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# ANNUAL REPORT



**WSÁNEĆ**  
LEADERSHIP COUNCIL



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# Message from the Director of Operations



As we reflect on 2024, I am reminded of the foundational story of W̱SÁNEĆ—the story of ŁÁU, WELṈEW, the sacred mountain that became a refuge during the great flood. This story of resilience and renewal is the origin of our name, W̱SÁNEĆ, "The Emerging People." It speaks to who we are and our enduring connection to our lands, waters, and each other.

This connection is echoed in the Saanich Territorial Declaration, which affirms that "the land, the waters, and all the gifts of the Creator are held in trust by W̱SÁNEĆ for the benefit of current and future generations." This declaration is not just a statement of our rights but a commitment to uphold the responsibilities and sacred relationship to our territory. It reminds us that every action we take today shapes the legacy we leave for tomorrow.

In 2024, the spirit of emerging—of rising together—has guided the work of the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council. Through our Nation Rebuilding efforts, we have strengthened unity and laid the groundwork for shared governance. The W̱SÁNEĆ Lands Trust Society and ÇENENITEL program continue to lead the way in reclaiming and restoring the sacred connection to our lands, ensuring future generations can walk in the footsteps of their ancestors.

Just as our ancestors anchored themselves to ŁÁU, WELṈEW to weather the flood, we anchor ourselves to our teachings, responsibilities, and collective vision. This year, our marine guardians have been recognized for their ecological stewardship, exemplifying how the wisdom of our people merges with contemporary practices to protect our relatives of the deep. Likewise, our work with local and federal governments demonstrates our commitment to stewardship and co-management of W̱SÁNEĆ territory.

The challenges we face as W̱SÁNEĆ echo the trials of the flood, but our story and the Saanich Territorial Declaration remind us that we are defined not by adversity but by our ability to rise. Together, as W̱SÁNEĆ, we are building a future that honours our past, upholds our rights, and embodies the resilience of "The Emerging People."

As we look ahead to 2025, we remain steadfast in this purpose. HÍSW̱KE to our leadership, staff, and community members who continue to guide us forward. Let us rise together with hope, unity, and strength as our ancestors once did.

HÍŚ̱KWE SIÁM

Gordon Elliott,  
Director of Operations,  
W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council

# Executive Summary

This report provides a high-level snapshot of the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council's programs, projects, and operations since the last AGM in December 2023. Over the past year, the WLC has made significant progress in advancing WSÁNEĆ priorities, including the development of a Joint Statement with Canada and BC to share our differing perspectives on the North and South Saanich Douglas Treaties and agree to work toward their recognition and implementation.

The WLC successfully hosted the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Forum, creating a platform for meaningful dialogue among community leaders. Efforts to address environmental concerns were prioritized, particularly regarding construction activities in the Goldstream River area, ensuring the protection of vital ecosystems.

Additionally, the WLC continued to provide in-kind support to the WSÁNEĆ Lands Trust Society (WLTS), reaffirming our commitment to land stewardship and cultural preservation. These accomplishments reflect the ongoing dedication of the WLC to protect and enhance the rights, lands, and waters of the WSÁNEĆ people.



2024 Reef Net Crew



Singers at TIKEL Land Back Ceremony



Restoration Work at TIKEL



# Joint Statement

As a component of the Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Self Determination Discussions (RIRSD), the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council (WLC) has developed a joint statement with Canada and BC to share our differing perspectives on the North and South Saanich Douglas Treaties and agree to work toward their recognition and implementation.

The joint statement begins with a recognition that the W̱SÁNEĆ Nation, together are the beneficiaries and successors to the North Saanich and South Saanich Treaties of 1852.



In the joint statement, the WLC highlights the W̱SÁNEĆ oral histories of the Douglas Treaties and declares that no sale of land took place. The document highlights that through the meeting with W̱SÁNEĆ, Douglas recognized W̱SÁNEĆ territory and rights—which come from XÁ, EL,S and W̱SÁNEĆ law. The joint statement also mentions that the Crown has never honoured the commitment to W̱SÁNEĆ rights and title.

In the joint statement, Canada and BC acknowledge that a lack of recognition of the Douglas Treaties has caused deep harm to the W̱SÁNEĆ Nation and that Canada and BC have an obligation to respect the constitutionally protected rights provided for in the North Saanich and South Saanich Treaties.

The document concludes with a recognition of the different perspectives of the Douglas Treaties and a commitment to implement the Douglas Treaties based on a shared understanding. The WLC will continue this work through the RIRSD table.

The WLC did work to bring in all W̱SÁNEĆ communities to the signing of the document but with Tsartlip and Tseycum leadership wanting to move forward together, signing of the Joint Statement was set for the beginning of July, however, a few days before the signing, the provincial government requested a delay of signing until after the 2024 Provincial election. WLC staff are preparing to set another signing date for the Spring of 2025.

# Nation Rebuilding

## ■ W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Forum

In April 2024, the WLC hosted a meeting for W̱SÁNEĆ Chief, Councils and staff. This all-day meeting provided information to leadership on the benefits of working together as a Nation and some of the challenges that we meet while working in silos.



KELLOLEMEĆEN - QENTOL, YEN photo

Presentations that were given were:

- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) Historian regarding W̱SÁNEĆ
- Ministry of Indigenous Relations (BC) and CIRNAC – benefits of collaborative tables
- Woodward and Co. – Collaborative Pursuits of Rights Recognition and Implementation
- W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council – Douglas Treaty Implementation Challenges
- Miles Richardson (Haida Nation) – Reconciling Ways of Knowing, Nationhood Support Initiative

The key outcomes: a commitment to work together, the W̱SÁNEĆ member communities need to determine what things they wish to work together on and that we need to find ways to include elders in the discussions. There was support to plan the next steps to work with UVIC Governance with Mile Richardson and a recommendation to plan a W̱SÁNEĆ community meeting. The W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council supported moving forward with Miles Richardson's, Nationhood Support Initiative.

The Nationhood Support Initiative has been developed for interested First Nations in BC to



W̱SÁNEĆ Territory - ÍŁO,EL (Camas)



develop roadmaps for rebuilding their nationhood, enabling them to govern their territory legitimately and effectively, Nation to Nation. Giving contemporary expression to ancestral laws, governance, and identity – Who is our Nation today? How do we bring ourselves together as a Nation when the Indian Act and Crown have tried to separate and redefine us, How do we bring our ancestral ways of being and knowing and governing to life in our collective processes. Miles Richardson, through this initiative, and with his partners helps Nations create a roadmap, laying out their vision for their contemporary nation and how they plan to achieve this vision. They do this by asking key questions and drafting a gap analysis of what you need to properly run your government.

