

## LETTERS



### First Nations take Northgate boss to task

Re: Mine shafted, CEO tells forum (*BIV* October 2-8; issue 936)

Comments made by **Northgate Minerals'** CEO **Ken Stowe** at a recent mining forum in Denver were demeaning, misleading and revealing all at the same time.

First of all, it was unfortunate Mr. Stowe had chosen to demean a respected Tse Keh Nay elder who, in good faith, spoke about "speaking to bears" in an attempt to explain to the Kemess North review panel how his people fulfil their long and deep-seated connection to the land, including animals like the grizzly bear.

While it is possible that Mr. Stowe's comment was not intended to be tactless, ignorant or even racist, it was nevertheless worthwhile that he exposed his true colours. This is especially so given he and his company officials had told the Tse Keh Nay that they respected them and wanted to do business together. But that, of course, was prior to the panel's decision to kibosh his project.

Secondly, the panel's decision to reject his project was not "illogical" at all. Rather it was perfectly logical to value a pristine lake within a watershed that provides water to two downstream communities. It was similarly logical not to kill a lake that people have relied upon since time immemorial for spiritual strength. And it was just as logical not to sacrifice these two precious values for an economically marginal project whose impacts would have included an obligation to perpetually treat and monitor for water quality, and similarly a large dam to ensure the safety of those same downstream communities, the ongoing cost of which would have ultimately been borne by the public.

Thirdly, his assertion that his project was "sacrificed on the altar of unresolved land claims" is somewhat true and yet very telling. On one hand, governments and industry are forced to deal with First Nations because, in addition to our communities being located out on the land, we have constitutionally protected aboriginal rights and title to our traditional territories. This means that mining standards inevitably have to rise because our rights and communities will no longer be run roughshod over as they once were.

On the other hand, it should never be presumed that by resolving land claims, ill-conceived projects like Kemess North will somehow succeed. That would be an uncalculated mistake. Good business sense suggests that the mining community must begin to demonstrate that it truly understands and supports First Nations. Actions to the contrary will only hinder relations.

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