



Photo by Caitlyn Vernon

## Conservation that Protects Our First Nations Values

For the first time in history, our leaders have successfully negotiated land and resource agreements government-to-government with the Province to increase our rightful authority to govern and manage our traditional lands. The Province and Coastal First Nations have committed to setting aside new protected areas that accommodate our Aboriginal Rights and Title and to managing our resources on the remaining land base using the principles of “ecosystem-based management”. We are committed to developing a thriving and diverse economy that is based on protecting ecosystem health and strengthening our cultures.

Ecosystem-based management (EBM) is a land management approach that recognizes that people, communities and the land are inseparable. Our choices must consider the health of both the people and the land that sustains them. EBM has two goals: maintain ecosystem health and improve human well-being.

Our coastal territories represent the largest intact area of temperate rainforest remaining on Earth. This spectacular area provides habitat to grizzly bears, salmon and wolves, sustaining monumental cedar and Sitka spruce trees. On a global scale, they are comparable only to tropical rainforests for the biodiversity they support.

Over the last 100 years, our natural resources have been exploited for maximum profit and the resulting cost to our communities has been enormous. The loss of coastal old growth forests and the impact on old growth-dependent species has become a global concern.

Signing of the land use agreements with the Province was historic because it called for an immediate halt to logging on one-third of the land base, protecting a stunning 1.92 million hectares of land. The agreement has resulted in a new protected area designation, one where we can practice our Aboriginal Rights, such as harvesting cedar, hunting and fishing.

Our First Nation Land Use Plans set out the areas that were protected, along with recommendations from the Provincial Land and Resource Management Planning process. These protected areas offer a unique opportunity to rebuild and strengthen our capacity to steward our lands and resources.

## Conservancies: Protecting our Aboriginal Rights and Title

Coastal First Nations negotiated with the Province to amend the Park Act so that it is respectful of our Aboriginal Rights and Title. The “*Conservancy*” designation recognizes our Aboriginal Right to continue our traditional practices, such as harvesting cedar, hunting and fishing, while maintaining ecological and recreational values. The ‘*Biodiversity Area*’ designation maintains biodiversity and First Nation values.

### WHAT KINDS OF ACTIVITIES ARE ALLOWED IN A CONSERVANCY?

‘Conservancies’ are different from other park or protected area designations because one of the primary purposes is to protect and maintain First Nations social and cultural uses and because they enable First Nations, on a priority basis, to pursue conservation-based commercial activities, such as wildlife viewing, guided-fishing, small-scale hydro for local needs and tourism.

Commercial logging, mining and large-scale hydro-electric power generation are prohibited in conservancies. The main difference between a Biodiversity Area and a Conservancy is that mining may be permitted in a Biodiversity Area, but only after discussion between First Nations and the Province.

## Conservancies Protect our Invaluable Cultural Wealth

Conservancies preserve our past and our future by protecting our historic cultural features, such as village sites, mortuary poles, burial sites, and stone fish-weirs. They protect on-going traditional practices, such as places where we harvest seaweed, roe-on-kelp, and salmon. Conservancies also protect specific places on the land where there is significant oral history, knowledge and stories.

### CONSERVATION AT A GLANCE

**1.92** million hectares is newly protected on the central and north coasts and Haida Gwaii

**33%** of our land base is now protected with new and existing protected areas

**25%** of all watersheds are protected

**40%** of all documented salmon-bearing streams are protected

**128** Conservancies are legislated

**21** Biodiversity Areas are legislated

## World Class Rainforest Protection

Our territories represent the largest intact temperate rainforests left in the world. Protecting these ecosystems is a conservation gain for everyone on the planet. Most conservancies contain old and mature forests, protecting the critical habitat of many keystone species, including marbled murrelets, northern goshawks, tailed frogs, mountain goats and grizzly bears. Over a hundred intact watersheds have been protected, which improves the protection of salmon bearing streams.

