

## **CITXW NLAKA'PAMUX ASSEMBLY ANNOUNCES DECISION ON PROPOSED HIGHLAND VALLEY COPPER MINE LIFE EXTENSION (MLE), ASSERTING ABORIGINAL RIGHTS AND TITLE TO HIGHLAND VALLEY**

**n̓eʔkəpmx Territory** – Citxw Nlaka'pamux Assembly (CNA) has formally announced its support for the Highland Valley Copper Mine Life Extension Project (the Project).

This decision follows extensive and deliberate engagement in the Environmental Assessment process and conditions, rooted in the assertion of n̓eʔkəpmx<sup>1</sup> rights and title over our territory, including the Highland Valley. CNA's support reflects a commitment to securing sustainable and culturally respectful outcomes for the eight Participating n̓eʔkəpmx Bands that we represent and securing mitigation measures and restoration of ecosystems in Highland Valley.

“Our decision to support the Project is based on a careful assessment of its impacts and our ability to secure appropriate mitigations for tmíx<sup>2</sup> and people” said Chief Christine Walkem, CNA Board Chair and Chief of Cook's Ferry. “n̓eʔkəpmx have occupied and used the Highland Valley since time immemorial. This is our land, and we are determined to ensure it is cared for according to our laws, principles, and values, for current and future generations.”

### **Grounded in Knowledge and Collaboration**

CNA has been actively engaged in the Environmental Assessment process for the Project.

In 2018, the CNA Environmental Assessment (EA) Strategy was developed to address limitations of the Provincial Environmental Assessment process and outlined relations with communities via a Community Working Group and in-community engagements, the Province, and Teck Highland Valley Copper (HVC) resulting in a community-driven n̓eʔkəpmx Impact Assessment Framework.

In 2022, CNA authored n̓eʔkəpmx Knowledge into most chapters of HVC's EA application known as the Single Application Package<sup>3</sup>. CNA actively held the pen to ensure an equal weighting of n̓eʔkəpmx Knowledge and Western insights into the application that provided additional context to the reviewer regarding n̓eʔkəpmx rights, title, principles and values to support our n̓eʔkəpmx Impact Assessment of the Project.



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*This was the first time in the province's history that an Indigenous Organization directly authored parts of an Environmental Assessment application.*

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“Through our technical review of the Project, we provided over 1,200 comments to ensure that the impacts were comprehensively evaluated,” said Sarah Desrosiers, CNA's Territorial Stewardship and Implementation Manager. “This process culminated in the n̓eʔkəpmx Impact Assessment

Report, which reflects a holistic understanding of past, present, and future impacts from HVC on nteʔképmx territory and people.”

CNA’s work has been instrumental in shaping the draft Environmental Assessment Certificate and its significant conditions toward sustainable development. This includes addressing potential impacts and mitigation measures to water and air quality, wetlands and riparian ecosystems, food sovereignty, and socioeconomics with mitigation measures detailed in conditions like the Watershed Management and Mitigation Plan, Wetlands and Riparian Mitigation and Offsetting Plan, Light Scatter Management Plan, Nlaka’pamux Foods Monitoring Plan, Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Net-Zero Plan, Construction Workforce Accommodation Plan, Health and Medical Service Plan, and Social Closure Plan to ensure accountability from HVC and the Province.

### **Defending nteʔképmx Rights and Title**

CNA reiterates nteʔképmx assertion of exclusive Aboriginal Rights and Title in Highland Valley.

“nteʔképmx rights to this land are irrefutable, as shown by documented historical use, the establishment of reserves in the Highland Valley, and the modern agreements entered by the eight Participating nteʔképmx Bands with the Province and Teck in 2013,” stated Chief Christine Walkem, CNA Board Chair and Chief of Cook’s Ferry. “We will continue to assert and defend these rights to ensure that nteʔképmx benefit from sustainable and responsible resource development and that Highland Valley is eventually returned to a healthy, robust ecosystem.”

The “Highland Valley Reserves” are evidence of exclusive use and occupation of Highland Valley by nteʔképmx people who were members of Cook’s Ferry Indian Band. A total of four Cook’s Ferry reserves allotted in 1889 are impacted by Highland Valley Copper mining operations<sup>4</sup>.

