUR FUTURE, FOREVER.

IT IS OUR INHERENT RIGHT TO DETERMINE WHAT HAPPENS TO OUR PEOPLE, OUR LAND AND OUR CULTURE.

THE INHERENT RIGHT GIVEN BY THE CREATOR CANNOT BE GIVEN OR TAKEN AWAY.

TAHLTAN LAND IS UNCEDED TERRITORY AND WE WILL DEFEND OUR RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS IN ANY WAY POSSIBLE.

THERE IS NO AMOUNT OF MONEY THAT CAN BUY THE KLAPPAN AND TODAGIN- THEY ARE PRICELESS. THE PROMISE OF JOBS DOES NOT COMPENSATE FOR THE LOSS OF LAND, RESOURCES AND IMPACTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND PEOPLE.

We'd like to thank the conference organizers and everyone here for allowing us to present our message. For more information please see our web site www.sacredheadwaters.com

This talk is dedicated to ancestors.