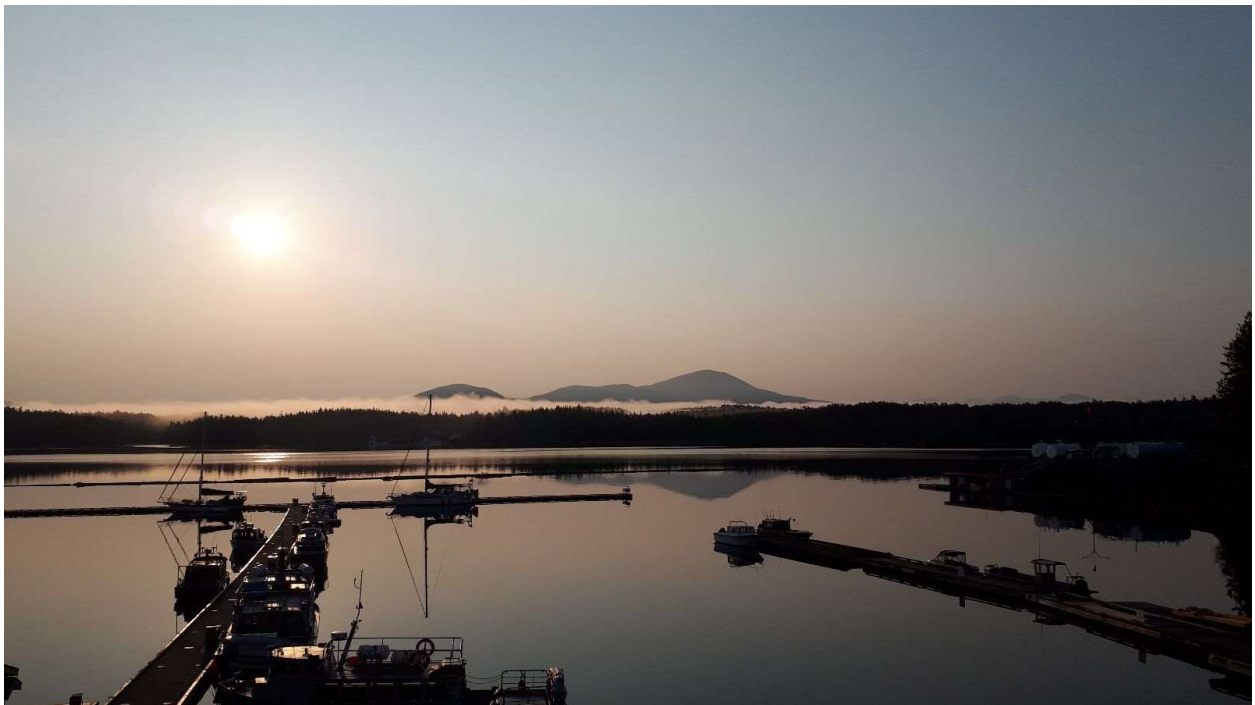




**Coastal Stewardship Network Annual Gathering**  
Shearwater Resort, Hałzaqv (Heiltsuk) Territory  
May 15-19, 2023



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### ACRONYMNS USED IN THIS REPORT:

CFN-GBI – Coastal First Nations-Great Bear Initiative

CSN – Coastal Stewardship Network

RMS – Regional Monitoring System

HIRMD – Heiltsuk Integrated Resource Management Department

CCA – Central Coast Archaeology



*Guardians pose for a group shot on the final day of the gathering.*

## OVERVIEW

### Summary

The 2023 Coastal Stewardship Network Annual Gathering was the first in-person gathering held since 2019, and the first ever hosted in Bella Bella, Haítzaqv Territory. This highly anticipated event brought with it much sharing, learning, connecting, re-connecting and, especially, laughter. By week's end, everyone left with full hearts and tired bodies, and increased knowledge about the importance of each other's stewardship work.

### Background

Since 2008, the Coastal Stewardship Network, a program of Coastal First Nations-Great Bear Initiative, has held the CSN Annual Gathering to bring all Guardians together, and to share stories and ideas about regional stewardship across the North Pacific Coast.

The CSN team provides support for Coastal Guardians of all CFN-GBI member First Nations—the Wuikinuxv, Heiltsuk, Kitasoo Xai'xais, Nuxalk, Gitga'at, Gitxaala, Metlakatla, Old Massett, Skidegate, and Council of the Haida Nation.

To help advance the Guardians' efforts to monitor, protect and restore the cultural and natural resources of their Nations, CSN provides the following support:

- Facilitate networking between Guardians, stewardship staff and other partners;
- Coordinate a Regional Monitoring System, used by Guardians to track resource use and ecosystem health in their territories;
- Provide training and professional development opportunities for Guardians and other stewardship staff;
- Identify funding opportunities and strategic partnerships to increase capacity; and
- Raise awareness and help establish a recognizable stewardship presence on the coast.

### Purpose of the CSN Annual Gathering

The annual gathering provides an excellent opportunity for Guardians to make new connections and renew old ones, while sharing updates on stewardship priorities, and accomplishments and challenges over the past year.