CNA acknowledges the challenges posed by decades of industrial development in the Highland Valley, including mining. Without consent, nteʔképmx people were removed from living in and were denied the practices of fishing, hunting, gathering in parts of Highland Valley to facilitate mine development in the 1960s. Mining has taken place ever since. Starting in 2013, CNA negotiated agreements that go beyond revenue sharing to address cultural and community priorities, laying the groundwork for meaningful participation in decision-making.

"Our support for the Project is not without conditions," added Chief Walkem "we are clear in our expectations for oversight, compliance and enforcement. Our support reflects our vision for a future where nteʔképmx lands are managed with respect for our laws, principles, and values. Since the establishment of our working relationship with the Province and HVC in 2013, we have learned and identified areas to strengthen our relationship and participation in sustainable mining and restoration of Highland Valley. The Project provides opportunity to solidify our voice."

Support for the project also means support for the employment and contracting opportunities that contribute to the socio-economic well-being of members, offering jobs across various sectors, including environmental stewardship, technical roles, and support services. These positions not only support nteʔképmx livelihoods, but also enhance skills development and economic participation within the CNA’s communities.

“Our responsibility as leaders is to ensure that our decisions today honour the rich history and legacy of our ancestors and secure the socio-economic and cultural well-being of our children of today and future generations,” said Chief Fred Sampson, Vice-Chair of the CNA Board of Directors and Chief of Siska Indian Band. “Supporting the Project is about ensuring tmíx<sup>w</sup>, resources, and

opportunities in the Highland Valley are managed according to our principals, our Knowledge, and our rightful authority as nteʔképmx.”

### **A Path Forward**

CNA’s decision is informed by an unwavering commitment to protecting nteʔképmx lands, water, and culture while participating constructively in processes that shape the future of nteʔképmx territory.

“nteʔképmx have always been stewards of this land,” added Nicole Johnny, Executive Director of the CNA. “They know their responsibilities to the land and future generations. By engaging directly and assertively, nteʔképmx are shaping outcomes that reflect their principles and values, ensuring that the Highland Valley remains part of nteʔképmx legacy for years to come.”

### **Glossary**

<sup>1</sup>nteʔképmx is the linguistic spelling of the word “Nlaka’pamux.”

<sup>2</sup>tmíx<sup>w</sup> is understood not only as ground, earth, or land, but tmíx<sup>w</sup> is also a more encompassing term meaning the world in its entirety, under the earth, in the earth, above the earth, the water in all its forms, the winds, and the skies.

<sup>3</sup>It is referred to as such, because the application, a first of its kind, included an application for an Environmental Assessment Certificate, an application for an amendment to EAC #W02-01 for Basal Aquifer Dewatering, a joint Mines Act (M-11) permit, Environmental Management Act (PE-376) permit, and several other provincial permit amendment applications.

<sup>4</sup>Cook’s Ferry Indian Band Reserves 365 acres along the Pokheitsk Creek for Chilthnux IR No. 12; 520 acres on the eastern shore of Divide Lake, Highland Valley for Quillanton IR No. 13; 560 acres in the Highland Valley for Enquocto IR No. 14; and 520 acres in the Highland Valley for Squetankilhats IR No. 15.

### **About the Citxw Nlaka’pamux Assembly**

Citxw Nlaka’pamux Assembly (CNA) is a not-for-profit organization that was formed in 2013 to manage and administer the agreements relating to Teck Highland Valley Copper Mine (HVC) on behalf of Ashcroft Indian Band, Boston Bar First Nation, Coldwater Indian Band, Cook’s Ferry Indian Band, Nicomen Indian Band, Nooaitch Indian Band, Shackan Indian Band and Siska Indian Band (the Participating Bands). CNA work is rooted in hundreds of years of history and a legacy of protecting the nteʔképmx people and our territory and culture. Headquartered in nteʔképmx territory in Merritt, B.C., CNA provides training and job readiness along with cultural, social, and technical programming to over 2780 members of the eight Participating Bands.

### **About the Territorial Stewardship Department (TSD)**

TSD supports the Participating Bands in making informed decisions relating to mineral resource activities in nteʔképmx territory by clearly identifying, mitigating, and resolving potential impacts to nteʔképmx rights, title, principles and values. TSD’s aim is to strengthen nteʔképmx jurisdiction within nteʔképmx territory and bring the communities’ priorities and engagement processes to the foreground of any mining proponent’s priorities. The Participating Bands may use the services of the TSD, at their discretion, to support their decision-making. The Participating Bands will retain their full, exclusive, decision-making authority with respect to mineral resource activities within nteʔképmx territory.