

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

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FNLC Fully Supports Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation's Road Restrictions in Response to Decades of Exploitation by Western Forest Products

(Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) – The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) stands with the Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation (MMFN) who are currently restricting access to a portion of Highway 28 that trespasses upon Ahaminiquus Indian Reserve Number 12, between Gold River and its port. The MMFN has been forced to impose this restriction in response to Western Forest Products Inc.'s (WFP) ongoing use of their lands without consent and the tactics WFP have employed to avoid compensating the MMFN for the use of their road for over 20 years.

The MMFN have stated that their restriction on the highway is not a blockade and does not apply to the general public, but rather to WFP vehicles that continue to undermine MMFN jurisdiction and transport natural resources illegally across their reserve lands. These lands have never been transferred to the Province, nor has the Nation ever received compensation for the use of the road. The FNLC supports the MMFN's legal right to control the use of and access to its lands and calls upon WFP and the Province to immediately exercise respect and deference to the MMFN's unextinguished Title, Rights, and jurisdiction over their unceded lands.

As the MMFN work toward securing a compensation agreement with the Ministry of Transport, the FNLC urges the WFP to end all attempts to evade negotiations, and to accept full responsibility for exploiting a road that was built without MMFN consent or agreement over 50 years ago. The FNLC also calls upon the public to respect the MMFN's wishes to not have protesters physically join them in their road restrictions, and to exercise peaceful, safe conduct at all times.

Quotes

Robert Phillips, First Nations Summit Political Executive

"We are in full support of the Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation (MMFN) as they exercise their rights to determine who has access and use of roads through their reserve lands. It is very unfortunate that Western Forest Products has ignored proper protocols and has chosen to not engage in good faith negotiations to reach an agreement with MMFN on fair compensation for past, present and future use of Highway 28. This is yet another unfortunate example of an external company choosing to take advantage of such a situation and then pull out when they are called out on their exploitation."

Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations

"As a key resource industry in B.C., forestry is a high priority for a comprehensive legislative reform to bring it in alignment with the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. The forestry sector and companies such as Western Forest Products (WFP) can start this work now and lay the groundwork with Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation to negotiate historic compensations and an agreement. The FNLC and the province have worked hard to lay a pathway to reconciliation and it is time industry stepped up to start this work too."



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Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President, Union of BC Indian Chiefs

“With the passage of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* in 2019 and repeated assurances from the Province that reconciliation is one of the cornerstones of their government, it is unacceptable for Western Forest Products (WFP) to avoid the repercussions of violating the consent, Title and Rights, and jurisdiction of the Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation (MMFN). We call upon the Province and WFP to work with the MMFN to address their grievances and to establish an equitable compensation agreement that will recompense the Nation for the WFP’s unauthorized use and commercial exploitation of their lands. Immediate action must be taken to respect and uphold the MMFN’s interests and rights from now and into the future.”

ENGOs and other advocates are encouraged to provide letters or statements of support, and to provide updates through social media of the situation, in order to amplify the Mowachaht/Muchalaht Nation’s requests for action and aid.

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

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