

Petition of the Douglas Tribes 1874

Peter Ayessik to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs

New Westminster, July 14th, 1874.

SIR, - Having been, along with some others, commissioned by the Chiefs to present our common petition to you, we have come down to New Westminster yesterday, and, after consultation, we came to the conclusion to send the petition by mail.

You have told Alexis and myself not to go down till you send notice.

We expect to hear from you, through Rev. Father Durieu, at New Westminster.

I have, &c.,

(Signed) Peter Ayessik, Chief of Hope.

To the Indian Commissioner for the Province of British Columbia: -

The petition of the undersigned, Chiefs of Douglas Portage, of Lower Fraser, and of the other tribes on the seashore of the mainland to Bute Inlet, humbly sheweth: -

1. That your petitioners view, with a great anxiety, the standing question of the quantity of land to be reserved for the use of each Indian family.

2. That we are fully aware that the Government of Canada has always taken good care of the Indians, and treated them liberally, allowing more than one hundred acres per family; and we have been at a loss to understand the views of the Local Government of British Columbia, in curtailing our land so much as to leave, in many instances, but few acres of land per family.

3. Our hearts have been wounded by the arbitrary way the Local Government of British Columbia have dealt with us in locating and dividing our Reserves. Chamiel, ten miles below Hope, is allowed 488 acres of good land for the use of twenty families: at the rate of 24 acres per family; Popkum, eighteen miles below Hope, is allowed 369 acres of good land for the use of their families: at the rate of 90 acres per family; Cheam, twenty miles below Hope, is allowed 375 acres of bad, dry and mountainous land for the use of twenty-seven families: at the rate of 13 acres per family; Yuk-Yuk-y-yoose, on Chilliwack River, with a population of seven families, is allowed 42 acres: 5 acres per family; Sumass, at the junction of Sumass River and Fraser, with a population of seventeen families, is allowed 43 acres of meadow for their hay, and 32 acres of dry land; Keatsy, numbering more than one hundred inhabitants, is allowed 108 acres of land. Langley and Hope have not yet got land secured to them, and white men are encroaching on them on all sides.

4. For many years we have been complaining of the land left us being too small. We have laid our complaints before Government officials nearest to us; they sent us to some others; so we had no redress up to the present; and we have felt like men trampled on, and are commencing to believe that the aim of the white men is to exterminate us as soon as they can, although we have always been quiet, obedient, kind and friendly to the whites.

5. Discouragement and depression have come upon our people. Many of them have given up the cultivation of land, because our gardens have not been protected against the encroachment of the whites. Some of our best men have been deprived of the land they had broken and cultivated with long and hard labour, a white man enclosing it

in his claim, and no compensation given. Some of our most enterprising men have lost part of their cattle, because white men had taken the place where those cattle were grazing, and no other place left but the thickly timbered land, where they die fast. Some of our people are now obliged to cut rushes along the bank of the river with their knives during winter to feed their cattle.

6. We are now obliged to clear heavy timbered land, all prairies having been taken from us by white men. We see our white neighbours cultivate wheat, peas, &c., and raise large stocks of cattle on our pasture lands, and we are giving them our money to buy the flour manufactured from the wheat they have grown on the same prairies.

7. We are not lazy and roaming-about people, as we used to be. We have worked hard and a long time to spare money to buy agricultural implements, cattle, horses, etc., as nobody has given us assistance. We could point out many of our people who have, those past years, bought, with their own money, ploughs, harrows, yokes of oxen, and horses; and now, with your kind assistance, we have a bright hope to enter into the path of civilization.

8. We consider that 80 acres per family is absolutely necessary for our support, and for the future welfare of our children. We declare that 20 or 30 acres of land per family will not give satisfaction, but will create ill feelings, irritation amongst our people, and we cannot say what will be the consequence.

9. That, in case you cannot obtain from the Local Government the object of our petition, we humbly pray that this our petition be forwarded to the Secretary of State for the Provinces, Ottawa.

Therefore your petitioners humbly pray that you may take this our petition into consideration and see that justice be done us, and allow each family the quantity of land we ask for.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

(Signed) Peter Ayesik, Chief of Hope,
And 109 others.

I hereby testify that the Chiefs above referred to met together in my presence, and the above petition is the true expression of their feeling and of their wishes.

(Signed) Peter Ayessik, Chief of Hope