



NEWS RELEASE

**TLC TO TRANSFER SISÇENEM (HALIBUT ISLAND)
TO WSÁNEĆ LEADERSHIP COUNCIL**

Charity raises more than \$1.55M to purchase and protect the ecological and cultural gem

FOR RELEASE: February 26, 2021, 10:00 AM

Victoria, BC – The Land Conservancy of British Columbia (TLC) and the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council are pleased to announce a landmark partnership agreement that will transfer title of SISÇENEM, a 9.67-acre island off the east coast of Sidney Island, from the charitable land trust to the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council as an act of reconciliation. Also known as Halibut Island, the island was recently purchased by TLC for \$1.55 million. The transfer will be historically significant as the first of its kind between a land trust and an Indigenous community in Canada. TLC will work together with the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council to draft and register a conservation covenant and develop a co-management plan that will incorporate Indigenous land management principles that will provide access for cultural, education, research, and monitoring purposes.

SISÇENEM is an important cultural place for WSÁNEĆ people. Located immediately east of Sidney Island and many WSÁNEĆ villages, SISÇENEM was a place where WSÁNEĆ people would fish for cod, collect traditional medicines, and harvest camas. Most importantly for WSÁNEĆ people today, SISÇENEM will be a place where WSÁNEĆ people can be in peace.

Discussing SISÇENEM, WSÁNEĆ Elder SELILIYE (Belinda Claxton) reminisced about islands such as this and their importance for future generations: "I remember, we'd go from island to island. We went to harvest seagull eggs and boxwood and different types of medicine. Or, during minus tide we would get sea urchins and stick shoes (chitons) . . . And, the fragrance of those wildflowers. Sometimes I get a whiff of it when I go out in the spring. It brings back such beautiful childhood memories. It was so natural and so pleasant to be able to see that when I was a child. This is the sort of experience I want my children and my grandchildren to have. I don't want them seeing it in the picture. There are not many places like this left."

The name SISÇENEM cannot be easily translated into English as a whole, but each syllable conveys a sense of what the place is to WSÁNEĆ people: SISK means "enjoying the sun," ÇEN is a feeling of inner peace, and EM means a place where these things happen. Roughly SISÇENEM means *sitting out for pleasure of the weather*.

"Everyone living in WSÁNEĆ Territory is a subject to the Douglas Treaties. WSÁNEĆ people have Douglas rights and Aboriginal rights and title, and settlers have obligations to protect and honour those rights. This means that reconciliation is everyone's responsibility. The return of SISÇENEM to WSÁNEĆ people by The Land Conservancy—with the support of generous private donors and Dr. Tara Martin—is a meaningful step in that direction. It shows that

reconciliation doesn't have to wait for government's lead and that we can all do our part to protect the environment and help heal the W̱SÁNEĆ people. The phrase "Land Back" is no longer a euphemism. It's finally a reality," says Chief Don Tom, Tsartlip First Nation and W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council Chairman.

TLC was able to acquire the island with the support of one major donor to protect the site's cultural, ecological, and geological significance after the island and donor was brought to the charity's attention by Dr. Tara Martin, UBC Faculty of Forestry's Conservation Decisions Lab Head.

According to Dr. Martin, "SISÇENEM is an ecological and cultural jewel. There are only a handful of islands like this left in the Salish Sea. When it came up for sale I knew I had to find a way to get it back into the hands of its traditional owners to ensure its stewardship and protection for generations to come."

"We believe this is an historic event, the first time a Canadian land trust has transferred title of a conservation property to a First Nation as an act of reconciliation," said Cathy Armstrong, TLC Executive Director. "We will be working with W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership and Dr. Martin to develop an eco-cultural restoration plan. TLC is humbly grateful for the opportunity to facilitate this ground-breaking transfer of title for the benefit of future generations."

TLC will be raising funds this spring to support ongoing restoration and monitoring work on the island. For more information about SISÇENEM and how you can get involved, visit www.conservancy.bc.ca or call TLC at 1-877-485-2422.

Facts

- SISÇENEM supports Garry oak, arbutus, and Douglas fir woodlands, and open wildflower meadows. Garry oak associated ecosystems support many of Canada's species at risk including the common nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*) and popcorn flower (*Plagiobothrys tenellus*). In the spring, the meadows are carpeted with ḴŁO,EL (Great Camas, *Camassia leichtlinii*), Fawn lily (*Erythronium Oregonum*), and Chocolate lilies (*Fritillaria affinis*).
- Due to the lack of deer browse on SISÇENEM, researchers have identified an abundance of native species with cultural significance such as ḴEXMIN (Indian consumption plant, *Lomatium nudicaule*) and ḴŁO,EL (Great Camas, *Camassia leichtlinii*).
- Part of the same geologic formation as Sidney Island (Turonian), SISÇENEM is comprised of bedrock carved by the last glaciation, basal conglomerate, and sandstone outcrops containing exposed fossils of bivalves and mollusks including the beautiful ammonite fossils. This geologic formation on Sidney Island and along Island View Beach led to the discovery of mastodon and other prehistoric mammal fossils.
- Scientific research and educational programming regarding the eco-cultural restoration of the island will continue in partnership with the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council, TLC, and Dr. Tara Martin, University of British Columbia.



WSÁNEĆ
LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

About

The WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council Society is a unified, legal governing body comprised of three WSÁNEĆ First Nations: Tsartlip, Tseycum, and Tsawout. It aims to promote the interests of the WSÁNEĆ First Nations by enhancing recognition of, and respect for, WSÁNEĆ Douglas Treaty rights and WSÁNEĆ Aboriginal rights and title. The WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council promotes the WSÁNEĆ culture, traditional practices, and language, including the original WSÁNEĆ management of the environment as it was meant to be. The WLC also seeks to promote sustainable and equitable development of resources within WSÁNEĆ Territory.

The Land Conservancy of B.C. (TLC) is a non-profit, charitable Land Trust working throughout British Columbia. TLC's primary mandate is to benefit the community by protecting habitat for natural communities of plants and animals. Founded in 1997, TLC is membership-based and governed by an elected, volunteer Board of Directors. TLC relies on a strong membership and volunteer base to help maintain its operations. Learn more about TLC by visiting www.conservancy.bc.ca.

The Conservation Decision Lab is led by Dr Tara Martin and comprises a team of post-doctoral and graduate students pioneering the development of methods to predict impacts of cumulative effects on biodiversity and transform these predictions into decisions to inform what actions to take, when and where to recover and conserve biodiversity. The Salish Sea is a focal point for their research. For more on what they do visit www.taramartin.org

Media contacts:

Chief Don Tom

Chair, WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council
Chief, Tsartlip First Nation
Cell (250) 813-3315
Email chief@tsartlip.com

Cathy Armstrong

TLC Executive Director
Office (250) 479-8053
Cell (250) 588-4945
Email carmstrong@conservancy.bc.ca

Steph Troughton

Senior Manager, Communications
Faculty of Forestry, Dean's Office
University of British Columbia, Vancouver Campus
Cell (604) 362-7706
Email Stephanie.troughton@ubc.ca

Dropbox Folder: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/xvujaajotehu6z3/AAA3tr59DaVuAbcEuaHKXy9ha?dl=0>