

# FRIENDS OF THE NEMIAH VALLEY

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July 23, 2010

Prime Minister Stephen Harper  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Ottawa, ON

Dear Prime Minister;

Re: Taseko Mines and the proposed destruction of Fish Lake in B.C.

Within the next few weeks you and your cabinet will be called upon to make a decision regarding Taseko Mines proposed Prosperity Gold-Copper Mine project in British Columbia. In making that decision you and your senior ministers will have the benefit of the Report of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency independent Panel. You will also have the benefit of technical information from the highly qualified staff of government departments like Fisheries and Oceans, Transport, Environment, Natural Resources and others.

Our organization, Friends of the Nemaiah Valley (FONV), was selected as one of the interested parties in the Hearing process and we received federal funding to enable us to participate. We were pleased to be able to observe the process and to attend many of the hearings in the Nemaiah Valley itself (site of the proposed mine), as well as the technical hearings in Williams Lake. Consequently, we believe we are in a position to render an opinion on the process itself and on the results. Furthermore, we are able to place our own opinion in the overall context of the implications of the project for the community in whose immediate territory the mine would be located, the region, the province of British Columbia, and the nation as a whole. Indeed, we foresee international implications for the decision you must ultimately come to.

We view the process to date as eminently fair and open. We were impressed by the Panel members, their fairness, dignity and clear integrity. While their Report is not everything we could have wished for, we are prepared to accept that the conclusions drawn by the authors from the Hearings are honest and without any agenda beyond that laid out in their written directions.

Unfortunately, due to the interpretation the Panel chose to place on their instructions, there are serious omissions. One of these is an analysis of the relative economic benefits to be derived from the project by the province and the country as a whole. Briefly, a report prepared for FONV and presented to the Panel by distinguished economist Dr. Marvin Shaffer concludes that, due in part to a large subsidy in the form of industrial rate hydroelectric power, there will be no net economic benefit to either the federal or provincial governments or the people of the nation. I am sure that as someone trained as an economist you will appreciate that to develop an environmentally and socially destructive mine – and a politically extremely sensitive one, too – for no net economic benefit is not a wise decision.

However, we believe that what should be of even greater concern to you and cabinet is the united opposition as demonstrated by the strongly worded resolution by the Assembly of First Nations Chiefs. The news release ([http://fonv.ca/news\\_and\\_events/newsfishlake](http://fonv.ca/news_and_events/newsfishlake)) issued by the Tsilhqot'in National Government today

demonstrates that a decision by your government to ignore key conclusions of the CEEA Panel and to grant approval to Taseko's project will result in such a furor across the nation as to put your government's future in doubt at the very least.

It is clear that the Panel heard and accurately reported First Nations (and others) concerns and absolute opposition to this project. For example:

“The Panel concludes that the Project would result in significant adverse environmental effects on fish and fish habitat, on navigation, on the current use of lands and resources for traditional purposes by First Nations and on cultural heritage, and on certain potential or established Aboriginal rights or title.”

“The fish and fish habitat compensation plan would result in the creation of a new replacement lake called Prosperity Lake. Although it would be designed to support approximately 20,000 larger rainbow trout, it would neither meet Fisheries and Oceans Canada No Net Loss policy nor provide assurance to First Nations that the fish would be safe for consumption. .... It is unlikely that the plan would meet the requirements for the establishment of a self-sustaining rainbow trout population, or a replacement First Nations food fishery. .... The Project would result in a high magnitude, long term and irreversible effect.”

Further, the Panel notes Transport Canada's concern that “Prosperity Lake would not adequately mitigate the losses of the fishing and recreational experience at Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) or the use by First Nations.”

“Panel heard that the cultural importance and spiritual value of the Teztan Biny area could not be replaced or mitigated. Thus, the Panel's overall conclusion is that the Project would have a high magnitude, long term, irreversible effect on the Tsilhqot'in.”

“The Panel also concludes that the Project would have a significant adverse effect on established Tsilhqot'in Aboriginal rights, recognized and affirmed in the William case.”

“The Panel concludes that the effects of the Project on the potential Tsilhqot'in title would be significant.”

With regard to possible management of environmental effects, “the Panel believes that these recommendations would not eliminate or accommodate the significant loss First Nations would experience as a result of the Project.”

Prime Minister, we believe the Panel's intent is absolutely clear. They have made the strongest statement possible within their mandate as they have interpreted it. They are saying that this mine project **should not proceed based on the impact on First Nations**. They also heard and reported accurately on impacts to the threatened Chilcotin grizzly bear as well as other environmental and social effects, including cultural loss to the Tsilhqot'in people

Frankly, FONV would have been satisfied with the Panel's report being the last word on this issue, even though we believe it deficient in some important areas. We could accept that it is one from which you, your ministers, and the various government departments advising you could take sufficient direction as to come to a wise and just decision. Should you choose not to do so, we believe you will throw the entire environmental assessment process into disrepute.

Unfortunately, neither Taseko Mines Ltd., the Government of the Province of British Columbia, nor the local and very vocal lobby groups in towns nearest to the mine will let it rest there. Though we are confident that a majority of British Columbians and Canadians strongly oppose this development and the destruction of our lakes for what are mainly private interests, the very organized and well financed proponents are demanding that their private financial opportunities for profit trump the public interest and the rights of First Nations. You will hear from them at great length and with an intensity that we cannot match.

Let me end this overly long letter by reminding you of your statement of apology to former students of Indian residential schools. It is a very moving statement and you were clearly sincere in your delivery of it. You said: “The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian residential schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language.”

Speaking of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission you said, “It will be a positive step in forging a new relationship between aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.”

Yet, this mine project, should it be approved, will put the lie to all of that. It is profoundly disrespectful of First Nations wishes and consequently it will destroy any and all efforts to bring about a better relationship between First Nations and the rest of us.

The media release issued today and the statement by the Assembly of First Nations with representation from all across the nation testify strongly to that. We implore you to heed their caution that approval of the mine over the clear warnings of the Panel ..... “would demonstrate utter disregard for the survival of First Nations as distinctive cultures within Canada.”

Not only is the nation watching, the world is watching.

Under the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the United Nations defines the social practices, rituals and cultural expressions of aboriginal peoples as intangible cultural heritage. They say “strong cultural identity is imperative to socially healthy Aboriginal communities, and often the key difference between 'functional' and 'dysfunctional' communit(ies)...” Therefore, the U.N. has protected these social practices under the Convention. Further, “The (presumed) economic gains of mining leases have been accompanied by cultural loss, which, in turn, have produced a breakdown in social capital and increasing incidences of substance abuse and domestic violence.”

The Xeni Gwet'in and Tsilhqot'in First Nations intangible cultural heritage is threatened by the mine and must be protected by the Government of Canada according to the United Nations.

You have a wonderful opportunity to do the right thing here and to advance the relationship between First Nations and the rest of Canada to a new level. To do so you must say “no” to Taseko's plan to destroy an ecosystem, a way of life, and the healing relationship between Canada's First Peoples and the rest of us.

You must say “no” to Prosperity Mine.

Thank you for listening.

David Williams (for the board)  
President  
Friends of the Nemaiah Valley