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Mamalilikulla First Nation Holds Community Dedication Ceremony for Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA)

News Release

May 5, 2022 – Port McNeill, British Columbia

The Mamalilikulla First Nation today held a community dedication ceremony at the site of its recently-declared Gwaxdlala/Nalaxdlala¹ (Lull Bay/Hoeya Sound) Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) in Knight Inlet, on the British Columbia Central Coast.

The ceremony was hosted by Chief Dr Robert Joseph (OC, OBC) authority and Ambassador for Reconciliation Canada, and included drumming, dancing and prayers, as well as presentations from Mamalilikulla Chief Councillor Winidi (John Powell) and supporting comments from chiefs of neighbouring First Nations as well as provincial government representatives.

“On November 29 of last year, the Mamalilikulla made an IPCA Declaration to reflect our intent to restore our traditional governance approach and take a primary role in the planning, use, management, and restoration of our lands and waters in Gwaxdlala/Nalaxdlala,” said Chief Councillor Winidi (John Powell). *“We were clear on our intended collaborative approach to achieve our stated objectives. We presented a constructive challenge to Canada and British Columbia to implement the articles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and advance reconciliation efforts with us.”* said Chief Powell.

Powell said that the community dedication was held on-site for its community members, most of whom were unable to attend the November, 2021 IPCA Declaration due to COVID restrictions and flood events. *“One of our stated objectives was to use the IPCA as a means of reconnecting our people with their traditional lands, since they are scattered throughout BC and*

¹ Pronounced “Gwat-ch-dala-lah / Nah-latch-dala-lah

many have never seen this important cultural area. My hope is that reconnection will foster their commitment to the work that lies ahead of us.”

The 10,416 hectare IPCA contains a unique underwater sponge and coral reef of high biodiversity, critical estuaries and salmon-bearing streams. The watersheds are important to many land, sea and sky beings including grizzly bears and eagles. A number of historical Mamalilikulla settlements and associated cultural and archaeological sites are found within the IPCA. The Mamalilikulla First Nation has been working with Canada and British Columbia on a co-governed marine protected area, and collaborating with BC on the area’s forest management under the Great Bear Rainforest Land Use Order.

Chief Powell stated that significant progress has been made with provincial government ministries. *“I’m pleased to be able to report that the provincial Ministry of Forests and the new Ministry of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship have signed a letter of intent to collaborate with us over the next year on some key Mamalilikulla objectives that include joint planning of the watersheds, a strategy for shared monitoring and enforcement, as well as a strategy for cultural place name and language restoration.”*

“Of particular importance,” said Chief Powell, “is the commitment we have made to work together on a more formal enabling agreement and a process and format for joint recognition of our IPCA. Although we have declared this area under our own Nation laws and Section 35 of the Constitution Act, it’s important from a practical and symbolic perspective to secure legal recognition reflecting the provincial government’s commitment to implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and its articles related to our right to plan, manage and control our territory.”

In the six months since its Declaration in Victoria, the Nation has been able to attract short-term funding to increase its capacity and commence a number of foundational projects, including the development of a business model for co-governance and development of an ecological baseline that will influence future restoration and resource monitoring, as well as undertake a joint watershed planning process with BC. Chief Powell noted that the Nation has already completed its own plans, based on its ancient law of Aweenak’ola.

“If there is one disappointment we currently share,” said Powell, “it is the inability to attract any dialogue with Fisheries and Oceans Canada. One of our challenges to DFO was to provide some immediate protection to the well-documented underwater coral and sponge gardens that are growing at the Hoeya Sill in our IPCA. We have had to appeal to the commercial fishery sector for a voluntary avoidance of this area during the commercial prawn fishery, which coincidentally opened today for this area. Our law of Aweenak’ola obliges us to protect these underwater creatures from irreversible destruction and damage, and we will do everything possible to achieve that protection.”

For further Information:

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