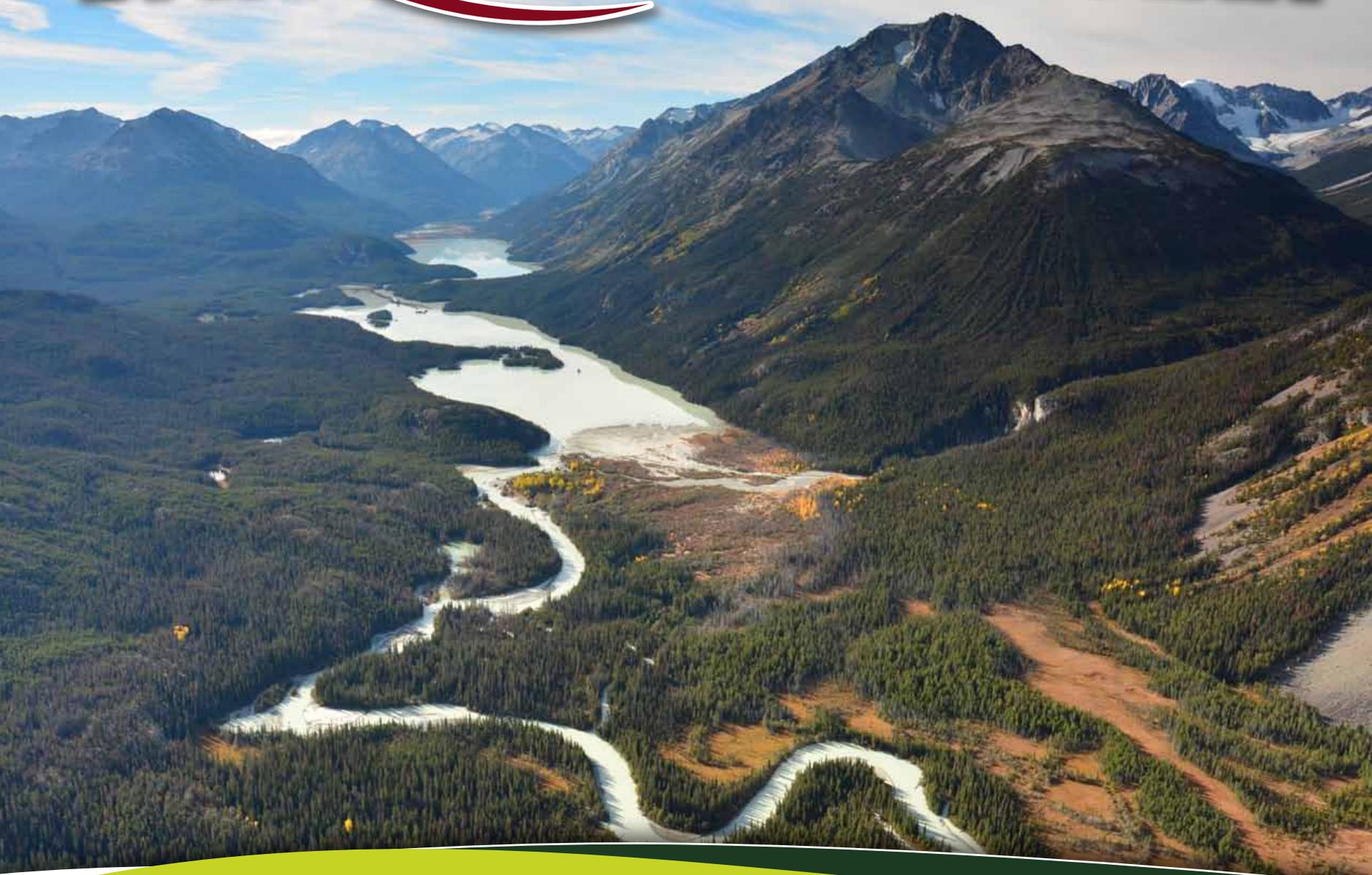




# DASIQOX TRIBAL PARK



## Safeguarding Nature and Culture in Tsilhqot'in Nation Territory



**Joe Foy**  
National Campaign  
Director,  
Wilderness Committee  
@JoeFoyWild

**B**ig wild animals like grizzly bears, moose and wolves need big wild country to survive and thrive. That's one reason I am so excited by the Tsilhqot'in Nation's recently announced Dasiqox (*Dah-zee-koh*) Tribal Park initiative.

