

Treaty group get say in development First Nations' heritage now being considered

By Stacy Cardigan Smith

Gulf Islands Driftwood
June 6, 2007

First Nations people now have a say in the process of issuing building permits on heritage sites within the Hul'qumi'num Territory.

This will help protect and conserve heritage properties in the area from southeastern Vancouver island to the Gulf Islands and the lower Fraser River, and includes over 800 archaeological sites in the Gulf Islands.

With the signing of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group (HTG) and the province Monday, First Nations people will be given a chance to review and comment on all applications "so the First Nations' values around the site can be taken into consideration," said HTG negotiator Brian Thom.

Prior to the agreement, no formal consultation process existed between governments and First Nations people, who have lived in the area for thousands of years.

A 30-day turnaround time has been agreed upon by HTG and the provincial Archeology Branch so the total application time should not change, ensured Thom.

Thom estimated the program will actually ease relations between property owners and First Nations peoples as there will be no issues that pop up after a permit has been issued.

As many of the potential sites remain undocumented, especially those further away from the shore, HTG has funded a computer program that estimates where sites may be located based on other discovered locations.

"All the geographic models that you can think of have been thrown in," Thom said, including proximity, land slope and water sources.

The province and Islands Trust have committed to using this program, he said.

The memorandum gives First Nations people a chance to have a voice in "a system that until recently has been really driven by archaeologists and bureaucrats."

The agreement calls for new opportunities for public education, but no funding has presently been set aside for that purpose.

"B.C. didn't come with a budget. They came with good will."

The MOU is the result of three years' work. It is a long-standing agreement, but unlike a treaty, parties can "walk away" from it, said Thom.