

Weaving together
the threads of
conservation
and community
wellbeing



The Talking Stick

NEWSLETTER OF THE COAST OPPORTUNITY FUNDS

COAST ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY (CEDS) AND COAST CONSERVATION ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION FUND (CCEFF)

Community Well-Being in the Great Bear Region

In this issue, we celebrate the social and cultural outcomes of conservation and economic development projects led by Participating First Nations. These projects contribute to the vibrancy of the Great Bear region by protecting a healthy environment and promoting community well-being.

On Page 2, you can read about how the Gitga'at Guardian Program sustains access to traditional food sources and keeps strong cultural connections to Gitga'at lands and waters. We feature the cultural revitalization efforts taking place through Homalco Wildlife Tours and youth tour guides on page 6. You can find a story about Nanwakolas Council's community well-being initiatives on page 7.

The Coast Funds Board of Directors values the opportunity to see projects like these in action. In September, we held our Board meeting in Terrace. We visited several First Nations partners and project sites, including Kitselas Canyon, the Gitlaxt'aamiks, Gitwinksihlkw and Laxgalts'ap villages of Nisga'a First Nation, and Haisla First Nation. These annual visits are an important way for our Board to meet the people we work with, see the communities we work in, and understand how Coast Funds can better support the conservation and economic development aims of Participating First Nations communities. As always, I came away impressed by what has been achieved so far, and inspired by the possibilities ahead.

You can download *Talking Stick* stories from the Coast Funds website if you would like to share or reproduce them in your own publication or website. If you have suggestions for other places we should distribute the newsletter, if you would like more copies sent to your community, or if you would like it to be emailed to you whenever it comes out, please contact info@coastfunds.ca or call 1.888.684.5223. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this issue.



Darcy Dobell, Chair
Coast Funds Communications Committee

WHAT'S INSIDE Guarding a Way of Life: the Giga'at Guardian Watchman Program supports community and cultural traditions in Hartley Bay | Homalco Wildlife Tours: engaging youth in culture | Nanwakolas Community Well-being Initiative | Coast Funds News



"HAVING OUR PEOPLE EMPLOYED AND OUT IN THE COMMUNITY AND THE TERRITORY IN THEIR UNIFORMS IS DEFINITELY APPRECIATED BY EVERYONE, BECAUSE THEY KNOW THAT THE GUARDIANS ARE OUT THERE AND LOOKING AFTER WHAT WE HAVE."

KYLE CLIFTON, GITGA'AT FIRST NATION STEWARDSHIP DIRECTOR

Project Stories

SINCE COAST FUNDS WAS CREATED, THE PARTICIPATING 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, FISH PROCESSING, TOURISM BUSINESSES AND ACCOMMODATION, INTEGRATED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, FEASIBILITY STUDIES AND MORE.

Left: Marven Robinson, Operations Manager of the Gitga'at Stewardship Department.

Right: Mary Reece, Gitga'at Guardian helping to identify humpback whales.

Guarding a Way of Life:

the Gitga'at Guardian Watchman Program supports community and cultural traditions in Hartley Bay.

For the Gitga'at, it's incredibly important to have our own people out on the water to manage and monitor the territory," says Kyle Clifton.

"The Gitga'at Guardian Watchman project is important to us, not just for the jobs it creates, but for the pride instilled in the crew and the community," says Clifton, the Gitga'at First Nation Stewardship Director. "Having our people employed and out in the community and the territory in their uniforms is definitely appreciated by everyone, because they know that the Guardians are out there and looking after what we have."

Looking after their territory is crucial to members of the Gitga'at First Nation, whose home community of Hartley Bay is located on BC's remote Northwest Coast. Accessible



only by sea plane or boat, the territory is home to unique ecosystems that support diverse wildlife and rich resources that Gitga'at members depend on.

Gitga'at culture is deeply tied to their lands. For generations, Gitga'at people have protected their territory. Its resources are vital to identity, food security, and cultural traditions. For the Gitga'at, monitoring and access to resources in their territory is foundational to community well-being.

A new approach to stewardship

The Gitga'at have been stewards of their land for generations, but the decline of the fishing industry in the 1990's meant many were no longer able to access remote parts of their territory. "A lot of our members grew up on the water through commercial fisheries, and when that went down and we didn't have as many jobs in it as before, and it left a hole for those who enjoyed being out on the water and had an existing knowledge of the territory," explains Clifton.

