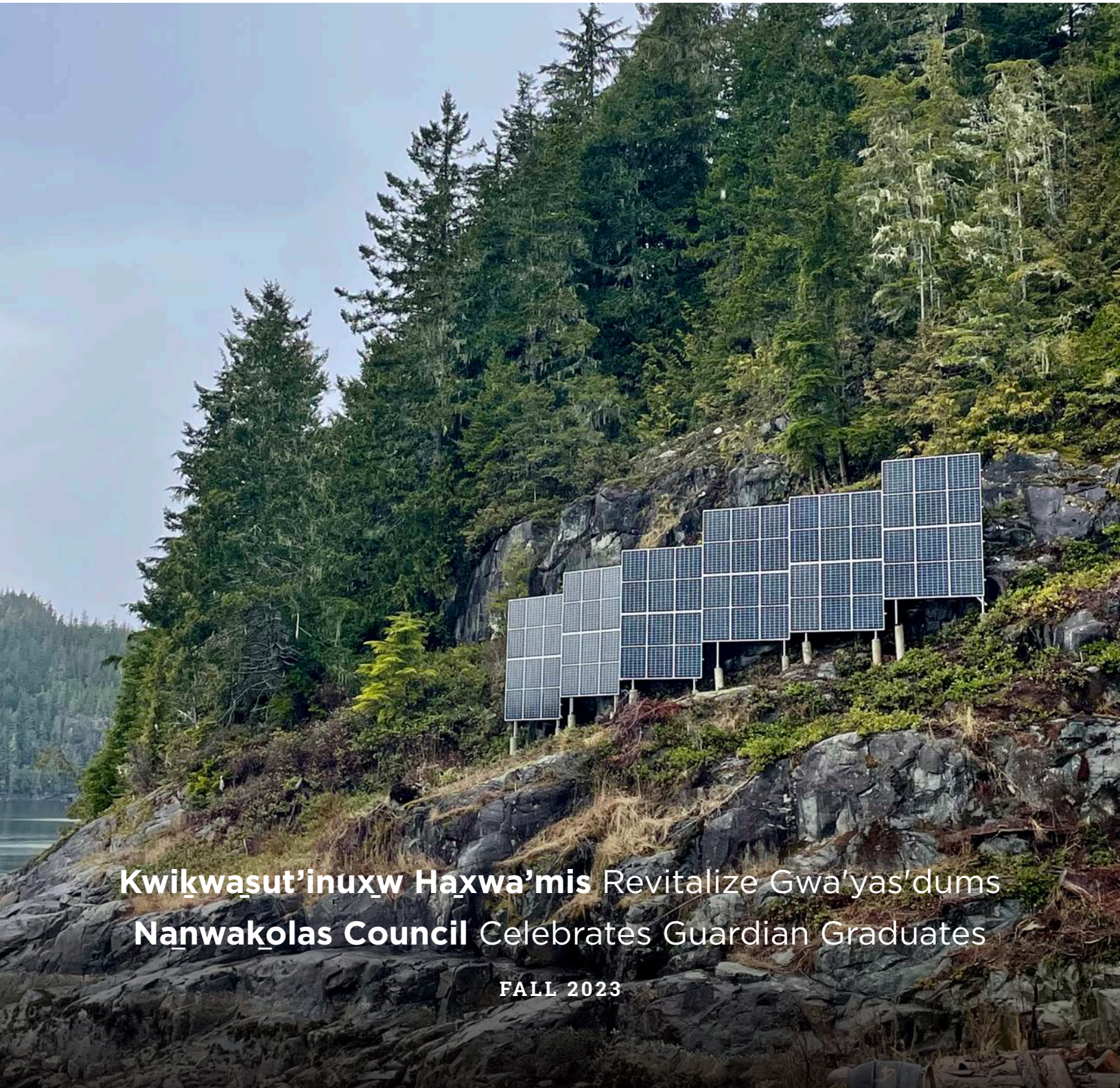


TALKING STICK

A GREAT BEAR
RAINFOREST
PUBLICATION



Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis Revitalize Gwa'yas'dums
Nanwakolas Council Celebrates Guardian Graduates

FALL 2023

Updates from Coast Funds

Welcome to the fall 2023 edition of Talking Stick, a magazine that celebrates First Nations' conservation and economic successes in the Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii.

In this issue, we're featuring the **Kwíkwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis** First Nation's journey to revitalize the village of **Gwa'yas'dums**. After decades of colonial underinvestment in the community, the Nation led an award-winning comprehensive community planning process, bringing everyone together to decide on priorities and set a new path forward.

