

“Stop. Just Stop!”

Cheslatta Elder George Louie, when asked what he wanted as compensation for Kemano I

**A collection of news articles documenting the long, on-going saga
of the Cheslatta Carrier Nation’s struggle
for justice, their survival and their future**

1992 – present

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Cheslatta Grave Flooding Continues

Windspeaker

Author: Cooper Langford, Windspeaker Staff Writer, CHESLATTA LAKE B.C

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Traditional graves at the old Cheslatta reserve are flooding again this year, adding more fuel to the British Columbia band's 40-year-old drive for a fair land settlement.

Only 87 of the original graves in the three separate cemeteries remain after years of flooding, caused by an aluminum smelting development.

"It is against the law," said Marvin Charlie, chief of the small band now centered on several small reserves around the northern city of Prince George. "The Criminal Code and the Cemetery Act is very specific about graveyard desecration...They send people to jail for such offences."

The process that led to the erosion of the graves began in 1952, when the Aluminum Company of Canada - now known as Alcan - temporarily dammed Cheslatta Lake for its Kemano hydro project.

An estimated 30 graves at one of the sites were washed out in 1957 when Alcan released water into Cheslatta River. Alcan released water to deal with federal concerns that the Kemano project was having negative effects on the region's salmon fishery.

The move washed away at least 17 graves, according to Indian Affairs records of the time released by the band. Band members estimate the number of lost graves at 30 and say coffins and grave houses were found floating in the water. They also said bones, crosses and debris washed up on the shore for years following the incident.

In a letter to Indian Affairs in the spring of 1957, Robert Skin, a provincial delegate to the Native Brotherhood, wrote: "We have seen for ourselves the graveyard that used to be at Cheslatta No. 9 Reserve. It's all gone and we don't know where the dead have gone....All the dead have floated away and gone ashore somewhere."

"People ask us why we are making a fuss now," Charlie said. "This desecration has been occurring for 35 years...They don't know how long we have been fighting this."

The Cheslatta band has been seeking a fair land claim settlement since 1952 when members were forced to leave their traditional homes by Alcan's Kemano project.

Indian Affairs records suggest a compensation agreement were reached between the band, the government and the company about the same time flooding began. But band research and outside analysts are alleging that many of the original land surrender documents were forged, likely by government officials.

The band also said it never received the promised full compensation. Band research also indicates the native people affected by the development were offered less than white people the project forced to move.

Ottawa agreed to negotiate a specific claim with the band in 1987, but negotiations broke down in 1990. There has been no action on the claim since, said band manager Mike Robertson. "We are really pissed off," he said. "If they don't come back to the table real soon, we are going back to court."

The band has its case before the courts in British Columbia. The action is temporarily on hold while the band sees if a federal promise to negotiate goes anywhere.

- See more at: <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/cheslatta-grave-flooding-continues-0#sthash.EnShQA43.dpuf>

Flooded Graveyard A Symbol Of Disregard For Culture, Traditions

- Windspeaker

Author: Windspeaker Staff

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The flooded graves at the old Cheslatta reserve in northern British Columbia are only the tip of the damage created by a government's negligence of Native land rights. They are a deep insult resting on top of a very deep injury.

The sight of the quiet white houses tilting into the waters of Cheslatta Lake is also highly symbolic. What are cemeteries if not a place where the living remember those who went before, a monument to a community's history and the culture handed down over generations?

But Native history and culture has never been highly valued in Canadian history. And in the 1950s, when Alcan was building dams to support its aluminum smelter in Kitimat, the concerns of a handful of Indians on small reserves could stand in the way of massive development.

The Cheslatta people were forced to move on short notice with previous little compensation and much personal loss. Band members say the relocation was the start of family disintegration and alcohol abuse in their community.

Like the graves, much of what they had to call their own was washed away.

With this history in mind, Ottawa agreed to negotiate a specific land claim in 1987. But the government's offers were minimal and talks ground to a halt in 1990. Since then there has been little movement towards an agreement.

It's hard to imagine how Ottawa cannot negotiate under the circumstances. The band has produced volumes of research, citing a litany of abuses by government and spectacular allegations of forgery on the original land surrender documents.

And then there are the graves. No single image could so easily portray the historical wrongs visited on the people, the utter disregard for culture and tradition.

To their credit, the Cheslatta people have developed a plan to restore their community and their connections with the past. The plan calls for the restoration of Cheslatta Lake and the identification of historical sites and nature walks for recreation purposes.

Ottawa should perhaps follow this lead. The government should stop counting its beans and get back to the table and negotiate a real deal. Then it should throw its support behind the band's redevelopment plans. And if at all possible, Alcan should be dragged along for the ride, maybe even pay some of the costs.

This much is owed to the Cheslatta people, who were independent and self-sustaining before Alcan came to its town. Alcan has seen the benefits of flooding Cheslatta land in its profit lines. The provincial and federal governments have seen the benefits in increased tax revenues. Now it's the Cheslatta people's turn.

- See more at: <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/flooded-graveyard-symbol-disregard-culture-traditions#sthash.XP9boX1n.dpuf>

Leaders Demand Inquiry Into Aluminium Industry

- Windspeaker

Author: Windspeaker Staff, Prince George BC

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Native leaders in northwest British Columbia are demanding a full-scale investigation into the regional's aluminium industry and fears industrial development is destroying essential salmon runs.

"Everything is at stake here. Hopefully we'll see good results," said Tl'azt'en chief Carrier and Sekani nations for an inquiry into Alcan's Kemano completion project. Recently released environmental studies from the project-commonly known as Kemano II - reviews five years ago -support aboriginal concerns about potential environmental damage, chiefs say.

In press statements, the bands have accused Ottawa and the provincial and federal governments of hiding information that may have held back the \$1 billion project.

Ottawa signed a deal with Alcan and the province, called the Kemano Settlement Agreement, in 1987. It cleared that path for the hydroelectric project that will supply power for Alcan's smelter at Kitimat. The federal government also exempted the plan from an environmental review.

"If the documents had been available in 1987, the public would have been astounded by the whitewash presented by the provincial and federal government," said Cheslatta chief Marvin Charlie. "Canadians were misled into believing Kemano II would not impact the salmon and freshwater fishery. But the fact is, there has been a major cover-up regarding scientific data."

Chiefs in the region fear the completion of Alcan's Kemano aluminium projects will lead to sharp reductions in the Nechako River's water flow, devastating the chinook and sockeye stocks.

In media statement, they say the federal fisheries department estimates potential salmon production on the Nechako is more than 30 million fish, about 10 times current production levels. They also claim that flows will be reduced to 13 per cent of the natural level in the river, which is the rearing channel for millions of salmon and other game fish.

British Columbia's NDP government is planning a review. It has appointed a lawyer to go over Alcan's agreements and advise the cabinet on how to proceed.

But Carrier-Sekani chiefs say a provincial investigation will not go far enough. They are demanding a full federal-provincial judicial inquiry where witnesses will give testimony under oath. "It has become clear from recently released documents that the Kamano Settlement Agreement was made for political, not scientific reasons," Carrier-Sekani tribal chief Justa Monk said in a media release.

The Chiefs are also asking for an "interim measure" to prevent environmental damage until an inquiry is conducted.

- See more at: <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/leaders-demand-inquiry-aluminium-industry#sthash.ZQctoLnL.dpuf>

NO SURRENDER

- Windspeaker

Author: Windspeaker Staff

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IN 1952, THE INDIAN AFFAIRS ATTEMPTED TO NEGOTIATE A LAND SURRENDER WITH THE CHESLATTA BAND IN NORTHERN B.C.

FORTY YEARS LATER THEY ARE ACCUSED OF RAILROADING 70 PEOPLE OUT OF THEIR HOMES THROUGH DECEIT AND FORGERY.

" I do not presume we should stand in the way of a development such as proposed by the company even though it may mean the Indians will lose two or three small reserves."

D.J. Allen, Superintendent of Reserves and Trust. Dec. 1, 1951.

"They chased us out like a bunch of coyotes."

Pat Edmund, Cheslatta band member, 1980.

George Louis remembers the day when the Indian Affairs officials showed up at Cheslatta. He was a young man at the time, in his mid-20s. Today, he remember it as one of first times men from the department had ever come to the isolated reserves around the Cheslatta-Murray Lake system in British Columbia's northern interior.

It was early in the spring of 1952. The ground was deep in mud from the melting snow and the ice on the lake was rotting. The government men had come to Cheslatta to break the news.

It was big news. Big news that, according to modern band research, had been circulating in neighboring white communities for more than three years, where officials had been making offers on white-owned properties standing in the way of the Aluminum Company of Canada and its plan to produce the "metal of the future" in the B.C. wilderness.

The Second World War was over. Alcan was building Kitimat, then billed as the largest aluminum smelter in Canada. The aluminum project was coupled with Kemano, a plant tapping the hydro-electric power potential of the region's rivers and lakes. It was a project of fantastic proportions, a celebrated engineering miracle that would turn B.C. rivers on their heels in the service of economic development.

But for the 70 people living around Cheslatta, whose quiet economy was based around centuries of fur-trapping and the moose hunt, the news would be as fresh as it was devastating. It would be the day that marked the start of their decline into the poverty and social problems that plague so many modern reserves. It was also the first day of a history of government dealings, that looking back now appears fraught with deceit and perhaps outright fraud.

"I was out fishing through the ice," Louis says, recalling the day the Indian Affairs officials called a community meeting to tell the Cheslatta people they had to get out of the way - now. "I heard a sleigh coming. One guy stopped and told me there was going to be a meeting. I asked him what was happening. He said 'They're going to chase us out' They were going to flood the area. I couldn't believe it."

