



# T'Sou-ke Nation

## Constitution Development

Self-governance: Our Rules to Live By



*Nicholas Collins*  
PHOTOGRAPHY

### **Sacred and Sovereign:**

The T'Sou-ke Nation is working to restore its jurisdiction and lay a foundation for self-governance through the development of a T'Sou-ke Nation Constitution.

We seek to implement this project in an atmosphere of respect that acknowledges the value of this process. A constitution developed from the citizens up will establish a solid foundation of self-determination for the improvement of social, cultural and economic conditions, and overall health and wellbeing within our community.



# What is a Constitution, What can it do, and Why do we want one?

A constitution is a document that explains how a government will function. Developing a T'Sou-ke Constitution is an important step towards self-governance. Currently many things require approval or funding from AANDC, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (Formerly known as INAC, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada). This is often a significant barrier preventing T'Sou-ke from doing things the community wants. Under self-government we will be independent and we must now decide for ourselves what our government will look like. The Indian Act Band government system will no longer apply to us; instead we will create a system that will meet our needs and run according to our values. The T'Sou-ke Constitution will become T'Sou-ke's highest law. Our T'Sou-ke Constitution will include a statement of the core values, beliefs, and principles of our nation. These principles will be used to guide the everyday life of Citizens and also provide rules and responsibilities for leaders and government employees to live by.



The T'Sou-ke Constitution will include a statement of the core values, beliefs, and principles of our nation

Our constitution will address things like how decision makers are elected, how laws are made and enforced, and how leaders are held accountable to the Citizens. There are some requirements of things that must be included in our Constitution but there is also flexibility for us to choose what we may want to include, or not include. This is an opportunity to have rules and guidelines to follow that are chosen by the T'Sou-ke community and reflect our values. In this way the Citizens who are affected by decisions are involved in making the decisions for themselves and for future generations, unlike the governance structures that have been imposed in the past. **Our goal is to map out a system of self-governance.**



# We Need Your Input!





# Involvement and Engagement

In order to be strong and effective, the Constitution must be developed by the citizens of this community, **which means you!**

## **We can't do this without you.**

A Constitutional Development Committee has already been created to involve T'Sou-ke community members in drafting the Constitution for our nation. We intend to talk to every member about what is important to them for our future.



We are coming to you to ensure that your thoughts and opinions are heard. As we build the Constitution we will review it with the community. We aim to have the work substantially completed by March 2015. When it comes time that the community feels the Constitution is ready, it will go to a vote and everyone will have an equal say. If it is not ready, it will continue to be reviewed and things will be added or removed as needed. A constitution is required for self-governance, with or without Treaty.

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We can use the T'Sou-ke Constitution to govern ourselves when we are ready

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T'Sou-ke community members will have the opportunity to participate not only in these home visits but also at community meetings and online. A T'Sou-ke community fieldworker will be available to listen to your input and help you to obtain answers to your questions. The T'Sou-ke Constitution Development Committee has been appointed from members of the community by Chief and Council to act as a steering group and provide focused input on the Constitution.



# Background

The T'Sou-ke Nation has always had constitutional principles. As we are traditionally an oral people we have not written them down. This step of writing a constitution helps to formally recognize and protect parts of the way of life of our people, to pass down for generations to come, and also to communicate this to others.

The Coast Salish people have graced the coast of Vancouver Island since time immemorial. We can use the guiding principles of our ancestors to manage precious resources and keep a spiritual, mental, emotional, physical balance and connection with Mother Earth and to protect what is sacred to the Creator.



Our people once governed without outside intervention, since then a lot has changed and our communities have struggled to maintain our beliefs, principles, and values while under the control of the Department of Indian Affairs. The authority to govern ourselves has been hindered and now our lives are greatly affected by the effects of these interventions. Our current governance structure has been imposed and the relationship is not by choice. **This is not acceptable and we must act now to come together and participate in rebuilding our Nation for the future.** We must connect our web of history to this modern way of life, and we must do so on our own terms.





This document that we will develop together to meet our needs and goals can be a powerful tool for change. We can use this constitution to serve as a foundation for our people in consideration of the past, the present, and the future. The constitution must fairly reflect the colors of our youth, elders, women, politics, religion, legends and traditions. This is one of the most opportune times to be T'Sou-ke, where we can grow, learn together and bring forward the true spirit of our community.

