

KASKA NATIONAL CONSTITUTION COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS  
May 8, 2007. Dease River First Nation, Good Hope Lake, BC

PRESENT: Hammond Dick, Kaska Tribal Chief, Kevin Carlick, Dease River First Nation Chief, Ann Maje Raider, Liard Aboriginal Women's Society; Brenda Carlick, Dease River Band Council, Leon Johnny, Fannie Vance, Isabell Johnny, Fran Carlick, Irene Porter, Lorna Reid, Shelly Lawen, Anne Johnny, Cat Lee, Mary Maje, Billie Maje, May Brodhagen, Violet Greenway, Andrew Leach, Lois Moorcroft

Opening Prayer: Violet Greenway

Chief Kevin Carlick welcomed everyone to the community. He introduced Andrew Leach who is working with Dease River First Nation on policy and constitutional development. Tribal Chief Hammond Dick thanked Kevin and all of Dease River First Nation for hosting the meeting. One of the requirements to put a constitution in place is to let know who we are. Hopefully we will adopt this constitution in the near future. Thanks to the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society for their continued support to keep this project active. We want people to feel free to jump into the discussion at any time.

Ann Maje Raider said she is proud to carry her family Kaska name of Maje, some people might know her by her former name as Ann Bayne. The mandate came from the elders at the Kaska National Assembly in Fort Ware in 1998 to work on a national constitution. Our elders talk about Dena A'i Nezen, our spiritual law. We want to be sure there's great respect for our land, waters, animals, and people. That's reflected in the Dena name for our constitution: Gukeyeh Guk'eh Gu'sani. We are still looking for funding to develop all of our national laws.

National Assembly

HD: Chief and Council are sitting members of the Assembly. Chief and Council are elected to make decisions on behalf of the citizens. We should keep with that practice. A General Assembly is held out in a field somewhere, and there should be a requirement for one or two leaders to stay in the community. There could be emergencies. We can't expect every Chief and Councillor to always attend National Assembly.

AL: I've seen this before, a lot of organizing and planning goes into the meetings. Sometimes things happen that prevent people from attending.

If there's a death, a Chief or Councillor could send an alternate by written notice. Would that work?

BC: How many families are there in the Kaska nations? Each family group should have their own representatives. Is our vision international? The strength in your nation is in numbers. Kaska is culture, tradition, the way we live, a lifestyle, I don't see it as a skin colour. We have to provide for our people to grow. Do we go far enough to call ourselves a Nation? We need to invite people in, the Jay Treaty when we marry non-Kaska they become Kaska. We don't have the numbers.

HD: We're a small part of the larger number, outnumbered 29 million to 1 in Canada.

BC: We should bring the traditional and blend it with the contemporary.

HD: That's what we're doing. Setting up a government, making laws. Who we are, how we govern ourselves.

BC: International governments don't recognize land claims because they're not treaties. Kaska should be writing letters like the Alaska Inter-tribal Council that's advocating for tribal governments across Alaska. <http://www.aitc.org/Intrnl.Declaration.htm>

### National Council

People who live outside Kaska communities have the right to run for office. So candidates should be able to get signatures on their nomination papers from Kaska citizens who live in outside communities.

How often should the National Council and National Executive meet?

HD: Executive should meet as often as possible. National Council 3x a year plus at the National Assembly.

### Elders Council

HD: I want to bring up the numbers. Shouldn't the Elders Council decide how many people sit on it?

AMR: We want to show respect for the communities to empower people.

KL: Each community should have an equal voice at the National Elders Council. If some communities only want 2 elders, they should all have 2.

VG: There should be 2 elders from each community, and not 4. I would like to see an Elder who stands up and speaks out and who understands the issues. We need elders who will bring back the information to community Elders Councils.

KL: The only way we'd get 4 from Good Hope Lake is if we had one Wolf, one Crow, one male and one female. If we want balance to it we should have the same number from each community.

MM: Elders have to have knowledge, know their culture and history. They have to understand what's going on in the meetings. It's up to the leadership to fill them in. I've seen elders get up and talk about something that has nothing to do with the meeting.

AMR: LAWS wants to get funding to help empower the communities and organize the Elders Councils and the Youth Councils, and help them to get their own money. We need to get the Constitution working.

HD: Leonard Thomas from Fort St James, south of Fort Ware, speaks Kaska and organized a very active Elders Council. We could ask him to come up for the August meeting to speak to our people.

BC: When a non-Kaska marries a Kaska we should adopt them as Wolf or Crow, the opposite of their spouse.

HD: I've been thinking about the men's and women's representatives. Can we have an opt-in or opt-out clause? This has always been an issue for me. A constitution should be for everyone. There shouldn't be any guaranteed seats. There's got to be a different way of doing this. I'm not comfortable with men and women's representatives but I'm looking for a way to make it work.

AMR: You thought that up last night didn't you. How could an opt-out/opt-in approach work. It doesn't make sense. We could have a trial period for the first term of the new National Council, and change it if it's a big problem.

MB: Hammond, I don't understand your position.

HD: Because women are not adequately represented in government, and their issues are not addressed, we've put in 2 guaranteed seats for women. Every person can run for office. You don't have gender representation in the Canadian Constitution.

### Law Making Process

Each Kaska Nation must approve or reject proposed laws at a General Assembly. What if several laws are proposed in one year. Would we have to hold 7 G.A.s in one year if there are 7 laws proposed?

VG: Before you change a law it has to go before the people. We have to make sure our laws are secure and can't be easily changed. The executive should be reporting back to the Council and the people.

AL: It's hard to get 75% of the people to agree on anything. There was a lot of support for the Olympics in BC, and they got 72% support on a referendum. Why is the approval margin so high? It's a very high benchmark, and might be hard to reach.

### Ratification

The Working Group has to get to Fort Ware in June.

We're looking at a target date of a special National Assembly at the end of August in Frances Lake. That's our goal.

### Conflict of Interest

AL: Does your definition of family members include somebody who lives in the same household?

### National Laws

AL: Westbank Constitution has guidelines for capital expenditures; it ensures a Nation is not caught with a large debt. There are lots of templates out there, why reinvent the wheel. I have the Westbank First Nation Constitution, and it's a good model. I'm also working on policy documents for Dease River First Nation and Chief Carlick will offer to share that work with all other Kaska Nations in Kaska Tribal Council. He'll bring that proposal to the next KTC meeting.

AMR: We would appreciate that.

Closing Song: Edna Deerrunner