

Yale treaty sparks protest over fishing sites: The tribal council believes the Sto: lo people have a claim to the Yale treaty lands

Glenda Luymes, The Province

The initialling of the historic Yale treaty Friday morning is likely to be greeted by angry protest.

The treaty has sparked controversy because **it will give the 145-member Yale First Nation full control of valuable fishing sites in the lower Fraser Canyon** -- sites the Sto: lo people have fished for generations.

"Governments can lay out any promises they want to in a treaty with the Yale band, but we will not allow the treaty to infringe on our aboriginal title and rights in the Fraser Canyon, including our rights to fish there and operate our dry racks," Sto: lo tribal council president Grand Chief Clarence Pennier said Wednesday.

Sto: lo organizers have been out in their communities, encouraging people to attend the initialling ceremony scheduled for 10 a.m. at Camp Squeah, which is about 12 kilometres north of Hope on Hwy. 1.

A large number of protesters are expected to make their views known -- with the help of signs and drums.

"We don't want all the government ministers and their entourages leaving Squeah thinking that this is all tied up, that this brings some kind of closure to aboriginal interests in the area. We want them driving away saying 'Oops,'" said council policy adviser Ernie Crey.

Upper Fraser Valley RCMP Cpl. Lea-Anne Dunlop could not say whether police would be at the signing, noting only that they could be called upon in a "keep-the-peace capacity."

The tribal council, which represents eight major bands and about 3,000 members, believes the Sto: lo have a strong claim to the fishing sites that will become part of the Yale treaty lands.

They also question the Yale band's status in signing a treaty, arguing the Yale are part of the larger Sto: lo First Nation.

"The Yale band council can scrap any notion that our elders and families will be lining up to get a pass to exercise our rights to fish, visit our ancient villages and graves and protect our cultural heritage in the Fraser Canyon," said Pennier. "In the wake of the Yale treaty will come years of conflict in the eastern Fraser Valley."

The Sto: lo are also mounting a legal challenge to the initialled treaty, which will need to pass votes by both the Yale First Nation and the government.

gluymes@theprovince.com