



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 31, 2021

‘Stan Modeste, Salish Bear Totem, Malahat Summit’

DUNCAN – Today, July 31, 2021, a small private ceremony was held at the Malahat Summit to ensure that cultural protocols were completed prior to the removal of the Salish Bear Totem for refurbishment. The memorial items people have placed at the totem will remain at the site.

The Salish Bear Totem was carved by the late Stan Modeste, Chief of the Cowichan Tribes for two terms, as part of the 1966 Route of the Totem Centennial project, coordinated by the Ministry of Transportation and Highways (Ministry). In 2015, the City of Duncan oversaw the coordination of the refurbishment of the totem on behalf of the Ministry. A private ceremony was held at that time to raise the totem, under the guidance of the Modeste Family, Cowichan Tribes and Cowichan Elders.

On the early morning of July 2nd, 2021, the Salish Bear Totem was purposefully set on fire in an act of unacceptable retaliation with a message reading, “one totem – one statue”. Two women saw the fire and used water bottles to try to douse the flames, and others driving by stopped to help until fire crews arrived.

Since then, the City has been working under the guidance of the Modeste Family, Cowichan Tribes and Cowichan Elders to follow the protocols related to removing the totem and begin refurbishment. The Ministry is providing the funds for today’s ceremony and the refurbishment of the totem.

We are thankful for the words that have been shared from South Island Indigenous leaders in their recent statement regarding this totem and the related event that took place in Victoria and join them in their call for all of us to “join on the road to healing. We need to walk together, support each other and demonstrate humanity.”

- 30 -

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