For Immediate Release
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Lower Similkameen Band Council

Unearthed Ancestral Remains

Okanagan-Lower Similkameen Indian Band Territory/Cawston, British Columbia: Human remains were uncovered during the late afternoon on Monday, February 29th. The skulls of two individuals were discovered during excavation on an orchard in preparation for future planting; the contractor ceased all operations and notified the RCMP immediately. The coroner determined the remains to be ancestral.

The RCMP notified Chief Crow on Tuesday, March 1st and with the property owners consent, a site visit by Chief and requested attendees occurred to assess the site disturbance. The contractor confirmed all disturbed soil was placed on the property and no removal of soil had occurred off the property. An archaeologist was present during the initial site visit to assist in determining next steps for the band and the property owner under the BC Heritage Conservation Act.

“We need to keep that in mind these are our Grandparents; Great, Great, Great Grandparents and we need to make sure they are taken care of properly.” ~ Chief Crow. It is important to protect and teach others the Smałqmiš culture in ways that honour our Ancestors. Smałqmiš have a responsibility to take care of the tmxʷúlaʔxʷ (land) and tmixʷ (all living things) which includes our Ancestors as they are a part of our lives and having them unearthed affects the entire community. It is critical to rejoin and repatriate our Ancestors back to the tmxʷúlaʔxʷ.

Under the guidance of the elders and Chief, the exposed remains were to be collected for safekeeping (under temperature controlled conditions) to prevent further damage until their repatriation to the tmxʷúlaʔxʷ. To ensure protection from further disturbance on site surveying, monitoring and collection has occurred to date to minimize continual weathering and exposure of remains that continue to surface daily. Since the initial collection began, the number and size of remains leads us to believe there are at minimum, five individuals ranging from adult to infancy.

A Heritage Conservation Act (HCA) permit is required to complete any additional land altering or soil removal, including the completion of an Archaeological Impact Assessment (AIA). The ONA member bands have been contacted to support the expedition of the HCA permit to complete an AIA. With the cooperation of the property owner; Lower Similkameen Indian Band and the BC Archaeology Branch are working together to ensure next steps are taken to respect, honour and protect the ancestral remains.

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