



TAHLTAN CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Resource Development Policy Statement

April 7, 1987 – *In history as well as in mythology, the Tahltan Indian people have always been acknowledged as the original inhabitants of the Stikine River Watershed in northern British Columbia. Archaeological evidence has determined that the Tahltan people have continuously occupied this area for thousands of years, perhaps as many as 10,000. This is what is often referred to in poetic terms as “since time immemorial.”*

The first white person to come into Tahltan country was Samuel Black who arrived in 1821 exploring for the Northwest Trading Company. Our people never met Black and so it wasn't until 1838 when the second white person, Robert Campbell of the Hudson Bay Company, entered our territory that European contact with our people was first made.

Tahltans had an elaborate trading economy already established when the Hudson Bay Company first encountered our tribe. Although the H.B. Co. was very interested in immediately setting up a competing trading operation in Tahltan country, our people blocked them for approximately forty years so as to protect our own established trading economy. At that time Tahltans had an active commercial network based on our position as a middleman between the coastal trade and the tribes living north and east of Stikine country. We also traded our own fish and furs and other natural resources such as obsidian to all peoples who came into our country.

Tahltan people are very proud of our tradition of commercial enterprise and equally proud that we were able to protect our interests against the mighty H.B. Co. empire for those many years. It wasn't until the 1870's Cassiar gold rush was in full swing that the H.B. Co. was able to open its first trading post in Tahltan traditional territory.

Even though our people have lost the monopoly position of business in our own country, we are still active on many business fronts. Our present tribal objective is to increase our participation in all business that develops within the borders of our tribal territory so that we can again enjoy a self-sustaining healthy and enterprising economy.

We wish to make it very clear that Tahltan people and the Tahltan Tribal Council are not inherently opposed to any specific type of business or resource development within our country. However, we do feel strongly that any development within our tribal territory must adhere to some basic principles that the Tahltan Tribal Council has developed.

We appreciated that most private developers “just want to conduct their business.” They do not want to have any discussions or participate in any actions that have overtones of aboriginal rights or native politics. We in one sense sympathize with that wish of developers because we, as businessmen, also experience frustration when politics begin to directly affect our business endeavors. However, the reality is that if our tribal objective of achieving substantial

participation in business development within our country is to be realized within a reasonable time, we must combine politics and business when dealing with developers wishing to establish themselves within Tahltan country. Developers will have to come to terms with this reality if they expect to function successfully within our territory.

Before a resource development project can commence within Tahltan tribal territory, it will be necessary for the developer and the Tahltan Tribal Council to enter into a project participation agreement that encompasses the following elements and basic principles:

1. assurance that the development will not pose a threat of irreparable environmental damage;
2. assurance that the development will not jeopardize, prejudice or otherwise compromise the outstanding Tahltan aboriginal rights claim;
3. assurance that the project will provide more positive than negative social impacts on Tahltan people;
4. provision for the widest possible opportunity for education and direct employment-related training for Tahltan people in connection with the project;
5. provision for the widest possible opportunity for employment opportunities for Tahltan people with respect to all phases of the development;
6. provision for substantial equity participation by Tahltans in the total project;
7. provision for the widest possible development of Tahltan business opportunities over which the developer may have control or influence;
8. provision of the developer to assist the Tahltans to accomplish the objectives stated above by providing financial and managerial assistance and advice where deemed necessary.

If resource developers and the Tahltan Tribal Council can reach agreement embracing the points noted above, then we believe that Tahltans, the developers and all other Canadians will enjoy equitable benefits from each resource development undertaken and there will be business harmony within Tahltan traditional tribal territory.

Signed: *Vernon Marion, President Tahltan Tribal Council – April 7, 1987*

