

Canada's First Nations Confront Ottawa: New Prosperity Mine Must Be Rejected. Fish in Teztan Biny Will Die

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Tsilhqot'in Chiefs along with non-First Nations representatives from the Cariboo-Chilcotin region are in Ottawa this week to remind the Harper government the New Prosperity mine must be rejected after receiving a second negative Federal Panel Report which predicts that all the fish in Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) will die.

The Federal cabinet is scheduled to make a decision by the end of the month.

"The Tsilhqot'in, supported by First Nations and non-First Nations across the country, fear the scathing findings of not one but two independent expert Panels will be forgotten amidst the lobbying efforts by Taseko Mines Ltd. and its supporters," said Chief Joe Alphonse, Tribal Chair for the Tsilhqot'in National Government.

"After two reports that found significant and immitigable adverse effects to fish, water, and a sacred Tsilhqot'in cultural school, one would think that the decision should be easy, yet we remain concerned because it appears to us that this company and its cheerleaders have free access to the Federal Ministers, while we are ignored."

Chief Roger William of the Xeni Gwet'in First Nations Government said: "Now we have two independent panels stating the mine would significantly infringe the rights and culture of the Tsilhqot'in, and threatens our ability to sustain our way of life and cultural identity."

"This project cannot be approved because we hold a court declaration of Aboriginal rights to this area, and the federal government has a constitutional duty to protect and uphold those rights."

AFN National Chief Shawn Atleo stated, "The Assembly of First Nations stands with the Tsilhqot'in, as we have from the beginning and at the recent Williams case at the Supreme Court of Canada, as they assert their right to protect their lands, citizens and sacred sites. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples requires free, prior and informed consent by First Nations on any activities that their lives or their lands and, clearly, the Tsilhqot'in reject this project. Governments must respect and honour our rights and title."

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs said: "First Nations

across the Province and the country are watching this decision very closely, as a test of the Harper government's commitment to First Nations or to maintaining the last shred of credibility left in the environmental assessment process."

"The UBCIC, along with all provincial and national First Nation organizations stand firmly behind the Tsilhqot'in, and we are fully prepared to help them defend their rights and environment if the government chooses a path of irresponsible development."

First Nations are not alone in their opposition to this mine. Sage Birchwater from the Fish Lake Alliance, a group of Williams Lake citizens opposed to the mine said:

"Many Williams Lake and Cariboo citizens participated in good faith in both panel reviews, and if the federal government ignores the independent findings, then what was the point of having an environmental assessment in the first place?"

Patricia Spencer from the Friends of Fish Lake, a group of citizens from 100 Mile House opposed to the mine said: "The fact that the proponent has for years continued to attempt to push this project ahead despite opposition from First Nations demonstrates the company's profound lack of respect for the Tsilhqot'in people. If First Nations and non-First Nations are to find a path to reconciliation in B.C., it begins with respect, and that means rejecting this mine once and for all."

Chief Alphonse concluded: "The Tsilhqot'in appreciate the support we've received from First Nations across the country, and our non-First Nation neighbours with whom we share our lands and waters. It is an honour that citizens from Williams Lake and 100 Mile House, as well as Grand Chief Phillip and the National Chief, have joined us in Ottawa.

"This fight has been unfairly spun by the company and its PR machine as a First Nation versus non-First Nation issue. Well the truth is that many more non-First Nations spoke out against this project in the public hearings than those in support. The upcoming decision must be about the facts, and a truthful examination of them only leads to one conclusion: this mine proposal must be rejected, once and for all."

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