Located about 125 kilometres southwest of Williams Lake, BC, the Dasiqox Tribal Park covers over three hundred thousand hectares of spectacular wilderness and prime wildlife habitats.

The tribal park is situated in the heart of Tsilhqot'in Nation territory, and would also protect important cultural and spiritual areas from inappropriate industrial development.

What makes the tribal park initiative even more of a force for nature is that it borders a number of existing large protected areas, including Ts'il'os Provincial Park, Nunsti Provincial Park, Big Creek Provincial Park and South Chilcotin Mountains Provincial Park. The

tribal park would connect this super-cluster of protected areas, providing a wildlife corridor large enough to give the region's iconic species a fighting chance at long-term survival.

Tribal park proposals like Dasiqox have helped shape BC's natural and cultural landscape for the past three decades. Meares Island, the old-growth forest-covered backdrop to Tofino in Clayoquot Sound was declared a tribal park in the early 1980s. The Tla-o-qui-aht and Ahousaht First Nations there made the designation in an effort to protect the island's forests from being clearcut. Logging plans for Meares were halted and soon after, several other First Nations made tribal park declarations to protect areas they held precious.

Within a decade, the Stein Valley in the Fraser Canyon Region and Gwaii Haanas on BC's north coast were both declared as tribal parks by the First Nations of those territories. Both went

on to become highly valued protected areas because of their outstanding wilderness and cultural heritage values.

Since those early days, tribal park proposals have sprouted all across BC. These initiatives make the province unique in the breadth of its protected natural and cultural landscapes, designated and managed by First Nation governments.

It's a success story that is still unfolding – and Dasiqox Tribal Park is the latest chapter.

The Dasiqox Tribal Park vision will benefit from widespread public support. Huge clearcuts scar the lands surrounding the park's boundaries, and the logging draws closer with each passing month. The Tsilhqot'in and their friends have successfully defeated a proposal to build a massive open-pit mine inside the tribal park area at Teztan Biny (*Tel-tahn Bee*), known as Fish Lake, but other industrial threats loom.

**The Dasiqox Tribal Park initiative is a tremendous opportunity to support the human rights of the Tsilhqot'in people and to protect the region's abundant fish and wildlife.** This initiative is supported by a recent Supreme Court decision, which gave the Tsilhqot'in Nation strong powers to govern their country.

Read on to find out more about this incredible territory and see how you can support the Tsilhqot'in Nation's wild vision.

**The Tsilhqot'in Nation (pronounced Tsileth-qo-t'een)** is comprised of several First Nation communities whose territories stretch to the south and west of Williams Lake, BC. The communities represented by the Tsilhqot'in National Government include:

- Tl'etinqox (Anaham)
- Xenigwet'in (Nemaiah)
- Tsi Deldel (Alexis Creek)
- ?Esdilagh (Alexandria)
- Yunesit'in (Stone)
- Tl'esqox (Toosey)



**Photo top:** Taseko Lake in Dasiqox Tribal Park (Jeremy Williams), **above:** Loretta Williams, Jessica Setah-Alphonse and Marilyn Baptiste at the announcement of Dasiqox Tribal Park (Joe Foy), Grizzly bear and cubs (Jeremy Williams).

# Dasiqox Tribal Park (Nexwagwez?an): There For Us

## Stepping Into Our Authority

Russell Myers Ross, Yunesit'in Nits'il?in (Chief)

The creation of the Dasiqox Tribal Park is presented as a vision, simply, to do things better and to cut through the conflicts the Tsilhqot'in have with the Crown governments of BC and Canada. We seek to plan and develop a future for generations to come using the best available science, cultural knowledge and expertise from multiple points of view.