It was true. On April 16, 1952, most of the members assembled at the Bel-ga-tse #5 reserve to meet Robert Howe, then B.C.'s Indian agent, and a Mr. E.A. Clark of Alcan. The meeting was called on short notice and members who were out on their traplines couldn't be notified. Melting snow and muddy trails made travel to the site impossible for others. The weather was indeed bad enough to keep the officials from reaching Bel-ga-tse for several days. It was fish that ultimately tied the fate of the Cheslatta band to the fantastic dreams of the aluminum producers and their engineers.

In 1950, the B.C. government granted rights to all of the water that flowed into northern B.C.'s Nechako River. The river was being dammed, flooding three more rivers to turn to create the 250-mile Nechako Reservoir. The reservoir drove Kemano's gigantic turbines that fed the smelter's voracious power appetite.

But damming the Nechako threatened the lives of the millions of salmon that migrated up the river every year. The federal fisheries department wanted assurances these stocks would be protected.

At the end of March, 1952, it was decided damming Murray Lake would create a small reservoir with enough water to sustain the Nechako salmon run for five years while the river filled the reservoir.

Construction on the Kenney dam began immediately but there was one small catch. The people of Cheslatta lived on Murray Lake. Building the reservoir would flood their homes.

And so it was that Howe and Clark, along with some assistants, helicoptered into Cheslatta on a rainy April 20. They carried bags of groceries for the Natives, who were running low on food after waiting four days, ready to hear the details of how they would be forced to relocate.

"My people were called to a meeting at Cheslatta Reserve, all on short notice," Marvin Charlie, the current chief, told researchers in a 1984 interview as the band was preparing a lawsuit against the government.

"Some of my people were out trapping and they didn't attend the meeting. Most of them didn't know what the meeting was about, immediately. Not next week, not next month or next year, they were to move out now. Some of the elders refused to move for the love of their homes and land. They were herded from their land and homes."

It is clear from department records the government and aluminum officials had a difficult time convincing the Cheslatta people to surrender their homes and move to a new community at Grassy Plains, 30 miles away, even though Alcan was ready to foot the bill.

Department records claim the band was not willing to negotiate unless they were guaranteed cash compensation on a per capita basis, a monthly pension for each band member, compensation for traplines as well as the purchase of land buildings at the new site before the band members arrived. Memorandums from the period called the band's demands "*fantastic and unrealistic.*"

Making little progress with the group, the officials decided instead to approach each band member individually and find out what they wanted for their property. Privately, band members with little understanding of money or current land values estimated their personal properties at anywhere from \$50 to \$15,000.

The talks went nowhere for two days. But then the band had a sudden change of heart, if Indian Affairs records are to be believed. The band voted unanimously to surrender 2,600 acres "...and for the Indian Affairs Department) to sell to the Aluminum, company of Canada, our Cheslatta Indian reserves...for the sum of \$130,000, provided that this amount is sufficient to establish our band elsewhere to our satisfaction on a comparable basis. "

With the so-called deal in hand, Howe and Clark left Cheslatta grasping documents they said gave them permission to flood Cheslatta.

But community members don't remember reaching any kind of agreement, other than one might have been imposed from top down.

"The last day...they told us we're going to get \$129,000, all the band." Abel Peters, who acted as translator during the meeting, recalled in a 1991 interview. "And they told us that we were going to get another \$129,000...No written paper or anything. That's the way they work it. Everything was crooked. Crooked all the way. The DIA and Alcan were together. The DIA never, never stuck with us. Against us all the way."

With the so-called surrender complete, the Cheslatta people began the difficult trek to new homes at Grassy Plains. The spring that had turned their trails into muddy ruts and families could only carry the barest necessities.

The picture did not brighten once they reached Grassy Plains. Money from the government compensation did not arrive until the summer of 1953. Many families were forced to spend the first year in shacks and tents. Even then, the cash had to be spent on buying the new land.

Fearful that the Natives might return, Indian Affairs hired contractors to burn the Cheslatta communities behind the exodus. And when the hired hands balked at setting fire to a church erected by community members in 1860, the government men grabbed the torches and gasoline and did the job themselves.

George Louis was tending his trapline during the surrender meeting and the relocation of the Cheslatta people. When he came out from the bush two months later, he found a ghost town. But though the people were gone, Cheslatta was still his home, the site of his small stone house, and he stayed for awhile - at least long enough to see his village burned.

"I seen the helicopter come down. I went to the store and I saw smoke coming up." The smoke was from burning houses and bonfires fed by leftover blankets, tools, furniture - whatever had been left behind in the rush to move the people.

Flood waters rose around the community that spring.

Several graveyards were washed under in what is perhaps the most vivid image of the destruction. For the next three years, bones and coffins washed up on the lakeshore. The damage to the tiny cemeteries continues where the simple white grave houses tip silently in the rotting shorelines of Murray and Cheslatta Lakes.

A stone cairn stands on a small rise above what used to be the graveyard at Cheslatta's main reserve. An aluminum plaque on the monument erected by Alcan reads: "Erected to the memory of the Indian men, women and children of the Cheslatta Band, laid to rest on Reservation five, now under water. May they rest in peace."

Today, the Cheslatta people live on scattered parcels of land around Prince George. It takes a 173-mile round trip to visit all the pieces of their jigsaw reserve. The once self-sufficient band now boasts unemployment rates of 85 per cent. Drug and alcohol abuse is prevalent and over-crowded housing is the norm. Traplines, once a major source of income, have been decimated by flooding and clear-cut logging.

The band entered specific claims negotiations in 1987, after the federal government agreed they should be reimbursed for land purchased during the relocations. The talks have not gone smoothly and the community must hold bingos, raffles and bake sales to help cover negotiating costs.

There is one final twist in the Cheslatta story that comes with findings from an ex-RCMP forgeries expert who examined the original land surrender documents.

"The Cheslatta people were taken for a ride," say

- See more at: <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/no-surrender#sthash.0JIafGlu.dpuf>

Alcan project to get hearing

- Windspeaker

Author: Cooper Langford, Windspeaker Staff Writer, Victoria

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A controversial hydroelectric project in British Columbia that threatened salmon stocks won't be stopped, but it will be subject to a long overdue public hearing, provincial officials said.

On the heels of a report saying Alcan's so-called Kemano Completion Project has a legal right to proceed, the B.C. government announced review plans it hopes will set aside long simmering disputes. "This huge project was approved without formal public hearings," Premier Mike Harcourt said in a press statement announcing the public hearings. "My government rejects the kind of deal-making that leads to the project's approval...(But) breaking the agreement could cost B.C. taxpayers well over half a billion dollars."

Alcan's Kemano project, a \$1 billion hydroelectric project that will reduce flows in the salmon-rich Nechako River, has been subject to years of opposition and controversy. About \$500 million has already been spent on the half-finished tunnel and generator project, which was approved in Ottawa in 1987 without an Environmental review. Since then the project has been in and out of courts on challenges to its environmental review exemption launched by Native communities and environment groups. Project opponents are currently trying to have the Supreme Court of Canada rule on the issue of federal review.

Last week, Victoria lawyer Murray Rankin, a special adviser to the province on Kemano, released a report saying the province should hold a review but had no power to stop the project. The economic benefits flowing from Kemano outweigh negative environment impacts, which would be limited to specific regions, Rankin said. He also said the province would have to repay money already invested by Alcan if steps were taken to block the project.

But Rankin also recommended the creation of the review panel and said the Nechako salmon habitat can be maintained through careful management of the river's water level. Native communities and environmental activists, however, has not put their stamp of approval on the Rankin report or the province's plans.

Justa Monk, chief of the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, called Rankin's report a "legal opinion designed to protect the provincial government." "We are shocked that the Harcourt government would suggest the Kemano Completion Project should proceed when there are so many unanswered questions," he said.

One of the main questions demanding answers from communities along the Nechako is whether Ottawa approved the Alcan development for political reasons.

Several documents leaked to researchers for the Cheslatta band suggest scientists for the federal fisheries departments were coerced into changing the tone of their studies to meet political ends. The leaks fuel beliefs among project opponents that Ottawa and the province ignored data that suggested river flows could dwindle to 13 per cent of their pre-development volume. Such a reduction could devastate the fishery.

Rankin said he hopes the review will bring to light much of the information causing concerns about political influence in the scientific process. Most of the documents relating to the 1987 project approval have been kept secret.

Hydro project devastating region

- Windspeaker

Author: Dana Waggoner, Windspeaker Contributor, CHESLACCA LAKE B.C.

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He's gone - or going - but he won't be forgotten. Brian Mulroney will be remembered in northern British Columbia, long after he's kicking up daisies, as the man who pulled the plug on the Nechako River.

Decades from now, people will talk about the old Nechako River - and how it used to be. They'll talk about the prime minister - "What was his name? - who teamed up with B.C. government in 1987 to kill one of the province's finest rivers. They will remember a B.C. government that forgot, and continues to forget, the provincial motto Splendor Sine Occasus (Splendor Without Diminishment).

The Nechako has been fighting for its life since the early 1950s when Alcan started sucking up to one third of its water to produce electricity as part of (hydroelectric plant) Kemano 1. Now it looks as if the river will die an unnatural death, finished off by Kemano 2. And this ain't no mercy killing. There's still a lot of life left in the Nechako. The question is for how long?