At the same time, an increase in industrial proponents and vessel traffic in the area made it imperative that the Nation be able to monitor and track the changes and effects of development to ensure their traditional way of life is protected.

In response, the Nation chose to restructure its stewardship programming and invest funding from Coast Funds and other partners to redevelop the Gitga'at Guardian Watchman Program. "This served a couple of main purposes," says Clifton. "Firstly, that we are looking after our territory effectively, but that we could also provide a certain kind of job that our members were looking for. It was our hope that we would train members, and if they saw opportunity here and chances to learn, they would see they can have a career as a Guardian and it would entice them to stay."

It's an approach that works. The program is meeting the dual goals of recruiting skilled members who are familiar with the area and its conservation priorities, while supporting the employment aspirations of the remote community.

Looking to the past for the future

"There's an amazing amount of knowledge about traditional management of our resources in our territory," says Spencer Greening, a Gitga'at member who is researching and documenting local knowledge and cultural features as part of his Master's thesis at the University of Northern British Columbia. "For example, this area has a lot of fishing history. We are looking at evidence of fish traps in the area to get an idea of who was there, how they managed the fish, and get an estimate of what time of year people were fishing and what their route was."

By examining past stewardship practices, the Nation hopes to maintain cultural traditions and resources to ensure harvests do not deplete those resources, and that their ecosystems remain healthy. "The in-depth knowledge that the elders have, about which streams there will be salmon in and exactly what time of year—it's an unbelievable amount of knowledge that exists," says Greening. By recording and continuing these traditional practices, the unique culture of the Gitga'at is maintained and their resources are protected.

The role of the Guardians

This field research is supported by the Guardians, who provide logistical backup. For example, the Guardians take Greening and other researchers to visit culturally and environmentally significant sites in the territory and conduct their work. In turn, their findings complement the Gitga'at initiative to maintain and reinvigorate their members' ties to, and knowledge of, their territory.

Marven Robinson, Operations Manager of the Gitga'at Stewardship department, explains: "We are building a living map. We've done quite a bit of work already on the mapping and the place names, so now we are going to develop our own map that our people can use to jump on a boat and go somewhere in the territory, knowing what is there. We need our people to be able to go and get to these special places."



The Gitga'at community of Hartley Bay.

Robinson says it's also important to have Gitga'at names on the map rather than using European place names. It's an initiative that will help pass information from one generation to the next: "That's the best way of teaching the kids too, over time, is the hands on approach so they start using the language, and seeing its connection to our territory," says Robinson. "To have something that we're able to say, 'this is ours, and this is how we are going to use it,' and then to take the elders out, and be able to tell them, 'this is Old Town, this is Laxgalts'ap,' in our own language—that's special. To have the data and to have this ability, it's pretty amazing."

The ability to take past occupancy research findings back to the community is the ultimate goal for the Guardians. "We're doing this research in order to state that these are the territories, and these are the laws for them," says Greening. "We don't want to talk about our traditional management practices like they're in the past. We are living this, strengthening our ability to watch over the territory, and ensuring our vision for it is alive and well."