As the name Nexwagwez?an ("it is there for us") indicates, **this tribal park is meant to reflect us** – as we have often been forgotten people in our own homeland.

The beauty of making something new gives us all a chance to put our hearts and minds together. As Tsilhqot'in, we have been greatly affected by the recent decision of the Supreme Court of Canada confirming that we hold title to our lands, as well as the federal government's rejection of two open-pit mine proposals located within our territory.<sup>1</sup> These decisions highlight the significance of the region and the need to seek a more thoughtful means of relating to Indigenous peoples, and by extension, respectfully relating to the land that supports us. This is clearly a statement

of change; it's time to arrange a set of principles that does not lead to conflict over resources.

At this point, there is a mountain of work to do and many challenges to resolve. Yet what is important to our team is that we take time to make the right decisions, and that we express how we think and feel to build morale and legitimacy among local residents and Tsilhqot'in communities. This is a break away from conventional politics where parties, ideologies and money guide policy, and where decisions are made in far-away colonial centres.

Equipped with our ancestors' teachings, and using our relation to the land and people as a guide, we are determined to become the major decision-makers and beneficiaries of this initiative – our culture and livelihoods depend on it.



Photo left: Bald eagle (Jeremy Williams), above: Tsilhqot'in Chiefs, left to right, Russell Myers Ross, Roger William, Joe Alphonse, Bernie Elkins Mack, Percy Guichon and Francis Lacey (Tsilhqot'in National Government).

In June 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada made a groundbreaking ruling that acknowledged Aboriginal title to more than 1,700 square kilometres of land to the Tsilhqot'in Nation. This ruling establishes the rights of the Tsilhqot'in people to use, enjoy and profit from their traditional territory, and places a greater burden on governments to justify economic or industrial development on the land.<sup>2</sup>

### Dasiqox Tribal Park Announced

Over 400 people gathered at Teztan Biny in October 2014 to witness the announcement of the Dasiqox Tribal Park. Tsilhqot'in and local residents took part, along with those who travelled some distance to attend the event. Among them, Nuuchahnulth Master Carver Tim Paul and his family came as special visitors to the event and gifted a totem pole as an icon of alliance with the Tsilhqot'in Nation, for their courage in defending Teztan Biny.



Photo: Totem pole by Nuuchahnulth carver Tim Paul (Jeremy Williams).

"To me it's there for our culture, way of life, language, rights and title. The government, through their approvals of industry, has impacted our rights and title. We can look at any economic development in our Tribal Park assuring that our rights and title are protected.

– Chief Roger William, Xeni Gwet'in

### What is the Dasiqox Tribal Park?

The Dasiqox Tribal Park expresses First Nations' traditions, self-determination and a way to govern the land in our area. We have chosen the path of a tribal park as a better way to respect the boundaries of ecosystems, while incorporating First Nations' sustenance and cultural activities.

Current land-use plans established by the province of BC – which often include industrial resource extraction – have not met our basic requirements and needs.

### Main Features of the Tribal Park:

#### Ecosystem Protection

- Connect surrounding parks with wildlife corridors
- Support key species such as wolves, grizzly bears, moose, wild salmon and rainbow trout
- Maintain healthy forests
- Protect watersheds and wetlands, including Teztan Biny and Yanah Biny (Little Fish Lake)
- Practice environmental stewardship, on the ground

#### Economy for Sustainable Livelihoods

- Embrace Tsilhqot'in traditions of natural harvests and sustenance
- Support development that is consistent with Tsilhqot'in values and ecosystems
- Support sustainable livelihoods, through community leadership and economic oversight

#### Cultural Revitalization

- Protect cultural heritage and preserve archaeological sites
- Create cultural education camps
- Continue to promote the use of spiritual sites
- Continue an active research program with Tsilhqot'in Elders

## Protecting Ecology: The Wild Heritage of Tsilhqot'in Territory

David Williams, Friends of the Nemaiah Valley

The ecological values represented in Dasiqox Tribal Park are without equal. The amazing wildlife living here are of continental and even global significance.

