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Sitka Tribe of Alaska Calls for Respect for Totem Poles and Culturally Significant Places

Sitka Tribe of Alaska condemns the recent trend of social media videos depicting visitors dancing around kootéeyaa (totem poles) in Southeast Alaska. Kootéeyaa represent the history of our people and our hopes for the future. They are integral to the vibrant culture that we work so hard to protect and perpetuate. While we support tourism as both economic development and as an opportunity to educate visitors about our vibrant, living culture, we expect visitors to treat our people, our homelands, and our culture with respect. Dancing around kootéeyaa is disrespectful and we ask the visitor industry to strongly discourage this misguided behavior.

The Tlingit people have lived in Sheet'ká Kwáan since time immemorial. We are not separate from this land. The culture that originated with our ancestors and that we now sustain grew out of this place and contributes to its richness and beauty. The same is true for our Tlingit, Haida, and Tshimshian citizens and neighbors across Southeast Alaska. We ask all visitors to our homelands to approach their time here with respect, care and curiosity.

“Sitka Tribe of Alaska started our own tourism program to educate visitors about our traditional territory and represent our culture in an authentic way,” explains Rob Allen, the Tribe’s general manager and a local tourism leader himself. “Disrespect for totem poles, sacred



sites, and other elements of our culture is unacceptable and undermines our trust in the industry that we have worked hard to establish. We will continue to work with our partners to address acts of disrespect and protect our cultural heritage.”

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Sitka Tribe of Alaska is the federally recognized Tribal government of Sitka, Alaska, representing over 4,846 Tribal Citizens. As a Tribal government, STA is responsible for the health, safety, welfare, and cultural preservation of its Tribal Citizens.