

Tribes, HTG Aimed at Reconciliation?

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By Michelle Thompson

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The Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group's chief negotiator says he is optimistic Cowichan Tribes will remain with the HTG.

"We are starting to put together a working plan," Robert Morales said. "I think it's in the best interest if we are able to carry on together."

His hopefulness came after a meeting indicated a strong community desire to keep the groups together.

Some of the 100 people that attended a Jan. 10 community forum - held to discuss Tribes' involvement with HTG - felt the issues threatening to separate the groups could be resolved.

"There are some issues we need to work on," Morales said. "We have put together a bit of a work plan to see if we can resolve those to the satisfaction of our membership and work out areas of concern."

Last year, Tribes then-chief Harvey Alphonse announced intentions of forming a parallel treaty group from HTG. But when Lydia Hwitsum was appointed chief, she felt more internal and community consultation was necessary before that happened.

Following the meeting, the HTG board of directors met to discuss ways of addressing Tribes concerns.

One contentious issue involves the decision-making weight Tribes has. Its chief is one of six directors on the HTG board - consisting of five other chiefs - even though Tribes' population consists of 50 per cent of the HTG population base.

"But the way decisions are made, we have one vote out of six," Hwitsum said. "So there's one structural element there."

After working with HTG to discuss whether it has the support necessary to meet Tribes' goals, Hwitsum will report back to the community, probably in March.

"I'm to work with them to address Cowichan's concerns," she said. "We're to undertake best efforts to try and sort this out effectively."

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