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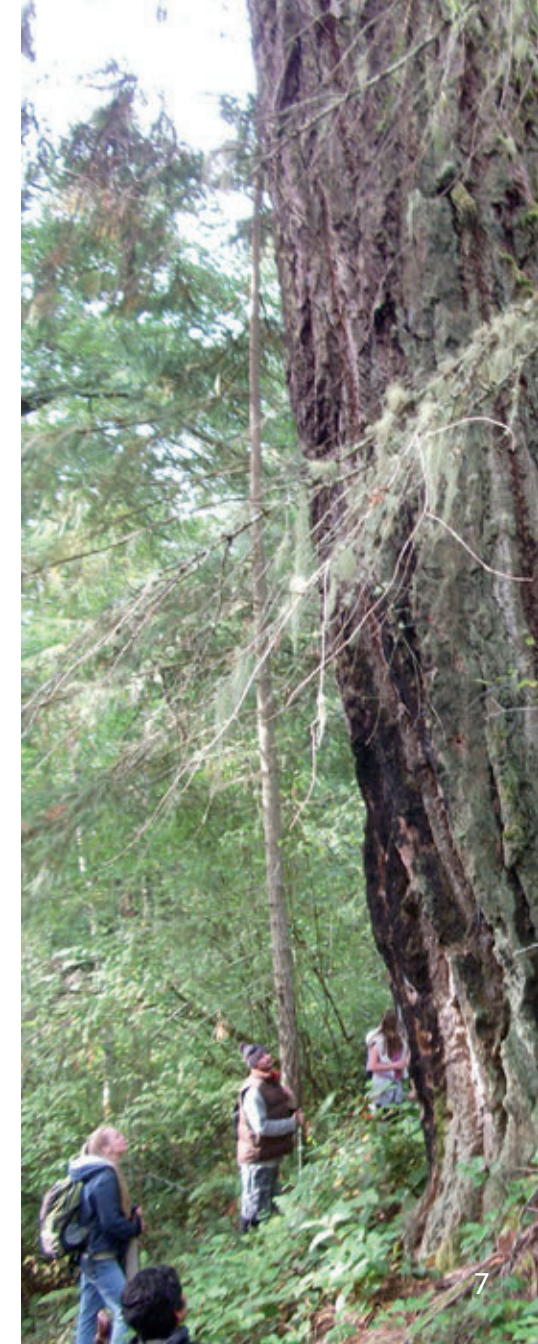
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The Aim of the T'Sou-ke Constitution is to establish general principles that are built to last. We may reference the need to pass a law on a certain topic without specific details as to what the law will say. That way the law can be changed as needed without having to change the Constitution itself, which can be a challenging task.

The content of our Constitution will be unique to T'Sou-ke Nation, however some Nations who have gone before us in this process have identified some common features to be included in a constitution. We can use these as a guide as we get started, the following sections will detail some of

these features. In the following sections you will be asked questions, the answer's you share will be kept anonymous and reviewed by the T'Sou-ke Constitution Committee. This booklet does not attempt to cover everything that may be included in the T'Sou-ke Constitution, but rather it is an introduction to some of the major features.



# Preamble

A preamble is an introductory statement that guides the interpretation of the document. A preamble provides context and explanation. In this section we could express who we are, where we come from and what is important to us.

## Huu-ay-aht Example:

We, the people of Huu-ay-aht, by this Constitution declare our unique identity as a nation and claim our rightful place as equal participants in Canadian Society.

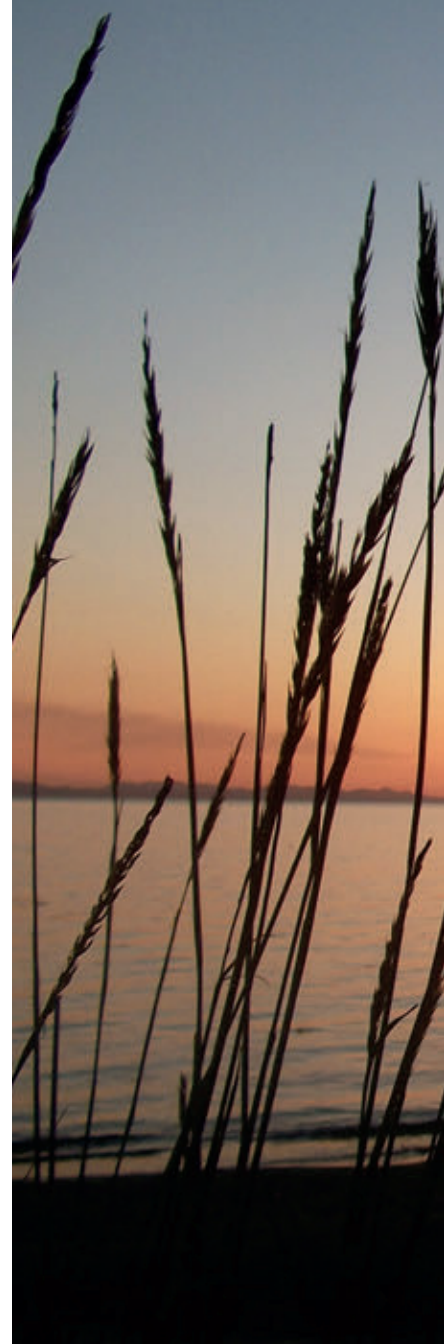
We have existed from time immemorial and have occupied and used the lands, waters and resources of our traditional territory throughout history, a traditional territory that extends from the mountaintops to the off-shore areas as shown on the map attached to this Constitution.

