

Shared Responsibilities

First Nations perspectives on the health and wellbeing of the cultural and ecological systems that connect us, from estuaries to old growth forests



SUMMARY REPORT OF THE
2023 ESTUARY TO OLD
GROWTH GATHERING



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“The Elders encouraged us to engage in responsibilities based dialogues....what gifts can I bring to this conversation?”
-Eli Enns, IISAAK OLAM Foundation



Overview

Participants

The Gathering brought together:

80 delegates

20 First Nations

from along the west coast of BC

The Estuary to Old Growth Gathering brought together Elders, youth, elected officials, Guardians, community members, representatives working in various service departments, and ally organizations to address our shared responsibilities to the health and wellbeing of the cultural and ecological systems that connect us. The Gathering was hosted by T'Sou-ke First Nation in partnership with the Westcoast IPCA Support Program (WISP).

WISP supports relationship building and knowledge sharing among First Nations along the west coast of BC. The program fosters opportunities for collaboration, strategic visioning, and alliances among First Nations interested in working together towards common goals.

Through our partnerships, WISP is working to advance two parallel projects that offer opportunities for First Nations looking to advance their cultural, economic stewardship, and economic development priorities: 1) the BigCoast Forest Climate Initiative aims to engage 31 First Nations, and 2) the Indigenous-Led West coast Stewardship Corridor aims to engage 13 First Nations. Given the overlap between the two projects, there are collectively 35 Nations who were invited to attend the Gathering to begin a dialogue around these projects and how we can work together for future generations.

First Nations that attended:

Ahousaht

Halalt

Hesquiaht

Homalco

Hupačasath

Huu-ay-aht

Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis

Malahat

Mowachaht/Muchalaht

Nuchatlaht

Old Massett Village Council

Pacheedaht

Skidegate

Tla'amin

Tla-o-qui-aht

Toquaht

Tsawout

T'Sou-ke

Wei Wai Kum

Yuułu?ił?ath Government



Objectives

1

Create space for dialogue among First Nations about what they're doing within their territories that contributes to biocultural diversity conservation



2

Strengthen relationships between First Nations who wish to collaborate

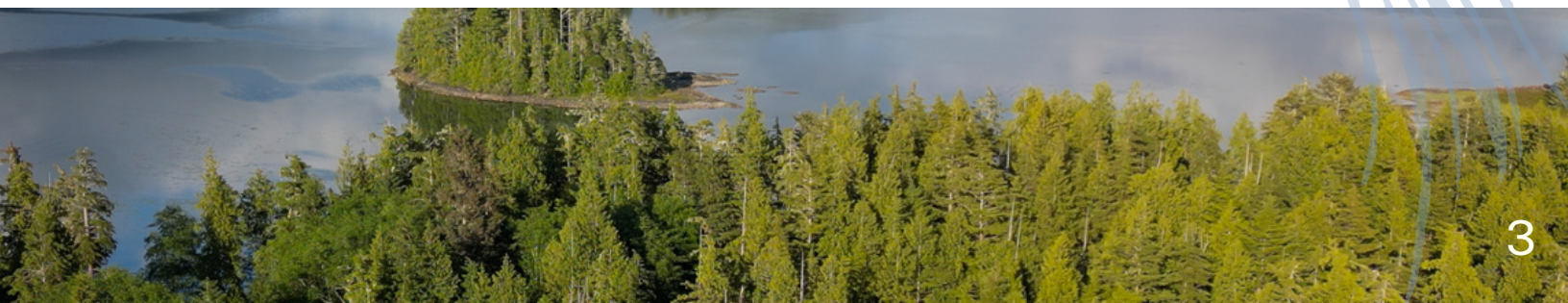
3

Identify what kinds of support for biocultural diversity conservation initiatives is needed/wanted by First Nations



4

Build awareness about Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), the Westcoast IPCA Support Program (WISP), the Indigenous-Led West coast Stewardship Corridor, and the BigCoast Forest Climate Initiative, and the IPCA Ambassadors program



Key Themes

Participants of the 2023 Estuary to Old Growth Gathering brought up the following themes and spoke about the importance of these ideas in First Nations approaches and perspectives on the conservation of the ecological and cultural systems that connect us:



Interconnectedness of Stewardship, Language and Culture



Indigenous Governance and Sovereignty



Developing a Restoration Economy



Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer



Data Sharing and Working Together



Interconnectedness of Stewardship, Language and Culture

Participants shared about the value of relationship to the land and waters as a source of healing; healing the land from the ongoing impact of industrial activity and climate change, but also culturally and spiritually healing for the people doing that work. Language was shared as an intrinsic link; to the land and also to the generations before us and those yet to come.

