

The Impacts of the Reserve Creation Processes on Indigenous Women: Implications for Specific Claims Discussion Paper, Video Interviews and Web Resource -

Project Description

The Union of BC Indian Chiefs, under the direction of the BC Specific Claims Working Group¹, seeks funding to prepare a discussion paper and conduct video-recorded interviews on the relationship between the historic Indian reserve creation in British Columbia and the political, economic, and social marginalization of Indigenous women. The paper will enlarge our understanding of this complex history and explore possible implications for the resolution of specific claims. The videos will capture interviews with community experts on their home territories talking about the ways in which colonial gender bias has resulted in historical losses of land, resources, as well as vital knowledge of Indigenous laws and matriarchal economic systems and governance structures.

Background and Rationale

This project flows directly from the BCSCWG's previous work on integrating Indigenous laws and legal systems into specific claims processes. In 2019, the BCSCWG developed an online resource on this topic that includes a series of short interviews with Indigenous community members discussing historical land and resource losses on their territories through the lens of their own laws and legal principles. Throughout the process of conducting the interviews, it became apparent that the reserve creation processes carried out by colonial and Dominion officials in the 19th and 20th centuries had profound effects on the traditional political, economic, and social power of Indigenous women.

Government officials conducted processes of reserve creation in accordance with European patriarchal social norms and beliefs, and colonial assimilation strategies, effectively ignoring key territories and resources tied to the governance, economic, and cultural roles of Indigenous women. Our analysis will examine the diversity of ways that Indigenous women exercised authority over lands and resources in their territories and how the colonial assumptions that drove BC reserve creation resulted in the significant marginalization of Indigenous women, affecting their social influence and power and legalized discrimination under the Indian Act.

Our analysis will expand our current understanding of how the gendered nature of reserve creation affects the scope and nature of specific claims. Our interviews with community experts will highlight the intertwined impacts of the loss of women's authority and land and resource loss on particular communities. Understanding these losses will contribute to the necessary revitalization of important structures of Indigenous governance. The resolution of longstanding specific claims is a crucial element in the process of reconciliation and will contribute to the realization of economic prosperity for affected communities.

Significantly our project will align with Indigenous Services Canada's (ISC) goal of advancing Indigenous self-determination; it will support and fulfill its key priorities of attaining economic prosperity, keeping children and families together, and developing reliable infrastructure. In order for ISC to realize its overarching vision of improved quality of life for Indigenous peoples, we need to be able to understand

¹ The BC Specific Claims Working Group (BCSCWG) is a group of Indigenous leaders and specific claims technicians, created via resolution by the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) in 2013 and tasked with advocating for the fair and just resolution of BC specific claims and advancing specific claims as a national political agenda item. Throughout our work, we emphasize the historical uniqueness of colonization in BC and the need for a process that addresses the distinctive challenges of claims resolution in this province.

the roots of marginalization and colonization and be able to reflect on the ways the reserve system still feeds into present structures and relationships. Our project studies the past so as to learn how we can dismantle persisting, interconnected colonial structures that keep communities and families divided and disenfranchised, without reliable infrastructure and resources. Our project will ultimately point the way to how we can establish healthier, stronger systems of Indigenous governance— systems wherein women are empowered and able to exact matriarchal governance, knowledge, and economic systems to help their communities realize their full economic and social potential.

Deliverables

On the basis of both historical and legal research, we will develop a discussion paper of approximately 25-30 pages that will be shared with the UBCIC Chiefs Council and posted on our specific claims-Indigenous laws web resource, *Our Laws Arise from the Land*. We will conduct 6 to 10 video and audio interviews with community experts, transcribe them, and post them on the website.