



Shannon Hurst/The Interior News
Friends of Wild Salmon, Pat Moss, left, discusses the impact of energy development on First Nation territories at the Connecting the Drops forum on Monday.

Forum explores energy plans

By Shannon Hurst
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First Nations from across the North gathered on Monday to address the cumulative impact of energy development on traditional territories.

The Connecting the Drops: Planning for Prosperity forum, hosted by the Gitksan Treaty Office, was scheduled to precede the Minerals North conference to be held in Smithers this week.

Forum organizer Doug Donaldson said he hopes it will be the start of a longer regional discussion.

"This was an opportunity for watershed workers and lands and resource staff from First Nations to learn from each other about proposed energy developments and explore strategies for reducing their impact," he said. "Predicting the impact of individual projects is getting better but adequately assessing the effects of multiple projects needs work."

Wet' suwet'en Chief (Kloum Khun) Alphonse Gagnon called the conference a good first step to build unity and mitigate accumulative impact on traditional territories.

"We realize the overall

effects on us are bigger than we can fight one at a time and we need to work together," he said. "[First Nations need to] practice what we preach and we need to work together."

Gitksan Chiefs negotiator Bev Clifton-Percival said the disruption of the land and eco-system, which is already in a fragile state, is one of the Gitksans' greatest concerns.

"When development is occurring, all prospects must be taken into account," she said.

"There is a real human cost and land can't be given back once it's taken away."