

Nisga'a treaty to cost \$311M: negotiator

VANCOUVER (CP) - Final cost for settling the first modern-day treaty in British Columbia history will total more than \$300 million, the province's chief negotiator said Wednesday.

Details of the 500-page agreement between the Nisga'a Tribal Council and the B.C. and federal governments were released at a news conference.

The details were disclosed two weeks ahead of the planned Aug. 4 initialing ceremony, because the provincial Liberal Opposition tabled portions of the agreement in the legislature Tuesday.

Provincial negotiator Jack Ebbels said the total cash cost of the treaty will be \$311 million.

But it doesn't include the estimated cost of the land given to the Nisga'a in the Nass Valley in northwestern B.C., estimated at \$109 million.

Also not included is the cost of *Īforgone revenues*,¹ which is compensation for companies who have resource interests in the designated treaty area. Those costs have not been calculated but will be split 50-50 between the B.C. and federal governments.

The agreement must be ratified by the three parties and Nisga'a president Joe Gosnell conceded there are no certainties with his people.

"There are dissenters within our nation," he said. "All we can do is provide our people with the information."

Some of the 5,000 Nisga'a see the deal as a sellout of their rights and a settlement for a fraction of their traditional territory.

The agreement-in-principle gives the Nisga'a almost 2,000 square kilometres of land in the Nass Valley. It's about one-third the size of Prince Edward Island but one-tenth as much as they originally claimed.

Gosnell said Nisga'a officials will take the vote to the four native communities in the Nass Valley to explain it in detail. He doesn't expect a vote for several months.

The cost of the treaty includes a

\$190-million cash transfer to the Nisga'a and about \$31 million toward fisheries conservation, stumpage fees and employment training.

Another \$30 million will come from the federal government to help pay the Nisga'a legal costs for the negotiations, which have been on-again, off-again for more than two decades.

The B.C. government also agrees to pay \$41 million to pave a gravel provincial highway between Terrace and the Nass Valley.

The Liberals, among other critics, argued the treaty deserves a full public discussion and a referendum, instead of the planned ratification votes by the B.C. legislature, House of Commons and the Nisga'a.

"The sooner the public has the information, the sooner they can start becoming involved and informed about this issue," Liberal Leader Gordon Campbell said Tuesday. "It's important for people to be included in this."

The treaty follows the basic outlines of the 1996 agreement-in-principle, which came after more than a century of effort by the Nisga'a to get Ottawa and Victoria to recognize its claims.

Premier Glen Clark has called the treaty the most crucial issue facing British Columbia.

It's the first of more than 50 treaties being negotiated with various B.C. First Nations, who claim land and rights over much of the province.

Clark said failure to ratify the Nisga'a treaty would deal the province a serious economic blow and send a message to aboriginals that British Columbians don't want to negotiate treaties.

The alternatives, he said, would be court action or even confrontation, such as the native roadblocks that periodically raise the emotional temperature.

The B.C. government plans to spend \$2.3 million on an advertising campaign convince British Columbians why they should support the treaty.