

SOUTHERN GULF ISLANDS FORUM

September 24th, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm

Meeting Notes

Attendees

Eric Pelkey, W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council, guest speaker

Ken Thomas, Penelakut Tribe, guest speaker

Kathleen Johnnie, Penelakut Tribe, First Nations Consultant (joined at 11 am)

Adam Olsen, MLA

Dan Rogers, Islands Trustee (Keats)

Jane Wolverton, Islands Trustee (Galiano)

Laura Patrick, Islands Trustee (Salt Spring)

Deborah Morrison, Islands Trustee (North Pender)

Peter Luckham, Islands Trustee (Thetis)

Gary Holman, CRD Director (Salt Spring Island)

Clare Frater, Islands Trust Director, Trust Area Services

Lisa Wilcox, Islands Trust Senior Intergovernmental Policy Advisor

Laura Parker, Outreach, Office of Adam Olsen MLA

Jake Rees, Constituent Advocate, Office of Adam Olsen MLA

Carly Bilney, Islands Trust, notetaker

Judith Cullington, Facilitator

Welcome

MLA Olsen welcomed attendees and commented on the incredible honour that members of the Southern Gulf Islands (SGI) Forum have, to work and represent the beautiful territories of the Coast Salish Peoples. He commented on the need to be creating more opportunities to learn about who we are and where we have come from and added that we have a lot to learn. He thanked Eric Pelkey from the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council and Ken Thomas from Penelakut Tribe for sharing their wisdom at the meeting. MLA Olsen noted that the members of the SGI Forum represent a very powerful place.

Opening blessing

Eric Pelkey, W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council, provided an opening blessing, thanking the Creator for the beautiful day, for our families, relatives and friends and asked that the Creator watch over each and every one of us and give us strength in these times.



Eric Pelkey – WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council

Eric Pelkey introduced himself and described his responsibility, as a Tsawout Hereditary Chief and WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council Community Engagement Coordinator, to protect the culture of his people and educate others about the WSÁNEĆ Nation.

He explained that the WSÁNEĆ Nation has four existing villages over a territory that stretches a long way – including Malahat and Semiahmoo by Blaine, the Saanich Peninsula, the Southern Gulf Islands and the San Juan Islands; these villages share the same language.

WSÁNEĆ – The Emerging Land

Eric shared a story about where the name WSÁNEĆ comes from:

Ten thousand years ago a great flood happened in WSÁNEĆ territory. Before that great flood happened the Creator, XÁLS, came down and told the people to prepare themselves for a great flood. He told the people to build great canoes from the strongest trees so that they could take as many people as possible and take the things they need to live for a sustained time on the water. In those days, just as today, there were people who listened and people who were skeptical.


Those who listened to XÁLS started to build giant canoes. When the water started to rise, there was thunder and lightning throughout the land, and those who had prepared started gathering things into their canoes, including long ropes that were hundreds of feet long and made out of durable cedar bark that XÁLS had told them to make.

The people in the canoes saw many families perish in the rising floods. The land began to disappear as the water continued to rise until the only thing visible was the highest point on the peninsula, to where the people paddled. They tied the ends of their ropes to the giant arbutus trees and, eventually, even the top of the peninsula disappeared under the water.

The cedar branch ropes were almost gone when the water finally stopped rising. The people remained on the water for a long time until one day a raven flew onto the chief's canoe with a cedar branch in his mouth. The chief welcomed the raven as a sign that the land would come back.

The water began to recede until the people again saw the top of the peninsula and land continued to appear below. XÁLS came down to the people and told them this is WSÁNEĆ – which means, *“the emerging land.” You are the emerging people, the WSÁNEĆ Nation, the people that emerged from the flood.*

Eric then shared a memory from the mid-1990s when he went to Salt Spring to deal with human remains that had been found on the beach. He was accompanied by spiritual people, people who have the sacred hereditary right to handle ancestral remains, and an archaeologist. From the remains, the archaeologist assembled a complete skeleton of a person whose head had been flattened and who was surrounded by arrowheads, axe heads and various beads that showed the person held a high place among their people; she concluded that the person was about 5,000 years old.



The W̱SÁNEĆ people brought the remains to higher ground, reburied them and marked the place with stones. Elders laid a blessing on the grave site and one elder went to gather medicines to cleanse everyone and lay a blessing. At one point during the day, the archaeologist asked Eric if he had heard about a great flood that had happened in the area because she kept coming across evidence of such an event that happened about 10,000 years ago. Eric told her that all W̱SÁNEĆ people know the story of the great flood. The archaeologist was shocked and questioned why she had never learned about the great flood in all her years of education. Eric explained that the great flood is part of W̱SÁNEĆ history, but it is a repressed history.

Eric commented that this physical evidence shows that everything passed down by his elders was true.

See more information at <https://wsanec.com/history-territory/>

Douglas Treaty of 1852


Eric explained that it is part of his responsibility to educate people who live and work in W̱SÁNEĆ land that they are in treaty territory. He described the W̱SÁNEĆ treaty that was brought about in 1852 when W̱SÁNEĆ people had a summer fishing village in Cadboro Bay. Trails connected the various villages and runners would take messages between the villages.

