

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Fire recovery in Lytton progressing as Kumsheen Heritage Committee simplifies the archaeological permitting process

Lytton, BC, May 19, 2022 – Debris removal and recovery activities are progressing quickly on municipal and uninsured properties in Lytton, British Columbia, thanks to the implementation of a single archaeological permitting process and the diligent monitoring of recovery sites by Nlaka'pamux heritage technicians.

“From the beginning of our recovery, we wanted to make it clear that archaeological work and the protection of Nlaka'pamux heritage would not impede Lytton's rebuilding process,” said Jason Robertson, Lytton First Nation Councillor and Nlaka'pamux Nation Tribal Council (NNTC) Land-based Project Coordinator. “While we've heard claims that archaeological protection has delayed our community's recovery, the progress we are seeing on the ground says otherwise.”

The village of Lytton is located on an ancient village site and burial ground that was at the centre of the Nlaka'pamux homeland. Although last summer's fire destroyed much of the town's post-colonial history, it also created an opportunity to acknowledge and protect the much deeper Indigenous heritage of the place known to the Nlaka'pamux as Kumsheen.

“We already know that there are Nlaka'pamux burials in several places throughout Lytton,” said Dr. Michael Klassen, NNTC Heritage Advisor. “We've mapped out these locations, and the heritage monitors are watching these areas carefully. Fortunately, no ancestral remains have been encountered, but the possibility of encountering, and potentially disturbing burials is a real concern anywhere in town.”

Since August 2021, the Nlaka'pamux Nation Tribal Council and Lytton First Nation have worked in collaboration with the village of Lytton and the province of British Columbia to establish the Kumsheen Heritage Committee (KHC) – an oversight body with the goal of protecting Nlaka'pamux archaeological artifacts and ancestral remains found in Lytton without compromising the speed of the village's recovery from the fire.

The KHC has developed a single archaeological permit for the entire village, allowing property owners or designates to sign on to the permit at no cost. Under normal circumstances, each property owner would need to apply for a separate permit if archaeological artifacts were encountered during recovery activities, resulting in a more costly process with lengthy delays. While the new archaeological permit is being applied to municipal and under-insured properties, work has not yet started on insured properties, as insurance companies have not adopted the permit.

“We're not sure why the insurance companies have not signed up for the heritage permit,” said Chief Matt Pasco, Chair of NNTC. “All the funding is in place to implement the heritage monitoring. All they need to do is call the village to set it up.”

While the KHC's archaeological protection plan was developed by November 2021, last fall's disastrous floods and harsh weather cut off access to Lytton, delaying the start of the debris removal. By early March 2022, the archaeological permit was in place and recovery activities were able to progress.

"Protecting what remains of this heritage at Kumsheen is of utmost importance to the Nlaka'pamux, says John Haugen, LFN Representative on Kumsheen Heritage Committee. "Acknowledging and respecting Nlaka'pamux heritage is an important step on the path to reconciliation. Rebuilding from the fire provides an opportunity to do things differently and not repeat the wrongs of the past."

The KHC has recommended that Nlaka'pamux heritage technicians monitor recovery activities to avoid or minimize potential impacts to protected archaeological sites and prevent disturbance to buried ancestral remains. In March, the village of Lytton hired a local Indigenous-owned firm to provide monitoring and archaeological services for the entire village. To address the added costs of this monitoring, the province has provided funding to cover all heritage and archaeological investigations.

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Established in the early 1980's, the Nlaka'pamux Nation Tribal Council (NNTC) is an Nlaka'pamux governing body which protects and advances Nlaka'pamux title and rights. Member communities include Snepa, Nteq'em, Lytton, Skuppah and Boothroyd. NNTC is guided by the wisdom of our ancestors and Elders, by the Nlaka'pamux Resolution on Natural Resources and by the fundamental law that if you take care of the land, the land will take care of you.