In a short time, the Nation has made strong progress on its goals. With new housing and community infrastructure – powered by a solar and battery microgrid – the Nation is rebuilding Gwa'yas'dums and investing in new economic opportunities. Through these efforts, more Kwíkwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis members will be able to return home.

This issue also includes a recap of ceremony celebrating recent graduates of the **Stewardship Technician Training Program** (STTP), which is delivered by Vancouver Island University in partnership with **Nanwakolas Council**. Our board and staff team was honoured to attend

the ceremony at the Kwanwatsi Big House and to see graduates cheered on by their leaders, family, and friends.

During the ceremony, we heard from STTP graduates, who shared their experience with the program and their goals for their futures. Many have moved into important roles as Guardians and stewardship leaders for their Nations. Others are continuing their education and planning careers in archaeology, forestry, and natural resources management.

These stories are just a small sample of the many good things happening on the coast. In the news, we're excited to see growing recognition of First Nations' leadership and expertise in stewardship, culture, community, and business.

We hope you enjoy this issue of Talking Stick. If you have ideas for stories and photos we can share, you can reach our Communications Manager, Stephanie Butler, at talkingstick@coastfunds.ca.

Eddy Adra
CEO

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FALL 2023

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COVER

Gwa'yas'dums, located on Gilford Island, is the main village for the Kwíkwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation.

PHOTO

Raine Playfair / Coast Funds

OPPOSITE PAGE

The new health and administration building in Gwa'yas'dums sports a solar roof and includes space for health workers, Nation staff, and council meetings.

PHOTO COURTESY

Charge Solar



Coming Home to Gwa'yas'dums

To revitalize the village of Gwa'yas'dums, Kwik̓wasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation has made generational investments in community planning, housing, renewable energy, and infrastructure.

ON THE SOUTH-CENTRAL COAST, the Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis are working to revitalize Gwa'yas'dums, a village their people have occupied for thousands of years. The Nation has invested in renewable energy, new housing, and a modern health and administration building.

These important projects come after decades of colonial underinvestment, which left the community with moldy housing, unsafe drinking water, and poor access to essential services. The struggles the community has faced stand in sharp contrast to the wealth the territory holds, says Rick Johnson, Hereditary and elected Chief of Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation (KHFN).

"This village has been neglected for so long," he says. "With all the abundance this place holds, it doesn't make sense that, as a Nation, we're struggling with inadequate housing, inadequate water, and a lack of schools."

As infrastructure and services declined, many KHFN members left the village and moved to communities with better access to jobs and schools. At one point,

“It's been such a positive uplift for this community.”



LEFT

Chief Rick Johnson was born in Gwa'yas'dums and is working with council and staff to revitalize the village and bring community members home.

PHOTO

Patricia Sayer / Coast Funds

Chief Rick Johnson recalls there were only 14 or 15 people living in Gwa'yas'dums, mostly Elders, who he credits for maintaining the Nation's presence in their territory.

To turn things around, KHFN leaders and members came together to develop a comprehensive community plan to guide the Nation's efforts to revitalize the village. Since completing the plan in 2005, the Nation has made incredible progress, investing in 30 new homes, a water treatment system for wells, renovations to their 100-year-old Big House, and a health and administration building.

This summer, the Nation completed work on a new 221 kW solar photovoltaic (PV) and 1.1 MWh battery microgrid, which is reducing the village's reliance on imported diesel fuel for generators. The village is powered by 525 solar panels, each about the size of a bedroom door. During the day, the panels charge a bank of batteries, which can store up to two days of electricity. The Nation has kept its three diesel generators as a backup power source, and use them to

charge the batteries on days when the sun can't meet demand.

KHFN's Manager, Capital Projects, Jamie Pond, estimates that the system will save over 73,000 liters of fuel each year, reducing costs and emissions. "It's worked out far better than we even imagined it would."

With the new solar PV microgrid in operation, the Nation is investing in electric heat pumps and exploring new possibilities, like building a freezing and processing facility for local fisherman. To support members who want to return home to Gwa'yas'dums, the Nation is preparing for a new subdivision, working to source drinking water from a nearby lake, and developing local tourism opportunities.