Not much longer unless British Columbians kick up a bigger fuss. The liar court government announced on Jan. 19 that Kemano 2 can go ahead. And the Supreme Court of Canada decided on Feb. 4 not to get involved in the legal debate.

The Nechako has its headwaters in the traditional territory of the Cheslatta Indian Band, which was devastated by Kemano 1. That project forced many non-Native people in the Ootsa Lake area to move as Alcan said it needed their land to create the Nechako reservoir. Although Ootsa settlers were given up to two years notice, some of their anger at having to relocate still lingers after more than 40 years.

Unlike Ootsa settlers, Cheslatta people were given little notice their land was needed for the massive Alcan project. They were approached in early April 1952 and told they'd have to get off the land on which they had lived, hunted and trapped for generations.

A few weeks later a coffer dam on Murray Lake started to back up water, flooding the Cheslatta homeland on Cheslatta Lake. With their backs to the wall and a gun to their heads, the Cheslatta people decided to leave.

They planned to return for the rest of their possessions. But before they could get back, Alcan sub-contractors torched their villages. And someone looted their belongings.

The Cheslatta's nightmares were far from over. In 1957 when the gates of the Skins Lake Spillway were first opened a massive surge of water washed away a Cheslatta graveyard at the west end of the lake. The Cheslatta were horrified. The graveyard contained dozens of their beloved ancestors who disappeared into the muddy torrent of the once placid Cheslatta Lake.

Coffins and grave houses were found floating on the surface of the lake. For years, bones, crosses, debris and even a skull were found washed up on the shores of Cheslatta Lake.

To compound the problem, Kemano 2 could very easily wipe out 20 per cent of the Fraser River's salmon stock.

The provincial government has decided even though the fish could be gone forever, it's better for that to happen than to shut down Kemano 2. Many Natives and non-Natives don't feel that way. For them, survival is the issue: the survival of the Nechako River, B.C. commercial fisheries and the food fishery of more than 100 Fraser Indian nations.

- See more at: <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/hydro-project-devastating-region#sthash.hyNK6ekP.dpuf>

B.C. bands seek input into Alcan hearings

- Windspeaker

Author: D.B. Smith, Windspeaker Staff Writer, Vancouver

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The B.C. government may hold its own talks to address Native concerns over the expansion of a hydroelectric project in the northwest section of the province. The Carrier Sekani Tribal Council boycotted the B.C. Utilities Commission public hearings over completion of the Alcan Kemano Project on the Nechako River. But provincial Native Affairs Minister John Cashore said the NDP government may try to get an agreement to start talks with the council and resolve concerns over the environmental and economic impacts of the expansion.

The tribal council has already met with a provincial negotiator to set up the "government-to-government interim talks," tribal council co-ordinator Rick Krehbiel said. "There may be hope for that process. It remains to be seen." Some of the tribal council's 10- member bands, including the Cheslatta, have registered as participants in the public hearings just to "keep their options open. "But there's no representation at all," he said. "Some (tribal council) staff registered just to get information out of those clowns."

The terms of reference for the commission's discussions, which began Nov. 7, were too narrow for the tribal council's participation to have any effect, Krehbiel said. The commission is not addressing the extent of damage done to flooded lands and salmon runs on the Nechako and Fraser Rivers during the 1950s.

The review process further ignores the government-to-government protocol signed between British Columbia and First Nations in the province only three months ago, Krehbiel said. Last month, the Assembly of First Nations executive council, including Grand Chief Ovide Mercredi, called on the federal government to suspend hearings. The AFN also wants Ottawa to compensate the Cheslatta for 40 years of "inaction and inattention."

Band Chief Marvin Charlie said the Cheslatta were prepared to participate "under protest" until the commission announced in September that Alcan would be providing the information base for the hearings. "They (the B.C. Utilities Commission) wants us to play their game and as soon as we reluctantly agree, they

change the rules," Charlie said. Experts retained for the benefit of registered participants, including the band, are no longer available and now act only as advisers to the commissioners.

The Cheslatta maintain the Nechako is the most important tributary to the most significant salmon-producing river in the world. Expanding the project, originally built to provide power for Alcan's aluminum smelters near Kitimat, B.C., will entail drilling a second tunnel from the Nechako's watershed, diverting up to 84 per cent of the flow.

The council has mounted an extensive public pressure campaign to sway support away from the mega-project, Krehbiel said. They're concerned that recent drops in the price of aluminum means power from the expansion of the project will be earmarked for sale to B.C. Hydro and the U.S.

That could mean taking the province or Alcan to court over a breach of license, he said. The project is currently licensed only to produce electricity for Alcan's smelters, not for sale in the U.S.

- See more at: <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/bc-bands-seek-input-alcan-hearings-0#sthash.boOZZoeT.dpuf>

Royal Commission **Indian Suffered 'Unspeakable Acts'**

By Mark Hume Vancouver Sun **November 16, 1993** Page One frontpage headline

The treatment of British Columbia's Cheslatta Carrier Indians is a "story of horrors," a member of the Federal Commission On Aboriginal Peoples said Monday in Vancouver.

"It is a story to shock the consciousness of all reasonable Canadians.: commissioner Paul Chartrand said in reaction to a presentation by a small native band that is fighting against Alcan's hydro-electric project on the Nechako River.

Chartrand said the Royal Commission has heard a lot of disturbing testimony in its tour of the country, but nothing compares to what he heard from four Cheslatta representatives in a hearing at the Chateau Granville.

"The story of the Cheslatta Carrier is quite unique. I think it is unique is the horrors that have been perpetrated on your people... They have been unspeakable acts." said Chartrand in a short, emotional response to the Cheslatta presentation.

Chartrand said he would urge his fellow commissioners, many of whom were not in Vancouver for Mondays hearings, to act quickly to assist the Cheslatta.

He promised, among other things, to ask the government to order an investigation into the department of Indian Affairs to find out why so little was done to help the Cheslatta Carrier group, who were flooded out of their homeland in the 1950's by phase one of Alcan's Kemano Project.

The Cheslatta are now fighting to stop the second phase of the project, known as Kemano II, which would further drain the Nechako, taking up to 84 per cent of the river flow.

The Cheslatta said Kemano II will devastate their people, and warned that they might resort to violence to stop the project.

“This statement that I conclude with today is not a threat, it is a factual statement: Kemano II will proceed over our dead bodies.” said Mike Robertson, a senior researcher with the Cheslatta Carrier Band.

“The issue of Kemano II is not economics, nor is it a matter of government liability. The issue of Kemano II is not entirely environmental, nor is it in its entirety the extinction of an entire run of salmon. The issue of Kemano II is survival.”

“Quite simply, the Cheslatta people will not survive Kemano II. Kemano II will erase Cheslatta physically, culturally, economically and environmentally. Kemano II will finish the job that Alcan and the governments started in 1952.” said Robertson.

The Cheslatta presentation came shortly after the band announced it would not participate in hearings into the project that are now being held by the BC Public Utilities Commission.

Robertson said the Cheslatta want the BC Government to cancel the hearings and instead call a public judicial inquiry. He said an announcement by Federal Environment Minister Sheila Copps, that the department of fisheries and oceans would join the BC hearings is not good enough.

Copps said in Ottawa that her government will lift the so-called gag order that the Conservatives had placed on DFO. “We will provide whatever support is needed to the BC review.” Copps said in an interview. “We are certainly interested in providing technical and scientific backup.”

The previous Conservative government warned last spring it was prepared to go to court to prevent past or present employees from being subpoenaed to testify about the project.

Robertson said Copps has taken a step in the right direction, but her government has not gone far enough. “I don’t hold much hope for it. If they are going to follow the same terms of reference as the BC hearings, they might as well stay home.”

“We want them to postpone this thing. If they are going to allow these (DFO) guys to testify, they can’t do it on Dec.6 (when the hearings resume). They need more time to prepare and so do we.”

Chief Marvin Charlie told the commission that his people have been fighting the Kemano –project for 41 years. He told how his people fell into alcohol abuse and how suicides became rampant in the community in the years after Kemano I drowned the traplines and village sites in Cheslatta country. “It left a deep scar in the people’s heart.” he said.

Korena Peters said she grew up listening to her elders cry about the impact of Kemano I. She said she doesn’t want to see another generation go through that with Kemano II. “I’m telling you today, save the Nechako River.” she said. “Does history have to repeat itself?”

Kemano II is a \$1.3 billion hydro development. Alcan has spent \$500 million on the project so far.

Acting in what a Senate committee later described as an illegal manner, then prime minister Brian Mulroney’s cabinet exempted Kemano II from environmental assessment hearings.

Kemano II Opponents Claim Project Endangers Salmon Stocks

- Windspeaker

Author: Susan Lazaruk, Windspeaker Correspondent, Vancouver

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Opponents of Alcan's Kemano II project in northern B.C. are predicting dire consequences for salmon stocks if the hydroelectric mega project goes ahead.

To draw attention to the \$1.3 billion project that diverts water from the Nechako River, Greenpeace organized a rally outside the giant aluminum company's downtown Vancouver head offices recently. The crowd of about 75 listened to speeches by area Natives, environmentalists and a former federal scientist who says Kemano II, or the Kemano Completion Project, will harm B.C.'s fish stocks by reducing the Nechako's flow by more than 80 percent.

They say the project was approved for the wrong reasons.

"The whole course of events in the deliberations of this project has been controlled politically instead of through science and good management," said Dr. Gordon Hartman, a biologist with the Department of Fisheries and Ocean (DFO) for 30 years.

