

Native heritage deal signed



Keith Vass

Robert Morales and Stan Hagen sign an archeological memorandum of understanding Monday.

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The Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group signed a new agreement Monday with the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts that will give First Nations in the area a role in protecting their own heritage sites.

The agreement will let the treaty group's six member nations share information about the location, and cultural importance of archaeological sites with the province.

It will also mean an expanded role for First Nations in deciding whether or not to issue development permits for land that contains archaeological sites.

There are more than 1,000 sites, mostly burial sites, within Hul'qumi'num territory.

Hul'qumi'num chief negotiator Robert Morales said the deal would help create a balance between the spiritual value of the lands and development.

"These really are the signposts that we were here, and that we existed on the land," Morales recalled being told by one elder.

"It gets to co-management," said Hul'qumi'num negotiator Brian Thom.

"A lot of what First Nations governments are looking for is a real say about their land, about their culture, about their history."

It's just the second agreement of its kind between the province and a First Nations group. Minister Stan Hagen said he hopes to see similar agreements in other parts of the province.

"What we are about to sign will put down on paper the respect that needs to be shown," Hagen said.

Thom says the treaty group is pleased with the agreement, but said he'd would prefer to see such issues covered in a comprehensive treaty with the province.