

The Sacred Land Conservancy doing business as Sacred Sea is a 501c3 Lhaq'temish led non-profit dedicated to protecting Lummi sovereignty, treaty rights, Schelangen, and sacred sites, and to revitalizing the Salish Sea.

Our Lhaq'temish term for orcas is qwe'hol'mechen, meaning "the people under the waves." They are people just like us, but they wear killer whale regalia that allows them to live under water. Ancestral teachings hold that there are kinship bonds between the Southern Resident qwe'hol'mechen and our people. Because we are family, we held a Sna'teng and gave the J, K, and L pods a Lummi family name: Sk'aliCh'elh. Chairman Leonard Forsman of Suquamish, Chief Leah George-Wilson of Tseil-Waututh, Senator Kevin Paul of Swinomish, and Rueben George of Tseil-Waututh were our witnesses on Orcas Island at this ceremony in 2019.

Like us, Sk'aliCh'elh have language, culture, rituals, song. Like us, they hold family to be sacred and their matriarchs are central to their community. And like us, they depend on salmon for sustenance, culture, and spirit.

As habitat destruction, dams, various pollutions, industrialization, and climate change have depleted Chinook runs, both Sk'aliCh'elh and our Lhaq'temish people have suffered. Members of Sk'aliCh'elh have starved to death from lack of Chinook, which is their primary food source, and Lummi fishermen and their families (all of us) have suffered economically, socially, and emotionally from the same lack. We are taught: "What happens to Sk'aliCh'elh, happens to us." Nowhere is this clearer than with the salmon crisis.

There is no way to divide our identity, Schelangen, culture and spirit from either qwe'hol'mechen or from the Chinook salmon. Since time immemorial, we have been in sacred relationship with one another.

It is our Lhaq'temish Xa xalh Xechning (sacred obligation) to honor and caretake both Sk'aliCh'elh and the Chinook. We care for the salmon because the salmon feed us and sustain our lives, livelihoods, and lifeways; we care for Sk'aliCh'elh as we do our own family members.

This obligation has led us to engage in a campaign to bring one of the stolen sisters home. In 1970, a number of young Southern Resident Orca relations were violently captured from their native Salish Sea waters and sold to aquariums. Only one of these Sk'aliCh'elh members survives to this day. We have given this relation the Lummi name Sk'aliCh'elh-tenaut, which means "daughter of Sk'aliCh'elh." She has also been called "Tokitae" and "Lolita" in captivity, where she remains the star attraction of Miami Seaquarium, held in the world's smallest orca tank, subjected to relentless sun and extreme social isolation.

Building on ATNI Resolution 18-32, "Tokitae, the Southern Resident Killer Whale Population, and the Salish Sea: Our Sacred Obligation," Lhaq'temish matriarchs Squil-le-he-le and Tah-Mahs are spearheading a campaign to bring Sk'aliCh'elh-tenaut ("Tokitae") home to the Salish Sea. This campaign is grounded in Indigenous values and is supported by a number of Indigenous leaders worldwide, elected officials, scientists, veterinarians, faith and environmental organizations, and citizens. A comprehensive plan to transport, rehabilitate, and provide ongoing care for her has been drafted by leading experts and is framed by Lhaq'temish culture in a wedding of ancestral teachings with Western science. Bringing her home will heal her, her mother, her family, and ours. Her story is also so much bigger: Sk'aliCh'elh-tenaut is an avatar of healing: she is drawing increased attention to the importance of upholding Indigenous rights, to Coast Salish peoples, to her Southern Resident family, to the salmon crisis, and to the challenges facing our shared Salish Sea home. Bringing her home provides hope for healing in many ways. Hy'shqe! More at: [www.sacredsea.org](http://www.sacredsea.org)