



THE ASBC PAGES

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

New Relationship calls for Political Commitment to Provincial Heritage Conservation in British Columbia

Since 1978, the BC Heritage Trust served as a main provincial funding agency for archaeology, public awareness and community heritage planning in British Columbia. The Trust acted as a benefactor of heritage grants and scholarships for graduate students, university researchers, First Nations and non-profit community groups. Over 2,300 heritage initiatives were financially sponsored though nearly \$30 million provincial investment over the last 25 years, including the activities of the ASBC.

In 2003, British Columbia dismantled the B.C. Heritage Trust. The Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management led by Minister Stan Hagen justified this elimination as a necessary cost-cutting measure to streamline provincial core services.

In its place, British Columbia invested \$5 million dollars in a new non-governmental funding agency — the BC Heritage Legacy Fund. But it's no BC Heritage Trust. Under new guidelines, "archaeological research" is specifically not eligible for funding. Today, there exists a void of government funds devoted to improve the protection, understanding and public awareness of First Nations' archaeological heritage in British Columbia.

If political commitment is reflected in financial support, provincial heritage conservation is a very low political priority. While Ministers talk about the New Relationship with First Nations, the Archaeology Branch remains underfunded and understaffed. First Nation heritage sites and burial grounds con-

tinue to be destroyed by rampant unregulated development. The general public continues to live in ignorance, if not fear, of the First Nation heritage in their backyards. And First Nations, local governments and community groups lack the necessary funding and management tools to help provide stewardship over their local archaeological heritage.

In September 2007, the First Nation Leadership Council sent a letter to Premier Campbell calling on British Columbia to renew its political and financial commitment to help protect and preserve First Nation heritage sites in British Columbia.

The ASBC in its Constitutional mandate to "protect the archaeological and historical heritage of British Columbia and to this end to assist the various levels of government in implementing applicable heritage legislation", supports this initiative and calls on British Columbia to re-invest in its commitment to provincial heritage conservation. New provincial investment is needed to increase funding for the Archaeology Branch, improve enforcement of the provincial law, address First Nations rights and interests in heritage conservation, build effective provincial and local government stewardship tools, and provide stable funding sources to support archaeological research, public education and community heritage planning. If there is any substance to the New Relationship, British Columbia best politically commit to investing in First Nation heritage conservation as a vital part of its celebrations for B.C.'s 2008 150th Anniversary.

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