The WLC continues to work with Miles on this project.



## ■ Framework Options

The WLC staff have put significant time into looking at not only the different frameworks that are being drafted by First Nations in British Columbia but also the needs of WSÁNEĆ and the most appropriate pathway forward for WSÁNEĆ.

The WLC has always been focused on the broader WSÁNEĆ Territory and how we can help create space and capacity for treaty implementation. This work has been done through many conversations with local governments and the Gulf Island National Park Reserve but to address it more comprehensively, staff have started drafting an Incremental Treaty Implementation Framework Agreement that will commit the Federal and Provincial Governments to reconcile infringements of the North and South Saanich Douglas Treaties.

In researching different agreement types, it was found that many First Nations in BC have several agreements that work towards a larger incremental framework

agreements, these agreements help the First Nation grow its capacity, both within its people and within its governance, preparing the community for treaty discussions and actions regarding treaty implementation. Recognizing that W̱SÁNEĆ also does not have the capacity for territorial engagement and management and this is a result of government policies and funding inadequacies, there became a focus on the Heiltsuk House Post Agreement that works to close the socio-economic gaps of their community and increase the ability of their governance structure.

These two approaches, partnered with the Nationhood Support Initiative mentioned above, have the potential to prepare W̱SÁNEĆ Communities for broader territorial engagement. The WLC staff and leadership will continue to develop these concepts over the next couple of years.

## ■ Land Acquisition Framework Research Project



The W̱SÁNEĆ Nation is currently engaged in important conversations with the federal and provincial governments about land reconciliation and acquisition, with a focus on addressing shared territory within their traditional lands. A central challenge in this process stems from the limited availability of Crown land, the prevalence of fee-simple privately owned land across W̱SÁNEĆ territory and the separation of the W̱SÁNEĆ Nation into five Indian Act Bands. These factors create significant obstacles in developing a unified approach to land acquisition and, more importantly, in alleviating competition for land between W̱SÁNEĆ communities.

In the 2024/25 work plan, there is a focused effort to address these challenges by developing a comprehensive land acquisition framework. This project aims to create a strategy that incorporates the unique land acquisition needs of individual W̱SÁNEĆ Bands while providing a territorial perspective that benefits the Nation as a whole. The ultimate



goal is to establish a long-term strategy that allows the W̱SÁNEĆ Nation to secure, hold, and manage land for future generations. This project takes a structured approach to creating this land acquisition framework, ensuring that it reflects the input and priorities of all W̱SÁNEĆ communities and people.

The overarching objective of this project is to create a unified, strategic land acquisition framework for the W̱SÁNEĆ Nation that addresses current challenges and provides a long-term vision for future land management. This project is being initiated in 2024 but will continue into 2025.

## ■ Dispute Resolution Research Project



*W̱SÁNEĆ Territory - XPA,  
(Western Redcedar)*

The objective of the Project is to conduct research and provide a legal memorandum outlining examples of First Nations' dispute resolution processes, especially those that could support the resolution of land-related disputes and those which could facilitate dispute resolution between First Nations.

This Research Project will provide an analysis and recommendations regarding the application of certain models to the W̱SÁNEĆ communities. This information may be used to inform the development of a W̱SÁNEĆ dispute resolution protocol, which may be created once community input has been obtained regarding potential approaches.

## ■ Referrals System Research Project

The WLC is seeking to explore the development of an online referrals hub to support First Nations' participation in Crown and proponent-led consultation and engagement processes. The objective is to identify the necessary technology and form development required to create this platform, while also addressing the existing information or system gaps that hinder the development of a collaborative referrals system. This research project will provide recommendations for the appropriate software and process to support the creation of this system.



*WSÁNEĆ Territory - BOĶEĆ (James Island Bluffs)  
from PKOLS*

This project will include assessing the technology needs through identifying and evaluating the technology options required to create an online referrals hub that facilitates effective First Nations participation in consultation and engagement processes. Identifying information and system gaps and developing form and process recommendations that consider the workflows, are processes needed to ensure a streamlined and user-friendly platform for referral management. This project will deliver a final recommendation for the most suitable software solution to support a collaborative and efficient referrals hub, tailored to the needs of the Nations and compliant with consultation and engagement requirements.

## ■ Fisheries Research Project

The WLC has finally acquired a small pocket of funding to work on the Fisheries Research Project. Because the estimated cost of the project exceeded the approved funding, this project has been separated into several phases and will take a couple of years to complete. This research project intends to pull together all information regarding the history of WSÁNEĆ Fisheries, this information will provide a foundation for leadership either in negotiations of fisheries management or in litigation regarding loss. In phase one (2024), we are focusing on readily available information, in phase two (2025) we will work on identifying and addressing gaps in the information collected, this will include community fisheries discussions.



*Salmon at SELEKTEL (Goldstream)  
- QENTOL, YEN photo*



# Local Government

Although the WŚÁNEĆ Treaties were made with the Crown, the division of power that has taken place in Canada since 1852, has not only forced the need for a relationship with the provincial government but has created the need for relationship building with the local governments that are actively making decisions regarding WŚÁNEĆ land. In a WŚÁNEĆ Leadership Council Technical Advisory Meeting, Bruce Underwood stated, “The growth of



*W*ŚÁNEĆ Territory - Sunset from PKOLS

the local municipalities is the death of our culture.” With this in mind, and considering the WLC Strategic Plan to “Increase neighboring governments’ and citizens’ understanding of WŚÁNEĆ, territory, history, natural laws and the Douglas Treaty”, and to “use co-management agreements with government’s, agencies and authorities as a stepping stone to full decision making”, the WLC has been working to make a change at a local government level.

## ■ CRD

The relationship with the CRD ranges from providing feedback on Regional parks Planning and the CRD Land Acquisition Framework to drafting agreements that address pollution from the local landfill. These things have varied over the years and have increasingly taken more capacity of the WLC staff. Because of this, the WLC has requested an MOU between the WLC and the CRD that provides capacity to the WLC to do the work required. In 2024, both the WLC and CRD drafted and approved a WLC CRD MOU that has provided the capacity to hire a Local Government Program Manager that will increase our ability to engage on CRD and Local government’s files.

## ■ WLC CRD MOU

The CRD MOU commits the two organizations to meet to discuss Governance issues and options, increasing economic employment opportunities, protection of ancestral sites, solid waste management, regional and electoral area parks, environmental protection, land acquisition, art, place names and public education, harvesting and cultural learning opportunities for the CRD Board and staff. Both organizations recognize that additional topics may arise. These conversations have started with the two topics stated below and will continue in the new year with a work plan that starts to address some of the other topics.