The region is home to an unparalleled suite of iconic and keystone species, including apex predators like grizzly bears, grey wolves, wolverines and cougars. California bighorn sheep and mountain goats are found in the mountain areas, and the lowlands and forests provide rich habitat for moose and deer.<sup>3</sup>

Genetically-unique wild horses populate the Brittany Triangle portion of Dasiqox. These horses exist within a fine ecological balance, and their numbers are kept in check by wolves, black and grizzly bears, as well as cougars.<sup>4</sup>

Near the headwaters of British Columbia's life-giving major artery – the Fraser River – the Dasiqox (Taseko) and Chilko Rivers contain large runs of chinook, sockeye and coho salmon. These salmon have been dubbed "super salmon" by fisheries biologists, because of their enlarged hearts, which enable them to make the strenuous journey from the Pacific to the area's mountain-

bound lakes and streams. Many of the region's lakes teem with rainbow trout, providing a sustainable and emergency food source for Tsilhqot'in people.

Over one hundred species of birds also populate the Dasiqox Tribal Park. Seasonally, thousands of waterfowl nest in many areas within Dasiqox, as do sandhill cranes and white swans. Raptors like bald and golden eagles, red-tailed hawks and osprey can be seen flying overhead.

**By connecting six existing protected areas already established by the BC government, Dasiqox provides safe migratory travel corridors for the many species that thrive here.** This type of habitat connectivity is essential in order to preserve the integrity of what is one of the richest ecological areas in Canada.



Photo: Wild horses in Tsilhqot'in territory (Gary Fiegehen).

"I believe the establishment of Dasiqox Tribal Park will engage the Tsilhqot'in Nation to have a greater say in how the area will be managed and protected. The park is not just for the use of Tsilhqot'in people but also for everyone else to enjoy and benefit from what the amazing territory has to offer.

– Chief Percy Guichon, Tsi Deldel

"Dasiqox Tribal Park is a land-use plan protecting cultural, traditional use and the environment, which all industries, operators and visitors are to follow and respect. This Tribal Park is between two Tsilhqot'in communities, Xeni Gwet'in and Yunesit'in, and supported by the Tsilhqot'in Nation.

– Chief Joe Alphonse, Tl'etinqox, Tsilhqot'in National Government Tribal Chair

# Alternatives to Mining

Dawn Hoogeveen, Friends of the Nemaiah Valley

Teztan Biny lies in the heart of the newly announced Dasiqox Tribal Park. It is a culturally and spiritually significant place to the Tsilhqot'in people, and also the site of an open-pit mine proposal that was reviewed twice and rejected both times by the federal government.

Despite the overwhelming opposition to the proposals, in January 2015 the BC government gave the mining company, Taseko Mines Limited, an extension to its provincial Environmental Assessment Certificate. This permit was originally granted in 2010, but does not actually give the company authority to construct the mine.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, it is a cause of great concern.

The Tsilhqot'in communities of Yunesit'in and Xenigwet'in chose to

create the Dasiqox Tribal Park as another way – a positive alternative, following years of political and legal struggles and study. The Tribal Park is based on research into a unique ecosystem, as well as the threats of industrial mining and logging activities. These struggles were highlighted by the recent Supreme Court of Canada decision on June 26, 2014, which unanimously awarded title to the Tsilhqot'in Nation.<sup>6</sup>

It is the view of the Tsilhqot'in Nation that the high cost of conflict requires a forward-looking approach to respect Indigenous authority in this sensitive area. The Dasiqox Tribal Park will promote sensible economic alternatives, as well as the responsible oversight of ecologically important lands, rivers and lakes within the Tribal Park boundaries.



Photos clockwise: Rally to protect Tsilhqot'in waters from mining plans (Andy Miller), Clearcut logging near Dasiqox Tribal Park (Jeremy Williams), The late Harry Setah, Ts'il'os Park Ranger, at work on horseback (Marilyn Baptiste).



# Truly Sustainable

Jessica Setah-Alphonse, Yunesit'in

My name is Jessica Setah-Alphonse. My father, the late Harry Setah, was the original First Nations Ts'il'os Park Ranger and Wild Horse Ranger for Xenigwet'in. He grew up around horses and took care of the backcountry on horseback.

