

MEADOW LAKE FIRST NATIONS GOVERNANCE

First Nations People Creating New Paths Forward

Tansi, Edlánet'e and hello,

My name is Richard Ben and I am the Tribal Chief of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council. Along with Cree Vice-Chief Richard Derocher and Dene Vice-Chief Lawrence McIntyre I would like to take this opportunity to keep everyone informed about an important process that the nine Meadow Lake First Nations (MLFNs) are engaging in alongside the federal government.

Under the direction of the nine Chiefs, MLTC has entered into discussions to move forward on an initiative that holds tremendous promise and potential for the future of the MLFNs. In order to put it all in context we have decided to make the following information available to everyone who is interested in what Governance means to the MLFNs and how the process works. Our efforts in this undertaking are not only guided by the direction of the nine Chiefs but by the support and blessing of many Elders and community members.

Governance means many things to our home communities, but in general Governance has always had the same goal in mind since its inception and this is...

Self-determination

Historically, the MLFNs were governed by their own set of laws that the entire community lived by

and respected. These values sustained our cultures and functioned because they were developed by sacred principles and practices. What we seek to accomplish through the governance process is to reform the systems we live by to suit the needs of our modern communities and their modern realities.

As we move forward on this path we do so with open minds and the understanding that solid governance is the foundation by which the MLFNs will thrive and attain prosperity. The more control we exercise over our own affairs, the more we can build upon our strengths and successes.

With that in mind we are moving forward as a team to make sure that the process addresses the needs of the nine communities and the potential we see in our nation-to-nation relationships.

I believe in what we can accomplish by working together and I hope that the MLFNs continue to guide and direct the process so that all peoples in our shared region can prosper and move beyond the challenges we are facing not just now, but in the future. We look forward to providing you frequent updates and getting your feedback on an ongoing basis. Together we can make a better system that meets everyone's needs.

*Yours in Governance,
Richard Ben, MLTC Tribal Chief*



Richard Ben

Governance Negotiations Team

Allisun Rana, Lead Legal

Since 2000, Allisun has provided legal advice to First Nations on a variety of issues, including the Crown's Legal obligation to consult, breach of fiduciary duty, Treaty and Aboriginal rights, and various Indian Act and Governance matters. She has appeared at all levels of court in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan.



Allisun Rana

Allisun's experience in regulatory and environmental law includes providing legal and strategic advice to First Nations on consultation and assisting them with their participation in environmental assessments and intervention in other regulatory processes for major projects.

She has appeared before federal and provincial regulatory boards in both British Columbia and Alberta and represented Treaty 8 First Nations in British Columbia through the environmental assessment process for the Site C Dam. She was also a member of the legal team that represented the British Columbia Treaty 8 First Nations in the Site C judicial reviews and appeals.

Allisun is also trained in interest-based negotiation and works collaboratively with her clients to build effective negotiation teams. She has negotiated resource management and consultation agreements with governments and impact benefit agreements with project proponents.

She also represents First Nations in the submission and negotiation of claims in the federal Specific Claims process and in self-government negotiations with the federal government. Allisun also negotiates commercial agreements on behalf of First Nations and her involvement in First Nations community development initiatives has included the development and implementation of First Nations trusts, the design and facilitation of reserve land selection processes, the coordination of traditional use studies, and applications under Canada's Additions-to-Reserve policy.

Patrick Derocher, Project Manager

Patrick Derocher is a member of the Flying Dust First Nation and has represented First Nation organizations at local, regional, and national levels and has considerable experience working in senior government structures. Patrick is also trained in Interest-Based Negotiations from the Banff Centre of Excellence.

He is a strong advocate for the protection of Treaty Rights and effective governance within First Nations. Patrick possesses skills in a number of areas including conducting research, policy analysis, interpersonal communication, effective oral and written communication and proven management skills.

Lawrence McIntyre, Interim Project Manager and Dene Vice-Chief of MLTC

Vice-Chief McIntyre has previously served multiple terms as a leader in his community of English River First Nation and has garnered much respect for his style of leadership. More recently Lawrence has become a valued member of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council as their Dene Vice-Chief. His various roles and capacities have been many from program coordinator to elected leader and his extensive experience in community development is a great asset to the Governance team.

Harold R. Johnson, Lead Justice Advisor

The Governance team is very fortunate to have a knowledgeable advisor in the form of Harold R. Johnson. Given his years of practicing law and authoring books about his experience and in-sights, he is very familiar with the issues related to justice in northern communities. Harold brings a vast array of knowledge and experience with him that will enhance how the Governance team directs its path.

Jeff McCallum, Communications

Jeff McCallum is a member of Flying Dust First Nation and has previous experience working with the MLFNs and the tribal council. In the past Jeff has worked as the Communications Co-ordinator for the Governance program and as the Communications Officer of MLTC.

