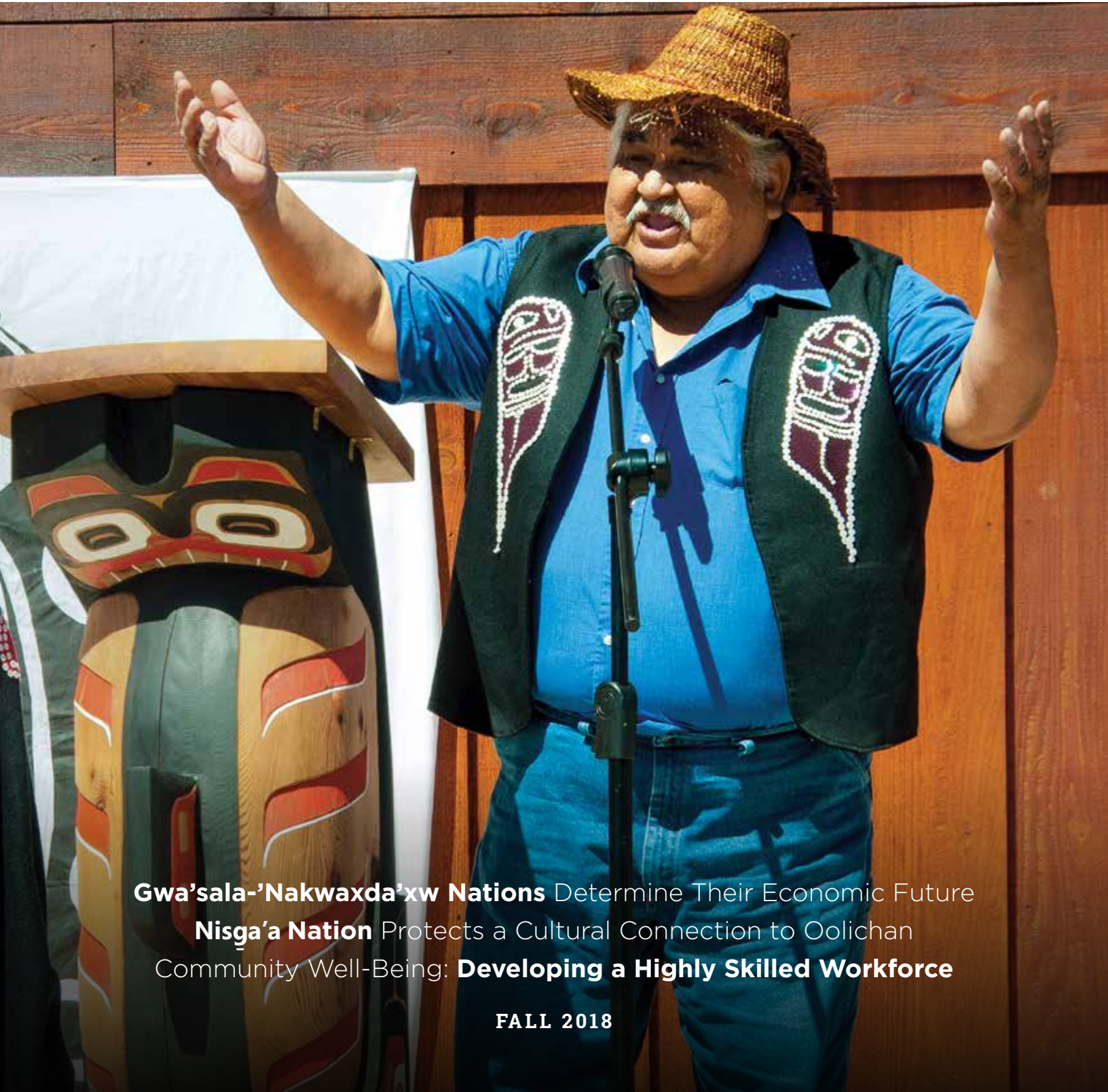


TALKING STICK

A GREAT BEAR
RAINFORREST
PUBLICATION



Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nations Determine Their Economic Future
Nisga'a Nation Protects a Cultural Connection to Oolichan
Community Well-Being: **Developing a Highly Skilled Workforce**

FALL 2018

Updates from Coast Funds

Welcome to the fall 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 features **the endeavours of two First Nations to strengthen the well-being of their communities.** On north Vancouver Island, the **Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nations** are growing and diversifying their economy through the establishment of K'awałsi Economic Development Corporation. On the north coast, the **Nisga'a Nation** have undertaken a multi-year study to ensure their cultural connection to oolichan, known as the saviour fish.

