



Sacred 'Yos' is no place for housing site, chiefs say

Eric Pelkey, left, of the Sencot'en Alliance, and Tsartlip Chief Chris Tom stand on the docks across from Bamberton, the site of a 3,000 -home development proposal.

First Nations elders say development on Malahat Mountain is illegal because the land is protected by treaty rights.

Louise Dickson, Times Colonist
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Tsartlip Chief Chris Tom wants to stop development at Bamberton on Malahat Mountain across from Brentwood Bay. "We'll do whatever it takes to preserve our sacred property," said Tom. "It's got to be stopped."

First Nations people call the mountain Yos. According to Tsartlip elder Tom Sampson, Yos is a place where First Nations people go for spiritual advice, a place where people can go to look after themselves.

At a meeting in the Tsartlip Longhouse on Monday, Tom, Pauquachin Chief Ed Mitchell and Sampson voiced their concerns about Three Point Properties' plans for the Bamberton development. Tom said when he met with developers on Feb. 7, they talked about their plans to clean up the property.

Two days later, he read in the Times Colonist about a proposal for a 3,000-home development. "This has been overlooked and we have been overlooked and what we stand for, which is the preservation of sacred sites like Yos," said Tom.

Ross Tennant, Three Point Properties development manager, said there is no proposal for a 3,000-home development yet. Planners are trying to establish if there is fresh water and sewage facilities for a development of that size and how many houses will fit on the hill. "It's a planning number we've worked around," said Tennant. "And it's still subject to environmental review and rezoning.

"But I understand their concern that we were further down the planning road than we actually disclosed to them. First Nations have not always had had friendly relationship with developers. We're trying to build some trust and hopefully we can still have an effective dialogue with them."

Mitchell said his main concern is protecting the water in Tod Inlet, where water quality is improving. "You get that many houses in there and it's not going to take too much to damage the water down there. There are only one or two clam beds where we're able to dig," said Mitchell.

Septic tanks, overflowing with waste, can do a lot of damage very quickly, he said. "Three thousand homes is an accident waiting to happen."

The local chiefs were joined by Eric Pelkey of the Sencoten Alliance, a political/cultural organization that represents the Pauquachin, Semiahmoo, Tsartlip and Tsawout First Nations. The alliance is worried about the environmental impact to the mountain and its ecosystem, he said. "We want to be a major player in the cleanup project that's happening over there. We want information on what's happening and what's being done," said Pelkey, who called for an environmental assessment on the project.

Sampson said development on the mountain is illegal because the Douglas Treaty gives First Nations the right to the land. "The B.C. government has no right to issue permits or licences on areas protected by treaty," he said. Tom Christensen, minister for aboriginal relations and reconciliation, was not available for comment.