

The Common Voice

CCIRA Newsletter

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CCIRA



Central
Coast
Indigenous
Resource
Alliance

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Introducing CCIRA

The Central Coast Indigenous Resource Alliance (CCIRA) is composed of First Nations working together to protect our marine environment, strengthen our vibrant cultures and build a sustainable economy in all central coast communities.

Nearly a decade ago, our Nations discovered that unified input to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on crab stocks achieved more than previous attempts by individual Nations. Through lessons like this, we have learned the value of working together to engage with government.

“In order to restore and maintain our ecosystems, cultures, and human well-being we need to cooperate and respect one another,” says Ross Wilson of the Heiltsuk Nation. This vision of strength through unity has gained momentum as a grassroots movement in our communities.

Since its humble beginnings, this movement has expanded to take on many different projects within our Nations. Ensuring that local First Nations benefit from the marine resources in our traditional territories is one of the primary drivers behind CCIRA’s work. Today CCIRA includes people from all of our communities working on everything from acquiring fishing licences and providing job training for our people, to creating watchmen and education programs.

Grassroots direction from our communities guides all of CCIRA’s activities. CCIRA has now grown into a formal relationship between the Heiltsuk, Kitasoo/Xai’Xais, Nuxalk and Wuikinuxv Nations. “There is strength in numbers when trying to influence government’s marine resource policies,” says Doug Neasloss, Kitasoo Xai’Xais chief counsellor. “Sitting together at the table strengthens our position and lets us learn from each other.”

Today we are working together to uphold the laws of our ancestors and create a better tomorrow.



Ken Edgar, a Kitasoo/Xai’Xais elder, harvests herring eggs from a hemlock branch, a sustainable harvest method our Nations have practiced for thousands of years.

Dive Training Provides New Employment Opportunities

Robert Shaw of Wuikinuxv knows first hand how diving certifications can open new doors for employment. Five years ago he completed his PADI open water and commercial SCUBA certifications. Since then he has been learning his trade, gaining experience as a deck hand and as a diver. Then last year, at the age of just 27, he began running his own urchin boat and crew.

"I had to learn pretty quick," says Robert. "I didn't know where to find the urchins or how to dive and run a boat. Now it is not as hard as it used to be. I've listened to others and learned a lot." This year Robert plans to enhance his skills by taking his commercial Surface Supply Dive course. Completing this course will certify him for commercial geoduck diving. CCIRA is using Robert's success as a model and has helped 21 other community members complete their PADI openwater dive course this year.

"I grew up on the water and I don't really want to do anything else," Says Robert. He enjoys experiencing the weather and watching humpback and killer whales from the boat. But seeing sea lions during dives is his favourite job perk. "They just come right up to you and check you out. They are fast and can shoot up out of nowhere. You don't get to experience those things from the harbour," he says. "It is a pretty neat job."

With CCIRA's help, Robert is leading the way for others to follow. Of the 21 people who passed their PADI open water diving course this year, five are taking a six-

week commercial SCUBA course and three will also take the commercial Surface Supply Dive course. In addition to funding these training initiatives, CCIRA has also acquired a geoduck licence and four sea urchin licences to ensure that work is available for those who complete their dive certifications.

"We're working on training people so they can be part of the fishery instead of watching other people profit from the resources in our backyard."

Doug Neasloss of Klemtu points out that new possibilities are emerging in our communities from these initiatives. "Up until now" he says, "we would sit in our houses and look out at one of the most valuable geoduck regions on the coast and we didn't earn a cent from it." With the purchase of a geoduck licence and by investing in training for our people, all that is beginning to change. "We're working on training people so they can be part of the fishery instead of watching other people profit from the resources in our backyard," says Doug.

These projects are examples of the work CCIRA is doing to help create the fishing jobs that our communities say they want in their Marine Use Plans. CCIRA's Program Director, Ken Cripps is one of the people who has been working hard to acquire funding for these projects. "In the future," he says, "we'd like to see a whole fleet of people like Robert out there working on the water."



Jeff Windsor of the Heiltsuk Nation celebrates the successful completion of a skills dive with his dive training instructor.



