



Coastal Stewardship Network Annual Gathering

Haida Gwaii – May 4-9, 2025



The view from the top of Taaw Tldáaw (briefly known as Tow Hill) on the North shore of Haida Gwaii.

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OVERVIEW

Summary

At the 2025 Coastal Stewardship Network Annual Gathering, held on Haida Gwaii from May 5-8, Coastal Guardians and other stewardship staff from across the North Pacific Coast gathered to share stories, ideas and lessons learned about their roles protecting their respective territories.

Hosted by the Council of the Haida Nation and CFN's Coastal Stewardship Network, the event featured four full days of activities—including hands-on training for compliance and enforcement, discussions about working collaboratively with Crown stewardship agencies, plus extensive learning about Haida culture and heritage from local Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

“The gathering is a chance for Guardians to take a break from their busy stewardship work, and truly connect with each other,” says Aroha Miller, Program Manager for the Coastal Stewardship Network.

“Building relationships takes time, but it’s a vital part of this work. After the gathering, the Guardians were all reminded that they’re part of a much larger family across the North Pacific Coast, and all working toward similar goals.”

For the duration of the gathering, Guardians stayed at Hiellen Longhouse Village, surrounded by lush, ancient forests near Taaw Tldáaw (briefly known as Tow Hill), steps away from the north-facing beaches that reach out to Nee Kun Rose Spit, the location of one of the Haida origin stories. It was a perfect setting for an event that focused so heavily on Haida culture and history.



Inside the Haida Heritage Centre at Kay 'Llnagaay, in HlGaagilda (Skidegate).



The view after sunset of the north shore of Haida Gwaii, with Taaw Tldáaw looking tiny in the distance.

Purpose of the CSN Annual Gathering

Since 2008, the Coastal Stewardship Network (CSN), a program of Coastal First Nations-Great Bear Initiative (CFN-GBI), has facilitated the CSN Annual Gathering to bring Guardians and other stewardship staff together to discuss regional stewardship efforts on the North and Central Coast and Haida Gwaii.

The gatherings feature a unique mix of hands-on cultural activities and highly practical field training, such as environmental monitoring techniques or compliance and enforcement training. These gatherings provide an excellent opportunity for Guardians to make new connections and renew old ones, share updates on stewardship priorities, and accomplishments and challenges over the past year. The gatherings also involve participation from community Elders and knowledge keepers, who share knowledge and wisdom with all participants.

These gatherings are an essential part of the ongoing networking support that CSN provides for Guardians of all CFN-GBI member Nations and Councils—Wuikinuxv, Heiltsuk, Kitasoo Xai'xais, Nuxalk, Gitga'at, Gitxaala, Metlakatla, Old Massett, Skidegate and Council of the Haida Nation.



Coastal Guardians pose for a picture at the Tluu Xaada Naay Society Longhouse, in Gaw Tlagee Old Massett.

AGENDA

May 4: Arriving in Haida Gwaii!

- Guardians arrive throughout the day and settle into Hiellen Longhouses.

May 5: Welcome and Introductions

- Welcome from Haida leadership; CSN introduces the event and representatives.
- Guardian introductions: accomplishments, lessons learned and story sharing.

May 6: Collaborative Stewardship

- Morning presentations from representatives from the Haida Nation, DFO, BC Parks and Gwaii Haanas Wardens
- Afternoon Compliance & Enforcement Scenarios
 - *Discussion:* Protecting both natural and cultural heritage.

May 7: Kay 'Llnagaay Tour in Skidegate

- A guided tour through Kay 'Llnagaay.
 - *Discussion:* Stewardship work within a historical context.

May 8: Cultural Day in Old Massett

- Weaving Demonstrations with Haida Elders.
- Carving studio visits with Kihl 'Yahda Christian White and Jaalen Edenshaw.
- Boat building with John Bennett.
- Traditional net making in Gaw Tlagee.
 - *Discussion:* Questions for experts and making connections with other Nations.

