



Carrier Sekani
Tribal
Council



British Columbia
Assembly of
First Nations



Union of
British Columbia
Indian Chiefs



First
Nations
Summit

BC FIRST NATIONS & THE MOUNTAIN PINE BEETLE EPIDEMIC

*Developing a Strategy and Action Plan & Implementing the New Relationship
September 19-20, 2005 – Civic Centre, Prince George*

PUBLIC STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

September 20, 2005

Dakelh Traditional Territory/Prince George, B.C. – We, the assembled treaty, non-treaty and non-aligned nations from across British Columbia that are impacted by the mountain pine beetle epidemic speak with one voice. This coming together of our respective Nations and communities is a remarkable show of unity and organization, made necessary by the single greatest natural disaster our communities have ever faced.

Today, 69 First Nations and 8 First Nations organizations completed an interim action plan – *B.C. First Nations Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan* – that addresses our immediate priorities in the face of the beetle's destructive presence in our territories and communities.

Our leadership will be discussing this action plan immediately with Premier Gordon Campbell, who recently assured affected Nations and communities that they would have a say on the province's roll-out of the federal government's \$100 million 'down payment' to address the crisis.

This pledge is consistent with Forest Minister Rich Coleman's comment today at the forum, who said First Nations' involvement in current provincial and local planning was "not at a level that [he] was happy with." The Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, Tom Christensen, also attended the forum and told us he supports our "effective and meaningful engagement" on the issue.

Therefore, in the spirit of The New Relationship, we expect that the Minister will allocate funds from the \$100 million 'down payment' to deal with the crisis after he has fully consulted with the affected First Nations and taken our priorities into account.

The provincial representatives have requested First Nations' support to seek an additional \$900 million from Canada to address this epidemic. Prior to that support, First Nations want a bi-lateral agreement with British Columbia as to how those funds will be used.

Chief Harry Pierre of the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council said "our action plan provides our leaders a clear and immediate mandate to engage all levels of government to have this serious matter addressed without delay".

To address our immediate concerns we are initiating an action plan, encompassing:

- Rights to Forest Resources
- Consultation and Accommodation
- Environmental Sustainability
- Development of New Economic Opportunities and Economic Sustainability
- Institutional Arrangements Consistent with The New Relationship
- Representation on Domestic and International Negotiations which affect Forest Policy
- Social and Cultural Sustainability

Grand Chief Ed John of the BC First Nations Leadership Council will immediately bring our action plan forward to the Premier's Office under the auspices of the New Relationship goals and principles arrived at early this year. He said "our priorities identified in the action plan must be achieved if we are ever able to sustain our Nations and communities in the face of this epidemic's destructive path." He stated that we can achieve our objectives because "our unity is moving the political goal posts in this province in our favour".

Chief Stewart Phillip of the BC First Nations Leadership Council, said our coming together is "historically momentous and the greatest sign of hope that our Nations and communities can and will meet the challenges head on".

Regional Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo of the BC First Nations Leadership Council said he wants to let all levels of government know that "our action plan is an interim step on the path toward comprehensive planning and joint-decisions with governments as it relates to the pine beetle epidemic and land use matters generally."

Our emergency forum was held in Lheidli T'enneh territory and was co-hosted by the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council and First Nations Leadership Council of BC, which is composed of the executives of the First Nations Summit, Union of BC Indian Chiefs, and the BC Assembly of First Nations.

For further comment on the *B.C. First Nations Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan* contact:

Grand Chief Ed John, (604) 926-9903

Chief Stewart Phillip, (250) 684-0231

BC Regional Chief Shawn Atleo, (604) 922-7733

CSTC Tribal Chief Harry Pierre, (250) 562-6279

See also: www.cstc.bc.ca/mpb/