



The **RELAW** Project  
REVITALIZING INDIGENOUS LAW  
FOR LAND, AIR & WATER

# Shuswap Nation Tribal Council

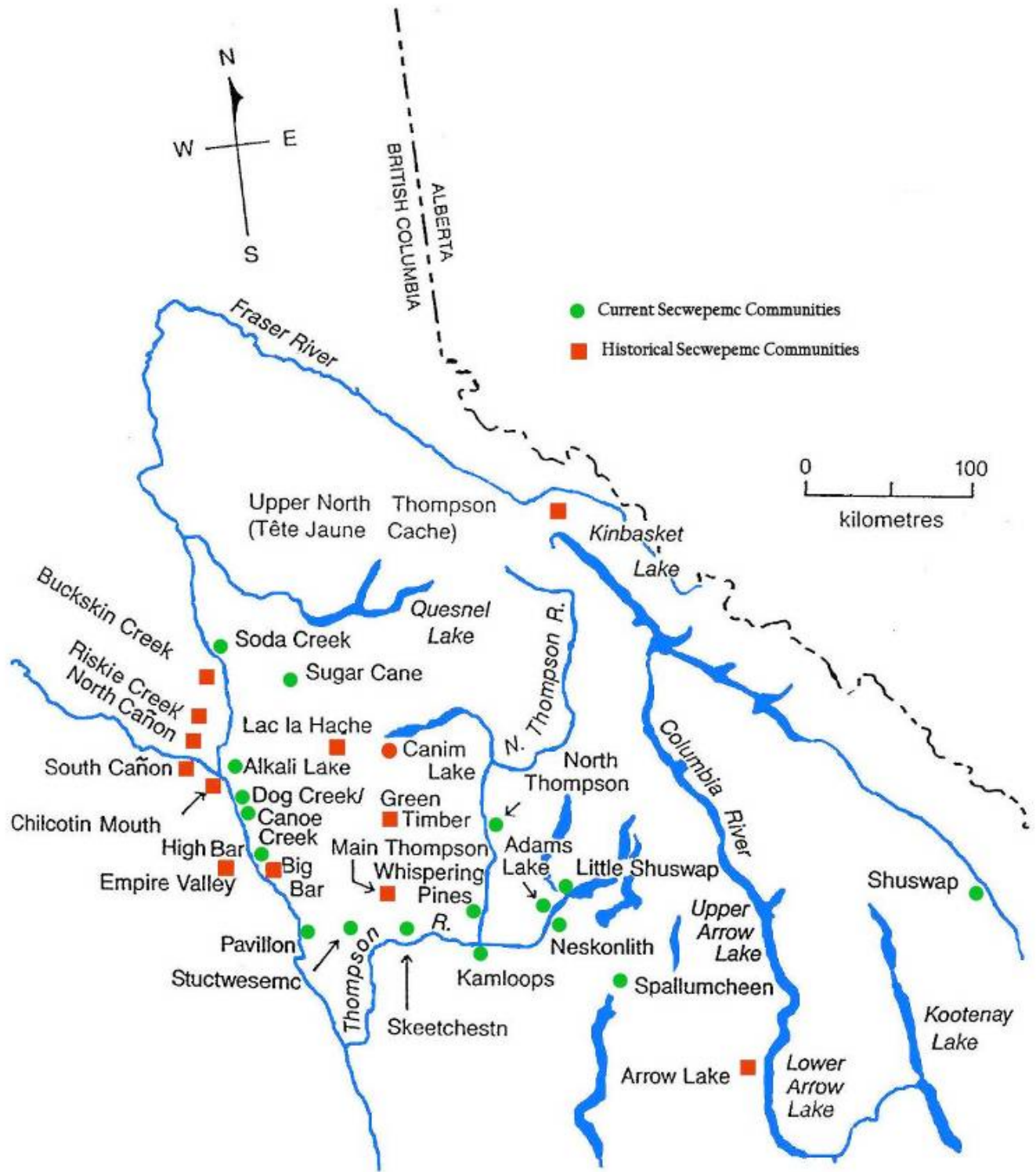
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## Telling the RELAW Story



**WEST COAST**  
Environmental Law





# Secwepemcul'ecw Since time immemorial



# Secwépemc peoples and Secwépemcúl'ecw

Secwépemc peoples are responsible under Secwépemc laws for the care and management of Secwépemcúl'ecw, which is the name in the Secwépemcstsin language for Secwépemc territories.

For thousands of years, Secwépemc peoples have lived as a self-governing nation composed of independent communities (or “campfires”) united by common Secwépemc culture, language, law and connection to Secwépemcúl'ecw. The Secwepemc nation consisted of 32 campfires, but as a result of the impacts of colonization it currently consists of 17 bands organized into different groupings.

The Shuswap Nation Tribal Council (“SNTC”), which undertook the RELAW project, is an organization composed of nine Secwépemc bands.





**Our shared vision:**

**“A unified nation operating under our own governance, guided by our own laws, supported by the management of our own resources, and founded in the strength of our language and ceremonies”**



# Revitalizing Secwépemc law

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The Secwepemc nation has held its territorial authority and sovereignty in Secwépemcúl'ecw through the application of Secwépemc laws and governance processes. However, colonization has done damage to the exercise of Secwépemc laws, including by impeding the Secwépemc legal processes used to govern and make decisions about the land, water and sky worlds in Secwépemcúl'ecw.

