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Presentation of Kukpi7 (Chief) Judy Wilson

Neskonlith Indian Band,
Lake Secwepemc Division
Secwepemc (Shuswap) People

Secwepemculecw –

Secwepemc traditional territory

- The Secwepemc Nation historically consisted of 32 communities and our traditional territory covers over 180 square miles in the South Central Interior region and important rivers, such as the Thompson and the North and South Thompson and the Shuswap Lake Watershed which are all part of the greater Salmon River Watershed.
- As Secwepemc we collectively hold Inherent Title and Rights in our entire territory (Secwepemculecw) which are protected by Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution.

Secwepemculecw



Secwepemculecw

- Our people have never signed treaties and will not sign agreements that aim at the extinguishment of our land rights. We cannot give up our land and water, we have obligations to protect it.
- Our elders like Mary Thomas all had stories of travelling our lakes and rivers with their own grandparents and one day being told they could no longer land on a certain beach or enter a certain area. Our people saw fences go up in living history.
- Our waters are sacred and our people continue to fish in our lakes and rivers and depend on our water and lands for sustenance.

Salmon in Secwepemc territory

- Our Territory is the home of the Adams River Sockeye Salmon Run and also the Salmon River, both in core traditional use areas of the Lake Secwepemc People.
- The Lake Secwepemc People carry the traditional knowledge which is key to the sustainable management of the Fraser River Sockeye Salmon and to the protection of key watersheds around the Shuswap Lakes.
- The Neskonalith Indian Band previously took DFO to court regarding their failure to take conservation measures for the South Thompson River Coho (which was close to extinction) resulting in conservation measures now being implemented along the Fraser River.

Salmon River Delta

- The Salmon River is an important salmon bearing stream in our traditional territory, it empties into the Shuswap Lake at Salmon Arm. The Salmon River Delta is one of the last unregulated river deltas in the Shuswap Lake Watershed and a very active ecosystem.
- The main reason why the Salmon River Delta remains undisturbed is because it is located on the Neskonalith Indian Reserve. It is now threatened by a large shopping centre development (SmartCentres) in the Delta and connected flood plains of the Salmon River. The Neskonalith Indian Band Reserve lands border on the proposed Smart Centre Development which would increase risk of flooding of the reserve lands.

Salmon River Delta

- The Secwepemc People have always looked after the sensitive ecosystem and wetlands around the Salmon River Delta. Our people traditionally used and continue to use these lands, including to collect medicines. We have also replanted traditional plants and seen the protection and restoration of the ecosystem through our efforts.
- Our people have seen the negative impact of other developments in riparian zones on the Salmon River. We even had to carry salmon upriver to spawn.
- As a salmon bearing stream the Salmon River falls under the constitutional responsibility of the federal government, especially the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO).

Salmon River Delta

- The Neskonalith Indian Band is currently working on ways to protect the Salmon River Delta, one of the last meandering river deltas in the Shuswap Lake Watershed.
- The City of Salmon Arm has approved a large-scale shopping centre development in the floodplains of the Salmon River Delta which has already resulted in destruction of fish habitat and would forever alter this pristine ecosystem.
- The Neskonalith Indian band and its members are instead committed to preserving this important fish habitat, including spawning channels for salmon.

Traditional Knowledge

- Elder Mary Thomas who lived next to the Salmon River Wetlands and dedicated her life to protecting the environment, was recognized as an important traditional knowledge holder at the national and international level.
- We want to work together on her dream to build a cultural and ecological centre adjacent to the Salmon River to protect this important eco-system and share our traditional ecological knowledge. We want to declare the Salmon River Delta a Bird Sanctuary and see it protected.

Traditional Knowledge

Shuswap Cultural Centre

Late Elder Mary Thomas

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Standing as Indigenous Peoples

- As indigenous peoples we have standing at international law and interact with the federal government on a nation-to-nation basis.
- The federal government has a fiduciary obligation to protect Aboriginal Title and rights and all our interests in our traditional territory.
- As indigenous peoples we have standing at court to hold the federal government (and DFO) accountable for failing to protect our land and river from the negative impacts of the proposed development.

The duty to consult and accommodate

- We further interact with the province on a government-to-government basis and the courts have imposed a strong duty to consult and accommodate on the province.
- As indigenous peoples we have Inherent rights and jurisdiction, unlike municipal governments who only have delegated authority, which is why we interact directly with the federal and provincial governments.
- Yet the City of Salmon Arm unilaterally amended their official community plan to allow the Smart Centres Development without taking into account the concerns of the Secwepemc People and the community plans of Neskonlith.

International Law

- Under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Convention on Biological Diversity, to which Canada is a party, indigenous peoples have the right to free prior informed consent to any development in their traditional territories.
- The Smart Centre development is proposed to take place in the core of Secwepemc territory, we call for implementation of the international requirement of prior informed consent of the Secwepemc People.

WORKING IN COALITION

- We share concerns about protecting the Salmon River Delta with local citizens and oppose the proposed Smart Centre Development. Neskonlith works together with Wa:ter (Wetland Alliance) and other concerned local citizens to protect this important eco-system.
- The Neskonlith Indian Band is committed to protecting remaining salmon habitat and connected ecosystems which are of crucial importance for our culture and livelihoods for future generations.

Kukstemc (Thank you)!