## ■ Solid Waste Management – Hartland Landfill

In 2024, the WLC staff continued to have discussions with the CRD regarding an agreement that addresses concerns about the Hartland Landfill. The drafting of this agreement has gone back and forth between the WLC staff, advisory committees, and the CRD staff, and will continue to do so until we have something satisfactory for leadership review. This agreement addresses environmental concerns, economic inclusion and contract, jobs and training opportunities amongst other things.

## ■ First Nation to First Nation Forum



The provincial government and the CRD are asking First Nations outside of the treaty process if they have an interest in sitting at the CRD table as voting members. This is a complex question, and because our leadership is interested in having decision-making authority in our territory this seems to be a good option. However, this option does not recognize the Nation-to-Nation authority our leadership carries and has the potential to downgrade their authority to a municipal level. First Nations in the modern-day treaty

process are not sure that this is what they want. Noticing that there was an issue with the question, the First Nations in the region requested a meeting to discuss this matter internally.

Helping with the organization of this Forum, WLC staff brought in the Jody Wilson Raybould (JWR) Group to facilitate the meeting and present on this topic. The Forum was attended by five of the local First Nations, all of which participated in the discussion. Although there was not a solution found in this Forum, there was support for creating government-to-government agreements rather than filling a seat at the CRD Board table. There is more work to do on this topic and the WLC will continue to consider options in 2025.

## ■ District of Saanich (DoS)



Although the DoS MOU was approved in 2021, there have been multiple reasons why the WLC has not yet implemented this MOU, one being staff capacity. Considering that this was addressed this Fall with the hiring of the WLC Local Government Program Manager, the implementation of this agreement is now moving forward. The topics discussed in 2024 were regarding a long overdue celebration of the renaming of PKOLS, Mayor, Council and Staff cultural acumen training and the inclusion of the WLC Archaeology protocols (drafted by WSÁNEĆ Cultural Monitors) when carrying out ground altering work. This work is ongoing



# The Indigenous Management Board

This past year, WLC has continued to uphold the rights and priorities of Tsartlip and Tseycum as members of the Indigenous Management Board (IMB). The other members of the IMB are the Quw'utsun Nation (Cowichan Tribes, Halalt First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Penelakut Tribe and Stz'uminus First Nation), Malahat First Nation, Pauquachin First Nation, Snuneymuxw First Nation, and Tsawout First Nation.



*SQELENSEN - QENTOL, YEN photo*

The IMB was established in response to the Crown's unilateral decision to establish the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve and to publicly propose a National Marine Conservation Area Reserve (NMCAR) within the Nations' territories. The body brings delegates and technicians from the Nations together to provide collective advice to each Nation's Chief and Council on how they can work together to take up and take back their roles, responsibilities, and authorities within their territories and waters.



*2024 Reef Net Crew*

Early this year, IMB's focus was on undertaking holistic and detailed research on the Priority Topics identified by community members and the IMB through Visioning Sessions. The Priorities include how to best address anchorages, water quality, and First Nations-led governance arrangements, among other things. This work intended to enable the 11 Nations to agree on a shared, holistic vision that would enable them to negotiate with the Crown for funding and tools that align best with the shared vision and the actual needs of the Nations.

While the IMB remains committed to completing this work over time, in July 2024, Parks Canada informed the IMB that funding for assessing the feasibility of the NMCAR would end in March 2025 if the Nations had not decided to enter detailed negotiations for an NMCAR. The IMB has also identified a potential risk that the option for seeking an NMCAR may be withdrawn if there is a change in the Federal Government in 2026.

As a result, the IMB has decided to reorder its work program and is now focused on assessing whether an NMCAR is a tool the Nations want to use and, if so, on what terms. The shortened timeframes for this assessment have reduced the time the Nations have to engage with their communities on this important work. Despite this, WLC has been working hard to host community sessions this winter to ensure community members have the opportunity to understand the NMCAR proposal and to gather community views on whether it should be pursued or not.

Careful work is also being done to make it clear that any decision to enter detailed negotiations, cannot be mistaken by the Crown for a final decision on whether or not to establish an NMCAR. Crown commitments are also being sought to ensure that there would be time during detailed negotiations for Nations to work with their communities on the proposal before any final decisions to establish an NMCAR are made.

Information on our previous and upcoming information sessions can be found on our website.



# The W̱SÁNEĆ Lands Trust Society (WLTS)

The W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council (WLC) continues to provide in-kind support to the W̱SÁNEĆ Lands Trust Society (WLTS), which was established as a charitable organization to hold land for the benefit of the W̱SÁNEĆ collectively. The WLTS is dedicated to the following purposes:

- Establishing and maintaining spaces for the exercise and enjoyment of W̱SÁNEĆ rights, title, and Douglas Treaty rights.
- Protecting and caring for sites of ecological, historical, and cultural significance.
- Preserving and safeguarding the natural and cultural heritage of W̱SÁNEĆ.
- Advancing reconciliation, honoring the Douglas Treaties, and upholding W̱SÁNEĆ rights and title.
- While the WLTS enables W̱SÁNEĆ to hold land collectively, it also recognizes the need for individual W̱SÁNEĆ Bands to hold land for their own purposes. The WLTS provides a place where W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership can sit together to make decisions about how particular lands should be held or managed. Through its ongoing efforts, the WLTS plays a vital role in preserving and strengthening the connection between W̱SÁNEĆ and their lands.



## ■ Building Capacity

The W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council (WLC) has supported the W̱SÁNEĆ Lands Trust Society (WLTS) through its initial stages of establishment. Efforts are underway to develop the processes and practices needed to ensure the Lands Trust will continue to be fundamentally grounded in W̱SÁNEĆ SKÁLS while also operating safely and effectively within the western legal framework.

A major success this year has been successfully securing funding for the WLTS in its own



right so it can expand its capacity and operations. This funding will enable the hiring of:

- A policy analyst to collaborate with Elders and community members in developing foundational practices and processes.;
- An experienced Lands Trust Manager to oversee the overall operations of the Lands Trust and to secure further land return; and
- A bespoke W̱SÁNEĆ Knowledge Keeper, a position to be advertised in the coming year.

The W̱SÁNEĆ Knowledge Keeper role will be uniquely designed to align with



the skills and expertise of the successful applicant. This position aims to increase W̱SÁNEĆ capacity by providing a community member with opportunities to gain experience and expertise in Lands Trust operations while leveraging their existing knowledge and abilities.