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 develop and lead these initiatives.

Projects like the two featured here make significant positive contributions to the communities in which they take place.

In this issue we focus on how **First Nations' investments with Coast Funds in workforce development and skills training are empowering First Nations community members.**

We are also pleased to take this opportunity to announce the election of **Huux (Percy Crosby)** as chair of our board of directors. Percy has been a Coast Funds director since 2013, bringing a wealth of experience and knowledge to his new role. We look forward to Percy assuming this leadership role as the board continues to steward Coast Funds in its service of First Nations throughout the Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii.

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 talkingstick@coastfunds.ca.

Darcy Dobell
Communications Committee Chair

Brodie Guy
Executive Director

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FALL 2018
EDITOR LAURA HOPE

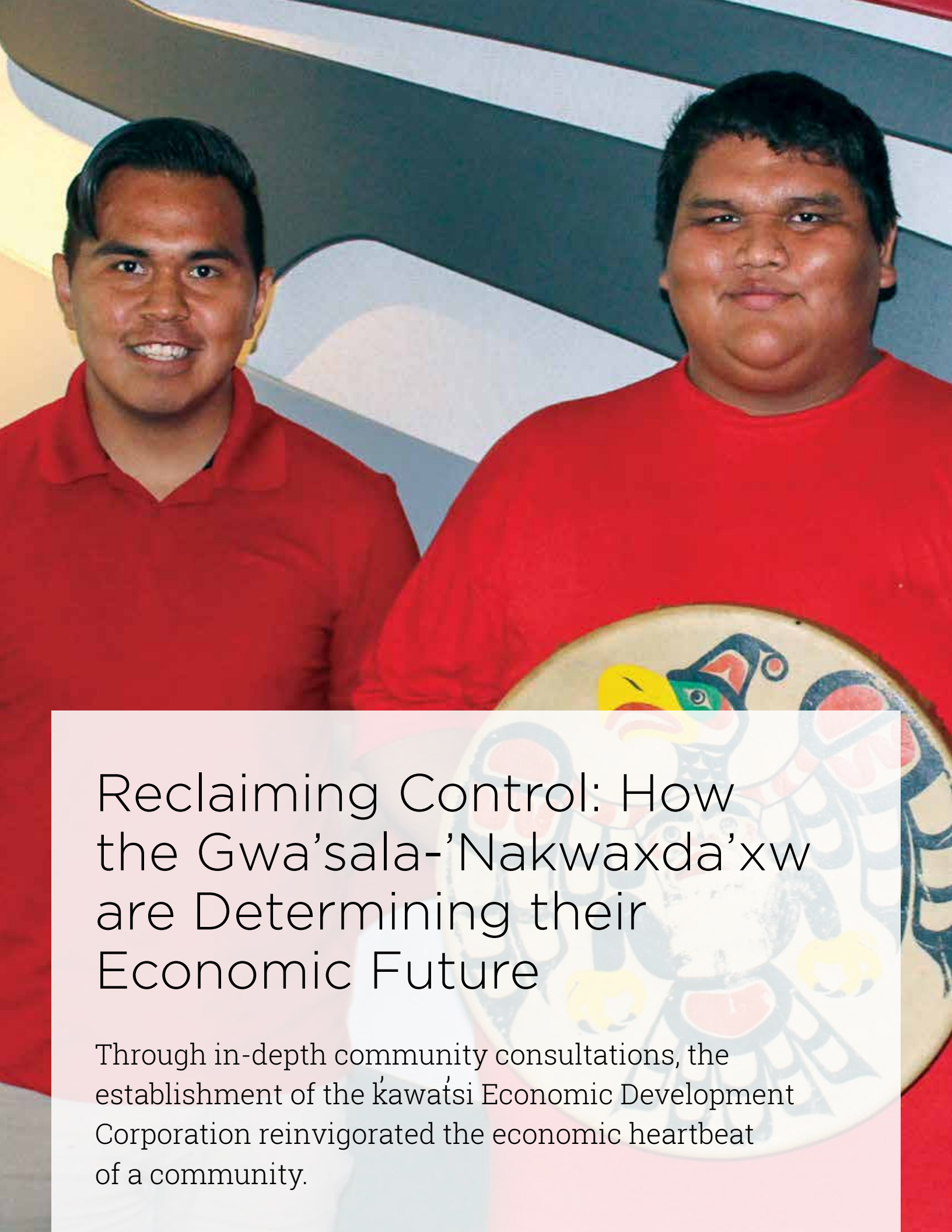
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COVER
Chief Paddy Walkus of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nations speaks at the grand opening of Kwa'lilas Hotel.

