



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Immediate Action Must Be Taken to Address Reported Desecration of shíshálh Burial Site and to Transform the Broken BC Heritage Conservation System

Sechelt, BC – shíshálh Nation is angered and demanding action to address reported damage to a known shíshálh burial site. The complex site, which was registered in the Provincial heritage conservation system in 2015, includes the ancestral grave sites of at least 80 shíshálh people, and many other irreplaceable artifacts, some as old as 1500 years. In spite of provincial regulations protecting the site, logging activities have occurred and it appears that irreconcilable damage has been done to this significant cultural landscape.

"This is heartbreaking. This is infuriating. This is culture-destroying. This must stop now," said hiwus (Chief) Warren Paull of the shíshálh Nation. "What other population in this country could have the gravesites of its people destroyed in this way?"

For decades Indigenous peoples across British Columbia have demanded fundamental changes to how Indigenous cultural heritage sites are protected. Change has not come. Section 4 of BC's Heritage Conservation Act that enables agreements with First Nations about their heritage resources has rarely been used by the Province.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was affirmed as applying to the laws of British Columbia in 2019 through the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, upholds the Indigenous right to maintain, control, and protect cultural sites and cultural heritage, as well as the right to human remains.

"Like Indigenous peoples across British Columbia, shíshálh's basic right to our own cultural heritage is violated every single day that the existing Heritage Conservation Act remains in place. With the passage of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act in 2019, this situation cannot continue any longer. If Section 4 of the Heritage Conservation Act is not available to confirm our role in managing our own cultural heritage resources, then a solution is to use Section 7 of the Declaration Act. The Province enacted Section 7 as the tool to have agreements about free, prior, and informed consent with Indigenous peoples. Creating this tool was a good decision that holds tremendous potential. It is time to begin to use that tool in relation to cultural heritage, and to do so will be of benefit to the work of reconciliation across the Province" said hiwus Paull.

The Province has commenced an investigation about violations of its laws as a result of the logging and damage done to the heritage site. shíshálh will cooperate fully with the investigation

to ensure all of the facts of the situation are uncovered, and shíshálh cultural protocols are respected.

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