

TALKING STICK

A GREAT BEAR
RAINFOREST
PUBLICATION



Kitasoo/Xai'xais Nation and the Success of Spirit Bear Lodge
Nisga'a Nation Implements Innovative Cultural Tourism and Marketing Initiative
Community Well-Being: **Growing Resilient Economies**

SPRING 2018

Updates from Coast Funds

Welcome to the Spring 2018 edition of Talking Stick.

Published throughout the Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii, this newsletter explores conservation science, stewardship, sustainable development, and community well-being initiatives led by First Nations.

This issue, we're excited to bring you **two stories of sustainable, culturally-inspired tourism initiatives**. On BC's central coast, Spirit Bear Lodge, owned and operated by **Kitasoo/Xai'xais Nation**, is a model of success in ecotourism. And on the north coast, **Nisga'a Nation** has embarked on an impressive cultural tourism and marketing initiative that showcases their unique culture, attracting visitors from across the globe.

You can **find full versions of these stories online at coastfunds.ca** along with in-depth interviews, community well-being outcomes, and ways to connect directly with the individuals who developed and led these initiatives.

This season marks ten years since Coast Funds opened its doors. Since inception, **Coast Funds has approved \$78.5 million to support 337 vital projects led by First Nations** whose territories span the Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii. Through those projects,

First Nations are strengthening community economic prosperity, environmental conservation, social empowerment, and cultural vitality across the coast.

At the end of this newsletter, you can find one example of the positive impact First Nations are delivering with Coast Funds investments in their communities. You can fully explore all the community well-being outcomes on our website.

Finally, we're pleased to invite you to **join us on our newly launched Facebook page**. Stay up-to-date with the latest stories from the Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii by liking our page at **Facebook.com/CoastFunds**.

We are honoured to present the stories First Nations are sharing in Talking Stick. If you'd like us to publish your story, please reach out to us at **talkingstick@coastfunds.ca**.

Darcy Dobell
Communications Committee Chair

Brodie Guy
Executive Director

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COVER

The Spirit Bear is a subspecies of the black bear found on BC's north and central coasts. The bear is the namesake for the Kitasoo/Xai'xais owned and operated Spirit Bear Lodge.

PHOTO BY
Kyle Breckenridge

OPPOSITE PAGE

Spirit Bear Lodge employs 35 people in a community of 300 people in Kitasoo/Xai'xais Nation's remotely located village of Klemtu, BC.

PHOTO BY
Cael Cook, courtesy of Spirit Bear Lodge

The Success of Spirit Bear Lodge: How a Remote, Community-led Business Became a Global Model For Ecotourism

Over two decades, the Kitasoo/Xai'xais Nation has developed a globally-recognized ecotourism business. Spirit Bear Lodge has helped strengthen economic, conservation, and cultural well-being in the community of Klemtu.



For many years, Kitasoo/Xai'xais Elders rarely spoke of the Spirit Bear for fear it would be hunted into extinction if word spread of its existence. Yet today, the bear is globally recognized and the Kitasoo/Xai'xais people have achieved the opposite: tourists travel from across the globe for a chance to glimpse the animal.

The celebrity of the creature parallels, and is in large part due to, the success of the eponymous Spirit Bear Lodge. Like the bear whose image adorns its logo, the lodge has become known worldwide. Over the last two decades, Spirit Bear Lodge has helped strengthen economic, conservation, and cultural well-being in the community of Klemtu at the heart of Kitasoo/Xai'xais territory.

Employing nearly 10 per cent of the local population, the Lodge has diversified opportunities for employment in the community, particularly for youth. Additionally, by drawing attention to the region's stunning landscape and globally rare species like the Spirit Bear, the business helped attract researchers to the area and strengthen protection of the Nation's vast

territory. And perhaps most importantly, it played a major role in the establishment of a cultural stewardship program for the Nation's youth and Elders.

The story of Spirit Bear Lodge is about more than just a successful ecotourism business, it is the story of the Kitasoo/Xai'xais Nation creating a conservation-focused, one-of-a-kind, sustainable business in one of the most remote places in Canada.

