

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

The year 2020 will forever be remembered for the dramatic impacts of the global coronavirus pandemic. It's been especially challenging for our communities and their health and emergency response leadership who have responded with speed, creativity and effectiveness to keep our members safe. We'd like to acknowledge how remarkable their achievements have been.

While hopes for an effective vaccine are being realized, it's not over yet. Coastal First Nations remains committed to supporting member communities as COVID-19 continues to have both short and long-term impacts on us. Our leaders are proud of how our organization has responded to our communities' evolving needs during this pandemic.

This year, we also had the opportunity to look back on the past 20 years of our alliance as coastal nations. Our 20th Anniversary provided an opportunity to reflect on how far we've come and to refresh our commitment to the CFN Declaration signed so many years ago. Our leaders understand that having a Declaration that simply hangs on an office wall does not define success. We must live it every day. And through a very challenging year we have done this.

In our 2000 Declaration, we set out a roadmap for the future, committing ourselves to:

- Make decisions that ensure the well-being of our lands and waters.
- Preserve and renew our territories and cultures through our tradition, knowledge, and authority.
- Be honest with each other and respectful of all life.

Over the past year, our journey together included signing a "Pathways to Reconciliation MOU" with the Province in July 2020. We have made progress on many elements of the agreement to varying degrees – including forestry, lands and stewardship, climate action, carbon credits, northern aquaculture and connectivity.

Going forward, our alliance will continue work on important marine issues, including Fisheries Reconciliation. This initiative has a 10-year goal of achieving the following for our Nations:

- significant and growing access to all commercial fisheries in the region.
- a new First Nation- owned commercial fishing company.
- a new fisheries co-governance approach with DFO that includes new funding.

Our model is being watched closely by other First Nations across Canada as new policy changes on preferred means



commercial fisheries and co-management of fisheries are expected to set new precedents in Canada.

Throughout the past year, the Coastal Stewardship Network (CSN) has continued to support CFN-GBI communities in strengthening their stewardship capacity and authority. The CSN Team focuses on five key areas: networking and collaboration; program development support for the Coastal Guardian Watchmen (and other stewardship initiatives); coordinating data collection for the Regional Monitoring System; facilitating stewardship training initiatives, including the Stewardship Technicians Training Program (STTP); and spreading awareness of coastal First Nations' stewardship efforts through communications and storytelling. The program continues to be a model for communities across Canada and in other parts of the world.

We are proud of the accomplishments achieved together in the past year. Each success strengthens us to be better positioned to embrace the opportunities of tomorrow.

Our communities continue to inspire us with their resilience, creativity and spirit, and we appreciate the ways they are making Coastal First Nations-Great Bear Initiative stronger. We look forward to a brighter future, where we continue to thrive and be Stronger Together.

Thank you for joining us on this exciting journey.

Please follow our progress in our Stories from the Coast newsletter, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and www.coastalfirstnations.ca.

On behalf of all our staff, board and leadership at CFN-GBI, I wish a happier New Year ahead to all of our communities, their members and loved ones.

Giaxsica,

Chief Marilyn Slett

A VISION FOR A NUXALK ELDERS' VILLAGE



A visionary new plan for a Nuxalk Elders' Village will provide long-term care and homes for elders and help combat a growing housing crisis in the community. The innovative housing project means elders will no longer need to leave the Bella Coola Valley to secure seniors' care and it's predicted to solve about 45 per cent of the community's housing shortage, according to Nuxalk Health Director Kirsten Melton.

"We are very underhoused in the entire valley, not just Nuxalk. There are no homes to rent here, there are no homes to buy," says Nuxalk Health Director Kirsten Melton. "What ends up happening is our young people will move away for education or work experience and when they come home, they return with family members and they have nowhere to live. So the bigger picture was to help solve the housing crisis."

The Elders' Village will provide 10 individual housing units for elders. The homes will encircle a long house style building that provides a traditional meeting space for elders, potlatches and other community gatherings. An outer ring of multiplex homes will provide rental space for families. "It's designed to create a village feel," says Carrigan Tallio, Nuxalk Property Manager who leads the project.

The Nuxalk proposal was one of 24 out of 342 applications selected across Canada. It received start-up funding from the [Indigenous Homes Innovation Initiative](#) of Indigenous Services Canada. Tallio estimates the overall budget at \$7 to 8 million and is slated for completion by March 2023.