Protecting and monitoring their resources

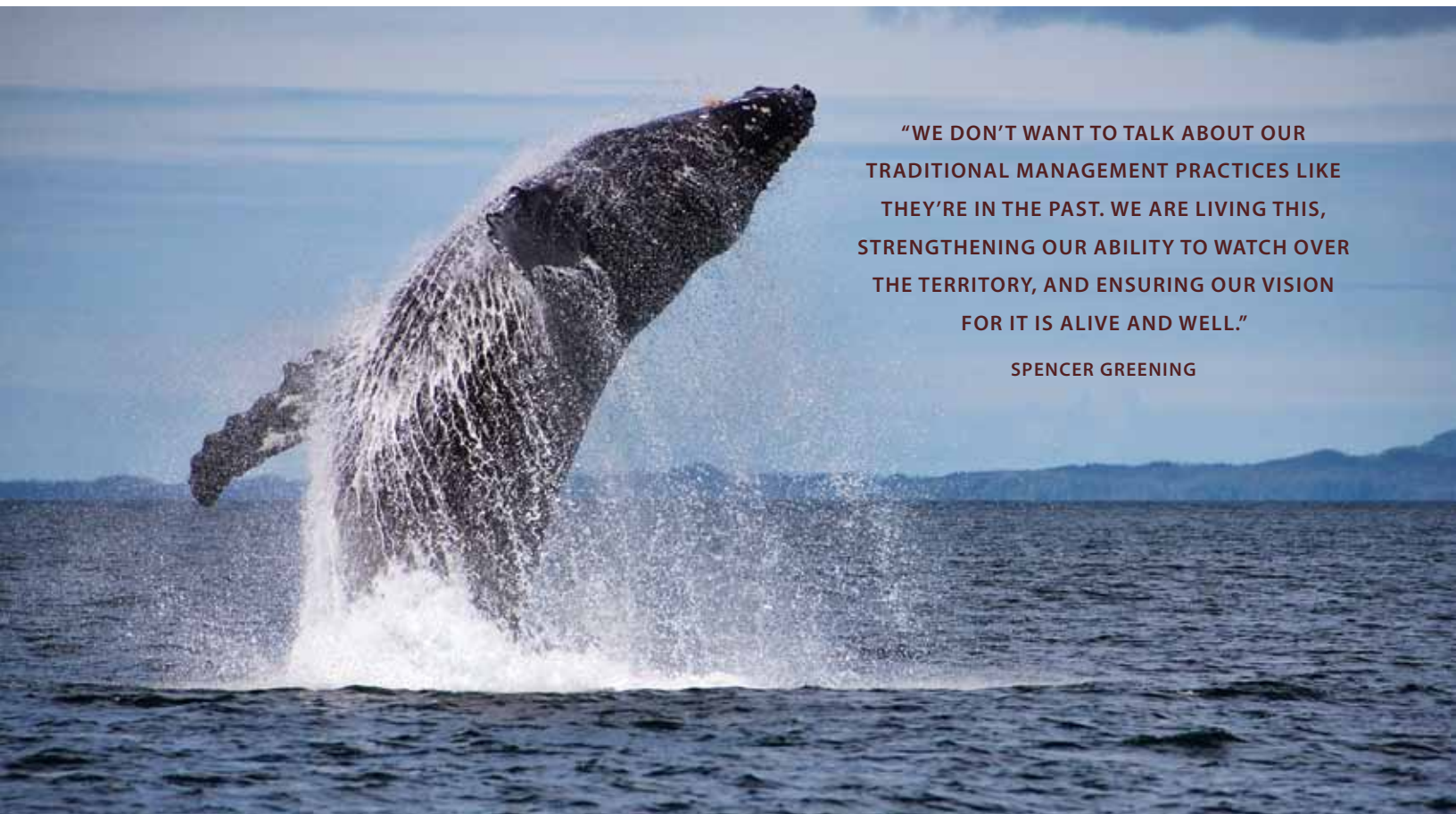
The Guardians also directly support the diverse research programs of the Gitga'at Stewardship office. This scientific

research aims to do stock assessments of resources, track wildlife, and establish and monitor baseline contaminants.

One major aspect of this research is to ensure the Gitga'at traditional food harvests, which remain vital to Gitga'at food security, are safe to consume. "We've been studying data on contaminants in bivalves because they are particularly vulnerable to impurities," says Chris Picard, Science of the Gitga'at First Nation. "We are putting together a synthesis of all the data and baseline contaminants so that when more industry and ships pick up, we will know if things have changed from those baseline surveys of the bivalve conditions." This research not only ensures that the seafood the community eats is safe, but helps inform decisions around development in the territory.

Through dock patrols, monitoring and research, the Guardians also track abundance and harvests of food sources. "We get a really good overall look at what is leaving this territory," says Robinson. "It's really important to get that information and have the data to identify how much of what is where, so that we can manage our resources effectively."

This information directly supports the continuation of the traditional food harvests of the Gitga'at. "The Guardians will let the community know how the levels are," says Greening. "For example, they'll go out and check the seaweed, and let the



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SPENCER GREENING

WATCHING THE WATER: GITGA'AT GUARDIANS AID IN WHALE RESCUE

The monitoring work of the Gitga'at Guardians enables them to be quick responders to any human or environmental situation which requires swift action. This ability proved to be very useful in July when an Orca whale became stranded in their territory.