PHOTO COURTESY
Kwa'lilas Hotel

OPPOSITE PAGE
Thomas Coon and Walter Brown of Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nations host drum-making workshops in their roles with K'awałsi Tours.

PHOTO BY
Coast Funds



Reclaiming Control: How the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw are Determining their Economic Future

Through in-depth community consultations, the establishment of the kawatsi Economic Development Corporation reinvigorated the economic heartbeat of a community.

In 1964, a coerced government relocation removed two First Nations—the Gwa’sala and the ‘Nakwaxda’xw—from their homelands and amalgamated them on the north end of Vancouver Island. The relocation separated the Nations from their means of subsistence and community members struggled in the new environment.

In 2007, the Nations began developing a plan to return their community to economic self-sufficiency. Through an in-depth community planning process, the Nations developed a strategy to support its members through the creation of k’awatsi Economic Development Corporation (KEDC).

The planning process started with a three-year community consultation, led by Jessie Hemphill who now chairs the KEDC board of directors. Hemphill says the planning process effectively captured the voice of the community. “The vision really came from them,” Hemphill says. “We had really active Elders, really active children and youth that took part. So, the final document was a really good representation of that.”

By focusing on the goals established through the consultation process Conrad Browne, CEO of k’awatsi Economic Development Corporation was able to bring to life the community’s vision. By supporting Chief and



Council to create a strategic plan, and enlisting expert contractors to lay the foundation of a solid business, Browne had established the development corporation by winter of 2014.

Within a few short years, KEDC has become an economic force on north Vancouver Island. “We started with one person and one boat and at the highest part of our season [in 2017] we had 130 employees across seven distinct businesses,” says Browne.

True to KEDC’s guiding principles, the businesses operate profitably, create employment, and benefit community members, the environment, and the culture and values of the community. Each of these businesses serves as a source of pride for community members, and a source of hope.

Chief Paddy Walkus sees the work being accomplished by KEDC as a source of inspiration for his community. “I really believe it provides a lot of drive, especially in our young people. They’re looking beyond the current horizons and that is exciting for all of us,” Walkus says.

The corporation has become a symbol of the will and strength of the Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw people, a people who are once again self-determining their economic future.

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

“We started with one person and one boat and at the highest part of our season [in 2017] we had 130 employees across seven distinct businesses.”

ABOVE
k’awatsi CEO Conrad Browne and
Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw councillor
Darryl Coon.
PHOTO BY
Coast Funds



The Saviour Fish: Protecting Nisga'a Connection to Oolichan

As oolichan populations across the coast collapsed, impacting culture and access to traditional food for many First Nations, the Nisga'a Lisims Government undertook a multi-year research project to understand and support the Nation's efforts to conserve the oolichan population, and to ensure Nisga'a citizens can continue to harvest the fish year after year.

ABOVE

Nisga'a fishers harvest oolichan through the ice at Fishery Bay.

PHOTO BY

Nicole Morven

The oolichan is a fish of many names: eulachon, ooligan, hooligan. It is sometimes called candlefish because it is so high in oil content that, when dried, it can be fitted with a wick and used as a candle. To scientists it is *Thaleichthys pacificus*. To the Nisga'a it is saak, the saviour fish.

For thousands of years, the Nisga'a people have harvested oolichan from K'alii-Aksim Lisims, the Nass River. Sim'oogit Naaws (Harry Nyce Sr), director for the Nisga'a Fisheries and Wildlife Department, says the fish continues to be a mainstay of the Nation's culture. "For us, it is a life-saving fish," he says. "It's the first fish that comes in the new year arriving as winter supplies are dwindling."

The slender, silvery-blue fish began to disappear from the waterways of the province in the 1990s, likely due to a combination of climate change,



“For us, it is a life-saving fish. It’s the first fish that comes in the New Year arriving as winter supplies are dwindling.”

overfishing, industrialization, and by-catch. The population decline—estimated at 98 per cent—negatively impacted First Nations' culture and access to traditional foods.

In 2011, the K'alii-Aksim Lisims oolichan was assessed as “threatened” by the Government of Canada's Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). The Nisga'a Nation worried its connection to oolichan might also be in danger, and acknowledged the need to begin collecting better data on the culturally and ecologically important fish in order to ensure a sustainable fishery could be maintained.

