
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2023IRR0019-000539
April 15, 2023

Blueberry River First Nations
Doig River First Nation
Halfway River First Nation
Saulteau First Nations
West Moberly First Nations
Crown–Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada
Office of the Premier
Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

Five First Nations reach settlement with B.C., federal governments on Treaty Land Entitlement claims

VANCOUVER – On April 15, 2023, five First Nations in B.C., alongside provincial and federal government representatives, announced settlement agreements of the Nations' Treaty Land Entitlements claims.

The settlements resolve long-standing claims that these First Nations did not receive all the lands owed to them under Treaty 8, which they signed in 1899.

The settlements were announced by Judy Desjarlais, Chief of Blueberry River First Nations; Trevor Makadahay, Chief of Doig River First Nation; Darlene Hunter, Chief of Halfway River First Nation; Justin Napoleon, Chief of Saulteau First Nations; and Roland Willson, Chief of West Moberly First Nations; along with Marc Miller, federal Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations; B.C. Premier David Eby; and Murray Rankin, B.C. Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

Honouring Treaty and legal obligations to First Nations and working collaboratively to renew relationships are fundamental to addressing historical wrongs and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in Canada. These settlements will also create economic and business opportunities for the entire northeastern region of British Columbia.

For more than 100 years, the First Nations were deprived of the use and benefit of thousands of acres of land owed to them under Treaty 8, while the resources on and under those lands were taken and developed by others. Under the settlement agreements, Canada will provide the First Nations compensation for these losses and costs relating to the claims.

In addition to monetary compensation from the Government of Canada, the Province of British Columbia will provide approximately 44,266 hectares (109,385 acres) of Crown land to the First Nations. In a related agreement, the Province of Alberta has also agreed to provide an amount of land to the Doig River First Nation in that province.

The resolution of these Treaty Land Entitlement claims is the result of the dedicated effort by the Chiefs, Councils, communities and negotiators since 2004. These Treaty Land Entitlement settlement agreements demonstrate the federal and provincial governments' commitment to

advancing reconciliation – one that shows commitment to build trust, acknowledges and respects the Treaty relationship, and helps build a better future for all Canadians.

Quotes:

Chief Judy Desjarlais, Blueberry River First Nations –

“This is a monumental day for the Blueberry River First Nations community, our Elders and the ancestors who came before us. This settlement is part of an ongoing process of recognition and healing from Blueberry’s long and difficult history of displacement and marginalization within our traditional territory. We have overcome many significant challenges and obstacles through almost two decades of negotiations to achieve fair compensation from the Crown for our Treaty Land Entitlement claim. We still have a long way to go, but in the spirit of truth, transparency and reconciliation, we are setting a path for the next seven generations to be able to continue our traditional and cultural way of life on the land our ancestors were from, which they called: ‘Su Nachii K’chige’ – the place where happiness dwells.”

Chief Trevor Makadahay, Doig River First Nation –

“Council is very committed to meeting with you all in the future and the membership are very happy to have Treaty Land Entitlements settled and a substantial investment in our local community and northeast B.C. with our urban reserve.”

Chief Darlene Hunter, Halfway River First Nation –

“Halfway’s ancestors adhered to Treaty 8 in 1914, but never received the full land entitlement promised to them under the Treaty. Halfway filed a specific claim in November 1995 for those lands and started negotiations in December 2002. Now, 99 years later, Halfway has finally resolved this outstanding Treaty promise with Canada and B.C. This settlement will benefit not only the current generation of Halfway members, but also the generations to come.”

Chief Justin Napoleon, Saulteau First Nations –

“We are very happy to have finally reached a settlement with B.C. and Canada. Our Elders, our community and our past leaders worked for decades to mend this broken treaty promise. They never lost faith and they proved that it can be done. We are grateful for the support that we’ve received from neighbouring communities and people across the region. Now we can take another step forward together and show that honouring the Treaty will help make B.C. a more fair and more prosperous place for everyone.”

Chief Roland Willson, West Moberly First Nations –

“It has been a long hard journey to get us here to this point today. We’re thankful to finally be able to move into implementation. Thanks to those who worked diligently on this historic claim, including previous Chiefs, Councils, Elders, members and legal teams. It feels good to finally be moving into the next stage – now the work begins. We look forward to working collaboratively with both governments as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the rivers flow. What we have been able to accomplish here, will set the stage for the next generations to continue to move our Nations forward in a positive manner.”

Marc Miller, federal Minister of Crown–Indigenous Relations –

“A truth that cannot be ignored is that, for far too long, promises, trust and relationships with Indigenous Peoples were broken because Canada did not live up to its obligations as a Treaty partner. Now, we must work together to address that legacy and to renew our relationships to last generations. I would like to thank the Chiefs, Councils and the Province of British Columbia. As we advance this critical work together, we remain steadfast in our commitment to the spirit and intent of Treaty 8.”

Premier David Eby, British Columbia –

“Honouring Treaty 8 is a critical part of B.C.’s work to advance reconciliation in the Peace River area and reconnect these Nations with their land. By settling the Treaty Land Entitlement claims, we’re righting an historic injustice and restoring what was promised under Treaty. This is an important step that will provide greater predictability and economic opportunities for everyone in the region.”

Murray Rankin, B.C. Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation –

“The settling of the Treaty Land Entitlement claim is an historic step toward reconciliation in the Peace River area and will help build healthy communities and prosperous, thriving economies. Honouring Treaty 8 will bring benefits to everyone who lives in the northeast.”

Learn More:

Specific claims: <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100030291/1539617582343>

Blueberry River First Nations: <https://blueberryfn.com/>

Doig River First Nation: <https://doigriverfn.com/>

Halfway River First Nation: <https://halfwayrivergroup.ca/halfway-river-first-nation.php>

Saulteau First Nations: <https://www.saulteau.com/>

West Moberly First Nations: <https://westmo.org/>

B.C. Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation:
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/organizational-structure/ministries-organizations/ministries/indigenous-relations-reconciliation>

A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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Information about Treaty 8 First Nations in B.C.

- Blueberry River First Nations are a signatory of Treaty 8 located in the Peace region of northeastern British Columbia. The Nation has both Beaver and Cree cultural groups that exist together, forming one community.
- Doig River First Nation is Tsáá? ché ne dane, a proud Dane-zaa people indigenous to the upper Peace River region of British Columbia and Alberta. The community is in northeastern British Columbia, approximately 70 kilometres northeast of Fort St. John.
- Halfway River First Nation was originally located on the Chowade River. Through a relocation into IR 168, Halfway River First Nation became situated where they are today, north of the Halfway River approximately 75 kilometres northwest of Fort St John.
- Saulteau First Nations are a proud and culturally strong people. The main Saulteau community is located at Moberly Lake, 100 kilometres southwest of Fort St. John near Chetwynd.
- West Moberly First Nations are on Moberly Lake and are a signatory to Treaty 8.
- First Nations who did not receive all the land they were entitled to under treaties signed by the Crown and First Nations can file a Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) claim with the Government of Canada. TLE settlement agreements are negotiated between First Nations and the Government of Canada, typically with the participation of provincial/territorial governments.
- From April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023, 56 specific claims were resolved for \$3,515,647,357 in compensation; 64 claims were filed with the minister and Canada, and Canada made an offer to negotiate 56 claims.
- Working in partnership with First Nations, Canada has resolved more than 665 specific claims since 1973.

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