

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**Hundreds Support Lummi Nation in Call to Bring Captured Orca Home**

Austin, TX -- Today, more than one hundred people gathered at Huston-Tillotson University to support the Lummi Nation's mission to bring their beloved orca whale, Tokitae, back to her family and native waters in the Salish Sea of the Pacific Northwest. The Lummi embarked on a Totem Pole journey on May 10 to call on the Miami Seaquarium to return Tokitae, the only Salish orca whale still alive from the violent capture of more than 40 orca whales in these waters decades ago.

Austin was just one stop on the Lummi's Totem Pole Journey – a 23-day trip across the country from the Lummi Nation in Bellingham, Washington to Miami, Florida to raise awareness about Tokitae's return and the importance of restoring the Salish Sea.

The Austin event also highlighted the cultural connections Texas and the Northwest have had for thousands of years.

"Native peoples in Texas are proud to welcome our relations from the Pacific Northwest, the Lummi Nation, and support their efforts on their journey," said **Tane Ward, Senior Organizing Manager for the Sierra Club**. "We understand the importance of honoring all of our relations and maintaining equilibrium with the natural world. We are also united in our steadfast maintenance of our culture and life ways, and value this exchange as a mutual recognition of our greater purpose."

Ward noted that Texas struggles with the same issues that affect the Lummi and the Salish Sea. "We are not in equilibrium with our natural world. Our economy is dictated by extraction, transportation, and burning of toxic chemicals for fuel and to create other dangerous materials to feed consumerism. More specifically, we are striving to protect our sacred places as Native peoples in Texas."

In Eagle Pass, along the border, many tribes are fighting against the Dos Republicas coal mine along with a strong coalition of local activists. In the lower Rio Grande Valley, South Padre Island, one of the last pristine beaches in Texas, is threatened by the construction of export facilities for fracked gas.

“Tokitae’s story is more than a story of a whale. Her story is the story of the Native peoples of this country who have been subjected to bad policies,” said **Jay Julius, Chairman of the Lummi Nation**. “Because of the failure of policymakers to protect our wildlife, she was stolen from her family 47 years ago and taken to the Miami Seaquarium. Because she is a relative of the Lummi people, it is our sacred obligation to bring her safely home to the Salish Sea.”

“Tokitae’s abduction from her home should serve as a warning to all of us about the failure of policy to protect the marine life of the Salish Sea,” continued Julius. “She is a part of our precious ecosystem and a member of our Salish family. There are constant assaults on our lands and waters, whether it’s from the fossil fuel industry that puts profits over the health of people, animals and our environment, or from invasive species introduced to our waters that threaten the health of native species of salmon.”

The Totem Pole Journey will make its next stop in Houston, Texas on Sunday, May 20. It is expected to arrive in Miami on May 26.

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#### About the Sierra Club

*The Sierra Club is America’s largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with more than 3 million members and supporters. In addition to helping people from all backgrounds explore nature and our outdoor heritage, the Sierra Club works to promote clean energy, safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and legal action. For more information, visit [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org).*