

Newsletter of the Nanwakolas Council

AWEENAK'OLA

SEPTEMBER 2014 ISSUE 3

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Watching over a Changing Landscape

We've heard from the Nanwakolas member First Nations how important it is that they have the opportunity to fulfil their ancestral responsibility to take care of their lands and waters. In this third issue of "Aweenak'ola," we profile the powerful work led by the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nations in creating and implementing their Guardian Watchmen program over the last two years.

Other First Nations like K'ómoks are eager to get their own programs under way: on page 7, Chief Rob Everson explains why that's so important. A summary of the Nanwakolas vision for a regional network supporting the member First Nations as they create and implement their own programs is on page 8.

Supporting an ideal state of community wellbeing is another ancestral responsibility that First Nations take very seriously. On page 9, we tell you about the Community Wellbeing Strengthening Plan developed by the five member First Nations who signed the 2011 Reconciliation Protocol with the Province of British Columbia.

Since the last issue of "Aweenak'ola," the Tsilqhot'in people have celebrated a ground-breaking success in winning an Aboriginal title case in the Supreme Court of Canada. The landscape of British Columbia has changed forever, and the rights and title of its Aboriginal peoples can no longer be denied. This makes the work we all do together to move back into our rightful place of stewardship and authority over our lands and waters more important than ever. You can read more about the landmark Court case, with commentary by Nanwakolas Executive Director Merv Child, in the September issue of *Focus* magazine: www.focusonline.ca.

This summer saw a significant change on the Nanwakolas Council Board. In June one of the original directors, Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Chief Paddy Walkus, stepped down from the Board. He was replaced by Councillor Terry Walkus. I would like to thank Paddy for his years of support and dedication to Nanwakolas. It was a pleasure working with you, Paddy. I would also like to welcome Terry to the Board. We very much look forward to working with you as well as we support the member First Nations in their goals and vision for Aweenak'ola, "the land we are on."

We hope you enjoy this issue, and wish everyone a safe and warm fall out in the territories.

Dallas W. Smith, President, Nanwakolas Council

Eyes and Ears on the Land and Waters: The Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Guardian Watchmen

When the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Guardian Watchmen program was in its infancy, back in 2010, Leslie Walkus was an on-call junior watchman. The budget only permitted one senior watchman to be on board for three months. Walkus worked for just four short weeks over the entire summer.

KARA BRUDIN-MILLAR, LESLIE WALKUS, DENISE RICHARDS PADGETTE, AND BRIANNON FRALEY. THE GUARDIAN WATCHMEN ARE SHOWING VISITORS PARTS OF THE TERRITORY (NAKWATO RAPIDS).



"I could sit here for hours and talk about my job and how much I love it. To go out there in such a beautiful part of the world and to have this feeling that you're doing something so important is a very good feeling. Being able to come home to the community and talk about the work being done, and see how much comfort that gives them—I think that's my favourite part."

—LESLIE WALKUS, GWA'SALA-'NAKWAXDA'XW
GUARDIAN WATCHMEN PROGRAM MANAGER



This year the program ran for eight full months, with a vessel operator trained in-house through a program designed and developed by Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw, two senior watchmen (one working fulltime) and three junior watchmen. Walkus is also no longer junior back-up. He's now in charge of the program, having passed an intensive training program in 2013 covering everything from small motor mechanics to archaeological inventory training, with flying colours ("He led the way in every exam!" interjects Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw economic development officer Conrad Browne proudly).

Walkus isn't about to boast about his achievements but he does say that the training was a very valuable experience. "There's a huge amount involved in undertaking a Guardian Watchmen program well and safely. You really need to know what you are doing, and how to do it properly."

The beginnings of the program

In 2010, when Browne started working for Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw, he was presented with a hot-off-the-press comprehensive community plan. "It was a very good place to start work," he says. "Everything that was important to the First Nations was included in this amazing document."

Although Browne was hired in an economic development role, the clear ambition expressed

WHO ARE THE GUARDIAN WATCHMEN, AND WHAT DO THEY DO?

According to the Coastal Guardian Watchmen Network (CGWN), a network of Guardian Watchmen practitioners on the central and north coast established in 2005, Guardian Watchmen are the men and women who "carry forward the work of their ancestors to manage and respect their natural and cultural resources through traditional laws," monitoring and protecting the lands and waters in their territory "to ensure a vibrant future for generations to come."

Guardian Watchmen patrol the waters in their traditional territories to monitor the health of wildlife and environmental conditions and the impact of industrial and recreational uses of the area, gathering data to inform decision-making and policy development. They also monitor and encourage compliance with regulatory requirements by users of the area and resources, and assist with the implementation of marine use plans and other resource management initiatives.

in the community plan to have a Guardian Watchmen program “leapt off the page” at him. “The plan spoke volumes about the intensity of the desire to get the communities out into the traditional territories to monitor, to ensure that resources are being extracted responsibly, to make sure that cultural components of the territories are not being adversely affected and to engage with recreational and commercial fishers.” When Browne asked the elders about it, they were adamant that they wanted to see this program up and running as soon as possible. “So that’s how it all began.”