“We talk about restoration, we just worry about the mouth, the estuary - but you gotta go way back....we need to talk about how we can do [restoration] properly in everyone’s territory”

- **Larry Swan, Ahousaht First Nation**

“Language, it opens up your heart - it connects you to culture, it connects you to nature” -**Archie Little, Nuchatlaht First Nation**

“Restoration work is spiritually healing”
- **Lisa White, Old Massett Village Council**

“When we speak our language, it is eloquent. I feel so much stronger when I speak my language. Sincerely. The things that I say come from my heart, not from up here [my head] and I always feel so proud knowing that I speak for my ancestors”

- **Tom Curley, Tla-o-qui-aht**





Indigenous Governance and Sovereignty

Indigenous perspectives on governance were shared through the framing of the relationship between humans and the rest of Creation as one that is rooted in responsibility, respect, and reciprocity. This responsibility to treat all relations with respect is one that was discussed as needing to be restored and instilled in future generations.

“We have laws around plants but we don’t talk about it enough. But we should. Cause things are out of balance”

- **Chief Gordon Planes, T’Sou-ke First Nation**

“I feel that that’s my job as a First Nation, to protect the rights to hunting and fishing for our people, for my kids and grandkids”

- **Dion Joseph, Tsawout First Nation**

“When the Europeans first arrived here, sure we were illiterate - we could not read that stuff. But they were also illiterate, because they could not read our totems”

- **Joe Martin, Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation**

“Governance structure used to be a circle - now it’s a pyramid”

- **Savannah McCarthy, Yuułu?it?ath Government**





Developing a Restoration Economy

Participants discussed the need for more jobs for their Nation members that are not extractive but rather contribute to building a conservation or restoration economy. Stories were shared about historical economic activities within and between First Nations and emerging jobs such as Guardians programs. The importance of ensuring that wealth generated from local “resources” (i.e. fish, forests, etc) stays within the local Nation/community was also underlined.

“We need to find a balance between conservation and economic development” - **Jonquil Crosby, Yuułu?ił?ath Government**

“We were brought up taking care of the land, so I’ve always had that, and now we’re able to get paid for it and I make a good living for my daughter” - **Kayla Lucas, Hesquiaht**

“We need jobs that allow people to make a living without taking from the land....need a program to train and certify outdoor guides”
- **Natica Deline, Yuułu?ił?ath Government**

“[Our] people used to work 3-4 days a week and have time left over for arts and culture” - **Joe Martin, Tla-o-qui-aht**

“[I would] love to see a hub/network of communities living off a working forest, benefitting from the wealth of that forest”
- **Steven Buskie, Mowachat/Muchalaht**

“I would love to see [a food security and climate change project] evolve so we can start trading again and foster connections along the coast” - **April Treakle, Tla’amin First Nation**



Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer

Indigenous youth are gaining pride in who they are and where they come from. The importance of passing knowledge onto youth from Elders, through language learning, on-the-land learning, and bringing youth to Gatherings such as the Estuary to Old Growth Gathering was identified as critical to the path forward. Youth are the future.

“It’s important that we teach that to our children, our lineage, where we come from. It’s how we’re connected to our lands, to our language. It’s important because our parents gave us that. Our grandparents and parents gave us our voice, and left it to us to pass on our teachings and our ways of life”

-Chief James Thomas, Halalt First Nation)

“We need to be out there [on the land], sharing, talking, putting it here [in your head] so your grandchildren will know”

- Larry Sawn, Ahousaht First Nation

“It’s our youth. We really have to involve our youth, that’s where it starts. Prime examples are the young ladies that are here, they’re our future matriarchs”

- Kayla Lucas, Hesquiaht on the Warrior Women of Hitaču

“I’m grateful to be here because I want to be the change I want to see in the future, whether it be for me or for my nieces and nephews”

- Hannah McCarthy, Yuułu?it?ath Government

“We’ve got to teach them when they’re young, mould them into their positions to protect the earth, protect the land”

-Dion Joseph, Tsawout



Data Sharing and Working Together

Many participants shared perspectives on the importance of working together, not only across First Nations, but also with non-Indigenous academic, public, and private sector allies. In addition to discussions around data-sharing, this led to the suggestion of developing a Protocol Agreement or Declaration to strengthen our collective commitment to collaboration.

