



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 29, 2023

t'i xwey kwems sqwalten "our language is awake"

Qualicum First Nation celebrated for the official reawakening of their pentl'ach language

WJOLELP, UNCEDED TERRITORY OF WSÁNEĆ NATION / BRENTWOOD BAY, B.C. — The First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) celebrates the Qualicum First Nation for its success in reawakening their language, pentl'ach (pronounced punt-lutch), which has been considered a "sleeping language" since the 1940s and has now been officially recognized by the Province as the 35th First Nations language in B.C.

The pentl'ach language has been added to the list of B.C. First Nations languages through a change to the regulations that list all B.C. First Nations languages, and which is part of the legislation that created FPCC and supports First Nations languages, arts and heritage revitalization in B.C.

Qualicum First Nation has diligently worked to restore pentl'ach since 2017, through archival research, community engagement and creating partnerships with the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, the University of Victoria and the First Peoples' Cultural Council. Early accomplishments of the language team included establishing a writing system.

With support and funding from FPCC's Language Revitalization Planning Program, the pentl'ach language team developed a multi-year language restoration plan that includes establishing the current state of the language, developing a project timeline, engaging with the community and creating an inventory of available materials that could be referenced later in their work.

This approach is a model for other First Nations on how to reawaken sleeping languages. The Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and linguists are key allies in providing expertise that supports communities in achieving their goals for their respective languages. The Department of Canadian Heritage also provides funding to the FPCC to support their work with First Nations communities.

Tracey Herbert, CEO, the First Peoples' Cultural Council —

"Language revitalization is challenging and complicated work even in the very best of conditions with living languages. What Chief Recalma and the Qualicum First Nation members have achieved with the re-awakening of pentl'ach is only possible because of their passion, persistence and dedication. This is a wonderful example of what is possible when language revitalization is supported by leadership in communities. Everyone at FPCC is honoured to support the efforts of the Qualicum Nation. We raise our hands to Chief Recalma and Nation members and look forward to continuing to work with them to develop fluent speakers of pentl'ach."

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Chief Michael Recalma, Qualicum First Nation —

“pentl’ach is a vital part of our culture and our identity. For our people, pentl’ach has always been a part of us, but this recognition is an exciting milestone on a long journey to reestablish pentl’ach as a living language in our community.”

Honourable Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation —

“I commend the Qualicum First Nation's historic success in awakening the pentl’ach language, a testament to their cultural resilience. Their dedication is supported by the First Peoples’ Cultural Council, who are shaping a vibrant future for First Nations’ languages in our province. The B.C. government is proud of our partners in FPCC, Canada and B.C. First Nations who are working together to revitalize Indigenous languages in B.C., home to more than half of all First Nations languages in Canada.”

Honourable Pascale St-Onge, Minister of Canadian Heritage —

“This is an important day to recognize the resilient efforts of the Qualicum First Nation in reviving their pentl’ach language. We are committed to supporting the hard work and dedication of Indigenous communities and organizations, such as the First Peoples’ Cultural Council, in revitalizing their languages. These efforts will ensure their stories, traditions and cultures can be passed down to future generations.”

Dr. Lorna Wánosts’a7 Williams, Chair of the First Peoples’ Cultural Foundation —

“I lift my hands high to the Qualicum First Nation, for their dedication and strength as they reawaken the pentl’ach language. I am also grateful to the First Peoples’ Cultural Council and Foundation, and the University of Victoria for their working partnership with the Qualicum people through uplifting this important work done by the community. This news gives me great excitement and hope for other sleeping languages across Turtle Island and beyond.”

This project was funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation.

Learn More:

The First Peoples’ Cultural Council: fpcc.ca

FPCC Language Program: <https://fpcc.ca/programs/about-our-language-programs>

The First Peoples’ Cultural Foundation: fpcf.ca

FPCC’s First Peoples’ Map of British Columbia: maps.fpcc.ca

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MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

Celebrating the reawakening of the pentl'ach language

This backgrounder accompanies the news release: Qualicum First Nation celebrated for the official reawakening of their pentl'ach language

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Terminology:

A **sleeping language** is one that is not actively spoken in a community.

Reawakening a language is a notable moment in revitalizing a language, in that a sleeping language is brought back into the public consciousness to strengthen and reinforce its use.

A **living language** is actively spoken within a community and will be shared with younger generations. *It is important to note that the term "extinct" is inappropriate as it suggests no hope for revitalizing a language.*

About the pentl'ach language

The pentl'ach language was considered a "sleeping language," a language with no active speakers since the 1940s when its last known speaker passed away.

The pentl'ach language belongs to the Salishan language family and originates in the territory of the Qualicum First Nation, located between Comox and Nanaimo. Historically, other languages were also spoken in the community but pentl'ach is the traditional language of the territory. Elders with knowledge of Éy7á7juuthem, one of the neighbouring languages with which pentl'ach shares a history of connection and interrelations, supported the work to restore pentl'ach, building on some common features between the two languages. Neighbouring languages include **Éy7á7juuthem, Hul'q'umi'num' / Halq'eméylem / həñqəminəḿ** and **She shashishalhem**.

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The reclassification of pentl'ach language

Transitioning from a sleeping language to a living language takes years of planning, documenting and support from community members and experts. This includes reconstructing the language from existing documentation, learning to speak it and then developing revitalization initiatives to pass the language on within the community.

The Qualicum First Nation has been working for several years to reclaim the pentl'ach language. The nation received grants from FPCC's Language Revitalization Planning Program to develop a community language plan, including a plan for reconstructing pentl'ach from the documentation that exists.

In May 2023, the FPCC Board of Directors approved pentl'ach to be added to the First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Regulation as the 35th First Nations language in B.C. The Government of British Columbia made the amendment to the regulation official on November 2, 2023.

Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages 2022

According to FPCC's Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages 2022, there are at least 2 semi-speakers and 20 learners of pentl'ach.

The First Peoples' Map of B.C.

FPCC developed the First Peoples' Map in response to First Nations in B.C. who had requested a centralized platform to share information about their diverse languages, arts, heritage and communities. This online, interactive space interweaves language, arts, culture and heritage and also includes language use regions, data, pronunciations and user-contributed content. In 2023, pentl'ach was officially included on the map as one of the 35 living languages of B.C. Visit the map to see where pentl'ach is traditionally spoken: maps.fpcc.ca.

About Qualicum First Nation

Meaning "where the dog salmon run," Qualicum First Nation's prosperity and stability are built on cultural understanding and harmony among their community members and families. Their language values strive toward re-establishing their relationships with their traditional, ancestral language and culture.

About the First Peoples' Cultural Council

FPCC is a First Nations-run provincial Crown corporation with a mandate to support the revitalization of First Nations languages, arts, cultures and heritage in British Columbia. The organization provides funding and resources to communities, monitors the status of First Nations languages, develops policy

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FIRST PEOPLES'
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recommendations for First Nations leadership and government and collaborates with organizations on numerous special projects that raise the profile of First Nations arts, languages and heritage in B.C., Canada and around the world. For more information, visit: www.fpcc.ca

About the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation

The Foundation is an Indigenous-led charitable society that provides funding to Indigenous organizations and communities to protect and revitalize their languages, arts, cultures and heritage. The Foundation's sister organization is the First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC). Our funding allows FPCC to provide training, programming and resources to B.C. First Nations communities to elevate their efforts to protect and rebuild their cultural systems. The Foundation will continue to work alongside FPCC towards our shared goal of thriving Indigenous Cultures that are passed on from generation to generation. To learn more visit: fpcf.ca

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