## ■ ÇENENITEL Program

Currently in its establishment phase, ÇENENITEL (“helping each other”) aims to bring the capacity, land holdings, and expertise of western lands trusts, environmental organizations, and experts together with W̱SÁNEĆ Knowledge Keepers to develop the strategies needed to achieve W̱SÁNEĆ restoration and reconnection goals for conservation throughout W̱SÁNEĆ territory.



The goals include:

- Creating self-sustaining, culturally appropriate, and climate-conscious revenue streams that will allow W̱SÁNEĆ to move away from reliance on fluctuating grant funding over the long term;
- Coordinating W̱SÁNEĆ-led land management and restoration efforts for lands acquired and/or managed within W̱SÁNEĆ territory;
- Increasing W̱SÁNEĆ legal agency within their territory by developing policies and negotiating arrangements with municipalities and other organizations that meet the legal and cultural needs of W̱SÁNEĆ; and
- Increasing W̱SÁNEĆ capacity to lead

restoration and land-management initiatives within their territories by creating tailored employment and training opportunities that meet the needs of WSÁNEĆ youth and community members.

This past year has been focused on finding ÇENENITEL partner organisations, agreeing on how the parties will work together, collecting baseline information to inform strategy development, and undertaking a pilot project to build WSÁNEĆ community understanding of carbon sampling, which has the potential to support future climate-friendly revenue streams. This pilot project

was a partnership with one of the ÇENENITEL partners, the Raincoast Conservation Foundation. WSÁNEĆ stewards and community members joined Raincoast in a two day carbon monitoring training on SDAY, ES (Pender Island) and supported the creation of a training video that will enable this knowledge to be shared more broadly.

In the next year, we intend to bring the information gathered by ÇENENITEL partners together with WSÁNEĆ Knowledge Keepers, Leadership and Community Members to develop and trial more pilot projects that will support the strategy.

## ■ TIKEL Restoration Work



Vancouver Island Beggarticks  
(*Bidens Amplissima*)

This year, efforts have focused on preparing for a WSÁNEĆ Community-Led Restoration Planning process, that is set to start in early 2026. Key activities in preparing for this work have included:

- Gathering baseline data collecting historical data, elevation points, onsite mapping of species and infrastructure, and contributing to a hydrology study will ensure that WSÁNEĆ Community Members can have informed discussions about their goals for this place;
- Interim maintenance and reconnection work:
  - Engaging youth from the Reef Net Program in invasive plant removals;
  - Mowing of larger areas of invasives to reduce their spread;
  - Hosting community seed harvesting sessions to collect native seeds for future restoration work, and
  - Securing a significant donation of logs to be used to provide habitat and restore the soils during the restoration.

- Securing funding: One of our biggest wins is securing sufficient funding to enable a comprehensive WSÁNEĆ-led planning process in 2026. This funding will empower the community to take ownership of the restoration work and their ongoing relationship with this place. It will include not only agreeing on priorities for the wetland design and construction as well as how it will be cared for into the future.

The planning process is set to begin in early 2026, incorporating both community-wide sessions and targeted focus groups. For updates and participation opportunities, visit the website or email [info@wsanec.com](mailto:info@wsanec.com) to join the mailing list.



## GINPR

The Cultural Committee and WLC have been working with Parks for the protection of Sacred burial and Cultural grounds within the GINPR. The WLC also worked with Parks to establish a WSÁNEĆ welcoming figure in the Gulf Islands.

### ■ GINPR Supt screening

In February 2024 we began a screening process with GINPR for their new Park Site Manager (superintendent). There were many applicants from all provinces and all walks of life for this position. The screening process was arduous and required the devotion of much time and energy from the WLC. The screening process resulted in four great applicants for the interview process. In mid-October, an offer was finally made to the best applicant, but we have not heard the results yet.



## ■ GROWING TOGETHER / WSÁNEĆ ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

The WSÁNEĆ ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE group was created to provide oversight and land stewardship over GINPR lands and waters. Since they started, they have also become involved with other lands and waters of WLC Interest.

# SÍƷÁMEN (Sidney Island) Fallow-Deer Eradication

The WLC has been involved as part of the steering committee for 3 years to set the stage for the final eradication of the Fallow deer on SÍƷÁMEN. The steering committee consisted of representatives from Parks Canada, WLC, SALLAS (Sidney Island Residents Assoc), Islands Trust, SPCA, and BC Conservancy. A year ago, we completed Phase I of the eradication plan, 78 Fallow deer and a few blacktail deer were taken. Our people were a major part of the



carcass recovery team, skinning and preparing for delivery to a certified butcher. All meat was distributed between Tsawout, Tsartlip, Tseycum, Pauquachin and Malahat. Phase II plan began immediately after the completion of Phase I. On November 5, 2024, we were informed that Phase II has been paused by Parks Canada, by direction from the head office in Ottawa. We were not consulted or given notice.

# Wildfire Conference – UVIC

The WLC supported the organization of this conference in the early summer of 2024. The purpose of this conference was to give the First Nations perspective on the dangers of wildfires in our communities. We were able to bring in First Nations who had experienced wildfires and also First Nations who had established firefighter training centers in their communities.

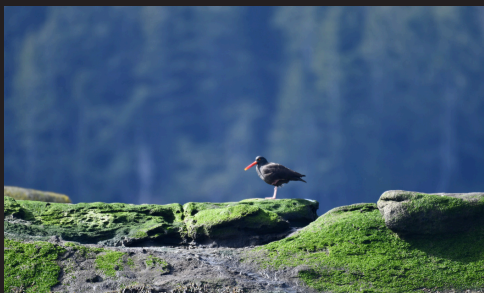
# Bowhunting (Archery) Training

There has been a huge interest by W̱SÁNEĆ hunters in learning how to bow hunt. Our goal is to offer ongoing bowhunting classes to the community led by certified W̱SÁNEĆ Archery Instructors. We have just completed the certification process for the Bowhunting Instructors and will begin classes soon.



*Bowhunting Instructors Class*

# W̱SÁNEĆ Artists Council



*Local Wildlife - QENTOL, YEN photo*

The W̱SÁNEĆ Artists Council's goal is to promote W̱SÁNEĆ artists within the territory of W̱SÁNEĆ. We are seeing art from other territories being promoted within W̱SÁNEĆ territory without opportunity being given to W̱SÁNEĆ artists. The WLC however does not have a budget to support the W̱SÁNEĆ Artists Council meetings or activities at this time.