"The concept of the village is that the unit is like a tiny home with an attachment of a caregiver's suite," Melton explains. When elders were consulted about the project, she says many had one main caregiver that was most likely a grandchild who they wanted to hold space for and not leave behind.

"We said that should not be a barrier or a concern for you. We'll accommodate that, we'll have caregiver suites included in each unit," says Melton. "At the same time, we thought why not provide these caregivers with healthcare training? Once we offered them that option, most of the elders agreed they would take a unit if their caregiver could come with them and get an education."

Melton says the project offers elders affordable, accessible and culturally appropriate seniors' housing while helping address

Nuxalk housing shortages and overcrowding. The new units give elders the opportunity to pass on their homes to their children and free up space for an entire family in their household. "Some of our households are only three to four bedrooms homes, but they have nine to 20 people living in one house," she says.

The need for Nuxalk-based elder care addresses a critical lack of support for First Nations culture and traditions in the provincial healthcare system, says Melton. "If you need to be in long-term care in any way, you get put on a wait list for the entire province and the first bed that opens up, you are then placed."

"So we have elders who have had to move to Merritt, who have had to move to Williams lake, who have had to move to Vancouver. That itself is actually decreasing our elders' life span – not being in community, not being with families, not being with their loved ones."

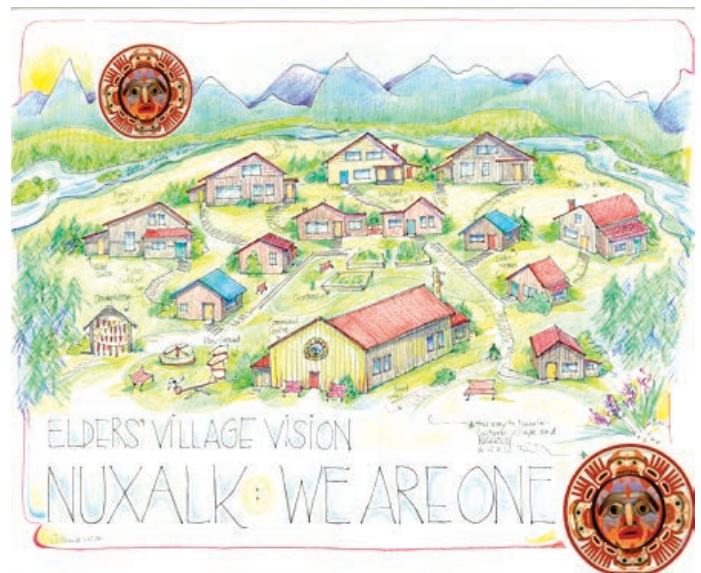
Only seven beds in the local hospital are set aside for long-term care for the entire Bella Coola Valley. "We found that to be extremely disheartening knowing that some of our 89-year-old elders were being shipped to Merritt for the last year or two of life," she says. "That's not a Nuxalk way, that's not a First Nations way."

The Elders Village will provide much-needed accessibility for elders with mobility and disability issues, and in a global pandemic era, the village is designed to bring service providers to the elders. "It will be their own village and their own space and if it comes time to having to restrict things, they will have everything at their disposal," Melton explains.

