

Open House for Charlie Lake Residents Regarding Blueberry River First Nations Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) Charlie Lake Parcels

March 11, 2020

Summary of question and answer period with audience

1.0 Introduction

This is a summary of a public meeting held March 11, 2020 to engage with local residents and stakeholders on proposed land transfers to Blueberry River First Nations as part of a Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) claim. The meeting provided opportunities for residents and stakeholders to learn more and ask questions about the proposed land transfers and the Treaty Land Entitlement process which is currently being negotiated between Blueberry River First Nations, the Province and the federal government.

Information about Treaty Land Entitlement and proposed land transfers in northeast B.C. can be found online at: <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/govtogetherbc/consultation/land-transfers-in-northeast-british-columbia/>

Note: the statements and questions raised by members of the public, and recorded in this summary, do not reflect the views of the Province of British Columbia.

The questions raised at the meeting have been summarized, and to the best extent possible, this summary reflects the dialogue between attendees and provincial representatives. We have added additional information for participants in [square brackets] where we did not originally respond at the meeting, did not respond fully, or followed up afterward to get an answer we were unable to provide at the meeting. Questions were answered by Doug Konkin, Chief Negotiator with the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation (MIRR) and Dale Morgan, Regional Executive Director, MIRR. The answers provided were based on the information available at the time of the public meeting.

2.0 Session Information

Provincial Representatives:

Facilitator: Jocelyn Paul, Director Strategic Initiatives, MIRR

Presenter: Doug Konkin, Chief Negotiator, MIRR

Panel: Doug Konkin, Dale Morgan (MIRR Regional Executive Director, North), Tara Forest (MIRR Regional Negotiator), Jason Lawson (Crown Lands Specialist, Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development)

Support: Jana Bock, Renee Simard, Penny Vanderwekken-Dunn (MIRR Senior Resources Information Officers), Sue Campbell (Regional Negotiator), Genevieve Patterson (Land and

Resource Specialist, Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development).

Blueberry River First Nations Representatives

James Tate, Negotiator/Legal Counsel; Simon Turner, Negotiator/Legal Counsel; and Deane Strongitharm, Community Planner.

Agenda

Location: Charlie Lake Community Hall

Date: March 11, 2020

Time: 2:00 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.

Time	Topic
2 pm	Doors Open (small group discussions)
3 pm	TLE Presentation (followed by Q&A)
7 pm	TLE Presentation (followed by Q&A)

3.0 Presentation Summary

Doug Konkin presented an overview of the progress and status of TLE negotiations with Blueberry River First Nations, including specific information about the Charlie Lake TLE shortfall land selections and a summary of stakeholders' concerns to date.

Blueberry River First Nations' representatives provided introductory statements, and a long-time resident of the Charlie Lake area also provided an opening statement by invitation at the 7pm presentation.

4.0 Question and Answer Summary

The following section summarises the questions and answers that followed the 3 pm and 7 pm presentations. Prior to the question and answer session, Blueberry River First Nations and a Charlie Lake resident made opening remarks.

3 pm Q&A session

Speaker #1

Context: Member of the public

Question: Are TLE negotiations looking at more than just land transfers such as Shortfall (e.g. are you also considering fish and wildlife)?

Response: The focus of TLE negotiations is on selecting lands for transfer, specifically Shortfall and Additional lands. Fish and wildlife are not part of TLE but there are other provincial land use

initiatives in the northeast that consider wildlife planning, land and resource management planning (the LRMP Update) and the Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment (RSEA).

Blueberry's representative, James Tate, noted that that Blueberry River First Nations has been working on TLE land selections since 2004. He added that Blueberry has proposed a Memorandum of Understanding between Blueberry and government in recognition of Charlie Lake water and ecological health, including recognizing the importance of water quality values and watershed planning and to improve the protection of the Charlie Lake watershed. The lake is of great importance to Blueberry River First Nations both culturally and environmentally.

Speaker #2

Local MLA: Dan Davies

Question: Is the federal government compensating B.C. for any land that is transferred?

