



economic alliance

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signposts

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Mining Cluster Development & Implementation

The 16-97 Economic Alliance is applying to Western Diversification for the development and implementation of a Mining Cluster, as part of the Community Economic Development Initiative or “pine beetle money”. Based on the recently completed Cluster Identification and Prioritization project, Alliance members know that north central BC has a geographic concentration of related businesses and suppliers that collectively provide this region with some competitive and comparative advantages in mining because of local access to key resources. (E.g. skilled labour, capital, information, etc.)

We believe this strategic investment to develop a cluster would meaningfully assist firms and the various communities to expand the volume of sales and types of products offered to the mining sectors, which would in turn expand mining activity—and economic diversification—in the area.

We also believe that given the interest among forest-dependent communities

to diversify their economies in response to the mountain pine beetle epidemic, there is strong interest in finding effective ways to link forestry suppliers with mining firms that could use their products.

While the Alliance is an excellent coordinator for this initiative, connecting interested private-sector firms, “ec-dev” practitioners and local governments, and supporting the coordinator of efforts and working collectively across the region, we also recognize that the development of a mining cluster is challenging for some of our partner organizations and communities. Some of our First Nations members are actively engaged politically with mining decisions in the region. The article in this Signposts by the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, an Alliance member, is intended to remind and inform us of the variety of opinions, philosophies and realities we engage in across our region as well all seek economic diversification and community sustainability.

A Message from Carrier Sekani Tribal Council

The Member Nations of the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council (CSTC), like all northern communities, have a strong desire to see economic growth in our region. However, certain industries pose a greater risk to environmental and human health, and have a greater impact on First Nations’ constitutional rights. The current boom in the mining

industry has posed significant challenges, which are obviously highlighted through the recent joint panel decision to not approve the Kemess North Mine.

As a member of the 16-97 Economic Alliance, CSTC must ensure that our participation in the regional cluster ini-

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A Message from Carrier Sekani Tribal Council continued...

TAKE NOTE!

The Industry Cluster Prioritization Project has been completed. The Executive Summary will be available on the Alliance website soon.

For more information about the Alliance or the Industry Cluster Project, please contact us!

tiative does not negatively impact the work that is being done by First Nations such as Takla and Nak'azdli, who are currently dealing with the Kemess and Mount Milligan mines, respectively. Both First Nations enter environmental and other decision making processes at a disadvantage, and the thought of providing companies with further advantages through the regional clusters does not seem fair.

So what is the real issue here? Consultation is required, and companies have the records to show they have been consulting—why is this not enough? One key difference is on the idea of sustainability. When First Nations look at a project that has the economic lifespan of 10-15 years, but whose environmental impact would last thousands of years, it is very difficult to justify this short-term gain. In weighing the benefits versus the impacts of any proposed mine, First Nations need the appropriate resources and time to do this. And in the end, companies and the government need to respect the community's decision.

This leads to the notion of *free, prior and informed consent*, which has recently been adopted under the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Rights.

Consent is very different than consultation. Consultation is a procedural exercise, which often results in frustration on both sides. If a company of government approaches a mining project with First Nations' consent as an objective, much time and resources can be spared if the project does not meet the community's criteria for sustainability. This is clearly evident in the case of Kemess North, where Northgate could have saved \$28 million and 4 years if they had respected the community's position from the outset on the destruction of Amazy Lake.

In looking ahead to the 16-97 work on a regional mining cluster, we have to ask ourselves with the streamlined regulatory climate, the tax breaks and the current mineral prices—how many more advantages do mines need? By contrast, First Nations enter the process with inadequate resources, time and recognition of our rights to ensure that development is sustainable. Should our member nations support CSTC's participation in the mining cluster, we need to take a good look at how we can level the playing field, and how we can begin to implement the UN declaration, and recent case law such as the Xenii Gwet'in ruling.



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We are stronger working together

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