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Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)
Grand Conseil des Cris (Eeyou Istchee)

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Cree Nation Government
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Chisasibi
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Wemindji
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PRESS RELEASE

Bill Namagoose, Long-Serving Executive Director of the Cree Nation Government/Grand Council of the Crees of Eeyou Istchee Receives Honourary Doctor's Degree from Carleton University

Nemaska, Eeyou Istchee (June 24, 2022) – Carleton University today bestowed the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa,* to Bill Namagoose in recognition of his many decades of service to the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee and his key role in the many achievements of the Cree Nation as both Chief of his community of Waskaganish and as Executive Director of the Cree Nation Government/Grand Council of the Crees of Eeyou Istchee. Over the past four decades, Bill Namagoose has been a consistent champion of Cree and Indigenous rights and has been instrumental in ensuring that the recognition of those rights were transformed into benefits for the Cree communities and the Cree people of Eeyou Istchee.

Bill Namagoose is from the Cree community of Waskaganish (formerly, Rupert House, the first location of the Hudson's Bay Company established in 1668) on the coast of James Bay, Quebec, and he is a survivor of the Indian Residential School System.

Upon his return to his community, he was asked by the community to become its Band Manager and was given the job of resolving the deficit in band accounts and putting the community on a solid financial basis. As Band Manager and later Chief of the community, he oversaw the construction of the community sanitary infrastructure and water system, the upgrading and modernization of the electrical system, and the construction of many of the houses in the community. He assisted numerous community members in establishing a range of local service enterprises including the post office, construction company, housing, and convenience store.

Mr. Namagoose was appointed by Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come as the Executive Director of the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) in 1988. His first challenge was to manage a major court case that the Cree Nation Chiefs embarked upon which addressed the failures of both Provincial and Federal Governments to implement the 1975 Treaty—the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement*. This challenge was immediately met by another major challenge at approximately the same time when Quebec announced that it would soon commence Phase Two of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project.

The proposed project was to build the Great Whale River and Nottaway-Broadback-Rupert Projects and were to create reservoirs that would flood Cree traditional territory, stretching over an area of 12,000 km^2. Mr. Namagoose organized the Cree efforts within Canada and internationally to oppose this project. Mr. Namagoose's work to promote energy efficiency and other alternatives to resolve energy shortages in the Northeastern America became part of the general movement for wind power, gas turbine generators, and the development of cogeneration opportunities, while at the same time, relieving the pressure for a new round of hydroelectric projects.

Bill Namagoose played a critical role in defending Cree Indigenous rights in the context of possible Quebec secession during the period leading up to the Quebec referendum on sovereignty in 1995. He coordinated the efforts to promote the concept of the Cree right to self-determination under international law, and that Cree consent was required in any discussions related to the future of Cree lands. Bill Namagoose spearheaded the publication of *Sovereign Injustice* which set out the Cree position with respect to Quebec secession. The argumentation in this publication was frequently cited in the Supreme Court reference case on Quebec separation.

Over the course of his tenure as Executive Director, the Cree Nation began its involvement internationally to promote, draft and gain approval of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.* Canada recently adopted legislation to implement the *Declaration*, an achievement which promises to be a major milestone in the reversal of colonialism, paternalism and systemic racism.

Since the signing of the initial *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement*, the Cree Nation has concluded over 80 agreements with Quebec and/or Canada. Bill Namagoose has been involved in the negotiations of most of these agreements.

Bill Namagoose has also been closely involved in the establishment of the Cree Trust Fund, which manages funds received from both Quebec and Canada pursuant to various agreements; he oversees the performance of the James Bay Cree-Naskapi Pension Fund, one of the most successful pension funds in Canada; and, he became a member of the Board of Directors of the First Nations Bank in 2002. Since 2016 he has served as Chairman of the First Nations Bank.

Upon learning of this distinction by Carleton University, Grand Chief Mandy Gull-Masty stated: "*Bill has devoted his life to the advancement of the Cree people of Eeyou Istchee. The Cree Nation extends its thanks for his courage, his wisdom, and his commitment to serving to our Nation. He has worked alongside many of our Cree leaders and made significant contributions to the historic journey of the Cree Nation. We acknowledge and thank him for his service as he receives this prestigious recognition from Carleton University*."

- 30 -

For further information:
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