May 9: Depart Haida Gwaii

- Haw'aa!

ACTIVITIES

Hosted on Haida Gwaii for the first time in a decade, the 2025 Gathering focused heavily on cultural trips and collaborative activities with other resource management agencies. Throughout the event, Guardians were treated to an incredible amount of knowledge-sharing from the Haida hosts.



Gaagwiis (Jason Alsop), President of the Haida Nation, speaks about the importance of the Guardians' work.

Day 1: Welcome from Haida Leadership

On May 5, Guardians were welcomed to Haida Gwaii with a speech from President of the Haida Nation, Gaagwiis *Jason Alsop*, who emphasized the value of their stewardship work, and acknowledged the often-heavy weight of their collective responsibilities in caring for their homelands. After welcomes from Laana 7awgaa *Irene Bruce*, Haida Fisheries Program Manager (on behalf of the CHN Marine Stewardship Director, Gwiisihlgaa *Daniel McNeill*) and from lihangaa k'adangaa *Ed Davis*, Protected Area Program Manager (on behalf of the Lands Stewardship Director, Kung K_ayangas *Marlene Liddle*), the Guardians made their own introductions, along with a discussion about recent accomplishments and future priorities.



Guardians discuss collaborative stewardship work with reps from BC Parks, DFO and Parks Canada.

Day 2: Collaborative Stewardship: Compliance & Enforcement Scenarios

On May 7, participants were joined by representatives from BC Parks, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), and Parks Canada for presentations at the Tluu Xaada Naay Society Longhouse, in Gaw Tlagee Old Massett.

After morning presentations, the full group headed to the beach for compliance-and-enforcement scenarios, where Guardians practised dealing with conflict in challenging situations. The scenarios included instances of people collecting firewood illegally, cutting down a monumental cedar tree in the back country, and fishing without a proper license, with each station involving discussion about techniques, such as “contact and cover,” for dealing with emotional encounters with the public.

The Guardians were able to explore their own strategies for diffusing tense situations and educating the public regarding what is (and isn’t) permitted in their territories—with more “seasoned” veterans lending their expertise and support to younger staff, still new to the role.



Guardians participate in compliance-and-enforcement training scenarios with Crown agencies.



Guardians admire the latest work-in-progress of a master Haida carver, Kihl 'Yahda Christian White.

Day 4: Cultural Day in Old Massett

The final day of activities had Guardians once again immersed in Haida culture. The morning involved weaving demonstrations with Haida Elders from the Adult Day Program, while local artisans came to engage with the Guardians as well, which was highlighted by an impromptu halibut necklace raffle! In the afternoon, Guardians visited local carving studios to learn directly from the artists themselves, including Kihl 'Yahda *Christian White* and Jaalen Edenshaw. The Guardians also learned about boat building with long-time builder John Bennett and about traditional net making with a group in Gaw Tlagee that demonstrated the entire process.

At the end of that final busy day, the Guardians still had time to share their thoughts and perspectives about the week in a closing circle. Each participant took the time to thank the Haida hosts for sharing their culture and knowledge so willingly. That openness to share was a common theme throughout the entire gathering and reciprocated by all those who attended.

The sentiment was captured best by Yhaal Xyaalaas *Curtis Brown*, who attended the gathering as the CHN Protected Area Administrative Coordinator: "An Elder taught me long ago that whatever knowledge you gain, you don't selfishly keep it, you share it. That's what I try to do, and that's what I see all these other Nations do too. It's what this gathering is all about, the sharing of knowledge from one person or Nation to another."



Haida Elders and artisans provide a demonstration of hat making for the Guardians.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are truly grateful to the Haida Nation for welcoming us for the 2025 Coastal Stewardship Network Annual Gathering, and for the extensive help in planning accommodations, activities and everything else! CSN also thanks the National Guardian Network and Environment Climate Change Canada for their generous financial support of this gathering.



Capturing the sunset near a calm Kwahtsiisda (Blow Hole), at the base of Taaw Tldáaw.