Response: No, ultimately B.C. has the legal obligation to provide the lands, whereas the federal government has made a financial settlement offer which is a significant component of the settlement package. The Province is contributing the Shortfall Land as well as offering Additional Land for purchase at fair market value.

Speaker #3

Context: Member of the public; speaker explained that he worked with the provincial government in the past.

Question: The Charlie Lake TLE Shortfall Lands will transfer with mineral (subsurface oil and gas) rights. Once the lands are transferred to the federal government for reserve creation who says they can't be developed?

Response: The provincial government is transferring mineral (subsurface oil and gas) rights for Shortfall Lands to Canada, and B.C. is keeping the subsurface rights for Additional Lands, some of which could be added to federal reserves as surface lands only.

Blueberry River First Nations' representative told participants that while Blueberry would have the right to develop subsurface rights on Shortfall Lands, they may choose not to do so. Blueberry chose parcels for cultural, environmental, and community reasons, and it is not their intent to develop oil and gas. Culture, environment and community has been their steadfast focus since 2005.

Speaker #4

Context: Local area resident. BC Wildlife Federation representative. The Province has added additional information to the response below.

Question: Has Northern Goshawk been raised as a concern in the Charlie Lake parcels? Any development plans should consider protecting this species' natural habitat.

Response: [Local biologists have identified some vulnerable and threatened species, including bats and Canada Warblers, but not Northern Goshawks in these parcels specifically.] If Charlie

Lake lands transfer as Shortfall Lands, and Blueberry River First Nations proposed development, they would have to complete appropriate environmental surveys [and prepare development plans consistent with the *Species at Risk Act* to protect and conserve specific species, before any development could begin.]

Speaker #5

Context: Local area resident. The Province has added additional information to the response below.

Question: Will environmental factors be assessed before or after land transfers?

Response: Environmental factors are considered before lands are transferred. Specifically, a provincial biologists' assessment would provide specific recommendations before any transfer takes place.

Blueberry River First Nations would be required to complete appropriate environmental surveys and prepare development plans consistent with the *Species at Risk Act* to protect and conserve specific species before any development could begin.

If development requirements and environmental protections on federal lands are like current provincial requirements and protections, then further assessments before a transfer decision will not be needed.

Follow-up Comment: It will be important to leave trees in the area in case of development.

Follow-Up Question: Will environmental factors be assessed before or after lands transfer? What if an environmental issue is identified after land parcel transfers?

Response: We have a good idea about the habitat and species in the parcels. [The Province is completing reviews of the parcels to understand existing environmental interests.] It is also our understanding that federal government legislation such as the Species at Risk Act (SARA) are applied stringently on federal lands. [Federal policy requires that any proposed development activities undergo environmental reviews prior to approval to ensure they will not harm the environment.]

Blueberry's representative, Deanne Strongitharm noted that more detailed environmental assessments would happen after the parcel transfers, when a development proposal is made.

Speaker #6

Context: Local area resident. The Province has added additional information to the response below.

Question: Private lands with better services are available in the Charlie Lake area. Other provinces have offered private lands to First Nations under similar circumstances. Why can't First Nations buy private lands for their TLE?

Response: The provincial TLE settlement mandate is to provide Crown land, not private lands. Like anyone, Blueberry members can choose to purchase private lands at their discretion.

[We understand this question to be about a strong interest to protect the lake and its surrounding ecosystems. We are prepared to look at options within negotiation timeframes in a way that could meet both Blueberry's interests and public interests. While the provincial mandate does not include private lands, the Province asked Blueberry to look at the lands identified by participants following the open house. We are also continuing to work with Canada to confirm how the current proposed parcel could be transferred and managed in a way that meets the public interests regarding conservation.]

Blueberry River First Nations' representative Simon Turner also noted that Blueberry River does not have much unencumbered Crown land left from which to choose. These parcels are important to resolving TLE claims, and this parcel offers a special place where Blueberry can establish a quiet Elder's facility.

