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FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

January 20th, 2015

First Nations Leadership Council congratulates Pauquachin, Tsartlip, Tsawout, Tseycum, and Hul' qumi'num Nations, in particular Cowichan Tribes, Penelakut, Lyackson and Halalt Nations in reaching an agreement regarding the purchase of Grace Islet

Coast Salish Territory (Vancouver, BC) – On January 15th, 2015 a partnership between local First Nations, the BC Government and the Nature Conservancy of Canada was announced which would allow the purchase of Grace Islet which is a well-known burial site of high-ranking First Nations people. Grace Islet is an important site to the impacted First Nations which saw the desecration of the burial site by an owner that was developing the site for residential use. The FNLC commends all parties involved in reaching this significant agreement which will ensure the site is protected.

Chief Maureen Chapman, Board Member for the BC Assembly of First Nations stated, “Across BC, First Nations have and continue to work to protect sites of cultural and spiritual significance within our traditional territories. This planned partnership to support the long-term conservation of Grace Islet would not have been possible without the perseverance of the local First Nations, who united and were steadfast in their determination that a solution could be found despite a challenging situation where private property rights collided with Aboriginal rights.”

“We commend all of the parties that worked long and hard to get this agreement done. However it has unfortunately been another example where development has taken a priority over the preservation of an important First Nations cultural site. Governments and developers must understand and recognize that cultural sites such as Grace Islet are sacred to our people. These sites represent our history and are cultural anchors that connect our communities to our past, present and future”, said Robert Phillips of the First Nations Summit political executive.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs stated, “We congratulate all parties involved, however the Province must do more in protecting First Nations burial sites. The *BC Heritage Conservation Act* is woefully inadequate in protecting our ancestors’ remains. Grace Islet as well as other significant sites around BC will continue to be desecrated and destroyed without significant amendments to the *BC Heritage Conservation Act* or successful implementation of section 4 of the Act which would allow for First Nations to manage heritage sites within their territories.”

The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

For further comment please contact:

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