Marvin Charlie, Chief of the 60-member Chaslatta L'en Carrier Nation, said Kemano II threatened his people at Cheslatta Lake. When the first phase of Kemano was built, the Cheslatta were forced to surrender their land and move north because of flooding. Their old homes were burned.

In the four decades since, they say the old lake shore village sites and cemeteries have been flooded 80 times, sweeping the remains of 50 Cheslatta into the rising waters. But the Cheslatta haven't stopped thinking about the future.

"We have a big plan for Cheslatta Lake," said Charlie. "We hope to keep it as natural as possible, but the way the Alcan aluminum company's flooding it every year, year after year, maybe twice in the summer....":

Meanwhile, at public hearings held by the B.C. Utilities Commission in Prince George the day before the Vancouver rally, Alcan regional vice-president Bill Rich said his company has the right to finish the project and that it will stand up to public scrutiny.

Rich said claims of an 80 per cent reduction in river flows are incorrect because they're based on levels before the first stage of Kemano. He said that's irrelevant because salmon stocks have been maintained at lower current levels.

"Under KCP, Nechako River flows at Prince George, as they exist today, will be reduced by 29 per cent and in the upper Nechako by 53 per cent.

The problems today are rooted in the 1950s when the B.C. government granted Alcan unlimited water rights in exchange for building a smelter and creating hydroelectric power for the province.

Key to the project is the Nechako River, which flows east in the country's most important salmon-spawning grounds. The Nechako River is a major tributary of the salmon-rich Fraser River, which flows about 750 kilometres south to Vancouver.

The first stage of Kemano involved damming the Nechako to reverse its flow westward to flood 200 kilometres of lakes and prime timber lands, creating the Nechako reservoir. Alcan now diverts one-third of the Nechako's water, but it wants more - 88 per cent of the Nechako's flows - to expand its smelter operation and to generate more electricity for B.C. consumers. Alcan announced plans for the completion project, a giant tunnel to allow a greater flow of water, in the 1970s.

But the DFO, whose job it is to protect fish, opposed the expansion because of the harm to salmon. DFO minister Tom Siddon offered a compromise: Alcan could have 50 per cent (up to 75 per cent in some cases) of the Nechako's flow. Alcan insisted on 88 per cent and the court case was still set to go.

Five DFO scientists who worked on the impact of Kemano made it clear they felt Ottawa's compromise would harm the fish. Senior DFO officials told them to keep quiet or be dropped as expert witnesses for the case.

In August 1987, a week after the court case began, senior federal officials met with Alcan executives at their Vancouver head offices to negotiate a deal. The court challenge was dropped. Siddon said the deal would result in no net loss of fish habitat and would benefit fisheries. The scientists were stunned. They charged that the amount of water granted to Alcan was less than half the minimum required to maintain the salmon stocks. They called procedures proposed to maintain the stocks faulty. But Kemano II was to go ahead, and in 1988 construction began and environmentalists demanded a federal-provincial Environmental Assessment and Review Panel, standard procedure for such mega projects.

In 1990, however, the Conservative Cabinet passed a special order to exempt Kemano II from a review, the only time in Canada's history that's been done. The exemption was later condemned by an all party committee of Parliament as illegal and unconstitutional.

Six years later, the new Liberal government has promised to reopen Kemano and remove the gag but to date nothing has been done.

Construction has been halted on the project at least until the public hearings are finished. Meanwhile, the provincial NDP government says its hands are tied. It calls the agreement a backroom deal but says it's a binding legal document and the government must abide by it. Premier Mike Harcourt commissioned lawyer Murray Rankin to advise his government on legal aspects of Kemano II. Rankin concluded in January 1993 that the government would be liable for the \$500 million Alcan has so far spent on the project.

The Cheslatta and another Carrier Nation are calling for a federal-provincial review.

- See more at: <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/kemani-ii-opponents-claim-project-endangers-salmon-stocks#sthash.EyRLbUzg.dpuf>

B.C. kills Kemano project

- Windspeaker

Susan Lazaruk, Windspeaker Correspondent, Vancouver

Volume: 12 Issue: 20 Year: **January 1995**

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To stop West Coast salmon from going the way of East Coast cod, the B.C. government pulled the plug on the giant Kemano hydro project in northwestern B.C. The move delighted environmentalists and area Natives but left business groups and affected workers spitting mad.

Premier Mike Harcourt killed Alcan's \$1.3 billion Kemano Completion Project Jan. 24, citing worries over the harm lowered water levels resulting from the huge dam would do to salmon stocks in the Fraser River system. "We won't take the chance" with the salmon, Harcourt told a Vancouver news conference. He called on the federal government to end its 1987 agreement, signed by Brian Mulroney's Conservatives, B.C. Social Credit and Alcan, to use up to 88 per cent of the Nechako River. He said the deal was negotiated in secret, without full information on the effect the project would have on salmon runs and with an exemption for any environmental assessment studies. "If the federal government refuses to do its part by reversing its decision, my government will be forced to step in with legislative action," he said. The shutdown sets up a battle royale over who should compensate the aluminum company for the \$535 million it's already sunk into the megaproject.

Harcourt insisted Ottawa is liable, but federal Fisheries Minister Brian Tobin accused B.C. of playing politics, saying it had the power to revoke Alcan's licence, granted by the Socreds. "To start this game of trying to reconstruct past history and try to say, 'We're going to make the decision but somebody else will pay the cost,' is not, I don't think, a constructive or responsible approach to this issue."

The company's only comment is that it is disappointed and wants to meet with government to discuss the shutdown of the project, which is also called Kemano II and was to provide Alcan with more hydro power for its smelters.

The Cheslatta-Carrier Nation is applauding the decision, but it's doing so cautiously, said Mike Robertson, a senior researcher with the band in Grassy Plains. "It's fine to cancel the project, but we're still waiting to hear what's going to be done about Kemano I," he said.

Outstanding issues from the first phase include treaty and land claims and flooding. When Kemano I began in the 1950s, the Cheslatta were forced to surrender their land and move to Grassy Plains because of continual flooding. Homes on the band were burned. And since then the site of the village, including ancient burial grounds of 50 of their ancestors on the shores of Cheslatta Lake, have flooded 80 times.

The land still floods every spring and summer and area rivers remain 30 per cent normal levels. There were plans for Alcan to complete the nearby Kenney Dam to restore water levels and stop flooding, something Cheslatta hopes will happen so they can return. (Alcan has yet to comment on the fate of the dam.) "In time, that's the plan of the people, to take control of their land and start long-term rehabilitation of the rivers and lakes," he said.

The Cheslatta are also worried about the future of the hydroelectric project, now a gigantic half-completed hole carved out of the side of the mountain. "We're afraid it might turn into a Kemanos III," said Robertson. But he said next time he's certain his people will be included in the process. "They sure learned a lesson on how to deal with a megaproject of this size," he said. "(The situation) is a result of 15 years of hard work by the Cheslatta."

- See more at: <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/bc-kills-kemano-project#sthash.S5Vmz4o0.dpuf>

Demise of Kemanos II reason to celebrate in Indian Country

- Windspeaker Editorial
Author: Windspeaker Staff

Volume: 12 Issue: 20 ` Year: January 1995

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First Great Whale is stopped and now Alcan's Kemanos II - the last few months have provided much to celebrate in Indian Country.

The \$1.3 billion hydroelectric monster, known as the Kemanos Completion Project, which promised to change forever the face of the Fraser River system in British Columbia, met its undignified demise Jan. 23.

Acting as coroner, provincial Mike Harcourt took the pulse of common opinion, and with the insight granted politicians during the months leading to an election, announced KCP dead.

The process leading up to that announcement has been a long and painful one. Everyone from environmental organizations to Native groups have taken a run at the sensitive underbelly of the beast over the years. The original project, Kemanos I, was unpopular with the Cheslatta Indians since the 1950s when the Nation was uprooted by constant flooding and washed away to settle in Grassy Plains. The Cheslatta Nation is still waiting for compensation for the upheaval.

In 1987, though, when the federal government granted Alcan its sweetheart deal, allowing the company to bypass environmental assessment studies and move to construct Kemanos II, the public showed it would not stand for another assault on the land. It was an appealing agreement. Now, eight years later, that public position has been vindicated and the fight seems to have been won.

What was it, though that finally killed Kemanos after all these years? It was the salmon, Harcourt said. The threat the project posed to the multi-billion dollar fishing industry was too great to chance. Building Kemanos would lower the Nechako River by 88 per cent of its natural flow. An environment disaster waiting to happen, it seemed.

The more cynical believe, however, it is not so much the salmon Harcourt intends to save, but the skin of the ruling New Democrats. Could it just be a well-timed decision for a flagging political party entering the first stages of an upcoming election?

What really killed Kemano? The sleazy, backroom dealings of an arrogant federal government and a mega-corporation trying to cut corners, limit input, and stifle responsibility? The people of B.C. insisted on the kind of responsibility to the land and its people we've come to realize goes hand-in-hand with successful economic development.

The Conservative party which sanctioned the Kemano project those many years ago has all but gone the way of the dodo. It seems fitting that the agreement itself should be tossed out after them. The flagrant flaunting of the rules of fair play will now and forever be intolerable. The Liberal government should see the situation so clearly. It's now up to them to put the final nail in the Kemano coffin.

Amid the cheers and applause for Harcourt's decision, however, there is resentment and anger. From those small communities that saw Kemano as a means to create economic wealth, the decision to scrap the project has been denounced. "British Columbia is closed for business," the municipal leaders say.

