

Robert's Bay Territory Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the W̱SÁNEĆ territory where we gather today. We acknowledge this village of W̱SI,IKEM, which includes what is known in English as Robert's Bay, Shoal Harbour, and Tsehum Harbour. W̱SI,IKEM means "little place of clay," which is complementary to W̱SÍ,ĶEM, "place of clay," in the area known as Patricia Bay in English, where the Tseycum First Nation currently reside. W̱SÁNEĆ shellfish garden technology would've been key stewardship and economic drivers in places of clay like W̱SI,IKEM and W̱SÍ,ĶEM. These shellfish gardens entail the building of rock walls at the lowest tide mark. The walls trap sand and sediment, creating a terrace on the landward side. And, sea flora such as kelp and sea lettuce would be removed from the shellfish garden area, and shellfish would be dug up with specialized digging sticks. The meadows in the area of W̱SÍ,ĶEM and W̱SI,IKEM were full of Camas, which were managed and fertilized through the controlled burn of Garry Oak leaves and small shrubs, these Camas meadow foodscapes are known as the Garry Oak Ecosystem, the rarest ecosystem in BC. Camas was a food staple like rice or potatoes are today in the North American diet. Camas, however, contains considerably less carbs than these modern starches. The caretaking of forests, meadows, and beaches by the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples was instrumental in the biodiversity early explorers, colonizers, and settlers observed in W̱SÁNEĆ territory.

W̱SI,IKEM village was an important site of net duck hunting. Many elders of W̱SÁNEĆ described the abundance of ducks being such that they would blacken the sky when they'd arrive in a place. This made hunting ducks with a net the most advantageous way to hunt ducks. When the elders of today were young, they were often scolded when they switched to hunting with shotguns. Their grandmothers or grandaunts would say, "You ruined the meat." Because the shotgun pellets were throughout the body of the duck. So, those young men had to learn to hunt ducks with a .22 and were instructed to always get a head shot.

When colonizers arrived, they pushed W̱SÁNEĆ peoples out of W̱SI,IKEM over the course of decades. Early arrivers had plans for farming and mining, which required roads, mills, and ferries, and so the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples were parcelled out pieces of land and slowly, slowly those parcels shrunk and disappeared. Once the infrastructures were in place, the colonizers would entice European

settlers through tourism to Tsehum Harbour. This tourism promoted the digging up of W̱SÁNEĆ peoples' artifacts and ancestral bones in this ancient village of W̱SI,IKEM. Though the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples were displaced from residing in W̱SI,IKEM, their hunting activities were maintained in W̱SI,IKEM. One of the final blows of pushing W̱SÁNEĆ peoples out of W̱SI,IKEM was the establishment of the Bird Sanctuary. The petition to create the bird sanctuary was "signed by the majority of the owners of property adjacent to Shoal Harbour" and resulted in an "order that the killing, hunting, capturing, injuring, taking, or molesting of migratory game... is hereby prohibited at all times within the said sanctuary." Hunting is a sacred practice to W̱SÁNEĆ peoples. Animals aren't "game" to the W̱SÁNEĆ people, they're relatives, and each duck relative provided opportunities for nourishment, sharing of intergenerational knowledge, development of identity, and spiritual ceremony.

Acknowledging this condensed history allows for our involvement with the land and waters and the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples to be in greater and deeper respect for this territory and the original stewards. This allows for people to know how to be the allies they wish to be. The W̱SÁNEĆ knowledge carriers refer to their stewardship of land as caretaking, and caretaking of the land is caretaking of the people. That includes caretaking of all the people in W̱SÁNEĆ territory. Support for healing from displacement of W̱SÁNEĆ peoples from their villages is important, but ensuring that settlers know the harms of the recent past in order to avoid the replication of these patterns allows for true repair, and allowing for a community built around respecting W̱SÁNEĆ peoples and ecosystems, and ending the patterns that sought to end W̱SÁNEĆ ways of life.