

Great Bear Rainforest speech

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10:00 AM



Thank you to the Musqueam for welcoming us to your traditional territory today. It's a profound moment for all of us, I think, every time we get to experience the performance of First Nations drumming and singing...connects us better to what First Nations mean when they say they've been here for millennia; they are connected to the land. And so I'd like to thank you very much for your welcome, Wendy Grant-John, Councillor Grant-John. Thank you very much. Chief Dallas Smith, I know we'll hear from you in a few minutes. Chief Marilyn Slett, Rick Jeffery, Richard Brooks and Chief Wayne Sparrow, thank you very much.

The Great Bear Rainforest is a.... There's no question it's a jewel in the crown of magnificent landscape in British Columbia, and it's a jewel for all Canadians. It covers 6.4 million hectares, that's an area of land the same size as Ireland. It's the largest intact temperate rainforest in the world. Vancouver used to look like that or a lot like that, but it was before we understood the importance of preserving land, the importance of working with First

Nations as partners in understanding how to maintain it sustainably.

Ten years ago we began this process -- for some environmental groups it was 20 years ago -- to protect the Great Bear Rainforest with the coastal land use decision. After that decision was made and we sought input and received input from 26 First Nations, from companies, from environmental groups and the public, I'm very proud to announce today that we have reached this landmark agreement.

Special thanks to Steve Thomson, our minister responsible for forests for his persistence and his belief that this could be done. That was a belief and a persistence that was shared by everybody around the table. As Marilyn said to us when we were in Bella-Bella the other day, her First Nation is a group of very patient people, and they had the chance to prove that over the last ten years.

This decision protects 85% of the old growth and second forest growth. It preserves land with cultural, ecological and spiritual ties which are vitally important to the people who have lived there for millennia, and it includes more protected areas for freshwater ecosystems and species as diverse as the grizzly bear and the tailed frog. The remaining 15% will help support coastal logging and economic opportunities for First Nations, continuing their ancient tradition of making a sustainable living off the land. We have also signed reconciliation protocols that include a greater stake in the forest sector and the end of the commercial grizzly hunt in coastal First Nations traditional territories.

We are the stewards of this magnificent land, and today we celebrate what hard work, tenacity and strength of purpose will allow us to achieve if we decide to work

together. Congratulations to everybody who worked so hard to make this day a reality. I know there were many days where many people around the table even doubted it could be done. You did it. It is proof of the strength of what we can do if we decided to find common purpose. Thank you.