Good relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in the Fraser Basin are critical to the overall sustainability of the region. Constructive relationships work to enhance culture, build and sustain a healthy community and environment, and create a foundation of trust and dialogue upon which sustainability can be advanced. It is in everyone’s interest to resolve issues of Aboriginal title and rights. The Fraser Basin Council acknowledges the importance of title and rights in the 11th principle of its Charter for Sustainability—“We recognize that aboriginal nations within the Fraser Basin assert aboriginal rights and title. These rights and title now being defined must be acknowledged and reconciled in a just and fair manner.”

Court decisions have defined some aspects of Aboriginal rights and have also described the duty of the Crown to undertake consultations and to accommodate Aboriginal rights. There have also been encouraging advances in treaty negotiations as well as other formal and informal methods of establishing self-determination, rights and title.

- In 2001, the population of Aboriginal origin in the Fraser Basin was 115,000 and the population of Aboriginal identity was 88,000 (18% increase since 1996).
- Average life expectancy of Status Indians in the Fraser Basin was 72.1 years in 2001, compared with 78.5 years for non-Aboriginals in the Basin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Expectancy</th>
<th>FAIR/MIXED RESULTS</th>
<th>On average, life expectancy is less for the Aboriginal than the non-Aboriginal population in the Fraser Basin (by 6.4 years), but the gap is narrowing.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>The Next Generation</td>
<td>MIXED RESULTS/POOR</td>
<td>Since 2000 an increasing proportion of children in care are Aboriginal. Highest education levels attained are, on average, lower than in the non-Aboriginal population, but improving.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Progress in Treaty and Non-Treaty Measures, Protocols and Agreements</td>
<td>GETTING BETTER</td>
<td>Since 2002 significant progress has been made in improving relations and clarifying, respecting and accommodating title and rights.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Life Expectancy and Socio-Economic Conditions (2001)²³⁴

Life expectancy is a key indicator of socio-economic conditions of people and is strongly related to relative poverty, income inequality, and sustainability. Average life expectancy for Status Indians living in the Fraser Basin in 2001 was 72.1 years, compared to 78.5 years for other Basin residents. The largest difference (more than 11 years) was in the Greater Vancouver-Sea to Sky region. The BC Provincial Health Officer's 2001 Annual Report², the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's Community Well-Being Index³, and a recent study by the Centre for Native Policy and Research⁴ show that Aboriginal people in the Fraser Basin face poorer overall socio-economic conditions than non-Aboriginal people, such as higher unemployment rates and lower income rates and educational attainment. However, the gap is narrowing with time.

Children and Youth-The Next Generation (2000-2006)⁵⁶

In 2001 over half of all Aboriginal people in Canada were under the age of 25. While children and youth inspire hope, there is significant concern for young Aboriginal people in BC. Educational attainment data for 2001 show that there is a lower proportion of Aboriginal people (8.4%) with a university education, compared with non-Aboriginal people (21.7%). However, there are similar proportions of both populations at the levels of high school graduation, college and trades. Aboriginal children make up approximately 9% of all the children up to
age 18 in BC, but 40% of all children under the care or guardianship of the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development. Although the total number of children in care in BC has been decreasing over time, the proportion of Aboriginal children in care has risen from 36% to 49% between 2000/01-2005/06.

Participation in Protocols, Agreements and Informal Arrangements in BC (2006) 7,8

There are many approaches underway to advance sustainability in Aboriginal communities and to improve Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations. In the spring of 2006, the provincial government enacted the New Relationship Trust Act, which provides funds for First Nations in BC to acquire tools, training, and skills to better participate in land and resource management planning, and develop social, economic and cultural programs for their communities. The independent Board of Directors is appointed by the First Nations Summit, Union of BC Indian Chiefs, BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Leadership Council and Government of BC. The government's commitment to The New Relationship is a fresh approach to building and strengthening relationships and working towards self-governance.

The Union of BC Municipalities documented 24 different agreements between First Nations and local governments in BC, ranging from cooperation and communication agreements to resource management and capacity development partnership agreements. The First Nations Summit and the Union of BC Municipalities held four provincial-wide Community-to-Community Forums, and more than 135 regional forums in the past five years with an aim to increase dialogue, improve understanding and support opportunities for partnership and collaboration.

