

THE IMPACTS OF LOSS OF STATUS UNDER THE INDIAN ACT

On December 31, 2010 there were 6,892 registered members with Gitanmaax, Glen Vowell, Kispiox, Hagwilget, Gitsegukla and Gitwangak Bands. These 6 communities are located in the Gitxsan territories and **all** (on reserve and off-reserve members) will be impacted by the Gitxsan treaty negotiations. The Gitxsan Treaty Society is negotiating their Gitxsan Alternative Governance Model (GAGM) which, if approved by Gitxsan voters will see the loss of rights as well as programs and services made available under the Indian Act.

The end of the Indian Act will have tremendous impact on you and your communities. In this article we will look at the impacts of loss of Indian status.

If you are a status Indian under the Indian Act you have a special relationship with the Crown (mainly the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA)). DIA has a fiduciary (trust) relationship with you, and that relationship results in the delivery of programs and services to you and your communities. The federal government provides programs for education, health, housing, social development and capital projects. If the Indian Act no longer applies to our communities you can no longer turn to Indian Affairs and other federal departments for the minimal – safety net programs and services.

The Gitxsan Treaty Society advertises to the world that they want the Gitxsan to be ordinary Canadians. GTS has not explained what benefits you will receive if what they propose is successful. It is important that you have information on all impacts.

As an ordinary citizen of Canada you will:

1. No longer live in Gitxsan communities but in municipalities. There will be no land set aside for future generations. Living in municipalities you will be paying property taxes (to pay for garbage collection, sewer, water, road maintenance, snow removal) if you currently have "ownership" of your home. (A home owner in the Village of Hazelton can pay in the area of \$2,600.00 for property taxes).
2. If you rent your home, it is likely that your land lord will need to increase your rent to cover property taxes.
3. Be required to pay in to a medical plan to ensure you have medical coverage and also pay up front for prescriptive drugs, medical, dental and vision care.
4. Pay for textbooks, school supplies and extra fees for your children from kindergarten to grade 12.

5. Pay taxes on all goods and services purchased or delivered on reserve.
6. No longer receive assistance for adult and post secondary education, including costs for tuition and living expenses.
7. Services and programs designed to meet the needs of individual Gitksan communities now available from Band administrations will no longer be available. You will need to go to the provincial government offices if you require assistance.
8. If you are employed on reserve you will pay income tax. Some reserve based employers already underpay staff with the excuse that income tax is not payable on reserve.
9. It is uncertain what will happen to the band members who are registered, status Indians but do not belong to a House group.
10. No longer have a democratic right (under the Indian Act) to vote to select your community Chief Councilor and Councilors.

It is true that our on reserve programs and services are not enough however what is received; helps our members who need support. The Gitksan Treaty Society says you will never stop being Gitksan. It is true, if you are born Gitksan you will always be Gitksan, however you will no longer be a status Indian under the Indian Act. Has the Gitksan Treaty Society provided you with information on how your day to day life and circumstances will change? They have not. Instead the only communication you receive from the GTS is propaganda against the Indian Act. **It is worth noting that across Canada over the years we have seen a number of court cases where individuals have fought to gain Indian status. The Gitksan Treaty Society however wants you to give up your status.** Many of those pushing for the end to the Indian Act have enjoyed the rights and benefits of being a status Indian.

On May 12, 2011 GJ Sebastian of the Gitksan Treaty Society invited you to provide information to your Head Chief to have access to employment and become shareholders in a Trust and Development Corporation. Is the GTS looking to buy your support? Will it be a requirement for you to pay in to the feast or support your Chief in order to gain employment, or receive benefits after a treaty?

It is time to ask the GTS exactly what life will be like for you and your children. Stand up for your rights and demand information from your Chiefs and the Gitksan Treaty Society. Do not depend on others to speak up. Each and every voice or question raised will have an impact.