

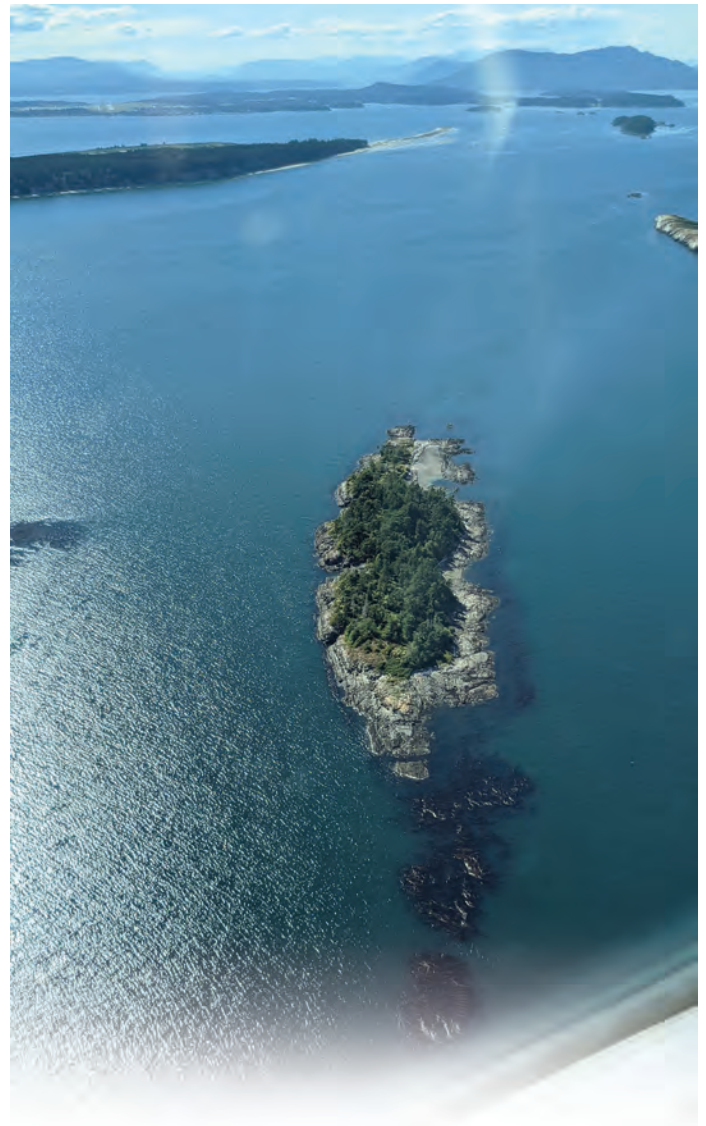
A FIRST IN CANADA!

TLC Transfers SISØENEM (Halibut Island) to W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council

In 2021, The Land Conservancy of British Columbia (TLC) and the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council announced a landmark partnership agreement that will transfer title of SISØENEM, a 9.67-acre island off the east coast of Sidney Island, from the charitable land trust to the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council as an act of reconciliation. Also known as Halibut Island, the island was recently purchased by TLC for \$1.55 million. The transfer will be historically significant as the first of its kind between a land trust and an Indigenous community in Canada. TLC will work together with the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council to draft and register a conservation covenant and develop a co-management plan that will incorporate Indigenous land management principles that will provide access for cultural, education, research, and monitoring purposes.



“We believe this is an historic event, the first time a Canadian land trust has transferred title of a conservation property to a First Nation as an act of reconciliation,” said Cathy Armstrong, TLC Executive Director. *“We will be working with W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership and Dr. Martin to develop an eco-cultural restoration plan. TLC is humbly grateful for the opportunity to facilitate this ground-breaking transfer of title for the benefit of future generations.”*



SISØENEM is an important cultural place for W̱SÁNEĆ people. Located immediately east of Sidney Island and many W̱SÁNEĆ villages, SISØENEM was a place where W̱SÁNEĆ people would fish for cod, collect traditional medicines, and harvest camas. Most importantly for W̱SÁNEĆ people today, SISØENEM will be a place where W̱SÁNEĆ people can be in peace.

Discussing SISØENEM, W̱SÁNEĆ Elder SELILIYE (Belinda Claxton) reminisced about islands such as this and their importance for future generations: *“I remember, we’d go from island to island. We went to harvest seagull eggs and boxwood and different types of medicine. Or, during minus tide we would get sea urchins and stick shoes (chitons) ... And, the fragrance of those wildflowers. Sometimes I get a whiff of it when I go out in the spring. It brings back such beautiful childhood memories. It was so natural and so pleasant to be able to see that when I was a child. This is the sort of experience I want my children and my grandchildren to have. I don’t want them seeing it in the picture. There are not many places like this left.”*

The name SISØENEM cannot be easily translated into English as a whole, but each syllable conveys a sense of what the place is to W̱SÁNEĆ people: SIS̱ means “enjoying the sun,” ØEN is a feeling of inner peace, and EM means a place where these things happen. Roughly SISØENEM means sitting out for pleasure of the weather.

TLC was able to acquire the island with the support of one major donor to protect the site’s cultural, ecological, and geological significance after the island and donor was brought to the charity’s attention by Dr. Tara Martin, UBC Faculty of Forestry’s Conservation Decisions Lab Head.

According to Dr. Martin, “SISØENEM is an ecological and cultural jewel. There are only a handful of islands like this left in the Salish Sea. When it came up for sale I knew I had to find a way to get it back into the hands of its traditional owners to ensure its stewardship and protection for generations to come.”

TLC will continue to raise funds this spring to support ongoing restoration and monitoring work on the island.

ABOUT

The W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council Society is a unified, legal governing body comprised of three W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations: Tsartlip, Tseycum, and Tsawout. It aims to promote the interests of the W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations by enhancing recognition of, and respect for, W̱SÁNEĆ Douglas Treaty rights and W̱SÁNEĆ Aboriginal rights and title. The W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council promotes the W̱SÁNEĆ culture, traditional practices, and language, including the original W̱SÁNEĆ management of the environment as it was meant to be. The WLC also seeks to promote sustainable and equitable development of resources within W̱SÁNEĆ Territory.

