



MEDIA RELEASE

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May 28, 2020

ʔEsdilagh First Nation (Alexandria First Nation) Enacts Historic ʔElhdaqox Dechen Ts'edilhtan ("Sturgeon River Law")

ʔEsdilagh Tśilhqot'in Territory: The ʔEsdilagh First Nation (Alexandria First Nation) enacts the historic ʔElhdaqox Dechen Ts'edilhtan ("Sturgeon River Law") exercising their governance over stewardship and management over the waters that flow throughout the whole of its caretaker area. The law, originating from Tśilhqot'in inherent teachings, is unveiled in its written form.

The ʔElhdaqox Dechen Ts'edilhtan is a component of the broader Tśilhqot'in laws governing lands and water. The waters are vital to the Nation and the law articulates the time honoured customs to ensure water will remain safe and clean for current and future generations.

On June 26, 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada declared Aboriginal title for the first time in Canadian history, in the homeland of the Tśilhqot'in people. The community of ʔEsdilagh is one of six communities that comprise the Tśilhqot'in Nation, and as such have rights and title over their territory including the waters in their territory which connect the entire Nation and sustain the culture, wildlife, fisheries and livelihoods that exist there.

The ʔElhdaqox Dechen Ts'edilhtan was enacted by the ʔEsdilagh First Nation on May 27, 2020 and was endorsed by all six Tśilhqot'in Chiefs today, May 28, 2020. The law applies to all waters in ʔEsdilagh territory. Awareness and compliance of the law is sought from both existing and proposed projects, and all other users who may impact the waters throughout the territory.

Quotes:

Nits'ilʔin (Chief) Joe Alphonse, Tribal Chair, Tśilhqot'in National Government:

"The Nation is currently appealing a BC Ministry of Environment permit amendment which allows the Gibraltar Mine to increase the rate of its effluent discharge by 50%, sending tailings effluent straight from its tailings pond to the Fraser River. Despite years of requests to seek alternate water management treatment solutions this permit was approved. By obligation of our Elders and historical teachings the Nation is united to uphold this law – water is essential to our existence. Documenting our traditional laws and having them recognized is a vital component of implementing our rights and title. We're excited to see

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this law come into effect and the Nation will continue to develop our laws to ensure we move forward in a way that is sustainable.”

Nits'il?in (Chief) Roy Stump, ?Esdilagh First Nation:

“Today we released our *dechen ts'edilhtan* (“laws”) concerning the waters in writing to ensure the protection of this vital resource and to maintain its natural condition. The Tsilhqot'in people are known as the *People of the River*. Inherently, we have a responsibility to both the *nen* (“lands”) and *tu* (“waters”) to maintain a balanced and dutiful relationship. If we take from the land for the purpose of survival or sustenance we ensure we give back and that our actions don't cause negative impacts to mother earth. Our people have been frustrated to see the mismanagement and disregard for the environment and the preservation of the waters. Therefore, we know it is time to enact this law to ensure that our rights and role as stewards of the land are recognized and respected so that we can protect our sacred lands and waters for our people and for future generations.”

Nits'il?in Yaz (Councillor) Chad Stump, ?Esdilagh First Nation

“Any proposed activities within our territory and that which could impact the *?Elhdaqox* (“Sturgeon River”), must have our consent. Our people have always relied on water from *?Elhdaqox* to meet our basic needs, and for cultural and spiritual purposes. We recognize the importance of protecting and preserving the *?Elhaaqox* from degradation including discharging effluent or dilution of discharge. We have witnessed the destructive impacts of irresponsible government and industry and we are exercising our rights to ensure that the destruction of our lands and waters does not continue. Those who wish to pursue projects on our lands must ensure they seek consent from our Chief and Council, and ensure they are following the law.”

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Resources:

- [?Esdilagh ?Elhdaqox Dechen Ts'edilhtan \(“?Esdilagh Sturgeon River Law”\)](#)

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