At my parents' encouragement, I pursued an education in archaeology and First Nations studies. I am also a qualified educator, and I returned to Yunesit'in to teach in the school. Now, after working in archaeology, I'm an elected Councillor and lead in developing the Dasiqox Tribal Park.

I am mindful of our time: Sadanx (ancient past), Yadanx (past), K'andzin (present) and Sech'iziqi (future). I am taking what I learned from my father

to help build something for my three daughters – from the preservation of the forests and watersheds, to re-energizing our culture through songs and stories. We can honour our Elders' teachings in their respect for the land, promote protection of our cultural sites and continue gathering as people on our land. I truly believe that our efforts to establish the Dasiqox Tribal Park will answer many of our current challenges.

It is there for us, to protect places like Teztan Biny from destructive mining and forest harvesting practices. **It will support a healthy ecosystem at the same time as building an alternative economy.**

I know my father would have been proud of what we are achieving today.

Nexwagwez'an is a significant place for the Nation because of its breathtaking landscape, the two major waterways that sustain life, the animals that we are guided by through our stories, and because we need a space to heal and rebuild using our value system to ensure long-term viability.

– Chief Russell Myers Ross, Yunesit'in

"It is our duty to protect our lands, waters, wildlife, wild plants, way of life, future generations and Mother Earth – she provides for us all. This Tribal Park is a small area of land set aside to implement our traditional laws to protect and provide opportunity for our people, while maintaining a healthy ecosystem and preserving our way of life for those not yet born.

– Marilyn Baptiste, Nits'il'in Yaz/Councillor, Xenigwet'in

"It's a great concept for the protection of animals and resources, and a great opportunity to assert our Tsilhqot'in title.

– Chief Francis Lacey, Tl'esqox

# Songs and Stories

Alice M. William, Xenigwet'in

Growing up in the Tsilhqot'in lands, our parents told us stories:

In the days of the ?Esghaydam (ancestors) and Sadanx, our people created songs, sang and danced at gatherings. It was a way of life on the land – a time of deep roots, steeped in cultural traditions. These traditions were our own rules and regulations passed down from our ancestors.

Our Tsilhqot'in people created songs for berry picking, for hunting, for fishing, for harvesting medicine, for happiness, for the water, for the land and for marriage.

**Other cultures wonder about our need to connect to the land; it is as deep-rooted as our Tsilhqot'in DNA.**



Photo: Alice M. William displays her freshly caught fish (Alice M. William).

Our Tsilhqot'in Deyens (shaman-women) sang songs created by their spirit guides. So, if you sing a song created by someone else, mention who created and sang this song and why, to honour the artist. The spirit

guides of the Tsilhqot'in Deyens warned of future happenings, sickness, and also foretold of war and enemies in the vicinity.

