

# \$16.3 million cost for OPP to police Land Back Lane for six months

 by Kaitlyn Clark  
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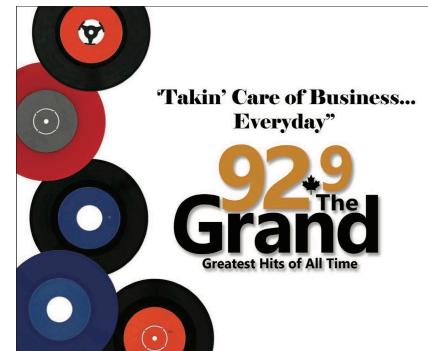
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By Mike Renzella

**The Haldimand Press**

CALEDONIA—The OPP spent \$16.3 million policing the ongoing protest over the McKenzie Meadows building development site in Caledonia, known as 1492 Land Back Lane, between July 19, 2020 to January 19, 2021, according to information obtained by APTN News.



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“An APTN reporter told me that they obtained this information through the Freedom of Information process. I do not have any information on this,” said OPP Provincial Constable Rodney LeClair. “What I can tell you is that the OPP is committed to public safety and security and has maintained that objective throughout. Having sufficient resources on hand to ensure the safety of the public, the police, and the demonstrators was paramount.”

According to APTN, the information they procured showed a breakdown of expenses, which included salaries for 24-hour coverage of the site that led to extended overtime pay. Other listed expenses included travel costs, hotels, food, equipment, building rentals, and more. LeClair declined to offer further clarity on how the money was spent: “It would be inappropriate for me to comment on operational details which include staffing and/or resources deployed to assist.”

Skyler Williams, spokesperson for the self-described land defenders at the site, shared his opinion on the news: “It’s an absolutely ridiculous number that we’re talking about. Spending \$16.3 million dollars – \$2.3 million a month – on a group of Indigenous people that are sitting around a fire, singing our songs, telling jokes, and laughing. This is absolutely ridiculous that this is how we’re responding to Indigenous folks standing up for our rights.”

“At the same time, it’s almost typical from responses that we’ve seen from the government across the board, that we’ve seen the same outrageous spending when it comes to the Wet’suwet’en out west towards people who are standing up against the pipeline out there,” continued Williams. “This is the thing we’ve come to understand as the normal marching orders for the OPP.”

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CALEDONIA—A BANNER HUNG ON SITE AT THE MCKENZIE MEADOWS CONSTRUCTION SITE, DUBBED 1492 LAND BACK LANE BY THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN AT THE SITE SINCE JULY 19, 2020.—PHOTO COURTESY OF SKYLER WILLIAMS.

Conflict between the OPP and demonstrators began shortly after people first entered the site in July 2020. Altercations saw arrests made by the OPP with use of non-lethal force equipment, such as tasers and rubber bullets; OPP reported rocks and pieces of wood were thrown at officers. Demonstrators responded to these altercations by barricading local roads, including digging up asphalt with a stolen excavator and setting fires on and near the road.

“Here we are eight months later and we still have an invitation to the Feds and the Province to deal with this in a peaceful way, where men coming with guns in their hands isn’t the only representation from the government,” said Williams. “This isn’t an armed occupation. This isn’t a violent struggle. This has been kumbaya by the fire for the last eight and a half months. We’ve only been met with violence and intimidation in these tactics of dividing our community even further than the last 200 years.”

In a public statement, Williams outlined the expectations that those on site want to see met before they will consider leaving the site. They include the Provincial and Federal governments respecting Indigenous People’s rights to sovereignty over the land and for the land in question to remain under Haudenosaunee control: “We will

never stop caring for our lands, we will never stop protecting what belongs to our children and grandchildren. It's time the Provincial and Federal governments realize that and come to the table to talk about how they will actually live up to their treaty commitments," said Williams, who also wants the criminalization of the demonstrators to end.

"Courtney Skye, one of the women from Six Nations that has been here and involved in doing stuff, went into Caledonia one day last week. She was arrested getting lunch. Chelsey Bouchard was arrested in Hamilton. Her licence plate was run and it came back showing a warrant for her arrest. She was arrested in front of her two small children," described Williams of recent arrests. "This is going to burn in the minds of those toddlers and in the hearts and minds of so many people, just how big that divide is between Indigenous people across the country and the courts, the cops, and the jails."

LeClair offered the following summary of the situation: "Since July, the safety of the public, the police, and the demonstrators has been paramount. During the event, officers were assaulted, police vehicles were damaged, roads were dug up with stolen construction equipment, and fires had been set. Resources were deployed to ensure the safety of the community and to monitor the safe movement of traffic throughout the area."



**Kaitlyn Clark**

Born and raised in Cayuga, Kaitlyn Clark started freelancing for The Haldimand Press straight out of university. A few months later she took on the role of a full-time reporter and just two years later she and fellow reporter Jillian Taylor took over as co-publishers. She is honoured to help The Haldimand Press continue its great legacy of community-minded journalism.