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Cariboo MLAs, TNG join call for quick start to Prosperity assessment

By Ken MacInnis Tribune Editor

Both Cariboo MLAs and the Tsilhqot'in National Government are calling on Premier Gordon Campbell and the provincial government to proceed quickly with an environmental assessment process for the proposed Prosperity mine.

The TNG also wants to be part of any panel review, and plans to hold a referendum on the Prosperity project after the EA process is complete. "There may be differing opinions about the best way to proceed with the proposal, but everyone agrees that an environmental assessment would provide useful information that is needed sooner rather than later," Cariboo South MLA Charlie Wyse says. He and Cariboo North MLA Bob Simpson have written Campbell to tell him Tsilhqot'in chiefs are eager to see the final assessment.

Prosperity is a copper and gold mine proposed by **Taseko** Mines at Fish lake, 125 kilometres southwest of Williams Lake.

Taseko has pushed for the provincial and federal governments to define what form the EA process will take by Dec. 15, or work on the proposal will have to halt. The MLAs hadn't contacted the federal government as of Wednesday morning.

TNG director of government services Joe Alphonse says the TNG wants to sit on a panel with the province and the federal government. "It has to be three levels of government," he says. "That's always been our position. We want to look at every aspect of this proposal. "If it's everything (**Taseko**) says it is, then we want to be part of it. But we don't want to dive in the pool without checking the water."

The letter to Campbell also asks for support for the TNG in information gathering, as it plans to hold a referendum among the six bands it represents.

While the TNG is eager for the process to get underway, Alphonse maintains that the draining of Fish Lake — **Taseko**'s plan is to drain it and use it for tailings storage, but create a larger lake at the end of

the 22-year life of the mine — is unacceptable.

“No amount of money can replace the lake,” Alphonse says. “If they can mine and save Fish Lake at the same time, then we can look at (other aspects of the project.)”

Wyse says Tsilhqot’in leaders have spent a great deal of time over the last three weeks on the issue, including a meeting in Victoria with provincial NDP leader Carole James.

Vice-president of corporate affairs for **Taseko** Brian Battison says he welcomes the additional voices calling for the EA process to move quickly.

“It says there is a strong, growing voice in B.C. for this project to be properly and fully examined,” he says. He adds that it’s not clear if the process will be done through a panel - the governments can opt for a comprehensive review instead.

He says the option to drain Fish Lake is the one **Taseko** deemed among several alternatives to be economic, but that the company is open to ideas, as long as the economics make the project feasible. And he says, the Fish Lake option is also the most environmentally responsible.

“It gives the highest amount of security for the **Taseko** River,” she says. “When people understand the science and reasoning behind it, they will conclude that draining the lake is the responsible thing to do for the environment.”

Wyse says reconciliation with First Nations must go beyond the treaty process, and includes a wider range of items, including support for a TNG referendum.