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March 11, 2016

Sent via e-mail

Honourable Catherine McKenna
Minister of the Environment and Climate Change
458 Confederation Building
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6
E-mail: minister@ec.gc.ca

Dear Minister McKenna,

Re: Takla Lake First Nation's comments on the draft Environmental Assessment Report for the Pacific Northwest LNG Project and request for an urgent meeting to set up a Nation-to-Nation consultation process for the Project

Introduction and Summary

I am writing to express Takla Lake First Nation's ("**Takla**") serious concerns with the fundamental scientific and legal deficiencies in the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency's (the "**Agency**") draft environmental assessment report (the "**Report**") for the Pacific Northwest LNG project (the "**Project**").

If approved, the Project will directly impact Flora Bank, which is located in the Skeena estuary and serves as a critical nursery for approximately 40 different salmon populations. These populations include annual runs of several hundred million young salmon that are sustainably harvested by at least ten different First Nations, including Takla. The Project has the potential to cause serious adverse environmental effects on Skeena salmon harvested by Takla members, thereby adverse impacting Takla's Aboriginal rights and interests.

On October 22, 2015, I wrote to your predecessor to ask for an urgent meeting to discuss Takla's concerns about the Project. At that time the federal timeline had been paused to allow Pacific NorthWest LNG to undertake 3D modeling work to assess potential environmental effects of the Project in Flora Bank. I also wrote to, and had my staff follow up several times with, Pacific NorthWest LNG to request a meeting to discuss Takla's concerns about Project impacts on Skeena salmon and their habitat.

Although the Project has the potential to cause serious impacts to Takla's Aboriginal rights and interests, Canada has failed to consult Takla about the Project, and Pacific NorthWest LNG has expressly refused to meet with us to discuss our concerns. Concurrently, there are numerous scientific flaws in the Report, as discussed in detail below.

The fundamental scientific and legal deficiencies outlined in this letter are creating significant regulatory risk and uncertainty that will make any decision you may make under s. 52 of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012* (the “**Act**”) highly vulnerable to legal challenge, thereby seriously threatening the Project’s viability.

The Agency cannot lawfully finalize its Report under s. 25(2) of the Act, and you cannot lawfully make a decision under s. 52 of the Act, without:

1. the Agency properly assessing Project effects on the Skeena salmon;
2. the Agency assessing how those adverse environmental effects will impact Takla’s Aboriginal title and rights; and
3. Canada satisfying its constitutional duty to consult and accommodate Takla in relation to the Project.

To date, none of those critical steps have been taken.

As you know, the deadline for you to make a decision under s. 52 of the Act is March 22, 2016. Given that the Agency/Canada cannot take the steps outlined above before that time, you must extend the time period for making your decision under s. 27(3) of the Act. Takla respectfully requests that, at minimum, you extend the time period by three months. However, under the circumstances, it is more appropriate that you recommend to the Governor in Council that the time period be extended by a longer time pursuant to s. 27(4) of the Act.

Importance of Skeena River Salmon to Takla

Takla members have harvested salmon in the upper reaches of the Skeena River, including the Bear Lake and Sustut watersheds, for thousands of years. Takla recently commissioned an expert ethnohistorical report that documents how the Bear Lake Sekani people (whose descendants are now Takla members) harvested Skeena salmon both prior to contact and at sovereignty, and how Takla members continue to do so today (the “**Report**”). A copy of the Report is attached as Appendix “A”.

Takla members continue to harvest Skeena salmon to sustain our way of life. A map showing (i) how the northwestern portion of Takla’s territory is situated within the Skeena watershed, (ii) salmon bearing streams, rivers, and lakes in the Skeena watershed (including in Takla’s territory), and (iii) the location of some of Takla’s reserves is attached as Appendix “B”. Several photographs showing Takla members harvesting Skeena salmon in our territory is attached as Appendix “C”.

As a result of the dramatically reduced numbers of the now red-listed early and late Stuart sockeye salmon stocks in the Fraser River watershed, Takla increasingly depends on the Skeena River watershed for abundant stocks of chinook, coho, sockeye, and steelhead salmon. Any adverse impacts to those salmon stocks would cause serious adverse impacts on our Aboriginal title, rights, and interests, as well as to the health of our members. Put simply, those impacts would fundamentally alter our way of life and who we are as Sekani people.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has, since 1999, kept records of the amount of salmon harvested by Takla and our members in the Skeena watershed. Evidence submitted by Lax Kw’alaams to the Agency on December 17, 2015¹ indisputably establishes that chinook and sockeye salmon that we

¹ Lax Kw’alaams Fisheries Submission to CEAA, Dec. 17, 2015

harvest from the Bear and Sustut watersheds are dependent on, and use, habitat in Flora Bank that will be adversely impacted by the Project.

The Agency's draft Environmental Assessment Report is fundamentally flawed

More than 130 leading scientists have now signed an open letter to you expressing their professional opinion and conclusion that the Report is scientifically flawed and fails to provide an appropriate basis for you to make a decision under s. 52 of the Act (the “**Open Letter**”). The Open Letter identifies the following key scientific flaws with the Report:

1. Misrepresentation of the importance of the Project area to fish populations, especially salmon;
2. Flawed assumption that lack of information equates lack of risks;
3. Disregard for science that was not funded by the proponent;
4. Inadequate consideration of multiple Project impacts and their cumulative effects; and
5. Unsubstantiated reliance on mitigation.

The Report also fails to adequately consider several peer-reviewed scientific studies, which have reached the following conclusions regarding Flora Bank:

- Flora Bank is a critical habitat to salmonids, and the Flora Bank habitat differs from other areas on the north coast and the Skeena River;^{2,3,4,5,6}
- Flora Bank supports salmon harvested upstream in the Skeena River watershed by several First Nations, including Takla;⁷
- There is an inadequate scientific understanding of the Skeena River Estuary to accurately predict long-term Project impacts in Flora Bank;⁸

² Manzer, J.I. 1956. Distribution and movement of young Pacific salmon during early ocean residence. Fisheries Research Board Progress Report #106, 24-28.

³ Higgins, R.J., and Shouwenburg, W.J. 1973. A biological assessment of fish utilization of the Skeena River estuary, with special reference to port development in Prince Rupert. Northern Operations Branch, Fisheries and Marine Service, Department of the Environment. Technical Report 1973-1.

⁴ Hoos, L.M. 1976. The Skeena River estuary status of environmental knowledge to 1975. Report of the Estuary Working Group, Department of the Environment, Regional Board (Pacific Region). Special Estuary Series No. 3.

⁵ Carr-Harris, C., Gottesfeld, A.S., and Moore, J.W. 2015. Juvenile salmon usage of the Skeena River estuary. PLOS one 10: e0118988.

⁶ Moore, J.W., Carr-Harris, C., and Gordon, J. 2015. Salmon science as related to proposed development in the Skeena River estuary. Report to Lax Kw'alaams Band Council.

⁷ Moore, J.W., Carr-Harris, C., Gottesfeld, A.S., MacIntyre, D., Radies, D., Barnes, C., Joseph, W., Williams, G., Gordon, J., and Shepert, B. 2015. Selling First Nations down the river. Science 349: 596.

- Disruption of water currents by the proposed trestle and suspension bridge could lead to widespread erosion at Flora Bank;⁹
- Mitigation often fails to recover original levels of ecosystem function;¹⁰ and
- Research in other estuaries has found that industrial development, similar to the Project, causes lasting damage to salmon populations.¹¹¹²

Takla agrees that the Report is scientifically flawed for the reasons identified by these leading international scientists in their Open Letter. The Agency must address these serious and fundamental flaws before it finalizes its Report or you make a decision under s. 52 of the Act.

Permit Conditions and Mitigation

The Agency has failed, for the reasons set out above, to conduct a proper environmental assessment of the Project that is sufficiently grounded in science. Given that Project impacts have not been properly characterized or assessed, it is impossible for the proponent, the Agency, Canada or Takla to determine whether the proposed permit conditions and mitigation measures will be effective and will address Takla's concerns about Project impacts on the Skeena salmon populations, and on Takla's Aboriginal title, rights, and interests.

Canada has failed to consult and accommodate Takla about the Project

As outlined above, Canada has failed to consult and accommodate Takla in relation to the environmental assessment for the Project. Canada must discharge its duty *before* the Agency finalizes its Report and you make a decision under s. 52 of the Act.

Consultation with Takla must include a discussion and meaningful response and actions on outstanding baseline studies on the Skeena salmon populations, and corresponding impacts on Takla's Aboriginal title, rights and interests. This must be carried out before you make a decision under s. 52 of the Act.

⁸ Pickard, D., Porter, M., Olson, E., Connors, B., Kellock, K., Jones, E., and Connors, K. 2015. Skeena River estuary Page 7 of 7 assessment: technical report. Available:

http://skeenasalmonprogram.ca/library/lib_433/.

⁹ McLaren, P., 2015. The environmental implications of sediment transport in the waters of Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Canada: a comparison between the kinematic and dynamic approaches. Journal of Coastal Research. *In-Press*. Available:

<http://www.jcronline.org/doi/pdf/10.2112/JCOASTRES-D-15-00134.1>

¹⁰ Rey Benayas, J.M., Newton, A.C., Diaz, A. and Bullock, J.M. 2009. Enhancement of biodiversity and ecosystem services by ecological restoration: a meta-analysis. Science 325: 1121-1124

¹¹ Magnusson, A. and Hilborn, R. 2003. Estuarine influence on survival rates of coho (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) and chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) released from hatcheries on the U.S. Pacific coast. Estuaries 26: 1094-1103

¹² Meador, J.P. 2014. Do chemically contaminated river estuaries in Puget Sound (Washington, USA) affect the survival rate of hatchery-reared Chinook salmon? Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences 71: 162-180.

In addition, Takla must be added to the list of “Aboriginal Groups” in the definitions section of the Permit Conditions in the Report.

Closing

Takla looks forward to engaging with Canada on a Nation-to-Nation basis to ensure that Project impacts on Takla’s Aboriginal title, rights, and interests are adequately assessed, and appropriate mitigation measures are identified before any decision is made on the Project.

I invite you and your staff to a meeting in Prince George to discuss the urgent and important matters raised in this letter. Please have your staff contact David Radies via e-mail (dradies@taklafn.ca) or by phone (250-564-9321, ext. 27) to set up a meeting at a mutually convenient time.

On behalf of Takla Lake First Nation’s Council,

<Original signed by>

John Allan French
Chief, Takla Lake First Nation

Encl.

c: Ron Hallman, President, CEAA
Heather Smith, Vice President, CEAA
Irene Gendron, Director and General Counsel, CEAA
Candace Anderson, Crown Consultation Coordinator, CEAA
Lisa Walls, Director: Pacific and Yukon Region, CEAA
Karen Fish, Communications Advisor, CEAA
Michael Culbert, President, Pacific NorthWest LNG
Takla Lake First Nation Council
Scott A. Smith, Takla legal counsel, Gowling WLG

APPENDIX A

Takla Lake First Nation – Northwestern Boundary Report

Takla Lake First Nation Northwestern Boundary Report



Figure 1: Sekani women at Fort Connolly, 1911. BCA I-33167

Submitted to the Takla Lake First Nation

By Loraine Littlefield and Deidre Cullon

February 2016

Confidential and Without Prejudice

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to review the available ethnohistorical evidence to determine if Bear Lake Sekani people, who are now part of the Takla Lake First Nation, exclusively used and/or occupied the northwest boundary region of their territory at the time of sovereignty (1846). Prior to this report, the northwest boundary of the Takla Lake First Nation territory, as set in their Statement of Intent map submitted to Canada and British Columbia, was not based on substantive or comprehensive research. This report helps to remedy that omission.

The primary methodology used in compiling this report was to review available historical and ethnographic material on the region. This entailed researching documents held by national, provincial and university archives as well as archives in United States. Genealogical research included a review of all known sources of birth, marriage and death records.

The historical material for this region is sparse due to its remoteness from well-travelled routes. The earliest sources are found in the fur trade and exploration records. They substantiate that Sekani people, who hunted in the area and regularly visited Bear Lake and the upper Skeena River to fish the seasonal runs of salmon, inhabited this region. A fur trading post, Fort Connolly, was established in 1826 on Bear Lake, but it was not until exploration by the Overland Collins survey team in 1865 that attempts were made to travel up Skeena River, above the Sustut River, to the Stikine River. Guides for this arduous trip were Sekani. More extensive mapping of the region did not occur until the turn of the century and accurate surveys were not completed until 1940s. Evident from these early explorations is the existence of multiple Aboriginal trails, crisscrossing the area, reflective of the fact that it was an important hunting and fishing region for the Sekani and their families who lived at Bear Lake and Caribou Hide.

