



THE PROGRESS

LAND CLAIMS

# This is our land

**Soowahlie seeking  
compensation for  
loss of CFB  
Chilliwack land  
and Cultus Lake  
parks**

By Robert Freeman  
Staff Writer

**Soowahlie I.R. 14 in 1864**

Established by the Colonial government, this 4000 acre reserve includes what later became known as the CFB lands, Cultus Lake Park Board, and a portion of Cultus Lake Provincial Park.

*Soowahlie Indian Band*

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Making Sense of The Land  
Question in Chilliwack

## *Land Claims In Chilliwack*

Since Colonial settlement, Sto:lo have been seeking a reasonable land and resource base for our cultural survival and economic sustainability.

Today, Canada has two distinct land claim processes operating in BC. Treaty involves Nation-to-Nation negotiations between Canada, BC and the Sto:lo Nation. "Treaty Negotiations," seek to resolve the Land Question and define the extent and nature of Aboriginal self-government including jurisdiction over lands and resources. Treaty provides an opportunity to negotiate sharing of land, resources and governing powers and authority between Canada, BC and Sto:lo Nation.

The second form of land claim (occurring simultaneously and separately from treaty negotiations) is often referred to as a "Specific Claim." The Soowahlie claim to the CFB lands in Chilliwack is such a claim. Specific claims are about returning reserve lands that have been taken away from Aboriginal people either without their consent or without fair compensation.

### **Soowahlie Claim to CFB**

Saying that Soowahlie has a "claim" to the CFB lands is perhaps misleading. It would be more accurate to say that Canada and BC unlawfully reduced or expropriated land from the original Soowahlie reserve. We are going to BC Supreme Court to resolve our specific claim for our Colonial Reserve.

### **Please Note:**

We are not seeking to dislodge individual property owners within the bounds of the pre-confederation Soowahlie reserve.

### **History behind the CFB Claim:**

The first Indian Reserves on the BC mainland were created during the 1858 Fraser River gold rush. At the time, the Colonial government assured Sto:lo people that lands suitable to sustaining their traditional way of life, as well as supporting Sto:lo making the transition to a western agricultural economy, would be protected.

In 1863 Governor Douglas made it clear that Indian reserves needed to be large enough to enable individual Sto:lo villages to be economically self-sufficient. At a large outdoor public gathering, Douglas declared that Sto:lo people had the right to determine the size and extent of their own reserves.

In May 1864 Sgt. William McColl arrived in Chilliwack and, with the Soowahlie leaders,

marked off a 4000-acre reserve including what later became known as the CFB lands. That same month, Sto:lo leaders, informed the government that they were happy with the new reserves. The new governor made a commitment to protect Sto:lo reserve lands.

In 1867, in response to settler pressure, the government broke its promise and unilaterally reduced the Soowahlie reserve by 83%. Other Sto:lo communities faced similar improper reductions. Soowahlie has been fighting to have its land returned ever since. The return of the CFB land would set the foundation for rebuilding a strong self-sufficient Aboriginal community as originally envisioned by the Soowahlie and Colonial leaders nearly 150 years ago.

The Soowahlie claim to the CFB lands do not prejudice the broader Sto:lo efforts to secure treaty guarantees to certain other land and resources in the Fraser Valley. Indeed, the two issues are separate. One is about large political issues; the other (the CFB case) is about basic justice.

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