

# Re-Making Space in North-Central BC: The John Prince Research Forest (JPRF), 1993 to 1999

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## Introduction

In 1999, the Tl'azt'en Nation and the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) celebrated the founding of the John Prince Research Forest (JPRF), the first co-managed research forest of its kind in Canada. Situated in an area simultaneously identified by the Tl'azt'en Nation as traditional territory, and the BC government as 'unallocated' Crown land, the JPRF required a significant re-visualization of the landbase. This research explores the re-making of that space, and the unique co-management partnership that evolved with it.



## The JPRF

The JPRF is a 13, 032ha working forest jointly managed by UNBC and the Tl'azt'en First Nation through Chuzghun Resources Corporation (CRC), a non-profit company. It is located between Pinchi and Tezzeron Lakes, 50kms northwest of Fort St. James. Forest management of the JPRF is regulated through provincial forest legislation and tenured through a Special Use Permit (SUP). The broad mandate of the JPRF is to combine scientific and Aboriginal approaches to land and resource management; to enhance and promote multiple resource values; to provide a venue for research, education and training; and to contribute to the socio-ecological sustainability of the region.

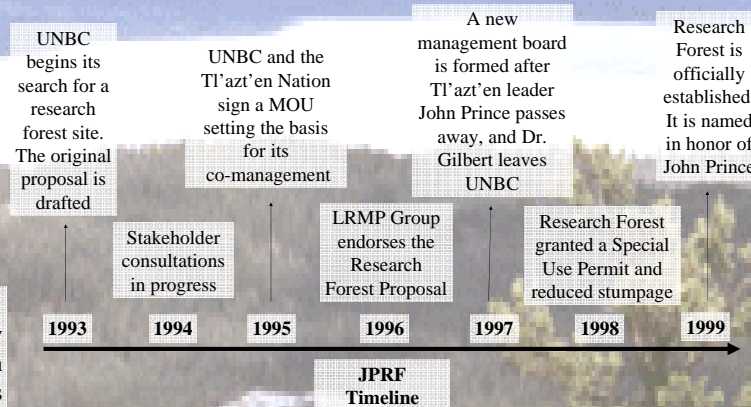
## The Initial Vision

The initial vision behind the JPRF is attributed to Dr. Fred Gilbert, founding Dean of Natural Resources and Environmental Studies (NRES) at UNBC. Arguing that "any forestry program worth its salt has to have a research forest," Gilbert worked with the Ministry of Forests in 1993 to identify a parcel of unallocated land that would suit UNBC's research and education needs. Selected for its diverse landscape and proximity to Prince George, the proposed site posed a significant challenge – it was within the traditional use area of the Tl'azt'en Nation and was subject to prospective land claims. Eager to create a positive working relationship with the Tl'azt'en, and with other stakeholders including the new Fort St. James Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) Working Group, Gilbert and Dr. Wini Kessler, Chair of UNBC's Forestry Program, began stakeholder consultations.

## Contested Space

Following preliminary negotiations with Tl'azt'en Deputy Chief John Prince, Gilbert composed a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 1994, indicating UNBC's intention to *consult* with Tl'azt'en regarding activities on the research forest. Privileging Tl'azt'en claims to the space by means of *consultation*, however, was not a satisfactory arrangement for Tl'azt'en or for the various stakeholders represented by the LRMP. Demanding more than 'a voice' in the management of the forest, the Tl'azt'en lobbied for an equal partnership with UNBC.

The LRMP, for its part, argued that the MOU privileged Tl'azt'en claims at the expense of other stakeholders and gave 'a perception of ownership of the land' by the Tl'azt'en. UNBC, Tl'azt'en, and the LRMP held diverse and even contradictory images of the landbase and how a and by whom it should be managed.



Forest Manager (left) consulting with Tl'azt'en Keyoh holders

## Methods

To document the JPRF's history we employed:

- Meeting agendas and minutes, newsletters, newspaper articles, brochures, correspondence between key players from partner communities and other relevant stakeholders
- Oral evidence from interviews with key players from the Tl'azt'en Nation, UNBC, and the Ministry of Forests (MOF)

## Co-Management: Re-Making Space

By 1995, a new image had taken shape. *Co-management* gradually replaced references to *consultation* in subsequent MOU drafts. With the partnership in place, UNBC and the Tl'azt'en Nation collaborated to solve the outstanding issues of tenure and reduced stumpage.

The MOF, however, refused to grant joint tenure of the JPRF to both parties. Briefly endangering the project, this refusal was eventually handled by UNBC receiving tenure and immediately signing its management over to a JPRF board of directors with equal Tl'azt'en and UNBC representation. The JPRF is a co-managed space, visualized differently by Tl'azt'en and UNBC, administered jointly to meet both partners' goals.