WEI WAI KUM FIRST NATION
Campbell River Band

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For Immediate Release

Liǧʷiłdaxʷ History at ʔuxstalis (Tyee Spit): A Story of Conflict, Settlement, Loss and Potential Reconciliation

Campbell River, BC – May 29, 2024 – The rich history of ʔuxstalis, known to many as Tyee Spit, is a testament to the resilience and heritage of the Liǧʷiłdaxʷ people. Nestled along the picturesque shores of Discovery Passage, this land holds stories of conflict, settlement, loss and the ongoing journey towards reconciliation.

Dating back to the early 19th century, ʔuxstalis was a site of conflict between Liǧʷiłdaxʷ and Salish-speaking people. The area was marked by fortified villages atop cliffs and strategic fortifications, a testament to a time of territorial disputes and strategic alliances. By the late 1830s, the Liǧʷiłdaxʷ emerged as victors, expanding their territory to the northern end of the Gulf of Georgia, including the mouth of Campbell River.

With the conflict settled, Liǧʷiłdaxʷ people established a permanent presence at Discovery Passage, including at ʔUxstalis. Known for generations as a home community, ʔUxstalis was once dotted with traditional bighouses and eventually modern-style homes, surrounded by abundant food-gathering areas from plants and wildlife to salmon.

In 1863, the colonial government identified a reserve at the mouth of the Campbell River, encompassing Tyee Spit, recognizing the significance of the land to the Liǧʷiłdaxʷ people. However, it wasn't until 1888 that the reserve was officially surveyed and confirmed, securing ʔuxstalis as part of the Wei Wai Kum Indian Reserve.

Despite these acknowledgments, the early 20th century brought challenges as the International Timber Company sought access to the Campbell River estuary, including parts of the reserve and Tyee Spit for a sawmill. This led to a series of meetings with the Indian Agent and RCMP, who held great authority at the time, ultimately resulting in an “agreement” to the sale of 160 acres of the reserve, including Tyee Spit. Wei Wai Kum people received small compensation for their homes and land, and were promised lumber to rebuild, but this promise was never honored. In the opinion of Wei Wai Kum this transaction is not valid as the terms of sale and its permanence were foreign concepts, additionally this arrangement was made under immense pressure from the Indian Agent. One has to remember that during this period, First Nations were being jailed for leaving their Reserve without a permit and for practicing outlawed traditions like the Potlatch. This transaction then, occurring under much pressure and questionable circumstances, marked a significant change for the Wei Wai Kum people, as they were forced to move their homes southward and away from ʔuxstalis. The sawmill was never built.

Today, after numerous transfers, Tyee Spit is municipal property, but its legacy lives on as a popular park and local and tourist destination, However, Wei Wai Kum people continue to question the legitimacy of the original transaction and seek reconciliation and a return to their ancestral lands. As the broader community enjoys the beauty of ʔuxstalis, Wei Wai Kum Elders question the original surrender, believing it was done under duress, with no common understanding to the terms of the arrangement and with inadequate compensation.

In a world of reconciliation, it is important for us to understand our local history and in this case, the story of ʔuxstalis. It serves as a reminder of our colonial past but presents opportunities for reconciliation. The Wei Wai Kum people envision a future where ʔuxstalis is returned to them, allowing them to reclaim their heritage and rebuild the connection to their lands. It is hoped that the broader Campbell River community will embrace this, as an act of reconciliation in which everyone's lives are enriched through addressing past injustices and building a community that makes reconciliation real.

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