We draw our identity from our relationship to our land and from our rich heritage, culture, language and our stories, myths and oral traditions.

We honour our ancestors and our elders and commit ourselves to the values that they have preserved for us, values that provide us dignity and enhance our humanity.

We honour our children in our determination to see these values carried into the future.

As self-determining peoples, we accept the responsibilities inherent in governing ourselves and seek, with the assistance of Naas (the Creator), to govern with wisdom and respect for all people. Through the act of governing, we assume the power to preserve our natural world and enhance our identity.







***Is a preamble an important section to include in the T'Sou-ke Constitution?***

***What do you consider to be fundamental values of the T'Sou-ke Nation?***

This section doesn't have to be long. It can be short and direct as it is meant to send a message to T'Sou-ke Citizens and also other groups like the federal, provincial and local governments, other First Nations, media or companies who may do business in the area.



# Rights and Freedoms

When thinking about Rights and Freedoms they can usually be broken down into three categories

1. Protect the individual; such as I have the freedom to choose my own religion or I have the right to vote as an individual.
2. Equal and fair treatment; such as the right to an education, equal access to health care or financial aid, fair and equal treatment by our government.
3. Rights that are collectively held by the people; such as the right to a healthy environment and freedom to continue to participate in cultural practices.

Note: The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms will still apply to our Nation, this includes things like the right to not be arrested without being told the reason why, but we can list other things we think are important to include.

***What are some rights and freedoms you think are important to acknowledge in the T'Sou-ke Constitution?***







# Citizenship

We will also need a Citizenship Code that defines who may be considered a Citizen of the T'Sou-ke First Nation. Examples of citizenship eligibility requirements include:

- Enrolled under treaty/registered on the band list
- Adopted by a Citizen
- Descendant of a citizen
- **Meets the criteria of citizenship laws\***

\* This would leave an option to create laws in the future without having to change the constitution, as the steps involved in changing the constitution are challenging.

***What do you think are important issues to address about citizenship requirements?***

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**Examples:** Even if I am eligible to be a Citizen I should be able to choose if I accept that citizenship, especially if it means losing another citizenship; or who I choose to marry should have no effect on my citizenship, or my children's

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***Should some of the rights and freedoms we decide on be extended to non-citizens living on our lands?***

Note: Only people who are considered Citizens would be able to vote in elections



# Governance

This section is to provide details about our T'Sou-ke government structure, how elected leadership will function, what they will be expected to do and how laws are made.

We have many options for determining the structure of our government. We currently have a structure of Chief and Council, however in our T'Sou-ke Nation constitution we can choose to:

- i. Keep the existing Indian Act governance structure
- ii. modify the existing governance structure
- iii. revert to a traditional form of governance (under treaty must have democratic elections)
- iv. modify our traditional form of governance
- v. create something new

There are a wide variety of examples and options, and even the terms "Chief" and "Council" could be changed. We can involve Elders, Youth, Off-reserve Citizens, and have representation for Non-Citizens living on the nation's lands. Here are some examples of government structures.

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## Examples:

- A People's Assembly Committee (which could include persons representing off reserve Citizens and Non-Citizens living on the Nation's land) could advise Chief and Council on behalf of the Citizens;
  - There could be a Council of equals (no Chief) that is advised by a hereditary Chief and an Elders Council;
  - There could be a Council of Ministers with specific areas of decision making;
  - We could have a Judicial Council dedicated to dispute resolution and a Legislative Council that deals with laws.
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***What would you like to see in the T'Sou-ke government structure, and why?***

***Would you like to see groups other than Chief and Council involved in governance decision making?***





We can make decisions about terms of office for elected officials. Currently we must have elections every 2 years, some feel that this is not enough time to initiate changes and see them through. We could have rotating terms of office to ensure continuity in the government. The maximum time T'Sou-ke nation can go without an election is 5 years.

