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Chinook Indian Nation and Columbia Land Trust Sign Momentous Memorandum of Understanding

The Lower Columbia River has been nurtured and protected by the Chinook since time immemorial.

VANCOUVER, WASHINGTON — On Sunday, representatives from the Chinook Indian Nation and the Columbia Land Trust came together to sign a historic Memorandum of Understanding, establishing a foundation for future collaborative efforts in land stewardship.

The Memorandum of Understanding marked the beginning of a long-term partnership in restoration efforts and community planning between the Columbia Land Trust and the Chinook Indian Nation. The historic agreement enables the Chinook to review land conservation, stewardship, and restoration projects that parties are pursuing within the Territory, as well as supports joint exploration of opportunities for collaboration on conservation, stewardship, and restoration projects.

This Memorandum of Understanding marks a significant step in redistributing power, as the Columbia Land Trust actively shares authority with tribes, particularly the Chinook Indian Nation. It underscores respect for the Chinook's aboriginal territory, recognizing their status as a land claim tribe and affirming their historical and ongoing connection to these lands.

“This agreement holds profound meaning for us. As an unrecognized tribe, partnerships like this have historically been rare, and that is finally beginning to change,” said Chinook Indian Nation Secretary Treasurer Rachel Cushman. “The Columbia Land Trust made a choice to honor our aboriginal territory and recognize our role in protecting vital habitats. At a time when states like Oregon are just beginning to mandate agreements with tribes, this partnership shows that collaboration and respect don’t have to wait for federal recognition. We’re setting a precedent that honors our history and strengthens our commitment to stewarding the environment for future generations.”

Columbia Land Trust Executive Director Meg Rutledge added: “This agreement represents a first step in collaborating more closely on our shared goal of forever conserving and caring for land in the lower Columbia basin. It’s an incredible opportunity to work with the Chinook Indian Nation who have stewarded this land since time immemorial and learn from their deep connection to this area.”

The Chinook Indian Nation was federally recognized in 2001 under the Clinton Administration, only for that recognition to be rescinded 18 months later in 2002, forcing the Chinook to go without resources and benefits available to federally recognized tribes. The Columbia Land Trust's recognition of traditional knowledge serves as a lesson in recognizing and valuing Indigenous contributions to United States' history, regardless of recognition status.

To learn more about the Chinook Indian Nation, please visit ChinookJustice.org.

For information about the Columbia Land Trust, visit ColumbiaLandTrust.org.

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About the Chinook Indian Nation

The Chinook Indian Nation is made up of the five western-most Chinookan speaking tribes at the mouth of the Columbia River. The Chinook Indian Nation's nearly 70-year-old constitution identifies their five constituent tribes – the Clatsop and Cathlamet (Kathlamet) of present-day Oregon and the Lower Chinook, Wahkiakum (Waukikum), and Willapa (Weelappa) of what is now Washington State.

About the Columbia Land Trust

The Columbia Land Trust protects critical Northwest landscapes by working with willing landowners, collaborators, and key partners to build conservation that lasts. The Land Trust's mission is to conserve and care for the vital lands, waters, and wildlife of the Columbia River region through sound science and strong relationships.