

Tulsequah
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Chief

Sent from: Mike
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For Taku
Chief

Don't Let Environmentalists Take My Kids Future Away

My name is Gordon Loverin and my great grandfather was Chief Taku Jack of the now known Taku River Tlingit First Nation. My grandfather was Johnny Taku Jack, deceased 18 years now. Both men were considered great visionaries and men of high honour, both to their own people and to the non-native people who came to know and respect them.

Today I wonder what both men would say if they knew the current leadership of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation are planning on selling their people's interests and those of our children's children's interests to radical environmentalists?

I am talking about the Taku River Conservancy Project which Spokesperson John Ward, Clan Director TJ Esquire, Clan Director Tina Brooks, Lands Director Louise Gordon, along with her sister Sandra Ward (Nee Jack) are pushing, despite many calls from within the membership to look at other economic development opportunities taking place. I wonder what our membership would say if they knew this group of people along with the support of Round River Conservation Studies, Transboundary Watershed Alliance, the World Wildlife Fund, Dovetail Consulting and other like minded environmental organizations, are looking at putting a complete lock down on TRTFN traditional territory?

Bad enough that as aboriginal people we have endured the experience of missionaries telling us what is good for us, then the Department of Indian Affairs. Now these select, elitist groups are on the verge of becoming another master in our lives, with the help of our own leadership! Let me explain.

It has come to my knowledge that the Conservation Area Design (CAD) is simply a tool for the complete lockdown of any development within the traditional territory of the TRTFN. (*By the way the CAD report uses photos of my grandfather Johnny Taku Jack in a manner that suggests he is still alive and fully participating in the CAD report as a resource person - another example of environmentalists pulling the wool over peoples' eyes in pursuit of their own agenda.*) That the Taku River Conservancy is a project which will see a trust fund set up by the World Wildlife Fund of \$25 million dollars to ensure there is a complete "no development" stamp put on the 10 million acres which encompasses the TRTFN traditional territory.

Each year the TRTFN will receive \$2.5 million dollars as compensation for their involvement in creating this large-scale conservation region. I don't think the federal and provincial governments are even aware of the scope of this project. Two and half-dollars for every acre of our territory - it's even worse than the five dollars aboriginals received in the numbered treaties in Canada.

Don't take my word for it. Let the web page do its own talking. Here is an excerpt from Round River's web site at http://www.roundriver.org/taku_river_project.html#

*"The extent to which the TRT CAD and TRT Vision document call for conservation measures has not been achieved in British Columbia to date. In light of this, conservation in the Taku will require the integration of several components, including a mix of land designations and innovative management arrangements to achieve **large-scale regional conservation objectives**; legal settlement of the Supreme Court case; a financial structure that supports lasting conservation-based management; and a conservation-based economic development strategy.*

In addition, to best insure long-term conservation, mechanisms are needed for the TRT to gain sufficient management authority to continue protecting their territory. This authority must be gained through political, legal and economic means. Project efforts in 2003-2004 will focus on establishing wildlife monitoring procedures and furthering development of the Taku River Conservancy (www.takuriverconservancy.org), a TRTFN independent organization. Additionally, a TRTFN Conservation Department will be designed, as will environmental assessment procedures. Selected conservation economic initiatives will also be supported."

"Selected conservation economic initiatives" translates into no mining, no roads, no logging, no guide and outfitting, no trapping, no four wheelers, no skidoos, no commercial fishing. These activities lay outside what is considered conservation economic development. What has happened to our freedom?

What frustrates me as a member of the TRTFN is that we have been led down the garden path by our own leadership regarding the long disputed fight over the Tulsequah Chief mine project and the stated reasons for challenging the mine certification process. Clearly the long-term goal has been to slow the process down to a stand still so that the real objective could be given time to be completed – the Taku River Conservancy. This may not have been Melvin Jack's goal when he first challenged the environmental assessment process, but clearly it was the environmental lobby's goal from the start. Too bad Melvin Jack was used, as a patsy for their own needs! Just like photos of long dead Elders in the CAD report!

I wonder what home owners in and around Atlin would say if they knew that soon their land values could drop because as a no development zone, real estate is simply not going to be worth what it once was? Or that those who have small businesses in TRTFN traditional territory will not have the option to sell because no one will want to buy their existing business? Who would buy if everyone left because there is no meaningful employment and/or small business growth?

I am calling on all non-aboriginal interests in and around Atlin to contact their MLA and MP in Victoria and Ottawa, to help us find out what the real extent of the environmental organizations intentions in TRTFN lands are. We must put a stop to this so that Taku River Tlingit people can have a meaningful opportunity to chart our own economic course free from restriction, with the help of our non-aboriginal neighbours.

As a practicing journalist I have come to fully understand the legacy of colonization upon our people. I see light at the end of the tunnel as far as beginning to right some of those wrongs together - aboriginal and non-aboriginal, industry and small business interests alike. I will not stand idly by and watch my own leadership usher in another 150 years of social and economic suffering by creating a closed-door deal with environmental groups who think they know what's best for us.

Our people require jobs that lead to real development for them, not jobs that pay minimum wage because that's all conservation economic development initiatives can afford. That's not self-determination...that's yet one more snake oil salesman selling false promises. We must root out the snakes within our own leadership and the snake charmers that call themselves environmentalists.

Gordon Loverin
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