**Example:** There could be a four-year term of office with elections of half the council every two years, so not all of the council members would be elected at the same time, and it wouldn't be an entirely new council every two years.

### ***How often do you think leadership elections should be held?***

We could also include Principles of Governance and/or a Code of Conduct that direct how leaders will act.

**Example:** I think our leaders should put the interests of the nation ahead of their own personal interests.

### ***What is the key information that needs to be available to the Citizens to ensure the T'Sou-ke government is accountable?***

**Example:** I want to know what our government's money is being spent on; or I want to know about any sales or leases of our lands.

### ***Should there be a process for removing elected officials?***



# Governance Continued

While there are a lot of important topics to address in a Constitution, it doesn't have to be too complicated we can keep it simple! Some constitutions are 10 pages long and some are 80.

The best constitutions establish general principles that can be followed for generations to come, while still allowing for flexibility in the form of laws. The creation of laws can add specific details or be changed as new situations arise.

For example if it is important to Citizens that our lands are protected and we want to address that in the Constitution we could say: There will be laws on how our lands will be managed.

When we say there will be a law for our Nation to follow on issues such as land, this will then require our government, elected leaders and administration to refer to our Nation's law. These laws will list specific steps to follow when managing our land.





We must write down how we will make laws and also how those laws could be changed.

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**Example:** Laws affecting land use must be introduced and debated by government; citizens must then be provided a reasonable opportunity to review and comment on the proposed law, including advertising of public notices and direct notification of persons directly affected by the proposed law; a public meeting must then be held and citizen input considered before the proposed law can be finally adopted and brought into effect.

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***How do you think laws should be made?***

***Should there be a process for Citizens to propose a law?***

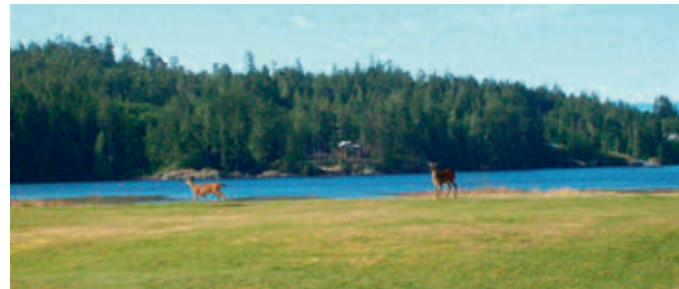
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**Example:** If a petition proposing a new law or amendment is signed by 20% of eligible voters then the Government is required to either adopt this proposal or put it to a community vote by referendum.

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***Should all proposed laws be presented to the Citizens?***

***What steps should be required before a law can be changed?***







# General Provisions

This section could include matters that affect the interpretation of the Constitution, how the Constitution will be brought into effect, how it can be changed after it is brought into effect and what would happen during the transition into self-governance.

We must provide eligible voters a reasonable opportunity to view the completed draft T'Sou-ke Constitution. Then before the Constitution is brought into effect, there must be a vote by way of a secret ballot so you can choose to privately say if you want or don't want to adopt the Constitution. In order for the T'Sou-ke Constitution to pass there must be a majority of eligible voters that vote in favour of the Constitution.

A majority could be anywhere from 51%-100%. This process is called ratification. Our aim would be to have broad support from the community for such an important document however it will likely not be possible to achieve 100% support.

***What would be an acceptable majority vote to you?***

We would need to describe a process for changing the Constitution after it has been adopted, this is called an amendment process.

***What do you think the process for changing the constitution should include?***

We should also decide how a proposed change to the constitution would be initiated.

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**Example:** We could say an amendment could be initiated by a Citizens petition with 50+signatures; or if the Chief and all Councillors agree on an amendment then it would be put to a Citizens vote

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We need to find a balance between making a process that requires broad support and allowing for change to happen when it is needed!

For example the Canadian Constitution can only be modified with the approval of all of the provinces and territories; this can be quite a challenge!



Thank you for participating in this process;  
we will be making all efforts to keep  
you informed as we put together this  
information and draft the Constitution.

The answers you've shared will be reviewed  
anonymously by the Constitution Committee to help  
them make decisions but they will not know exactly  
who said what.



If you have any questions or think of  
anything you would like to add to  
the answers you gave today please  
contact us at:

### **T'Sou-Ke First Nation Treaty Office**

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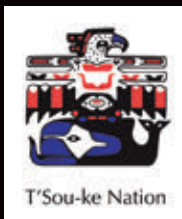
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