Ethnographic research for this study reveals that with the exception of Adrian Morice, an Oblate missionary, early ethnographers did not visit the region. Although Morice's primary work is on the Carrier, he does note that Bear Lake Sekani territory extends to 58 degrees parallel. James Teit, between 1906 and 1915, spent time with the Bear Lakers at Iskut and here he recorded the history of the Sastoten people who had once lived in the area but had since become extinct or merged with Bear Lake people in the early 1800s. The centre of their territory was Meziadin Lake. Diamond Jenness's work with the Sekani at McLeod Lake and Ft. Grahame, in the 1920s, is the most cited work on the Sekani. He mapped four divisions of the Sekani. He placed the Sasuchan at the northwestern end of the Sekani region and included Bear Lake and Thutade Lake. Jenness did not go to Bear Lake and due to his lack of information from Bear Lake Sekani, and because he was later influenced by Gitxsan sources, he failed to adequately understand the northwestern extent of Sasuchan Sekani territory.

The Gitxsan claim to the area was examined in detail. Historical sources indicate that at the time of contact, the Gitxsan were on the lower Skeena, below the confluence with the Sustut River. They did not move east to Bear Lake until well after the establishment of the

fur trading post on Bear Lake. Their movement northeast in search of hunting and trapping territory created considerable conflict with the Sekani, as documented in the fur trade journals, as well as by the Indian Agent of the Department of Indian Affairs in the late 1800s. Examination of early Gitx̱san ethnographic data gathered by Marius Barbeau in the 1920s confirms that Bear Lake and possibly Thutade Lake were claimed by the Gitx̱san house of Miluluk, a chief of the Kisgegas village. Genealogical research for this study shows that this chief married into a Sekani family, and we contend the claims at Bear Lake and Thutade Lake result from this marriage and others like it. However, as discussed in this report, territorial rights did not transfer to the Gitx̱san or any other nation through marriage. Family members only obtained hunting opportunities through these affinal ties.

Intermarriages were considered in our effort to understand other recent Gitx̱san claims to the area. Examination of the census of Kisgegas, a Gitx̱san village located on the Babine River, reveals a significant number of families that were linked to Bear Lake by 1911. These families are shown to be a combination of Sekani, Gitx̱san, Tahltan and T'lotona, who self identified as Bear Lakers. Intermarriage also resulted in Gitx̱san claims to Bear Lake territory. While Sekani custom of intermarriage provided access to hunting territories through both parents and grandparents, it did not result in a transfer of title to the Gitx̱san. Today Bear Lake families are part of Takla Lake First Nation. This is the result of the decision by the Department of Indian Affairs to amalgamate the two communities, Takla Lake and Bear Lake, in the mid-20th century. Some families with strong Gitx̱san ties moved to Gitx̱san communities.

This report concludes that the northwest region of the Takla Lake First Nation's territory includes the headwaters of the Upper Skeena River including to the head of Little Klappan River and Spatsizi River (headwaters of the Stikene). It includes all of Dutie River to the Skeena, and Motase Lake and Squingula River, including its tributaries. It includes the Upper Skeena River valley, from the Squingula River to its head including the Groundhog region of the Upper Skeena. The northern part of the territory includes Thutade, Tatlatui, and Kitchener lakes. It extends northward, down the Finlay River to below the Fishing Lakes, and turns westward, following the river valleys back to the headwaters of the Dutie and Sturdee Rivers. North of this region, the areas around Metsantan Lake and Caribou Hide should be considered shared territory.

Findings in this report support an expansion of the Takla Lake First Nation's northwest boundary based on the above outlined lands and as represented in Map 8. We conclude that the Takla Lake First Nation exclusively used and/or occupied this region both at the time of contact and at the time of sovereignty.

Introduction

This report describes the northwest boundary of the Takla Lake First Nation. It amends the omission of a region left off the Statement of Intent maps submitted for consultation with the Provincial Government of British Columbia. This report primarily focuses on the history and traditional territory of Bear Lake/Sasuchan/Sustut'ene Sekani who are now members of Takla Lake First Nation. This group existed as a separate community until 1959 when the Department of Indian Affairs unilaterally decided to amalgamate them with the Takla Lake band. Thus Takla Lake First Nation now holds the rights and title of those former Bear Lake members and their families.

The primary methodology used in compiling this report was to review available historical and ethnographic material on the region. This entailed researching collections held by National Archives of Canada, British Columbia Archives, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, UBC and UVIC Special Collections, and archives in United States. Some of this research was in person while some, such as the American archives, was solely online. Historical material examined included journals and diaries of fur traders, explorers, surveyors, and missionaries, as well as historical maps of British Columbia held at various repositories. Ethnographic research included analysis of all relevant material from early ethnographers who visited the region at the turn of the century. Genealogical research included a review of parish records held by the Diocese of Prince George, Department of Indian Affairs band rolls, and birth, marriage and death records from Vital Statistics of British Columbia. The genealogical research should not be considered complete given the extent of this material.

This report is divided into four parts. The first part of this report describes the land and the historical documentation including surveys and maps of the land. It also examines the historic and ethnographic evidence of Sasuchan Sekani boundaries. The second part of this report summarizes the competing claim for this land by the Gitksan and the evidence of conflict between them and the Sekani during the 19th century. The third part of this report uses census information, parish records and vital statistics data to show a number of family intermarriages between Sekani and Gitksan in the Bear Lake region whose descendants are current Takla Lake First Nation families. Similarly intermarriages to the Bear Lake Iskut community are also shown. Part four of the report includes the oral history of Bear Lake elders concerning their understanding of family ownership and use of the land. Finally, the conclusion summarizes Takla Lake First Nation's claim in the Northwest section of their territory. The Takla Lake First Nation Ethnohistory Report, October 2015, further supports this conclusion.

Part 1

Description of the Land

The northwestern region of the Takla Lake First Nation addressed in this report includes the headwaters of the Upper Skeena River including to the head of Little Klappan River and Spatsizi River (headwaters of the Stikene), the headwaters of the Dutie River and Sturdee River, and the lands between Bear Lake and the Skeena River. In the northern region it includes Thutade, Tatlatui, and Kitchener lakes, the upper Finlay River and the region around Caribou Hide and Metsantan Lake.

The resources of this region have been documented in various studies (see Dewhirst 1995, Gottesfeld and Rabnett 2007). Wildlife is abundant and includes large game animals such as mountain goat, caribou, moose, grizzly bear and black bears. Smaller mammals include the beaver, marten, fisher, otter, mink, lynx and marmots (“groundhogs”). Trapline licenses #618T003 and #738T012, which cover the southern portion of this region along the Sustut River are held by Takla Lake First Nation members.

The fish in the rivers and creeks include salmon and steelhead. Chinook and sockeye are the major salmon runs but coho are also present. In the lakes, rainbow trout, bull trout, Dollyvarden, and white fish are common. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada recognizes that fishing rights here belong to the Takla Lake First Nation and issues harvesting permits on the Sustut River and upper Skeena River to the Takla Lake First Nation under the First Nations Fisheries Initiative (Bustard 1993 in Baxter 1997). Since the banning of weirs and traps in 1906, most fishing in the region is done by gill netting, gaffing and snagging. A recent fisheries report documents the locations of Takla fishing sites on the Sustut River and the Upper Skeena River. These sites were identified by a Takla Lake First Nation member, Thomas Patrick (Gottesfeld and Rabnett 2007).

Historical Documentation of the Area

Despite the fur trade records that begin in the early 19th century, historical documentation of this area is limited. In 1823 William Brown stationed at Fort Kilmaurs on Babine Lake, reported the arrival of Sekani hunters from the Bear Lake region. He noted that they had the same habits as the Sekani on the ‘other side of the height of Land’ and that they hunted ‘on the west side of Bear’s Lake’ and ‘north of Babine River.’ He also noted that they traded for salmon with the Gitxsan (Kisegegas) at their village on Babine River (HBC, Fort Babine journal 1824).

In 1824 Samuel Black explored the region northeast of Bear Lake. He travelled to Thutade Lake and continued north to Caribou Hide and Turnagain River. Here he met Sekani people who wintered on the Finlay River and was told by their Chief, Methodiates, that they represented all the Sekani in this region, aside from another two families connected to them who were presently at Bear Lake.. Black did not travel to Tatlatui Lake or to the Upper Skeena River (Black 1955).

William Connelly established the HBC post on Bear Lake in 1826. In his early report of 1824 he noted that Sekani people inhabited the region around Bear Lake and White Fish (Takla) Lake. In September 1826, a reconnaissance to Bear Lake noted that only a few Sekani were at Bear Lake at the time of the visit, as the majority were away hunting for ground hogs. Two months later a post was established and a year later fur trade reports recorded twenty-two Sekani hunters attached to the post (HBC, Fort St. James journal 1827, 1829). Despite the activity of the fur trade at Bear Lake, there is no description or evidence that the fur traders themselves ventured into the northern region of the Sustut and upper Skeena rivers.

The earliest first-hand written account of the region is found in the Collins Overland Telegraph surveys. In the winter of 1865-66 a survey party made their way up Takla Lake to the present location of Bulkley House. Here they set up a winter base in order to explore the region. Several trips were made into this northwest region, one up the Upper Skeena to the Stikine River and another to the Thutade Lake region and north towards the Liard River. Two diary accounts by Major Frank Pope document the expedition along the upper Skeena; one that includes daily entries that ends abruptly before the Stikine River, and the other a narrative of the complete trip. The report of the Thutade Lake trip is in a letter written by the survey party naturalist, Dr. J.T. Rothrock.



Map 1: Proposed Route of the Western Union Telegraph, Pope, 1866 (LTSA 6TR1).

Pope's map gives detail of his route up Skeena and over to the Stikine River (see Map 1). He named three streams at the confluence of the Skeena River: Alexis River, Thomas River, and Quilis River. Alexis and Thomas were Bear Lake Sekani who accompanied Pope and Blenkinsop on this exploration.¹ They and their family spent the winter with the survey party at Bulkley House. Quilis was a sister-in law of Alexis who the party met at Bear Lake. She was instrumental in advising Pope and his team of their route, as she had been in the region as a youth. According to Pope's accounts their Atnah (Gitxsan) guide did not appear before they left Bear Lake in February. When he caught up to them many days later they dismissed him once they realized he had no knowledge of the region. On the Upper Skeena they met a single hunter, an Atnah trapping in the valley leading to Blackwater Lake. It was not until they reached the Stikine that they met the Tahltan or T'lotona (Pope 1865).²

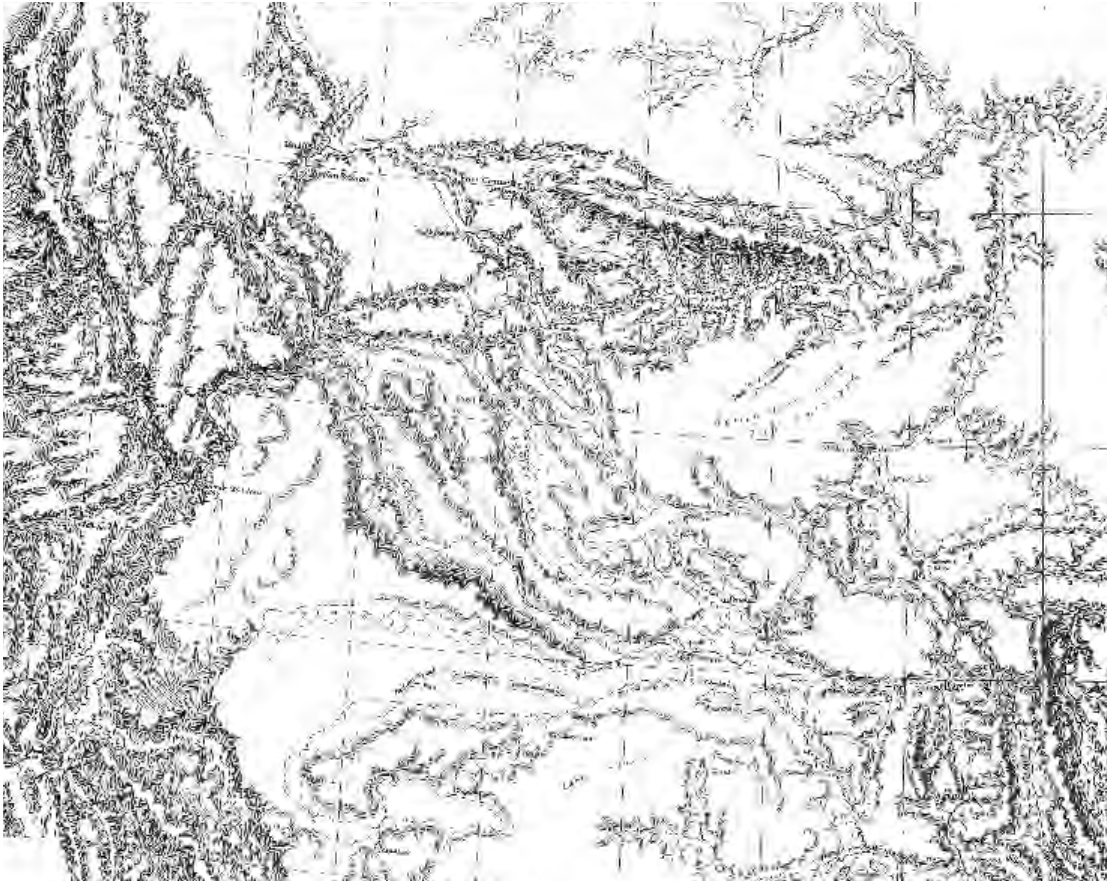
Unfortunately J.T. Rothrock's narrative of his expedition to Thutade Lake and north offers little understanding of where he went; however, it is likely further east and north than the region of interest for this report (Rothrock 1913).

