

## **Saskatchewan First Nations to host gathering to mark burial sites**

The seven First Nations that own land at Kinookimaw Beach, located 30 kilometres northwest of Regina, are to host a special gathering to pay homage to their ancestors while making plans for the future.

Today, the chiefs will be in Kinookimaw, where they will hold a pipe ceremony. They also intend to fence off old burial sites and graves in the area.

Reg Desjarlais from the Piapot First Nation said there are several unmarked graves in the area. One site he's aware of contains eight unmarked graves.

"They are my relatives," he said. "They have been (buried) there (since) maybe the 1920s."

Desjarlais's father Philip lived in Kinookimaw with his two brothers, until Philip was about five years old.

"They were my dad's relatives," Desjarlais explained.

Philip made sure to share this information with Desjarlais, who in turn, has passed this knowledge down to his children.

"A lot of kids ride around their (all-terrain vehicles) and motorbikes in the area," Desjarlais said, adding he's glad something is being done to preserve and protect the sites.

He said the unmarked graves are being driven over and are becoming eroded.

"This way, no one will bother them," Desjarlais said about fencing off the burial site and marking the graves.

Although he's happy that efforts are being made to safeguard the burial sites, Desjarlais said he would like the people of his community to honour those buried at Kinookimaw every year.

"Just to keep the tradition alive, that's my main objective right now," said Desjarlais.

In addition to hosting the pipe ceremony, the chiefs plan on meeting to discuss the possibilities of developing the land.

Earlier this week, Piapot Chief John Rockthunder said it was important to always recognize and honour the past. However to move forward and plan for the future, First Nations need to find ways to become more self-sufficient. Rockthunder believes this can be done through economic development.

Brian Sinclair, general manager of the Regina Beach Golf Club, supports what the chiefs are doing.

"They are basically looking at possibly developing the land in the future, and they want to recognize some of the burial sites out there before they break any ground for any plans they may have," said Sinclair.

He believes the land holds a wealth of potential and is looking forward to hearing what comes out of the gathering.

Source

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