## Implementing EBM on Adjacent Lands Necessary for Species Protection

Certain forested ecosystems are not adequately protected even with the establishment of Conservancies and Biodiversity Areas. Grizzly bears, for example, need extensive amounts of undisturbed habitat and connecting corridors between large protected areas. For this reason, the health of certain species within protected areas will depend on whether EBM is successfully implemented on adjacent lands. This requires determining the important habitat features on these adjacent lands and restricting logging practices to maintain these features.



## Balancing Ecological and Cultural Values with Economic Health

The elusive Kermode or Spirit bear lives in greatest numbers on the islands off the north-central coast of BC. Considered by scientists to be a genetic variation of the black bear, its white coat fascinates both geneticists and nature lovers alike. The Kitasoo/Xai'xais people have protected an important area where Spirit bears are concentrated. The Kitasoo Spirit Bear Conservancy is also home to marbled murrelets, wolves and bald eagles, and several rare ecosystems.

Spirit Bear Adventures is a community-based ecotourism business owned by the Kitasoo/ Xai'xais First Nation. It has offered sensational bear viewing and cultural history experiences for more than ten years. The Kitasoo Spirit Bear Conservancy will provide alternative economic opportunities for these kinds of conservation-based businesses. The vision of the Kitasoo/Xai'xais people is to balance ecological and cultural values with the rights of their community for economic health.

### Collaborative Management Agreements: Intergovernmental Partnerships for Conservancy Planning

Many First Nations are negotiating working relationships, or Collaborative Management Agreements, with the Ministry of Environment to establish a collaborative approach to park and conservancy management and decision-making. These agreements set out a process for joint management of Parks and Conservancies, including planning, information sharing, capacity-building and support for economic opportunities.

Managing individual conservancies will be done according to a Conservancy Management Plan tailored to the particular needs and values of each First Nation community.

### Considerations for Developing a Conservancy Management Plan

A Conservancy Management Plan identifies land zoning and allowable use within a conservancy and describes management guidelines for protecting cultural and ecological values. It also assesses compatible economic opportunities. Key components of a plan are:

**Values** — What are the ecological or cultural values that we care about? Why are they worth protecting? Examples: Traditional village site, monumental cedar forest, endangered animal species, food harvesting area, salmon spawning stream. What are the conservation-based economic opportunities we wish to pursue in the conservancy? Examples: tourism facilities, fish and wildlife guiding, small-scale hydro for community projects, carbon credits.

**Objectives** — What are the key outcomes we want to achieve in relation to the conservancy values? Do we want to reserve specific areas only for First Nations traditional use? Do we want exclusive access to specific commercial opportunities?





**Issues** — What are the specific problems that may prevent us from achieving the objectives? Are there threats to conservation values? Examples: Overuse of a site, climate change impacts, water pollution, theft or damage to artifacts. What may prevent successful access to and development, of a commercial opportunity? Examples: Too many other commercial users, lack of sufficient access to support a viable business.



**Strategies** — What actions are we going to take to protect these values and reduce negative impacts? Examples: Monitoring and enforcement by Guardian Watchmen, traditional harvesting policies, restoration of degraded habitat, restricted camping or other uses in certain areas, community outreach, orientation programs for tourists, research studies.

### **Conservation Financing**

The Coast Opportunity Fund will grant funds to protect and manage ecosystems through an endowment worth \$60 million. Eligible projects include research and monitoring, conservancy management planning, interpretation of ecological or cultural values, habitat restoration and capacity building.

See the Coast Opportunity Fund website at: [www.coastfunds.ca](http://www.coastfunds.ca).



**Turning Point Initiative Coastal First Nations**

T 604.696.9889 | F 604.696.9887 | [coastalfirstnations.ca](http://coastalfirstnations.ca) | 1051-409 Granville Street, Vancouver, BC V6C 1T2

The Coastal First Nations is an alliance of First Nations on British Columbia's North and Central Coast and Haida Gwaii. The Coastal First Nations include Wuikinuxv Nation, Heiltsuk, Kitasoo/Xaixais, Holmalco, Gitga'at, Haisla, Metlakatla, Old Massett, Skidegate, and Council of the Haida Nation. More information on Government-to-Government Agreements and other Ecosystem-Based Management topics can be found on our website.