

Native cultural sites agreement a major step forward [unsigned editorial]

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If you aren't all that interested in First Nations issues, you may have flipped past the headline on the top of page five without looking at the article underneath it too closely.

Go back and take another look.

This is not just another story about an obscure piece of paper marking another plodding step forward in a tedious treaty process.

Rather, it is a significant step toward the protection of First Nations culture and community planning throughout the community.

Regular News Leader Pictorial readers are very familiar with stories of First Nations people angered as development damages or threatens burial spots or other culturally sensitive sites.

Those same readers are just as familiar with stories of developers or local government officials frustrated by First Nations concerns unexpectedly arriving late in the process to upset their development plans.

Stories like Poets Cove, TimberCrest and Hill 60 still resonate.

It is our hope the Memorandum of Understanding signed Monday between the province and the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group is a major step in banishing those stories into the dustbin of history.

Previously there was a lack of recognition outside the Native community as to the existence of these sites and their significance to the Native community.

Previously local First Nations were loathe to publicly pinpoint or even speak about these sites until it was too late.

The MoU - the second of its kind in B.C. - should change that

To paraphrase chief Hul'qumi'num negotiator Robert Morales:

This sets out a new relationship between the B.C. Archaeology Branch and Cowichan First Nations.

It builds on the goals of public education, rigorous management, and improved government-to-government communications to achieve improvements in the protection,

conservation and management of heritage sites. It creates new opportunities for public education and information sharing around the potential location of yet unrecorded sites;

Perhaps most importantly, it provides for improved communications between the province, the HTG, the Hul'qumi'num member First Nations, local government, potential developers, and professional archaeologists regarding heritage sites and heritage permit applications.

If it does all that, then it will be a significant step indeed. Inch by inch, the tedious process of connecting the Cowichans is moving forward.