



# Media Advisory

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## **Group of Four Yukon First Nations Signs Letter of Understanding**

**Whitehorse, Yukon** – Friday last week, the Chiefs of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, the Carcross/Tagish First Nation and the Kluane First Nation inked a historic Letter of Understanding in the Kwanlin Dün Council Chambers. The document recognizes that since the four are facing similar interests and circumstances, there are benefits to working together and ensuring that their specific concerns and issues are being addressed and that their agenda has the attention of the federal and territorial governments.

The final land claim and self-government agreements of the first seven First Nations came into legal effect between 1995 and 1998. The agreements of the four First Nations signatory to the Letter of Understanding were concluded between 2002 and 2006. As a result, the seven have been implementing their agreements for more than a decade whereas the four have only recently started this task.

The seven, the Letter of Understanding states, seem to have devoted significant time and resources to program and service transfer agreements to enhance the scope and nature of the programs they have taken down to increase the funding transferred to them. They have also finalized the nine-year review of their agreements. The four, on the other hand, are in the early stages of implementation and, generally, focus on legislative development, governance and land related issues. In the short term, the four may shift their attention to the establishment of local service agreements and regional or district structures.

"The fact that our four First Nations will pool their resources to address all the issues not covered with the seven at the table seems to be following the natural order," says Mike Smith, Chief of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

In addition to their agreements having come into legal effect more recently, the four First Nations have other issues in common. Most noteworthy, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and the Carcross/Tagish First Nation are located in or near dense concentrations of non-First Nation populations. As a result, their traditional territories are flooded with third-party interests, including mining, forestry, agricultural, outfitting and residential land tenures.

“The signing of the Letter of Understanding is a significant event,” says Ta’an Kwäch’än Council Chief Ruth Massie, “and a first step to collectively addressing common issues that affect those of us who are urban First Nations—like working together on our overlaps with each other in our traditional territories and start preparing for the renewals of our Financial Transfer Agreements based on the actual number of our citizens as required by our agreements.”

“It’s great to be working together again and doing what we committed to do in the agreements. The signing of the Letter of Understanding reflects the original intent and mandate of our final land claim and self-government agreements,” says Mark Wedge, Kha Shade Heni of the Carcross/Tagish First Nation.

Chief Wilfred Sheldon “is proud to be part of the coalition of the four First Nations. Through this process,” he says, “we can pool our resources and work as a united team. We still support and believe in the work of the first seven First Nations—they are the trail blazers and we come behind grooming the trail. As a smaller First Nation with different timelines, when it comes to the implementation of our final land claim and self-government agreements, this coalition will give us the time we need to deal with our agreements in a good way. I feel really good about this Letter of Understanding and our four First Nations working together.”

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