



PEACE RIVER REGIONAL DISTRICT



First Nations Backgrounder

Peace River region, Treaty 8

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diverse. vast. abundant.

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Please note that the language and opinions expressed through citations in this report does not necessarily reflect those of the Peace River Regional District and its members. The information provided in this report is for general reference only, and is not intended to supersede the traditional oral histories or otherwise expressed experiences or information from the signatories of Treaty 8.

Summary

Treaty 8 is the largest encompassing land mass at 840,000 square kilometres and includes lands in northeastern British Columbia, northern Alberta, northwestern Saskatchewan and southern portions of the Northwest Territories.

Currently, Treaty 8 includes 39 First Nations communities: 23 Alberta First Nations, 3 Saskatchewan First Nations, 6 Northwestern Territories First Nations and 8 British Columbia First Nations.¹

Treaties with Indigenous peoples

Treaties are agreements made between the Government of Canada, Indigenous groups and often provinces and territories that define ongoing rights and obligations on all sides.

These agreements set out continuing treaty rights and benefits for each group. Treaty rights and Aboriginal rights, commonly referred to as Indigenous rights, are recognized and affirmed in [section 35](#) of the Constitution Act, 1982 and are also a key part of the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) which the Government of Canada has committed to adopt.

Treaties with Indigenous peoples include both:

- historic treaties with First Nations
- modern treaties, also called comprehensive land claim agreements with Indigenous groups

(Government of Canada, 2023)

Historic treaties

Starting in 1701, the British Crown entered into treaties with Indigenous groups in the British colonies of North America, which would later become parts of Canada. The Crown is the legal name for the British and later Canadian federal, provincial and territorial governments.

Over the next two hundred years, the Crown signed treaties that defined the respective rights of Indigenous peoples and European newcomers to use the North American lands that Indigenous peoples traditionally occupied. The historic treaties signed after 1763 provided large areas of land, occupied by First Nations, to the Crown, transferring their Indigenous title to the Crown in exchange for reserve lands and other benefits.

¹ (Treaty 8 Tribal Association, 2023)

The Government of Canada recognizes [70 historic treaties](#) in Canada signed between 1701 and 1923. Treaty 8 is part of [The Numbered Treaties \(1871-1921\)](#).

A total of 11 Numbered Treaties were negotiated during this period culminating with Treaty 11 in 1921. Furthermore, in the eyes of the Federal Government, the act of signing treaty brought Aboriginal people of the Northwest under the jurisdiction of the Dominion of Canada and its laws.

The early Numbered Treaties - Treaties 1 through 7 - became the vehicle by which the Department of Indian Affairs implemented existing and future assimilation policies in the Northwest while the latter treaties allowed for the opening of the North and access to valuable natural resources.

(Government of Canada, 2023)

Treaty 8 History, Peace River region

When Treaty 8 was negotiated in 1899, the federal government found Indians of two major language groups residing in the treaty area. They were Crees and Athapaskans (or Dené), including Chipewyan, Beavers, Slaveys, Dogribs and Yellowknives. Cree-speaking people lived in various locations throughout what is now northern Alberta. Chipewyans inhabited the eastern section of the treaty area, mainly in the vicinity of Lake Athabasca. Beaver Indians occupied the western part of the treaty area in what is now British Columbia and along the Peace River in Alberta. Slaveys, Dogribs and Yellowknives lived in the northern parts.

With prospectors and settlers migrating to Lake Athabasca, Great Slave Lake, and parts of the Peace River region during the Klondike gold rush of 1897-98, the federal government prepared to extend the Indian treaty system to the unceded area north of Treaty Six and south of Great Slave Lake.

The written terms and conditions of Treaty 8 were finalized during the negotiations at Lesser Slave Lake on June 21, 1899. The treaty commissioners decided to make adhesions at all of the other trading posts rather than negotiate several treaties.

The commissioners expected that once the Lesser Slave Lake Indians signed treaty there would be less difficulty in obtaining adhesions of the others. Therefore, there is little documentation available regarding the nine meetings in 1899, the four meetings in 1900 that occurred from Fort St. John to Fond du Lac and from Fort Resolution to Wabasca, and the meetings at Fort Nelson in 1910. In 1914, the Saulteaux and Hudson's Hope Bands were merely admitted to treaty. Moreover, several Indians were admitted to treaty in the isolated communities during the period following treaty negotiations.

(Madill, 1986)

Treaty 8 First Nations Members, British Columbia²

- [Blueberry River](#)
 - Blueberry River First Nations are a signatory to Treaty No. 8, 1899 (Blueberry River's ancestors officially signed on in 1900). Signatories to Treaty 8 (therefore, are not participating in the modern B.C. treaty process).
- [Doig River](#)
 - Doig River First Nation is signatory to Treaty No. 8 signed in 1899 and is in discussions with B.C. on land and resource issues outside the B.C. treaty process.
- [Fort Nelson](#)
 - Fort Nelson First Nation is a signatory to Treaty No. 8 signed in 1899 and is in discussions with B.C. on land and resource issues outside the B.C. treaty process.
- [Halfway River](#)
 - Halfway River First Nation is a signatory to Treaty No. 8 signed in 1899 and are in discussions with B.C. on land and resource issues outside the B.C. treaty process.
- [McLeod Lake](#)
 - Land issues have been settled through the McLeod Lake Indian Band Treaty No. 8 Adhesion and Settlement Agreement Act, 2000.
- [Prophet River](#)
 - Prophet River First Nation is signatory to Treaty No. 8 signed in 1899 and is in discussions with B.C. on land and resource issues outside the B.C. treaty process. Not participating in the B.C. treaty process.
- [Saulteau](#)
 - Saulteau First Nations are a signatory to Treaty No. 8 signed in 1899 and are in discussions with B.C. on land and resource issues outside the B.C. treaty process.
- [West Moberly](#)
 - West Moberly First Nations are a signatory to Treaty No. 8 signed in 1899 and are in discussions with B.C. on land and resource issues outside the B.C. treaty process.

