

SUTIKALH:

IT TAKES A WHOLE COMMUNITY TO STOP A SKI RESORT!

By Zig-Zag,
Camp Occupant, Fall 2002

On May 2, 2000, members of the St'at'imc nation and their allies established a permanent camp near Melvin Creek, located off Highway 99 between Mt. Currie/Pemberton and Lillooet, in the southern Interior region of BC.

Known as *Sutikalh*, the St'at'imc winter spirit of the area, the camp was set up to stop government and corporate plans to build a \$500 million all-season ski and recreation resort in an untouched Alpine mountain area.

Part of the Cayoosh Mountain Range, the region is a transition zone from the coast to the Interior. It is habitat to Grizzly bears, cougar, bobcat, wolverine, deer, hawks, owls and many other small animals. It also contains one of the largest herds of Mountain Goats now remaining in North America.

The area has been occupied and used by the St'at'imc for as long as 10,000 years, following the retreat of the last glacier period which carved out the steep-sided valleys and jagged mountain tops.

Along with food gathering, the area was also used by shamans, who went to the mountains for purification, spiritual renewal and training.

These traditions continue to be practised today at *Sutikalh*, where people come to gather foods, medicines, pure fresh water, and to participate in cultural and spiritual activities.

To this day the area remains unceded, unsurrendered St'at'imc territory, in which neither Canada nor BC have legal or moral authority to govern, claim territory or even carry out business.

That both levels of government continue to impose their authority is a violation of Canada's own laws and its highest courts (i.e., the 1763 *Royal Proclamation* and, to a lesser extent, the 1997 *Delgamuukw* Supreme Court decision).



A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

Of course, the St'at'imc have been well aware of the illegal theft and occupation of their territory. In 1911, leaders of the St'at'imc signed a declaration, stating in part:

"We claim that we are the rightful owners of our tribal territory... We have always lived in our country, at no time have we ever deserted it, or left it to others. We have retained it from the invasion of other tribes at the cost of our blood. Our ancestors were in possession of our country centuries before the whites came... We are aware the BC government claims our country, like all other Indian territories in BC; but we deny their right to it. We never gave it nor sold it to them. They certainly never got the title to the country from us, neither by agreement nor conquest, and none other than us could have any right to give them title."

1911 Declaration of the Lillooet Tribe [St'at'imc]

At this time, the St'at'imc and many other nations formed political organizations such as the Indian Rights Association (IRA) and the Allied Tribes of BC. They correctly understood that, without treaties, the province of BC and Canada were in violation of the 1763 *Royal Proclamation*. They sought to hold the government accountable to its own laws.

To this end they organized meetings, rallies and delegations to meet with government officials and the British Crown. By 1927, Canada outlawed any land claims organizing by First Nations through the *Indian Act*. This ban was not lifted until the 1950s.

Today, in response to increased legal action by First Nations (along with political and economic self-interest), the government is attempting to extinguish Aboriginal Title through the BC Treaty Process, thereby legalizing its theft of Indigenous territories.

150 YEARS ON STOLEN LAND

For over 150 years, the St'at'imc—like other First Nations—have seen their way of life nearly destroyed, their ancestral territories claimed by European settlers and colonial authorities.

Beginning in 1858 with the discovery of gold, tens of thousands of prospectors and settlers invaded the southern Interior. They brought diseases which decimated the St'at'imc and other Interior nations (as occurred on the coast); in some cases, villages saw 90% of their populations die.

By the 1920s, rail-way lines had been punched through, increasing European settlement and resource extraction (logging and mining). In the meantime, First Nations were forced onto small reserves and generations of Indigenous children placed in Residential Schools.

In the 1950s and '60s, hydro-electric dams and power plants were established, destroying or reducing entire salmon runs in the Bridge and Seton Rivers. By the 1970s, clear-cut logging and road-building scarred many valleys and mountainsides.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

In 1990, the BC government began an expansion of Highway 99, upgrading a logging road that cut through the Melvin Creek watershed. In order to connect this road to Hwy. 99, the provincial government expropriated a portion of the Mt. Currie reserve, using a section of the *Indian Act*.

This created a groundswell of opposition among the Lil'wat of Mt. Currie, who blockaded the Duffy Lake road. A large RCMP operation resulted in

63 arrests in the fall of 1990. Those arrested were held one month, refusing to give their names or co-operate.

