

HEADLINE: Governments Engineering Conflicts Between Communities Doesn't Advance Reconciliation

Enough already.

When will governments stop engineering conflicts between communities in the name of reconciliation?

In the Fort St. John area, we know that change is coming as the Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) claims process plays out. We want to coexist peacefully and constructively with the Blueberry River First Nation, our valued neighbours with centuries of history on the land.

But now, after years of government-to-government negotiations with little transparency for affected landowners, the Province has created yet more uncertainty and tension. Government is throwing Blueberry under the bus to avoid responsibility for its own ineptitude and inconsistency in the land settlement process.

When the land negotiations were finally made public by government watchdogs several years ago, a clear consensus emerged - including among many in the Blueberry band - that a few land parcels in the Red Creek and Charlie Lake areas were off the table; there were better alternatives. That approach would have reduced community tensions over outdoor recreation and watershed conservation. But after the 2017 election, this NDP government reversed course and put those parcels back on the table.

Last week, the provincial government handed members of the Blueberry First Nation a vote that gave them only one choice: take it or leave it on a settlement package including the controversial land parcels. Government created huge pressure and dangled a \$50,000 payment in front of every band member to ratify a flawed deal. Both indigenous and non-indigenous leaders know that the resulting "yes" vote will unnecessarily stoke tensions with adjacent landowners and long-time land users.

While landowners in Charlie Lake and Red Creek stand ready to continue working with the Blueberry First Nation toward a mutually acceptable resolution, we condemn the government-knows-best approach that has left us both in this undesirable position.

May our experience serve as a broader warning to other communities - when it comes to reconciliation, think twice when you hear someone say "I'm from the government and I'm here to help."

Concerned Citizens of Charlie Lake & Red Creek

