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**KATZIE, KWANTLEN AND SEMIAHMOO NATIONS IDENTIFY PRIORITY CROWN LAND WITHIN TRADITIONAL TERRITORY FOR RETURN**

*k'w'eq'ənəq traditional site in Surrey vital to First Nations' future and reconciliACTION*

**Surrey, B.C. | Unceded traditional territories of the Katzie, Kwantlen and Semiahmoo First Nations |**

The Katzie, Kwantlen and Semiahmoo (KKS) Nations have identified a parcel of land within their traditional territory — called k'w'eq'ənəq (Kwek-en-nek) and known as Campbell Heights North in Surrey — to be returned to the Nations to support their cultural and economic future. The site consists of 300 acres of industrial-zoned land that has been declared surplus by the federal government.

The request was officially announced today at an event held jointly by the three First Nations in Surrey, near the parcel of land.

“We are coming together as three Nations, as a family, working together to honour the countless past, present, and future generations of our Kwantlen, Katzie and Semiahmoo people,” said Chief Grace George of the Katzie First Nation. “We owe that to them, and the government owes that to us. It's time. It's not the time to talk anymore, it's time for us to see k'w'eq'ənəq returned to us. I cannot express enough how important this land is to us.”

“Katzie, Kwantlen and Semiahmoo — we are working together to take back this land we call k'w'eq'ənəq,” added Katzie Councillor Rick Bailey. “As we do this work, each day we get stronger, and each day we realize that we can go further together. We have invited the government to jump on board and return this land to us so we can all go down this road together.”

As Coast Salish people, the relationship between the Katzie, Kwantlen and Semiahmoo First Nations is based on a common language, similar cultural and spiritual practices, a strong connection to the land and broad kinship ties that stretch back millennia.

This land k<sup>w</sup>eq'ənəq is a hub for Katzie, Kwantlen and Semiahmoo. It is where the three Nations have always crossed paths, and there is a vast trade network extending across these lands. Unfortunately, because of colonization, many of the traditional food resources and natural medicines used to trade are not available anymore, or they're very limited. The Nations' economies, therefore, need to change — and they must be the ones to decide the future economic uses of their lands.

“Both the governments of Canada and British Columbia have enacted legislation to adopt UNDRIP,” said Chief Harley Chappell of the Semiahmoo First Nation. “Unfortunately, we just keep hearing, ‘We're working out our UNDRIP plan,’ and we haven't seen any real action taken yet. Government needs to be brave if it truly wants to enact reconciliation. Change takes bravery. We need somebody to be brave and support change so that we can truly see reconciliation in action.”

k<sup>w</sup>eq'ənəq is the last substantial piece of crown lands that the Nations are able to negotiate for in their shared traditional territory. As such, it has the potential to be a legacy that the three Nations and Canada leave to show how reconciliation can work in a very urban setting.

“Economic reconciliation is an extremely important and integral piece to the future of our communities,” said Chief Chappell. “Prior to colonization, we were the richest people in all the lands here, but our wealth was not monetary. Our wealth was access to land, access to resources and access to territories that we could hunt and gather on. That's where our wealth came from. Nowadays, that wealth has changed because we don't have that access to lands like we used to. The wealthy in this country have built intergenerational wealth off the resources and lands that are unceded, it's time for our Nations to have the same ample opportunities to do the same. Returning k<sup>w</sup>eq'ənəq to our Nations will provide intergenerational wealth to our communities for years to come. This is a chance for Canada to turn the talk of reconciliation into reconciliACTION.”

The exact use of k'weq'ənəq under Indigenous stewardship remains to be determined, but the Nations see a critical opportunity to work collaboratively with other governments in pursuing prosperous and sustainable land use and management for the benefit of all. Currently, a single private industrial agriculture company has a subsidized lease to grow crops. In November 2022, the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) initiated a proposal to consider including this land in into the Provincial Agricultural Land Reserve. However, the ALC ultimately concluded that it had no jurisdiction over these lands.

In its findings document, the ALC stated that: “In the circumstances of the ongoing negotiations between KKS and the Government of Canada, including in particular the length of those negotiations and the scarcity of federal Crown land in the claimed traditional territory of KKS, inclusion of the Lands in the ALR would not carry out the intent of the ALCA.”

“We carry the teachings from those who have come before us, and we owe a responsibility to care for and protect our land and precious resources for future generations,” said Chief Gabriel “We value community and we value working together in a kind and respectful way. k'weq'ənəq is part of our shared territories. We have been here since time immemorial and will continue to be here for countless more generations. We want to use this land to benefit our KKS Nations and the entire region for many years to come. We know this is possible.”

For more information, visit: [www.KKSFirstNations.ca](http://www.KKSFirstNations.ca)

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