



NORTHWEST TRIBAL TREATY NATIONS

Presentation To
Annual General Meeting
of

Northwest Corridor Development Corporation

(October 16, 2003 at Prince Rupert, B.C.)

Note: Roger Harris, MLA Skeena and Chair, Northern MLA's Caucus facilitated panel on Aboriginal Issues.

Acknowledge and thanks for the opportunity to share information with the NCDC annual meeting:

- Executive (Jeff Burghardt, Chairman & Graham Kedgley, Executive Director)
- City of Prince Rupert
- Bob Hill and the Tsimshian Nation – traditional territory
- Special appreciation and welcome to co-presenter, Sandra Cardinal from Alberta.

Co-chair of the Northwest Tribal Treaty Nations – I believe we have many common issues and requirements between us – I'll come back to that.

Also Chief (treaty) Negotiator for the Tsimshian Nation – use that experience to open and provide some general background:

Why would First Nation's pursue change?

(Want land, want self-government, want compensation etc.)

In addressing that question, I feel:

- FN's have a unique status in this land – legally and protected thru the Constitution. We have Aboriginal Rights and Aboriginal Title to the land and its resources.
- But, we also have Crown Title and the Crown's legislative authorities over the land and resources. Need to RECONCILE. (treaty and other community development processes are efforts we put forward)

A little more historic background:

- The federal Indian Act has been an effort to minimize authority and control First Nations people
- In 1969 the infamous White Paper was introduced in effort to ‘integrate’ Aboriginal People into mainstream society – it said don’t be different!
- Today’s FN Reserves are situated at key and strategic geographic locations – our Reserves cannot be avoided. Any infrastructure or development is implicated by FN issues and uncertainty will continue on a day to day basis if our requirements and issues are not addressed.

Most of BC is involved in the BC Treaty Commission (BCTC) process that opened its doors in late 1993. That process (treaty making) is an effort to achieve reconciliation, but it must be in a respectful manner with honesty and understanding from both sides. It can result in a new relationship (positive one) between First Nations and non-Aboriginal society.

Now back to the NWTT:

Our structure is not big, small office and very limited resources based out of Terrace. We are an alliance of FN’s from Haida Gwaii to the Prince George area and north of the highway 16 corridor.

- About 40-50 FN and Nation groups participate.
- 1991 the original Northwest Tribal Treaty amongst ourselves was signed in Prince Rupert. We’ve committed to respecting each other and to mutually help each other to address common issues eg. the protection of Aboriginal Rights and Title.

This has been a long road but we are chipping away at it, more recently, the NWTT has re-affirmed a desire to share information and to develop positive action for First Nations.

We have addressed the proposed federal First Nations Governance Act (FNGA) in effort to have it positively respond to our community needs rather than just the needs of policy makers who feel one structure will work for every circumstance.

- A positive outcome we recognized in addressing the federal FNGA was confirmation of a simple perspective:
 - Good government (Self-Government) must be supported by an effective and sound economy. You cannot have a sound economy if you do not have access to Land and its Resources. (Again, this is a requirement of Treaty making.)

The Economy (the reason we are gathered here today)

As realized with our FNGA process, we felt it an urgent requirement to address FN involvement in economic issues. The NWTT can be an advocate to a larger and more collective approach to this issue. We approached the provincial government

(who has been promoting the revitalization of a provincial economy since 2001) to outline our concepts and got agreement to resource some of our requirements.

NWTT initiative is to develop a formal strategy by:

- Coordinating amongst our many and diverse communities,
- Cataloguing plans and studies that have been tabled in our communities and generally for the north,
- Formalizing relationships with local government and industry,
- Developing options of approach to implement some of those plans and studies, eg. how to attract investment capital,
- Getting federal support and participation.

Our project is still in the works – being led by Dr. Kenn Whyte who may be in touch with some of your offices. We have been and will continue to reach out to our communities and municipal offices to gather and compare notes,

- We will be in touch with economic development officers and structures,
- We will address capacity building issues with the UNBC and our Colleges,

- We have already achieved a common Protocol Agreement on Cooperation and Communication with the North Central Municipal Association.
- We have very favourable relations with the Northern MLA's Caucus and intend to agree on a protocol with them as well.
- Your structure, the NCDC has been most positive in expressing the need for clear and consistent communication and issues sharing – our appreciation for the special efforts of your executive officer, Mr. Kedgley in this regard.

Two gaps we still face:

Canada is not with us and we haven't addressed the requirements of Industry in our needs.

The outcomes of our Economic Strategy Initiative are still to be determined, however, it does offer hope and promise for positive growth and development. What we don't want is another study sitting on another shelf with no follow-up.

Other Issues (and Realities)

FN's are players to be recognized.

- Whether through treaty making,
- Through partnerships arrangements (industry or others),
- By being leaders in economic development issues,
- Or as adversaries if issues and basic groundwork requirements are not addressed.

I believe we can minimize adversarial relations with a few simple principles:

- Respect each other,
- Understand respective and collective needs,
- Openly communicate with each other (and early rather than after the fact),
- Commit to our needs!

Status quo is not good enough. We have to find the way to adapt and change with today's requirements. It's to our collective benefit to agree on what should be done and how we do it, both collectively and individually. But remember from a First Nation's perspective:

- There must be respect of who we are,
- And that First Nations have a unique and special status. The essence of being a First Nation person cannot be pushed aside.

Advance concept of a provincial "First Nations Pavilion."

So how do we develop positively and in a sustainable fashion? How do we meet the needs of our citizens? How do we address requirements of tomorrow? That is the challenge we face in the North!

Thank you and I look forward to future opportunities to work with you.

(Presented by Gerald D. Wesley, Co-Chair, NWTT)