In fact, the message that has been sent to business is not that B.C. is unwelcoming, but that it has standards that cannot be compromised. Its people must be consulted, and its land protected. If the province does not attract the kind of business that is willing to live up to those standards - good riddance.

- See more at: <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/demise-kemano-ii-reason-celebrate-indian-country#sthash.jVm3R9MX.dpuf>

Savvy leaders learn to communicate through the press

- Windspeaker

Author: Paul Barnsley, Windspeaker Staff Writer

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CLASSROOM EDITION

The educational tool that showcases critical issues impacting Canada's Aboriginal People.

Page 8

If you're a careful reader of the mainstream press, you can stitch together the types of stories that get national front page exposure and from them get an idea of what a typical daily newspaper editor believes are the essential issues in Aboriginal communities.

Stories about corruption, incompetence, secrecy and other equally unflattering scenarios on reserves or in Aboriginal organizations will always make their way into the newspapers.

Most people will tell you that those stories should get attention. But what seems to be missing, many band council or tribal council officials will tell you, is any attempt to understand what's really going on beyond the initial sensation.

In Indian country there does seem to be an impression that the journalists have already made up their minds about Aboriginal people and their institutions. The way the mainstream press zeroes in on stories about financial mismanagement, alcoholism, family violence, nepotism, or welfare dependency indicates they've decided that Aboriginal people and their institutions are primitive and unsophisticated and in need of some help from the 'more advanced' majority. Why else is it that every time there's a report of a band operating in a deficit or encountering budget problems that Reform Party members or prominent business-oriented think-tanks or other conservative establishment groups immediately pronounce that Aboriginal people are not ready for self government? And, more importantly, why would the mainstream press think nothing of reporting those people saying such things without examining what those comments represent?

Several years ago, when former CBS sports analyst Jimmy "the Greek" Snider decided to tell his large, national viewing audience that Black people weren't suited for a particular sport because of their genetic make-up, his broadcasting career ended soon afterwards. That's because he was spouting the kind of pure bigoted ignorance that forever labeled him as undeserving of a national audience. Is there any difference between Jimmy the Greek's comments and those of a government bureaucrat or politician who concludes that an entire race of people are not ready to govern themselves because of a few problems?

Aboriginal leaders say "no." They say similar problems exist in Ottawa or in provincial or local governments. They wonder why reporters aren't writing that people involved in non-Aboriginal governments aren't ready to govern themselves. Their budgets aren't balanced. There's evidence of corruption with the awarding of government contracts in their departments. Shouldn't their race be labeled as deficient as well?

Is there any difference between Jimmy the Greek's comments and Canadian news organizations repeating the comments about Aboriginal people not being ready for self government? Only the difference between black and white. Aboriginal people would say. By reporting such stories without diving into investigating and exposing the racism inherent in the comments is to contribute to the racism and perpetuate it. When this is

seen to be happening on a regular basis, it creates a very high level of mistrust about the mainstream press for First Nations people.

As a result, when mainstream reports come to call they are treated with suspicion and rarely given much cooperation. The reporters are only human. They resent the antagonism they're greeted with. This affects the approach they take to the story. The story is written in an antagonistic mood. That makes the relationship between the First Nation in question and the press just that much worse. It becomes a counter-productive, even destructive cycle: the story creates more distrust which creates more antagonism which creates more negative coverage and even more resentment in the Aboriginal community.

There are actually a couple of possible answers. First, somebody has to point out the mainstream's mistakes, and try to educate people to be more understanding of what it is like to be a member of a minority group in Canadian society. Second, more Aboriginal people have to become participants in the communications media so that the mistakes are spotted before the stories make it to print or onto the airwaves. To this end, more Aboriginal people are working in the mainstream press and, at the same time, the Aboriginal press is growing and gaining credibility.

But as the Aboriginal press grows there are more problems to solve. Reserve communities are typically small and rural: the most populous reserve in the country has, at most, 9,000 residents. Newspapers and electronic media outlets operate on the same basis: the more people they reach the more advertising revenue they generate and the better the job they can afford to do and still be profitable.

Doing business in a small community means relatively low revenue and unsophisticated operations. The typical reserve newspaper is a weekly with a small staff. That staff is usually made up of inexperienced, entry level journalists who work with few of the advantages that daily papers have--things like libraries, electronic data bases, expensive resource material, even the time it takes to allow a reporter to spend a couple of days on one story and really explore it in depth. And reserve newspapers are still a relatively new phenomenon, especially independent papers that aren't propped up with band council funding.

The current generation of Aboriginal politicians can remember the days when their every move wasn't scrutinized by a critical press. That makes them resentful. Many still haven't adjusted.

Because regular reporting on band councils is a relatively new thing, media relations skills have only recently become important tools for a chief or band councillor. Some are better than others at handling the media or, to put it in a way that has a more positive connotation, some are more able to interact with the media without creating damaging misunderstandings. It's a skill to be able to tell a reporter your story without being misunderstood on some points. It takes very strong communication skills, especially when there is a cultural barrier between the reporter and the subject of the interview.

If both parties--the newsmakers and the reporters--want to overcome the cultural barrier and get accurate information out to the people, then both sides should be ready to work at it. Many Aboriginal politicians resent the time they have to spend with the media. Many just don't bother returning phone calls or providing the information that reporters request.

In the mainstream, politicians have been dealing with the press for a long time and there are longstanding traditions and protocols that govern the way the two work together. Thoughtless mainstream reporters assume that Aboriginal politicians know these unwritten rules and have agreed to follow them as a condition of running for office. Therefore, a call not returned or an information request denied, in the reporter's mind,

automatically signals a cover-up or an intentional invasion. A simple unreturned phone call can cause suspicion and antagonism.

Mainstream reporters and editors like to talk about fairness. To them, fairness is about treating everybody the same. However, the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that the law of the land guarantees a special status for Aboriginal people. As many judges have written in the last several years, Aboriginal people were here first, they have special rights. That bothers some decision-makers in newsrooms in this country.

For example, during a conference at Montreal's McGill University earlier this year, Andrew Coyne, one of the most respected columnists in Canada, became embroiled in a now famous battle with former national chief Ovide Mercredi over just that subject. It was clear that Coyne, an intelligent, thoughtful, well-informed voice for the establishment, as never going to see why it has to be that way for Aboriginal people. Coyne argued that it was time for Aboriginal people to give up their special rights and become nothing more or less than regular everyday Canadians. He argued that basic human rights are universal and should apply to everyone equally. Mercredi angrily countered that Coyne was asking for assimilation. He was asking Aboriginal people to forget about the past, forget about that world that was theirs in the days before European contact. Mercredi said it was sheer arrogance for a white European to say 'All people should be the same and they should all be like me.'

Boiled down to its crudest form, Coyne was saying 'Why can't you Indians act like regular people?' Mercredi's answer was: 'As far as we're concerned we do and we're NOT going to change. If we haven't given up our culture and heritage despite all you've done to wipe us off the face of the earth, do you really think we ever will?'

Aboriginal people and those of European descent each have a fundamentally different way of looking at the world. The mainstream would like everybody to be the same and Aboriginal people are saying 'no way!'

Understanding that fundamental difference is the biggest gap that needs to be crossed to ensure good press relations for First Nations people. Some first Nations have decided to tackle that chore, to meet the press half-way and give themselves a sporting chance at having their point of view relayed to the average Canadian who reads the paper and watches television news.

In particular, several British Columbia first Nations have distinguished themselves for their media savvy. The Cheslatta have waged a long and determined fight to gain compensation for lands that were flooded in the 1950s to make way for Alcan Aluminum's Kemano Project. They've had a long time to learn how to avoid the pitfalls of the public eye and they've had some notable victories.

When there's an important bargaining session of the Nisg'a agreement-in-principle coming up, the Nisg'a public relations people get into gear. The press is informed before the fact, the background is provided, access to knowledgeable spokespeople is facilitated.

Likewise with the Wet'suwet'en and Gitksan people. During the long years when their Delgamuuk land claim case has slowly climbed the judicial ladder the First Nations have learned how to make their point with the press.

At the same time, there are occasional cases where a band council tries to ban the press. The Consolidated Regulations of Canada say that regular band council meetings must be open to the public. Some councils have decided that only general meetings are 'regular' meetings, and committee meetings can be closed. That gives councils the option to do a majority of their business in closed session, something that the membership and the press feel can lead to corruption.

In late summer of 1997, beginning at the Stoney Reserve in Alberta and spreading to other communities in the province, dissident groups began to demand more accountability from their chiefs and councils. The Stoney case began when a provincial court judge ordered an inquiry into the band's finances. The province and Indian Affairs both objected to the judge's decision. But members say that only the band council establishment is benefiting from the band's oil wealth. Close observers of band council politics have long noted that nepotism and political influence in the awarding of government contracts at the local level are rampant in many First Nations.

Most observers, not just journalists, believe that sunshine is the best disinfectant, that openness is the only way to avoid these pitfalls. When a group of people who had been central in the call for more accountability on the Stoney Reserve travelled to Ottawa they were not welcomed by government officials who, one might think, would be anxious to address their concerns. Instead, they complained that they were given the 'run-around.' Many Aboriginal observers, who have lived their entire lives under the Indian Act, and have learned how the system really works, believe the federal government doesn't want the true extent of band council mismanagement and lack of accountability to ever be exposed. The observers say that Indian Affairs has created the mess and it's not in their best interest to ever find out just how extensive that mess might be or who's really responsible. They say the band council system is not all that different from the Canadian system, a system which is not nearly as open as the average Canadian believes.