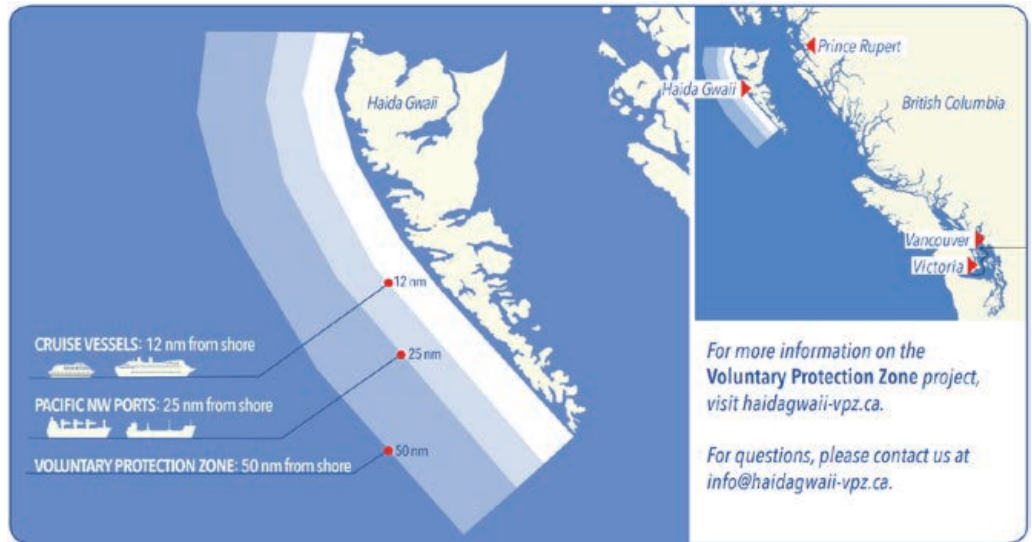
Cultural living in a modern home

The project team is working with Indigenous architect Christopher Clarke McQueen to involve knowledge keepers in the design of the building and site. "Creating this space is a

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A VOLUNTARY SHIPPING PROTECTION ZONE FOR HAIDA GWAI



When the Russian cargo vessel *Simushir* lost power off the west coast of Haida Gwaii in 2014, it would take 44 heart-stopping hours and a near grounding before a towing vessel was able to reach the scene. With a storm brewing, the Haida Nation could only stand by anxiously as the vessel drifted within five nautical miles of shore and was initially predicted to come aground on the ecologically sensitive Gwaii Haanas coast.

“We were just lucky that the weather changed,” recounts Russ Jones, contractor for Council of the Haida Nation (CHN) Marine Planning Program. “Those larger vessels carry significant amounts of fuel, that was the main risk, but there were also chemicals and mining supplies on board the *Simushir*.”

On September 1, a 14-month trial [Voluntary Shipping Protection Zone](#) went into effect off the Daawxusda West Coast of Haida Gwaii. The zone aims to keep large vessels far enough offshore to ensure adequate response time and prevent environmental disasters from shipping accidents.

After the *Simushir* near-miss, the Haida Nation were determined to establish a “safe distance offshore zone” as a high priority for their coast. CHN invested heavily in developing shipping industry partnerships and through a unique collaboration with Canada and industry stakeholders now co-leads the Voluntary Protection Zone (VPZ) trial with Transport Canada under a co-governance structure of the [Reconciliation Framework Agreement for Bioregional Oceans Management and Protection](#).

While it’s early days, Jones says, “We’re seeing that most vessels are observing the voluntary distances but there is a proportion of vessels that are inside the Voluntary Protection Zones.”

The [Voluntary Protection Zone](#) trial sets out three distances for participating vessels. Vessels of 500 tons or more are asked to remain a minimum distance of 50-nautical miles offshore as they transit Haida Gwaii’s west coast. Cruise ships are requested to stay 12-nautical miles offshore. Vessels traveling between Pacific Northwest ports are asked to keep a minimum 25 miles offshore. Fishing boats, tugs and barges are exempt.

“With vessels in the 25 nautical zone, we’re getting very good response,” says Jones. “We’ve seen the occasional incursions by them but they are very minor. I think there was one vessel that passed through a small corner outside their zone.”

The 50-mile minimum offshore distance applies mostly to the large cargo vessels and container ships that transit the Great Circle Route from North America to Asian ports. “There we’re seeing a number of vessels that are inside the VPZ,” Jones reports, adding that incursions are still less than 15 per cent of this vessel traffic, and “there might be good reason they go inside the zone, for example, if there are safety issues or bad weather.”

“It’s really too early to say how long this type of voluntary zone would work in the longer term,” say Jones. “We’ve agreed to do this as a trial.” The voluntary nature of the project requires the Haida Nation to work closely with a shipping stakeholder group to encourage industry collaboration. The group helps to follow up and communicate with mariners who are part of their association to encourage participation in the trial. They are also helping circulate a [CHN VPZ survey](#) to find out why some vessels are not fully participating.

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WE MONITOR BY LIVING HERE



In 2016, the Gitga'at Nation set out with research partners at the University of Victoria to design a community-driven project that would document the changes Gitga'at harvesters were seeing in local food harvests and how they were monitoring those changes.

The resulting “We Monitor by Living Here” program has now yielded three years of data and helped shape a Gitga'at monitoring program that enhances existing scientific methods with local and Traditional Knowledge.

Robyn Robinson is Lead Researcher for the project for Gitga'at Oceans and Land Department (GOLD). When one of the community's Hereditary Chiefs was asked how people had traditionally monitored changes in the land and sea, “He said, ‘We monitor by living here’ and that’s where the program got its name.”

