

March 19, 2009

For Immediate Release

**Re: Dispute over 20 Mile Bay Underscores Weakness in BC Treaty Process.**

The Vice President of the Sto:lo Tribal Council (STC) says that the dispute over 20 Mile Bay underscores a weakness in the BC Treaty process. “Both treaty negotiators for Canada and BC knew that 20 Mile Bay was at the heart of a dispute between the In-Shuck-ch and Chehalis well before ink was put to paper on an agreement this past Monday between the In-Shuck-ch and BC. The existing BC Treaty Process allows both Canada and BC to make treaties with First Nations without first helping First Nations resolve overlapping claims. This flaw in the treaty process only serves to undermine treaty making and sets the stage for both protests and court action. It’s both ironic and troubling that the BC Treaty Process has forced some First Nations to seek court protection of their rights from treaties or agreements negotiated between governments and First Nations. This situation needs to change; the quicker the better”, said STC Vice President Tyrone McNeil.

McNeil says that the STC is closely watching the dispute over 20 Mile Bay because a comparable dispute has erupted between Sto:lo First Nations and the Yale Indian Band over fishing stations, grave and cultural sites, and ownership and use of a string of reserves in the Fraser Canyon between the town of Hope and 5 Mile Creek. “Those reserves in the Fraser Canyon were originally set aside for the use and benefit of all Sto:lo. The reserves were not supposed to fall into the hands of a single Indian Band, namely the Yale Indian Band. And the Yale Indian Band Council has no place trying to run our fishermen out of the Fraser Canyon or deny them access to their ancient family fishing stations. And both Canada and BC should not give the Yale Indian Band the impression they enjoy carte blanche to both control and restrict access to the Fraser Canyon, this would be a serious mistake on their part”, said McNeil.

Vice President McNeil says that while the current BC Treaty Process has flaws its not too late to fix those shortcomings before moving on. The treaty process was set up to help create a climate of certainty for British Columbians, but, unfortunately, the opposite is occurring far too often. And he says that both BC and Canada need to meet with Sto:lo leaders before concluding a final treaty with the Yale Indian Band.

For more information, please contact STC Vice President Tyrone McNeil at: 1- 604- 798-1509.