# QENEN, IW And SXIXFE Reefnet Site



Ceremonial reclamation of the ancient village of QENINEW

The WLC led a project that involved Poets Cove, WSÁNEĆ Language Committee and WSÁNEĆ Elders to develop New Interpretive signs telling the stories of QENEN, IW, SXIXFE and the WSÁNEĆ History in the territory.

## Reef Net Project 2024



2024 Reef Net Crew

In 2024, the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council celebrated significant achievements in the ongoing revitalization of SXOLE (reef net fishing), an ancient practice central to WSÁNEĆ. The project is youth-led and is supported by supported by WSÁNEĆ Elders and cultural advisors. It continues to bring together participants from across the WSÁNEĆ communities, fostering intergenerational learning and cultural resurgence.

This year marked a major milestone: the reef net crew successfully set the reef net, a



technically demanding process requiring coordination and skill. This accomplishment reflects the dedication of the youth, who also travelled to Lummi Nation to deepen their knowledge by learning from experienced reef net fishers.

A video documenting this year's reef net launch captures the spirit and teamwork of the youth alongside the cultural and spiritual teachings from Elders and leaders. This initiative not only preserves cultural heritage but also builds sustainable practices for future generations.



*First Salmon Ceremony*

## Education of General Public

The WLC has been holding sessions to educate the public on the history and rights of WSÁNEĆ. We have done these sessions with the Public Workers Union, Saanich municipal Workers, Hospital Employees Union, 3 UVIC Anthropology classes, UVIC Indigenous Law Class, VIU Indigenous Law Class. Telus Employees Union, PCL Lab site workers (3 groups of workers), three different District 61 schools and the Saanich Council.

## Women's Gatherings Provided Opportunity for Healing and Connection

In 2024, WLC hosted two women's gatherings, providing a safe space for women in the community to connect with one another, share traditional knowledge across generations, and heal on the land.

The first gathering took place on April 13th and 14th at WSÁNEĆ College and was a partnership between WLC, Sharing Medicine Bundles, and the University of Victoria.



Recognizing that conversation flows more freely when hands are busy, the gathering centred around tactile workshops, including a beading workshop led by Joni Morris, an art workshop by Brianna Bear, a knitting workshop by Lavina Olsen, and a women's knowledge workshop by Katie George Jim.

Participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be in community.

Beading workshop leader Joni Morris, for example, shared, "I think it's important to be social. I would never want to be alone, and I would never want anyone else to be alone. Having these gatherings and the support from other women is really important for

me." There was also a sense of gratitude for the opportunity to transfer knowledge between generations. Knitting workshop leader Lavina Olsen remarked, "I was able to show the work that I do and pass it on."

The second gathering – a wellness-centred event – took place on October 5th, 2024, at Bodega Ridge Cabins on Galiano Island. The day started with breakfast for all participants and prayers by WSÁNEĆ elder May Sam before moving forward with a bounty of healing and wellness opportunities. Offerings included yoga with Angelina Thompson, personal massage appointments, and a walk to the beach to collect medicine stones, which participants later painted with designs and affirmations.



# Archaeology Program

Since its establishment in 2022, the WSÁNEĆ Archaeology Program has played a critical role in protecting WSÁNEĆ heritage and ensuring cultural values guide archaeological activities within WSÁNEĆ territory. The program operates under the guidance of the WLC Archaeology Committee, which includes WSÁNEĆ Cultural Workers and trusted archaeologists.



*Shown Above: Adelynn Claxton, Diana Henry, and Dr. Barbara Winter at SDÁLNEW bowl return ceremony at Saanich Fairground in January 2024.*

## Key Achievements in 2024:

- **Policy and Procedure Development:** Finalized the WSÁNEĆ Archaeological Procedures – which include a fee for service framework and policy and protocols to guide cultural monitoring and archaeological work in WSÁNEĆ territory.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** Delivered Archaeology training to WSÁNEĆ grave diggers, cultural monitors and stewardship staff. Participants visited archaeological sites on the Southern Gulf Islands and Saanich Peninsula, learned to evaluate impacts on archaeological sites from both natural and human causes, to do non-destructive forms of archaeological recording and documentation, and what to do when damages to archaeological sites are observed. WSÁNEĆ protocols and roles of gravediggers, monitors and stewardship staff were discussed.
- **Collaboration on Major Projects:** Implemented a Protocol Agreement that was negotiated in 2023 to guide development on a Canadian Food Inspection Agency property on East Saanich Road. Monitored excavation at the site, provided cultural acumen training for contractors, a ground-breaking ceremony, and provided a cultural worker trailer and funds for training. The project incorporates WSÁNEĆ artwork in the architecture and building design.



- Engagement with UVic-Tsawout about findings from the 2023 Archaeological Field School at ƧEL,ƧÉ (Cordova Bay);
- CRD engagement and cultural monitor report, Land Altering Works agreement review, and monitoring projects on the Saanich Peninsula and Gulf Islands
- **Site Protection and Restoration:** Parks Canada research project reviews, participation in an Erosion and Sea Level Rise workshop and monitoring initiatives, restoration of sensitive sites, and investigations in preparation for the project to eradicate fallow deer on SKƧÁMEN (Sidney Island)
- Reburials of ancestral remains at various locations
- Canadian Coast Guard Aids to Navigation replacement project Archaeological Impact Assessment (AIA) support and monitoring tower and base replacements
- **Service Agreements and Partnerships:** Implement monitoring provisions in WLC agreements: District of Saanich, Town of Sidney, Parks Canada, and initiated discussions with the District of Oak Bay
- Established Agreements with consulting firms Stantec and WSP, collaborated on projects with Cordillera Archaeology Inc
- Repatriated SDÁLNEW, the stone bowl illustrated above, from Simon Fraser University. The bowl was found in about 1900, on a settler's farm by ŁÁU, WELNEW (Mount Newton), and had been held by the SFU Museum since 1993 on behalf of the Saanich Native Heritage Society. The Museum had agreed to care for SDÁLNEW until WSÁNEĆ were ready for its return
- **Relationship Building:** Shared WSÁNEĆ Archaeological Procedures with the provincial Archaeology Branch, engaged about referrals, repositories and project monitoring



SDÁLNEW

## Referrals Program

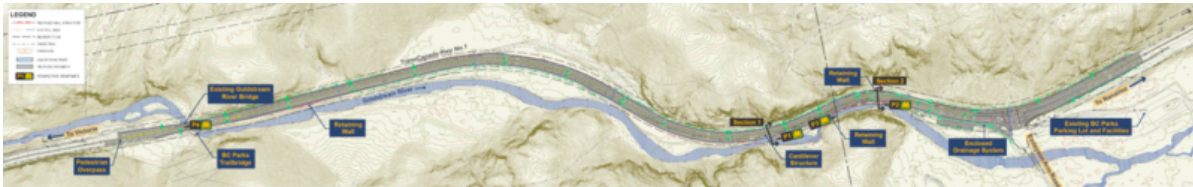


WSÁNEĆ Territory - ČEN,ƧÉ (Garry Oak)

The Referrals Program serves as a vital mechanism for protecting WSÁNEĆ interests in land use and resource development projects. It ensures that constitutional treaty rights and environmental protections are upheld through rigorous reviews, advocacy, and engagement with governments and developers.

