



Backgrounder

About k'weq'ənəq

k'weq'ənəq is currently recognized as federal Crown land, in Surrey, B.C. Several years ago, the federal government declared k'weq'ənəq as surplus to their needs, which earmarks the land for disposition. This land is significant to Katzie, Kwantlen and Semiahmoo (the “Nations”) because it is the largest piece of Crown land remaining in the Nations’ shared territories, and thus, the largest piece of land that the Nations can feasibly regain control of for the benefit of their Nations and future generations. Traditionally, k'weq'ənəq was used as a trade and travel route to enable commerce between the Nations – it provided a linkage between ocean and river resources and strengthened the Nations’ relationships. The Nations historic occupation and use of this land is supported by several archaeological sites existing within the immediate area.

Request by the Katzie, Kwantlen and Semiahmoo First Nations

The Nations are working together to have k'weq'ənəq, a piece of land which is integrally important to the Nations and declared “surplus” by the federal government, returned to them.

Since colonization, the Nations have had access to their traditional territory severely restricted. A growing population in the Lower Mainland and competing demands for an increasingly limited supply of land in the region has resulted in dwindling opportunities for the Nations to use their territories.

The Nations believe that the return of k'weq'ənəq is a way for the Government of Canada to put reconciliation into action through the principles of respect, genuine acknowledgment, working together in a government-to-government fashion, and enabling the Nations to be active partners in moving Canada forward.

Returning k'weq'ənəq to the Nations would also provide opportunities to unlock economic opportunity for the Nations, enabling more fulsome participation in the Canadian economy. It would allow the Nations to regain some of their economic independence lost to colonization and enable them to create opportunities and wealth that supports the long-term wellbeing of their people. Opportunities realized on this site would also provide significant ongoing benefit to local governments, the region, and the country in general.

Current use of the land

The roughly 300-acre parcel of land is currently being leased by the federal government at a below market rate to a private corporation that operates a farming business and is one of many pieces of land that this company owns or leases.

Misguided “Save the Farmland” Campaign

The corporation leasing the land has launched a “Save the Farmland” campaign that calls on the public and elected officials to join them in asking the B.C. Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) to

protect this federally held parcel of land by adding it to the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). A public hearing was held because of this campaign on January 23, 2023, at the Kwantlen Polytechnic University Auditorium in Langley.

The campaign and public hearing notwithstanding, the B.C. ALC has no authority or jurisdiction over this parcel of land, as it is federally owned and has always been intended to be industrial land. The parcel is listed in Surrey's Official Community Plan as Industrial, and in Metro Vancouver's plan as Mixed Commercial: the only reason this land has ever been used as agricultural land is that Canada had historically used the land to house a radio tower and wanted to generate a bit of additional income which would not interfere with that use. Now, there's no more reason for Canada to have a radio tower there (hence Canada's disposition of the land).

In November 2022, the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) initiated a proposal to consider inclusion of this land into the Provincial Agricultural Land Reserve. However, on June 21, 2024, the ALC ultimately concluded that it had no jurisdiction over these lands. In its findings document, the ALC stated that: "In the circumstances of the ongoing negotiations between KKS and the Government of Canada, including in particular the length of those negotiations and the scarcity of federal Crown land in the claimed traditional territory of KKS, inclusion of the Lands in the ALR would not carry out the intent of the ALCA."

As it stands, this 300+ acre parcel is generating about \$4,000.00 in taxes for the City of Surrey (to be used for critical services such as schools, police, etc.). If k^weq'ənəq were used at its highest and best use (like the parcel across the road), it would generate about \$29,000,000.00 in tax revenue to be used by the City of Surrey for essential services. Using this critically important land for the benefit of one corporation is not the right path for anyone but that corporation.

The corporation leading this lobbying effort has politicized these lands, causing confusion and frustrating the transfer process for the Nations. Furthermore, the rights that the Nations have to k^weq'ənəq, along with their past and ongoing efforts to secure interests in these lands, were never considered by the campaign organizers. At no time did the company mention the Nations' decades long engagement with the federal government over the future of this land, nor was any attempt made to meet with the Nations prior to the campaign being launched. Of course, there is a lot of available farmland (and land within the ALR) in Surrey or the Lower Mainland that this corporation could farm.

The arguments that protecting this land is essential for local food security are misleading and only consider one very small piece of the relevant information, to the prejudice of everyone but the corporation. As a result, the campaign is misguided and illustrates a fundamental misunderstanding (or distortion) of the history of this parcel of land and its intended purpose, as well as ignoring Indigenous rights.

Katzie, Kwantlen and Semiahmoo Partnership

As Coast Salish people, the relationship between the Nations is based on a common language, similar cultural and spiritual practices, a strong connection to the land, and broad kinship ties that stretch back millennia.

The Nations have been working together to support their shared views on nationhood, self-government, and stewardship over their lands for many years. This work formally began in 2013 when the Nations established a joint protocol related to the joint acquisition of lands within their shared territories.

The Nations are committed to further strengthening this partnership to advance shared interests in their rights, including title. This important work is an essential part of honouring the commitment and sacrifices of the Nations' ancestors and ensuring that future generations will be able to live more secure, fulfilling, and prosperous lives on their traditional and unceded lands. Above all, after reacquiring k'w'eq'ənəq, the Nations will ensure that k'w'eq'ənəq is used as its highest and best use to benefit all Canadians: this is reconciliation.

UNDRIP and DRIPA

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is an international instrument adopted by the United Nations in 2007. It enshrines the rights of Indigenous peoples to their lands, territories, and resources. It also recognizes their right to self-determination, cultural identity, and social and economic development. It has been adopted by many countries, including Canada, and has influenced indigenous rights policies worldwide.

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) is provincial legislation passed in British Columbia, Canada, in 2019. The act requires the government to align its laws with UNDRIP, develop an action plan in consultation with Indigenous peoples and report annually on progress. It is a significant step towards implementing UNDRIP in B.C. and promoting reconciliation with indigenous peoples. Implementing UNDRIP and DRIPA requires significant changes in laws, policies, and practices. It also requires meaningful engagement and partnership with Indigenous peoples.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) 94 Calls to Action and ReconciliACTION

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action originated from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, which was the largest class-action settlement in Canadian history. The Agreement was implemented in 2007 and led to the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The Commission spent six years traveling across Canada, hearing from over 6,500 witnesses, and hosting seven national events to engage the Canadian public, educate people about the history and legacy of residential schools, and share and honor the experiences of former students and their families. The Commission's final report, released in 2015, included the 94 Calls to Action, which are recommendations to further reconciliation between Canadian settlers and Indigenous Peoples. The calls are categorized into child welfare, education, language and culture, health, justice and reconciliation.

ReconciliACTION

ReconciliACTION is a direct response to the TRC's 94 Calls to Action, which emphasized the need for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. It aims to promote awareness, education, and action towards reconciliation, focusing on building cultural understanding and improving the lives of Indigenous people. ReconciliACTION encourages individuals, communities, and organizations to take concrete steps towards reconciliation, recognizing that everyone has a role to play in this process. It is also part of a larger movement in Canada, involving various initiatives, organizations, and individuals working towards reconciliation.

and Indigenous-settler relations. ReconciliACTION is deeply connected to the histories, cultures, and experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada, acknowledging the historical injustices and ongoing legacies of colonialism and oppression.