



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

01/25/2022

ST. JOSEPH'S MISSION INVESTIGATION – WLFN RELEASES PHASE 1 GEOPHYSICAL RESULTS

Williams Lake First Nation (WLFN) would like to acknowledge that the following release could be triggering for some people. A crisis support line at the Indian Residential School Survivors Society can be reached at 1-866-925-4419 and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

WLFN Chief and Council today announced the preliminary results of Phase 1 of the geophysical investigation at the former St. Joseph's Mission site.

The St. Joseph's Mission is located just kilometers from the WLFN community of Sugar Cane, in the San Jose River Valley south of Williams Lake. The St. Joseph's Mission was operated as an Indian Residential School between 1886 and 1981, where thousands of Indigenous children were forced to attend. The institution was operated by various religious sects over the years, and predominantly controlled by the Roman Catholic missionaries as part of the residential school system set up by the Government of Canada. The Onward Ranch was added to the Oblates' holdings in 1964 and operated as a ranch and farm to sustain St Joseph's Mission.

The objective of the geophysical investigation was to conduct a detailed survey covering accessible areas within the Phase 1 boundary to identify and locate any subsurface features indicative of potential undocumented graves.

A combination of techniques used in the geophysical investigation at St. Joseph's Mission include:

- Aerial Light Imaging Range Detection (LiDAR);
- Terrestrial LiDAR;
- Low flight aerial imagery;
- Magnetometry, and magnetic susceptibility; and
- Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR).



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During the Phase 1 geophysical investigation, the St. Joseph's Mission team surveyed approximately 14 hectares of the broader 480-hectare site using GPR technology. All reflections in the GPR data have been marked and reviewed through a rigorous quality control process. To date, the GPR found 93 reflections that have been recorded at the former St. Joseph's Mission. These characteristics of these reflections are indicative of potential human burials.

WLFN is currently preparing a strategy for Phase 2 of the St. Joseph's Mission investigation.

This next phase of the investigation will include:

- Additional geophysical investigation of those portions of the St. Joseph's Mission site not covered by Phase 1;
- Additional research and survivor interviews; and
- Engagement with affected communities, the governments of Canada and British Columbia, and the owners of the lands which comprise the site of the former St. Joseph's Mission.

"We understand that this information is going to be very difficult to process for survivors of St. Joseph's Mission, their families, our community members and others in the general public," states WLFN Chief, Willie Sellars. "There is much more work to do on the St. Joseph's site, and we have every intention of continuing with this work. For now, it's important that everyone focus on their own wellness, and the wellness of those around them. I'm encouraging everyone to reach out to others, to engage in ceremony or to access the various supports available. We also ask people to please respect the fact that the site of the former St. Joseph's Mission is on what is now private lands. There is 24-hour security at that location, and people should not be visiting or attending the site without first making arrangements to do so."

To arrange interviews with Kukpi7 (Chief) Willie Sellars:

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