



PRESS RELEASE

CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF THE COLVILLE RESERVATION

Media Contact:
Neeka Somday
(509) 634-2213

“Extinct” Sinixt Hunter Heads to the Supreme Court of Canada

For Immediate Release
October 5, 2020

NESPELEM, WA.— Rodney Cawston, the Chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CCT) says that all sn̓ɣay̓ckstx (Arrow Lakes/Sinixt) people are eagerly anticipating October 8, 2020, when the landmark case of *R v. Desautel* will be heard by the Supreme Court of Canada:

“We are looking forward to having our voices heard in the Supreme Court of Canada and are confident the Court will ultimately affirm the three lower court victories. We the sn̓ɣay̓ckstx are not ‘extinct’, and have the right and responsibility to hunt on and steward the land that our people have walked since time immemorial.”

Chairman Cawston again expressed his gratitude for the support of twelve separate First Nations and tribal organizations from across the continent, and on both sides of the 49th parallel, that are intervening in the case:

“This case has implications well beyond sn̓ɣay̓ckstx territory. COVID-19 has brought home the lasting impact that the “invisible line” has imposed on Indigenous people. While we are deeply saddened that the pandemic is preventing us from attending the hearing in person, it will not stop us from standing together in solidarity, spirit and prayer to assert our rights within our traditional territories on behalf of our ancestors and future generations.”

The sn̓ɣay̓ckstx or Lakes Tribe is one of twelve represented by the CCT. For thousands of years the sn̓ɣay̓ckstx occupied a sizable territory stretching north from Kettle Falls in Washington State to north of Revelstoke in British Columbia, and moved back and forth across what is now the boundary between the US and Canada. After that boundary was established in 1846, sn̓ɣay̓ckstx people on the “US side” found it increasingly difficult to continue to exercise their rights north of the border, including having a law passed in 1896 to make it illegal to hunt in their Canadian territory. Ultimately, many sn̓ɣay̓ckstx were forced to settle south of the border, and were later declared to be “extinct” in Canada in 1956.

In 2010, Rick Desautel was charged with hunting elk as a non-resident, and without a license, near Castlegar, B.C., which falls within the heart of snʔayʔckstx traditional territory. Following a lengthy trial held in the fall of 2016, Rick was acquitted of all charges, with Justice Lisa Mrozinski of the BC Provincial Court holding that snʔayʔckstx hunting rights endured to the present day and were constitutionally protected. Two subsequent appeals by the Crown were dismissed by the BC Supreme Court and Court of Appeal respectively.

Rick has been quarantining in British Columbia since mid-September so that he can travel to Ottawa to be present for this historic moment, even if the pandemic will force him to wait outside the courthouse:

“I am honored be able to take this journey with our ancestors, who have guided me across the border and here to Ottawa. Their help has deepened my faith that our rights, traditions and natural laws will prevail. I may only be able to stand on the steps of the courthouse, but that will not stop the process of truth and reconciliation, for which I share responsibility.”

The appeal will be heard by nine justices of the Supreme Court of Canada, and the Court is expected to reserve judgment for several months.

For more information on the journey of Rick Desautel to the Supreme Court of Canada, see the link below to “Older than the Crown”, the documentary produced by CCT and directed by award winning Native American filmmaker Derrick LaMere:

Documentary Link: <https://vimeo.com/370190413/cd0d6eeea8>

Rick Desautel will make a statement on the front steps of the Supreme Court at 8:30 a.m. EST/5:30 a.m. PST on Thursday October 8th. The hearing will commence at 9:30 a.m. EST, and can be viewed live at this link:

<https://www.scc-csc.ca/case-dossier/info/hear-aud-eng.aspx>

About the Colville Tribes:

Today, more than 9,504 descendants of 12 Aboriginal tribes of Indians are enrolled in the Confederated Tribes of the Colville. The twelve tribes which compose the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation include: ščəlám̓x̓x̓w (deep water) or Chelan; walwáma (Wallowa people) or Chief Joseph Band of Nez Perce; sx̓y̓ʔit̓p (sharp pointed trees) or Colville; šntiyátk̓w̓x̓w (grass in the water) or Entiat; snʔáyckst (speckled fish) or Lakes; m̓tx̓w̓u (blunt hills around a valley) or Methow; škwáx̓č̓ən̓x̓w (people living on the bank) or Moses-Columbia; nspilm (prairie) or Nespelem; uknaqin (seeing over the top) or Okanogan; palúšpam (people from Palouse) or Palus; s̓ənp̓f̓w̓ilx̓ (grey mist as far as one can see) or San Poil, and šnp̓šq̓w̓áw̓s̓x̓w (people in between) or Wenatchi.