Despite initial concerns, the community of Klemtu came to see the potential of ecotourism to bring economic, cultural and environmental benefits to their territory. In addition, community members saw parallels between ecotourism and their own stewardship approach to resource management.

Ecotourism was an industry that would use the natural resources of the territory in accordance with cultural laws, knowledge and values.

“The Elders always say what we have is not ours, we’re just holding it for the next generation. That’s really important in whatever we do that we look at the model and say we’re going to take care of it and make sure the next generation has something.”

“Our vision for our land and resources is based on the best definition of the term ‘sustainable’,” says Kitasoo/Xai'xais Chief Councillor Douglas Neasloss.

“To us this means that the wealth of forests, fish, wildlife and the complexity of all life will be here forever. It also means that we will be here forever. To remain here as Kitasoo and Xai'xais people, we need to protect and enhance our culture and protect our heritage.”

Today, Spirit Bear Lodge is recognized as an important tool for helping to protect the traditional territory of the Kitasoo/Xai'xais, as a catalyst for cultural renewal, and as a means to re-connect community members with their ancestral territory.

TO LEARN MORE, VISIT [COASTFUNDS.CA](https://coastfunds.ca) AND SEARCH **SPRIT BEAR LODGE.**



LEFT

Spirit Bear Lodge guide Justin Neasloss, speaks to lodge guests during an outing in Kitasoo/Xai'xais territory.

PHOTO BY

Michael Pietrocarlo, TNC Canada



Written on the Land: Cultural Tourism in Nisga'a Territory

A cultural tourism and marketing initiative developed by the Nisga'a Lisims Government boosts tourism in the Nass Valley, raises the profile of its entrepreneurs, and reinforces the sovereignty and culture of the Nisga'a Nation.

ABOVE

Nisga'a chiefs, elders, matriarchs, youth, and guests celebrate the raising of a Pts'aan in Gitwinksihlkw Village. A cultural tourism and marketing initiative by the Nisga'a Lisims Government serves to reinforce the unique culture of the Nation.

PHOTO BY

Gary Fiegehen, courtesy of Nisga'a Lisims Government

The Nisga'a Highway, running through the heart of the Nation's territory from Terrace to Gingolx, was given the numeric designation 113. The number was not chosen arbitrarily; from 1887 when Nisga'a chiefs travelled to Victoria to demand recognition of title, to 2000, when the Nisga'a Treaty was ratified and the Nisga'a Lisims Government passed its first law, exactly 113 years had passed. Over the next five years, the Nisga'a Lisims Government would extend and upgrade the highway, connecting the four villages of its Nation and inviting the world to visit Nisga'a territory.

The Nisga'a territory, encompassing 200,000 hectares from the K'alii Aksim Lisims (the Nass River) to the Hazelton Mountains is astounding in its beauty. It is a place of aquamarine waters, soaring snow-capped mountains, and an enormous lava field. The story of the Nisga'a people is written on the land, so visitors to the territory are offered more than breathtaking scenery—they are given the opportunity to experience Nisga'a culture.

Visitors to the Nass Valley are greeted by Txeemsim, a supernatural being who brought light to the Nass River in a time that the Nisga'a lived in semi-darkness. His image is the centrepiece of a recent cultural marketing and

tourism initiative by the Nisga'a Lisims Government. The initiative expanded and enhanced an auto-tour route along the Nisga'a Highway, developed a brochure to guide visitors along the route, and built a website devoted solely



to tourism in Nisga'a territory. The project and the partnerships that developed as a result have boosted tourism in the Nass Valley, raised the profile of entrepreneurs in the four Nisga'a villages, and reinforced the sovereignty and culture of the Nisga'a Nation.

The Nass River has always supported citizens of the Nisga'a Nation. Today, the people of the Nass River continue to benefit from the beauty and bounty of the river and its surrounding lands in part by inviting outsiders to experience the land and its stories.

The Nisga'a cultural tourism and marketing initiative was conceived by Bert Mercer, Economic Development Manager for the

Nisga'a Lisims Government, as a way to expand the economic base of the Nation, link the four Nisga'a villages and raise their profile as a collective unit, and to build partnerships with nearby communities. The centrepiece of

the initiative is an 18-stop auto-tour along 100 kilometres of the Nass Valley.

