

In Our Own Words - Williams Treaty

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In 1860, in the 1860's, our people started to complain about unsurrendered land in Ontario, and in the northern hunting grounds. So, they start to complain, and it takes sixty-three years for the government to validate the claim. And out of that comes that Williams Commission that is struck in 1923. If you look at the Williams Treaties, they included the former gunshot treaty lands, and they also included the townships that flow south of Lake Simcoe and meet gunshot, and they included those lands in as clause two of the treaty, and then they also wrote in the basket clause. And, the basket clause basically says that "if you have any claims before now, or after, they are all null and void, don't come back to us after this treaty is signed." The Basket Clause. They have completely contravened what the royal proclamation said. Because, there is already people living in the north, there is already lumbering happening in the northern hunting grounds, there was already mining permits being given out, and there is already settlement that has occurred. So, they have completely contravened what the royal proclamation said. They now, they are having to correct themselves and take a surrender, but out of that surrender, they take our right to hunt, fish and trap. They stole the people's' right to live off of country food. And, the basket clause is just one aspect out of the Williams Treaties that was hung around the peoples' neck. So, this is a really critical piece. When you read the treaty, that is the piece that stands out to me. It is that the government said that the Indian title was the right to hunt, fish and trap, and in the numbered treaties it is not. Because, the first nations retain their right to hunt, fish and trap only over the land that they have surrendered, so there is two different definitions of Indian title between 1871 and 1923. How can that be? How can there be two different definitions of what Indian title is?