The gold rush of the 1870s brought many prospectors to this northern region but there is no known documentation of their time here. Most of the trails went east from Hazelton to Takla Lake via Babine to the Omineca. While prospecting probably occurred in this region there is no record of interactions with the Bear Lakers.

In 1871 a map produced by British Columbia under the supervision of Joseph Trutch, the Chief Commissioner of the Department of Lands and Works, showed all the available information of the lands in the province. Bear Lake is shown, as is Sustut River and Sustut Lake: also parts of the Upper Skeena and Thutade Lake. The rest of the region is left blank. Of note are the two Gitxsan villages on the Skeena, Kuldo and an unnamed village at the location of Kisgegas (See Map 2).

¹ Thomas Alexis had another stream named after him, 'Tom Creek.' It was here he found several large nuggets of gold in 1889 (Hall 1994:45). Tom Creek is east of Takla Landing enroute to Germansen Landing. (Pioneer Gold Seekers of the Omineca. Ralph Hall, Morriss Publishing, Victoria. 1994)

² Pope commented on the lack of human presence in the region but given the time of year, February and March, and the wintery conditions he describes, it is not surprising he did not see anyone.



Map 2: British Columbia to the 56th Parallel, Lands and Works Office, 1871 (UVic Map Collection).

There is no other mention of this territory until the beginning of the 20th century when railway surveys began. The first survey was in 1899 and included the exploration of the Skeena River northward to its head and to the headwaters of the Stikine River (Canada 1901:158-171). In this report, the Chief Engineer noted that due to the ‘advanced state of the season’ they did not cover the 65 miles of this portion of the Skeena (Canada 1901:163), and relied upon an Aboriginal guide who “had been over this section several times” to describe it. No name is given for this guide. For information about the section around the Sustut and Bear Lake the surveyor went to Bear Lakers at ‘Port Connelly’ ‘regarding the trails and country in the vicinity’ (Canada 1901:166). A railway was eventually built on the other side of Babine Lake to the Skeena River and Port Simpson.

In 1907 the BC government published the first detailed map of the Northern Interior using surveys from the Oblate priest, Father Adrian Morice, who was resident at Stuart Lake. This map also reveals how little was known of this region at this time. While Bear Lake and Fort Connelly are shown, only part of the Sustut on the eastern side of Bear River named by Morice ‘Bear-Wallow River’ leading to ‘Bear-Wallow Lake’ (Sustut Lake) is detailed. Of note for discussion below is that this map shows the trail from Babine River, Kisgegas to Bear Lake across the Atna Mountains (see Map 3).



Map 3: Map of the Northern Interior of British Columbia, Morice 1907, LTSA 21TR9.

The first discovery of coal was made in the early 1900s in the Upper Skeena and Groundhog Mountain region. Prospectors began to pour into the region to stake claims along the various tributaries of the Skeena River with the major coal operations at Jackson Flats in the Groundhog coalfield. Surveys were made of their claims and aside from describing the country at the headwaters of the Skeena there is little information about First Nations in the region aside from Campbell-Johnson's report of the Gitxsan at Blackwater (Taylor 1912, Thomson 1977: also see Sterrit et al 1998:234).

The 1917 map of the Department of Lands, British Columbia government titled *Northern British Columbia*, is the first to show an overview of the region but still lacks the detail of later maps. This map includes a number of known Aboriginal trails. There is no trail shown along the upper Skeena or to the interior around Tatlatui or Kitchener lakes. A trail to Thutade Lake is drawn reaching it from the Finlay River and Ingenika River. Of note is the trail from the Nass River to Blackwater Lake and up to Groundhog Mountain in the upper Skeena (see Map 4).



Map 4: Northern British Columbia, 1917, Department of Lands, British Columbia. (LTSA 7TR11).

More accurate surveying of this region did not occur until 1931. BC government surveyor, Frank Swannell, surveyed the Bear Lake reserves in 1911 and partly surveyed the Thutade Lake region via the Finlay River in 1914. However, it was not until 1931 that he was assigned to survey the Tatlatui and Kitchener lakes region. Due to a miscommunication he failed to connect with surveys from the east and thus the upper Skeena River remained unsurveyed until 1942 when triangulation nets extended to include the Skeena, Nass and Iskut area (Sherwood 2004: 147; 2010:53). Despite the absence of large tracts of the upper Skeena River, Swannell's map from this expedition is still of interest here. He notes a trail between Bear Lake and Thutade Lake and from there to Kitchener Lake. From Kitchener Lake he travelled west toward the headwaters of the Skeena. This was a well-used route to access the headwaters of the Skeena and the Groundhog Mountain area. Also of note is the route to Caribou Hide village from Kitchener Lake.



Map 5: Plan of Topographical Reconnaissance of the Ingenika River and Headwaters of the Finlay River, Swannell 1932 (LAC MIC/619/Cassiar/1932 #27171).

In the report submitted to the Surveyor General from the 1942 survey, the provincial surveyor made several observations concerning the region. Of particular interest was evidence of extensive First Nation trails throughout. Also he documented three trails that were passable by pack-train: one from Telegraph Creek, another from above Fort Ware, and a third from Takla Landing. The Takla Landing trail went to this northwest boundary region. It was described as following:

...from Takla Landing [the trail] follows the Driftwood and Bear Rivers, crossing the Sustut river about 15 miles above its mouth and continues north-westerly to the head of Malloch Creek, passing close to Thutade and Tatlatui Lakes. It then follows Malloch, Dutu, and Black Creeks, passing to the south of Tzahny and Beaver Lakes and joining the main trail in the Kluatantan Valley (Pattinson 1943:C35).

The surveyor also noted that there were no permanent residents and that the “Bear Lake and Caribou Hide Indians” hunt and trap this region (Pattinson 1943:C37). These trails extend then from Bear Lake up to the Groundhog Mountain region of the upper Skeena and continue to connect to neighbours on the upper Stikine and Klappan areas.

Although trails in the region suggest it was well travelled, until almost the middle of the 20th century, it had little documentation and as the maps show it was one of the last parts of British Columbia to be accurately surveyed. The fact that the route to Groundhog Mountain was via Thutade and Tatlatui lakes could explain why Pope met virtually no one along the Skeena almost 80 years earlier. Based on Pope’s experience, the route along the Upper Skeena River is inhospitable in the winter. The next section examines the ethnographic evidence of the Sasuchan Sekani, the ancestors of Takla Lake First Nation, in terms of their northwest boundary.

Ethnographic Considerations

The ethnographic evidence is limited to a few sources. Very few ethnographers with the exception of Adrian Morice, the Oblate priest who visited the community of Bear Lake and Takla Lake, went to the region.

One of the boundary markers often used to determine the extent of Sekani territory is the Arctic/ Pacific divide. As noted in the Takla southern boundary report (Littlefield and Cullon 2015) this boundary was based on ecological considerations and ignores the historical and cultural dynamics that enabled Sekani to access salmon-bearing lakes and rivers on the outer borders of their territory. There is sufficient historical documentation to support that this was the case in the northwest boundary of their territory at the beginning of the 19th century.

George M. Dawson, a geographer who became head of the Geological Survey of Canada, visited northern British Columbia and produced a map of the tribal boundaries of the different language groups in the province. As well, he left a journal of his travels that is enlightening concerning the Bear Lake Sekani’s northwestern boundary. Initially he set the boundary of the Bear Lake Sekani at the forks of the Sustut and Bear rivers. Later, however, he writes that he acquired more information and found that this boundary at the Sustut was only recently imposed with the expansion of the Gitx̱san into Bear Lake Sekani territory (Dawson 1989:274). He implies that the Gitx̱san eastern boundary had been pushed to the Upper Skeena River, likely as a result of seeking better hunting and trapping regions to support the fur trade.

Dawson in a later publication of his explorations in the Yukon comments on the northwestern limits of Bear Laker Sekani in terms of their boundary with the Kaska. He describes the northern boundary of Bear Lakers to be the headwaters Turnagain River:

They [Kaska] also hunt over the basin of the Black or Turnagain River, southward, but not the headwaters of that stream, as the country there is claimed by the Al-ta-tin

(“Siccannie”) of Bear Lake region, who have lately returned to it after having abandoned it for a number of years... (Dawson 1887:10)

The statement that they had “abandoned” it several years ago indicates that this was part of their hunting territory at the beginning of the 19th century. His observation of abandonment however, must be placed in context. It is common practice for hunter and gatherers to leave a region for several years in order for the game to rejuvenate. This was likely the case here. The headwaters of Turnagain River are at 58 degrees latitude.

The Oblate priest, Adrian Morice, resident at the Stuart Lake mission between 1885 and 1905, wrote extensively on the Carrier with some references to the Sekani. In 1892 he published a map showing the Sekani territory to include Bear Lake and the area to the west of it, including the Sustut River. His map defines the western border of their territory before the upper Skeena River (see Map 3).

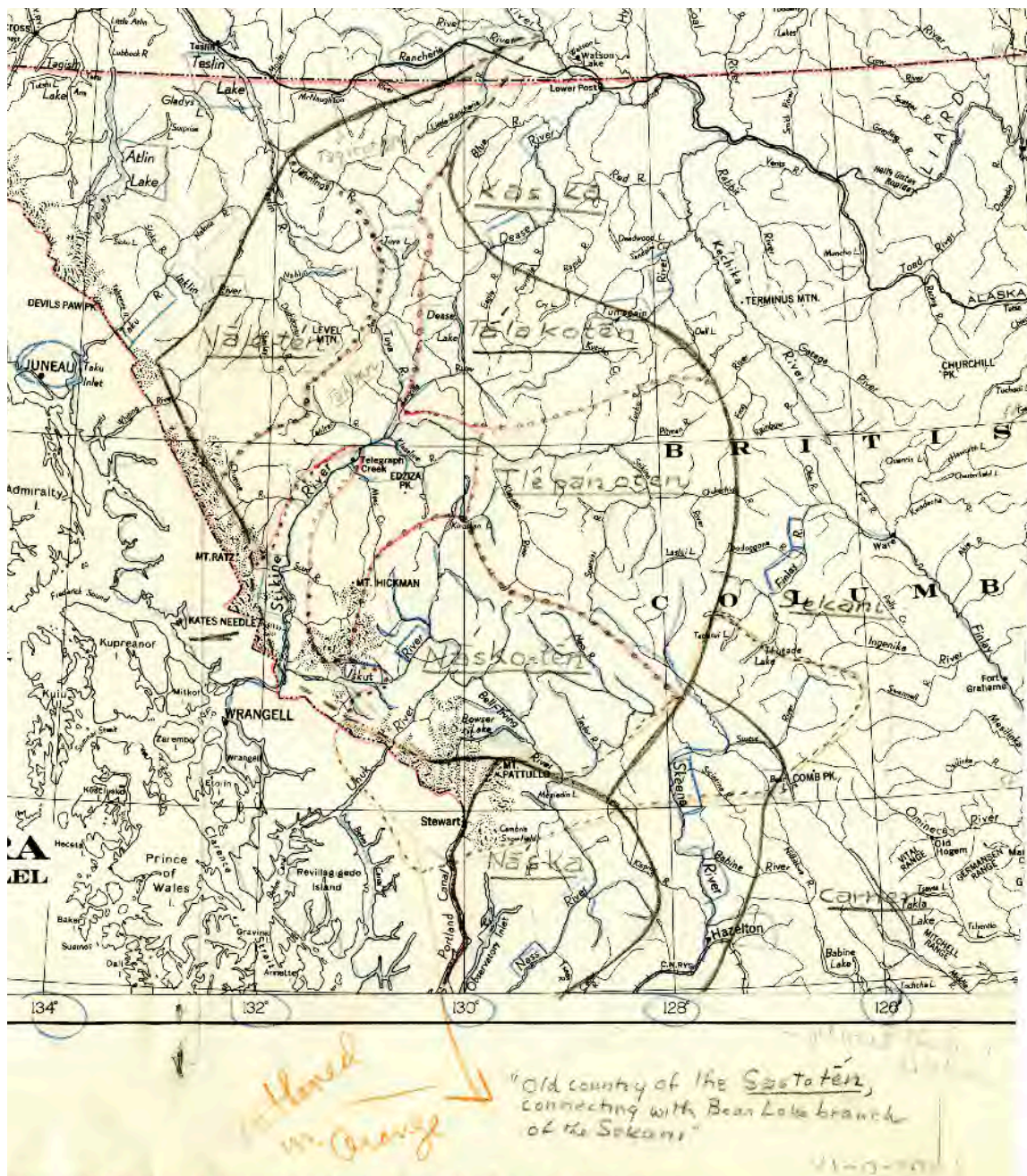
In other publications he defined Sekani territory as lying between 54 and 60 degrees (Morice 1889:112). Later he placed the northern boundary of Sekani territory to the 57th parallel (Morice 1897:117). This would then include all the headwaters of the upper Skeena, Thutade Lake and touch upon Tatlatui Lake. It should be acknowledged however that at the time of Morice’s writing there was no accurate map of the region. Nonetheless, it is assumed that Morice was making an assumption from his communication with the Sekani during his visits to Bear Lake and Fort Grahame.