7 pm Open House

Blueberry River First Nations 7 pm Opening Remarks (James Tate, Negotiator/Legal Counsel)

Blueberry River First Nations agrees that preserving the health and environment of Charlie Lake are key priorities, adding that the lake also has special cultural and environmental value for the Nation. Blueberry River First Nations is proposing a Memorandum of Understanding with B.C. that would include the following commitments:

- 1) recognise the importance of water quality values,
- 2) complete a watershed plan with participation from local government, and
- 3) put in place steps to improve water quality and watershed protection.

Charlie Lake Resident 7 pm Opening Remarks (Ross Bannerman)

We understand that land transfers are important and necessary. We respect Blueberry River First Nations and want them to be part of the community.

As stakeholders, our concerns are that the Province has been inconsistent with its approach to the land parcels - having removed the parcels once and now put them back on the table. We need to build trust and understand that our input makes a difference and that the Province isn't just making a pre-determined decision.

Local stakeholders are not opposed to land transfers in general, but we do have significant concerns about transferring the Charlie Lake and Red Creek parcels, and we want to know that other options are being considered.

The watershed reserve has protected this fragile lake and its watershed area for over 50 years. Local area residents want to keep being able to use the area as public lands for recreation. There is concern that a parcel transfer will result in permanent development and damage to the watershed. Red Creek residents are concerned that access to recreation will be lost.

Many residents also believe that the current land selections do not have support from the entire Blueberry River First Nations community.

7pm Q&A

Speaker #7

Context: Local area resident, Joyce Smith.

Comment: Today is about information sharing, and not a consultation and not a negotiation.

Speaker #8

Local area resident. An immediate response was not provided; we have added a response below.

Comment: The land should stay as Crown lands to protect the wildlife. There are 20 mammal species, hundreds of bird species, as well as pileated woodpeckers.

Response: [For additional context, B.C. is looking at a range of factors to help make recommendations and decisions about proposed land transfers. For example, provincial biologists and water specialists have provided us with information about the land selections under consideration, including some vulnerable and threatened species like bats and Canada Warblers. If Charlie Lake lands transfer as Shortfall Lands, Blueberry River First Nations would be required to complete appropriate environmental surveys and prepare development plans consistent with the *Species at Risk Act* and other environmental regulations to protect and conserve specific species, before any development could begin.]

Speaker #9

Clarence Apsassin, member of Blueberry River First Nations. An immediate response was not provided; we have added a summary response below.

Comment: Clarence expressed concern that Blueberry River First Nations has not held a band general meeting in four years, and he asked government to provide a process for sharing TLE information with Blueberry community members and to hear what people from Blueberry have to say about TLE. He indicated some Blueberry members do not feel heard by Chief and Council.

Clarence noted that the most important areas at Charlie Lake are at the mouth of the lake where the log hospital and trading post once were. Further, Blueberry had more areas identified in 2004 and some members would like important areas at the Beatton River and Pink Mountain areas to be considered. Some Blueberry community members are not interested in selections at Red Creek.

Response: [We are hearing that you have serious concerns about the processes that your community has in place to learn about and provide input on TLE. The Province approaches these negotiations through our government-to-government relationship with Blueberry River First Nations to develop a mutually acceptable settlement package. This means our engagement is with Blueberry representatives who work with Blueberry's Chief and Council.]

We are committed to a transparent public engagement process so that all individuals and organizations who have interests in the land transfers can be heard. Blueberry River First Nations has its own governing body and it has a responsibility to inform its own members about TLE. The community must formally ratify the agreement package by way of a community vote. Approval by a majority of community members would be required to approve the settlement.]

Speaker #10

Context: Member of the Public; individual indicated he has worked in the oil and gas industry for many years.

Question: I think there are economic motivations for withholding lands at Pink Mountain and Beatton due to potential oil and gas sales.

Response: There is no strategy to prevent Blueberry River First Nations from selecting lands at Pink Mountain or in the Beatton River area.

Speaker #11

Context: Member of the public. An immediate response was not provided; we have added a summary response below.

Question: Do these lands fall under the TLE Settlement Agreement or the TLE Lands Agreements?

