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WILLIAMS LAKE TRIBUNE

### Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs joins TNG in Prosperity opposition

By Ken MacInnis - Williams Lake Tribune

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1 Comment

Three chiefs from the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs have announced their support of the Tsilhqot'in National Government's opposition to the use of Fish Lake as part of the Prosperity mine project.

In a letter to project proponent Taseko Mines's vice president of corporate affairs Brian Battison, the federal review panel, and the Tribune, the chiefs write that they find it to be "shocking, deeply disappointing and totally unacceptable that Taseko continues to disrespect the Tsilhqot'in people and the leadership by undermining any possibility of open and respectful dialogue or engagement on select issues of mutual benefit."

The letter was signed by UBCIC president Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, vice president Chief William Charlie, and secretary-treasurer Chief Robert Chamberlin.

In an interview, Phillip said the mining industry needs to understand that using lakes in operations is a non-starter.

"If it's in the plan to fill in a lake with tailings, that's going to run headlong into First Nations opposition," he said. "There would be a modicum of hope if (mining companies) would initiate dialogue, instead of coming to the table and saying 'we have no choice but to destroy this lake, and let's talk about it.'"

Stewart did not identify Taseko Mines' "inflammatory statements" mentioned in the letter, which reads "Taseko's recent letters and statements in the media are clearly intended to aggravate rather than resolve conflict."

"As Indigenous Peoples, the Tsilhqot'in are determined, and charged with the duty, to protect and preserve Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) and the ancient and abiding connection to the lake," the letter reads.

Battison said he intends to write a letter back to the three chiefs.

"It appears the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs were not given all of the facts, and is unaware of some important information," he said, citing a record going back several years of open and respectful dialogue, and \$900,000 in funding to assist the TNG in "better understanding of our project and to discuss how it could participate in the benefits the mine will generate for the people of the Cariboo-Chilcotin."

He said Taseko's aim is to create opportunities for people, including Aboriginal people.

An alternative assessment was conducted — and is part of the current federal panel review of the project — and concluded draining Fish Lake was the only viable solution, he said.

"Disagreement over how a project will proceed should not be misinterpreted as disrespectful dialogue," he said.

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