Between 1906 and 1915, James Teit, spent time with the Tahltan and Bear Lakers on the Stikine River and at Telegraph Creek. He collected stories and songs, as well as artifacts for the various museums in Canada and United States. Teit (1956:52) found it difficult to determine the Tahltan boundaries and attributed it to the historical changes over the last 100 years. He does however confirm that the Tahltan territory did not include the upper Skeena watershed or the Tatlatui and Kitchener lakes area.

Teit’s Bear Lake informants spoke of a Sastoten people who once lived in the area but had since become extinct or merged with Bear Lake people.³ Their territory on Teit’s map extended to the east as far as headwaters of Sustut River, and included Thutade and Tatlatui Lakes, to the forks of the headwaters of the upper Skeena, to the south on the Skeena just north of Kuldo, and as far east as the Unuk River and Portland Canal. The centre of their territory was Meziadin Lake. Bordering their lands to the north and east were the southern Tahltan, the regional bands of Tlepanoten and Naskoten, and to the south were the Naska (Nisga’a). (see Map 6).⁴

³ According to Teit ‘Sastoten’ means Bear Water people. It should be noted that the families at Bear Lake refer to themselves as Sustut’ene, a division of the Sasuchan. The root ‘sus’ is in reference to ‘bear.’ Note Teit’s notation at the bottom of his map: “Old Country of the Sasoteten connecting with the Bear Lake branch of the Sekani.”

⁴ To be noted here, Groundhog Mountain and the Groundhog Coal Field is fully within southern Tahltan (Naskoten) territory. Naskoten as a regional group disappeared in the 20th Century and the Tsimshian name for them is equivalent to Tsetsaut Naqkyina (Boas 1895 in MacLachlan:1981:461). Tsetsaut as noted above is Teit’s Sastoten.



Map 6: Teit n.d. "Maps of clans and territories: Report on Tahltan field work among the Tahltan, Kaska and Bear Lake Indians." Canadian Museum of History (Teit VI-O-8M).

Teit's 'Sasotens' people are today identified as the Tsetsaut, Athpaskan speaking people who were brought to the 'verge of extermination' by 1885 (Duff 1981:454-457). They were eventually assimilated into the neighbouring tribes. Duff writes:

From the traditions of the adjacent Gitx̱san and Coastal Tlingit it is evident that many families of the Tsetsaut were assimilated into these tribes and thereby lost their separate identity. Some others were likewise assimilated into the mixed Sekani-Giksan people of the vicinity of Bear lake and the headwaters of the Skeena(1981:454)

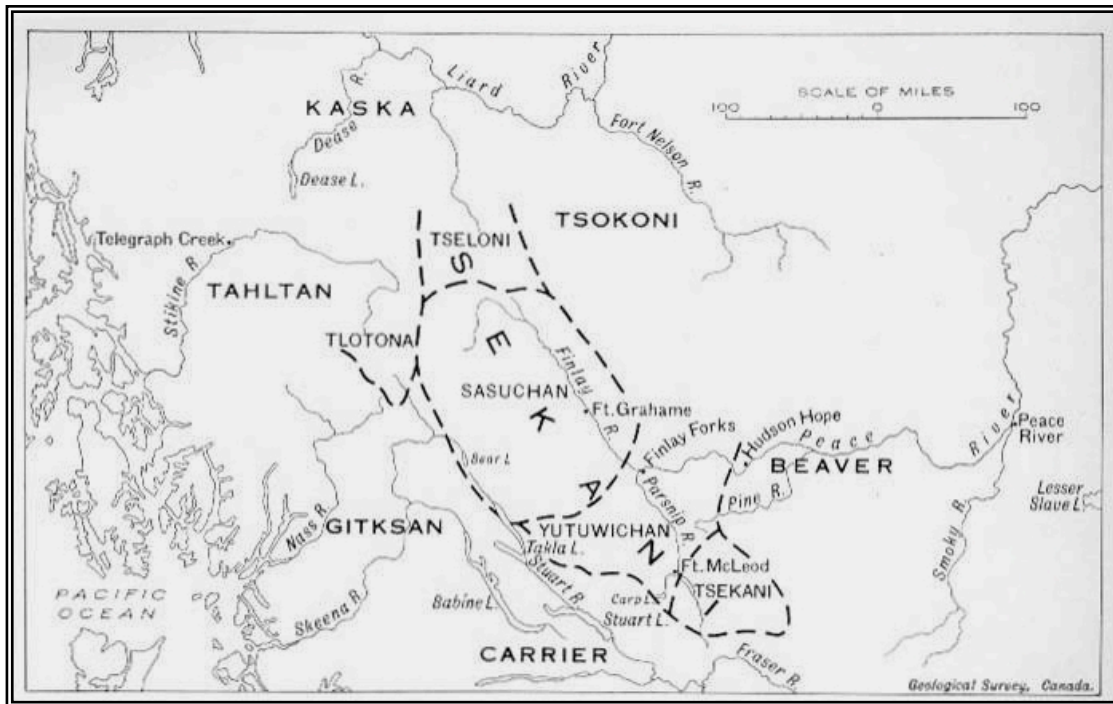
In 1915, Teit states that “some Indians claim that Tsetsaut were the same as the old Bear Lake tribe...Part of the tribe still live around Bear Lake and Sustut Lake...”⁵ (in Duff 1981:455).⁶ These Tsetsaut were part of a displaced eastern band with the remaining fragment of a western band finding sanctuary at Kincolith (Boas 1897, Emmons 1911).⁷

Diamond Jenness did his fieldwork with the Sekani in 1924. He spent three weeks at McLeod Lake and one week at Fort Grahame. Jenness did not go to Bear Lake or Takla Lake and there is no indication that he spoke to anyone from this area. He describes Sekani territory as between 54°20’ and 58° degrees north and to the west along the Pacific divide ‘except for a spur around Bear Lake.’ He divides them into four regional bands, each with their own hunting territory. Of the Sasuchan Sekani he states that their territory “covered all the basin of Finlay River from the mouth of the Omineca north and west, including Thutade and Bear lakes” (Jennes 1937:11). His map, which offers very little geographic detail, shows the Sasuchan Sekani northern boundary to include the headwaters of the Finlay River, with the northwest region following the line of the upper Skeena River but not touching the Skeena River, until it reaches an area slightly north of Toodogone River. This northern boundary to Toodogone River is judged by way of the relationship of the Stikine River where it shifts direction to a southerly flow and location of the headwaters of the Finlay River (see Map 7).

⁵ Although further research and linguistic expertise is needed, Teit’s comment may be supported linguistically with Tsesaut being a variation of Sustut, or at least based on the root ‘sus.’

⁶ Giksan oral history of the Tsetsaut is found in Sterritt (1998), which includes their displacement from Meziadin Lake area.

⁷ Further research on the Tsetsaut is necessary to better understand who they are. Generally they are identified as an independent, Athapaskan speaking peoples who moved into the region of the Nass and Stikine headwaters, extending to the Pacific Coast. According to Gitx̱san tradition, many were assimilated into Gitx̱san houses, while some assimilated with Bear Lakers. However, the term Tsetsaut has also been applied to the Nassgotin, a band of the “Tahltan” (another term representing various different peoples) who were “relentless enemies” of the Tsetsaut proper. Sterritt calls them Laxwiiyip (1998:19) and according to Duff, this was the term applied to the Nassgotin (1981:455).



Map 7: Jenness 1937 showing Sasuchan territory.

Jenness (1937) attributes the region of the Upper Skeena River and the Sustut west of the Bear Lake to the Gitksan. It should be noted that the preceding winter, 1924-25, he spent time at Hazelton. Given that Jenness did not interview Bear Lakers or visit the area, it is possible, and argued here, that his understanding of the northwest boundaries are derived from the influence of the Gitksan when he was at Hazelton. Unfortunately there are no field notes to consult concerning his research at Hazelton to confirm this theory. His published work from this period is on the Bulkley River Carrier (Jenness 1943). In his map of the Carrier territory there are no boundaries marked for the Sekani north of Takla Lake.⁸

More recently Denniston (1981: 434) shows the Sasuchan Sekani northwest boundary to include Thutade and Tatlatui Lakes, and the Sustut east of Bear River junction but does not extend west to include the upper Skeena River. Denniston derived her understanding of the Sasuchan northern boundaries from Jenness and not from archival research or fieldwork.

The northwest region of Takla territory has had little documentation by early ethnographers and the boundaries they have described for the Sasuchan Sekani were not based on fieldwork or extensive research. Much of their assumptions about the Upper

⁸ Jenness also collected two origin stories from the Bulkley River Carrier that included the Sekani on the west side of Bulkley River. Dizkel, their origin village, was located at Mosquito Flats, 12 miles east of Hazelton above Suskwa River. At this village the Gitksan from the Skeena River, the Carriers from Babine River and the Sekani beyond Babine River gathered here annually and trapped salmon (1943:477). From another source, Dizkel is the original home of the western Carrier, Gitksan and the Sekani. When two squirrels inspected their dam, it 'made them scatter and flee to their present homes; and the passage of years has produced their present differences (Jenness 1934:21 in Jenness 1943: 477).

Skeena River are derived from either theories about the Arctic/Pacific divide or hearsay from non-Bear Lake informants. The lack of fieldwork in the region, coupled with the geographic absence of information about the region until later in the 20th century, has led to considerable misinterpretations of the Sekani northwest boundary as it stood in the early 19th century.

The following section examines the competing claim in the northwest region of Takla Lake First Nation territory by the Gitx̱san. This claim has been made in recent times. The Gitx̱san documentation for this claim begins with the discussion of their origin village of Gitangasx and its relation to Bear Lake.

Part 2

Competing Claims to the Area

Much of the oral history the Gitx̱san have used to support their claim to Bear Lake and the northwest boundary region of the Takla Lake First Nation is published and documented in *Tribal Boundaries in the Nass Watershed*, by Neil Sterritt et al (1998). This oral history was presented as part of the Delgamuxw court case. The Gitx̱san call their oral history, their *adaawk*, which tells their history from time immemorial to the present day. It is a history that is memorized and retold by their chiefs and witnesses in the public forum of their feasts (Sterritt et al 1998:15). Central to this history is the origin village of *Gitangasx*, which is reported to be on the Skeena River to the west of Bear Lake.⁹ According to the descriptive maps it is located on the Skeena between the confluences of the Squingula River and the Slamgeesh River, just above 4th cabin (Sterritt: 17,25, 32, 37). This is a very old site and is considered the origin place for several Gitx̱san houses (Sterritt et al. 1998:16).¹⁰

According to the oral history, people from this origin village established houses further south along the Skeena, while others remained in the Upper Skeena region at *Gitangasx* and around Blackwater Lake. Eventually the Gitx̱san abandoned the Upper Skeena River region due to continued pressure and attacks by the Tsetsaut¹¹ (Barbeau 1920:BF-76.6; Sterritt et al. 1998:18). It is not known when this village and area was actually abandoned but it is estimated to be about four generations ago, circa 1800 (Sterritt et al 1998:41). Through periods of successive migrations people from this northern area eventually migrated to Kuldo on the Skeena River and to Kisgega'as on the Babine River. Both villages are approximately 40 miles southeast of Bear Lake.¹² Gitx̱san claim that the

⁹ Gitangasx can also refer to a general area where there are several villages (Sterritt et al 1998:16).