The BC Treaty Commission facilitates treaty negotiations among the federal and provincial governments and BC First Nations through a six-stage process, leading to the signing of a final agreement. Of the 98 First Nation Bands in the Fraser Basin, 44 are participating in the Treaty Commission process. 38 Bands are represented at the 11 treaty tables that have reached Stage 4 in the BCTC process. Of the seven Bands now at Stage 5 (Negotiation to Finalize a Treaty), four are within the Fraser Basin-Yekooche Nation, Yale First Nation, Tsawwassen First Nation and Lheidli T’enneh Band, which has now initialed a final agreement. The next stage is consultation and ratification. Negotiations have been completed with the Tsawwassen First Nation.

Aboriginal Language Characteristics (2001) 10

Language is often inseparable from culture. It is integral to traditional Aboriginal perspectives and value systems, and ultimately, to Aboriginal identity. In 2001, Aboriginal language retention was highest in the Cariboo-Chilcotin and Upper Fraser regions of the Fraser Basin. In both regions, the proportion of the Aboriginal population who spoke traditional languages at home and who had knowledge of Aboriginal languages was higher than the provincial average.

As established through the courts and government policy, the Aboriginal harvest of salmon for food, social and ceremonial purposes is accorded highest priority after conservation concerns, while recreational and commercial fisheries follow in priority. In 2005 Aboriginal fishers in the Fraser River harvested nearly 700,000 sockeye, consistent with the numbers harvested over the past several years. Fraser Aboriginal catch data include fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes, as well as Pilot Sales, which provide an economic opportunity for some First Nations. The commercial harvest occurs mainly in the marine regions and usually accounts for the majority of sockeye salmon taken. Lower salmon runs in recent years, however, have led to
conservation concerns and lower commercial allocations.
Aboriginal Salmon Harvest (2001-2005) 11

The Fraser River is home to one of the world's largest runs of sockeye salmon, a key element of the region's sustainability. Salmon are a principal mechanism for transporting nutrients from marine to freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems. Salmon are also extremely important to the economy, culture and history of First Nations who have depended on this resource for thousands of years. As established through the courts and government policy, the Aboriginal harvest of salmon for food, social and ceremonial purposes is accorded highest priority after conservation concerns, while recreational and commercial fisheries follow in priority. In 2005 Aboriginal fishers in the Fraser River harvested nearly 700,000 sockeye, consistent with the numbers harvested over the past several years. Fraser Aboriginal catch data include fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes, as well as Pilot Sales, which provide an economic opportunity for some First Nations. The commercial harvest occurs mainly in the marine regions and usually accounts for the majority of sockeye salmon taken. Lower salmon runs in recent years, however, have led to conservation concerns and lower commercial allocations.

The On- and Off-Reserve Population of Aboriginal Identity (1996-2001) 12, 1

The geographic distribution of Aboriginal people is changing rapidly. Today, more than half of all Aboriginal people in Canada and more than three-quarters in the Fraser Basin live off-reserve. This rapid transition to urban areas impacts on such things as the delivery of services to Aboriginal people no longer living on reserve and a sense of cultural separation. From 1996-2001, the Fraser Basin's off-reserve population of Aboriginal identity increased nearly 20%, from 55,000 to 68,000, while the on-reserve population increased approximately 15% from 16,000 to 19,000. 2 Three-quarters of the Basin's Aboriginal population lived off-reserve in 1996 and
2001; nearly half of all those off-reserve lived in the Vancouver region. The Thompson Region had the largest on-reserve Aboriginal population in 2001, more than two-thirds of the population.

