



PRESS RELEASE

CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF THE COLVILLE RESERVATION

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Successful Ceremony to Honor Sinixt Leaders

Nelson, BC-- The Colville Tribes (CCT) packed the house at The Capitol Theater in Nelson, BC on Thursday March 15th. The event honored past and present Sn̓ɬay̓ckstx (Sinixt) leaders and was also a celebration of the decision in the Rick Desautel case, a landmark court victory for the Colville Tribes and the Sn̓ɬay̓ckstx. The decision recognized a constitutionally-protected right to hunt for Sinixt people in Canada, and effectively erased a 1956 declaration of “extinction” of the Sn̓ɬay̓ckstx.

Following welcoming remarks from CCT Chairman Dr. Michael Marchand and speeches from Cody Desautel, CCT Natural Resources Director, and Mark Underhill, lead counsel on the Desautel case, three important Sn̓ɬay̓ckstx leaders were recognized.

The first honoree was the late Melanie Burris, who helped protect Sn̓ɬay̓ckstx ancestral grounds at Vallican, BC, against the threat of corporate expansion during a 1989 blockade by Sn̓ɬay̓ckstx, providing spiritual leadership for all of those in attendance.

The second was the late Virgil Seymour, a former Council member who played an instrumental role as the Arrow Lakes Facilitator until his untimely passing in 2017. Virgil once said “People ask, ‘What do you want?’ I would like to be able to take care of our sacred places, our ancestors’ bones, and to have consultation for the resources that come out of there.” Virgil’s dreams have moved one step closer to realization with the Desautel court victory.

Lastly, Rick Desautel, ceremonial hunter and recently retired CCT Fish and Wildlife employee, was honored for stepping up and persevering through a long (and continuing) court battle for the benefit of future generations of Sn̓ɬay̓ckstx people. Mr. Desautel’s wife, Linda, accepted Rick’s gift on his behalf.

The event also featured inspiring performances from the Inchelium Big Drum and Sn̓ɬay̓ckstx flute player Brian Phillips, as well as artwork from Sn̓ɬay̓ckstx artists Ric Gendron and Stefanie Ruben Marchand.

Dr. Michael Marchand said, “I have seen our narrative go full circle. I was only three years old when I and other Sinixt people became ‘extinct’ in the eyes of the Canadian government, but here we are today, as Sinixt members, ready to make our voices heard once again in what has been unequivocally confirmed to be the traditional homeland of the Sinixt people. Rick Desautel has been a leader amongst the Sinixt community and he was at the right place and the right time to make history for his people.”

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About the Colville Tribes:

Today, more than 9,520 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.