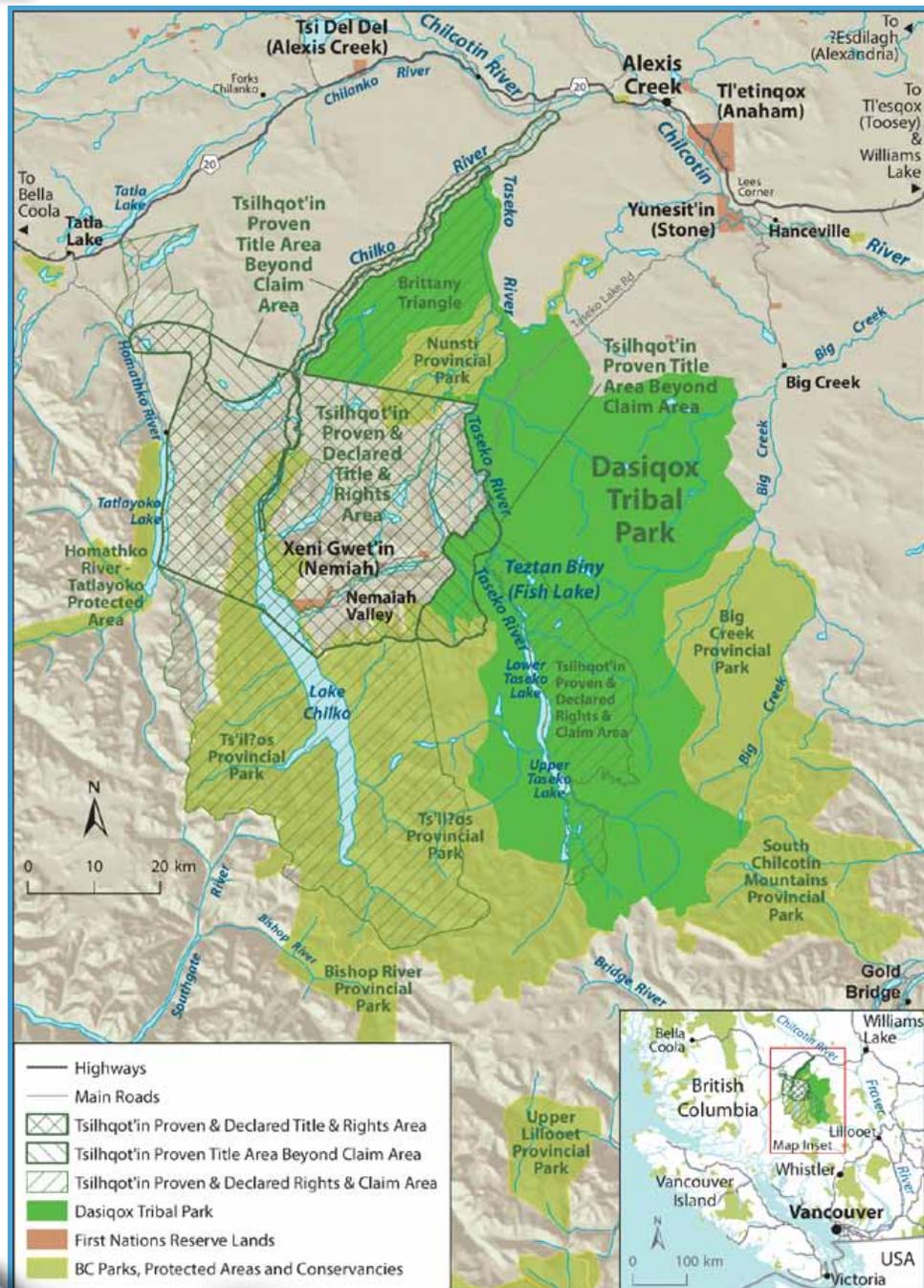
Tsilhqot'in people gathered as a way to socialize, have ceremonies, sing songs and tell stories in the evenings, as advised by the Elders.

Our dad, Jimmy Bulyan, sat around the campfire at Yanah Biny (Little Fish Lake) in the evenings and told stories. I was very young when

he told his stories, so I didn't sit around the campfire with the adults to listen. I was more into playing.

The Tsilhqot'in gathered from miles around. These gatherings fostered a deep connection among our people. A distant neighbour once told me, "We knew there was

a funeral or gathering when the Tsilhqot'in came through; they came straggling through and they had a definite destination. It was amazing how they communicated, it must've been moccasin telegraph."



# I Am But One Root in the Tsilhqot'in History of Eons

By Alice M. William

I am a Tsilhqot'in woman, I am Nenqayni.

Our grandparents, Samulyan and Annie, went to the south of Taseko (Dasiqox) in the South Chilcotin Mountains to get away from the smallpox and flu epidemics around 1918. They used the land and travelled around to camp, fish and hunt in these areas. That's how our dad, Jimmy Bulyan, got to know the country. He later used this knowledge to support his family.

After our parents had moved to Yunesit'in to live, Chief Akow (Louis Quilt) told them, "Why don't you move to Yanah Biny and Nabis?" So they moved to an area known as Nabis and Yanah Biny.