The auto-tour takes visitors to culturally significant stops, all within an easy walk of the Nisga'a highway. Stops include the Hlgu Isgwit hot springs, Ts'itksim Aks (Beaupre) and Ts'itksim Aks (Vetter) waterfalls, Wilp-Adok-shl Nisga'a (the Nisga'a museum), and the four Nisga'a villages of Gingolx, Laxgalts'ap, Gitwinksihlkw, and Gitlaxt'aamiks. The accompanying auto-tour brochure and tourism website provide deeper cultural context including Nisga'a language translation for all stops.

TO LEARN MORE, VISIT [COASTFUNDS.CA](https://coastfunds.ca) AND SEARCH NISGA'A TOURISM.

ABOVE

Anhluut'ukwsim Lax-mihl, the dedication site for the Nisga'a Memorial Lava Bed Park. The park was dedicated on April 30, 1992.

PHOTO BY

Gary Fiegehen, courtesy of Nisga'a Lisims Government

“Cultural tourists who come up here want to know about Nisga'a traditions in a very authentic way. They don't want to be spoon-fed inauthentic touristy content.”

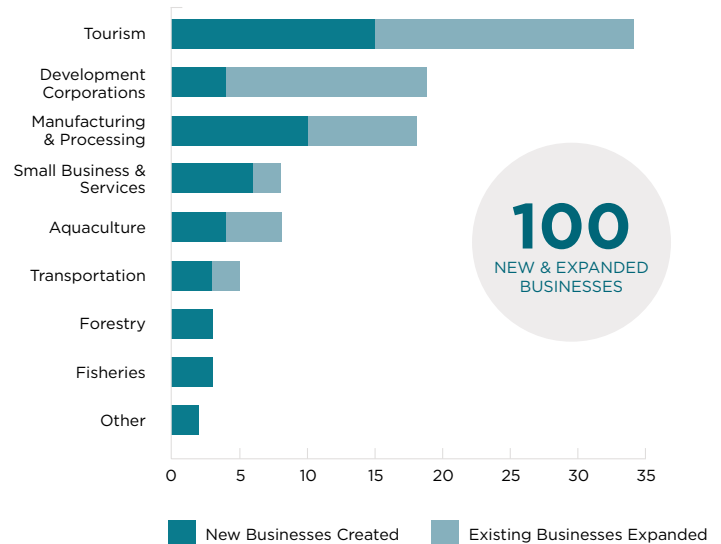
COMMUNITY WELL-BEING: GROWING RESILIENT ECONOMIES

First Nations are creating sustainable businesses and strategically acquiring and expanding companies in the Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii. Since Coast Funds' inception in 2007, First Nations have created and expanded 100 businesses. These businesses help diversify local economies and provide family-supporting incomes for community members who might otherwise have to relocate to find employment.

The positive environmental, economic, social, and cultural vitality outcomes of First Nations' investments are highlighted on our website and in our 2017 annual report that is released in late April every year.

TO LEARN MORE, VISIT COASTFUNDS.CA
AND SEARCH **COMMUNITY WELL-BEING**.

FIRST NATIONS' BUSINESSES CREATED AND EXPANDED BY SECTOR



New Faces at Coast Funds



Paul Plater, Director, Finance

As Director, Finance, Paul leads all aspects of Coast Funds' financial operations. Paul works closely with the Executive Director and board to oversee the financial stewardship of Coast Funds, its management of socially responsible investments, strategic projects, and the timely disbursement of funding to First Nations.



Lydia Liew, Financial Administrator

As Financial Administrator, Lydia is responsible for effective and accurate accounting to support the entire team as they work with First Nations to invest funds in conservation and sustainable development throughout Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii communities.



Laura Hope, Communications Specialist

As Communication Specialist, Laura works with First Nations to share the knowledge, experience, and stories of their development and conservation projects.

OVERLEAF

Misty waterfalls in K'ootz-Khutze Conservancy, located on the east side of Princess Royal Channel, along the Inside Passage route in Kitasoo/Xai'xais and Gitga'at territories.

PHOTO BY
Brodie Guy



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