



PRESS RELEASE

CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF THE COLVILLE RESERVATION

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Historic Desautel Hunting Rights Case to be heard by Supreme Court of Canada

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VANCOUVER, BC— Rodney Cawston, the Chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CCT), announced today that the Supreme Court of Canada has granted leave to appeal in the Rick Desautel hunting case, in which three lower courts have held that Desautel, and by extension all s̓n̓ʕay̓ckstx (Sinixt/Arrow Lakes) people, including s̓n̓ʕay̓ckstx or Arrow Lakes members of the CCT, have the right to hunt in their traditional territory in Canada.

“We welcome the opportunity to have this historic case heard by Canada’s highest court. We are confident that the Supreme Court will, like the lower courts, confirm the truth of our history and identity, and that the burden of the false declaration of “extinction”, which our people carried for far too long, will be lifted”, Chairman Cawston said today.

The s̓n̓ʕay̓ckstx or Lakes Tribe is one of twelve represented by the CCT. Since time immemorial, the s̓n̓ʕay̓ckstx occupied a sizable territory in what is now British Columbia, and moved back and forth across what they view as an artificial boundary between the United States (U.S.) and Canada. When the border was established in 1846, s̓n̓ʕay̓ckstx people on the “U.S. side” encountered increasing difficulties in exercising their rights north of the border, including the passage of a law in 1896 that made it illegal to hunt in their Canadian territory. Ultimately, many s̓n̓ʕay̓ckstx were forced to settle south of the border, and were declared “extinct” in Canada in 1956.

Rick Desautel said today that he “looks forward to the Supreme Court confirming that my identity as a s̓n̓ʕay̓ckstx man cannot be questioned when I cross the border to hunt in the traditional territory of my ancestors. I will become an old man before this case is finished, but I will die a happy one, knowing that I will have played a role in taking away the pain of extinction from my grandchildren and the future generations to come. Púti? k^wu alá? (we are still here).”

Mark Underhill, lead counsel for Desautel, added this: “At issue in this appeal is whether aboriginal identity can be effectively erased by the imposition of colonial laws, government

policy, or an international border. This case will have important implications for all indigenous peoples on both sides of the border.”

The hearing of the appeal by the Supreme Court is expected to be in the spring of 2020 in Ottawa, Ontario, with a decision to follow some months later.

“Rick’s journey to preserve the rights of our ancestors for future generations will continue, and in the interim, we intend to carry on the sn̓ɬay̓ckstx journey towards reconciliation” Chairman Cawston said, “we will continue to share our traditional knowledge and rich culture with the broader community now living within sn̓ɬay̓ckstx qwaṁqw̓m̓t̓ i? t̓m̓xw̓la?xws (our beautiful territory) in Canada, along with our First Nations neighbours, amongst which many sn̓ɬay̓ckstx descendants reside”.

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About the Colville Tribes:

Today, more than 9,527 descendants of 12 aboriginal tribes of Indians are enrolled in the Confederated Tribes of the Colville. The tribes, commonly known by English and French names, are: the Colville, the Nespelem, the San Poil, the Arrow Lakes, the Palus, the Wenatchi (Wenatchee), the Chelan, the Entiat, the Methow, the southern Okanogan, the Moses Columbia and the Nez Perce of Chief Joseph’s Bands.