The next year, as highway construction proceeded, the government announced it was seeking proposals for a ski resort development in the Melvin Creek area—a project only possible with the forced expansion of Hwy. 99.

NOT ANOTHER SKI RESORT

In 1991, in response to the government's proposal, Nancy Greene-Raine resort consultants Inc. (NGR), submitted plans for the Cayoosh Ski Resort, a \$500-million all-season ski and recreation resort, with an upper and lower village, a 12 km access road to the upper village, 14 lifts, a conference centre, skiing, hiking, horseback riding, and as many as 12,000 daily visitors with accommodation for 14,000 (2,000 for staff).

NGR Inc. is owned by Nancy Greene, a former Olympic gold medalist, and her husband Al Raine. NGR has also been involved in a bitter struggle for the past 3 years with the Secwepemc nation over a \$70 million expansion to the Sun Peaks ski resort, located 1 hours drive north of Kamloops.

Initially, the government's own Environment Ministry, Kamloops region, advised against any development in the Cayoosh and Melvin Creek watersheds, citing high wildlife values, especially Grizzly bear and Mountain Goat habitat.

In 1993, NGR withdrew their proposal. Intervention by high-ranking government officials, however, renewed the Cayoosh proposal and created political pressure to force it through.

In 1994, Employment minister Glen Clark met with Al Raine. Following this, Raine stated he was "very encouraged by the new attitude of cooperation." The

following year, the BC cabinet overruled the Kamloops offices' initial decision, and in 1996 NGR applied for project approval certification through the BC government's Environmental Assessment Office (EAO).

Over the years, reports and studies submitted to the EAO have failed to mention, or downplayed, both Grizzly and Mountain Goat habitat and negative environmental impact.

Finally, on August 14, 2000, the EAO gave its approval for the Cayoosh ski resort. The EAO is considered the most 'difficult' phase for a project of this size and nature to pass. Now, all that remains is for NGR to receive a master development agreement as



required under the Commercial Alpine Ski Policy (CASP).

The CASP is a responsibility of Land and Water, BC, Inc. (formerly BC Assets and Lands Corporation), a government agency created to sell, lease, and 'develop' Crown lands. This final stage is a technicality, and it is expected that by 2003-04 the final go-ahead will be given. As of Fall 2002, Sutikalh still remains and no construction or logging has occurred.

ST'AT'IMC MAKE THEIR STAND @ SUTIKALH

Just as the EAO process neared completion in 2000, the alarm was sounded. On May 2/00, the Sutikalh camp was established, and before the month ended it was decided to make it a permanent camp.

From the beginning, Sutikalh has served as a rallying point for the St'at'imc. On June 11/00, over 120 people gathered at Sutikalh, including members from all 11 St'at'imc communities. The meeting overwhelmingly rejected the ski resort.

Throughout June & July, more permanent structures were built, including construction of an *Estken* (a traditional pit-house). From July 27 to August 4/00, some 40 children and youth attended the camp, gathering food and medicines and participating in cultural activities. They also helped distribute 1500 pamphlets and collect hundreds of signatures on a petition opposed to the ski resort.

On August 14/00, when the EAO gave its approval to NGR, the St'at'imc set up an information checkpoint at Sutikalh on Hwy. 99 for 17 hours. In Vancouver, St'at'imc representatives and several Aboriginal political organizations, along with environmentalists, protested outside the Vancouver Stock Exchange (to deter potential investors).

This grassroots organizing helped put pressure on all 11 St'at'imc band councils to come out in opposition to the ski resort, even though some chiefs and councillors actually support development. On August 17/00, the Lillooet Tribal Council issued a letter to NGR, signed by all 11 chiefs, rejecting the ski resort.

On October 2/00, a referendum on the ski resort was held in Mt. Currie, the closest and largest St'at'imc community to the Melvin Creek area. Of 324 votes cast, 276 voted No, with 46 voting Yes.

The St'at'imc have also received public support from various Aboriginal groups, including the Interior Alliance (band councils of the Southern Carrier, St'at'imc, Secwepemc, Nlaka'pamux and Okanagan), the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the United Native Nations (UNN), the Native Youth Movement (NYM), and the Cheam First Nation.

Several environmental groups are also opposed to the Cayoosh ski resort, including the Society

Promoting Environmental Conservation (SPEC), the Western Canada Wilderness Committee (WCWC), Sierra Club and even former government biologists.