Our father lived to enjoy his family, ranching and horse herd there. His struggles and hard work only made him more determined to stay.

Jimmy Bulyan had many talents – he was a guide, horse trainer, rancher, wrangler and cabin builder. He also made friends easily with other nations. All of these skills allowed him to support his family for three decades, until he passed on in 1971.

The catastrophes of life and nature were ever present for us. Some

people lost hay to floods, lost cows to predators, lost horses to thieves, and lost food caches to other travellers. Others lost loved ones on the trails. Many of our people had to struggle and persevere.

Our Tsilhqot'in Elders, the knowledge keepers, have shared the history of this land, the people who lived there, who travelled there – and who camped where. The Tsilhqot'in land and trails cover a wide range, and this is supported in writing, by ethnographer James Teit and anthropologist Robert Tyhurst.<sup>7,8</sup>

"This is another form of jurisdiction to assert our Tsilhqot'in laws while working for our future generations."

– Chief Bernie Elkins Mack, ?Esdilagh



Photo: Elder Christine Lulua and child Nelhus picking Bedzish Ts'ediyan, Indian tea (Betty Lulua).

## Public Consultation about the Tribal Park

The two lead Tsilhqot'in communities initiating the Dasiqox Tribal Park are Xenigwet'in and Yunesit'in. The public is invited to follow and comment on the tribal park initiative as it develops. Local residents, Tsilhqot'in communities, government and commercial enterprises are encouraged to provide input on the Dasiqox Tribal Park.

The Dasiqox Tribal Park initiative offers "a new era where Tsilhqot'in title to the land has been recognized by the courts and where new relationships with the provincial and federal governments can be fostered through respect and consent," says Chief Roger William of the Xenigwet'in First Nation. This statement demonstrates a new governing expectation, and a potentially new arrangement based on respect for First Nations authority and First Nations consent before any industrial project is allowed.

A position paper about the tribal park initiative is publicly available, which offers explanations and practical information. The position paper, map and consultation path can be found on the website: [www.dasiqox.org](http://www.dasiqox.org)



Photos: Salmon (Gary Fiegehen), Tsilhqot'in Elder Orry Hance on horseback in Taseko Lakes area (Jeremy Williams).

## Historic Declaration of Dasiqox Tribal Park: July 26, 2015

The Dasiqox Tribal Park was announced on October 4, 2014, and a formal Declaration will be made on Sunday, July 26th, 2015 at Teztan Biny in Tsilhqot'in territory.

In addition to the Declaration, the Dasiqox Tribal Park team will also coordinate a week-long camp from July 20th to 26th, which will include many activities and workshops related to the objectives of this project.

For those interested in attending, please seek permission (RSVP) by contacting Jessica Setah-Alphonse or Margaret Lulua by email at [margaret.lulua@tsilhqot.in.ca](mailto:margaret.lulua@tsilhqot.in.ca)

For updated information, visit [www.dasiqox.org](http://www.dasiqox.org)

# TAKE ACTION

Please write to BC's Premier and ask that the provincial government honour and respect the Tsilhqot'in Nation's Dasiqox Tribal Park.

Premier of BC

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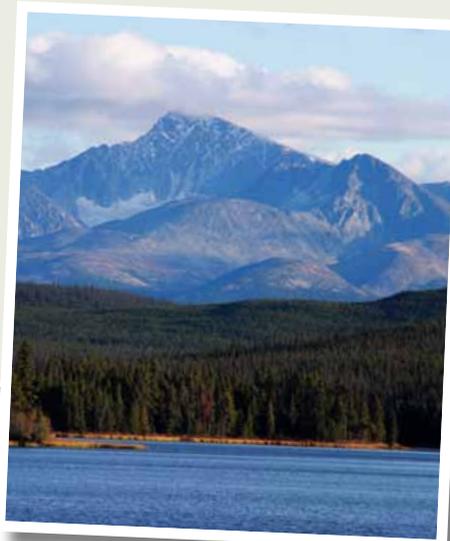


Photo: Teztan Biny (Joe Foy).



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in their efforts to preserve their historic Tsilhqot'in lands!

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