*McLeod Lake Indian Band, which did not originally adhere to Treaty 8, signed onto the treaty in 2000.

*Kwadacha Nation and Tsay Key Dene Band are acknowledged by the PRRD as First Nations within the District, but are currently not signed onto Treaty 8.

² Government of British Columbia. (2023, March 31). First Nations A-Z Listing. Retrieved from gov.bc.ca: 2023

The ethno-linguistic grouping within the eight First Nations includes Sicannie (Sikanni), Slavey, Beaver (Dane-zaa), Cree (Nehiyaw) and Sauteau (Anishinabe)³.

Treaty 8 First Nations Members, Alberta⁴

- Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation
- Beaver First Nation
- Bigstone Cree Nation
- Chipewyan Prairie First Nation
- Dene Tha' First Nation
- Driftpile Cree Nation
- Fort McKay First Nation
- Fort McMurray First Nation
- Horse Lake First Nation
- Kapawe'no First Nation
- Little Red River Cree Nation
- Loon River First Nation
- Lubicon Lake Band
- Miskisew Cree First Nation
- Peerless Trout First Nation
- Sawridge First Nation
- Smith's Landing First Nation
- Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation
- Sucker Cree First Nation
- Swan River First Nation
- Tallcree Tribal Government
- Whitefish Lake First Nation
- Woodland Cree First Nation

Bands present at the signing of Treaty No. 8, 1899, Peace River region

(Lesser Slave Lake, Alberta - June 21, 1899)

Dane-Zaa (Beaver, Dunne-zaa, Tsa-dunne, Tsattine)

Dane-zaa is an ethno-linguistic grouping that belongs to the Athapaskan language family. The Dane-zaa call their language Dane-zaa Záágé?, though it still appears in many sources as the Beaver language.

³ Treaty 8 Tribal Association. (2023, March 31). *Affiliated First Nations*. Retrieved from Communities: <http://treaty8.bc.ca/cultural-section/>

⁴ Government of Alberta. (2023, March 31). Treaty 8 First Nation Consultation Contacts. Retrieved from Indigenous consultation contacts: <https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/ir-treaty-8-consultation-contacts.pdf?1680306699130>

Dane-zaa Záágé? is an Athabaskan (or Dene) language and is therefore closely related to the languages of other Athabaskan-speaking First Nations, including the Sekani, Kaska, Dene Dháh (Alberta Slavey), Tsuut'ina (Sarcee) and Dene Sų́liné (Chipewyan).

Dane-zaa Záágé? is spoken in the areas of Doig River, Halfway River and Prophet River in British Columbia, as well as on the Blueberry River First Nations. It is also spoken in Alberta on the Boyer River (Rocky Lane) and Child Lake (Eleske) reserves.⁵

The name Dunne-za has been translated to "Those who live among the beaver." The spelling Dane-zaa is used for "the Real People" and is used by the Dane-zaa Language Authority.

Different tribes and First Nations in the Peace River region use different spellings:

Dane-zaa

- Blueberry River First Nations (BRFN)
- Doig River First Nation (DRFN)
- Halfway River First Nation (HRFN)

Dunne Tsaa

- Prophet River First Nation (PRFN)

Dunne-za/Dunne Za

- Saulteau First Nations (SFN)
- West Moberly First Nations (WMFNs)

The English term "Beaver" is a European/settler translation of the name used by several of their neighboring tribes. The Dakelh called them Tsattine / Tsat'en and the Plains Cree called them Amiskiyiniw, both meaning "Those who live among the beaver" or "Beaver People."⁶ The name Beaver derives from the main site of the Dane-zaa, the Tsades or River of Beavers, now called the Peace River.

Woodland Cree (Sakāwithiniwak or Nehiyawak)

In Canada, the Cree language has several dialects and is spoken across a vast area from Labrador to western British Columbia.

The origination of the word "Cree" derives from the short form of a cross variation of the Ojibwa word "kistanowak" (people of the north) and the Jesuit equivocal word "kristinue". The Woodland Cree are the largest indigenous group in northern Alberta and are part of the Algonquian language family.

⁵ (Ridington, 2012)

⁶ (Doig River First Nation, 2023)

Chipewyan

The word “Chipewyan” is derived from Cree meaning “pointed skin”, but most Chipewyan call themselves “Dene”. The Chipewyan are members of the Northern Athapaskan branch of the Athapaskan language family.⁷

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⁷ (Department of Citizenship and Immigration Indian Affairs Branch, 1964)

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