Gitga'at Guardian George Fisher received a call from a passing sail boat that an Orca whale had been spotted stranded on some rocks in the remote territory. Responding quickly, he and the Guardians moved straight to action: "We grabbed ropes, we grabbed buckets, we grabbed anything that we thought we would be able to use to help out this killer whale" says Fisher. The Guardians raced out to the whale's location, where it was perched on an outcrop of rocks, becoming exposed as the tide went out. "Watching this whale lying on the rocks, slowly drying up as the tide fell—it was something else," says Fisher.

In the warm summer weather, the beached Orca was in distress and at risk of drying out in the eight hours it would take for the tide to come back up and free her. The Guardians were able to assist in keeping the whale cool and moist by using buckets and water-soaked cloths to saturate the whale's skin.

After working tirelessly to keep the whale cool for hours, it was finally released and swam away freely when the tide came up—an outcome that may not have happened without the quick-thinking response of its rescuers.

The active presence of the Guardians in their territory means they can swiftly react to any emerging situation which requires skilled technicians out on the water, whether it is a boater in distress, a trapped animal or an illegal poaching activity.

You can watch the dramatic rescue and see George's interview on the CBC here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQEdz3I3bk0>



Gitga'at Guardian George Fisher monitoring the territory.

community know where and when it will be ready. They're able to say to the community 'it's at this location, and it will be ready at this time,' so we know when to go to seaweed camp."

Bringing it back to the community

Moving forward, the Gitga'at Guardian Watchman program will continue to unify the traditional stewardship practices of the Nation with scientific monitoring in order to protect their territory. In doing so, the program also provides employment opportunities and protects the Gitga'at culture.

The Guardians bring their research findings back to the community, and they are also informed by the Aywalk

traditional law by consulting with the hereditary clan chiefs. "The hereditary chiefs are involved at a strategic level," says Clifton. The department managers will relay our plans to them, and they will come to us when they have something they are interested in and would like the Guardians to look into." It's a system that supports Gitga'at Nation's community well-being.

"The chiefs are proud of what the Guardians are doing. They like that our boats are out and visible in the territory and to have people know that is something goes on that they can talk to the Guardians. It's a good thing all around."

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**ALISON TRENHOLM, DIRECTOR OF
GOVERNANCE FOR THE HOMALCO
FIRST NATION**



Traditional Homalco songs presented
as part of cultural tour.

Homalco Wildlife Tours: Revitalizing Culture and Engaging Youth

We last featured Homalco Wildlife Tours back in January 2012, when we looked at efforts to grow the bear viewing tour business by protecting the Orford River hatchery. Since then, Homalco Wildlife Tours has been busy expanding and diversifying its tour offerings.

"Business is booming," says Shawn O'Connor, Homalco Wildlife Tours CEO. "We've had more business this year in the shoulder season than last year in the peak season."

The Xwémalhkwu (Homalco) First Nation-owned and operated business is based out of the Orford River Valley, located halfway up Bute Inlet. Its growing success is in part due to a recent cultural tourism expansion which showcases the Homalco culture. This addition is not only boosting the business, it's also having a positive impact on the Nation's community-wellbeing.

"All of our crew out there are Homalco members, and it's provided long-term employment" says Alison Trenholm, Director of Governance for the Homalco First Nation. "However, because the wildlife viewing tours are seasonal, we have been trying to build the shoulder season so we can create a longer term of employment through that operation, and that's where the cultural tours come in. They've helped to grow Homalco Wildlife Tours and that's been really great to see."

The development of the cultural tours also created the opportunity to engage Homalco youth as tour guides, and reconnect them to Homalco culture. "This last year has been really exciting, watching the development and growth of the capacity of the tour guides. Our young people have been learning the culture, learning the language and the song and dances, and it has been really wonderful experience to see," says Trenholm.

To prepare them for their positions as guides, the Homalco guides underwent an intensive three week training to develop their capacity and reinvigorate their connection to the Homalco culture. "When they came back home to the community, and they did their introductions in the Homalco language, from the greetings and the welcome they would be providing to guests, and sang the songs and participated in the dances, it was just amazing," says Trenholm. "It was an extremely powerful experience to see their enthusiasm and know that there's a revitalization taking place and a strong desire to learn."

