



governance toolkit

best practices

Principle: Respect for the Spirit of the Land
Government: Haisla First Nation

OPPORTUNITY

The primary residence of the Haisla people is Kitamaat Village, found at the head of the Douglas Channel on British Columbia's north coast.

In 1990, elders of the Haisla First Nation found a logging road flagged into the Kitlope Valley – the largest unlogged coastal temperate rain forest watershed in the world. Six years later, the Huchsduwachsu Nuyem Jees / Kitlope Heritage Conservancy was designated through provincial Order-in-Council under the *Environment and Land Use Act* to protect the cultural and ecological values of the area. The Heritage Conservancy is collaboratively managed by the Haisla First Nation and the Province of B.C. through the Kitlope Management Committee.

With the government announcement, the Kitlope Valley was set aside from industrial development. Of the 25 largest watersheds on the coast of B.C., it is the only one left unlogged.

What happened in the Kitlope set it apart from other areas of the province where land use issues polarized

NCFNG

is a national, independent, First Nations-controlled organization dedicated to supporting First Nations as they work to implement their inherent right to self-governance. The development of a set of shared principles that clearly articulate our approach to effective governance is one way in which we support that work. This NCFNG Effective Governance Case Study profiles a best practice in the principle “Respect for the Spirit in the Land”.

To learn more about this case study, contact:
Haisla First Nation
www.haisla.ca

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and divided communities. In the face of Haisla determination to maintain their ancient connection to and respect for the land, the logging company, West Fraser Ltd., relinquished without compensation all cutting rights in the Kitlope.

PRINCIPLE IN ACTION

The Kitlope Management Committee, composed of an equal number of Haisla First Nation and provincial government representatives, administers the management plan that provides guidance for the management of the ecology and natural resources within the conservancy.

The plan provides direction regarding the types, levels, and locations of uses and activities within the conservancy, including commercial and recreational uses, activities and facilities. The plan aims to provide a balance between conservation, and economic and cultural sustainability while meeting the vision and objectives for the conservancy and the goals for the provincial protected area system. The plan also considers the relationships between the conservancy and adjacent land use. The Kitlope Management Plan establishes an overall framework and vision for:

- Conservation of ecological, scenic and wilderness values
- Conservation of cultural values and opportunities for traditional resource uses
- Commercial and non-commercial recreational activities
- Research and scientific activities
- Education and promotion

A key component of the plan is to encourage and establish research and interpretive programs that use both traditional ecological knowledge and science-based research. The intent of the plan is to contribute to better understanding the ecosystems of the greater coastal area and to inform management practices.

The plan also encourages cultural and ecological tourism. Individuals and small groups of people

boating, camping, hiking and fishing within the area are all acceptable commercial uses.

The plan – and its framework of co-management – provides an infrastructure to support successful stewardship of the area.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The Haisla First Nation identifies four key actions that supported their success in protecting and preserving the heritage conservation area.

Community Engagement and Consultation: The following steps were undertaken in developing the management plan: 1) a vision statement – the *Kitlope Declaration* – was developed by stakeholders, 2) consultation revealed key issues and concerns associated with the conservancy and its management, 3) a management plan was drafted with an advisory group and the management committee, 4) a second round of consultation was held to solicit input on the summary of issues and options and on the draft plan itself, and 5) the final draft was distributed to Haisla band members.

Establish Allies in the Struggle: Submissions were made to the Old Growth Task Force. Yvonne Chouinard, world-renowned mountaineer (and owner of the Patagonia clothing company) flew outdoor photographer Myron Kozak into the Kitlope. His photos found their way into myriad publications around the world. The connections were made and the Haisla had their allies.

Relationship with Communities and Local Governments: It is important to the Haisla and to the Province that good relationships exist with the neighbouring municipalities and the regional district. In recent years, the district has filled one of the provincial seats on the Kitlope Management Committee. The Na na kila Institute and BC Parks have also worked to provide an opportunity for community members to provide assistance on some of the trips that are scheduled to the Kitlope Heritage Conservancy.

Connection to Other Land Use Planning Processes: The plan is linked to and incorporates direction from other land use planning processes drawing on over a

We do not own this land so much as the land owns us. The land is part of us; and we are part of the land.

— Kitlope Declaration

decade of discussions and many more years of experience. The Kitlope was identified as an area of ecological significance in the provincial Old Growth Strategy as well as in the “Parks and Wilderness for the 90s” process.

CHALLENGES

While there exist ongoing operational issues related to the management of the Heritage Conservancy, most are addressed in the management plan. As examples:

The Haisla assert that both cultural values and natural values require protection. The plan has at its base the understanding that human and natural values are inseparable.

A number of facilities are planned within the area and managers will be challenged to construct durable and easily maintained facilities that are visually appropriate for the conservancy and that minimize impacts to local ecosystems.

One of the key goals of the conservancy is to protect the natural resources of the area, including wildlife and the integrity of the area's ecology. Management of the area must have the sustainability of natural resources as a primary focus. Scientific research combined with traditional ecological knowledge is encouraged.

NCFNG GOVERNANCE LESSONS LEARNED

The effective governance principle of *Respect for the Spirit of the Land* is manifest through and enshrined in the *Kitlope Declaration*. First Nations peoples are positioned to take back our legitimate place on the land. This will be accomplished by asserting our inherent rights to protect and preserve the land and its resources, and by optimizing the economic opportunities the land provides. These rights are ours through our ancestral role as stewards of the land. It is through connecting with and honouring the spirit of the land that our governance strategies remain effective and appropriate. Asserting these rights through means such as the *Kitlope Declaration* is a critical step in this process.

LINKS AND MORE INFORMATION

The Kitlope Heritage Conservancy Provincial Park
www.britishcolumbia.com/parks/?id=194

Na Na Kila Institute: Totem Pole Project
www.nanakila.ca/pole.html

Kitlope Declaration
www.nanakila.ca/documents/kitlopedeclaration.jpg