# Major Projects in 2024

## ■ Goldstream Park Median Barrier Project



*Trans-Canada Highway 1 – Goldstream Median Barrier Widening Project Overview*

Since March 2022 WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council have been engaging with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) about the proposed road widening at SELEKTEŁ (Goldstream River), a sacred WSÁNEĆ site and critical salmon habitat.

Where the highway passes through Goldstream Park, MOTI proposes to widen 2.5 km of the highway, install a median barrier, connect Goldstream trails to other nearby trails, and complete pedestrian underpass and overpass projects. The project would blast rock, install



**SELEKTEŁ**  
(Goldstream River)

three retaining walls, a cantilever structure over the river, and an enclosed drainage system with oil/water spill collection and separation devices near the Finlayson Arm Road intersection.

The WLC is concerned about how this project could impact fish and their habitats, and hired neutral third-party environmental consultants to review reports and legal review of materials. We hosted community Engagement Forums in October 2023 and January 2024, to present project information and get input from WSÁNEĆ members. Recordings of the Forums and a digital version of a survey can be found on a password protected WSÁNEĆ members page on the WLC website. See <https://wsanec.com/members-only/>

Project Research reports and interviews document the history and occupation of SELEKTEŁ, and Cumulative effects of industry on the Goldstream Watershed. An internal BC Parks impact assessment of the Goldstream project identifies risks to salmon and their habitat, to species at risk in the park, and to old growth forests and plant communities.





*SELEKTEL (Goldstream River) - QENTOL, YEN photo*

In April, WLC reached out to Tsawout, Pauquachin and Malahat about taking a united WSÁNEĆ approach to responding to the MOTI Goldstream project referral. Malahat accepted the invitation to collaborate. We commissioned LGL Environmental Research Associates to review draft wording for a tenure package, the 2024 Environmental Assessment report, Contaminated Soil and Groundwater reports, and plans for storm drain highway runoff infrastructure and installation of an underground container to separate water from oil and grit in the riparian area adjacent to the Goldstream River.

LGL's report contains 105 technical review comments, questions and recommendations for the project, with foci on water quality, fish impacts from works in and adjacent to the river, storm drainage, and the proposed holding tank. It flags the need for pre-project surveys for fish, fish habitat and wildlife habitat.

The WLC Board met with MOTI's Minister in June, and spoke to concerns about the project at the meeting, conveying that input from WSÁNEĆ member engagement to date was generally not supportive of the project. WSÁNEĆ engagement deadlines were extended to the end of 2024.





*Salmon fry and Three-spined stickleback at SELEKTEŁ (Goldstream River) - QENTOL, YEN Photo*

In late November WLC met with Department of Fisheries and Oceans at the WLC RIRSD table, to discuss the November 2021 DFO project review and avoid and mitigate letter for the Goldstream project. We had reviewed the letter to check for consistency with the Fisheries Act that prohibits death of fish via the harmful alteration, disruption or destruction (HADD) of fish habitat; and the Species at Risk Act (SARA) that prohibits unauthorized effects on listed aquatic species at risk, and any part of their critical habitat including their residences. We asked how

new information on the SARA listing of Chinook salmon is being considered, and noted that LGL's report flagged that the proposed project works at Goldstream would constitute a HADD, so should trigger a DFO permit decision and related engagement. We also flagged that the signatory on the letter neglected to consider section 2.3 – Rights of Indigenous Peoples of Canada (upholds rights) or section 2.4 – Duty of Minister (requires the Minister consider any adverse effects the decision may have on the rights of Indigenous peoples as recognized and affirmed by Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982). We advised that because DFO didn't consult they couldn't know about or accommodate WSÁNEĆ concerns, including potential impacts on Douglas Treaty rights.

Following the meeting WLC shared the LGL report and the project Environmental Assessment report with DFO, along with a list of questions.

Looking Ahead: WLC are planning a cultural event at SELEKTEŁ to illustrate that Goldstream is a sacred and incredibly important place for the ongoing practice WSÁNEĆ ways of life. We will continue to engage with DFO and MOTI, and may have legal counsel explore potential actions for treaty breaches and title claims in project areas, ensuring WSÁNEĆ rights are upheld.

We had meetings with Tsartlip, Tseycum and Malahat Chief and Councils in early December to provide a project update and receive input.



*WSÁNEĆ Territory - SELEKTEŁ (Goldstream River)*



*Salmon run at SELEKTEŁ (Goldstream River) - QENTOL, YEN Photo*

## ■ Joint Utility Board (JUB) Sewage Treatment Plant Outfall Relocation

This project was delegated to WLC in March 2021. Since then the proposed outfall relocation point has changed four times. New Receiving Environment Monitoring Program (REMP) and environmental assessment reports were produced, but involving WSÁNEĆ stewardship program personnel and knowledge holder input in the baseline research and project methodology has not occurred.

Over the past three years, WLC has: Advocated for improved baseline data collection to assess the environmental impacts of relocating the sewage outfall from the Cowichan River to Cowichan Bay or the embayment line; Highlighted consultation gaps and emphasized the need for WSÁNEĆ involvement in project planning and sampling activities; Engaged with the JUB to address concerns related to water quality, marine habitat impacts, and the broader implications of the project. The engagement process for the project is still underway.

## ■ CRD Regional Park Interim Strategic Plan 2022-2032

The Interim Strategic Plan was approved in July 2022 for a 1-year interim period to allow for further engagement with First Nations. In January and July 2023 WLC sent a response to CRD Parks about the Interim Plan that was generally supportive, but flagged serious concerns about how CRD changes to the Strategic Plan enabled changes in regional park Management Plans on the Saanich Peninsula and the Gulf Islands. In the past plan, most Regional Parks were designated as Natural Areas where the focus was on maintaining biodiversity and habitat for



wildlife; in the updated Strategic plan most of those areas are now designated as Natural Recreation Areas that enable more recreational activities. The Strategic Plan for 2022-2032 was approved and WLC concerns were not accommodated.