Planning for an Abundant Future

The health and well-being of our Nations depend on access to abundant marine resources. Yet, for 150 years we have stood witness as greed and poor management of these resources drove some stocks to historical lows. For example, today we often cannot get enough salmon to meet our food, social and ceremonial needs. To improve resource management and regain control over the use of marine resources in our traditional territories, our communities began creating our own Marine Use Plans.

The success of these plans comes from combining our people's knowledge with the best available science to create a path towards a sustainable future for our Nations and the resources we depend on. "We live here. We drink the water, we breathe the air, we eat the fish, we eat the crabs," says Alex Chartrand of the Wuikinuxv Nation. "Who better knows about the area than those who grew up on the water?"

All four Nations have now completed Marine Use Plans that aim to protect and enhance marine resources for future generations, while creating access to fishery jobs and marine foods close to home. But we didn't stop there.

To strengthen our ability to negotiate with government, we combined these community plans into a harmonized Central Coast First Nation Marine Use Plan. This harmonized Plan contains the collective knowledge of all our Nations and provides a blueprint for how our communities will work together to manage marine resources throughout the entire central coast.

"It just didn't make sense to argue over territorial boundaries while everything was fished out," says Doug Neasloss of the Kitasoo/Xai'Xais Nation. "The harmonized Marine Use Plan is an example of how communities are working together for mutual benefit."

From salmon to seaweed and shellfish, our Nations rely on access to marine resources close to home.

We are connected to mother earth – we are a spirit like the rocks and salmon – we must respect this – what we do to the land will happen to us... If we do not respect our resources no one will.

- Nuxalk visioning feast



The harmonized plan was created by our communities to benefit our communities. It involved input from commercial and food fish harvesters, elders, hereditary chiefs, councillors, and our technical staff.

Based on our customary laws, the marine plans are now being implemented by our Nations with support from CCIRA. This important work follows four guiding principles. In order of importance, they are:

1. Ensure conservation of natural and cultural resources
2. Ensure the Nations have priority access to resources for cultural and sustenance use
3. Enable appropriate First Nations' commercial use of resources
4. Enable appropriate non-First Nations' commercial and recreational use of resource.



CCIRA is working with our Nations to put more of our boats and people to work.



Fishing boats in the harbour on a sunny, quiet day.



SEAS Initiative Investing in Our Youth

Before last summer Whitney Sadowski had never conducted field research. She had also never worked in ecotourism, been trained in wilderness first aid or learned about collecting plants for food and traditional medicine. Most importantly, she had never seen much of her traditional Kitasoo/Xai'Xais territory. All that changed when she became a summer intern with the Supporting Emerging Aboriginal Stewards (SEAS) Community Initiative.

Before applying to the SEAS initiative, Whitney was working in the fish plant in Klemtu after growing up in Vancouver. "I grew up in the city and lost touch with nature and the Kitasoo/Xai'Xais traditions," she says. "Being out in our traditional territory while listening to [our elder] Charlie tell stories about our heritage was really incredible."

Whitney was one of eight interns of the Kitasoo/Xai'Xais Nation who were part of the SEAS summer internship program in 2012. SEAS is working towards a sustainable future for our communities led by a new generation of local leaders who are empowered through education, mentorship and community support.

The initiative began in Heiltsuk territory in 2009 as a partnership between Qqs Projects Society (pronounced kucks), the local school and environmental nonprofit

organizations. SEAS achieves its goals through in-school programs that target students from kindergarten to grade 12, and a summer internship program for senior high school students.

Johanna Gordon-Walker is the SEAS School Coordinator for the Heiltsuk. She works within the local school to help teachers incorporate units on topics like wolf ecology and traditional knowledge into the school curriculum.

Johanna also strives to take youth outside the classroom and into the outdoors to connect with their environment and culture while learning about science and conservation. During the school year she organizes guided excursions for students led by local elders, resource managers, naturalists, and scientists that correspond with seasonal events like the salmon run or traditional harvesting. "We try to make the educational experience relevant to our students as First Nations on the coast," she says.