One day, a young man was running on the trail from Cadboro Bay to Tsawout and when he got to Gordon Head, he came upon a wooden fence across the trail. As he stopped to wonder what the purpose of the unusual structure was, he did not notice he was being watched by a settler. When the young man resumed his mission to bring an important message to Tsawout he jumped over the fence and started to run; as he began to run across the field the settler killed him with a shot that was heard in Cadboro Bay.

People from Cadboro Bay came running and found the young man laying on the trail and saw the settler with his weapon. They carried the young man to the chief's house in Tsawout and told the chief there what they had seen. The chief was angry and at a subsequent meeting among all the chiefs of W̱SÁNEĆ Nation it was determined that the settlers were a danger to the W̱SÁNEĆ people and needed to be exterminated.

During those days, there were missionaries living among the W̱SÁNEĆ people who had learned the Nation's language. They facilitated a meeting between the chiefs and Sir James Douglas where thousands of warriors secretly waited for the signal to kill Douglas as he climbed a mountain to meet the chiefs. A priest, carrying a large cross ahead of Douglas, asked the chiefs not to kill his people because, just like the W̱SÁNEĆ, they are a spiritual people who also believe in the Creator. The chiefs decided that maybe they would be able to live in peace with the newcomers. The priest interpreted that to Douglas, who waved his arms back and forth across the territory, and the W̱SÁNEĆ took that to mean that Douglas was accepting the peace treaty and that no more harm would come to the W̱SÁNEĆ.

Eric commented that the rights of the W̱SÁNEĆ people through the Douglas Treaty of 1852 have been confirmed in court, and the meaning of the treaty is still being worked on between nations. He also encouraged meeting attendees to visit the W̱SÁNEĆ website and noted a new addition to the site called



“Resources for Settlers” where people can learn about WSÁNEĆ, including basic pronunciations which have been difficult for settlers today and in the past.

Resources for settlers: <https://wsanec.com/learn-settlers/>

Douglas Treaties: <https://wsanec.com/the-douglas-treaties/>

Ken Thomas, Penelakut Tribe

Ken Thomas is a councillor and staff member with Penelakut Tribe. He explained that his Indigenous name was passed down from his grandfather at the Fraser River where a village site was and that Penelakut translates to ‘half buried homes on the beach.’

Ken noted that the Penelakut use all the islands and islets in travels back and forth to the Fraser River, up to Cape Mudge and towards Campbell River, including the Gulf Islands, that are important to the Penelakut people. He made the following comments about how development occurring in these areas today – areas where he used to hunt just a few years ago – is hurting his people:

- ♦ Harvesting areas for traditional foods are getting smaller all the time;
- ♦ Over harvesting in the commercial sector is increasing;
- ♦ Sacred places where ancestors were laid to rest are being exposed due to erosion;
- ♦ Traditional food sources are in jeopardy from the logging practices; and
- ♦ Wharves are being built where clams were harvested.

The Penelakut would like to work together to try to solve these issues. Ken highlighted the importance of communication, sharing and learning from the stories of the past.

Ken noted that the Gulf Islands is home for the Penelakut – their medicinal source and food source. He described habitat damage as a big concern for the Penelakut that must be addressed so that future generations can enjoy the pristine foods that the Penelakut enjoyed in the past.

Ken commented on the need to see more First Nations involved in decision-making in the Gulf Islands on land that First Nations have utilized forever.

Information on Penelakut Tribe and the Creation Story at <https://penelakut.ca/about/>

Ken Thomas on traditional teachings about food sustainability:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qle2RtG0m_c

Kathleen Johnnie, Penelakut Tribe, First Nations Consultant, joined the meeting at 11:00 am. She commented on the importance of First Nations having the ability to make decisions about the lands and water. She explained that Penelakut Elders tell their people to not put lines or borders on maps because they are not representative of how the land is used; the Penelakut (and other nations) have a very different worldview of land and resource access than the European worldview.



Discussion

Forum members discussed their reflections on what they had heard, and ways that we can work together in support of Indigenous communities in this area.

- ♦ We need to set aside some of the science and find new ways of learning that have been lost
- ♦ Sharing the stories is so important
- ♦ We need to find a way to co-govern, to resolve land dispute issues and grant access to hunting and fishing and traditional activities to which future generations have every right
- ♦ We need to advocate to other levels of government and other agencies to share in this work
- ♦ Coordination is needed between federal, provincial, local and Indigenous governance to address issues raised
- ♦ The rights of the people who were displaced from these islands need to be considered
- ♦ We should work to ensure that the *Islands Trust Act* is brought into compliance with the Islands Trust Reconciliation Declaration
- ♦ The Islands Trust Reconciliation Declaration needs to be put into action
- ♦ There is need for Indigenous representation on Islands Trust committees
- ♦ The way voting happens in the islands is in conflict with the principles of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* and, given the history of displacement, we need to consider how seats in the Islands Trust area can better represent Indigenous people
- ♦ Settler government mechanics and bureaucracy need to be grounded in an ethic of place and community—the way in which the *W̱SÁNEĆ* govern—with thoughtful decision-making about how to protect place and space
- ♦ The Islands Trust regulates land use, but also has the opportunity to advocate, educate and work in partnership and there is opportunity to help islanders understand areas where they can do better
- ♦ The Trust Policy Statement review is a good opportunity to help people in the Gulf Islands understand the history of the region and why reconciliation is a part of the review
- ♦ Access to hunting on Galiano by First Nations should go beyond initiatives at the Galiano Conservancy Association
- ♦ We need to see more First Nations involvement in making decisions about what happens on the islands
- ♦ To share teachings, First Nations need areas to harvest and access to clams and salmon streams
- ♦ A systemic study should be done to ensure that First Nations are receiving the same services as others within the Capital Regional District (CRD) and to highlight gaps and areas that can be improved
- ♦ The CRD includes an extensive park system and has a responsibility to bring First Nations back to their traditional role of stewarding public lands
- ♦ We need to bring First Nations back to resource management to ensure that traditional harvesting can continue on land and in the water