Response: [Both. We anticipate two legal documents will form the settlement package for all tables.

1. The Settlement Agreement sets the terms for full and final settlement of TLE claims, including the quantum (amounts) of Shortfall Lands and Additional Lands to which the Nations are entitled, and
2. A Lands Agreement sets out the proposed Shortfall Land and Additional Land selections and the process for completing the land transfers.

Once negotiations have concluded, the entire package, including both agreements will be put forth for approval by the provincial and federal governments and ratified by each First Nation.]

Speaker #12

Context: Resident of the Golf Course Road. The Province has added additional information to the response below.

Question: I worry about the parcel at the end of Golf Course Road. The wetland on that property filters and protects the lake which I understand is the second largest inflow to the lake. What can you tell us about timelines, and keeping development to a low, environmentally sensitive footprint as suggested in Blueberry's concept?

Response: As noted, the provincial government is completing a review of the parcels to understand the environmental risks, both ecological and hydrological. We are also working with Canada to understand how legislation and regulations will apply on federal lands. If the proposal that Blueberry has outlined is done properly, it will respect the wetland and provide setbacks along the foreshore. We understand that there may be concern if the plan changes going forward. [Again, Blueberry River First Nations would be required to complete appropriate environmental surveys and prepare development plans consistent with the *Species at Risk Act* and other environmental regulations to protect and conserve specific species, before any development could begin.]

Input from stakeholder engagement and environmental reviews of the proposed land parcels will be taken into consideration when the Province decides on what lands will transfer. As far as timelines go, the progress of negotiations between Blueberry First Nations and the Province will largely determine when land agreements are finalized. These are complex discussions and they take time.]

Speaker #13

Context: Member of the public. The Province has added additional information to the response below.

Question: Why not negotiate a contract with Blueberry River First Nations to make sure that any development is consistent with the current guidelines and regulations around the lake?

Response: [In addition to the requirement to submit development plans and follow legislation, regulations and federal policy for development, Blueberry has proposed a Memorandum of Understanding with B.C. that would commit the parties to recognising the importance of water quality values and completing a watershed plan. This is one of several options being considered to ensure appropriate environmental protections and management requirements are in place if the land is transferred. Further discussions between Blueberry, the Province and local government may help shape next steps.]

Blueberry River First Nation's representative noted that Blueberry's selections is about restoring the promise of the Treaty. The Nation has had a cultural connection to the lake for thousands of years and is interested in protecting and restoring the lake.

Speaker #14

Context: Member of the public.

Questions: Are there any criteria to guide the type of land selected as Shortfall Land? Does the process leave room for changes? How much land is selected for each purpose (e.g. Federal Reserve or Fee Simple)? Why didn't the Province give Blueberry River First Nations a list of lands to choose from?

Response: The Province worked with the First Nations to identify available Crown lands and provided them with a list of criteria, which included places to avoid, such as provincial parks. If,

after the Settlement and Lands Agreements are signed, a parcel is found to have an issue that cannot be resolved for transfer, there is an alternate lands process in the Lands Agreement which will allow for some changes to parcels.

Speaker #15

Member of the public. The Province has added additional information to the response below.

Question: Where is the opportunity for the public to vote and be part of the land transfers decision?

Response: Everything we hear today will be considered in recommendations and a decision. [We hear that nearby residents and property owners are concerned about the land transfers, and that they want their concerns heard and addressed. The Province will review the concerns and input from all stakeholders – local government, tenure holders, the public and others – before making any decisions on land transfers. This includes listening and considering all public input as a key part of our decision-making process.]

We will also share a “What we heard” report that will keep stakeholders informed about the land transfer process, report out on land transfer decisions and provide feedback on how stakeholders’ input was considered in the decision-making process.]

Follow up comment: I feel like government is putting me against my friends.

Speaker # 15

Context: Member of the public. An immediate response was not provided; we have added a summary response below.

Question: Can government put a buffer between the Blueberry River First Nations and residential areas?