“We all gotta stand up and do what’s right. Finger pointing’s not gonna get us anywhere. We need to work together. Starting today. We need to listen and understand each other” - **Larry Swan, Ahousaht First Nation**

“When one area is protected (ex. Wanačas Hixhuu?is & Haida territories), it just leads to other places being logged. How can we work with our neighbors to prevent that from happening?”
-**Joe Martin, Tla-o-qui-aht**

“Collaboration is key, sharing data and information, integrated Guardians programs [e.g. patrolling together, training together, sharing data]...corridors will follow suit and be supported by that”
-**Owen Jones, Old Masset Village Council**

“How we collect data will be integral to this work, we need to have the right information” - **Chief Gordon Planes**

“We all want to protect our fish, our species - this is very simple, if we can protect that, we can work on everything else”
-**Brandy Lauder, Hupacasth**



Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs)

Key Ideas:

- ➔ IPCAs are determined by Indigenous peoples and informed by Indigenous knowledge systems and understandings of the interconnection of all things
- ➔ IPCAs are a positive alternative vision for regional community and economic development
- ➔ IPCAs are the opposite of the province's approach to species conservation

IPCA Opportunities :

- ✓ Economic development
- ✓ Housing (eg. IPCA Ecovillages)
- ✓ Cultural revitalization
- ✓ Food and water security
- ✓ Uplift and assert Aboriginal title

“It is through our constitutional agency as sovereign Indigenous Nations that we have not only the right, but the responsibility to protect these places. Indigenous governments, First Nations, Métis and Inuit, have constitutional agency to create constitutional parks. That’s where we derive our authority - not going to the province and proposing, ‘may we please have a park?’ Our laws come in at a different point in the hierarchy of law in this country.”

-Eli Enns, IISAAK OLAM Foundation





Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation IPCA Declaration

During the gathering, we witnessed a historic event as the Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation declared an IPCA, invoking their inherent rights and title and protecting over 41,000 hectares of their lands and waters between Hada (Bond Sound) and Kakweikan (Thompson Sound).

The IPCA includes salmon-bearing watersheds, traditional villages, and other sites important to the Nation's cultural heritage. This IPCA responds to the negative, colonial impacts of resource extraction and the need to assert stewardship of this area for the well-being of the land, waters and future generations of Musgamagw Dzawada'enuxw people.

The Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation plans to monitor and enforce the IPCA through a Guardian Program that will ensure the protection of their land and waters.

Through this declaration, the Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation wishes to establish systems that will strengthen governance, food security, culture and economic development. They will examine current land-use designations made by the provincial and federal governments and bring them into alignment with inherent ancestral laws, as well as work with both levels of governments and third party users to correct the past and build upon Indigenous-led stewardship to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The IPCA declaration follows traditional laws that are also recognized under section 35 of Canada's Constitution Act (1982).

Learn about the numerous ways IPCAs are being established and declared in the: [IPCAs Creation Guide](#) on the [IPCAs Knowledge Basket](#)

Read more: [HERE](#)

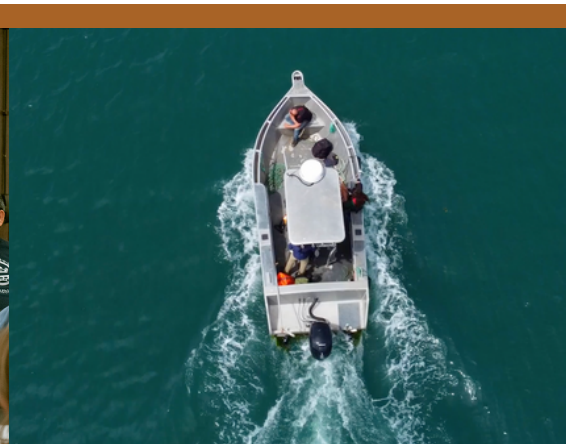


Next Steps

**“A Protocol Agreement will be important for collaboration across the Corridor”
- Chief Gordon Planes, T’Sou-ke First Nation**

Based on what we heard at the Gathering, highlighted by the key themes above, the following actions have been identified as next steps for the WISP to continue building relationships and work towards collaboration:

- 1 Design and develop a presentation on IPCA opportunities
- 2 Fundraise for another Gathering and host virtual IPCA Q+A Sessions
- 3 Continue working with Elders, community members, Guardians programs, Land and Resource Departments, and allied partners to design systems and protocols for data collection and sharing
- 4 Gather support with First Nations’ leadership to engage in a Protocol Agreement or Declaration in 2024
- 5 Gather support with First Nations’ leadership to apply as a collective to the \$1 billion Nature Agreement



