
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation
Stó:lo - People of the River Referrals Office

Partnership to benefit Upper Fraser Valley communities

VICTORIA – A new Strategic Engagement Agreement (SEA) pilot project with 12 Stó:lō First Nations will create more streamlined consultation processes for industry and promote more effective engagement between government and First Nations in the upper Fraser Valley.

The B.C. government is providing \$265,000 to negotiate and implement a framework agreement for the 18-month pilot project, which will improve relations between the Stó:lō First Nations and the provincial government. The project will help create more effective business procedures for administering applications and referrals for First Nations, government and industry.

SEAs are one of a range of agreements B.C. uses to provide opportunities for First Nations and non-First Nations communities, raising the level of certainty for development planning and investment while assisting with economic independence and land management for First Nations.

The agreement will establish a government-to-government forum to oversee the implementation of the agreement, including a commitment to negotiate a multi-year SEA, which could include other Stó:lō bands that are not part of the pilot project.

The pilot project follows on the successful N̄nwaḱolas Clearing House model, which began in 2007 and provided a single window for First Nations referrals related to natural resource applications in the N̄nwaḱolas Council's territories. N̄nwaḱolas has gone on to build on the success of their pilot with a SEA in 2010 and a Reconciliation Protocol in 2011. Representatives of the N̄nwaḱolas Council provided input to the Stó:lō First Nations in the development of the Stó:lō pilot project.

The 12 Stó:lō First Nations that are participating in the pilot are Cheam First Nation, Leq'a:mel First Nation, Scowlitz First Nation, Shxw'ow'hamel First Nation, Skawahlook First Nation, Sumas First Nation and the Ts'elxweyeqw Tribe, which signed on behalf of the Aitchelitz First Nation, Skowkale First Nation, Soowahlie First Nation, Squiala First Nation, Tzeachten First Nation and Yakweawkwoose First Nation.

Quotes:

Mary Polak, Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation –

“This pilot project is a strong first step on the road towards a Strategic Engagement Agreement that will strengthen our relationship with many of the Stó:lō First Nations. By reducing the burden of referrals, we create efficiencies and ensure job creation for families in the region.”

Chief Otis Jasper, Soowahlie First Nation –

“Developing a more effective referral review process is a key priority to creating a balanced approach to identifying and working through areas of concern for participating Stó:lō communities and creating economic opportunities. This project will provide a vehicle for us to have an active voice in land and resource decisions in our homelands.”

Dallas Smith, Chair of the N̓nwaḱolas Council –

“I believe that the success of N̓nwaḱolas’s original clearinghouse pilot project for managing natural resource issues was foundational for the subsequent development of our Strategic Engagement Agreement and our Reconciliation Protocol.”

“I am excited to see a number of the Stó:lō Nations entering into a similar pilot project, and look forward to seeing their vision reflected in the creation of an effective consultation structure that will benefit their communities for years to come.”

John Les, MLA, Chilliwack –

“The goal of the Stó:lō pilot project is to make decisions more efficiently, which in turn will help projects to get off the ground more quickly. This will boost employment and attract investors into the upper Fraser Valley and will ultimately benefit communities and families across B.C.”

Quick Facts:

- Strategic Engagement Agreements (SEA) with First Nations are intended to encourage a positive and respectful government-to-government relationship; strengthen B.C.’s investment climate and establish mutually agreed upon procedures for consultation and accommodation.
- B.C. currently has five fully operating SEAs with First Nations, including Kaska Dena (2012), Taku River Tlingit First Nation (2011), N̓nwaḱolas Council Society (2010), Ktunaxa Nation (2010), and Tsilhqot’in Nation (2009).
- Entering into SEAs with First Nations is one of many tools being used by government. For those First Nations who chose to also enter the treaty process, SEAs can help to build the mechanisms to support decision-making in a post-treaty environment.

- For First Nations not in the treaty process, SEAs provide an opportunity to take a more active role in the decision-making process and develop a stronger government-to-government relationship with the B.C. government.

Learn More:

A copy of the framework agreement is available at:

http://www.newrelationship.gov.bc.ca/agreements_and_leg/engagement.html

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