

Weaving together  
the threads of  
conservation  
and community  
wellbeing



# The Talking Stick

NEWSLETTER OF THE COAST OPPORTUNITY FUNDS

## A Resourceful Issue

This month, it's our pleasure to bring you a profile of the Heiltsuk Integrated Resource Management Department. It's only been up and running since 2009, but as you'll see, Heiltsuk are already reaping the benefits of using their Coast Funds conservation allocation to marshal all of their stewardship resources and functions into one efficient, accountable institution that is working hard to protect and enhance Heiltsuk's rights and management of their territory. A big thank you to Kelly Brown, Julie Carpenter, Mike Reid, Dave Whitehead, Laurie Whitehead, Harvey Humchitt Snr. and everyone else at HIRMD who contributed photos to go with the story.

In September, we held our fall Board meeting in Prince Rupert. It was a chance for us to go to the communities of Metlakatla and Lax Kw'alaams and see some of the work they have been doing. We also had a very special treat at Lax Kw'alaams—see pages 6 and 7— to find out what I'm talking about, and for photographs of the visit.

As always, please don't hesitate to let us know what you think about material you read in *The Talking Stick*, and anything we could do to make it more informative, interesting and useful to you. **Don't forget you can download the newsletter from our website, or any stories in it that you would like to share or reproduce in your own publication or on your website.**

If you have ideas on where else we should distribute the newsletter, or you would like us to email it to you whenever it comes out, please contact us at [info@coastfunds.ca](mailto:info@coastfunds.ca) or call Mary Speer at 1.888.684.5223. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy this issue as well as your summer.



Cindy Boyko, Chair  
Coast Funds Communications Committee

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# Project Stories

IN THE FIVE YEARS SINCE COAST FUNDS WAS CREATED, THE FIRST NATIONS HAVE EMBARKED ON A WIDE RANGE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION PROJECTS, FROM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION CREATION TO CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLANNING. PROJECTS UNDER WAY INCLUDE FORESTRY, TOURISM BUSINESSES AND ACCOMMODATION, INTEGRATED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, FEASIBILITY STUDIES AND MORE. WE PROFILE ONE OR MORE PROJECT STORIES IN EVERY ISSUE.



## Building Blocks: Heiltsuk Integrated Resource Management Department, Waglisla (Bella Bella)

"THIS LAND AND WATER RUN THROUGH OUR VEINS HERE, HOW THEIR PROTECTION AND USE IS MANAGED IS INCREDIBLY VITAL TO US AND TO OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS."

HEILTSUK TRIBAL COUNCIL (HTC)  
CHIEF COUNCILLOR MARILYN SLETT

*In* 2002, in recognition of their fundamental connection to the land and water in their territory, the Heiltsuk Nation approved an action plan to create a brand-new natural resources department, responsible for managing the stewardship of Heiltsuk territory and its resources and accountable to a separate Board of Heiltsuk community members.

The goal was to extend Heiltsuk's ability to protect its aboriginal rights and title and to increase its self-governance capacity. In practice, the vision was



that the new department would manage stewardship functions currently undertaken in isolation by various different individuals and groups, often with few resources behind them, and bring those various functions together in an integrated and efficient process in one stewardship institution.

Those activities would be far-ranging. They would include developing and implementing resource policies; effectively coordinating and responding to the hundreds of referrals sent to HTC each year; negotiating and implementing resource use agreements with third parties and other governments; fundraising for conservation projects; undertaking research and mapping; incorporating Heiltsuk values into all areas of stewardship, especially cultural resource management; and last but certainly not least, ensuring the implementation of good communication practices both with the community and externally.



It was an ambitious, exciting and challenging vision. But despite the financial and logistical challenges of making such a fundamental operational shift, there was also no question in the minds of the Heiltsuk leadership that it was also a vision that somehow had to be made into reality.

During extensive community consultation during the late 1990s regarding the potential to separate Heiltsuk's business activities from its political institution, Heiltsuk members made it clear they also thought a separate natural resource management department, structured to work as an integrated unit in collaboration with Heiltsuk's other departments, was key to protection and advancement of the Nation's aboriginal rights and title to its lands and waters.

A governance survey undertaken in 2006 reconfirmed the importance of finding a way to implement this key goal. "Heiltsuk already had a number of departments working on various resource issues, like fisheries, forestry, and cultural heritage management," says Chief Slett. "But the departments

tended to work as silos, with next to no communication between them. It wasn't very effective, or efficient."

The vision, says Slett, was to "pull together" all the separate functions in one organized, integrated structure responsible for natural resource management and effective communication with Heiltsuk's other arms, such as its economic development corporation. Exactly how to do that was the first challenge Heiltsuk faced.