Response: [There are many ways to approach addressing concerns and interests with respect to land transfers. While buffers can sometimes be helpful where they make sense, they are not an option here. We want to choose strategies that will strengthen, not divide, relationships between communities.]

Speaker #16

Context: Member of the public.

Question: Why do the wall panels posted here at the Open House indicate that public comments must be provided by March 31st?

Response: Stakeholder engagement has been open for comments, and comments have been collected since 2017. This is the first public open house that specifically addresses these land parcels.

The Province set out a March 31st timeframe for comments about land parcels – two weeks following the open house – to give those who attended the open house and wanted to express their concerns and interests on land transfers, time to do so.

We will extend the comment timeframe to April 30, 2020.

Speaker # 17

Context: Member of Blueberry River First Nations.

Comment: Blueberry River First Nations negotiators are not getting the whole story of what the Blueberry community wants, only what you hear from the Chief, a councillor and a Band manager.

Response: [The Province has asked for and has received a Band Council Resolution, signed by all the family representatives on the Band Council, supporting the Blueberry TLE land selections.]

Speaker #18

Context: Member of the public.

Question: Who pays for the Treaty Land Entitlement land transfers?

Response: All the parties are responsible for covering their own participation costs in negotiations.

Speaker #19

Context: Member of the public. The Province has added additional information to the response below.

Question: If the watershed is so important, why can't Blueberry purchase the land as private land and local officials can manage the land with them? Then they would be under the same regulations as everyone else with property on the lake.

Response: [Blueberry River First Nations has selected Charlie Lake lands as Shortfall Lands, which means the land transfer is currently being considered as federal reserve land and not as a private land transfer.]

Blueberry River First Nations' representative agreed that preserving the health and environment of Charlie Lake are key priorities, and added that the lake also has special cultural and environmental value for the nation. Blueberry River First Nations is proposing a Memorandum of Understanding with B.C. and the Peace River Regional District to work on water quality, restoration and protection, and riparian issues.

Blueberry has a close spiritual and cultural connection to the lake and are disappointed to hear that the lake is in poor shape. The Blueberry (Dane-zaa) are called Tluge-La – people named after the suckerfish, which were once very populous in Charlie Lake. Overfishing and the introduction of other species have resulted in fewer numbers of fish in the lake.

Speaker #20

Context: Member of the public, Jim Little; a long-time resident of the northeast, and past employee of the provincial government. An immediate response was not provided; we have added a summary response below.

Question: The watershed reserve was established in 1968 to secure and protect the reserve. Government should be looking after public rights and use of those areas. Everyone, including First Nations should respect the designated watershed reserve. Why is it so easy to amend this watershed reserve for a different type of land use?

Response: [The health of the lake and the watershed reserve that protects it are important to government, stakeholders, and Blueberry River First Nations. Protecting the lake and its environment will be priority considerations in any future land-use decisions.

There are some ways that the lake and watershed health can be assured in future. One is maintaining the watershed reserve in place as is. Another approach is to recommend an amendment to the watershed reserve which would need to be supported by information showing that any future development will be regulated, subject to strict environmental requirements, and undertaken in a manner that addresses the health of the lake and watershed.]

Speaker #21

Context: Jensen, resident of the Charlie Lake area.

Comment: I remember when there used to be a slough right across on the Alaska Highway. It was filled over with dirt. Why did nobody stand up for the slough? Yet people were at the airport asking for signatures on a petition about TLE. It's important to settle Treaty Land Entitlement – Blueberry has been without their lands for 100 years.

Speaker #22

Context: Member of the public.

Question: Lots of people didn't know about the meeting. It should be better advertised.

Response: The provincial team worked with stakeholder contacts to identify a suitable date. We changed the date from February to March following requests from local stakeholders, the Northeast Roundtable and local governments. Alaska Highway News printed an article and indicated the event dates on February 5, 2020, and the Province ran advertisements for both Open Houses in the Alaska Highway News on February 20, 2020 and March 5, 2020. We sent copies of the ads to stakeholder contacts, the Northeast Roundtable, the City of Fort St. John, and the Peace River Regional District. We also asked stakeholder contacts who knew about the event to spread the word by word of mouth.