The goal of the Secwépemc nation is to move beyond *Indian Act* bands to restore and revitalize its system of governance according to a shared vision of: “a unified nation operating under our own governance, guided by our own laws, supported by the management of our own resources, and founded in the strength of our language and ceremonies.”<sup>1</sup>

In support of this vision, SNTC has spearheaded a multi-year effort to engage all Secwépemc communities in a conversation about how best to make this goal a reality. While SNTC is not the governing body for the work, its staff's role is “to support the nation as we transition to a national government as directed by the people.”<sup>2</sup>

SNTC participated in the RELAW project to assist in this larger effort of governance reform by exploring the application of Secwépemc laws to lands, waters and resources in Secwépemcúl'ecw.

## The RELAW team

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The RELAW project was carried out by the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council through a learning partnership agreement with the West Coast Environmental Law Research Foundation. The RELAW team consisted of:

- Bonnie Leonard, SNTC Tribal Director
- Kelly Mortimer, former SNTC Aboriginal Rights and Title Director
- Sally Hunter, SNTC Aboriginal Rights and Title Coordinator
- Gavin Smith, West Coast Environmental Law Staff Counsel
- Georgia Lloyd-Smith, West Coast Environmental Law Staff Counsel

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1. Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, *Secwepemc Governance: Community Engagement Sessions Findings* (March 2017), online: <<http://shuswapnation.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Secwepemc-Governance-Community-Engagement-Report-March-2017.pdf>> [“SNTC, *Community Engagement*”] at page 5.

2. *Ibid* at page 3.



# SNTC's work connected to the RELAW project

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## Written synthesis of Secwépemc legal principles

At the time its RELAW project started, SNTC had already completed a written synthesis of Secwépemc laws regarding lands and resources through a previous partnership with the Indigenous Law Research Unit. During this prior work, SNTC undertook extensive research of publically available Secwépemc stories and the legal principles they reflect, as well as conducted engagement and interviews with Secwépemc community members regarding Secwépemc stories and legal principles pertaining to lands and resources. This work was compiled in a detailed report analyzing Secwépemc lands and resources law.<sup>3</sup>

SNTC's pre-existing research allowed it to direct its efforts during the RELAW project on community engagement and drafting focused on how to apply its laws.

## Community engagement

As the primary engine of its work, SNTC organized a “governance tour” of Secwépemc communities. The issues addressed during the governance tour were broader than just the RELAW project, going beyond management of lands and resources to address overarching questions about how Secwépemc peoples should govern themselves and Secwépemcúl'ecw. As such, the resources and training provided through RELAW formed just one component of a larger initiative being managed by SNTC. Between September 2016 and March 2017, SNTC's governance tour included six regional gatherings as well as one Elder meeting and one youth meeting, facilitating the participation of over 500 people from across the Secwépemc nation.



Photo: SNTC

3. Indigenous Law Research Unit and Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, *Secwépemc Lands and Resources Law Research Project*, online: <<http://shuswapnation.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Secwepemc-Land-Laws-1.pdf>>.

The regional gatherings were nation-based but community-driven, with each gathering promoted by a community champion specific to the region. Here is how SNTC described the gatherings:

Each session employed the use of a language speaker who was available to support with translation and teaching of Secwépemctsin during the Governance Community Engagement sessions. There was also a Traditional Wellness Coordinator available at each session to ensure that the space and people were being taken care of by offering smudging and brushing off throughout the day. During the sessions, stories were shared by a storyteller at the beginning of the day and during lunch, and a food offering was made to honour the ancestors and give thanks for the day.

These sessions offered a space to be heard by leadership, a chance for relationships to grow and heal, and for kinship ties to strengthen. It held space for the people to share their knowledge with each other and work together, building Secwepemc Nation identity to be strong and unified. It also served the important purpose of informing the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council what the people in the nation envision in terms of Secwepemc governance and providing us the feedback necessary to advocate and plan for taking this work forward.<sup>4</sup>

### **Ec k tslecékstemstpes re tmícw-emp (Take good care of your lands)**

SNTC also requested that the RELAW team develop a draft environmental “code of ethics” based in Secwépemc law to assist in this work. The creation of the draft code, entitled Ec k tslecékstemstpes re tmícw-emp (Take good care of your lands), was informed by the existing research, engagement and synthesis of Secwépemc laws. The draft document puts forward guidelines intended to help all people, both Secwépemc and non-Secwépemc, to understand and follow Secwepemc law regarding lands, waters and living beings in Secwépemcúl’ecw. SNTC intends to use the document as a discussion draft to provide an example of how Secwépemc laws could be applied in new ways, as part of further engagement in Secwépemc communities about next steps for revitalizing Secwépemc laws and governance.



<sup>4</sup> SNTC, *Community Engagement* at page 7.

Telling the story of Sk’elép and the Bear during the governance tour. (Photo: SNTC)

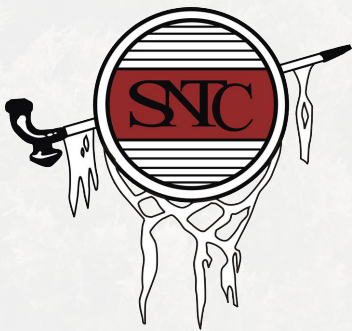


# A vision for the Secwépemc nation's future

SNTC's governance tour has resulted in a series of recommendations for next steps from the near-term to the next four years and beyond, including the creation of a work plan for Secwépemc nation priorities including lands and resources, as well as further promotion of and engagement with Secwépemc laws. All of this work will be in service of the Secwépemc nation's ultimate vision for its future:

**We will be self-governing and thoroughly outside of the colonial structure and process. We will have undergone the healing we needed, have engaged in formal dialogue amongst ourselves, set our direction and completed the action necessary to put our laws into place and to have our nation be strong, unified and recognized.<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>5</sup>. SNTC, *Community Engagement* at page 34.



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