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For Immediate Release

Re: Disputed Reserve Stays in the Hands of the Shxw'ow'hamel First Nation

Chilliwack: The Sto:lo Tribal Council says it is pleased with a decision by the Department of Justice that leaves the Kuthlalth reserve in the hands of the Shxw'ow'hamel First Nation. "The reserve, located across the Fraser River from the Town of Yale, was at the heart of a dispute between the Yale Indian Band Council and Shxw'ow'hamel after Chief Bob Hope of Yale asked the federal government to reverse a 1925 surrender of the Kuthlalth reserve to the Crown in trust for the Shxw'ow'hamel. The members of Shxw'ow'hamel are delighted with the decision and thankful to say goodbye to the worry caused by this dispute", said Sto:lo Tribal Council Vice President, Tyrone McNeil. .

McNeil says that while the decision came squarely down in favor of the Shxw'ow'hamel, the Yale Band continues to enjoy access to the Kuthlalth reserve for firewood for personal use. "All the merchantable timber has already been logged off so there is no reason for the Yale Band to be on the reserve except to gather firewood. That's the bargain they made in 1925", said Vice President McNeil.

The fight over the Kuthlalth reserve raises important issues about Sto:lo rights of access to the Fraser Canyon. McNeil says the Yale Band Council attempts to make Sto:lo feel like interlopers, people with no legitimate claims to long established fishing sites, continuing interests in spiritual places and cultural sites such as graveyards. "The string of Yale reserves dotting the Fraser Canyon is precisely the places where we built our villages and put up dry-racks to preserve salmon. The reserves were surveyed and set aside for use by all Sto:lo, not just a single Indian Band. Our ancestors used the entire Fraser Canyon. And we plan on hanging onto the legacy left to us by our forbearers", said McNeil.

McNeil says that disputes over land, fishing sites and access to the Fraser Canyon will not disappear anytime soon. He says differences with the Yale Band may increase as the band gets closer to wrapping-up their treaty talks with both B.C. and Canada. Be that as it may, McNeil said the Sto:lo Tribal Council joins Shxw'ow'hamel in celebrating a successful conclusion to the dispute over the Kuthlalth reserve.

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