After pushing for a re-assessment of oolichan as a “Species of Special Concern,” the Nisga'a Fisheries and Wildlife Department undertook a multi-year research project that would provide concrete evidence of the fish's population, support its efforts at conserving oolichan, and ensure Nisga'a citizens could continue to harvest the fish each year.

The results of the research project, which is still continuing in 2018, were surprising. “We found that... over the last three years the biomass of oolichan has risen,” says Edward Desson, fisheries manager for the Nisga'a Nation.

Sim'oogit Naaws (Harry Nyce Sr.) says the project was effective at putting together data sets for historical reference and providing more ways to maintain the resource. “That's extremely important for us,” he says “and we're appreciative of Coast Funds to recognize that and help us do the work that we're doing.”

Careful monitoring of the traditional Nisga'a fishery, and data collection of the oolichan population ensure that its numbers will not be reduced to a threatened level on one of the few river systems where their numbers are still abundant. That data will play an important role when COSEWIC re-assesses the status of Nass River oolichan in 2023, and ensure the Nisga'a can maintain their cultural connection to the saviour fish.

TO LEARN MORE, VISIT [COASTFUNDS.CA](https://coastfunds.ca) AND [SEARCH OOLICHAN](#)

LEFT

Lonny Stewart holds out a pint of oolichan grease at Walter's Camp on Fishery Bay.

PHOTO BY
Brodie Guy

COMMUNITY WELL-BEING: Developing a Highly Skilled Workforce

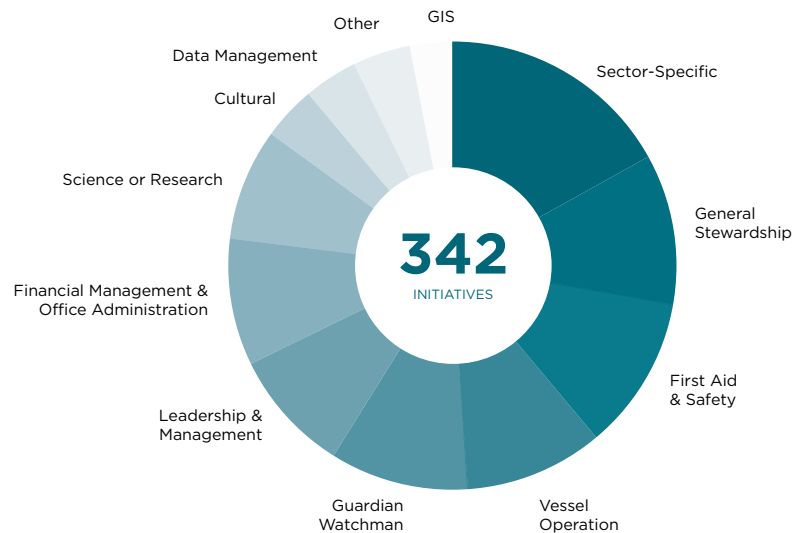
First Nations are building community members' skills, knowledge, and experience with on-the-job workforce development and applied training programs.

With Coast Funds' support, First Nations have led 342 initiatives that have trained 951 people and provided 13,329 training days.

Projects like the *k'awaṭsi* Economic Development Corporation and the Nisga'a oolichan research program enable community members to meet the growing demand for skilled workers.

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

WORKFORCE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES BY FIRST NATIONS



Welcoming Huux̄ (Percy Crosby) As Coast Funds' Chair



Coast Funds' board of directors is pleased to announce Huux̄ (Percy Crosby) has been elected to the role of Chair. Crosby has been a member of the board since 2013 when he was nominated by the Council of the Haida Nation. Prior to his election as Chair, Crosby was Vice-Chair of the board of directors and had been working closely with outgoing Chair, Merv Child, to ensure a smooth transition.

"Percy brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to his new role and I'm extremely confident in his ability to continue to steward the organization as it serves First Nations throughout the Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii," says Child.

Child had been serving as a director since Coast Funds' inception. "Over the past decade we have been honoured to have Merv serve as a director on Coast Funds' board," said Crosby. "I would like to wholeheartedly thank Merv for his immense contribution to the success of the organization and the First Nations we serve."

OVERLEAF

An aerial view of Ba'as (Blunden Harbour) in 'Nakwaxda'xw territory.

PHOTO BY

Brodie Guy



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