Any journalist who has ever tried to discover what the Cabinet is doing during their meetings or what transpires when the powerful Bureau of Internal Economy (the all-party committee which sets the working budget for the House of Commons) meets, will agree - some of the most important work done by the people's representatives in Canada is never revealed to the people.

The press has a huge responsibility. Reporters must keep shining the light on those who do the people's work to ensure that all the people are represented. Politicians and bureaucrats frequently feel that the press makes their job harder. That might be true but the unrest and controversy that continues to haunt band politics is a sure sign that only openness will leave the people feeling secure they are being treated fairly. That's a lesson that all public servants - Aboriginal or otherwise - will learn as they continue in their careers. If they're smart they'll choose to learn it the easy way.

- See more at: <http://www.ammsa.com/content/issue-4#sthash.M7oNusDC.dpuf>

- See more at: <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/savvy-leaders-learn-communicate-through-press-0#sthash.ZFJtGgef.dpuf>

Kemano deal draws fire

- Windspeaker

Author: Paul Barnsley, Windspeaker Staff Writer, Prince George British Columbia

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The Carrier Sekani Tribal Council is considering legal action that would seek to negate the recent out of court settlement reached between the province and Alcan Aluminium.

The government of British Columbia was facing a \$500 million lawsuit after former Premier Mike Harcourt cancelled the Kemano Completion Project in 1995 saying the planned \$1.4 billion project would hurt the fish stocks in the Nechako River. The Montreal-based aluminium giant claimed it had already spent close to \$500 million when Harcourt killed the project and filed suit to recover its losses. When Premier Glen Clark and Alcan CEO Jacques Bougie signed the deal on Aug 5, the threat of the lawsuit disappeared.

But environmentalists, taxation watchdogs, some legal experts, former fisheries scientists and the First Nations located along the Nechako River say that the province gave Alcan too much and did nothing to protect the salmon stocks in the Nechako which is part of the Fraser River system.

The Carrier Sekani Tribal Council calls the deal a sell-out. They accuse the province of paying its debts with First Nations' money and resources and ignoring their legal obligation to conserve the fish stocks in the Nechako.

The B.C./Alcan Agreement 1997 expires on Dec. 31, 2023. During the life of that agreement Alcan will receive as much as \$1.5 billion in subsidies from the province, according to the local chapter of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. Robert Pauliszyn, the director of research for the federation wrote a scathing three-part analysis of exactly what Alcan was given by the province. He said that below market prices for electricity supplied to Alcan by B.C. Hydro and reduced tax rates for water rental add up to between \$50 and \$60 million in annual subsidies for each year of the agreement. He goes on to charge that the originally-planned project would have been cancelled by Alcan anyway, due to changes in the marketplace that made the project too expensive to make a profit.

Carrier Sekani tribal vice-chief Reg Mueller said the latest deal is just another in a long series of assaults against the Cheslatta people. The story began in 1950 when Cheslatta hunters returned home to discover that their villages had been burned. The province had given Alcan permission to flood their lands in the Upper Nechako watershed as the company diverted existing waterways to power turbines that would provide electricity for the company's smelter in Kitimat.

Since then the Cheslatta have been fighting for compensation, running a persistent public relations campaign aimed at forcing the government and the corporation to make good for the loss of their traditional homeland. The tribal council has received legal advice that they stand a good chance of winning a challenge based on the claim that the province violated its trustee obligation by allowing Alcan to uproot the Cheslatta people in 1950 without their consent. A court, if it finds that the province was in breach of its fiduciary obligation, could set aside the transaction and award damages.

- See more at: <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/kemano-deal-draws-fire-0#sthash.gLoAXYZ3.dpuf>

Cheslatta Nation Goes to Court over Kemano

Written by **December 22, 1998** by admin

“Alcan is not obligated to spend a penny in the rehabilitation of the Nechako or the Cheslatta system. If Canada and B.C. is not committed, then Alcan is home free.”

Members of the Cheslatta Carrier Nation along with a group of Elders have filed a Statement of Claim with the Supreme Court of British Columbia in Prince George challenging all agreements and licenses granted to the Aluminum Company of Canada (Alcan) by the Canadian and British Columbian governments. These agreements and licenses allowed Alcan to construct and operate the highly controversial series of hydro-electric facilities and an aluminum smelter, known as the Kemano Projects, in north-central BC.

“We have run out of options. The only way to get Alcan Canada and B.C. to account for their actions is through the justice system,” said Chief Marvin Charlie. “We were not consulted in the 1950’s (Kemano I), we were not consulted in 1987 (Kemano II) and we weren’t consulted in 1997, which we now call Kemano III. Nobody was consulted – the farmers, the trappers, the municipalities, the commercial fishermen – nobody! Now we are expected to live with this forever – I don’t think so!”

The Kemano I Project resulted in the flooding of 120,000 acres of the Upper-Nechako Watershed, all within the Cheslatta Traditional Territory, and eventually removed approximately three-quarters of the natural flow of the Nechako River. The Nechako River is the largest tributary to the largest salmon-producing river in the world.

The Kemano II Project, an expansion of the first, was allowed to proceed when B.C. and Canada signed the infamous 1987 Settlement Agreement. In 1990, Kemano II became the first project in Canadian history to be granted an exemption from a federal environmental review process; an action later to be found illegal by a Senate-Commons Committee. Kemano II construction was subsequently halted by Alcan in 1997 who cited poor aluminum markets. In January of 1995, B.C. canceled the Kemano II project citing poor economic projections on behalf of the company.

Last August, under legal threats from Alcan, the B.C. government granted unprecedented rights and privileges to Alcan by signing the 1997 B.C./Alcan Agreement, which is now referred to as Kemano III. The B.C. government declared the Kemano II Project history.

Cheslatta claims that Kemano II is alive and well. With the 1997 Agreement, Alcan, who announced net profits for 1997 at \$641,000,000, got everything they wanted and more. “Alcan is not obligated to spend a penny in the rehabilitation of the Nechako or the Cheslatta system. If Canada and B.C. is not committed, then Alcan is home free,” says Chief Charlie.

Since their forced relocation by Alcan and the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) in 1952, the 85 members of Cheslatta live on scattered parcels of land in the Grassy Plains area 175 miles west of Prince George. In 1993, they concluded a long dispute with the DIA over the matter of how much they were compensated for the land and buildings at Cheslatta Lake. With two weeks notice, the people were ‘evacuated’ to higher ground, all of their homes and villages were burnt to the ground and their cemeteries washed into the lake.

Charlie said many band members live today in condemned homes and have high rates of alcoholism and drug addiction. Reclaiming their ancestral homeland is a way for the band to heal, he said.

Since 1956, the Cheslatta river and lake system have been used as a spillway channel to allow huge releases of water to enter the Nechako River below Cheslatta Falls. This has caused massive environmental damage.

The Cheslatta Carrier Nation is expecting widespread support for this court action from many groups including First Nations, municipalities, commercial fishermen, wildlife organizations, environmentalists and others that rely on a healthy Nechako River. The lawsuit seeks an injunction ordering the defendants to repair the damage they have done to the band's land.

"The fact is the upper-Nechako River and its watershed is owned and operated by the Aluminum Company of Canada," said Chief Charlie. "And up to now, nobody has been able to do a thing about it. Let's hope to change that."

Native band rushes to save grave markers from floodwaters

Mark Hume

VANCOUVER — The Globe and Mail

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When the waters rise to flood levels in a reservoir system operated by Rio Tinto Alcan in northern British Columbia, a small band braces for a grim ritual: the evacuation of "spirit houses" from a graveyard.

This week, for the fourth time in several decades, members of the Cheslatta band rushed to remove the sacred grave markers from cemeteries along the shores of a lake below the Skins Lake spillway, about 150 kilometres southeast of Prince George.

Pouring through Alcan's spillway, which is a release valve for the reservoir system that feeds the powerhouse for an aluminum smelter in Kitimat, is a biblical flood of water, produced by a long, wet summer and fall.

As the water level crept up the shoreline of Cheslatta Lake, band members picked up and carried to higher ground 140 spirit houses. The markers, coffin-sized structures that look like small buildings, lie atop graves, and are meant to shelter the spirits of the remains buried in the ground beneath.

"That's all we can do, short of digging up the graves," said Mike Robertson, senior policy adviser with the Cheslatta. Each gravesite is marked with long metal rods, bearing crosses, and corner pins so they can be relocated with metal detectors after waters recede.

Mr. Robertson said that, since the reservoir system was created in 1952, when Alcan built the Kenney Dam across the Nechako River, the graveyards have been evacuated four times because of "controlled release" floods. The most recent flood was in 2007.

He said the spirit-house removal was done with the help of Alcan, which paid for work crews and provided a helicopter to rush them to the graveyards. The spirit houses “were stacked in the bush like cordwood” and will remain there until floodwaters recede, Mr. Robertson said.

“It was an emotional time.... You never get used to seeing your ancestors moved,” he said. “It’s pretty hard on people. That’s your grandfather or great uncle. I know the people there that day were quite angry.... it is also troubling having in the back of your head that it could happen again anytime, even though there are solutions to this problem.”

The Cheslatta band has long called for a facility to be built into Kenney Dam, so that water could be released directly into the Nechako River, rather than diverting it into the reservoir, where the excess flows out through the Skins Lake spillway.

Mr. Robertson said floodwaters have exposed coffins in the past, and in 1952 bodies washed into the lake and were never recovered. The lake was later consecrated as a graveyard itself. He said the floods also erode riverbanks and pour silt into Cheslatta Lake, hurting the char which spawn there. The provincial government and Alcan have for years discussed building a water-release facility at Kenney Dam, mostly to assist salmon in the Nechako River, but the project has never come to fruition. Talks are expected to resume soon.