- ♦ The Island View Management Plan was offered as an opportunity for co-management between First Nations and the CRD
- ♦ The Islands Trust Conservancy will be soon posting an opening for an Indigenous Board member with hopes that a local First Nation will be able to fill the position and help make decisions about what takes place in the region (in discussion it was suggested two positions would be even better!)
- ♦ The W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council needs to be formally brought into these discussions, particularly Justin Fritz (Policy/Negotiations Manager) and Joni Olsen (Policy/Negotiations Analyst) with W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council
- ♦ Monthly meetings are needed to discuss how to move towards collaborative decision-making
- ♦ We need to bring in many more Indigenous peoples to the discussion
- ♦ Giving First Nations the ability to make decisions about the lands and waters will require an intergovernmental forum where government leaders can come together
- ♦ An intergovernmental forum might also respond to issues that arise where multiple levels of governance overlap
- ♦ First Nations have not typically been invited to present in person on issues at Trust Committee meetings
- ♦ Mapping is a concern as drawing lines on a map is not representative of how First Nations used the land
- ♦ First Nations have a very different worldview of land and resource access than that of European settlers
- ♦ First Nations used both the waters and the land of the Southern Gulf Islands and their activities required that they leave no trace (this is why settlers thought First Nations did not use the inland areas)
- ♦ Penelakut does not want mere Guardianship roles, but roles that include enforcement and authority, and helping to set the rules to be enforced
- ♦ CRD First Nations Relations Manager Caitlyn Vernon and CRD First Nations Relations Committee Chair Maja Tait should be invited to the next SGI Forum meeting
- ♦ There needs to be a cost-recovery funding mechanism in place to cover the cost of processing applications that are sent to First Nations
- ♦ In addition to intergovernmental forums or elected positions, First Nations should have clear invites to all Local Trust Committee meetings so that First Nations leadership may be involved in decision-making conversations
- ♦ The Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations should be at this table so they can hear the passion.
- ♦ Boundaries are an important thing to think about; others from more northern islands and surrounding regions ought to be included in these meetings
- ♦ Municipal regulations are needed that allow funding to be collected so First Nations can process applications
- ♦ Penelakut (and other nations) receives a ton of referrals and it is difficult to address them all



- ♦ Confidentiality can be an issue and there is a need to preserve sites without always identifying the reason why
- ♦ There is a difference between worldviews in how place is understood and we must consider how to work within existing governance systems to shift governance into new models without being constrained to Eurocentric, colonial boundaries
- ♦ The CRD invites First Nations within the CRD region to participate in its various commissions and committees.
- ♦ Ken Thomas commented that there are a lot more stories to share to bring some understanding.
- ♦ Eric Pelkey explained that Tsawout is an amalgamation of many places that existed in the Gulf Islands and the San Juan Islands. Many people that lived in those places now live in Tsawout because they were forcibly removed from their lands. Tsawout was their winter village, not their only village; Eric's family home village was where Poet's Cove Resort now stands on Pender Island. The W̱SÁNEĆ have always been here, and always will be here. Eric noted that we need to talk to one another in these meetings to determine how to bring First Nations back into governance in the Gulf Islands and in all of their territory.

Next steps and Actions

1. MLA Adam Olsen committed to reaching out to other Members of the Legislative Assembly who represent Islands Trust communities to see if they would be willing to create a multi-party parliamentary caucus to come together and discuss shared concerns. Islands Trust trustees should encourage their MLAs to be involved.
2. MLA Olsen and his staff will research the creation of a mechanism that enables Indigenous communities to create a fee structure that lists costs related to processing applications.
3. MLA Olsen and Kathleen Johnnie of Penelakut agreed to meet to discuss previous efforts of the Province to set up a referrals agency, and how this centralized office was a concern to First Nations.
4. Gary Holman will reach out to include First Nations in the CRD parks management plan reviews, including discussions on co-management.
5. Group to consider expanding its boundaries to be more inclusive throughout the Salish Sea, and to avoid thinking in colonial boundaries
6. Lisa will send a summary of activities at Islands Trust.
7. Participants agreed that this conversation was very useful and conversations must continue.
8. Progress on the above will be reported out in monthly meetings.