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Via Facsimile: (250) 387-0087

The Honourable Gordon Campbell
Premier of the Province of British Columbia
PO Box 9041 Stn. Prov. Govt.
Room 156 West Annex, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Campbell:

Re: Protection of SPAET Cave on Skirt Mountain

I appeal to you and Cabinet directly, and most urgently, to stop the destruction of SPAET Cave on Skirt Mountain near Victoria. It is imperative that we act to protect this cave.

I share with many peers the view that protection of SPAET Cave ought to transcend any private property rights. This small karst cavity has considerable historical, cultural, aesthetic, scientific and educational value to all British Columbians and aboriginal people. Arguments put forth that it is worthless and can be destroyed are specious, to say the least.

The actions permitted by government that damaged SPAET Cave previously have caught the attention of many people around the world. To those looking in on us, we appear to be wholly uncommitted to protecting karst caves on private land, even when they are of obvious natural and human value, unless they show evidence of traditional use. It is downright ironic that it can be resolved to protect any and all karst caves on Crown forest lands in BC by means of a simple ministerial order, as in the case of the Haida Gwaii order effective September 15, 2006, whereas we appear to be incapable of protecting this very modest-sized karst cave on private land.

The interest shown abroad toward SPAET Cave was brought home to those of us from BC who attended cave and karst conferences and other professional gatherings this year in the US, Australia, Germany, Austria, Italy, France, Spain, Switzerland, Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, and Croatia. In each of these countries we discovered the ardent scrutiny by peers of the issues cited in the media coverage generated right here in BC. To facilitate the ultimate destruction of SPAET Cave through government inaction, indecisiveness or delay will invite even greater close scrutiny worldwide, and could fetch enormous shame for British Columbia. Before submitting SPAET Cave to the developer, therefore, I urge you and Cabinet to consider all options to protect the site.

SPAET Cave has been altered by actions of the developer and archeological investigations authorized by government. These disturbances have desecrated the cave to some extent, but by no means have they eradicated the heritage value of the site. I re-examined the cave on December 6, 2006 at the request of Chief Chris Tom of the Tsartlip First Nation. Actions up to that date had altered the vegetative cover, soils and infiltration regime associated with maintaining the natural karst processes at the cave. Minor alterations to the inside of the cave attributable to archeological investigations authorized by government were also noted. However, I found SPAET Cave overall to be as structurally sound as it was when I first examined the cave briefly on May 21, 2006. In my view, it remained as at December 6, 2006 a worthy candidate for full restoration and protection.

A globally recognized principle of cave and karst protection, developed for the IUCN with input from Canada no less, holds that notwithstanding the non-renewable nature of many karst features, particularly within limestone caves, good management demands that damaged features be restored as far as is practicable.

SPAET Cave, apart from being a unique and unusual limestone cavity and hence an important element of biological and geological diversity for the greater Victoria region, holds particular spiritual, ceremonial and other cultural value to aboriginal people, including the Songhees and Tsartlip. Minister Michael de Jong and I heard firsthand on November 17, 2006 impassioned first nation accounts of what this sacred cave means to aboriginal culture. I've since witnessed numerous members of the Tsartlip community speak of SPAET Cave with extraordinary emotion; these are people plainly distressed by the desecration to date of their sacred cave and threats to destroy it completely.

Ideally, government could enter into a formal agreement with a first nation with respect to the conservation and protection of SPAET Cave. The site, after

all, represents an important aspect of the cultural heritage of first nations. Given that the first nations interest in this cave is so well established by them, it is of considerable importance that their interests be reflected in the development of a protection strategy.

I am joined by many scientists and professionals with specific cave and karst expertise who remain ready, willing and able to work towards restoring and protecting SPAET Cave, and I am confident that with political will and your leadership it will be possible to achieve that goal.

Once again, Premier, and Cabinet, please protect this cave site. I believe this course of action is in the best interests of the people of British Columbia.

If I can clarify or amplify on any aspect of this letter, please do not hesitate to call me. Alternatively, I can travel to Victoria within a few hours in order that we may discuss this matter in greater detail.

I ask respectfully that you reply at once to confirm receipt of this letter. Please indicate in your initial reply when I might expect to receive notice of your decisions in this matter. Thank you.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED

Paul Griffiths

Copies:

Members of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia
Chief Chris Tom, Tsartlip First Nation
Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, Union of BC Indian Chiefs