

Forest companies question Nisgaa treaty

(Vancouver Sun)

VANCOUVER (CP) - The B.C. forest industry says the Nisgaa treaty signed this week doesn't spell out how the industry will be compensated for the loss of land on which it now has cutting rights.

The deal could potentially lead to the expropriation of 10 to 12 per cent of all forest company tenures in the province said Ron MacDonald, president of the Council of Forest Industries.

The NDP government has estimated it will pay \$18 million to \$25 million in compensation to

forest companies that lose their access to timber because of the deal.

"Those figures appear to have been pulled out of thin air," MacDonald said.

"The industry has also received legal advice suggesting the deal may not be as final as politicians and negotiators have suggested it is," he said.

The forest industry, British Columbia's largest employer, supports the treaty process and will work closely with all parties to

find answers to its concerns, he said.

"Only at that point of time can we determine whether or not Nisgaa - as a template for future settlement - is something we can support," MacDonald said. "But we can't say it is, until these questions are addressed.

The treaty gives the Nisgaa 2,000 square kilometres of land, and transfers management for the forest resources from forest companies to the Nisgaa over five years.

In the first year after the treaty is ratified, the annual allowable cut on Nisgaa land is to drop to 165,000 cubic metres from the present 220,000 cubic metres, MacDonald said.

Of that, existing licence holders will get access to only 155,000 cubic metres, dropping down over the next four years until the Nisgaa control all the allowable harvest.

In addition, on the effective date of the treaty, a share of logging contracts on Nisgaa lands must go to Nisgaa contractors,

meaning everyone from truck drivers to road-construction crews could be replaced by Nisgaa-owned firms.

The president of the B.C. Truck Loggers Association said it is unfair that contractors will lose their rights immediately upon the implementation of the treaty.

We cannot endorse the Nisgaa treaty until we are satisfied that there is a compensation package in place that ensures that our members receive social justice, said Ken Dyson.