The annual gatherings feature a unique mix of hands-on field training and cultural activities, along with high-level discussions about shared priorities that guide their stewardship work. Although the annual gatherings were always intended to be in-person, the pandemic meant that the Guardians had to settle on meeting online, via Zoom, from 2020 to 2022, with the last in-person gathering held at the Hakai Institute on Calvert Island, July 2019.

The Guardians have always looked forward to the annual gatherings, but this one was even more highly anticipated—partly due to the long wait since the last in-person gathering, but also because it was the first to be hosted in community since 2015, when it was held in Haida Gwaii.



*Introductions around the fire at Kunsoot Wellness Centre.*

## AGENDA

### May 15: Welcome Ceremony and Dinner – Gvúkva'áus Haítzaqv Big House

- Opening Address – William Housty, Conservation Manager, HIRMD
- Opening Prayer – H̄lagm̄it Fran Brown, Manager, Haítzaqv̄la Revitalization
- Ceremonial Singing and Dancing
- Closing Remarks – Kelly Brown, Stewardship Director, HIRMD

### May 16: Connecting and Reconnecting – Gullchucks Kunsoot Wellness Centre

- Introductions: Guardians' Accomplishments and Stories
- Drum Making Activity
- *Optional Evening Activity: Barter Night*

### May 17: Cultural Field Trip in Haítzaqv Territory, with Central Coast Archaeology

- Morning Presentation by Q̄íx̄itasu Elroy White, Central Coast Archaeology
- Cultural Field Trip: Old winter village site, rock paintings and Culturally Modified Trees
- *Optional Evening Activity: Guided Tour of Gvúkva'áus Haítzaqv Big House*

### May 18: Managing Green Crab, with Diana Chan, Natural Resource Manager, HIRMD

- Morning Presentation by Diana Chan: *Managing Invasive European Green Crab in Haítzaqv Territory*
- Boat Trip with Heiltsuk Guardians: Check Crab Traps
- Back to Shearwater: Group Photo & Closing Remarks

### May 19: Breakfast Together and Traveling Home

## SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES



*Guardians gather outside the Big House before heading in for a full tour with Maxwell Johnson.*

Hosted for the first time ever in Haítzaqv territory, the 2023 Annual Gathering focused heavily on knowledge and culture sharing from our hosts, who graciously welcomed the entire group and shared knowledge about their territory and culture. The event featured a range of hands-on activities (see details below), including visits to cultural sites and important harvesting areas, and an engaging drum making exercise.

### [Day1: Welcome Ceremony and Dinner](#)

#### *Gvúkva'áus Haítzaqv Big House*

After all the Guardians and other participants arrived on the first day, a welcome ceremony and dinner was held at the Gvúkva'áus Haítzaqv Big House.

William Housty, Conservation Manager for HIRMD, provided an opening address, and introduced other leaders, singers and dancers who together welcomed the group to Haítzaqv territory.

Hłagmıt Fran Brown, who manages the Haítzaqvla Revitalization Project, played a key role in planning the opening ceremony. After a rousing series of songs and dances by Haítzaqv community members, Fran called up all participants to join in a final dance together.

Day 2: Introductions and Drum Making  
*Gullchucks Kunsoot Wellness Centre*



*Guardians enjoy a drum making activity at Kunsoot Wellness Centre.*

On their first full day together, the Guardians took a short boat ride over to the Kunsoot Wellness Centre, where they gathered around the firepit for introductions. During the open-ended discussion, some Guardians spoke briefly while others shared more detail about their background—how they became a Guardian, what the job means to them, and what they hope to take away from the annual gathering.

After lunch and a short group hike along the peaceful trail leading through the trees from Kunsoot, the Guardians got together again in the Cooks cabin for an interactive drum making

activity, led by Bernard Windsor and assisted by Chelsea Walkus, which helped everyone relax and get to know each other better. Many people had never made a drum before and were eager to learn this skill.

Not only did the activity allow for informal conversations and knowledge sharing, each Guardian also came away with a new drum to take home! The drums were put to good use over the next several days, including many songs after activities and dinner, and later by the fire.



*Bernard Windsor presents veteran Wuikinuxv Guardian, Patrick "Uncle" Johnson, with a new drum, as Metlakatla Guardian Terrance Robinson looks on.*



*Heiltsuk Guardians Troy Whitford (left) and Josh Vickers after a great singing session on the patio.*

Day 3: Cultural Field Trip in Haíłzaqv Territory  
With Óíxítasu Elroy White, Central Coast Archaeology



*Óíxítasu Elroy White points to an ancient rock painting on exposed rock in Haíłzaqv territory.*

On May 17, Guardians spent a full day with archaeologist Óíxítasu Elroy White, who runs Central Coast Archaeology from his home in Haíłzaqv territory.

Óíxítasu began the day with a presentation for Guardians, providing some background on his unique “M̓n̓úxvit approach” to archaeology, which unites his Haíłzaqv cultural and ancestral learnings with his professional training as an archeologist.

