



NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Forests
Treaty Negotiations Office
Cowichan Tribes

\$13.6 MILLION FOR COWICHAN WILL HELP REVITALIZE COAST

DUNCAN – Minister of Forests Michael de Jong and Geoff Plant, Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Treaty Negotiations, joined Chief Harvey Alphonse today to announce \$13.6 million in provincial funding to Cowichan Tribes, creating economic opportunities on southern Vancouver Island.

“This agreement – the largest signed to date – unequivocally demonstrates this government’s commitment to First Nations,” said de Jong. “Through forestry agreements, we’re improving certainty and creating new economic opportunities that will benefit all British Columbians.”

In the February 2003 Throne Speech, the government committed to sharing \$95 million in forestry revenues. Today’s announcement marks the seventh forestry accommodation agreement to include revenue sharing that the government has signed since making that commitment. Through these agreements, government has committed a total of almost \$28 million.

Increasing First Nations’ participation in the forest sector is an important component of the government’s Forestry Revitalization Plan. Announced in March 2003, the plan will also create new forest sector opportunities for community forests, woodlots and entrepreneurs through the provincewide timber reallocation process.

Under the forestry accommodation agreement, the Cowichan Tribes will share in forestry revenues of \$13 million over six years. In return, the Province receives acknowledgement from the Cowichan Tribes that the economic benefits are a workable interim accommodation with respect to the economic component of potential infringements of their aboriginal interests regarding forestry decisions and operations. This agreement also sets out a streamlined consultation process and provides certainty to forest operations within the Cowichan Tribes’ asserted traditional territories.

An additional \$600,000 in economic development funding from the Treaty Negotiations Office has been secured for Cowichan Tribes to provide forest sector training in engineering, silviculture, harvesting, and geographic information systems (GIS) mapping. This funding also provides for a forest development and stewardship plan to identify market strategies and explore building a new client base and value-added services.

“This funding will help Cowichan Tribes develop the tools to open up forest sector opportunities, access training, encourage partnerships with the private sector, and assist in coordinating forestry operations in the region,” said Plant. “This is part of our government’s ongoing commitment to provide economic opportunities that materially improve the lives of aboriginal people and help stimulate regional economies.”

“These agreements form the foundation for peace in the Cowichan woods,” said Alphonse. “These agreements reflect an unprecedented spirit of co-operation between the Treaty Negotiations Office, Ministry of Forests and Cowichan Tribes. They show what can be accomplished when we work together – a model we hope will be used in other negotiations.”

“These forestry agreements are good for Cowichan Tribes, good for the region, and good for all British Columbians,” said Cowichan-Ladysmith MLA Graham Bruce. “Working together, we can manage our forests for all our important values.”

The Cowichan Tribes are the most populous First Nation in the province. They live on nine reserves covering almost 2,400 hectares in the Duncan and North Cowichan regions.

“Forestry has a huge role to play in economic development – in our province, in our region, and for the Cowichan Tribes,” said Malahat-Juan de Fuca MLA Brian Kerr. “This funding is going to help the Cowichan Tribes become key players in the revitalization of our forest industry and our provincial economy.”

1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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