

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

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507-100 Park Royal South
West Vancouver, BC
V7T 1A2

Ph: 604-922-7733
Fx: 604-922-7433



1200-100 Park Royal South
West Vancouver, BC
V7T 1A2

Ph: 604-926-9903
Fx: 604-926-9923
Toll Free: 866-990-9939



500-342 Water Street
Vancouver, BC
V6B 1B6

Ph: 604-684-0231
Fx: 604-684-5726

The First Nations Leadership Council Demands a Fair Process for Treaty 8 First Nations in Court Over the Proposed Site C Dam on the Peace River

VANCOUVER, June 25, 2015 /CNW/ - The First Nations Leadership Council, composed of the executives from the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, the First Nations Summit, and the BC Assembly of First Nations, is extremely concerned that BC Hydro plans to start construction activities on Site C Dam as early as July 6, despite the fact that the court proceedings are still in motion and a decision on Site C proceeding has yet to be determined.

The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) will fully support the Treaty 8 First Nations to address this injustice and to prevent damage to the Peace River Valley.

The Treaty 8 First Nations received notice from BC Hydro that work at the dam site could commence as early as July 6. BC Hydro wants to begin blocking off the main channel of the Peace River with large booms, bulldozing down giant trees, stripping away river bank habitat vital to bear dens, obliterating eagle nests, and impacting over 337 archaeological sites. On May 1, 2014, the Joint Review Panel for BC Hydro's Site C proposals provided its report which included recommendations, conclusions, and rationale to the federal Minister of Environment and Environmental Assessment Office. Significantly, the report acknowledged the impacts to current uses and resources for traditional purposes by Aboriginal peoples if the project was to proceed.

Treaty 8 First Nations have applied for judicial review of Ottawa's decision to support the project, stating the impacts to First Nations as highlighted in the report have not adequately been considered and thus, the proposed Site C project infringes on the treaty rights of the Treaty 8 First Nations. The Federal Appeal begins the week of July 20, 2015. The BC government, along with its crown corporation (BC Hydro), has ignored the requests of Treaty 8 First Nations in northeastern BC to put construction on hold until the outcomes of the court proceedings are known.

"The provincial government seems to have tunnel vision when it comes to building this project. Pushing ahead with construction activities at this time is premature and dishonourable," said Robert Phillips of the First Nations Summit political executive. "All citizens of BC should be deeply concerned; by denying the Treaty 8 First Nations their day in court, the government is making an outright statement that they are above democratic rights and the judicial system. This approach is unacceptable and an affront to the cultivation of constructive government-to-government relations between the provincial government and BC First Nations."

"The provocative activities that the BC government is recklessly trying to advance are irreversible, and will leave an irreparable and permanent scar on the land," said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of UBCIC. "These deliberate actions will also indefinitely scar BC's relationships with First Nations. If construction begins, it will be understood as a clear message that this government has absolutely no respect for the Treaty 8 First Nation people, and is blatantly disregarding constitutionally recognized Aboriginal Title, Rights, and Treaty Rights. Further, rushing ahead of the courts to build this project is an irresponsible and negligent use of tax dollars."

"I remind British Columbians that the BC government's decision to invest in BC Hydro's Site C Dam was done despite a Joint Review Panel Report which was inconclusive in terms of the business case for the project, but certain in terms of the damaging impacts anticipated to lands vital to Treaty 8 First Nations," stated BCAFN Spokesperson, Chief Maureen Chapman. "We should all be concerned that without clear rules surrounding environmental assessments and the approval of major projects, including changes to the processes which properly reflect Aboriginal rights and title, including treaty rights, energy infrastructure decisions and their implementation will be challenging for all involved," she concluded.

Background

*Many individuals are standing in solidarity with the T8FNs and have already donated close to \$50,000 towards their legal fund. The Victoria-based non-profit charitable organization RAVEN (Respecting Aboriginal Values and Environmental Needs) is managing the T8FNs' **Join the Circle** fundraising campaign. For more information or to make a donation go to: www.nosite-c.com .*

The West Moberly First Nations and the Peace Valley Environment Association are inviting concerned citizens to join the tenth annual Paddle for the Peace on Saturday July 11, 2015. For more information on this event visit www.paddleforthepeace.ca

For more information contact:

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President, UBCIC: 250-490-5314

Chief Maureen Chapman, Spokesperson, BCAFN: 604-922-7733

Colin Braker, Communications Director, FNS: 604-926-9903