

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 3, 2022**

**Secwepemc Hereditary Chief and Secwepemc Matriarch Among Four to Begin Week-long Contempt Trial Today: *Water Protectors Arrested for Opposing the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion in 2020 Face Jail Time***

Unceded Secwepemc territory (Kamloops, BC) - Today, four water protectors will begin their week-long trial at 10am. They include Secwepemc Hereditary Chief Sawses; Secwepemc matriarch April Thomas from hereditary blood lines of the snare tribe; Billie Pierre from the Nlaka'pamux Nation; and Senior Environmental Engineer, Romilly Cavanaugh, former Trans Mountain employee. The water protectors are being tried for criminal contempt of court and each of them face jail time. The four were arrested two years ago in October 2020 near Trans Mountain Pipeline's construction sites in Secwepemcúl'ecw beside Sqeq'petsin (The Thompson River). This will be the first time the Crown has tried members of the Secwepemc Nation for criminal contempt for opposing the pipeline in their own territory.

The Secwepemc Nation has not been consulted and has never given consent for the Canadian Federal Government's Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion (TMX) to proceed and cross waterways that are the lifeblood of the Secwepemc Nation. Once teeming with wild salmon and now experiencing the lowest run numbers since records have been kept, the toll that industry and unchecked development is having on Secwepemc Territories is increasingly more evident.

As a result of the lowered count number and the lack of appropriate Nation to Nation relationship between Canada and the Secwepemc, a sacred fire was lit in October 2020 and an invitation for meeting and discussion was offered to all involved parties. Instead of meeting with the Nation, the RCMP were deployed and on two separate occasions, while ceremony was being conducted, brutally arrested Indigenous Women and Elder Hereditary Chief Saw-ses.

Four additional water protectors arrested in Secwepemc territory on a different date in October 2020 are scheduled to go to trial for criminal contempt starting December 12, 2022.

"Secwepemc laws and authority supersede Canada's laws. The Secwepemc have never ceded, surrendered, sold, or signed away our lands and waters," said April Thomas. "Canada is in a conflict of interest regarding Trans Mountain Pipeline since it owns the company and also regulates it, while the BC court enforces an injunction to halt ceremony and quash peaceful protest against the pipeline expansion. Actions taken by Canada against the sovereign Secwepemc and Nlaka'pamux peoples for protecting our land and water are a continuation of Canada's genocide of Indigenous peoples," says Thomas.

"Why is the burden on us to prove to anyone, under threat of incarceration, why we were on our own territories conducting ceremony? Why have the Courts, the Province nor even the RCMP never had to prove their title and justification, legal or otherwise, for being here; for taking away and murdering our children; for polluting our waters and killing off our salmon?"

Hereditary Matriarch, Miranda Dick, says, "Indigenous People are the Canary in the Coal Mine when it comes to Raising Awareness of the Climate Crisis. This Pipeline has caused undue Hardship to Our People. The destruction of trees, wildfire, and floods cause further displacement."

Billie Pierre, from the Nlaka'pamux Nation, says, "I went to Sqeq'petsin in 2020 because where I'm from, our fish catches have dwindled since the Mt Polly tailings rupture in 2014. Whatever happens upstream impacts us. People used to be able to catch 100 salmon a year, and now often don't get any at all. Trans Mountain Pipeline laid out spawning deterrent mats years ago, and last month was drilled near Hope BC during a salmon spawn".

Photos: All by Ocean Shagor

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