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For Immediate Release

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Epekwitk Assembly of Councils Receives Eagle Donation from Island Nature Trust

A small gathering was held in the Epekwitk Assembly of Councils (EAC) Chamber on June 23, 2021, as Island Nature Trust (INT) representatives presented the EAC co-chairs with a taxidermized Eagle that the organization has been using for educational purposes around conservation for many years.

Island Nature Trust President June Jenkins Sanderson and Executive Director Bianca McGregor were in attendance to gift the Eagle to the Epekwitk Assembly of Councils Co-Chairs, Chief Darlene Bernard and Chief Junior Gould. This Eagle has played a special role in educating Island children and it was meaningful that the presentation could be made to the Chiefs during National Indigenous History Month.

Back in November 2001, a pair of Eagles was caught in a Coyote snare behind the hatchery in Cardigan, PEI. The male Eagle was examined by the Atlantic Veterinary College. He was later released by a class at Rollo Bay school after being deemed healthy. The female, sadly, was killed. She was still a young bird (less than 5 years old), as her head was not completely white, and she still had some dark feathers under her tail. This is same Eagle that INT presented to Island school children to promote the *Adopt an Eagle* campaign and is now presenting to the EAC.

According to Shannon Mader, Species-at-Risk Coordinator for Island Nature Trust, it was truly an uplifting experience to see the eyes of young children light up when they saw this Eagle come into their classroom.

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Quotes:

“The bald Eagle is a cultural symbol with unparalleled significance for the Mi’kmaq of PEI. INT’s gift is symbolic of our contribution to reconciliation and our intent to incorporate two-eyed seeing into our future stewardship of conservation lands in Epekwitk.” – Megan Harris, Director of Conservation for Island Nature Trust.

“The Eagle is a very sacred symbol in our culture. It flies high above the rest and offers our prayers to Creator. We are delighted to receive this meaningful and symbolic gift. I hope people will take time to learn about what the Eagle means to us as Mi’kmaq people, and that it serves as a catalyst to learn more about our values and culture.” – Chief Darlene Bernard of Lennox Island First Nation.

“I am glad to see Island Nature Trust take interest in strengthening its relationship with the Epekwitk Mi’kmaq. This Eagle serves as a symbol, a symbol that signifies there is a desire to partner, to learn more about one another, and learn how we can help one another. The Mi’kmaq have always been stewards of this land, and there are no doubt opportunities for us to work together now and in the future. – Chief Junior Gould of Abegweit First Nation.

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Background

Epekwitk Assembly of Councils

The Epekwitk Assembly of Councils is the joint forum that oversees and governs organizations that act in the shared interest of Abegweit First Nation and Lennox Island First Nation.

Comprised of the full Councils of both First Nations, the Assembly currently administers three organizations that are Provincial in scope: L'nuey, The Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI and the Epekwitk Development Corporation.

L'nuey's mandate is focused on protecting and advancing the Aboriginal and treaty rights of the Epekwitk Mi'kmaq, including negotiations, consultation, and governance development.

The Confederacy's role is to deliver shared programs and services on behalf of both First Nations, as well as serving as a Tribal Council, which provides services and technical supports to each First Nation's administration.

Eagle importance to Mi'kmaq

In the Mi'kmaq language, the Eagle is known as Kitpu. To the Mi'kmaq, the bird and its feathers are sacred symbols and objects that are universally recognized throughout Turtle Island (North America) by most native tribes and widely used in various ceremonies.

The Eagle or Kitpu is the medium through which Indigenous people can identify and appreciate the significance of the Creator's spirit among them and holds the highest esteem and honour. This honour and esteem extends to those who merely own or carry a feather or a claw of an Eagle. It is a great honour to be presented with an Eagle feather.

Island Nature Trust

Island Nature Trust is the Island's first and oldest private land trust, working since 1979 to protect the Island's natural spaces, for both the children and diversity of wildlife that call Epekwitk (PEI) home.

Island Nature Trust is a membership-based, non-government, Canadian charity dedicated to land conservation in Prince Edward Island since 1979. They envision a future where P.E.I. has a network of protected, robust natural areas championed by knowledgeable, engaged Islanders.

In a race against time, their mission is to preserve and steward forever a network of natural areas and wildlife habitats across PEI and bring together those who care about preserving PEI's natural legacy for future generations.

They are a key provider of technical, science-based knowledge on land stewardship and wildlife in PEI for landowners, governments and partner environmental groups.

They provide mentorship and employment opportunities to people committed to land stewardship, conservation research and wildlife monitoring who will continue building on the long tradition of Island Nature Trust as the premiere land trust on the Island.

Adopt an Eagle Campaign

The Adopt an Eagle program began as a partnership between the then PEI Department of Environmental Resources and Island Nature Trust in 1995. At that time Conservation Officer Gerald MacDougall dedicated his personal time to the conservation of this species. On the back of a steep decline for this and other raptor species across North America because of the global use of the pesticide [DDT](#), PEI's bald eagle population has steadily increased since the 1970s, thanks to public support.

The Adopt an Eagle Program was intended to educate landowners and the public of the habitat requirements and habits of the Bald Eagle. From its inception, Gerald and INT recognized the historical and cultural importance of this species to Indigenous peoples. Through the Adopt an Eagle program, thousands of dollars were raised for INT to further our stewardship mission in protecting wildlife habitat on PEI.

“The bald eagle is an enigmatic species close to the heart of North Americans. Along with other large birds of prey – in the last century they were on the verge of being wiped out. Since the 1970's they have seen an astonishing recovery thanks to the banning of the pesticide - DDT.

Island Nature Trust raised awareness of the challenges the species were facing by enabling Individuals and businesses to “Adopt an Eagle” beginning in 1995. The most important participants in this program were the thousands of island school children that learned about the species via an in-class presentation, with many given the opportunity to attend an Eagle banding. It was a rare opportunity to experience up-close the significance of this majestic bird.

It is a major success story that was thanks in part to the public and its love of the bird. There are now more Bald Eagles on PEI than ever.” – *Shannon Mader, Species-at-Risk Coordinator for Island Nature Trust.*