¹⁰ According to the Statement of Intent Map for the Carrier-Sekani Tribal Council, available on the BC Treaty Commission website, the boundary between the Sekani and Gitx̱san is along the height of land just east of the Squingula River.

¹¹ As noted above part of the Tsetaut or Teit's Sastoten were assimilated into the Bear Lake Sekani. [

¹² In the 20th century these two eastern villages were abandoned as their population moved to Kispiox and other villages on the lower Skeena. Despite this history of abandonment the Gitx̱san maintain that they retain the rights to these lands.

territories of the village of Kisgaga'as "extend northeast to beyond Bear Lake and the head of the Skeena, and north to include the Blackwater-Groundhog Mountain area in the Nass watershed" (Sterritt et al 1998: 98).

In Barbeau's field notes, from his 1920 work with the Gitxsan, there is mention of Bear Lake. According to an unknown source in Barbeau's fieldnotes, before living at *Gitangasx*, Kisgegas people lived near Bear Lake "on the *Kcán*" in a village called *Gitgala'ənxgis*. "Before that they lived near Fourth Cabin, fifty miles above the Skeena, *lulonkcax* and near this was the old village of *Gitangasxk* and above this was a river that branches into the Skeena, *luhaltantan* [Kluatantan] these were the Stikines, and about 30 miles above this the hunting grounds of *gel* which was called *cenaqlcu*, (ground hog) on the Skeena River" (Barbeau:BF-79.6:1). This vague statement places the village near Bear Lake, and yet notes it is on the Skeena River,¹³ which is actually some distance from Bear Lake. Another informant, Jimmy or Johnny Williams and his wife told Barbeau that their origin place was *Git'ang.ása*, near Bear Lake but that they all moved to Kuldo. From Kuldo they moved to the village of *Malulaq* at Kisgegas (Barbeau 1920:BF-81.2:1). What is unclear from these statements is where *Git'ang.ása* and *Gitgala'ənxgis* villages were and the nature of the relationship between Bear Lake and the village of *Gitangasx*.

According to Gitxsan house territory maps there are at least six houses that claim the northwest region of Takla territory. These houses are linked to the Gitxsan villages of Kisgegas and Kuldo. Several of these houses have family links to Takla Lake First Nation families. For example, the "hunting ground" for the house of *Melulaq* is outlined in Barbeau's material. John Brown described this area to Barbeau as: "A *meluleq* hunting ground from Kisgegas River and village up 20 miles on the Sagigot creek and then as far as Bear Lake. Associated with this house was (A2) another hunting territory from above the Bear Lake river... and near Sustut lake" (BF 79.1). A map of the 'A' hunting ground shows a range west of Bear Lake, only reaching the east side of the lake. No map was included for the 'A2' hunting ground (Brown in Barbeau 1920:BF-79.5). It is our opinion that these "hunting grounds" were accessed by these families through their marriage ties to Bear Lake Sekani (see Part 3).

Another chief's name in the same house as *Melulaq* and also linked to Takla families is *Aleist*. In Barbeau's notes the hunting ground of *Aleist* is '30 miles long and 15 miles deep' but no detail of location is included (BF 79.1). According to one source, *Melulaq* and *Aleist* were the same but separated so it is assumed that *Aleist*'s territory is beside *Melulaq*.

Barbeau's fieldnotes also reveal that the house *Wigaix* from Kisgegas had their hunting ground at the mouth of the Bear River [Sustut] as it empties in the Skeena, and then it follows the Skeena 20 miles above along the River to a Creek *Keegwintiyun* (BF-79.7).

Other houses that make claims in the region are *Tsa Buk*, on the eastern side of Bear Lake, *Wilgyet* and *Wilmixosk* along the Skeena River. The *NiiKyap* claim the western side of Bear Lake and a section on Thutade Lake.

¹³ Kcán is a variation of Xsiyeen, the Gitxsan word for Skeena (Sterritt et al. 1998:307).

Abel Oakes, from the House of *Xgwooyemtxw* of Kisgagas stated that his house claimed from Kcigonget [Kitwanga] Creek to Bear Lake and Blackwater. According to Sterritt (1998) this claim identified “the Bear Lake region, which includes the Sustut River watershed to the northeast” (Sterritt et al. 1998:101). Sterritt’s assumption is that Oakes’s description included the watersheds: the upper Skeena watershed, the Sustut watershed; and the Blackwater region. However, closer reading of Barbeau’s notes does not support this. Oakes told him that “the Indians did not want all of B.C. but only want from Kcigonget creek (15 miles below Gitwongé) to Bear Lake and Black-water. ‘That is all we want’” (Oakes in Barbeau 1920:BF-94.1). As the map shows (Sterritt 1998:102, map 13) this territory encompasses all the Gitx̱san villages to Kitselas on the Skeena, and the hunting territory that includes Bear Lake and Blackwater. It does not include all of the upper Skeena or the region of Tatlatui and Thutade Lakes.

In 1965, anthropologist Wilson Duff interviewed Jonathan Johnson of Kispiox, and between 1965 and 1967 another anthropologist, John W. Adams, spent 13 months conducting fieldwork among the Gitx̱san. Based on this work, Adams produced a map of Gitx̱san hunting territories that places the boundary just above the confluence of the Sustut and Skeena rivers (Adams 1973:11) Notably, none of the territorial claims recorded during these visits extend beyond Bear Lake.

More recently, according to the Gitx̱san elders, the Bear Lake region falls within the territory of the *Nii Kyap* house (McEachern 1991:7-8) of the *Lax Gibuu* (Wolf clan) from Kisgegas (Sterritt et al. 1998:18). This house with the House of *Xgwooyemtxw* was one of the last to leave *Gitangasx* according to oral history (Sterritt 1998: 41). A representative of the Gitx̱san House of *Nii Kyap* of the *Lax Gibuu* (Wolf) clan, asserts that the community of Bear Lake was established after the Gitx̱san expanded out from *Gitangasx* (Gitx̱san House of *Nii Kyap* 2006:1779). However, an early statement by another elder, in 1986 claims that *Nii Kyap* is a recent house among the Gitx̱san (Napoleon 2009:116). It is this house that currently claims the region as far east as Thutade Lake. None of the *Nii kyap* house claims are supported in the early fieldnotes of Barbeau.¹⁴

There is an overland trail that easily linked Kisgegas with Bear Lake while access from Kuldo is less clear at the time of writing. As a result, some people from Kisgegas are very familiar with the Bear Lake region and kinship ties between some Gitx̱san and Bear Lake Sekani families are strong. It is this region, between Bear Lake and Kisgegas, that John

¹⁴ It should be noted that it was not supported in the submission to the 1987 Delgamuukw court action. In the claim, “Gitx̱san traditional territory was depicted as extending eastward beyond the Skeena basin and into the Arctic drainage to include Thutade Lake, the eastern extent of Gitx̱san territory at Moose Valley and Moosevale Creek” (McEachern 1991: Map 2, Exhibit 1243 cited in Dewhirst 2006:23). “Thutade Lake, Moose Valley and the area on the north side of the Sustut River above Two Lake Creek were reported to be within traditional territories of the Gitx̱san House of *Nii Kyap*” (McEachern 1991: Map 3, cited in Dewhirst 2006:23). This claim was much larger than that previously reported by the Gitx̱san and researchers of Gitx̱san history. The judge noted that this area, claimed by the House of *Nii Kyap*, was removed from the initial Delgamuukw claim area and later re-instated (McEachern 1991:258-259), which suggested to him some internal ambiguity and uncertainty concerning the territory of the House of *Nii Kyap*.

Brown, a Kisgegas man, identifies as House *Meluleq*'s hunting ground. The vast majority of the area is outside of the area identified in this report as Bear Lake/Takla Lake First Nation territory.

A story told to Barbeau supports the argument that this hunting area was a contested land between Gitx̱san and Bear Lake Sekani:

It is near Meluloq hunting ground named giletuthamŌz the home (hatnŌq wild celery or rhubarb) And there is a big rock. I was very small boy when my uncle told me about this. But he showed me this big rock and said: - This is a sign that we won't fight with the Sikani anymore because we have driven our arrows and the Kisgagas 20 arrows. This is the way they put them in the crack. When you see arrows with point down it means peace, and the points up means war. And the arrows were painted [sic] downwards in the rocks. My uncle told me the story but I did not pay attention about it. This must have taken place about one hundred years ago. (Barbeau 1920 BF-68.5)

The Gitx̱san are claiming a considerable part of Bear Lake and the surrounding territory, much of which is recognized in the ethnographic literature as the territory of the Sasuchan Sekani. By the time of Barbeau's fieldwork in 1920 the Gitx̱san had incorporated it into their traditional house territories. We argue that this process is still ongoing as evidenced by the current claims of the *Nii kyap* house to Thutade and upper Skeena River. These are territories that are considered the Sasuchan Bear Lake Sekani, the ancestors of the Takla families today. The following section highlights the historical documentation of the Sekani- Gitx̱san conflict.

Gitx̱san and Sekani Conflict

The conflict between the Gitx̱san and the Sekani at Bear Lake is well documented in the historical record beginning as early as 1829. Fur trade records describe an incident at Fort Connolly that implies that the Gitx̱san were not regular visitors to the Bear Lake region. The fort had been in existence for three years when, for the first time, a party of seventeen 'Atnahs' arrived to take revenge for a Gitx̱san woman who had been kidnapped by a Sekani man. The manager of the post, Charles Ross, had returned the woman to her family and assumed that from her the Gitx̱san learned about the establishment of the post. He wrote that in early July a party of Gitx̱san arrived, making an "uproar" and to appease them he gave them gifts. In return they promised to come "occasionally to trade furs" (HBC Fort St. James 1829).

A Gitx̱san elder in an interview with Wilson Duff remembered this incident. In their discussion Jonathan Johnson of Kispiox maintained that the Gitx̱san went often to Groundhog Mountain, but only rarely 'if at all' ventured to Bear Lake (Duff n.d.a). He also indicated that the Gitx̱san people were not aware of Fort Connolly until a slave girl was set free to return to Kisgegas from Fort Connolly (Duff n.d.a), likely the incident noted above. Most certainly the Gitx̱san had no need to go to Bear Lake to fish for salmon as they had

productive salmon fishing sites on the Babine and Skeena River. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that their initial interests in the region were primarily to trade at the post.

While encouraged to trade, the Gitx̱san were not regular visitors at Fort Connolly in the first several decades of its existence. There are only three mentions of them after 1829 and prior to 1850 in the journals.¹⁵ In all cases they arrived in a large group with little to no beaver to trade (HBCA, Fort St. James Post Journal, 1 November 1831, 27 March 1832). One journal account in 1844 reveals that their presence was so troublesome that it disrupted management of the post (HBCA, Fort St. James Post Journal, 26 March 1844):

Late last evening, Bear Lake men arrived with furs as entered in day book. Mr. Maxwell [post manager] states this having gone astray in the portage between Babine & Tatlaw Lakes, and the arrival of Athahs at his post, who were rather troublesome, were the reasons why the men were so long returning.

By 1870 the Gitx̱san had become regular visitors to the post, but while the Sekani at Bear Lake had good relations with their Carrier and Nahanees neighbours, their relationship with the Gitx̱san was hostile. This hostility was noted by Father Adrian Gabriel Morice, the Oblate priest who visited the area:

That by right the Bear's or Connolly lake and adjacent country belong to the Tsekehne [Sekani] tribe; but, as a matter of fact, the village which is situated close to the H.B. Co's. fort is now the rendezvous of representatives of three different tribes, namely; the Tsekehne [Sekani] who periodically congregate there for trading purposes and have no permanent residence; the Carriers, a band of whom now inhabit the village and hunt in the vicinity of the lake with the consent of the former; and the Etnas or Kitiksons [Gitx̱san] from the Skeena river who are considered as mere intruders and as such live there only on sufferance. (Morice 1893:26-27)

This situation had not changed greatly by the turn of the century. G.T. Emmons conducted fieldwork among the Gitx̱san in 1909 and 1910. He noted that some Gitx̱san “live permanently among the Bear Lake people at Fort Connolly but they are stragglers and their presence is rather resented by the others” (Emmons n.d.:53).