"We used some of our Coast Funds conservation allocation to do a pilot project, researching other models, and interviewing managers and HTC Councillors to get their views on what was important. That took about a year," recalls Slett.

"Out of that work, we recognized there were several key things we needed to ensure the success of the HIRMD. The first was to appoint a department manager from within the community." Having someone at the helm with the right qualifications was vital, but it had to be someone who knew the community, and understood the Heiltsuk vision for the HIRMD:

*"We, the resource department, on behalf of the Heiltsuk people will assist in managing all our territory with respect and reverence for the life it sustains, using knowledge of the Marine and Land resources as passed down to us*





*for generations. We will work towards rebuilding and maintaining a healthy and functioning environment while meeting our social and economic needs for generations to come. We will work in collaboration with all Heiltsuk departments and citizens towards the preservation, conservation and enhancement of integrated resources within Heiltsuk Territory. We will also foster efficient and respectful working relationships with external governments, including First Nations and other interest groups."*

The first HIRMD director was Frank Brown. Since April 2012, Kelly Brown has been in the position, working with the HIRMD Board to implement the vision and the five-year Strategic Plan. "That was another key to our success," says Slett. "It was very important to identify the priorities up front and a plan for implementation of those priorities."

Kelly Brown says one of the early priorities was to take time to build a strong management and staff team in the department, which now employs fourteen fulltime staff and several seasonal and contract employees from time to time. "We have a really solid team," says Brown. "All the work that was done at the beginning to help people come together and learn how to work collectively as an integrated unit has really paid off. Even with some

personnel changes over time, the department has stayed strong and efficient."

Since 2009, the HTC has utilized its Coast Fund conservation allocation each year to support the creation and operation of the HIRMD. "That's our core funding," says Brown. "Trying to do this without our conservation allocation would be very difficult."

The conservation allocation is a permanent annual funding source, but the amount varies from year to year. "It's great to have it, but we are also looking at ways to ensure we have other stable funding sources that we can rely on for the long term," says Brown. "Our carbon credits agreement has been an important source of funds as well. One of our other ideas is to look at environmental service fees where

third parties wanting to utilize our resources pay a service fee according to a preset scale. That's starting to work already—we have proponents who are supportive of the idea and on board with it."

Brown says that in general, even after only just over two years in existence, relationships between HIRMD and third parties are very good. "One of the great benefits of the model is that this has really opened the door for us with industry to have that kind of conversation," he says.

"Industry have recognized the effort we've put into streamlining the referrals process and better communication and are showing real commitment to working with us. It's a win-win for everyone—it saves everyone time and money. Now we have much more efficient access to information, a two-way commitment to information-sharing, and real recognition of our





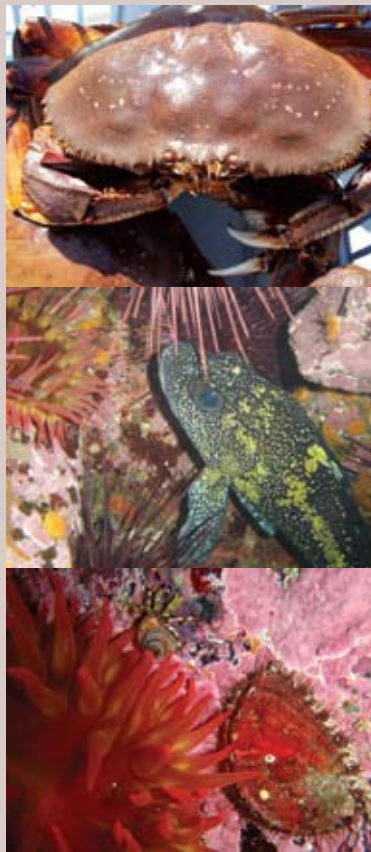
rights and the importance of protection of our lands and waters.”

There are a few kinks to iron out in the discussion with industry, says Brown, but the way things are a “far cry from the bad old days” of constant conflict and battling to protect the territory. “We have much stronger relationships with proponents and with governments these days. We have a reconciliation agreement with government now, too, and implementing its provisions is part of our work. I think government has recognized the importance of what we’re doing too, and our efforts at greater accountability and transparency are paying off.”

On the capacity front, says Brown, having an integrated department and a clear implementation plan has been instrumental in identifying not only clearly defined roles for fulltime staff, but opportunities for professional development and training for community members to enable them to step into new jobs as they become necessary and viable.