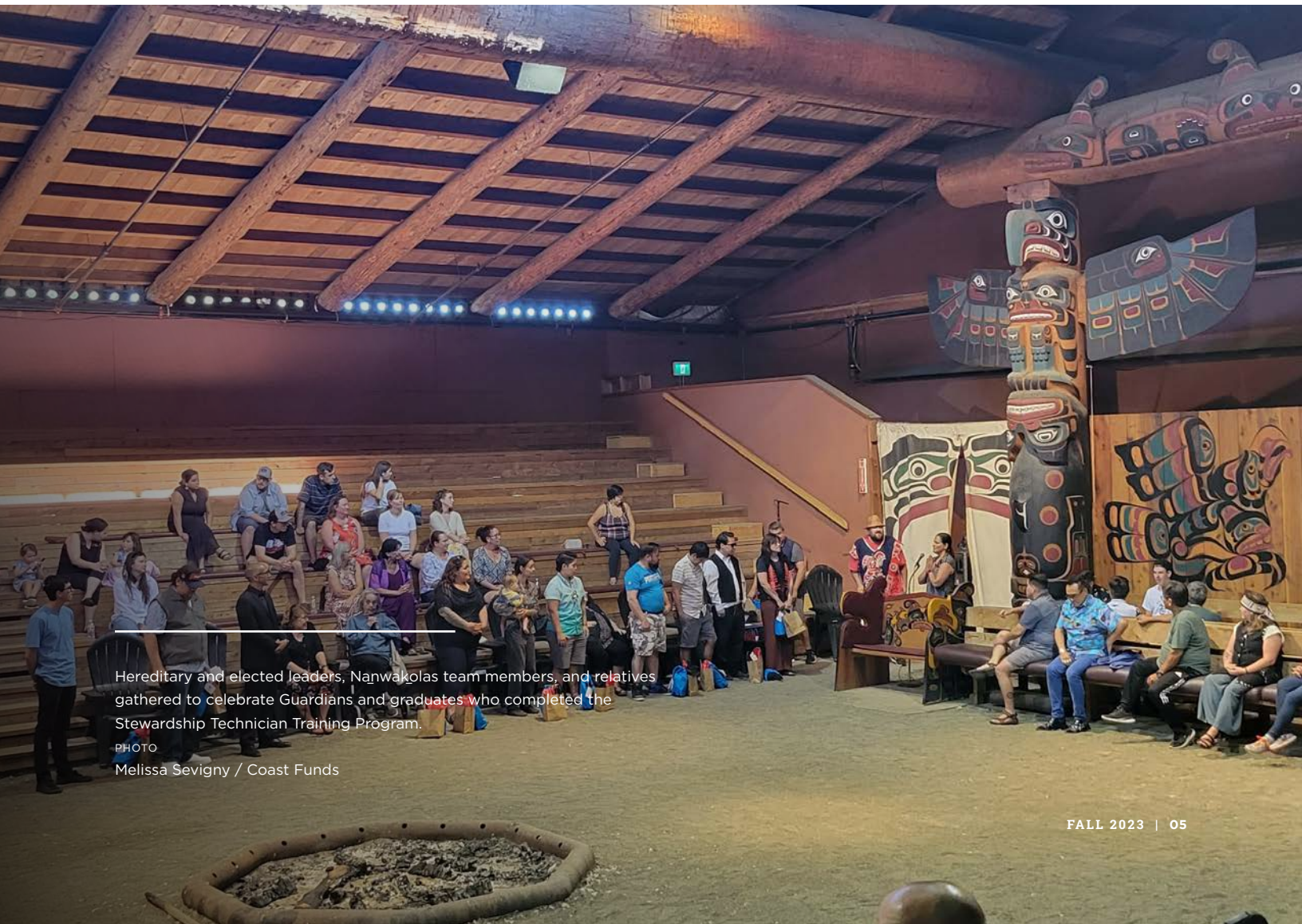
"It's been such a positive uplift for this community," says Chief Rick Johnson. "You see our kids that are here now? Some of them may stay. That's the dream, that's the hope."

FOR THE FULL
STORY, VISIT
[COASTFUNDS.CA](https://coastfunds.ca)
AND SEARCH
GWA'YAS'DUMS.



Celebrating in the Big House

Through the Stewardship Technician Training Program, Indigenous students gain skills, knowledge, and confidence to support them in taking on Guardian and stewardship roles in their traditional territories.



Hereditary and elected leaders, Nanwakolas team members, and relatives gathered to celebrate Guardians and graduates who completed the Stewardship Technician Training Program.

PHOTO

Melissa Sevigny / Coast Funds



LEFT

As part of the ceremony, young people shared traditional (and new) songs and dances.

PHOTO

Stephanie Butler / Coast Funds

RIGHT

Community storytellers joined author Katherine Palmer Gordon for a special event at the Bill Reid Gallery.