Jeff has been responsible for multiple projects directed at providing information to Meadow Lake First Nations members. Jeff's ability to creatively solve problems and connect with an audience in meaningful ways will help the Governance team communicate effectively.

A Brief Background on the Governance Negotiations

For over 25 years the communities that comprise the Meadow Lake First Nations (MLFNs) have been in pursuit of a comprehensive Governance agreement that would allow the individual First Nations to reclaim jurisdiction over their affairs.

While the process and the methods have varied, the overall goal has always been to negotiate nation-to-nation agreements that will allow the MLFNs to self-determine their community paths and move away from the outdated regime of the federal Indian Act.

The entire process involves a steady back and forth between governments whereby the significant portions of the agreement are negotiated by a negotiations team so that all matters involved can be resolved and finalized to the satisfaction of all parties. This process can be very

challenging at times and can test the patience of all parties involved but the importance of this work cannot be overstated.

The resolution of the Governance program will be the basis for community-based control over crucial programs and services that will benefit the communities for generations to come.

In order to accomplish this the Chiefs and Tribal Leadership have established a negotiations team and supplemented it with additional professionals and support staff to ensure that the work can progress efficiently and successfully.



Recent Developments in Governance

The Chiefs of the MLFNs have expressed a genuine interest in the establishing of the Governance team designed to negotiate a sector-specific agreement on two fronts.

Along with the Tribal Leadership this team has decided to focus their efforts on the negotiation of an Agreement which includes Justice and Lands and Resources. These discussions are still in the early stages and much more work will follow as the Governance process takes shape.

As the work plans develop and the Governance team begins to hold further meetings on both of these sector-specific jurisdictions, the team will address the priority areas put forward by the MLFNs Chiefs and their advisory team. The end objective will be to restore all Justice matters and all Lands and Resources matters to the control of the MLFNs.

The MLFN communities will be given an opportunity to inform leadership of their concerns, priorities and interests using feedback tools such as online surveys. Engagement and endorsement by the MLFN's membership ensures that the leadership is moving forward with the best interests of all stakeholders in mind.

Community members who wish to contribute to the process as it takes shape over the coming months should contact their local leadership and the Governance team to stay informed on current and future developments.

While the scope of this whole process seems daunting, the Governance team is already taking steps to ensure that negotiations have a solid foundation and adequate resources so that the work can progress in a meaningful way.

Justice

On February 17, 2021, the entire Governance team met virtually to introduce team members to the MLFN's leadership and to discuss the overall direction that the negotiations team will be taking in terms of the Justice sector.

During the virtual meeting the participants were able to hear from each other and also from other organizations who provided guest speakers that have established a First Nations-led system of Justice and public safety. These presentations exemplified what the MLFNs have the potential to create as negotiations proceed.

A lot of concerns and good points were discussed during this first meeting and a lot of participants made their voices heard. It became clear that the scope of the work ahead was great but the cumulative support and the will to make positive change was also great.

Lands and Resources

On February 25, 2021, the Governance team hosted another virtual meeting to discuss the potential direction of the Lands and Resources negotiations with the leadership of the MLFNs.

The participants of this virtual meeting had a very loaded and heavy agenda considering the enormity of what lands and resources mean to the wellbeing of the MLFNs. A presentation was made by an Ontario organization touting the potential model for how the MLFNs could structure their lands and resources capacities. Special attention was given to the fact that a cumulative and unified approach was best as compared to having each First Nation try to move forward alone.



There were also presentations regarding the best practices of identifying traditional territories and making the best use of the information once it is collected. These are going to be crucial steps that will determine how the MLFNs identify their land base and work to protect its well being and sustainability.

Building Capacity to Move Forward

Towards the end of March 2021, the Chiefs and Councils of the MLFNs will be meeting to collectively decide the best way forward for sector-specific Governance negotiations. The Governance team will be given their direction and the continuation of the work will have its focus.

As this date approaches, it will be important to ensure that the overall vision of what the communities are trying to accomplish stays vibrant and at the forefront. A unified approach comes with no guarantees on how the nation-to-nation negotiations will proceed but the energy and momentum of the MLFNs is strong.

At the heart of the Governance process is the negotiation table involving representatives from each of the parties involved. The Chiefs and Councils of the MLFNs have been driven to develop an Agreement that reflects the best possible outcomes for the communities.

In the past there have been significant steps taken towards achieving a system of government whereby First Nations people regain control of their present and their future.

The MLFNs and MLTC remain committed to making community-driven Governance a reality. With continuing support and input from community members, leadership and Elders this initiative will maintain and build upon its journey towards success.

Meadow Lake First Nations Governance



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