During the summer internship program, interns work alongside land and resource officers in our traditional territories. Interns get hands-on experience conducting scientific research and working with local ecotourism businesses and local hatchery managers, while visiting remote parts of our traditional territories.

SEAS interns exploring Khutze Inlet within traditional Kitasoo/Xai'Xais territory.



SEAS interns watching for wildlife in Mussel Inlet.



Building on the success of the SEAS initiative in Heiltsuk territory, CCIRA secured three years of funding for each of the four communities from the Moore Foundation to complement funds donated by The Nature Conservancy. By providing this financial support, CCIRA is helping to bring the SEAS model to other communities on the central coast. 2013 will mark the second year of the initiative in Kitasoo/Xai'Xais and Nuxalk territories. The hope is to get the program fully established in the Wuikinuxv territory this year.

Whitney Sadowski is eager to talk about the positive impact the internship program is having in her community. "It was great to see all the interns so engaged with the nature and wildlife around them," she says. "The younger kids didn't like waking up early in the morning, but as soon as we were out on the water or the land learning about nature or culture they were totally excited."

As part of their internship, Kitasoo/Xai'Xais youth had the opportunity to travel along the proposed Enbridge oil tanker route. "One of the interns did a photo project about why Enbridge should not come to our coast", says Whitney. "She is typically a shy person, but she presented her project at a community dinner, and spoke very well, sharing the knowledge she had learned in the previous weeks during the SEAS initiative."

SEAS programs are developed by aboriginal communities, for aboriginal communities. The programs are defined by First Nations, rooted in local knowledge and spearheaded by local leaders. The program is also a unique endeavour in each community. As SEAS expands into other central coast communities, no two programs will be exactly alike.

As a graduate of the internship program, Whitney is an example of how SEAS can create new opportunities for First Nations youth. She has since been hired as the Marine Use Planning Implementation Coordinator for Kitasoo/Xai'Xais, where she will continue to learn and use her knowledge to benefit the Nation. "It is a really steep learning curve," she says about her new job. "But Doug Neasloss, our former Marine Planning Coordinator, has been a great teacher and other CCIRA members have been a great support team while I learn everything. I can see myself living in Klemtu for a long time."

For more information about the SEAS initiative and how to get involved, speak to your Nation's community marine use planning coordinator or contact us at info@ccira.ca.



Heiltsuk intern, Gene Larsen, prepares to perform a stomach content analysis on a Dolly Varden trout.



The 2012 Heiltsuk SEAS interns pause for a photo after tagging Sockeye salmon. From left to right: Louis Shaw, Diana Chan (coordinator, Pacific Wild), Blake Carpenter, Richard Wilson-Hall, William Boss, Gene Larsen, Jenna Starr.

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About This Newsletter

CCIRA is involved in a wide array of projects and initiatives across the central coast. *The Common Voice* is one source of information about CCIRA's activities in our communities. Every couple of months a new issue will highlight specific projects that are underway across the central coast with updates on issues and policies that CCIRA is working on. *The Common Voice* is distributed to all central coast First Nations and is one way we are working to ensure that our communities stay connected with each other. For more information about CCIRA and what we do, please visit our website www.ccira.ca, or contact us at info@ccira.ca

Your CCIRA Community Marine Use Planning Coordinators

Andrew Johnson - Wuikinuxv

Vacant - Nuxalk

Whitney Sadowsky - Kitasoo/Xai'Xais

Julie Carpenter – Heiltsuk

Your CCIRA Staff

Ken Cripps – Program Director/Biologist

Megan Moody – Biologist

Gord McGee – Projects Manager

Aaron Heidt – Marine Planner/Policy Analyst

Cindy Hanuse – Administrator

How to Get Involved

- » Visit your Community Coordinator or Resource Stewardship Office and ask about your Nation's marine use plan.
- » Attend local marine use planning open houses and community meetings.
- » Take advantage of training and employment opportunities.

On the Horizon

Our next newsletter will have updates on the Eulachon research and monitoring that CCIRA is supporting. It will also highlight large-scale marine planning work that we are engaged in with federal and provincial governments to help implement key elements of our Nations' marine use plans.