PHOTO

Stephanie Butler / Coast Funds

SPIRITS WERE HIGH AT THE

Kwanwatsi Big House (the House of Thunder) as family members, community leaders, and partners filled rows of seats to celebrate and recognize the latest cohort of students graduating from Nanwakolas Council and Vancouver Island University's Stewardship Technician Training Program (STTP). About 100 people attended the June 12 ceremony to recognize graduates' achievements and share words of encouragement for their continued success.

Graduates completed coursework in 2021 and, with COVID-19 restrictions still in place, received their diplomas in a gathering over Zoom. The Big House ceremony was an important opportunity for graduates to celebrate in-person with family, friends, Elders, and elected and hereditary leaders.

Wei Wai Kum elected Chief Councillor Chris Roberts opened the ceremony and remarked on the many responsibilities Guardians carry, and the successes they've contributed to, including inventorying Large Cultural Cedar, protecting forests from tree poachers, conducting research, gathering data to support decision-

making, building relationships with partners and agencies, and much more. "Our Guardian programs have grown, and they continue to grow in size and scope."

At the front of the Big House, Nanwakolas staff and member Nation leaders recognized graduates with gifts, stories, heartfelt thanks, and big hugs. Many of the graduates took the opportunity to share their reflections on the program, the importance of stewardship, and their plans for the future.

"We had incredible teachers and incredible support staff to really make sure that every student succeeded in this program, and that made it really special for everyone," said Candace Newman, a member of K'ómoks First Nation. "I think that this work is incredibly important for our Nations. And like [elected Chief] Chris said, to have our representation out on the land is really powerful. I'm really proud of all of the other students and of future students that are going to take part in this work."

STTP is a full-time, 20-week program delivered through Vancouver Island University.

The program blends classroom and field learning on water and land monitoring, communication skills, archaeological inventory techniques, forest resource management, and vessel operation.

Through their partnership with VIU, Nanwakolas Council has delivered three STTP cohorts, supporting about 50 Indigenous learners to build the knowledge, confidence, and connections needed to succeed as Guardians.

2020/2021 STTP GRADUATES

Chip Mountain (Mamalilikulla)
 Thomas Levac Jr. (Mamalilikulla)
 Christina "Beans" Green (Tlowitsis)
 Mike Stadnyk (Tlowitsis)
 Stephen Glendale (Da'naxda'xw)
 Steven Glendale (Da'naxda'xw)
 David Cliffe (Wei Wai Kum)
 Wamish Roberts (Wei Wai Kum)
 Krystal Henkel (We Wai Kai)
 Terri Wells (We Wai Kai)
 Cedar Frank (K'ómoks)
 Caelan McLean (K'ómoks)
 Candace Newman (K'ómoks)
 Zeb Savoie-Velos (K'ómoks)
 Charles "Judge" Humchitt (Kwakiutl)
 Jacob Nelson (Quatsino)



This Place Is Who We Are

This summer, author Katherine Palmer Gordon released her latest book, *This Place Is Who We Are*, a collection of stories written with First Nations leaders working to revive stewardship traditions, strengthen cultural connections to their territories, and build healthy coastal economies.

This Place Is Who We Are: Stories of Indigenous Leadership, Resilience and Connection to Homelands was written in close collaboration with community storytellers. With support from Coast Funds and an anonymous donor, Katherine conducted dozens of interviews with astewardship leaders, knowledge holders, and hereditary and elected leaders.

To celebrate the book, Coast Funds and Harbour Publishing hosted

a special event at the Bill Reid Gallery in Vancouver. Katherine read an excerpt from the book and Coast Funds Chair Dallas Smith, who wrote the foreword, shared reflections on how much has changed in the Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii.

"We've built the capacity to make a difference," Dallas said. "We have so many boots on the ground to help achieve [our communities'] vision. And we have tremendous allies."

Dallas and Katherine were joined by three special guests with connections to the book: elected Chief Councillor Chris Roberts (Wei Wai Kum), Alkw Snxakila Dr. Clyde Tallio (Nuxalk), and forestry student Alexandra Thomas (Tlowitsis).

As a thank you to First Nations on the coast, Katherine is donating all royalties to the Coast Conservation Endowment Fund Foundation (part of Coast Funds), which generates revenue for First Nations' stewardship and Guardian programs.

This Place Is Who We Are can be purchased at independent bookstores and through Harbour Publishing.

**This Place Is
Who We Are**



BACK COVER
Low tide on the beach at Tsulquate.
PHOTO
Stephanie Butler / Coast Funds



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