In February 2024 the WLC advised the CRD Regional Parks that WLC view the updated Strategic Plan as authorizing direct impacts on WSÁNEĆ rights. The Board advises that if CRD Parks contemplate changing a park classification from Natural Area or Conservation Area to Natural Recreation Area, there should be engagement with and consent from WSÁNEĆ, as is the case for other Major Amendments.

## ■ CRD Mount Work Regional Park Management Plan

Over the past few years, WLC has been participating in site visits and technical meetings as part of a review of a Draft Mount Work Management Plan. We are in the process of putting in place a Committee – drawing on the WLC Archaeology, Environment, Language and Technical Advisory Committees. In May 2024 we negotiated an agreement and funding to enable participation in a planning process over the next 1.5 years. Part of the intent is to explore a Traditional Use and Access Agreement as part of the planning process.



*WSÁNEĆ Territory - Mount Work*

In November 2024 we retained Trailmark to draft content for some sections of the Management Plan, and WLC hired a Local Government Program Manager to assist with managing this and other projects with the CRD.

## ■ CRD St. John Point Regional Park Infrastructure

CRD Parks propose building a parking lot, toilet and kiosk development, and restoration activities – some of these activities require amendments to Mayne Island Official Community Plan and Land Use Bylaw – WLC cultural workers visited the site in September 2024 and recommend monitors be present for any excavation. The Referrals Committee and WLC policy staff have identified other considerations and will be providing a response to the referral in the coming months.

## ■ CRD Land Acquisition Strategy



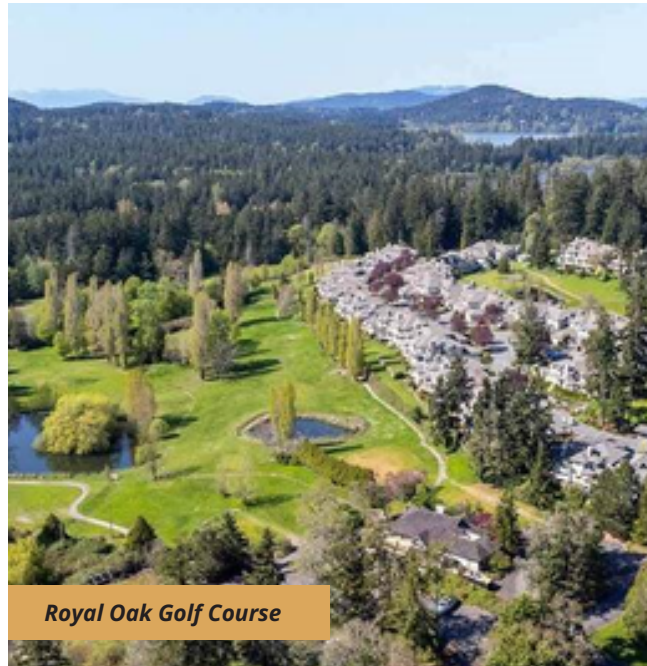
*WSÁNEĆ Territory  
- KÉKEYIŁĆ (Arbutus)*

The CRD Regional Parks Strategic Plan vision for Land Acquisition was a concern for WLC. An amendment to the Land Acquisition Strategy was initiated in 2023 – in February 2024 WLC provided recommendations for Phase 1 of the CRD Parks Land Acquisition Update. In March the CRD confirmed receipt - they anticipate being able to share an updated draft for Phase 2 in the coming months.



## ■ CRD Royal Oak Golf Course Acquisition

WLC received a referral from CRD Parks to finalize a CRD acquisition of the Royal Oak Golf Course in late 2023. The WLC Board requested that CRD Parks not add the Royal Oak Golf Course land to the Elk-Beaver Lake Regional Park. The WSÁNEĆ Chiefs came together to express interest in acquiring the property early in 2024. The CRD met with the Chiefs, and in June 2024 shared draft Interim Management Guidelines for the property. The WLC Policy Manager is leading engagement for this file, and negotiations are ongoing.



*Royal Oak Golf Course*

## ■ CRD Biosolids Management Plan

The CRD and WLC Solid Waste Working Group are reviewing the draft plan and a proposal to build a Residuals Treatment Facility at the Hartland landfill. Part of the plan is for a project that proposes to convert biosolids into biochar. A demo project is proposed and would be the first in Canada. The WSÁNEĆ Technical Advisory Committee received a presentation in November 2024 and ongoing engagement will be required to better understand the technology, the properties, and the potential applications for the product that is produced.

## ■ CRD Liquid Waste Management Plan

WLC received this referral that includes a Summary of Audit findings in August 2023. Referrals personnel met to discuss conversations that are occurring through a technical advisory committee, whose first meeting was in June 2024. It was identified that failures of the infiltration system occurred at seven locations in the north part of the Saanich Peninsula; we are concerned about shellfish impacts, and spoke of the need for a collective strategy to address the cumulative effects of sewage as well as stormwater and agricultural runoff, potentially building from the Pauquachin reports to federal, provincial and



WSÁNEĆ Territory - Trillium at PKOLS

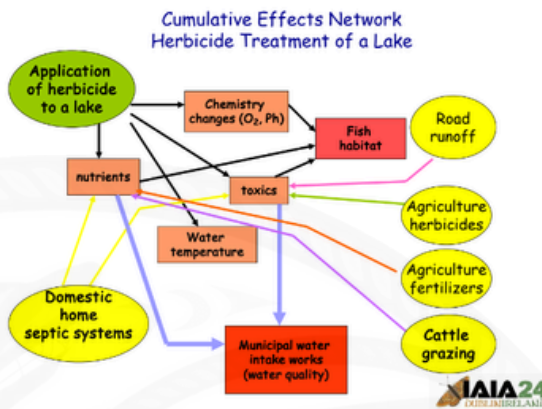
regional governments in 2023 to address rehabilitation of shellfish habitat locally and along the BC coast, including specific targets.

Other CRD project referrals include:

- Mt. Maxwell Community Park;
- Regional Trail Widening program;
- Regional Water Supply initiatives;
- Bowker Creek Watershed Restoration; and
- Transportation Governance engagement.

## ■ Professional Development: Cumulative Effects Assessment

In April 2024 WLC and Tsartlip Referrals Managers participated in cumulative effects training at an International Association for Impact Assessment Conference in Dublin, Ireland. The training provided a refresher on procedures and methods for conducting cumulative effects assessments. It included case studies from all over the world, including many Canadian projects, with spatial and time considerations, and approaches to assessing impacts on values that may be affected by projects.



