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MFS and WSFN Sign Historic Reconciliation Partnership Agreement

The Mixedwood Forest Society (MFS) and Wuskwi Sipiik First Nation (WSFN) have signed a formal partnership agreement to operate, manage and prepare for a transfer of ownership of the Society's Goldeneye field station to the First Nation.

With a sub-permit issued by the Provincial Parks and Protected Areas Department, WSFN has now assumed management of the 5 acre station at Wellman Lake in Duck Mountain Provincial Park, located in their treaty territory.

"At our last annual general meeting, the majority of MFS members decided to partner with, and transfer our Field Station asset to, Wuskwi Sipiik in support of and with respect for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings," said MFS Executive Director Lindy Clubb.

In commenting on the agreement, WSFN Band Councillor Craig Stevens said: "All my life have I waited to see something like this."

"Historically, Canada has not been kind to my people. When treaties were signed in the late 1800s, the Ancestors of my people did not intend to have their descendants cut off from the land that was their Lifeblood. In essence, the spirit of the land was lost and the spirit of my people was taken from them. Access to vital areas of cultural and ancestral significance was lost," Stevens explained.

He added, "Now, with this historic action undertaken by the Mixedwood Forest Society and the Wuskwi Sipiik First Nation, we can see the words of reconciliation become something tangible and real, in the spirit of truth and respect."

MFS purchased the former church camp property in 2000 and created an affordable forest research and education centre. It housed university researchers and students who collected data and made informed recommendations about how to protect the area's ecology and critical habitat from the impact of logging and leisure activities. MFS hosted presentations on the area's natural history, plants and animals. Youth and community groups have also used the station as a nature education camp.

WSFN will continue and expand the MFS mandate by incorporating their perspective into the study of forest, wildlife and environmental issues. They will share traditional teachings about the area's ecology, habitat and medicines, and how to live in balance with and connect to nature through ceremonies.

"With respect, humbleness and gratitude, we hope to bring a sharing of values based on traditions and knowledge of the land and to work with all peoples to achieve the very important act of reconciliation," Stevens said.

Ruth Pryzner, MFS Secretary-Treasurer and another signatory to the agreement, stated, "By working with Wuskwi Sipiik, we hope to learn more about ways we can transform our understanding of, and heal our relationship with, nature and each other."

Stevens added, "Through partnerships such as this we can all gain an understanding of what reconciliation means and I challenge the citizens of the Swan Valley to engage with us in making this long forgotten dream a reality."

Wuskwi Sipiik First Nation will host a healing ceremony at the site inviting people from the local community, MFS members and provincial Parks staff.

-30-

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