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 Huchsduwachssdu 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 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) con-
sultation revealed key issues and concerns associated
with the conservancy and its management, 3) a man-
agement plan was drafted with an advisory group and
the management committee, 4) a second round of con-
sultation 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 provin-
cial 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
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

*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**