



Office of the GITKSAN HEREDITARY CHIEFS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 5, 2012

Gitksan Hereditary Chiefs speak with one voice: Province of BC must recognize our laws and negotiate Long Term Forestry Agreement so we can create a sustainable economy.

Smithers BC – the head simgiigyey (chiefs) of the 65 huwilp (houses) of the Gitksan people called on the provincial government today to recognize our Ayookw (laws) and negotiate the Long Term Forestry Agreement (LTFA).

In a recent letter to the chiefs regarding negotiations of the LTFA, the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs called into question who speaks for the chiefs, citing the judge's comments in the Spookw litigation about the status of the Gitksan Treaty Society. The simgiigyey wish it to be known unequivocally they are the decision makers for the Gitksan people, not the GTS. Any agreement must be made with them and there is no question they are the correct political representatives as determined by thousands of years of Gitksan Ayookw. The hereditary chiefs publicly signed a letter today to be delivered to Premier Christy Clark.

“The letter from the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations is contrary to the authority of the blanket,” said Wii Elast (Jim Angus), “The authority of the blanket is a combination of how a head chief is tied to the house and the house is tied to the land. This is part of our ayookw and relates to how we make decisions. It has never changed.”

The Short Term Forestry Agreement has recognition of our ayookw right in there when it states the province recognizes the simgiigyey represent the huwilp,” said Tenimgyey (Art Matthews), “I am wondering why the ministry has suddenly forgotten who they are supposed to speak with. It has always been the hereditary chiefs and always will be.”

The Short Term Forestry Agreement expired in 2010. It was part of a three stage court ordered process set out by Justice Tysoe in *Yal et al. Vs Ministry of Forests 2002*. That ruling found the Gitksan to have prima facie rights and title and ordered the province and Gitksan to reconcile our interests in relation to forestry. The first stage was the Interim Forestry Agreement in 2003 followed by the Short Term Forestry Agreement in 2006. The STFA expired in 2010 and now the forest licenses listed on the STFA are in jeopardy as the consultation and accommodation of Gitksan interests is incomplete. The LTFA must be completed to further revitalize the forest economy in the Gitksan territories.

About the Office of the Gitxsan Hereditary Chiefs

The office represents the Simgiigyets of the Gitxsan Nation. The head Simgiigyets are the decision makers and utilize the Gimlitzwit (the traditional governance group made up of head chiefs of Gitxsan house groups) as a decision making forum to make collective decisions on Gitxsan rights and title to our lax yip (land). The Simgiigyets and wilp members have ownership and jurisdiction over 33,000 sq km of land.

-30-

For further comment please contact:

Wii Elast (Jim Angus)

Office of the Gitxsan Hereditary Chiefs

250-877-1603

Tenimgyet (Art Matthews)

Office of the Gitxsan Hereditary Chiefs

250-849-5275

Gwaans (Bev Clifton Percival)

Office of the Gitxsan Hereditary Chiefs

250-847-0603