George M. Dawson who visited the region maintained that the Gitx̱san had moved into the region as they had exhausted their own hunting grounds. He believed this to be a recent occurrence before his visit in 1876 (1989: 268). Later he writes:

Got some further facts about the encroachment of the Atanahs (Coast Inds. Chinsayans) [Gitx̱san] on the Porteurs [Carrier] & Siccanies [Sekani]. The Movement began only about 3 years ago, & is caused by the fact the Coast Indians [Gitx̱san] are more numerous, & have exhausted more or less completely all their own hunting grounds... Trouble between the tribes,

¹⁵ It should be noted that post records between 1832 and 1840 are missing.

seems to be anticipated by those knowing most about the matter.” (Dawson 1989: 274)

The Sekani have multiple stories of this conflict at Bear Lake and Jenness recorded two of them in 1924, revealing that at times the hostilities led to intermittent warfare. One story took place at Fort Connolly when it was first established on an island in the lake, another off the shores of Bear Lake. In both cases there was considerable loss of life on the part of the Gitx̱san (Jenness 1937:18). In one altercation the Gitx̱san of Kispiox and Kisgegas requested that a Stuart Lake Carrier who had married a Kisgegas woman, help negotiate peace. The resulting peace was sealed by a potlatch at Bear Lake and the two Sekani leaders exchanged clothes with the two Gitx̱san leaders and peace reigned for some time. Jenness estimates that this negotiated peace occurred sometime after 1840 (Jenness 1937:18).¹⁶

This peace however seems to have been short lived. Fort Connelly was closed in 1870 due to the scarcity of game in the area and the continual conflict between the Gitx̱san and the Sekani. Bear Lake Outpost, later to be known as Fort Grahame, was opened on the Finlay River for economic reasons but also to enable the Sekani to trade in peace. The Hudson Bay Company district report notes that eight Sekani hunters followed them to Fort Grahame while the eighteen ‘Atnahs’ (Gitx̱san) attached to Fort Connolly now went to Hazelton to trade (HBC 1891). Fort Connelly reopened in 1887 and closed permanently in 1892 due to the poor fur returns in the region.¹⁷

The Indian Agent at Babine Agency noted that this conflict continued in the late 19th century.¹⁸ Stationed at Hazelton he records several disputes that arose due to Gitx̱san trespass upon Sekani hunting and trapping lands:

July 16th, 1896: Attended a conference of some Kit-sems (Gitx̱san) in regard to trespassing in Sekanse beaver swamps (p29).

August 11, 1896: Attended a conference with Indians of here (Kit-Ksuns) in counseling to abstain from trespassing in the Siccannee, trapping and hunting grounds (p36).

Dec 9, 1896: Attended in counseling Kit-Ksuns containing trespass on Sikanee beaver preserves (p37).

¹⁶ In the oral history of Takla members there are also stories of battles that took place far into Sekani territory at Thutade Lake (Littlefield, Dorricott, & Cullon 2007:37).

¹⁷ It should be noted that contrary to Jenness’ assertion that Bear Lake was abandoned by the Sekani, Oblate records confirm that the Sekani remained in the region and were at Bear Lake, particularly during the summer for their annual fishing season.

¹⁸ Letters and documents (or copies) from the Hazelton Indian Agency compiled in book-form by the Indian agent Mr. Loring, and loaned by the present Indian Agent, Mr. Hyde to C.M. Barbeau, February 1924, BCA, Xerox copy, MG29, D7

Feb 17, 1897: Attended in conference with Kit-Ksun Indians in further regards to trespassing on Sikanee hunting grounds (p38).

In these accounts it appears that the Gitx̱san were the transgressors upon Sekani territory.¹⁹ Most certainly the Gitx̱san had distinctly different ideas of rights to hunting territories than Sekani. These rights were based upon membership in a corporate matrilineage called a 'house' (*wa.lp*). Each house owned a specific hunting and fishing territory, which was managed by the Chief of the house (Halpin and Seguin 1981:274). Rights to the territory remained with the house and trespassers were not tolerated.

On the other hand Sekani access to their territory was based on their mother's and father's rights, which were passed on by both their parents. This bilateral system of rights to territory and resources gave an individual access to a wide territorial range and resources. This was a necessary strategy in a territory where resources were widely and unevenly distributed (Denniston 1981).²⁰ This kinship system, with the custom of matrilocal residence, whereby a young man lives for a time with a bride's parents and later returns with his family to his own parents' territory if he so desires, offers a flexibility that was not possible under the Gitx̱san structured system (Jenness 1937: 54).²¹

One of the means of creating peace was intermarriage. Jenness documents an historical occasion between the Long Grass Indians, a splinter group of the Bear Lake Sekani, and the Gitx̱san sometime between 1860 and the 1870s. Warfare between the two groups was quelled with the marriage of a young Gitx̱san woman to a Chief's son. More recent Gitx̱san research gives more context to this oral history and the families involved (Sterritt et al 1998:55-56). In this case, the woman *Luuskayok* was married to *Kaiyeish* after Luuskayok's maternal uncle "shot a Sekani Indian whom he found hunting on his hunting ground." The location of the hostility occurred on the House of *Geel*'s territory. This territory according to Gitx̱san territorial maps is on the west side of the upper Skeena river headwaters at Groundhog Mountain. This incident confirms that the Sekani were hunting this far west. This marriage returned stability to a region that had become highly contested.

Intermarriage was an important strategy to access resources on lands where conflict arose and both the Gitx̱san and the Sekani had a common interest to maintain peaceful relations. According to Sheppard (1983:306-7) this was more important to the Gitx̱san for trade reasons as they were dependent upon accessing interior furs as intermediaries for the coastal trade. For the Sekani, access to Pacific draining rivers and streams was confirmed, ensuring a 'reliable, nutritious source of food which was relatively easily attainable' (Sheppard 1983:305). Sheppard writes:

¹⁹ Loring also reported that there were several occasions of internal disputes within Gitx̱san communities including Kisgegas (Loring Aug 23 1897: p 39).

²⁰ Population density was low, 1 person per 100 square miles (see McClellan and Dennison p372)

²¹ According to some sources (Jenness 1937 and Lanoue 1983) the adoption of a phratry system by the Sekani at Bear Lake and Fort Grahame was also a cultural adaption that accommodated Gitx̱san marriages.

...in relation to the Gitx̱san, the Sasuchan were relatively powerless. The Gitx̱san had a larger, more hierarchically structure, more stable, and more prosperous population. The potential that the Gitx̱san would claim Bear Lake and its environs as their exclusive range was clear to the Sasuchan. Bear Lake was on the edge of Sasuchan territory and intermarriage was one important way to maintain and strengthen rights to hunt in the area. (Sheppard 1983: 306)

Despite efforts to maintain peaceful relationships, conflict between the Sekani and Gitx̱san seems to have been endemic throughout the 19th century in the region of Bear Lake and the upper Skeena River. By the end of the century this conflict was diminished to a large degree by a number of marriages between Bear Lake Sekani and Gitx̱san families from the closest Gitx̱san village, Kisgegas. The following section examines the genealogical connection between these families and the present Takla families.

Part 3

Takla and Gitx̱san Links

The Bear Lake Sekani are strongly linked through intermarriage with the Kisgegas and as a result many Takla Lake First Nation families have some hereditary link to these families today. Located on the Babine River, three miles from the confluence of the Babine River and Skeena River, Kisgegas is one of many Gitx̱san villages. In 1890 the Indian Agent for the Babine Agency considered Kisgegas one of the largest Gitx̱san villages with a population of 289 and 37 houses. He noted evidence of their abandoned village at the forks of the river and reported that they had eleven acres of cultivated land close to their village (Canada RG 10, Vol 1585). Many historic maps reveal an overland trail between Kisgegas and Bear Lake.

The Indian Agents of both the Stuart Lake and Babine agencies acknowledged a close relationship between the families of these two communities and eventually realized that they had enumerated many Bear Lake and Kisgegas people twice on the 1911 census. In explaining this mistake Agent Loring from the Babine Agency stated that three quarters of the Kisgegas community lived off reserve at Bear Lake where they have potato patches. During the winter they stayed at their reserve at Kisgegas but during the summer they roamed over the Bear Lake country trapping and hunting (Loring 1915:131).

McAllan from the Stuart Lake Agency stated that until his recent conversation with Loring he did not know “that they had houses in Kisageas and were living there” (McAllan 1915:165) and that he could not tell how many of the Fort Connelly/Bear Lake tribe were Sekani or how many were Kisgegas (Gitx̱san) (McAllan 1915:166). Their confusion is not surprising given how remote Bear Lake remained in the early 20th century. It was rare for an Indian Agent to travel there and it was only in 1911 that McAllan made the trip with surveyor Swannell. What the two agents agreed on was that the chief of Bear Lake was Chief Thomas and he was Sekani.

In examining the census submitted by Loring and McAllan is easy to identify at least seven families that were duplicated on both the Kisgegas census and the Bear Lake census, for a total of 45 people. These families are easily traced to the descendants of Takla families today:

i. Chief Thomas (b. c1870, d. 1940) is listed with his wife Sarah (d. 1937) and three children. Sarah was from Hazelton according to their son Frank Thomas (d. 1984) and thus was Gitxsan. Chief Thomas and Sarah are on the earliest DIA Takla Lake Band rolls. Chief Thomas, as noted above, was the chief of Bear Lake and Sekani. Members of the Thomas family at Takla are all descendants of Chief Thomas and Sarah. [5]

ii. Bear Lake George (b. ca. 1870, d. 1954) is listed with his wife Salome/Julie with their six children. According to an interview with their son William George in 1995 (Dewhirst 1995:6) Bear Lake George was Gitxsan and Julie was Sekani. Oblate marriage records say both are Sekani so it is possible that one of Bear Lake George's parents was Sekani. This family is on the earliest DIA Takla Band rolls. Members of the George family at Takla are all descendants of Bear Lake George and Julie. [8]

iii. Thomas Abraham (b.1883, d. 1964) with wife Selina/Julie (b. 1875, d. 1957) and four children. According to Thomas' marriage certificate his father, Aleist Abraham (b. 1861) was Gitxsan and his mother Nelly (b. 1876) Carrier from Babine. His wife Julie (nee Jimmie) was Sekani. Thomas Abraham and family are on the DIA band rolls for Fort Connelly/Takla Lake band. All the descendants of Thomas Abraham are Takla band members. [6]

iv. Bear Lake Jack (b. ca. 1860, d. 1946) and wife Sophy (b. ca.1869, d. 1946) with 6 children. According to Sophie Jack's death certificate, she was part Carrier and part Gitxsan from Kisgegas. Bear Lake Jack was Gitxsan and possibly Tahltan. Bear Lake Jack and Sophie are on the DIA rolls for Fort Connelly/Takla Lake. Son Alec Jack married Madeline Louis, a Takla Creek woman according to DIA Fort Connelly/ Bear Lake band rolls.²² Daughter Elizabeth (Elsie)(b. 1896, d.) Jack married Patrick Bob (Sekani) (1891, d.). They had thirteen children.²³ There are many descendants of Bear Lake Jack and Sophy in the Takla band membership. [8]

v. Bear Lake Antoine Louis (b. ca. 1863, d. unknown) with 5 children. Antoine Louis married Annie Charley daughter of Gitxsan Bear Lake Charley (Olson) and T'lotona Mary Dennis who was part Sekani.²⁴ On their marriage certificate Antoine's father is Louis and his mother is Josephine. According to Oblate records they were Sekani on the baptism of their son Adam. Antoine's sister Madeline married Alec Jack (see above). This family is on the DIA Fort Connelly/Takla Lake band rolls. Also the 1921 Census lists both

²² Alex Jack in an interview with Davis (2001) says this grandmother was Cree and mother Carrier. Does not stipulate which side, paternal or maternal.

²³ It should be noted here that one of their children married Charlie Sampson, a Gitxsan from the Nii Kuyap House.

²⁴ Sterritt's asserts that Annie Louis (nee Charley) was Gitxsan when in fact her father was Gitxsan and her mother was a Dennis, which is T'lotona/Bear Lake.

generations as Bear Lake Nomads (T'lotona). Today descendants are at Iskut and Takla Lake First Nation. [6]

vi. Bear Lake Jim (b. ca. 1878, d. 1936) with wife Selina/Cecille (b. 1889, d. unknown) and five children. Bear Lake Jim was Gitxsan and his wife either Sekani or Tahltan. The DIA Fort Connelly/Takla band rolls show Bear Lake Jim with wife Cecille. Also found as Bear Lake Jim Dennis on the 1921 Census for Bear Lake Nomads with 10 children. The descendants of this family are at Iskut and Takla Lake. [7]

vii. Bear Lake Charlie Nicholas (b. ca. 1886, d. unknown) also known as Jeanlee Nicholas with wife Salome/Selene/Celina David (b. ca. 1889, d. unknown) (possibly Carrier as married at Babine) and three children. Bear Lake Charlie Nicholas and his wife are on the DIA Fort Connelly/Takla Band roll with at least 10 children. Many of these children married into other Bear Lake families and their descendants are at Iskut and Takla Lake First Nations. [5]

As well as these families there are other family groupings that are similar on the census but without further research their connection to Bear Lake Sekani and the Kisgegas is unknown.

