



**113**

# Contents

<b>1</b>	After one hundred and thirteen years...
<b>5</b>	Day One
<b>13</b>	Pride of Ownership
<b>19</b>	People of the Nass River
<b>27</b>	Gifts of the Forest
<b>35</b>	The Common Good
<b>43</b>	The Road to Unity
<b>47</b>	A Culture Renewed
<b>53</b>	One Hope, One Nation, One Year
<b>54</b>	Selected Timeline

# After one hundred and thirteen years...

The Nisga'a people first petitioned government to settle their "Land Question" in 1887.

In 1998, the governments of Canada, British Columbia, and the Nisga'a Nation signed the Nisga'a Final Agreement, the first treaty in British Columbia in more than a century. The treaty recognises Nisga'a Lands and contains self-government provisions. On May 11, 2000, the treaty went into effect, marking the end of a 113-year quest — and the beginning of an exciting new era of hope, prosperity, and goodwill.

This annual report reviews the implementation of the first year of the treaty, from its Effective Date until March 31, 2001.

# ...three governments made history together

## **The Nisga'a Final Agreement**

The Nass River Valley in Northwest British Columbia is a land of towering mountains, glacier-fed lakes, ancient forests, and rugged lava beds. The valley has sustained the Nisga'a people for millennia. Resources from the river and its plentiful watershed allowed the Nisga'a to develop one of the most sophisticated precolonial cultures in North America.

In the late 1800s, when much of Nisga'a traditional territory was declared Crown land, the Nisga'a people began petitioning government to recognise their connection to this territory. In 1973, the Supreme Court of Canada delivered its decision in the Calder case, which was brought to trial by Nisga'a Chief Frank Calder, president of the Nisga'a Tribal Council. Formal negotiations began between the Nisga'a Tribal Council and Canada in 1976. In 1990, the government of British Columbia joined the negotiations to establish a tripartite process. On August 4, 1998, a signing ceremony at Gitlakdamix signalled the completion of a quarter century of negotiations.

After ratification by the Nisga'a Nation, British Columbia, and Canada, the Indian Act ceased to apply to the Nisga'a people on midnight, May 10, 2000 (except for the purpose of Indian registration). The following day, the Effective Date of the treaty, was a historic and triumphant one for the Nisga'a people. It marked the end of a 113-year journey — and the first steps in a new direction.

Today, the Nisga'a Nation includes approximately 5,500 people, with the majority residing in four communities on the Nass River: Gingolx

"It's like night turning into day. It is dawn in the Nisga'a Nation."

— Dr. Joseph Gosnell, OC, OBC, LLD (Hon.),  
President, Nisga'a Lisims Government

(Kincolith), Laxgalts'sap (Greenville), Gitwinksihlkw (Canyon City), and Gitlaktamix (New Aiyansh). A significant proportion of Nisga'a people also live in the urban centres of Terrace, Prince Rupert, and Vancouver, British Columbia. Under the treaty, the Nisga'a collectively own approximately 2,000 square kilometres of land in the Nass Valley. For the first time in modern history, through the self-government provisions of the treaty, the Nisga'a have the legal authority to conduct their own affairs.

The treaty benefits not only the Nisga'a people, but all British Columbians and Canadians. It is already opening the door for joint economic initiatives in the development of the Nisga'a Nation's natural resources, and it lays to rest the uncertainty regarding land ownership. Guided by their culture and the wisdom of their elders, the Nisga'a are now entrusted with the care and protection of their territory and its inhabitants.

Because three governments share responsibility for the implementation of the Nisga'a Final Agreement, an Implementation Committee was formed to provide a forum for sharing information and ideas. The committee works to ensure that the treaty responsibilities are fulfilled in a timely manner, and to resolve issues that may arise. Canada, British Columbia, and the Nisga'a Nation report that the Implementation Committee has made measurable progress as the three parties work together in a spirit of co-operation.

The Nisga'a Final Agreement has served as an example for First Nations throughout Canada and the world. It demonstrates that governments and First Nations can, in goodwill, forge a more secure future for everyone.

