

# The Seattle Times

## Snoqualmie Tribe buys Salish Lodge and adjacent land for \$125 million, halting nearby development

Nov. 1, 2019 at 12:19 pm | Updated Nov. 1, 2019 at 8:42 pm



*With the landmarks as a backdrop, Snoqualmie Tribe Vice Chairman Michael Ross speaks Friday to the press and members of the Snoqualmie Nation about... (Steve Ringman / The Seattle Times) [More](#) ▾*

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SNOQUALMIE — Michael Ross remembers visiting Snoqualmie Falls with his great-grandmother in the mid-1990s, when he was around 5 years old and she was at least 100. [Ollie Moses](#) had spent most of her life near the falls, and a photo of the Snoqualmie woman is on display near a viewing area to teach visitors about the history of the site.

His great-grandmother hated what she saw, Ross said. She watched from her wheelchair as visitors, unaware of the place the falls holds in the hearts of the Snoqualmies, walked around her and dropped trash. She was upset for days, Ross recalled.

“She instilled in me, like many of our great-grandmothers, the importance and sacredness of this area and the respect it deserves,” said Ross, who is now vice chairman of the Snoqualmie Tribe.

On Friday, Ross looked at the photo of his great-grandmother as a young woman, in a white shirt and dark hat, as the falls roared behind him. On this day, he said, she would be happy.

The Snoqualmie Tribe announced Friday it has purchased the Salish Lodge & Spa and the acreage surrounding Snoqualmie Falls, marking a major victory in the tribe’s pursuit to reclaim land it considers sacred.

The tribe purchased the Northwest landmark and land from the Muckleshoot Tribe for \$125 million, according to the tribe. The total area is about 45 acres, including land north of and across Highway 202.

“Snoqualmie Falls is central to the tribe’s history, culture, spiritual practice and identity of the Snoqualmie people,” Tribal Chairman Robert de los Angeles said at a news conference overlooking the falls. “Its preservation and protection is of utmost importance to the tribe.”

With the purchase, the tribe has nearly doubled its land. The 55-acre Snoqualmie Reservation is the site of the tribe's other major business, the [Snoqualmie Casino](#). The date also marks 20 years since the tribe received federal recognition after losing the designation in the 1950s.

The tribe did not buy Snoqualmie Falls itself, but the 500-member tribe said it plans to discuss ownership of the underlying aquatic lands with the state. Puget Sound Energy holds the license to two hydroelectric generating plants at the falls.

The Muckleshoots [bought the Salish Lodge & Spa for \\$62.5 million](#), having outbid groups including the Snoqualmie Tribe, in 2007. The two tribes started formal discussions about the purchase about 10 months ago, according to Ross.

A planned development that had been approved by the city of Snoqualmie has been halted. The Muckleshoot Tribe wanted to build a hotel and conference center, as well as more than 100 homes, on land near Snoqualmie Falls.

No Muckleshoot representatives attended Friday's news conference, though Chairman Jaison Elkins said in a news release that the sale "is a prime example of Indian self-determination and how tribal nations can conduct business in a culturally sensitive way." Many Muckleshoot and Snoqualmie tribal members are related, and the Muckleshoot Tribe, too, considers Snoqualmie Falls a site of cultural importance. But the two tribes had been at odds over the development of the nearby land.

Snoqualmie Mayor Matt Larson said that the development plans were important to the city's efforts to address growth, but acknowledged that it had also been a serious point of contention among the city, the Muckleshoot and the Snoqualmie tribes. He wouldn't speculate on what the city will do instead, saying that he wanted to keep the focus on the Snoqualmie victory.



The Snoqualmie Tribe has spent years fighting development near the falls. Tribal members believe that the mists from the falls carry prayers to their ancestors, who used the site as a gathering place.

Ross, the tribe's vice chair, called the purchase the start of a healing process after decades of desecration by settlers. He likened it to part of a larger movement of tribes across the nation reclaiming their traditional lands.

“Finally, we are in control of the land we have lived in and cared for since time immemorial,” Ross said. “I stand here as a link from the last seven generations to the next seven generations who have experienced the pain and lived through the heartache. I also stand here because of the work that they did and the lives that they gave, in an effort to make a better future for their children. We intend to do the same.”

In 2005, Puget Sound Energy was ordered to decrease the amount of water diverted to its [two hydroelectric plants](#) each May and June after a legal battle with the tribe. The tribe attempted to decommission the plants in 2008, but the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals denied the petition for further review of the plants' operating license.

More recently, tribal members pushed [back against construction of a roundabout](#) between Snoqualmie Falls Park and the Highway 202 bridge. The tribe says their ancestors were buried there and the site should be left alone.

The roundabout was built, but the tribe is happy that other areas will remain undisturbed, said Tribal Councilmember Melynda Digre.

“It's such a powerful feeling, and a relief that my ancestors can rest peacefully,” said Digre, whose ancestors lived above Snoqualmie Falls.

“Before, our story was told for us. The most important thing is that now we get to tell our own story.”

Columbia Hospitality will continue to operate the lodge, a luxury resort with rates of at least \$200 a night for one of 86 guest rooms. The Seattle-based hospitality management company signed a 20-year contract with the Muckleshoot Tribe when it purchased the property.

The falls and Salish Lodge became well-known nationally after being featured in director David Lynch's 1990s television series "[Twin Peaks](#)" and movie, "Fire Walk with Me." Its titular small town was based on — and partially shot in — Fall City, North Bend and Snoqualmie.