

## MEDIA CONTACT:

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# PRESS RELEASE

Release Date: **November 30, 2023**

**Esk'etemc announces an important ratification vote on a Specific Claim settlement scheduled for March 2, 2024.**

**Members of the Esk'etemc are encouraged to reconnect and update their contact details for this important vote.**

Esk'etemc (People of Alkali Lake, B.C.) announces a forthcoming ratification vote for a Specific Claim that was filed with the Federal Specific Claims Commission in 2003 regarding the alienation of water rights for Indian Reserve (IR) #6, aka Tsqewt or Wycotts Flats. In February 2023, the Government of Canada presented a Settlement offer for this claim in the amount of \$147,118,969.

When Tsqewt was surveyed in 1881 by the Indian Reserve Commission, water rights to Vert Lake were assigned to the Esk'etemc for agricultural purposes. Historic documents and Knowledge Keepers' oral evidence prove that Indian Agents and government officials prevented the Esk'etemc from building irrigation structures and failed to fulfill the government's promise to secure water rights for Esk'etemc. Instead, these water rights were given to settler parties.

The Specific Claims Commission addresses claims against the Government concerning broken promises and failures to fulfill obligations to a First Nation. This settlement offer is not part of a Comprehensive Claim and does NOT address Title and Rights. The Tsqewt claim only addresses the government's broken promise to provide water to irrigate the reserve which would have provided food security and benefited the Esk'etemc.

*"Tsqewt has been important to the Esk'etemc since time immemorial and will continue to be important for the future of the Esk'etemcúlucw. Stories are shared by our ancestors and Elders today about how the lands provided more than food and agriculture for our people."*

– Esk'etemc Kukpi7 Fred Robbins.

Prior to releasing the settlement, Canada requires (25% plus 1) of eligible Esk'etemc voters to vote in favour of the offer and, of the votes cast, at least a majority vote in favour of the Settlement Agreement. The ratification vote to accept the Specific Claim Settlement Offer is scheduled for March 2, 2024.

*See next....*

## There are three options for voting on March 2, 2024:

1. In-person at the Esk'etemc Gymnasium
  - a. Voting polls are open between 9:00 AM - 8:00 PM only.
2. Mail-in ballot
  - a. A mail-in ballot will be sent to each registered voter that Esk'etemc has an address for.
3. Online voting.
  - a. Esk'etemc voters must pre-register with the Ratification Officer Ron Laufer to vote online. This information will be available in the mail-out packages and online in January 2024.

*"According to our Esk'etemc ancestors: land, resources, and culture are part of our backbone and our foundation. We strive to live by our cultural practices and traditional values. We respect all members' opinions and decisions. Our role is to help the people make an informed decision."*

– Esk'etemc Councillor Kerry Chelsea

The Esk'etemc Specific Claims Team is assisting Esk'etemc voters by providing information sessions about the Claim, the Settlement offer and the Ratification voting process by holding sessions at the following dates and locations in 2024:

1. January 13th - 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM at Esk'etemc Gymnasium
2. January 13th - 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM at St. Andrews United Church - Mckinnon Hall in Williams Lake
3. January 20th – 10:00 to 2:00 PM at Kamloops Coast Hotel and Conference Centre  
This will be a Hybrid session, and members can attend virtually or in person.
4. February 24th - 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM at The Gathering Place, University of Fraser Valley, Chilliwack  
This will be a Hybrid session, and members can attend virtually or in person.

Information packages will be mailed to all eligible Esk'etemc members who have submitted contact information to the Specific Claims Office or the Ratification Officer, Ron Laufer. These packages will include information about the voting process and information about the Specific Claim. If Esk'etemc members want to verify their details are correct or to add an eligible member, please contact the Esk'etemc Specific Claims Office BEFORE January 4, 2024, in order to receive an information package by mail.

### Contacts:

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### Esk'etemc Specific Claims Office:

Phone: 250-440-5611 extension 227 or 221  
Email: Specificclaimsesketemc@gmail.com  
Website: Seculecwem.ca

**Ratification Officer:** Ron Laufer Email: ronlauferelections@gmail.com