![Bar chart showing on- and off-reserve population of Aboriginal Identity in the Fraser Basin (1996-2001)](http://www.shim.bc.ca/fbc/ss3/Aboriginal.html)

Partners in park management

"The strength of our partnership will help ensure that Say Nuth Khaw Yum is protected and conserved for the benefit of all peoples." -Chief Leah George-Wilson

Today there are a growing number of innovative partnerships between the province and First Nations governments. Since 1998, the Tsleil-Waututh Nation (TWN) and the Government of BC have co-managed Say Nuth Khaw Yum Heritage Park / Indian Arm Provincial Park. The Park is located in the core of TWN traditional territory and on the beautiful waters of Indian Arm, a popular area for boaters, kayakers, campers and hikers.

In September 2006, the TWN completed phase one of the park management planning process by presenting BC Parks with a bioregional inventory atlas documenting all current biophysical, cultural and recreational aspects of the area. This is the first time that a bioregional inventory atlas has been developed for a provincial park. The TWN and BC Parks are committed as partners "to protect the wilderness environment and heritage values of the park and to maintain and make use of the
INSPRIED ACTION

What is being done?

➤ In 2005 and 2006, the BC government supported social and economic opportunities by signing Forest and Range agreements with 25 different First Nations in BC, involving over 4,000,000 m³ of timber: [www.for.gov.bc.ca/haa/FN_Agreements.htm](http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/haa/FN_Agreements.htm).

➤ The First Nations Mountain Pine Beetle Working Group has distributed $1.2 million since April 2006 to various First Nations communities to assess the economic and cultural impacts of the Mountain Pine Beetle: [www.fnmpb.ca](http://www.fnmpb.ca).

➤ In March 2006, the provincial government committed $1 million to preserving Aboriginal languages in BC. The funds will be distributed to 36 different Aboriginal communities through the First Peoples' Heritage, Language, and Culture Council: [www.fpcf.ca](http://www.fpcf.ca).

➤ If or when ratified, the current agreements with the Lheidli T'enneh Band and Tsawwassen First Nation will provide an economic opportunity for these First Nations through the commercial harvest of Fraser River salmon after considerations for conservation and fish health concerns: [www.bctreaty.net](http://www.bctreaty.net).

➤ The Greater Vancouver Regional District recently created an Aboriginal Relations Committee, responsible for providing advice to the GVRD. The GVRD endorsed a comprehensive First Nations Strategy to improve overall communication and relationships with First Nations: [www.gvrd.bc.ca/board/aboriginal.htm](http://www.gvrd.bc.ca/board/aboriginal.htm).

What else can be done?

➤ Invite members of local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and governments to participate in local meetings, events, projects and organizations.

➤ Learn more about the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in your area, and introduce yourself to local organizations and governments. Informal meetings and discussions work directly to build and strengthen relationships and trust.

➤ Explore ways that you, your organization, government, or business can work with local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and organizations, such as through formal and informal agreements, protocols and Memorandums of Understanding.
Access local government resources prepared by the Union of BC Municipalities, such as "Building Relations with First Nations: A Handbook for Local Governments." See www.civicnet.bc.ca, and select Featured Policy Topics/First Nations Relations.

**Lheidli T'enneh initials Final Agreement in treaty process**
October, 2006 marked a milestone in the BC Treaty Commission process when a Final Agreement was initialled by the Lheidli T'enneh Band, the federal government and the provincial government. For the Lheidli T'enneh, the next step is to hold a ratification vote in that community. The Final Agreement covers issues of self-government, rights to resources, such as wildlife, fish, timber and subsurface minerals, a fee simple transfer of 4,330 hectares of land (including 677 hectares of former reserve land) to the Lheidli T'enneh, and provisions for a capital transfer and payment of shared resource revenues.

Three other First Nations in the Fraser Basin are in stage five of treaty negotiation: Yekooche Nation, Yale First Nation and Tsawwassen First Nation.

![Taking a moment to celebrate - Premier Gordon Campbell, Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Jim Prentice and Chief Dominic Frederick.](image)

**REFERENCES**


FOOTNOTE:
i. Population estimates for Aboriginal origin and identity are from the population census. The growth in population of Aboriginal identity in the Fraser Basin appears to be larger than would be expected from natural increase and migration. Upon review by Statistics Canada and BC Statistics, the largest part of the growth was in the Métis, particularly among older people, and may be due to an increased propensity to identify as Aboriginal.