Secwepemc Landmarks Project: Building Community into Process

Introduction

Secwepemc-driven Collaborative Project

The Secwépemc Landmarks Project is a Secwépemc-led arts project that supports Secwepemctsín (Secwépemc language) learning and creates awareness of Secwépemc oral histories, language, and laws in Secwepemcúl̓ecw.

The project involves Cstélnec (Adams Lake Indian Band), Splatsínac, Skwláxec (Little Shuswap Lake Band), and Sk̓etsinec te Secwépemc (Neskonlith Indian Band) of the Secwepemc Nation.

Its inception began when Elders on a site tour of the Trans-Canada Highway 1 expansion projects to identify potential areas that would require protection during construction noticed there were no signs, symbols, or insignia that one was in the Secwepemc Nation.

It consists of 16 sculptures located along the Shuswap Trail Alliance trail systems and highly visited areas.

Secwepemc-led

What started with 8 fluent Secwepecstin speaking Elders (2 from each community) grew to around 70, as word spread and others came on-board to support the project.

The Project Team organized site visits for the Elders to 14 of 16 potential sculpture sites where they shared the ancient Secwepemc place names, activities that our people did and, in some cases, still do in those areas, and place-based personal stories.

Indigenous and Community Ownership

TSQÚQW7E ELDERS SITE VISIT, 2022

"A SMALL BAY" IN SECWEPEMCSTIN

Stelteglxús (Chase Creek Falls) means 'steep drop and the water foams up' in Secwepemctsín.

Unveiling Ceremony, 2024

Indigenous Protocol

The status quo is we come to a meeting, start on time, get the agenda items banged out and go our separate ways to carry out the action items. It is meant for efficiency and expediting the process ... When I started working on the Secwépemc Landmarks Project on a grassroots level, I had to relearn a whole process I had forgotten from my childhood.

Indigenous protocol speaks more to the human side of any issue, it's more important for us to reconnect and bond, have a good understanding of why were at a meeting and the purpose, socialization is a key part. When everyone feels settled, connected and safe, the meeting can start, and the information can flow.

Switsmalph Unveiling Ceremony, June 2022

Quaaout Unveiling Ceremony, October 2024

Indigenous Engagement:

- Take the time to build a relationship with Elders, Cultural Carriers, and Leadership
- Offer tobacco when requesting knowledge
- Connect and bond during social time to build trust
- Respect the life journey of the individuals and the mini-ceremony taking place

Onyx Falls Hike
 September 18, 2025

Onyx Falls Site Visit and Feedback Summary

- For the STA to build, manage, and maintain a trail at Onyx Falls for safety the importance of removing the danger trees in the area from the 2023 wildfire.

- Traditional food and medicine plant harvesting by Secwepemc along the trail

- Wildfire season is important to prepare for, along with future planning of the areas

- Have a boardwalk to get people off the ground along the creek at Onyx Falls area

- Another Secwepemc Landmark and storyboard

Onyx Falls Site Visit and Roundtable, September 18, 2025

Scatchard Mountain Site Visit and Feedback Summary

- Linking Scatchard Mountain Trails with the Chase-Harper Trails in the future

- Signage and storyboards at all the trailheads. The Secwepemc Landmarks storyboards are way out on the land and difficult to get to, so having them more prominent at the start of trails

- Have an interactive map in the Visitor Centres and online where visitors can could click on it and discover what activities are in the area

Scatchard Mountain Trails Hike, September 10, 2025

Community Involvement

Trailhead Post Carving

The project features close to 100 trailhead posts carved by close to 200 youth from Secwépemc Child and Family Services, Chief Atahm School, Shihiya, and School District No. 83 in 2021 and 2022.

Trailhead posts were carved by youth under the instruction of Secwépemc storyteller Kenthen Thomas and Secwépemc carvers Hop You and Vern Clemah.

These posts are located along the trail system for the youth to discover with their families.

Challenges

There are numerous barriers Indigenous Nations face:

- Lack of capacity

- Lack of technical expertise

- Marginalization of Indigenous people from mainstream society, including decision-making tables

- Legal dismissal of Indigenous Laws

- Cumulative and generational trauma resulting from genocide and assimilation policies

- Colonization

- Indigenous peoples are in the process of decolonization due to outdated government policies that created inequality.

- Many Canadians are working with Indigenous peoples on reconciliation and undoing the mistakes of previous historical policies.

Successes

- Cstélnec (Adams Lake Indian Band), Splatsínac, Skwláxec (Little Shuswap Lake Band), and Sketsinec te Secwépemc (Neskonlith Indian Band) of the Secwepemc Nation, and 15 artisans of which 13 are Secwepemc.

- 16 sculptures located within Secwépemc Traditional Territory and along the Shuswap Trail Alliance trail systems and highly visited areas and accompanying storyboards.

- Phase Three involved extensive Secwepemc community engagement and a Strategic Plan for community-wide site visits (Phase 4) to 10 of 16 sculpture locations with cultural activities and language.

- Relationship building and partnerships with: CSRD, City of Salmon Arm, Village of Chase, White Lake Residents Association, Back Country Horsemen of BC (Skimikin Trails), City of Enderby, District of Sicamous, BC Parks, Recreation Site & Trails BC, and more to come.

- Invitations to speak: Heritage BC Conference, Outdoor Recreation Council of BC; TOTA and ITBC Tourism Roundtables on the project.

Kukwstéc-kuc (Thank you)

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