Going forward, the provincial team will look at how to better get the word out about events.

Speaker #23

Context: Member of the public. An immediate response was not provided; we have added a summary response below.

Question: We feel pressured and don't really understand why there is a hurry to decide, especially since timelines keep changing.

Response: [We have come to a point in our TLE negotiations where we are finalizing the settlement agreement. Stakeholder engagement is a critical part of the work that we do in our ministry. Before finalizing the Settlement and Lands Agreements, it is important all stakeholders and the public provide input and express concerns and interests. This is their opportunity. This input is valuable and helps to inform our recommendations on land transfers.]

Speaker #24

Context: Member of the public.

Question: Just like Caribou, you're jamming this process down our throats. Where is the public vote?

Response: We are here with you, talking with you today. It's important to know that no decisions have been made on any land transfers at this time. This meeting is a public opportunity for you to provide feedback and for us to take that feedback into consideration as we move forward on the decision-making process, which will reflect a balanced assessment of the overall risks, interests and values.

Speaker #25

Context: Resident of the Red Creek subdivision.

Question: We are not against reconciliation. There were other land areas available for First Nations to choose from – I have seen the maps. Why didn't the current B.C. government respect the previous decision to remove the Charlie Lake and Red Creek parcels from the table?

Response: The lands were taken off the table by ministerial order and put back on by ministerial order. We are continuing to review, assess and develop recommendations for the Crown land parcels that First Nations identified as part of negotiations.

We are also continuing to work with Canada to confirm how the current proposed parcels could be transferred and managed in a way that meets the interests and concerns of stakeholders and the public. This is complex work and it takes time.

Follow-up Comment: Make sure you record this comment: we want the lands taken off the table.

Follow-up Comment: We see that not all people agree with the parcels, including at Blueberry River First Nations. Higher ups in government don't seem to be listening to locals.

Follow-up Comment: There's no guarantees. Once the land is gone, it's gone.

Speaker #26

Context: Member of the public.

Question: If the federal government is so involved in the negotiations, how come they are not here? How do you do negotiations without the federal government at the table?

Response: The federal government is involved and participating with all parties at the negotiations table; however, the federal government was not able to send anyone for these open house meetings.

Speaker #27

Context: Member of the public. An immediate response was not provided; we have added a summary response below.

Question: Why is it even feasible to choose lands at Charlie Lake if conservation is a high priority?

Response: [As we have stated, protecting the health of Charlie Lake is a priority for all parties – government, stakeholders, the public, and Blueberry River First Nations. We are going through the process of seeking a solution that will satisfy both the proposed land transfers and the public and stakeholders' conservation concerns. We are also considering how legislation and regulations on federal lands will help to manage development in a way that considers the watershed health.

It's also important to know that Blueberry River First Nations have been clear that they too want to ensure that the lake is protected, and proposed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Province committing the parties to recognize the importance of water quality values and completing a watershed plan.]

Speaker #28

Context: Member of the public. An immediate response was not provided; we have added a summary response below.

Question: Blueberry River First Nations showed us a diagram of what they plan to put on the property and have said they want to govern their own property. What comfort can you give stakeholders and the public that the development will remain low impact, and will be like the community around the lake?

Response: [As noted, we anticipate that federal lands will have development requirements that can minimize any potential impacts to the local environment and protect watershed health. We continue to work with the federal government to learn more about how First Nations proposed

development projects would be implemented on federal lands in the context of environmental protection.]

Speaker #29

Context: Member of the public. An immediate response was not provided; we have added a summary response below.

Question: Blueberry River First Nations have said they want to protect the land and provide Elder's housing. Can't they use a small area for housing and leave the rest for watershed protection?

Response: [Blueberry River First Nations' initial concept provided to the Province and stakeholders illustrated their plans for development of an Elders' residence to have a small footprint. After a meeting with stakeholders in January 2020, Blueberry shared an updated concept map that is adjusted to avoid the wetland.]

