

**Report for the Northwest Tribal Treaty  
On the Regional Meetings: February 12, 2003- March 5, 2003  
By Nelson Leeson, Co-Facilitator**

The theme for this year's regional sessions was "Building a Foundation for the Future". Meetings took place in Prince Rupert, Hazelton, Smithers Terrace, Old Massett, Burns Lake, Stellaquo, and Prince George from February 12 to March 5, 2003. The agenda items for each of the workshops included:

- (a) A brief background on Northwest Tribal Treaty;
- (b) INAC's *First Nations Governance Act* and *Northwest Tribal Treaty Phase I Process*;
- (c) "Building an Economic Strategy" for the North; and a
- (d) NWT update on activities and committees.

There is much interest in supporting the Northwest Tribal Treaty, all of our people realize political clout we have when unified, and the vast economic potential we can tap if we work together. Much care needs to be taken in the advancement of the "Spirit and Intent" of the Northwest Tribal Treaty. There is a lot of optimism and I sense a trust for the organization. People in attendance at these regional meetings appreciated the information presented, the kits provided, and their thought-provoking feedback that was shared amongst themselves, at each session.

There is an understanding that Band Governance as it is, will not suffice for today's needs. Anything delivered from the antiquated Indian Act, that is now over 128 years old, is not acceptable. I hope the depth of understanding of the dynamics of oppression is better understood by all of our people whether they are in politics or not.

It is obvious this go around that our people are looking at a much more expanded form of self-government, with a larger land base and greater jurisdiction and powers that enable First Nations to work towards becoming self-sufficient, self-reliant people again. Minister Nault's initiative is good as an *interim step* toward the self-government arrangements each of our respective groups will want to develop and negotiate at their own pace.

Each of our communities can learn much from each other by sharing concepts in all areas such as Inherent Rights, Health, Child and Family Services, Forestry, Fisheries, Wildlife, other land uses, and developing Governance Models that would be acceptable. Most of this, of course, will take place on their traditional lands. I do feel however, there is a great interest to be involved in joint ventures, both amongst Northwest Tribal Treaty groups and with third parties. Already we see Municipal, Provincial, and Federal politicians anxious to do business with First Nations people- this is both exciting and hopeful for all of our futures.

When we talk about our resources, the greatest resource we have are our youth; who have so much potential and promise to look forward to. "They have the opportunity to become players in shaping their roles in their communities, and mainstream economies". We need to instil in them the fact that they can become anything they want to be, the knowledge that they are our future, and the fact we trust them. The new society that is unfolding will accommodate our needs and aspirations- it is just going to take some hard determined effort on the part of all of us. Surely, the future of our children, their children, and our children's children, is more than worth the effort.

Health is a big concern with our people as it is with all Canadians. In particular, Child and Family Services, where the 30% cutback is another challenge for our people. I

expect some good discussions at the Northwest Tribal Treaty meeting in Terrace at the end of March to help find the solutions for us as a people to deliver this service to our people. It was not too long ago that our people took it upon themselves to take care of their own without all of the moneys that are now available.

On February 20<sup>th</sup> in Prince Rupert, Co-Chair Gerald Wesley, and Director, Mel Bevan made an important presentation to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs. The presentation available in your kits was clear, articulate, and makes a broad statement of all of our concerns; one important point we need to press for in all of our business is a non-derogation clause, that can offer us some comfort.

Justa Monk, Co-Chair, Directors Len Thomas and Bill Spenst had an historic meeting with Minister of Forests, Mike DeYong on March 3<sup>rd</sup> in Prince George. Apparently they delivered an excellent presentation laying out our concerns in Forestry. The Minister realizes the large area of British Columbia the Northwest Tribal Treaty covers and seems to want to look at tenures and revenue sharing with First Nations who are interested. I am sure Justa and Len will have more information to share and elaborate on at the March meeting in Terrace.

All of us are in various stages of development in our respective communities. The suggestions from all Regional Meetings is for each of us to share information and build a data bank that will benefit us all in developing an “Economic Strategy for the North”, in which we can become meaningful participants in the emerging new economy.

A two and a half to three year pilot project will be put into place with students to be trained to look at opportunities, past, present, and future, in all our respective areas. This work will be carried out in all of our communities, and then will look at planned development over the long term, which means establishing an implementation plan. Director, Elmer Derrick is spearheading this effort and I’m sure he will be available for comment at the meetings in Terrace.

Some of our communities are active in treaty negotiations and some are not. We need to respect First Nations choices in their decisions for the future. As Stephen Cornell states in his research, “You need the powers, the jurisdiction, and a cultural match for any type of self-governance to work”.

Much thanks to all of our Directors and Co-Chairs for their work on behalf of the Northwest Tribal Treaty Nations, this was all volunteer work and we need to recognize them for their efforts. I have enjoyed being a part of Phase I and II of the Northwest Tribal Treaty as a Co-facilitator. Thanks to Angela Wesley in her duties as interim Co-ordinator, Linda Horner for her taking of minutes, Regina Toth as a Co-facilitator, and Rick Krehbiel, whom will help with the Phase II Final Report. Much thanks to all of our people who made the Regional Meetings- you were great hosts.

The Northwest Tribal Treaty is now in a position to be a “political arm of sorts” and a basis for us all to grow in a positive pro-active manner that will help assure us a good future.

In Unity,  
Axlawhaals  
Nelson Leeson