Calls to Action

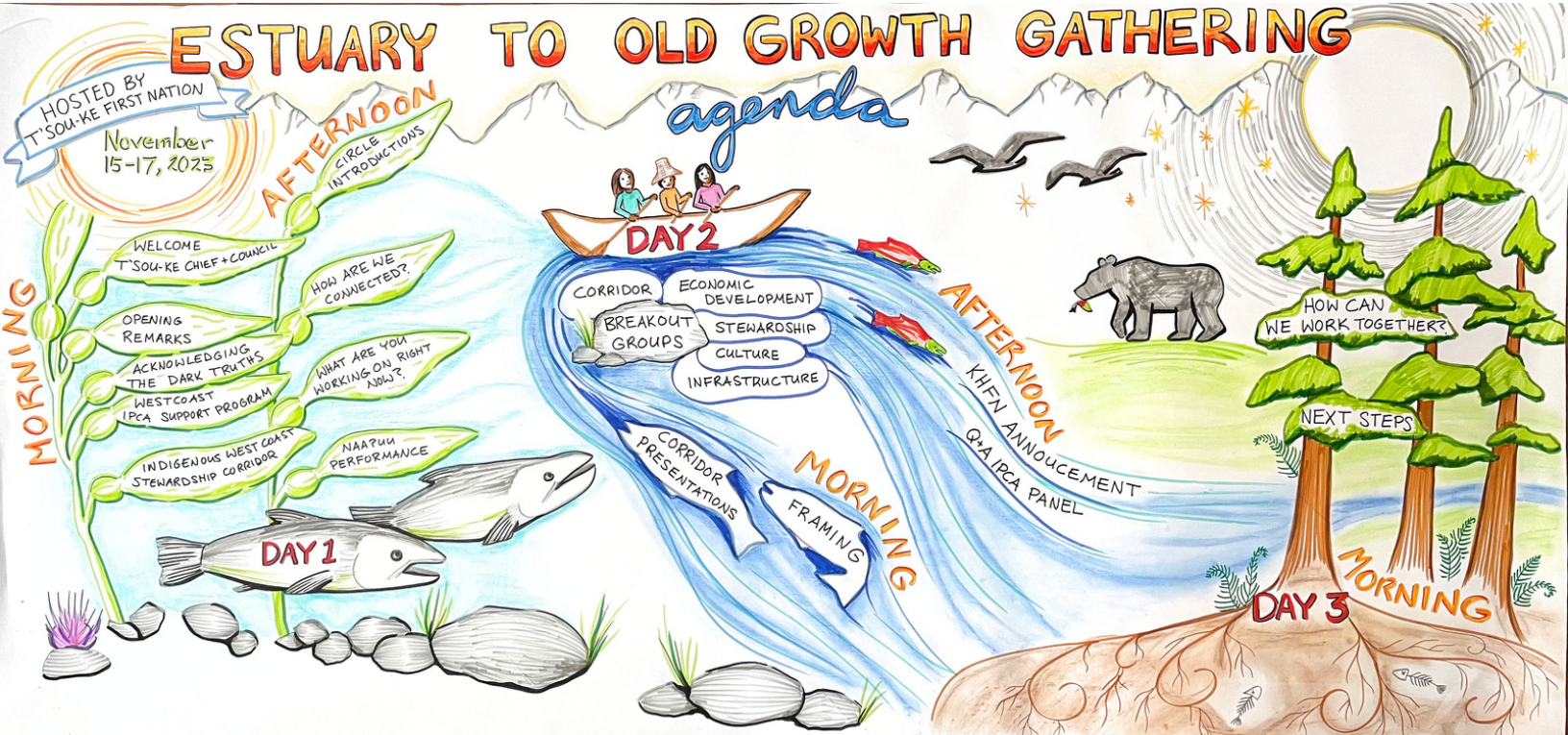
To stay engaged and up-to-date, the following actions have been identified as next steps for participants who attended the Gathering:

- 1 Share what you heard at the Gathering with your Nation and community
- 2 Stay connected by subscribing to the WISP's newsletter to stay up to date on current opportunities and access supports tailored to your Nation's priorities (email abby@iisaakolam.ca to sign up)
- 3 Invite the WISP team to present to your Chief and Council on IPCAs and other opportunities



Graphic Recordings

by Abby Sparling, IISAAK OLAM Foundation



Visual agenda



Opening Remarks, Day 1

Storyteller Keynote, C'iiqap/Laura Fraser, Day 1

Thank You

Partners:



Sponsors:



Parks
Canada

Parcs
Canada

Contact

Abby Sparling

Westcoast IPCA Conservation

Coordinator

IISAAK OLAM Foundation

E: abby@iisaakolam.ca

P: 778-679-1071



@westcoastipcasupportprogram



Westcoast IPCA Support Program - WISP



wisp@ipcainnovation.ca



<https://ipcainnovation.ca/wisp>