“We’ve set up youth training programs, for example, in forestry and conservation activities,” says Brown. “We have a Heiltsuk member who is an archaeologist, and he is mentoring two community members to start learning the ropes. HIRMD works with industry to direct them to select our archaeologist for assessments, and that creates two or three more jobs in the community every time. Those jobs used to go to outsiders, now they are going to Heiltsuk people. It’s still a work in progress of course,” he continues. “But you can really see the capacity we’re building because now we have the structure to do it. The long term goal is that we will have full capacity within Heiltsuk to fill all HIRMD positions that may become vacant or are added as we grow.”

“It’s wonderful,” agrees Chief Slett. “The creation of HIRMD is already resulting in the kinds of outcomes we were hoping for—capacity building and advancement of our rights and title. We now have industries coming to us and looking at ways they can support the Heiltsuk community, including job training, as part of the quid pro quo for resource use in our territory. BC Hydro is looking at training community members as meter readers, for example.”



HIRMD is also looking outwards, says Slett: “It’s been very good for our relationships. We’re looking at the businesses in our territory and now we’re in a position to reach out to them and have the discussion about land and water use. We’ve just signed an MOU with a fishing lodge and we have other discussions under way. We’ve also worked very hard to forge relationships

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with other institutions to harness their knowledge and advice. Each time we do that, we increase our capacity exponentially and move forward.”

Slett believes this kind of institutional capacity development is vital for communities to realize their goals for land and resource management in their territory. Although challenging, she says, in a day and age with so many external activities impinging on First Nations communities, it is “absolutely necessary.”

“Don’t forget, it has been hard work, but we found the solution right within our own community and I think if most communities scrutinized what they have at hand, they would find the same thing. We had all the resources, all the pieces were there. It was just a matter of pulling them together to work more effectively and better. The benefits for us have been huge.”





CEO David Mannix made some new friends at Metlakatla.



Coast Funds Directors and staff en route to Lax Kw'alaams from Prince Rupert: from right to left, Projects Director Neil Philcox, Chair Merv Child, Director Chris Trumpy, CEO Scott Rehmus, Finance Director Elisa Kreller.



Barb Petzelt and Joycelynn Mitchell explain the background to creating the Metlakatla Wilderness Trail to Coast Funds Finance Director Elisa Kreller.



We got to hike the Metlakatla trail for a way and enjoy the incredible landscape, feeling very rugged and brave until we met a group of Metlakatla elementary school students and their teachers coming the other way!



Lax Kw'alaams fish processing plant.



Coast Funds Chair Merv Child learns about the technical aspects of the Lax Kw'alaams fish processing plant from Joe Ward.

## COAST FUNDS NEWS

Last month, the Board held its annual fall field trip and Board meeting at Lax Kw'alaams and Metlakatla. We were treated to great hospitality, wonderful seafood and given generous use of both First Nations' facilities to hold our meetings—a great big thank you to both communities for your welcome and for hosting us.

These field trips enable our Board members and Vancouver staff to see for themselves what the communities we work with are doing, and to talk face to face with community members. It's an invaluable experience that gives context and depth to our understanding of the funding applications we receive, and helps us to make informed and supportive decisions.

It's extremely rewarding to be able to connect with people directly this way. We also get rewarded for our work in other ways—and being treated to a concert by the Lax Kw'alaams student band was one of the best surprises and pleasures of the trip. Yet another big thank you to band master Pat Dudoward and to all the students who played for us, and bravo to Bruce Allen and Pamela Tait for showing us their dance moves!



Manager Norman Black, Joe Ward and Captain Glen Kierece talk about plans for operation of the fish processing plant.



Lax Kw'alaams fishing boat, the Freeport.



Lax Kw'alaams student band in action.



## Photo Catalogue Project

From time to time in our materials—including this newsletter—we showcase the projects and communities of the First Nations we work with in articles and with photographs. To that end, we are collecting suitable images for a catalogue of photos that we can draw upon when we need them. If you have good quality, high resolution digital photos of your community or of projects that we can use, we'd be delighted to hear from you—please get in touch with Katherine Gordon at [communications@coastfunds.ca](mailto:communications@coastfunds.ca).



## COMING UP NEXT

In the next issue of the newsletter, scheduled for January, we'll highlight Haida's Youth Stewardship and Culture Camps as well as another project story. We'll also give you an update on our Strategic Plan for 2013—2015 and any other news of interest that we come across.

## SEND US YOUR STORIES

If you have stories to share, project photos, ideas about Coast Funds projects and community activities, or other interesting information, we want to know. We'll publish stories and photos on the website and in this newsletter whenever we can. You can send them to us any time at [communications@coastfunds.ca](mailto:communications@coastfunds.ca).