The opportunity to learn their culture and be employed by Homalco has had a far-reaching effect for youth guides. "A lot of them talk about how this experience has changed their lives, and how reconnecting with their culture has helped them to see different paths," says O'Connor. "We are hoping it will encourage them to go to post-secondary and that they will come back and work for the tour group again."

The overwhelmingly positive feedback on the cultural tours has led to the decision to include parts of them into the wildlife tours. "We've had our outfitter partners who have done the cultural tours come back and tell us it was really amazing," says O'Connor. "So, moving forward, we are going to incorporate the traditional welcome at the start of all our tours now."

Homalco guides welcome visitors
in a traditional canoe.



Homalco Wildlife Tours has recently launched a new website:
<http://thebearsofbute.com/>

The new website features a photo gallery of wildlife in the Orford River Valley, tour reviews and a streamlined booking process.



Nanwakolas Continues Community Well-being and Capacity Strengthening Plan

Nanwakolas Council Society is in the second-year of a comprehensive three-year plan to support community well-being and capacity strengthening initiatives with their member First Nations.

The plan includes training for workforce development, communications skills enhancement and information systems management. Together, these areas support member First Nations' ability to achieve long-term community wellbeing objectives.

"We have been meeting with our members and generating ideas and discussion around the different uses and applications that updated membership lists can have," says Chris Roberts, Nanwakolas Regional Economic Development Coordinator. This information can help the Nations effectively plan training and other programs to serve their community's long-term well-being. "We have been following up with each of the Nations independently to do one-on-one training with the staff that manages membership databases," says Roberts.

Support for training initiatives also extends to the stewardship and Guardian watchman programs of member Nations. In addition to coordinating a regional stewardship network to enhance data-gathering, Nanwakolas assists with training for the Guardians. "There's a lot of value added to our smaller member Nations that have a small guardian staff," say Roberts. "By attaining the training for certifications as a larger group it becomes more cost effective, which our members are appreciative of. We are really happy to help bring those training needs to those communities."

The member Nations are finding that this approach is working for them as well. "We are getting a lot of positive feedback from member Nations and other Aboriginal organizations for bringing capacity building and professional development opportunities to the region that otherwise would not be delivered here," says Roberts. "Moving forward, we will be building on this and continue to look for training and workshop opportunities that will assist Nanwakolas and other regional First Nations organizations and First Nations with doing their work."



Port Hardy harbour.



Board Trip to Nass Valley

In late September, our Board visited the Nass Valley area where they met with representatives of the Kitselas, Nisga'a and Haisla First Nations. The board was able to visit several completed and future projects sites and hear directly from the First Nations about their projects.

The Board visits the Nisga'a Museum, known as Hli Goothl Wilp-Adokshl Nisga'a, which means "The Heart of Nisga'a House Crests."

OTHER NEWS

Construction of Haisla Town Centre in Downtown Kitimat Begins

Haisla First Nation has started construction on the first phase of a mixed use development after finalizing a ten year lease agreement with LNG Canada. The residential building will contain 49 condo units and is slated for completion in late 2016. The building is the first to be constructed in the Haisla Town Centre complex in downtown Kitimat. This complex will include a further two residential buildings, a two-story office building, a hotel and a restaurant.

CEDS has funded a total of \$1.6 million to acquire the land from the province and complete associated work to bring the development permit to the approval stage for this property.

Canadian Environmental Grantmaker's Network

This summer, CCEFF joined the Canadian Environmental Grantmaker's Network (CEGN). CEGN has a mission to strengthen the impact of environmental and sustainability work in Canada through collaboration and shared knowledge. CCEFF is one of Canada's largest environmental grantmaking foundations and membership in the CEGN is an opportunity for CCEFF to contribute to the sector while also benefitting from sharing best practices and learning from other environmental foundations across Canada.

Entrepreneurship and Indigenous Identity

Bryan Gallagher, PhD candidate and Instructor at SFU's Beedie School of Business, has created a video on Indigenous Entrepreneurship and Identity in British Columbia. You can watch this video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbZq53UjUTQ&feature=youtu.be>

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

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