The program captures harvesters’ observations of environmental changes in the territory as a form of monitoring that can enhance western scientific methods currently underway in the territory.

“The Gitga'at Oceans and Lands Department has great data coming from the variety of scientific monitoring that happens, but wanted to be able to leverage the observations and knowledge of the people who are always monitoring the territory and who have been doing it for millennia,” explains Kim-Ly Thompson, University of Victoria researcher and community researcher who partnered with the Gitga'at Nation on the project and published the results in [People and Nature](#) in August.

“This project was really designed by harvesters in a large sense,” says Thompson. Harvesters and elders were brought together in a series of workshops and community meetings to discuss what information they wanted to capture and the best way to capture it. Over the course of two seasons, 79 community participants were interviewed about the changes they were observing to traditional harvest food species, including harvesters, elders and the people who receive, process and eat local foods.

“That’s also a way of monitoring quality,” she explains. “If someone is working on that fish by cleaning it and then



Joshua Bolton and Kim-Ly Thompson harvesting seaweed near Kiel. (Josh is a youth who has been helping with the “We monitor by living here” project since 2018). Photo credit: Natalie Ban

cooking it, or preserving it or smoking it, they might see other things in that fish that someone might not see if they had just caught it. We made sure we worked with these people we called knowledge holders – people who have experience working with these different food species.”

As Gitga'at project lead, Robinson says it was important to involve local youth in the interviews. The program equipped harvesters with logbooks to record their observations and held community workshops to make sure the results researchers were compiling accurately reflected what people were seeing. As the data was collected, it became clear that Gitga'at harvesters rely on a suite of indicators to observe changes in their territory that are missing from western science.

One of the significant differences, Robinson notes, is that Gitga'at indicators are intrinsically linked to community health and how the territory is cared for. “Through the process of doing this survey, my whole outlook of the territory changed,” she says. “Even though I’m not a harvester, I was raised in our lifestyle of going out there and getting the food. I was so used to coming home and seeing animals hung up or fish being preserved but I was not aware of how important harvesting is, how connected we are to the land, and what happens if we don’t harvest in certain spots.”

WE MONITOR BY LIVING HERE *(cont'd)*

Thompson says harvester knowledge introduces old ways of monitoring changes to food harvest species that western scientists might not observe. "For example, the taste of a species or the sound seaweed makes when it's being pulled off a rock. It's not something that scientists pay attention to, but it's something harvesters pay a lot of attention to when thinking of the quality of different foods."

"This shows there is already a system of monitoring in place and that has been here for a long time," she says. "Some of these indicators can be monitored through science but not all of them. So rather than scientists saying they know what's best, they can become partners within the local framework that already exists."

One of the big takeaways for Robinson was how food harvesting methods were deeply linked to community well-being. "I've never seen the harvesting done, but I've seen what's on our plate and in our freezer," she says. "When I heard in the interviews how much people were harvesting, I wondered where all the food was going. Then I realized it's all being shared."



Harvesting seaweed near Kiel. Photo credit: Natalie Ban



Wooks (halibut strips) drying in the sun at Kiel. Photo credit: Natalie Ban



Seaweed, wooks, and red snapper drying at Kiel. Photo credit: Kim-Ly Thompson

"Thinking about the effort that goes into all of that and that only a small part of the harvest stays with your family, it shows how much we all take care of each other," she says. "None of those harvesters get paid for what they're catching - so that was really cool to see."

Robinson says the data collected will inform stewardship management and harness harvester knowledge for use in negotiations with government about decisions made in their territory. As she prepares for the next round of interviews, Robinson says the plan is to keep improving the program in order to have data to compare and contrast over the long-term. "Just having this knowledge for years to come will be something that future generations can look back on and benefit from as well."

COASTAL GUARDIAN WATCHMEN: ABOVE AND BEYOND TO SUPPORT COASTAL COMMUNITIES



Coastal Guardian Watchmen are the eyes and ears of their Nations, working in the field and on patrol to protect the local culture, communities and ecosystems throughout their territories. For as long as these programs have existed, Guardians have also carried out many other frontline duties for their Nations, often going above and beyond their stewardship role.

This was especially true in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic brought much of society to a stand-still. With regular work and patrols either disrupted or put on hold, Guardians supported their communities in many other ways—from collecting groceries for community members, including food fish distribution, to checking up on Elders isolated at home and providing much-needed information updates for the entire community. For some Nuxalk Guardian Watchmen, it even meant taking on the very demanding role of working at an information checkpoint along the main highway into Nuxalk Territory.