“We haven’t given up on the water-release facility,” Mr. Robertson said. “We want some comfort that man-made water flows that are ripping through our valley won’t continue.”

Colleen Nyce, spokeswoman for Rio Tinto Alcan, said the high-water releases were necessitated by heavy rainfall all summer and fall, following a winter with above-average snow packs.

“We have been spilling this year higher than normal. But we have been spilling to a level that would not cause any flooding. However, just recently, last week, it was determined that we had to increase the spillway discharge in order to manage the safe operation and condition of the reservoir,” she said. “It’s always a sad situation. It’s not one that we want to be in,” she said of flooding the Cheslatta graveyards.

She said if Rio Tinto Alcan didn’t release the water now, extreme flooding could come later.

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Lake Marked By Grim Tide

Frank PEEBLES / Prince George Citizen

The skeletal remains of a child's pelvis and 27 other bones were found washed ashore Tuesday on the beaches of Cheslatta Lake. The bones, along with many others found this spring and in previous years, are those of long deceased Cheslatta people.

"They are definitely from the old graveyard that was washed away," said Mike Robertson, senior policy advisor for the Cheslatta Carrier Nation. "When the cemetery washed away in 1956 a lot of the caskets and bodies floated away. Their bones have been found, from time to time. We found a number of them a couple of months ago, but on Tuesday that was the most we'd ever located in one place."

Some of the bones were down on the gravel and others were up on the soil where they had been dropped by the fluctuating waters of the dam-controlled lake that feeds the Nechako River. The graves were washed

away due to the building of the Ootsa Lake dam to generate power for Alcan's aluminum smelting and hydroelectric generation.

"We will do DNA testing on these bones," said Robertson. "We want to know the age, sex, distinctions of heritage, even the precise family lines with the participation of living people."

Cheslatta Lake is slated to be designated as an official provincial grave site. A "Returning The Spirits" ceremony is scheduled for next Wednesday.

Discovery of bones at B.C. lake resurrects one of darkest tales in Canadian history

By: Stephen Hume Vancouver Sun page one **Mon May 28 2012**

Strewn across 300 metres of beach about 250 kilometres west of Prince George, a thousand kilometres by road from Vancouver, an angler at Cheslatta Lake stumbled upon what looked suspiciously like human skeletal remains.

RCMP and the coroner's office swiftly responded to officially determine whether the 25 bones found May 22 about 29 kilometres from what was once the village named Scatchola are of human origin, says Mike Robertson, the senior policy advisor to the Cheslatta Carrier Nation.

But among the Cheslatta community south of Burns Lake, many believe the bones will prove to be yet more remains of their relatives.

"I know bones," Robertson says. "Among these was the fully formed pelvis of what looked like a child."

The remains, he predicts, will again be found to come either from long-inundated graves or from those more recently washed out in one of the periodic floods caused by the spilling of surplus water from a hydro-electric development built more than half a century ago to power a \$5 billion aluminum smelting complex at Kitimat.

Historic community graveyards have been flooded out at least six times over the last half century and such grisly finds are common along the shoreline. In April, bones recovered along the lakefront at a site about 37 kilometres from the Scatchola village site were confirmed to be human.

The bones were likely deposited after coffins washed out of graves and floated away. Later, cast ashore, the caskets weathered away leaving human remains on the beach, Robertson says. Or they were churned out of already drowned graves in storms or spun along in swirling, powerful currents during the spilling of surplus water.

For the dead, whoever they were, the coroner's report won't matter.

For the living, the mere discovery triggers a recurring nightmare. Finding bones resurrects one of the darkest stories in Canadian history and also reminds the Cheslatta of the disgraceful indignity which continues to haunt them.

On Wednesday, May 30, the Cheslatta will gather -- yet again -- for a "return of the spirits" ceremony. Two Roman Catholic priests will pray and consecrate the lake itself as a cemetery.

During the rite, villagers will once again recite the names of family members, remembering those buried in almost 140 graves which have since been erased, washed away or immersed beneath flood waters.

Among the symbolically disappeared is the great and revered Chief Louie, thought to have been born around 1850 when James Douglas signed the first treaties at Fort Victoria, a practice that was later repudiated by the province for more than a century.

This sad ritual to help restless spirits find peace has now been going on for three generations.

Let's briefly recap recent Cheslatta history. George Louis told me some of it more than 20 years ago, sitting on the lakeshore, his blunt, calloused, roper's fingers thumping down on sepia-colored photographs of cowboys long since dead; the grandfather so old that in his youth he'd hunted with bow and arrow; his mother, Sabina, who brought him into the world in 1927 in a tent pitched at the foot of a sheltering spruce tree then died in an influenza epidemic.

George was raised by his aged grandfather, that famous Chief Louie, since washed away into the lake.

"We didn't know about welfare then," George told me. "We made a living trapping beaver, muskrat, otter. One month, I made \$3,000. Trap all winter; buy a saddle, a wagon, some horses."

When they were flush, George and his buddy Frank Peters would ride the train to Prince Rupert, take a boat to Bella Coola, and then, for a lark, they'd trek home overland, living off trout and small game as they travelled. Three days through the mountains on an old grease trail, one of the ancient trade routes by which the Nuxalk and the Carrier exchanged prized oolichan oil for antler, obsidian and hides.

One day in the early 1950s, George was hunting in the Sibola Range. He was running a remuda of five horses. He saw smoke near Cheslatta Lake, cut his horses loose and galloped in to warn about the forest fire.

But it wasn't a forest fire. It was his village burning. His family and friends had been cleared off to make way for the coming flood.

The government handed him a \$50 cheque and cleared him off, too.

"They said, 'That's for you to move out. That's your moving costs.' When I came back, the waters were rising and all the people were gone. They threw people's belongings outside and they burned the houses."

Smelter operations at Kitimat and the hydro infrastructure generate an estimated \$250 million a year for the B.C. economy. George got \$50 -- and his beloved grandfather, mother and family were washed into oblivion while government washed its hands.

Almost 50,000 hectares of the upper Nechako River watershed had to be flooded to provide power to the Kitimat aluminum smelter.

The indigenous Cheslatta were an inconvenience. But they were just Indians, so it was convenient to evict them from the lands they'd occupied since the last ice age. A few non-native homesteaders were also relocated, but political careers were made in winning them adequate compensation in the resulting uproar. The Cheslatta, though, seemed invisible.

"For the past 60 years," B.C.'s First Nations Summit, has pointed out in a letter to the premier, ministers and members of the legislature, "the Cheslatta people have sought to rebuild their lives and land from total social, economic and environmental devastation."

"Total" is not a small word.

To enrich our economy, theirs was smashed. Traditional trapping and hunting areas were flooded out; once-abundant salmon runs were decimated by the removal of 75 per cent of the natural flow from the Nechako River and so on.

As is so often the case with the dispossessed, many succumbed to alcohol, despair, even suicide. Some just left and kept on going to who knows where or to what fate? Some endured in hope of justice.

One of the consequences of providing Kitimat with cheap power is erratic water levels in the lakes, particularly when surplus water accumulating behind the dam has to be spilled. It goes out through a release facility at Skins Lake, which can cause Cheslatta Lake, downstream, to flood.

Graves were first washed out with releases of surplus water in 1956. Horrified Cheslatta, visiting the old village discovered the coffins of their mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings and other relatives bobbing on the lake along with grave markers, crosses, fence rails and other cemetery debris.

Robert Skin and Keom Morris wrote to the government: "We have seen for ourselves the graveyard that used to be at Cheslatta . . . All the dead have floated away and have gone ashore anywhere. We didn't find any, and please advise us what to do."

They got no reply. Who, in busy government, had time to deal with a few Indians in the B.C. bush? And in the face of \$250 million a year, who fretted over the desecration of a few graves in pursuit of progress?

More graves were flooded and washed out in 1957, then again in 1961, and again in 1992.

In 1993, the graves were re-consecrated. At that ceremony, a member of the federal Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples spoke about the appalling back story he had learned. The Vancouver Sun recorded his remarks.

"A story of horrors," he called it. "It is a story to shock the conscience of all reasonable Canadians."

"The story of the Cheslatta-Carriers is quite unique. I think it's unique in the horrors that have been perpetrated. . . There have been unspeakable acts," said commissioner Paul Chartrand.

In 1997, as part of a settlement following the shelving of a second phase of hydro development on the upper Nechako, the aluminum company and the government agreed to establish a \$100-million fund which would help pay for a release facility.

In 2001, the fund's management committee committed its support to construction of a cold water release facility to spill surplus water at the Kenney Dam instead of into Skins Lake and Cheslatta Lake diversion channel.

This would both serve to environmentally rehabilitate the salmon-sustaining capacities of the much-diminished upper Nechako below the dam. It would also end the washing away of Cheslatta graves.

The Cheslatta endorsed that proposal. So did government. In the spring of 2005, then-Premier Gordon Campbell officially announced that the province intended to invest in the new spillway.

"It's time for us to take a major step in revitalizing the Fraser River's most important salmon-spawning tributary and reviving a watershed that is integral to our fisheries heritage and to the Cheslatta first nation community," he proudly said -- not once, but twice.

It seemed timely. Graves were washed away again in 2007 and yet again in the fall of 2011.

Since Premier Campbell's announcement, however, official enthusiasm for the project has once again waned.