“The fact I use a Haíłzaqv word empowers me... I use our language to help interpret these sites created by my ancestors rather than the English words that tend to lose their meaning,” explained Óíxítasu, adding that Haíłzaqv ancestors named those sites that way for a reason. This has been the approach his entire career. For example, his Master’s thesis at Simon Fraser University—titled *Heiltsuk Stone Fish Traps: Products of my Ancestors’ Labour*—incorporates Haíłzaqv political and cultural entities and stories from Haíłzaqv oral historians.

During the morning’s presentation, Óíxítasu highlighted the importance of cultural and ancestral teachings for the Guardians’ work as well. “Your work is directly tied to your Indigenous laws, so I tip my hat to you guys,” he said. “As Guardians, you all have connections to your local places and territories, and those are ties that external academics just don’t have.”

After some questions from the group, everyone headed out on the Guardian boats to visit important cultural sites, including an old Haíłzaqv winter village, some rock paintings along the



coastline, and an island with several Culturally Modified Trees. Óíxítasu pointed out where an ancient stone fish trap has existed beneath the coastal waters for thousands of years, a clear example of continuous settlement and fishing ingenuity in the region.

“Drones are a great way to view some of these archaeological features,” said Óíxítasu, whose grandson, Gíla Keegan Nappie-Edgar, was on hand to demonstrate how drones can give them a better view from above while exploring the sites. Gíla works with Óíxítasu on drones and other technical tasks, as well as making connections with youth groups, such as the SEAS (Supporting Emerging Aboriginal Stewards) program in Haítzaqv territory.



*Learning about Culturally Modified Trees on a heavily forested island in Haítzaqv Territory.*

#### Importance of Collaboration

Every one of the day’s activities and topics—including visits to Haítzaqv cultural sites, drones, and discussions about engaging youth—clearly resonated with the Guardians, who often work with youth and other community members in a wide range of roles that go beyond stewardship.

Óíxítasu says this kind of holistic approach to the work, whether it’s about archaeology or stewardship, is what makes it far more meaningful and more effective too.

“This is intergenerational work that must be done responsibly,” he told the Guardians, as they gathered in the shade of a massive culturally modified cedar tree. “That’s why it’s so important to collaborate with other Nations as well, and to always be open to learning from each other.”

## Day 4: Managing Green Crab

*With Diana Chan, Natural Resource Manager, HIRMD*



*A female with thousands of eggs is caught before releasing more green crabs into coastal waters.*

On the final day of the gathering, Guardians took part in a full-day activity focused on European green crab, a highly invasive species that is concerning stewardship leaders across the North Pacific Coast. They worry that increasing numbers could lead to major declines in native fish and shellfish populations, including clam and other crab species, and salmon and herring.

In the morning, HIRMD Natural Resource Manager Diana Chan shared a presentation on what is known about green crabs—everything from identifying key features of the invasive species to the best crab trap designs and effective bait types for attracting them. “European green crab is a voracious predator,” said Chan in her presentation. “They are aggressive and territorial, and could potentially out-compete local species in important coastal areas, such as clam gardens.”

After some follow-up discussion and questions from the group, the Guardians headed out on the water to check, unload and measure crabs from traps in Gale Creek, an important area for clam harvesting in Haítzaqv Territory, and a site where green crabs have proliferated.

The group was led by Heiltsuk green crab team, Troy Whitford, Walter Campbell and Sheliagh Newman, who have been working together for years to manage the invasive species. Some traps came up empty, but the Guardians ultimately hauled out dozens of green crabs from just a few shallow areas—including one female (see top image) caught just before it released thousands of eggs into the environment.



*The catch from just one of many crab traps in Háítzaqv Territory.*

### Keeping Green Crab Numbers Down

Chan says complete eradication is highly unlikely once populations are established because green crabs are so hardy—adults have been known to stay alive for more than two weeks in the bed of a truck! They are also very prolific: females can release up to 185,000 eggs per year. But there are ways to slow their spread and at least mitigate the damage, which was the main theme of activities at the Guardian gathering.

“Frequent trapping is the most effective way to remove green crabs,” said Chan, “along with regular monitoring to ensure they don’t get established in new areas.” But she also cautioned against the “hydra effect”—an issue caused by trapping adults too intensively. Adult green crabs prey on their young, explained Chan, so taking too many adults out of the environment at one time could lead to a population explosion later, because fewer adults preying on immature green crabs allows more juveniles to reach maturity.

Stopping, or at least slowing the spread, of invasive species such as green crabs, will require more regional efforts like this in the future. The learnings passed along by Heiltsuk Guardians (and also Haida Guardians, who have also been managing the invasive species) will be highly useful for other stewardship offices across the Pacific North Coast, so that other Guardian teams can anticipate and combat the spread in its earliest stages.



*Crab traps used by Heiltsuk Guardians to manage green crabs.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CSN is grateful to the Hałtzaqv Nation (joint leadership and all community members) for welcoming the Guardians and other participants into their territory, and being such gracious hosts throughout the 2023 CSN Annual Gathering.

We also thank the Shearwater Resort and Kunsoot Wellness Centre, for providing facilities for accommodations and activities, and Environment Climate Change Canada, for their generous financial support of this gathering.