Another link between Kisgegas and Bear Lake Sekani is *Miluulak*. The history of this family includes Miluulak (*Melulaq*) Bob who married a Bear Lake woman 'Lootsma' circa 1880s. They had three children, two of which are linked to the present day Takla families of the Patricks and Abrahams (Charlie Sampson speaking notes 2007; Dewhirst 1995). *Mihuulak* was an important chief's name at Kisgegas and today they claim rights up to Thutade Lake.

Takla and Iskut Connection

In 1911 the government surveyor, Frank Swannell, observed that the population at Bear Lake 'appeared to be a mixed race of Sicanies and Stickeens with a few from Babine Lake' (Swannell 1911b:42). Swannell makes no mention of the presence of Gitxsan from Kisgegas. This link to the Stickeens (Tahltan/T'lotona) is a link to the Iskut who are also descendants of the early Bear Lake families. The Bear Lakers at Iskut have been referred to as the T'lotona or Long Grass Indians in the literature, and as the Bear Lake Nomads by the Department of Indian Affairs. Jenness estimates that they split off from the community at Bear Lake circa 1840 and that they exploited the land recently vacated by the southern Tahltan whose population had been decimated by warfare and disease (Jenness 1937:18). Sheppard adds that another migration of Bear Lake families added to this original T'lotona at the turn of the century:

The migration of Indians from around Bear Lake into the T'lotona regions was not large. It probably numbered only thirty to forty adults and children at most, but it was enough to make a difference to the T'lotona already in the Klappan-Spatsizi area, and enough to lessen the subsistence pressure on those remaining around Bear Lake.... The band moved into the Spatsizi Plateau,

from the Spatsizi River to the Arctic divide, and then joined with part of the T'lotona population.... The remainder of the T'lotona population exploited the area from the west of the Spatsizi River to the Iskut River, and became what I call the Klappan band (Sheppard 1983:337-338).

As Sheppard notes the Iskut utilized the Spatsizi Plateau lands of the upper Stikine River and the headwaters of the Skeena and Klappan River. This region bordered on the Bear Lake Sekani territory of the Upper Skeena and the headwaters of the Dutu and Sturdee rivers.

James Teit made a census of these Bear Lakers 1912 and 1915. In 1921 the Indian Agent enumerated the "Bear Lake Nomads" for the national census. With this limited genealogical information, supplemented with some Oblate parish records, the following families add to the list of ancestral relations to Takla families:

viii. Bear Lake Billy (b.1882, d. 1932) was acknowledged in the 1920s by the Indian Agent as the head of the Bear Lake Nomads. His father, Sellar (Sila) Dennis, was half Tahltan and half Gitksan (or Nass), and his mother was Nass mixed with Bear Lake. He was married to a woman who was half Tahltan and half Bear Lake Sekani (Teit 1912 census). In 1921 he is with Margarite (b. 1885) with 7 children.

ix. Chilly John (b. 1862, d. unknown) married 1st Amelia, 2nd Mary who was Sekani. Mary's parents Antoine and Betsie were from Fort Grahame. His daughter Isobel was born at Bear Lake. According to Teit's census (Teit 1912), Chilly John was the brother of Bear Lake Billy's mother, thus the uncle to Bear Lake Billy.

x. Peter John, or *Krics*, brother to Chilly John was not identified on Teit's census as he had passed away in 1907, (Sterrit et al 1998). The Oblate records show his father as *Ouskazeta*, who married Anna, daughter of *Youha*. They married in 1892, *Krics* was 34 and Anna was 30, both were listed as Nahannee (Tahltan/T'lotona).²⁵

xi. William (b.ca. 1880, d. unknown) was a half brother to Bear Lake Billy, same father, Denis, different mother, and was married to a woman from Bear Lake. Believe this to be William Dennis and Louise. Both are on the Fort Connolly/Takla Band rolls.

xii. Leon Dennis (b. 1885, d. unknown) marriage certificate states that his parents are Dennis and Mary Magdeline both from Bear Lake. He married Angele whose father was Jimmy and mother Agatha from Fort Grahame. It is noted that they were living at Bear Lake and Teit notes they are living with the Sekani (Teit 1912 Census).

xii. Jimmie Dennis (b. 1870, d. unknown), son of Dennis and Mary Magdeline (b. 1855, d.), also known as Bear Lake Jimmy, was born at Bear Lake and married to Cecille Cazell,

²⁵ Anna was part of the peace offering to the 'Long Grass' by the Gitksan as told to Jenness in 1924/5 (Jenness 1937: preface). Sterrit et al (1998: 276) claims she married Pierre John who died in 1907, brother of Chilly John and that she was Gitksan from Kispiox.

also born at Bear Lake according to their marriage certificate. This couple had 10 children. They are on the 1911 Bear Lake Census and the Department of Indian Affairs band roll for Fort Connolly/Takla. One of their daughters, Mary, married Johnny Bob Patrick, part of the large Patrick family at Takla.

xiii. Joseph Dennis (b. unknown, d. unknown), son of Dennis and Mary Magdeline, married Sophie from Bear Lake, his son Joseph married Maggie Tashoots, Tahltan.

xiv. Mary Dennis (b. 1881, d. unknown), daughter of Dennis and Mary Magdeline, married Bear Lake Charley, Carrier or Gitxsan, and her daughter Annie married Antoine Louis (see v. above).

xv. Bear Lake Charlie (Nicholas) (b. 1882/91/94) (see above vii) is on the 1921 Bear Lake Nomads Census. He is also on the Fort Connolly/Takla DIA band roll. Three of his children are known to have married into Takla. His other children married into Tahltan. (same as vii. above)

xvi. Patrick Bob and Elsie are on the 1921 Bear Lake Nomad census. This family is related to Bear Lake Jack above. Both the Patrick and Bob family are related to Nicholas family at Iskut.

xvii. Bear Lake William (b.1864, d. unknown), married to Melie/Louise/Amelia (b. 1879) is on the Fort Connolly/Takla band roll, which notes he was transferred to the Stikine Agency in 1937. According to Teit, his father was Sekani from Bear Lake and in 1915 he was living with the Sekani (Teit 1912 census).

xviii. Plug Hat Tom, also known as Tabak Tom on the Bear Lake Nomads 1921 census is married to Marianne. Both were Gitxsan but were part of the Bear Lake community. They are found on the Bear Lake Census of 1911 and the Kisgegas census of 1901. This couple raised two children related to the Takla present day Patrick and Bob family.

As this genealogical information shows, these families were a mix of Gitxsan, Carrier, Tahltan and Sekani. The intermarriage between the different cultural groups created a distinct community who identified themselves as Bear Lakers. The identity continues today among Takla families as well as Iskut families. In a recent publication about the Iskut community this fact was noted in the introduction as an important part of how Iskut people view themselves:

‘Susan and Mary are the proudest Bear Lakers there ever was.’ [an] overt acknowledgement of the connections of some Iskut families to Bear Lake, British Columbia, home to Fort Connolly...[they] asserted their links to an area where, according to the academic literature about northern Athapaskans, people speak Dakelh (Carrier) and Sekani languages...[this statement challenges] Iskut connections with other Tahltan speakers (McIlwraith 2012).

The following section explains how Takla elders view themselves as Bear Laker and how rights to land are transferred within families.

Part 4

Takla Elders' Understanding of this Territory

In 1915 the Indian Agent of the Babine Agency was asked if there was a distinct Bear Lake Tribe. His answer was “yes, there is and they belong to the Sekani” (McAllan 1915a:166). What is evident in this reply is that the Bear Lake community existed at the turn of the century as it had done throughout the 19th century. It was not until the mid-20th century that Bear Lakers were forced out of their community. Some of them went to Hazelton and others to Takla Lake. Charlie Sampson, who as a child moved to Hazelton, provides an account of this move from Bear Lake.

In 1949 [the people] of Bear Lake were evicted from the village. The reason for the eviction was that there was a murder in Bear Lake and the R.C.M.P. did not know anything about it until a month later. The Indian agent at the time was Mr. Howe. Mr. Howe figured that Bear Lake was too isolated, so he promised the people of Bear Lake; house, farm and animals where ever they were relocated too. (Sampson 2007: 7-8)

This promise of housing and help to establish farming was not kept according to this elder. Other families made their way to Takla Lake. Around 1954, researcher V.C. Serl conducted fieldwork at IR#7 at Takla Landing. He gave the following description of the community:

The Indian community is composed of Two Bands – the Takla Lake people, who occupy the section nearest the Bay, and the Bear Lake people, who occupy the old Hudson’s Bay post which is situated at the end of the reserve farthest from the present post. The Bear Lake people apparently occupy the reserve only during summer months – going north to Bear Lake for trapping during the winter.

In 1995 Dewhirst interviewed Takla elders concerning their use around Bear Lake. One of spokespersons for a large extended family from Bear Lake informed him of their family territory:

It included a vast area bounded by the confluence of the Firesteel and Finlay Rivers in the north, Johanson Lake in the east and headwaters of the Thutade River all of Thutade Lake in the west, and both sides of the Susutu River, including Willow Creek and Sustut Lake areas on the south side of the Sustut...The Sustut’enne family territory (*keyoh*) was used and occupied by the grandparents of present day elder Joe Bob Patrick and the Takla Lake

First Nation, and likely by his grandparents' parents before them. (Dewhurst 1995:29)

Another member of this large extended family explained how they acquired this northern area and why some Gitxsan today lay claim to the area:

My great grandparents and their family owned most of the territories in Bear Lake (Fort Connolly). My great grandmother's sister Louisey Jack allowed Arthur Sampson [Gitxsan] to use the territory because he was married to their granddaughter Mary Magdalene Bob. Simon Wright [Gitxsan] was also allowed to use their territory because he was married to Nancy Bob. Bob Patrick from Fort Graham was also allowed to use the territory because he was married to Louisey Jack's niece, Elsie Jack. (Sampson 2007)

Both Arthur Sampson and Simon Wright were Gitxsan men who married into Bear Lake families. This allowed them and their children rights to access and use the hunting territory that is now claimed by the Gitxsan First Nation. This is traditional Bear Lake Sekani territory, held now by Takla Lake First Nation families..

Sampson (2007) also pointed out another example of how this land was passed on to family:

My uncle David Bob was raised by William Dennis and Lowise Denise. They gave Uncle David a trap line from Caribou Crossing to close to Kisgega's village. His trap line was on both sides of the Kisgega's trail. Other people have traplines up in the Bear Lake area and they are: Thomas Jack, Paul Jack, William Charlie and Charlie Bob.

All the people that I have mentioned are Gitxsan [*speak Gitxsan*] and have every right to the Bear Lake area. (Sampson 2007)

William Dennis and Lowise Dennis are listed above (xi) above and have links to the Bear Lake Sekani community and Iskut Tahltan community. David Bob is a member of the Patrick Bob family (iv).

This explanation of access reveals an ongoing process, and likely long-standing practice, of gaining access to a territory and its resources through marriage. The right, however, came via the marriage to the Sekani person and did not transfer to another First Nation. Thus, access to a region and its resources was a marriage right not a birth right. In terms of any children resulting from the union, although their right was gained through birth, it was by virtue of the Sekani parent, thus remaining a Sekani right. The following excerpts from interviews with Takla members who are descended from Bear Lake families confirms this understanding:

While our family were the ones with rights to the land, it was also our people's way that other members of our family and members of neighbouring villages who were connected to us could have privilege to come and use the land for hunting and fishing or food foraging. (William Charlie Affidavit 1997: para 17)

When a person came into a traditional *kayoh*, they would have to show the connection to the family members and it was the family that was important and would allow them the use of the land. (William Charlie Affidavit 1997: para 19)

What is clear from these statements is that rights to territory are through families and they can pass through both men and women. These rights are not passed through a matrilineal system of lineage houses as in the Gitx̱san system. It is in fact quite clear that in a majority of cases Gitx̱san access has been through marriage to Sekani women and their rights to their parents' and grandparents' territory. This has allowed the Gitx̱san to expand their access to a wide range of territory but it did not at the same time expand the lands to which they have title.