Cumulative Effects Diagram

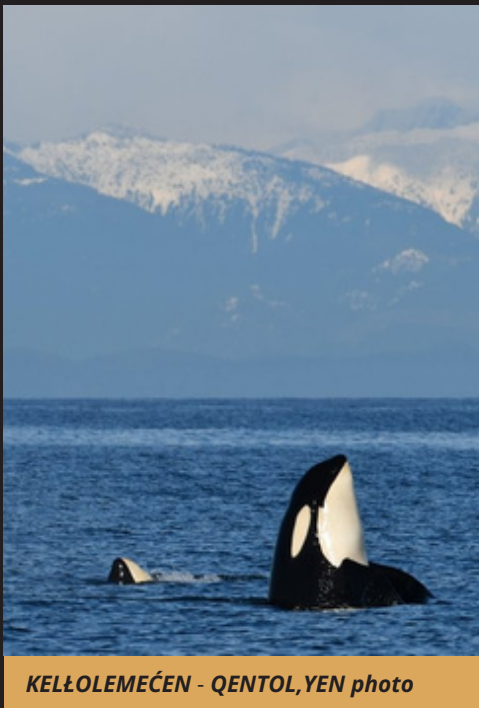


Cumulative Effects Map

# QENTOL, YEN / WŚÁNEĆ Marine Guardians Program

Over the past four years, since the inception of our guardians program in 2021, we have consistently garnered recognition for our initiatives as Marine Guardians, particularly in relation to the endangered Southern Resident Killer Whale. Our objective has always been to merge traditional knowledge of the KĒŁOLEMEĆEN (Killer Whales) with contemporary technology to monitor their movements throughout WŚÁNEĆ Territory. The endeavours we undertake have received acknowledgment that extends beyond our traditional territory, encompassing all of Vancouver Island. This year, our QENTOL, YEN WŚÁNEĆ Marine Guardians, was the winner of the Ecological Stewardship Award on Vancouver Island. This award was one of fifteen awards presented to island-based businesses, non-profits, academia, governments and individuals who demonstrated outstanding leadership in sustainability at the 2024 Ecostar Awards sponsored by Synergy Foundation.

Our yearly budget is \$892,000.00, allocated among three funds for the current fiscal year 2024-2025. Our program operates year-round, Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.



KĒŁOLEMEĆEN - QENTOL, YEN photo

The budgets for this fiscal year are funded by the following sources.

Parks Canada, Whale 2.0

Two Years, 2024-2026

Funding Supports 2 Staff full-time and 2 Staff part-time this fiscal year

Last fiscal year will support 4 Staff full-time and 2 Staff part-time

Yearly Funds: \$457,000.00

Department of Fisheries (DFO), Salish Sea Initiative

Last fiscal year of funding, ending March 31st, 2025

Funding supports 2 staff for this last year of available funding then the 2 staff members move under the Parks Canada, Whale 2.0 Funding

Yearly Funds: \$ 210,000.00

Department of Fisheries (DFO), Canada Nature Fund for Aquatic Species at Risk  
3 years of funding, 2023-2026



Funding supports 2 staff members part-time in years 2 and 3 of the funding.  
Yearly Funds: \$175,000.00

We are proud to say that various federal government departments are recognizing our comprehensive dataset of "Indigenous Science" that accurately reflects the marine environment in our traditional WSANEC territory and the efforts we are taking to voice our deepest concerns regarding the Endangered Southern Resident killer Whales.

Our commitment to advocating for our relatives of the deep is vital, especially as they encounter serious challenges. Since launching our guardian program, we have observed a troubling decline in their numbers, highlighting the urgent necessity for unified conservation efforts.

Our conservation efforts have gained recognition for the hard work of our small team of six: three WSANEC Marine Guardians, one Marine Data Analyst, one Marine Biologist, and me, Senior Manager. Our program has collected extensive data throughout the past fiscal year, and we will publish a detailed Annual Report by March 31, 2025.

Over the last year, we secured funding in collaboration with Simon Fraser University to install two more hydrophones in our territory for a total of three. In May 2024, the team set up their second hydrophone in Tumbo Channel and third in Active Pass. These underwater microphones allow us to understand the impacts of anthropogenic noise on marine life and the communication, behaviour, and habitat use of the different cetacean species within the area.

We also secured funding to establish two thermal imaging systems for whale detection, which also funded two of our three guardians until 2026. In October 2024, the QENTOL, YEN team set up two thermal imaging whale detection systems, each one consisting of two cameras. This project is a collaboration with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution with whale cameras from <https://whalespotter.ai/>. Our systems were installed on Pender Island (Bluffs) and Saturna Island (overlooking the Tumbo Channel).

This year, we developed an educational book to raise awareness about the KĒŁOLEMEĆEN. We created a 20-page Ocean SENĆOŦEN Activity Book that shares fun facts about marine life using SENĆOŦEN terms. The book includes various activities such as nature BINGO, mazes, word searches, crosswords, coloring pages, and more. Additionally, we donated 150 copies of the book to the ŁÁU, WELNEW Tribal School for each student and teacher.

David Dick, Senior Manager for the QENTOL, YEN Program

# Closing Comments



As we conclude the 2024 Annual Report, I want to take a moment to reflect on the collective progress we have made together as WSÁNEĆ. This year has been defined by action, collaboration, and the unwavering commitment to uphold our rights, protect our lands and waters, and strengthen our communities for generations to come.

The work highlighted in this report—across environmental stewardship, Nation Rebuilding, cultural revitalization, and governance—reflects the resilience, wisdom, and vision of our ancestors. Their teachings remind us that by working together as one WSÁNEĆ Nation, we are reclaiming our rightful place within our territory. This unity strengthens our voice, our presence, and our ability to care for the lands and waters that sustain us, as our ancestors did before us.

I extend my deepest gratitude to our leadership, staff, partners, and community members for their tireless efforts and dedication. Your contributions embody the strength of our Nation and the vision we hold for our future. Let us continue to rise together, firmly rooted in our history, culture, and connection to our territory, for the benefit of future generations. Looking ahead, 2025 promises new opportunities and challenges, but I am confident that by walking together, with unity, purpose, and determination, we will build a future worthy of our ancestors and those yet to come.

HÍSŪKÉ SIÁM,  
Gordon Elliott  
Director of Operations, WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council



WSÁNEĆ Territory - *TIKEL*



KELŁOLEMEĆEN - *QENTOL, YEN photo*



2024 Reef Net Launch