Global pandemic or not, Coastal Guardian Watchmen have always been highly valued within each community, and they often draw upon their unique knowledge and skills as Guardians to transition into diverse new roles for their Nation.

Just ask Chantal Pronteau, a former Kitasoo/Xai'Xais Guardian who is now a full-time Language Project Supervisor, working to help document and ultimately revitalize the two language streams in her territory. "I just wanted to do more for my community and this seemed like a really great fit," says Chantal, who started the



language work part-time in 2016 while she was still a Guardian. "and I also wanted to learn from Elders as much as possible. I learned a lot from my grandmother, who passed away a little over a year ago, so it's definitely very important for me."

The pandemic really changed how the documentation work was done, forcing Chantal and other staff to conduct language recordings in virtual ways, using Zoom for example. She says the ultimate plan is to create a "First Voices" archive and eventually use it for a range of other applications, such as language training and education for other community members. Chantal says she's also considering other avenues for helping out in her community, specifically focusing on health and wellness.

"I loved being a Guardian, and I'm bringing what I learned from that experience into these new roles as well," says Chantal. "Documenting language is really just another form of stewardship; it's preserving our culture. Those places that I worked to protect as a Guardian have ancestral names, and that's part of what we're trying to protect now—not just the place itself, but the place names too."

Across *Kandaliigwii* (Hecate Strait) on Haida Gwaii, that deep interconnection between natural and cultural stewardship is reflected in the work of the Haida Watchmen and Guardians. "We've got a lot of great experience within our program; some Guardians have worked 12-13 years in the role," says Richard Smith, Haida Fisheries Operations Supervisor. "They know what they need to do out there, and can easily take the reins over whenever needed and help others along. It makes my job a lot easier."

Richard is another great example of the diverse roles that Guardians play throughout coastal communities. Today, he oversees the work plans and schedules for all Watchmen and Guardians, and he also helps to organize the research-based dive trips for Haida Fisheries—drawing upon his first-hand experience as a diver. "As supervisor, I know this work can sometimes be challenging," he says, referring to the five years he spent working as a Haida Watchmen. "I've done the creek walks and clam sampling, and I've also spent long periods working in remote, isolated areas. I was really grateful for what I learned over those five years. Now, I just try to make it fun for everyone."

Richard says it's been a challenge this year due to COVID-19, but they still managed to get a lot of monitoring work done, including ongoing patrols on the water, as well as clam sampling, salmon counts, and crab harvest and other catch monitoring.

As for the future, Richard says he's happy and content in his current role, although sometimes he misses being out in the field and on the water. "I find it hard to settle and always want to learn more," he says. "But I love this job and I love the people I work with. It's really great to work with good people, and it helps that I've been in the field too. I was in their shoes, so I understand."

A MARINE PROTECTED AREAS NETWORK FOR THE NORTH PACIFIC COAST



For close to a decade, CFN member Nations and other First Nations have been working collaboratively with federal and provincial governments in long-term planning that aims to advance conservation, sustainable economic development and ecosystem-based management throughout the North Pacific Coast.

As part of their collective goals, planners have been engaged in an unprecedented effort to create a Marine Protected Areas (MPA) network that would protect the region's ecosystems and abundant marine life—including salmon, eulachon, herring and other culturally important species—while ensuring a variety of resource uses and activities that sustain coastal livelihoods.

This innovative MPA network is unique in many important ways. It's the first planning initiative of its kind to protect not only marine biological diversity, including some threatened and ecologically significant species and habitats, but also First Nations' cultural conservation priorities as well. It's also breaking new ground in terms of Indigenous co-governance, since the process has been co-led by First Nations from the beginning.

"This work will provide a model for other First Nations seeking to engage with governments in MPA planning," says CFN Marine Program Manager Steve Diggon, who is also the MPA Network Technical Team Co-chair. "Recognition of First Nations co-governance rights is a key aspect of the planning process, with each Nation establishing an agreement with Canada and BC that provides a framework for managing all MPAs within their territory."

Diggon says the MPA network aligns well with First Nations' interests, since it's being created through these strong co-governance arrangements that support Indigenous authority and responsibility to manage their own coastal territories.

