
INFORMATION BULLETIN

For Immediate Release
2018IRR0065-001914
Oct. 3, 2018

Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

B.C., Blueberry River First Nations advance reconciliation

VICTORIA – The Government of British Columbia and Blueberry River First Nations have agreed to further adjourn pending litigation until April 29, 2019, to allow for continued collaboration on addressing the effects of resource development in Blueberry River territory.

B.C. and Blueberry River First Nations agreed to extend the adjournment as an outcome of progress on implementing an agreement reached on June 16, 2018, which had initially adjourned litigation until Oct. 15, 2018.

B.C. and Blueberry River First Nations continue to build a stronger relationship through the implementation of the agreement and good-faith discussions.

An important component of the agreement is to update and amend the Fort St. John Land and Resource Management Plan. This process is intended to begin in October 2018 and will provide the opportunity for Blueberry River First Nations and other interested Treaty 8 First Nations to co-lead this work with the Province. The process will also involve local governments, industry, stakeholders and the general public.

Determining the scope of amendments to the land and resource management plan is the first step in this process and will be developed collaboratively with all interested parties.

This work is one of a series of measures committed to by the Province and Blueberry River First Nations through the agreement. Other commitments include restoration of selected inactive roads, seismic lines and oil and gas sites, new wildlife protection measures and developing new processes intended to create a more collaborative approach to resource development approvals.

If the parties continue to make sustained progress together in the upcoming months, the litigation could be placed into a long-term abeyance agreement.

The Province is committed to establishing a respectful, long-term government-to-government relationship with Blueberry River First Nations, based on recognition of Treaty 8 Rights, including hunting, fishing and trapping.

A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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B.C.-Blueberry River First Nations adjournment agreement

As an outcome of productive negotiations, B.C. and Blueberry River First Nations have reached an agreement that adjourns litigation until April 29, 2019, and outlines a path to address Blueberry River's concerns about the effects of resource development in its territory.

Commitments in the agreement include:

Fort St. John Land and Resource Management Plan

B.C. has committed to undertake a process to update and amend the Fort St. John Land and Resource Management Plan, in collaboration with Blueberry River First Nations and other interested Treaty 8 First Nations.

The amendment process will include engagement with local communities, industry, stakeholders and the general public. The process will start with an exercise with interested parties to determine the scope of amendments, but will include, at a minimum:

- Establishment of new protected areas within Blueberry River First Nations territory, including proposals for the expansion for the Pink Mountain protected area and a new protected area near Dancing Grounds;
- Establishment of an ecosystem-based management approach to land and resource management. An ecosystem-based management approach seeks to ensure the co-existence of healthy ecosystems and human activities, and will be developed during the amendment scoping process;
- Measures to support caribou recovery;
- Measures to protect and restore important cultural and traditional-use areas for Blueberry River First Nations.

The amendment process will also be integrated with other processes that are underway, and will identify goals and objectives for community and economic development, taking into account long-term stability, certainty for economic development and the meaningful exercise of Treaty 8 rights.

Consultation

The BC Oil and Gas Commission, and the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, are working with Blueberry River First Nations to jointly develop robust consultation processes for resource development applications that are clear, efficient and effective in meeting both B.C.'s and Blueberry River First Nations' interests.

The Province is also working to create an overarching committee with resource ministries and

Blueberry River First Nations to monitor the implementation of the adjournment agreement. The committee will also provide a forum to discuss strategic and policy issues related to land use and proposed resource development in Blueberry River's territory.

Wildlife

The Province will undertake a number of actions, including:

- Moose population inventories, in collaboration with Blueberry River and other Treaty 8 First Nations, including making management recommendations, taking into consideration the results from those inventories, as well as First Nations traditional knowledge with respect to moose;
- A predator control program to support caribou recovery in the Pink Mountain and Chinchaga areas;
- Identifying appropriate areas with Blueberry River First Nations for a controlled burn program to improve wildlife habitat.

Restoration

The Province will provide \$3.5 million to support work to undertake the environmental restoration of priority locations identified by Blueberry River First Nations. This includes restoring abandoned and decommissioned oil and gas sites, and reclaiming unused corridors, such as old roads and seismic lines.

Other actions

Blueberry River First Nations and appropriate provincial ministries and agencies will work collaboratively on a suite of other actions, including addressing the use of herbicides, fencing in relation to oil and gas sites, and initiatives to improve approaches to timber salvage and waste-wood operations within Blueberry River's territory.

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