



Treaty group aims to slow development

Wants changes to wait until land issues are settled

BY ROBERT BARRON, DAILY NEWS MARCH 7, 2009

The Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group is hoping to delay plans by forest companies on Vancouver Island to develop their land.

Robert Morales said the group has asked the commission to request that no further development be allowed on Island land that they consider their traditional territory until final treaties are signed and all outstanding land issues settled. He is a negotiator with the treaty group that will have a human rights complaint against Canada and B.C. heard by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on March 23.

Morales said that while the group considers up to 810,000 hectares of privately held land on southeast Vancouver Island as their traditional territory, their major concerns are with plans by forest companies like TimberWest to begin selling off portions of their land for development.

Jean Crowder, the aboriginal affairs critic for the NDP and MP for Nanaimo-Alberni, said the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group (which represents the Chemainus First Nation, Cowichan Tribes, Halalt First Nation, Lake Cowichan First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, and Penelakut Tribe) are on the "road of last resort" to have their concerns around the troubled treaty processes heard and dealt with.

"Unlike many First Nations, the members of the treaty group have little Crown land left in their traditional territories that can be used as part of the treaty process," she said from her Ottawa office Tuesday.

"We've recommended in the past that the federal government buy private land as it becomes available in the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group's traditional areas so it can be used as part of the treaty negotiations, but this request has fallen on deaf ears. TimberWest's plan to sell about 53,000 hectares of its land on the Island, much of which is in the group's traditional territories, is a case in point."

The treaty group's argument at the IACHR is that 810,000 hectares of its traditional territory in southeast Vancouver Island was illegally confiscated in 1884 as part of a land grant given to the Dunsmuir Company and they should be compensated for it. Morales said as more of the land is fragmented and developed it will be harder for the treaty group to be fairly compensated.

While he acknowledged that any ruling or request that the IACHR makes is not legally binding on Canada, the country's reputation would receive a "black eye" if it decides not to comply.

"It would be another black mark for Canada on an already questionable human rights record when it comes to First Nations," Morales said.

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