"The technical work feeding into this process builds upon the best available science and deep engagement with those who live and work in the region," says Diggon, adding that it could be a blueprint for future planning initiatives based on both Indigenous knowledge and leading-edge science. "It charts a new path forward by elevating both cultural and ecological values, and emphasizing the socio-economic values that are unique to the region."



Integrated marine planning has been ongoing for several years, especially since the Marine Plan Partnership for the North Pacific Coast (MaPP) initiative began in 2011. The long-term collaboration involving the BC Government and 18 First Nations, including all CFN member Nations, has proven highly effective in balancing multiple objectives and planning for the sustainable use of marine resources within the Northern Shelf Bioregion—the term used to describe the coastal area from North Vancouver Island to the southern tip of Alaska.

The MPA network aims to preserve the ecological integrity and productivity of this vital marine region for present and future generations, which means protecting its ecosystems and marine life from ongoing threats, such as increased vessel traffic, expanded ports, extensive commercial and recreational fishing pressures, and climate change.

"The well-being of coastal communities depends fundamentally on the health of these ecosystems," says Diggon. "This MPA network is not just about preserving biodiversity and threatened species; it's also about protecting the economic, cultural and spiritual aspects that have always sustained First Nations here—from traditional fishing and food gathering to important cultural heritage and archaeological resources. It taps into a long-standing history of stewardship by First Nations that have been here for thousands of years."

Watch the film below, which tells the story of CFN's collaborative efforts to establish a network of MPAs along the North Pacific Coast.

<https://youtu.be/71ZZ9CTzXWc>

A VISION FOR A NUXALK ELDERS' VILLAGE (cont'd)

way of bringing the community together and getting back to that Nuxalk way of caring for one another," says Tallio.

Tallio says a preliminary canvass of the community found that many elders had traditional medicine and harvesting knowledge they wanted to pass on but crowded living conditions made that difficult. The gathering space facility will provide an area for elders to share their knowledge and language skills, she says. "We want to design a space for people to interact and gather."

The housing units will incorporate traditional Nuxalk artwork – paintings, carvings and totems – into the exterior design. "We

have beautiful houses and apartment buildings but they're very plain on the outside," says Melton. "Traditional Nuxalk houses were very decorated."

The Nuxalk Health Centre project team has put up an architectural drawing of the Elders Village on its office wall. "We are so excited," says Melton. "At the beginning of COVID, we were all pretty exhausted and burnt out, because when it struck, we were already busy. But we put the pictures of the project on our wall to remind us – that's the goal and that's what we're all working toward."

A VOLUNTARY SHIPPING PROTECTION ZONE FOR HAIDA GWAI (cont'd)

"Did they not observe the VPZ because they did not know about it?" asks Jones. "That's possible. Were there special circumstances like weather or something else? That's why we're doing this survey. We're hoping it will increase participation in the trial."

Only two and a half months into the trial, mariners may simply not yet be aware of the zone. "We're finding that with vessels in the 25 nautical mile category, there are only a few operators on that route and we were able to communicate with them, so we're getting very good participation," Jones points out. "With those on the Great Circle Route, there are a lot more companies, as well as vessels that don't travel regularly to this area, so may not be aware of it."

Tracking Vessels

The VPZ program also provides a trial run for a sophisticated marine tracking system being piloted by the Haida Nation with Transport Canada.

CHN is able to monitor vessel traffic on its coast through the Enhanced Marine Situational Awareness Program, EMSA. The EMSA software system allows CHN staff based in Skidegate to track and generate monthly reports of shipping traffic activity inside and outside of the Voluntary Protection Zone areas.

"The software gives you reports on how many ships may be in a certain area at a certain time or whether they enter or leave a VPZ," says Jones. "Then it's a matter of ground-truthing that they are a vessel that should be participating in the voluntary trial. Some may be tugs and barges or fishing vessels that aren't included, so it's a matter of filtering those out."

Supporting safe distance offshore measures can benefit mariners as well as coastal communities. "That's why our focus is on accident prevention. If vessels keep further offshore it's more likely that if they were to lose power, a rescue vessel could arrive before they ground ashore," says Jones. "Most ships think it's not going to happen to them."

Share Your Story Idea with *Stories From the Coast*

Coastal First Nations communities are filled with some of the most inspiring and interesting people you want to meet. Let us know about people, places and projects your communities are involved in! Share your story idea with us to win one of our styling CFN baseball caps in a draw every month.

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