BIG \$ FOR BC GOVERNMENT

Despite government and corporate claims that there will be no environmental impact, it is obvious to any one that a \$500 million ski resort, with accommodations for 14,000 people, will have a major impact on wildlife habitat and ecosystems.

According to a financial analysis and market assessment by the EAO, the BC government stands to gain the most with an estimated \$1.1 billion in revenue upon project completion:

"[T]he province of BC and its residents have the most to gain economically from a project of this nature compared to possible returns to the applicant [NGR] and associated investors. This point of view ignores any environmental impacts..."

[Executive Summary- Review of the Market Assessment and Financial Analysis, EAO, www.eao.gov.bc.ca/PROJECT/destinat/cayooshc/assess/willsfinalreport.htm]

After 2 ½ years, Sutikalh continues to represent the will of the St'at'imc to protect one of the last, untouched mountain areas in their ancestral territory. It is also a model for other First Nations seeking to reoccupy traditional land and/or stop further destruction of territory by government and corporations.

STAND STRONG WITH SUTIKALH— HELP STOP THE CAYOOSH SKI RESORT!

The Best Way to Support Our Camp:

- Bring any food donations (rice, pasta, vegetables, etc.) and/or supplies (AA, C and D batteries, candles, tarps, etc.) directly to camp.
- Spread the word and stay informed.
- Visit camp, consider doing a 'Tour of Duty' at the Camp.

Directions to Sutikalh:

- Camp is located off Hwy. 99, half-way between Mt. Currie and Lillooet.
- Look for old logging road bridge over Cayoosh Creek. There is a banner in trees approx. 100 m north of bridge.
- Cross bridge and camp is down logging road on right, 100 m.

Check out SPEC website: www.spec.bc.ca/melvin/

Sutikalh Chronology 2000-03

May 2, 2000—Sutikalh camp is established by St'at'imc and their allies.

June 11, 2000—Gathering at Sutikalh. 120 people from all 11 St'at'imc communities attend and overwhelmingly reject Cayoosh Ski Resort.

July 27- August 4, 2000—Over 40 children and youth stay at Sutikalh. They gather food, drum, and participate in sweat lodge ceremonies. 1,500 pamphlets are distributed on Highway 99, and hundreds of signatures collected on petitions opposed to ski resort.

August 8, 2000—St'at'imc crash Whistler meeting where Gordon Wilson, then-Minister of Employment and Investment, is speaking.

August 14, 2000—Nancy-Greene-Raine Inc. receives certification from Environmental Assessment Office. In response, St'at'imc set up check-point on Hwy. 99 and distribute information [17 hours].

August 15, 2000—Demonstration at Vancouver Stock Exchange to deter investors and publicize struggle. Support from various Aboriginal political organizations including the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, Interior Alliance, United Native Nations, and Native Youth Movement.

September 16, 2000—Information distributed on Hwy. 99. Hundreds of signatures collected on petitions.

September 30, 2000—Rally in Mt. Currie in opposition to ski resort, asking people to vote No in upcoming referendum on ski resort.

October 2, 2000—Mt. Currie referendum on ski resort. Of some 800 eligible voters, 324 vote No, 46 Yes, to ski resort.

November 9, 2000—Front gate camp at Sutikalh destroyed and burned down by a dozen unknown persons. RCMP investigation results in no charges.

Winter 2000/01—Problems with hunters, skidooers, and hikers. Shots fired at camp. Several St'at'imc stay in camp over winter.



March 7, 2001—Incident at front gate—two vehicles of unknown persons vandalize signs.

April 6, 2001—RCMP assault camp member at front gate.

May 2, 2001—First anniversary gathering at Sutikalh.

June-July, 2001—All commercial trucks are blocked on Hwy. 99 for ten days, including logging trucks. Blockade creates controversy and tension, and finally ends with large police raid on camp, July 5. Over 40 RCMP, with dogs, a helicopter, and Emergency Response Teams, are used to arrest six camp occupants.

Fall-Winter 2001-02—People continue to visit and drop off food and material supplies.

May 2, 2002—Second annual gathering at Sutikalh.

Summer-Fall 2003—Sutikalh still stands. Warrior unity flag has flown at Sutikalh camp for over 2 ½ years.