Last January, Robertson says, just months after the latest flood, the Cheslatta received word from Premier Christy Clark's government that the province was no longer committed to contributing funds to construction of the new spillway.

So, here we are.

Salmon returns to the Fraser system are so low that the federal government holds a commission of inquiry to find out why.

Commercial fishboats are tied up. The 94 Fraser River and 20 Vancouver Island first nations bands that rely on salmon for food fisheries face rationing.

And while governments do yet another abrupt about-face on their upper Nechako commitments, a new harvest of bones is made along the shores of Cheslatta Lake. Once again, the Cheslatta people prepare to gather for another "return of the spirits" ceremony beside B.C.'s lake of sorrow.

Cheslatta Chief Corinna Leween wrote in an open letter to "the people of the Nechako Watershed" that she had cheered Campbell's announcement in 2005 that the water release facility would finally be built.

"Did I lie to my people? Did somebody lie to me?" she wondered.

"The Cheslatta people have paid the highest price possible going on 56 years now. We have seen our ancestors wash away. We've witnessed our village burnt to ashes. Cheslatta children, who could have been our Elders today, are buried in graveyards far from Cheslatta Lake and mourned by no one. Forgotten.

"We struggle daily, trying not to relive the past, by living each day, working to build and sustain a strong, healthy community. We have had failures and some victories but we cannot be successful unless we have a future."

Perhaps the last word should go to George Louis.

George departed in 2002 to join his ancestors. But I vividly recall that long ago conversation one languid afternoon while the wind whispered through the trembling aspens and Otis the Dog kept watch for the young grizzly that had been foraging in the scrub willows the night before.

As we looked at fading photographs of beloved hosts from the lost Eden of his childhood, George's voice was calm and clear and surprisingly free of bitterness or recrimination:

"You make somebody a refugee in his own country. Take away the food, the medicine plants, burn the villages - how do you compensate for that? What do I want? Stop. Just stop."

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Band proposes relief facility after dam floods graveyards, bodies wash away

Mark Hume AND Justine Hunter

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A small native band in northern British Columbia that has been trying for decades to get the government to stop a flooding problem that drowns graveyards every year is now offering its own solution.

The Cheslatta Carrier First Nation is proposing to come up with \$275-million in funding to build a water release facility and hydro power plant on the Kenney Dam, a massive earth-fill structure that diverts the Nechako River into a reservoir, about 80 kilometres southwest of Vanderhoof.

“We don’t want any money from the government,” said Mike Robertson, a senior policy adviser with the Cheslatta. “We have lost confidence in the government ... we have grown so frustrated waiting ... that my hands are shaking right now just thinking about it.”

Mr. Robertson said the reservoir backs up into Cheslatta Lake in the spring, inundating graveyards. He said 60 coffins have washed away since the dam was built in 1952, and each year there are fresh finds of human remains along the shore.

“Just recently we found a coffin lid... we have collected about 50 bones this year, including the pelvis of what looks like a five- or six-year-old child,” Mr. Robertson said. “You know, this haunts people.” DNA testing is being done on the bones to identify individuals.

On Wednesday, about 300 people gathered on the shore of Cheslatta Lake for a “Return of the Spirits” ceremony, which saw Roman Catholic priests bless three cemeteries and consecrate the lake as a graveyard.

Mr. Robertson said when Kenney Dam was built, 120,000 acres were flooded.

“Coffins floated away and came to rest in various places. Now fishermen find the bones here and there, wherever they were deposited,” he said. “It is very bizarre.”

The Cheslatta, a band with a population of about 300, have been pushing for years to have a water release facility built into the Kenney Dam, both to relieve flooding and to help restore flows in the Nechako River. The dam doesn’t have a power plant of its own. Its role is simply to hold back water that is directed further west to generate power for Alcan’s aluminum smelter in Kitimat.

In 1997, Alcan – now Rio Tinto Alcan – agreed to put about \$50-million into a Nechako Environmental Enhancement Fund (NEEF) to help compensate for the environmental damage done to the watershed. In 2001, NEEF recommended that a cold water release facility be built in Kenney Dam, but that proposal didn’t get provincial funding and wasn’t followed up on.

Mr. Robertson said the Cheslatta on Thursday made a new proposal to NEEF to tap into the money to help fund the project, which it will build in partnership with Surespan Construction Ltd. of Vancouver if an energy purchase agreement can be negotiated with BC Hydro.

Mark Rogers, vice-president of Surespan, confirmed a deal is in place with the band. “We see this as a great opportunity to achieve social and environmental goals ... and at the end of the day of course it has to be a viable business proposition,” he said.

Steve Thomson, B.C.’s minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resources, said in about a month he expects NEEF recommendations on how the funds should be used. “We understand a discussion around a cold water release facility will be part of that information coming forward,” he said. “We’re looking forward to receiving a proposal around that with an economic plan that would work. We’ve been engaged with the Cheslatta, we’ve been engaged with the fund.”

Colleen Nyce, of Rio Tinto Alcan, said her company “is supportive of Cheslatta Nations economic and social development initiatives” but is waiting to hear from NEEF. A BC Hydro spokesperson said the corporation is aware of the Cheslatta proposal, but is not currently negotiating with the band.

Cheslatta hopeful dam diversion will restore river

Windspeaker

Author: By David P. Ball Windspeaker Contributor PRINCE GEORGE, B.C.

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It's been 62 years since the Cheslatta Carrier Nation faced an offer they couldn't refuse from B.C.: abandon their soon-to-be-flooded villages and cemeteries in two weeks, or go to jail.

Today, the 130-resident community near Prince George continues to battle the waters as more and more human remains are exposed by flooding erosion—several last month alone—prompting the band to apply on Sept. 30 for a water license to build a water-release facility that would stabilize the Nechako River.

“We've had the solution to the problem for many, many decades,” said Mike Robertson, the band's senior policy advisor. “The solution is to build a release system for the Kenney dam.

“We've worked hard to get the land back. Now we're working to get the water back, and to stabilize the environment ... We resolved, here at Cheslatta, that we're going to do it ourselves.”

If approved, the nation would seek funding partners for its \$280 million Nechako River Legacy Project, which would construct a water release system in the bedrock beside the dam, and re-divert water into its original course – the now-dry Nechako canyon.

Previous provincial attempts to solve the flooding problem – and exposed ancestral graves – were abandoned in the face of the recent economic crisis, Robertson said. “It's an ongoing saga here at Cheslatta,” he said. “We're still fighting it. “It's extremely troubling. We just took in some bones we just found last week. It always upsets the people; I had some Elders come in just this morning to look at fresh bones.”

The Cheslatta's villages were flooded in 1952 with the construction of a dam to power Rio Tinto Alcan's aluminum smelter in Kitimat. Robertson said “it's just bizarre” that the firm only pays \$5 a year for a license to the water, when his band's water application cost \$10,525.

When the dam was built, it didn't include a spillway. As a result, the Cheslatta residents had to escape the rising waters caused by massive water releases upstream, which submerged cemeteries and dumped several million tons of debris into Cheslatta Lake.

“There's sure a lot of unfairness we've had to deal with, in terms of the government giving that water away,” he said. “We have to at least try to get it back. The people are resigned to that; they feel it's a small price to pay for the opportunity to get their water back .“In a dream world, the dam should have never been built. But now, the town of Kitimat depends on the dam, and Alcan has a legal license to have the dam there and use the water. We don't have an issue with Alcan; it's the permitting agencies that we're challenging.”

If the application is approved, constructing a diversion around the side of the Kenney Dam could take several years. Although generating hydro power is not the band's goal, Robertson said it needs to find a funding source for the expensive project.

The nation is currently attempting to negotiate for a long-term Electricity Purchase Agreement that would guarantee revenues from BC Hydro and pay for construction. If approved, income from the hydroelectric project would be diverted to fund the Nechako watershed's rehabilitation.

“Submitting this application formally starts the process of taking back the water that was stolen from us 62 years ago when the government issued a private company license to all of the water in Cheslatta traditional territory, which made billions of dollars in profit,” said Chief Richard Peters in a statement. “After making billions of dollars in profit from flooding the Nechako, the government and industry have never committed to a reinvestment to fix the environmental disaster they created. “As the project moves forward, we are fully prepared to undergo all required environmental review processes to try and right a wrong that has been allowed to continue for over 60 long and tragic years.”

But with Rio Tinto currently generating hydroelectricity from the Kenney dam, the Cheslatta would also need the mining giant’s permission to proceed as well.

In 2012, the firm returned 11,000 acres of land that had been seized from the band. But unstable water levels have made the land virtually valueless, Robertson argued.

The company confirmed it was in talks about a water release facility, according to a statement issued in September, and said it was committed to cooperating with the Cheslatta as they carry out technical work as part of preparation for a potential diversion project.

With many First Nations in various talks with government over treaties or land use – and the majority of B.C. unceded territory – Robertson hopes a lesson for others might be to look beyond simply lands and resources. “We want to encourage other First Nations to look at water licenses,” he said. “Very little thought is given to a perpetual, guaranteed water supply.

“This would not only allow environmental restoration of our land and people, but would also secure a source of water for us, for all time.”

In the meantime, the Cheslatta have plans to build what Robertson called a large concrete “tomb of the unknown Cheslatta” in which to store the human remains, caskets and grave houses recovered over the last few decades. “We’ll inter them in there until the lake is stabilized,” he said. “Then we can re-bury them.”

- See more at: <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/cheslatta-hopeful-dam-diversion-will-restore-river#sthash.5nOIFM5Z.dpuf>