Speaker #30

Context: Member of the public. The Province has added additional information to the response below.

Question: This land is identified as Shortfall Land, but could it be changed to Additional Land and transferred as Fee Simple? That way it will still be provincial.

Response: [Shortfall Lands are Crown lands intended to compensate First Nations for lands that should have been included in their treaties more than 100 years ago. The Province provided Blueberry River First Nations with Crown lands to select as options for proposed Shortfall Land settlement. These parcels were identified back in 2005 because the people have a deep historical, cultural and spiritual connection to Charlie Lake. They are also close to Fort St. John, and finally, they are among the only available Crown lands along the lake. For this reason, they are a good option for settlement of TLE claims.]

We are prepared to explore other lands that meet Blueberry River First Nations interests; while acknowledging that we are also working towards reconciliation of this historic Treaty commitment.

5.0 Evening Wrap Up and Summary

The session ended past the 9:00 p.m. time, and the provincial team did not capture specific wrap up comments and next steps from the evening. The following section has been added to provide a summary as well as to capture any actions and follow-up.

The following outlines the provincial team's summary of key messages and next steps. We have summarized the comments that are frequently raised, but not every comment from the evening is included here.

Summary of What We Heard

We have heard from stakeholders and the public that maintaining the health of Charlie Lake is of great importance. This means ensuring a high standard of water quality, preserving the health of the watershed and protecting the ecosystems and wildlife that the area sustains.

It is important that prior to any land transfer decisions being made, the potential impacts of any future development on Charlie Lake and the watershed must be considered. This would include an understanding of what types of development requirements and environmental standards would be in place on federal lands, and whether those would be consistent with current provincial and regional requirements. The Province will need to have confidence that any development proposed by Blueberry River First Nations will have a low environmental footprint that aligns with current guidelines and regulations. Blueberry will need to comply with applicable federal and provincial legislation on federal reserve lands.

Action: We will follow up with the federal government to confirm in more detail how development requirements and provincial and federal environmental protections are applied on reserve lands and how that compares with current provincial regulations and local guidelines.

We have heard people ask whether other lands could meet Blueberry River First Nations' interests around Charlie Lake.

Blueberry River First Nations identified these selections in 2005 because they have a deep historical, cultural and spiritual connection to Charlie Lake. They are also close to Fort St. John, and finally, they are among the only available Crown lands along the lake.

Action:

If alternative Crown lands nearby met with Blueberry River First Nations' interests, the Province would be open to exploring further. However, Blueberry has expressed strong reasons for the current selection, and we are looking at all ways in which the current proposed lands could meet our obligation to make up lands owed, provide a fair selection that meets Blueberry's needs, and address the interests of stakeholders and the public.

This includes researching how any proposed development would meet environmental requirements.

We have heard that there are concerns from some Blueberry River First Nations members that the Blueberry community may not be fully supportive of all the TLE parcels.

The Provincial government is in government-to-government negotiations with the legally elected Blueberry River First Nations Chief and Council.

Action: We have followed up with the Chief and Council to confirm that the full Chief and Council support the TLE parcels. Blueberry's Chief and Council have provided a Band Council Resolution (BCR) signed by the Chief of Blueberry River First Nations and all five councillors supporting the TLE selections.

We have heard clearly that people are concerned about how their comments and questions will be considered and used to inform a decision.

Stakeholder engagement is a critical part of the work that we do in this ministry. Before finalizing the Settlement and Lands Agreements, it is important all stakeholders and the public provide input and express concerns and interests. All feedback will be taken into consideration as we move forward on the decision-making process, which will reflect a balanced assessment of the overall risks, interests and values.

Action: We will reach out to the smaller groups and individuals you have designated as your spokespersons to follow up and where possible we may share potential options that are being considered.

Action: We are committed to reporting out to stakeholders and the public about any decisions made with respect to the land transfers via the govTogether website (<https://engage.gov.bc.ca/govtogetherbc/consultation/land-transfers-in-northeast-british-columbia/>) and the Northeast Roundtable.