



News Release

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First Nations advancing technology tools to deal with land use pressures

Dakelh Territory/Prince George, BC – On September 13 over 60 First Nations participants involving chiefs and technical staff from across the province wrapped up two days of information sharing and strategic planning on the provincial land referral system.

The Prince George workshop dealt with a host of issues related to the referral system which is responsible for inundating First Nations communities with complex information requests under short timelines.

Court judgments have confirmed that First Nations must be consulted by government where development activities pose a risk to their rights, whether it is as minor as laying out a service road culvert or part of activities leading to a major project. The referral process is the first step of many that the provincial government undertakes to fulfill this obligation.

“The situation across the province has reached the point where First Nations are completely overwhelmed by the amount of work it takes to address referrals on a day-to-day basis,” said Norm Leech, former chief of T’it’q’et First Nation and chair of the First Nations Technology Council, the event’s co-organizer.

“One participant described the situation as a “referral tsunami”. In the face of this deluge many First Nations are employing digital technology in an effort to keep up. The workshop gave others a chance to learn from those examples,” added Leech.

Still, the consensus from participants is that the referral process in its current form is woefully under-resourced. As a result, too many communities lack the necessary capacity to address the number and complexity of referrals; moreover, that the government’s quick-paced development agenda serves itself far more than it does First Nations, who continue to struggle to protect their cultures and lands.

Another message that arose is that First Nations want to have a say in where and when development takes place on their traditional lands including how this development plays

into their own economic goals. In light of that, an absence of industry players at the workshop was noted, which organizers hope to rectify for future sessions.

In the end, participants resolved to collaborate in the development of new technologies including new policy proposals to help them deal with referrals.

One participant with extensive international experience told the group that First Nations in British Columbia are leading the way nationally and internationally in using technology combined with traditional knowledge to affect development in their territories.

Satsan (Herb George), chairman of the National Centre for First Nations Governance, gave a keynote speech on the need for First Nations to employ their inherent right to develop tools and policies to influence development in their territories, which must be supported and accepted by government.

The workshop had the unique pleasure to be held on the same day that the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which succeeded in spite of Canada voting against it. Cheers and applause erupted when news of the declaration arrived.

A workshop summary report will be prepared over the coming weeks and presented to First Nations and the First Nations Leadership Council.

The workshop, which was web-casted the first day, was co-organized by the First Nations Technology Council and Carrier Sekani Tribal Council with financial assistance from the New Relationship Trust Fund and Natural Resources Canada's GeoConnections Program.

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