Conclusion

This report examines the existing historical and ethnological documentation of the northwest region of the Takla Lake First Nation territory. Research was complicated by the fact that there is very little written information about this region, as it was fairly isolated from European contact and was one of the last regions of the province to be accurately surveyed. This absence of written historical evidence, coupled with the lack of fieldwork by ethnographers, has often resulted in a misreading of Bear Lake Sekani traditional use and occupation in the area.

Problems often stem from misinterpreting the historical expansion of the Gitx̱san in the 19th century. This has led to Gitx̱san claims to the area, which are not supported in their own oral history. *Gitangasx*, their origin village is their easternmost site with very little Gitx̱san presence within the northwest Takla Lake First Nation boundary. The majority of their claim to this region has been rejected by the courts and is challenged in contemporary consultations.

We show in this report that the historical presence of Gitx̱san in this region was due to the establishment of Fort Connolly on Bear Lake and their interest in the fur trade and expanding their hunting grounds. The available information suggests that by the latter part of the 19th century, the Kisgegas Gitx̱san were regularly visiting this region. Several sources, however, note that this was a highly contested intrusion into Sekani territory. This intensified contact, nevertheless, eventually led to peace and intermarriage between a number of Kisgegas families and Bear Lake families.

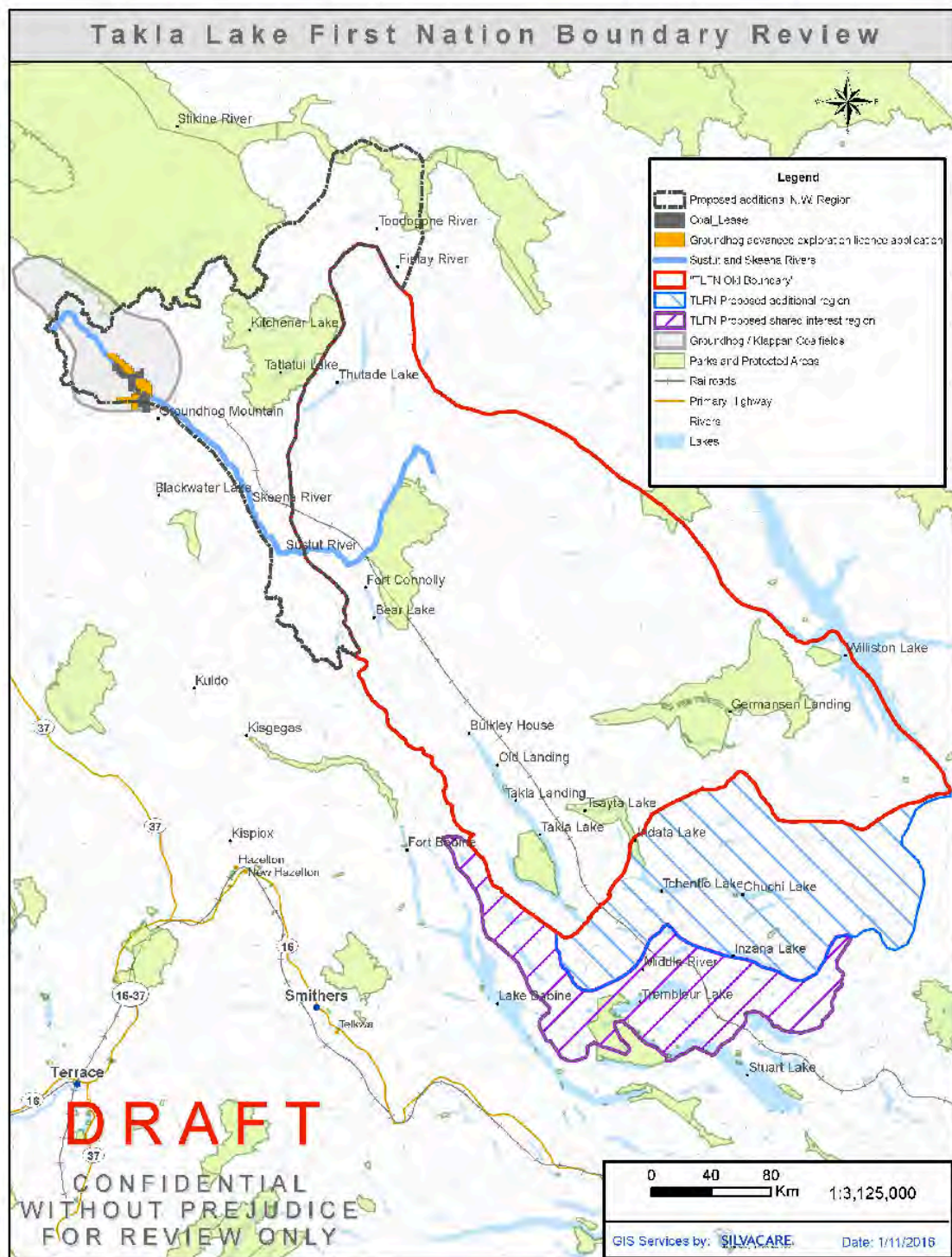
Genealogical research shows the extent of this intermarriage and confirms that by the turn of the century there existed a community of mixed families with Sekani, Gitx̱san, Tahḻtan and Carrier heritage. However, the Bear Lake chief was always recognized as Sekani by the fur traders, missionaries, and later Canada (Department of Indian Affairs), and that this was Sekani territory. Today these families accept their Gitx̱san heritage but identify as Bear Lakers who are now part of the Takla Lake First Nation. As Bear Lakers they have used this region as part of their traditional territory and see access to it based on family relationships.

Our research supports the conclusion that the Gitx̱san claim to the region north, east and immediately northwest of Bear Lake is the product of 20th-century interactions and that their claim is rooted in intermarriage with Bear Lake families. Despite these marriages, this territory is the traditional territory of Bear Lake Sekani people. Ethnographic and historical documentation supports this fact. Ironically Gitx̱san claims to rights in the upper Skeena and Sustut areas are based on their Bear Lake connections and not on Gitx̱san rights. For example, to support their fishing site claims on the Sustut and upper Skeena River they use Takla Bear Lake families' traditional use information. Since their official amalgamation with the Takla band in 1959, the Bear Lake Sekani have been part of the Takla Lake First Nation.

Given the evidence presented in this paper, in our opinion, Takla Lake First Nation territory includes the headwaters of the Upper Skeena River including to the head of Little Klappan River and Spatsizi River (headwaters of the Stikene). It includes all of Dutie River to the Skeena, and Motase Lake and Squingula River, including its tributaries. It includes the Upper Skeena River valley, from the Squingula River to its head, including the Groundhog region of the upper Skeena. The northern part of the territory includes Thutade, Tatlatui, and Kitchener lakes. It extends northward, down the Finlay River to below the Fishing Lakes, and turns westward, following the river valleys back to the headwaters of the Dutie and Sturdee Rivers. North of this region, the areas around Metsantan Lake and Caribou Hide should be considered shared territory.

Finally, we conclude that the Bear Lake Sekani exclusively used and/or occupied the northwest region of their territory, as represented in Map 8, at the time of contact and at the time of sovereignty. Therefore, the findings in this report support the inclusion of this region in the official Takla Lake First Nation territory map.

Map 8: Proposed additional lands in the north and northwest region of Takla Lake First Nation territory



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APPENDIX B

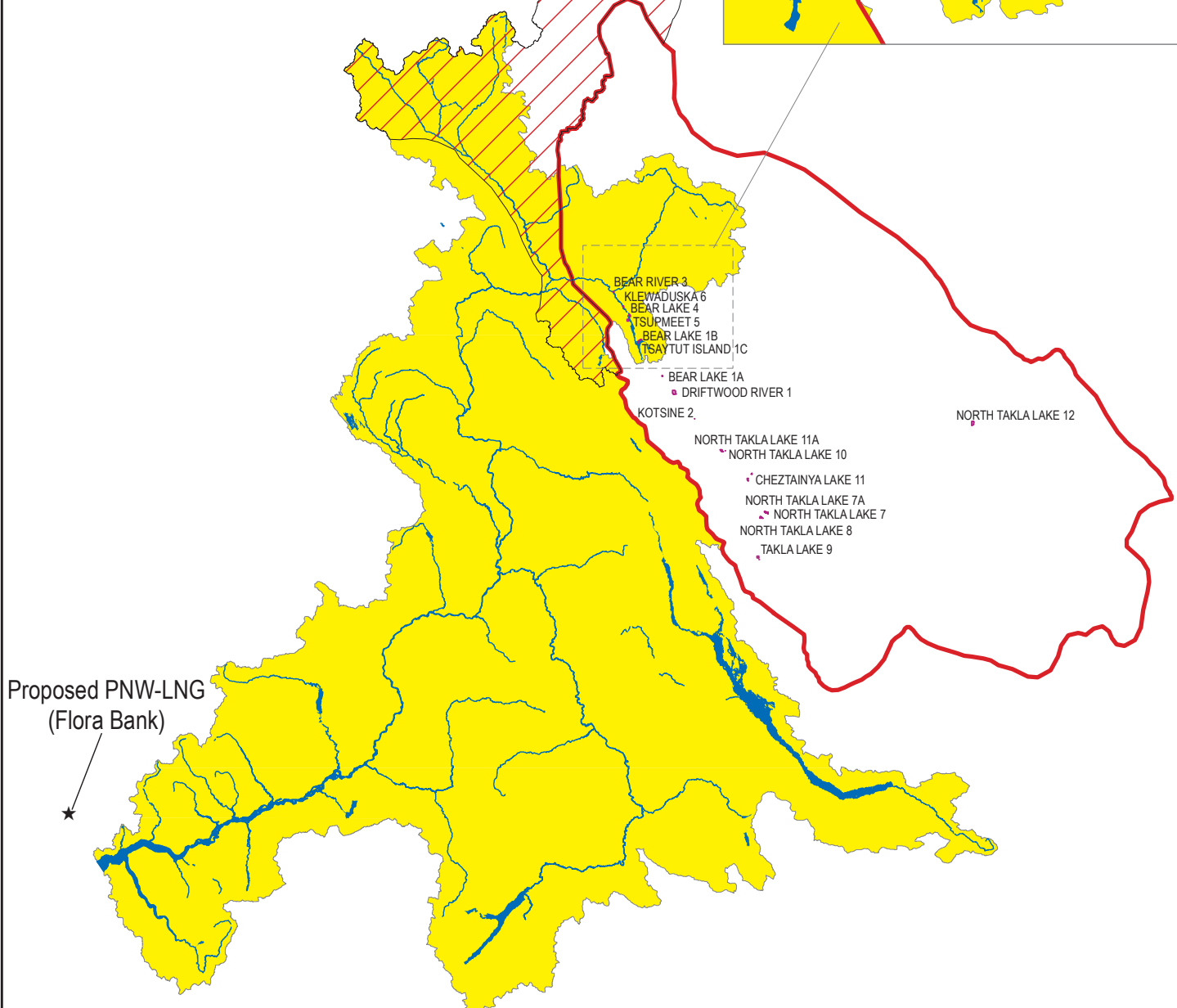
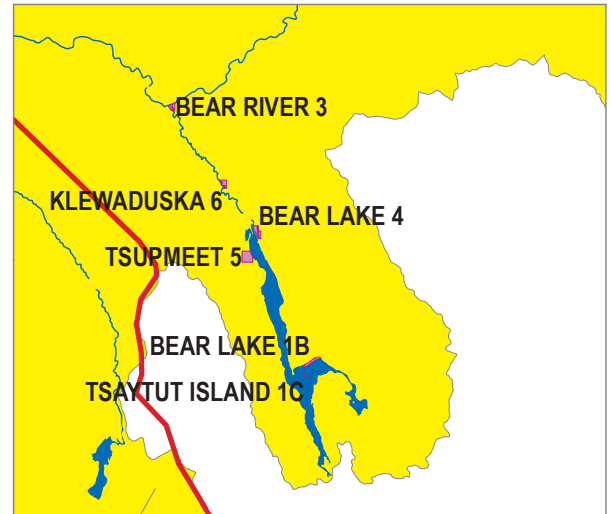
Flora Bank, Salmonids and Taka Lake First Nation Territory

FLORA BANK, SALMONIDS AND TAKLA LAKE FIRST NATION TERRITORY



Legend

- Takla Lake First Nation Territory
- Takla Lake FN Territory Under Review
- Takla Lake Reserves
- Salmon Migration Rivers\Streams
- Salmon Migration Lakes
- ★ Proposed PNW-LNG (Flora Bank)
- Skeena River Watershed



APPENDIX C

Takla fisheries use in the Bear and Sustut Watersheds

































