



---

## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

2025IRR0008-000276

March 31, 2025

### **Sacred land return, agreement advance reconciliation between Semá:th First Nation and B.C.**

ABBOTSFORD – Sumas First Nation (Semá:th) and the Province are strengthening their relationship through the return of the sacred Lightning Rock site.

After purchasing it last year, the Province has now successfully returned the 36-hectare Lightning Rock site to the Nation. This land holds deep cultural and spiritual significance to Semá:th and serves as a repository of traditions and narratives passed down through generations.

“The return of this sacred place is of great significance to the Semá:th, the Stó:lō, the Salish, and to First Nations people in general,” said Semá:th Chief Dalton Silver. “The respect and recognition evident here with this agreement is something our peoples have sought for too long. I’m thankful for the support from so many who’ve all played a part in making this a reality.”

The site contains a transformer stone that came to be known as Lightning Rock and is one of more than 100 sites where Stó:lō history says ancestors were transformed to stone. The site also holds the ancestral burial place of smallpox victims dating back to the 18th century.

Semá:th and the Province have worked in close collaboration to chart a path forward for the site’s protection since signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in 2017. In March 2024, the Province announced the purchase of the Lightning Rock site as part of ongoing negotiations with the intention to transfer the lands to Semá:th First Nation.

Now, the Province is returning the land to Semá:th First Nation. To make this historic moment possible, the Province and Semá:th signed a reconciliation agreement and a road agreement last fall. Since then, the Province and Semá:th First Nation have been working together to finalize the terms of the land transfer and engage with local interest holders so the agreement and the Lightning Rock return could be announced at the same time.

“Semá:th First Nation has spent decades advocating for this sacred land to be protected, and I am grateful to Chief Silver for his leadership in getting us to this point on our shared reconciliation journey,” said Christine Boyle, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. “This agreement is helping to protect this site, making a real difference for Semá:th members and providing certainty for everyone in the region.”

Through the reconciliation agreement, the Province and Semá:th First Nation have reaffirmed their commitment to building a strengthened government-to-government relationship and protecting the Lightning Rock site.

Part of the agreement includes a commitment for the Province and Semá:th First Nation to

establish a special initiative to plan for the stewardship of Sumas Mountain. This initiative will be co-ordinated under the S'ólh Téméxw Stewardship Alliance – British Columbia (STSA-BC) Collaborative Stewardship Forum, a partnership between B.C. and 17 Stó:lō First Nations.

Other terms of the agreement include:

- transferring ownership of the Lightning Rock site to Semá:th First Nation;
- working together to formally protect the Lightning Rock site;
- facilitating discussions between Semá:th First Nation and quarry operators about quarrying activity and potential economic opportunities; and
- supporting the development of a cultural education and healing centre through a \$1-million provincial contribution.

In addition to a reconciliation agreement, the Province, Semá:th First Nation and the City of Abbotsford have finalized a road agreement to explore alternative routes for the quarry access road that runs through the Lightning Rock site. The access route is used by gravel-hauling vehicles travelling to and from five quarries on Sumas Mountain and Highway 1.

“We are pleased to celebrate this significant milestone with Semá:th First Nation as these lands transfer from the Province today,” said Ross Siemens, mayor of Abbotsford. “As neighbours, the City of Abbotsford remains committed to working closely with Semá:th First Nation to address ongoing considerations in this culturally significant area in Semá:th traditional territory.”

The Province, Semá:th First Nation and the City of Abbotsford have agreed to contract a third party that will investigate the potential for mutually acceptable alternate routes for the access road. This process is expected to begin this year.

#### **Learn More:**

To learn more about Semá:th First Nation, visit:

<https://sumasfirstnation.com/>

To learn more about the STSA-BC Collaborative Stewardship Forum, visit:

<https://thetsa.ca/stsa-operations/csf/>

To learn more about agreements between the Province and Semá:th First Nation, visit:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/first-nations-negotiations/first-nations-a-z-listing/sumas-first-nation>

#### **Contact:**

Ministry of Indigenous Relations and  
Reconciliation  
Media Relations  
Art.Aronson@gov.bc.ca  
250 893-2028