Getting started

How do you start a Watchmen program when there is so much involved—everything from operating boats safely in some of the most dangerous waters in the world, to understanding monitoring procedures and how to keep proper records, to knowledge of the law and development of policy?

To answer those questions and more, Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw turned their eyes north to look at what the [Coastal Guardian Watchmen Network \(CGWN\)](#) was doing. That network, a project of the Coastal First

Nations Great Bear Initiative, had been in place for five years already by then, supporting eight of the central and north coast First Nations in their monitoring and protection programs.

“In May 2010 the CGWN held its annual conference at the Hakai Beach Institute on Calvert Island,” says Browne. “Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw sent a representative and she brought back a huge amount of information and great contacts for us to use.” Based on that information and with help from Claire Hutton, a former coordinator of the CGWN, Browne designed and created the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw program.

“We are very appreciative of the information and assistance provided to us by First Nations working within the CGWN and on the central and north coasts,” acknowledges Browne. “The kinds of issues we face are very similar, and without their assistance I don’t think we would have succeeded in getting up and running.”

Some of the key elements

Every dollar counts, for a start. “Some of the key things we had to think about included the budget, of course,”





says Browne. It can cost up to \$500,000 annually just to run a comprehensive, safe program, he says (that's not including the capital cost of acquiring equipment like boats, trucks and uniforms for the Watchmen). "So it is critical to focus on what is affordable."

Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw receives no funding from government agencies to do its work. It utilizes its annual [Coast Opportunity Funds](#) conservation allocation dollars to contribute to its operational funding, and subsidizes part of the costs by contracting the vessel for freight delivery when it isn't in use on the Watchmen program.

Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw has undertaken several contracts that have also assisted financially, including a marine biomass survey contract and a gray whale survey. Occasional contracts for data collection such as ling cod counts and biological assessments also help, but Browne emphasizes that careful budgeting is an ongoing and fundamental requirement.

ENCOURAGING COMPLIANCE

One of the key roles for the Watchmen is to encourage compliance with the law and any management agreements in force from time to time. Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Watchmen monitor recreational and commercial activity out on the water and record any regulatory breaches or non-compliance with management agreements and protocols. "Our officers will ask to see fishing licences, for example, and to have a look at the catch," says Browne. "But perhaps most importantly, they will also talk to people if they are doing something out of line and if it's possible,

persuade them to do the right thing instead."

That's a very intense experience, observes Leslie Walkus. "You have to approach people very carefully and supportively, just have a quiet word with them to help them understand why it's important to change their behaviour." Walkus participated in a role-playing workshop as part of his 2013 training program that he says was incredibly helpful: "We worked with a DFO officer who has lots of experience and he suggested different things we could do to make it work better. We had to all do it with someone we didn't know as

a mock scenario, and it really made me think about how you can do it well to be successful in motivating someone to comply."

THE RULES AND REGULATIONS

Both Walkus and Browne say it's a fundamental aspect of the work to be very familiar with all the legislation, regulations, policies and agreements that affect resource use and impacts in the traditional territories. "We work closely with many of the regulatory agencies, the RCMP, Ministry of Environment and B.C. Parks. We have a very good line of communications with all of them, especially with B.C. Parks, who have been very supportive."

Browne says the First Nations have also been very fortunate to have access to an online book (also available in print) that was created by the Environmental Law Centre at the University of Victoria called '[Environmental Laws: A Field Guide for B.C.'s North and Central Coast and Haida Gwaii.](#)' In 2011, working with the CGWN, the ELC produced the field guide to help First Nations have a ready reference guide to the various laws and regulations in effect in their territories. "It's a very well-done book. It gives you everything you need and is very easy to use. It's a very helpful tool for us out in the field and I would definitely recommend it."

The work that's under way

The Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw are engaging in several exciting new programs under the auspices of the Watchmen program, including a radioactive waste

monitoring program testing waste washing up from Japan after the Fukushima nuclear plant disaster in 2011. “That’s important on many levels for us. For example, we need to be aware if there is any radioactive waste contaminating seaweed, which is an important cultural resource,” explains Browne.

Elder and youth trips are also part of the operational plan and the First Nations will soon be working on a DNA study of bears within the territorial watersheds. “First Nations up north are doing the same thing, using the same standards, so that’s exciting,” says Walkus. “We’re in the process of setting up hair snares now, so we can use the hair that’s captured for the DNA testing.”

A worthwhile effort

The Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw are happy to share as much information as possible about what they are doing with any First Nation interested in setting up a

Guardian Watchmen program. “We went to present to K'ómoks (see “Getting on Board,” page 6) and we’ve offered to present to any of the First Nations who would like to have us do so,” says Browne. “This fall the Chipewyan First Nation from Alberta are coming to see us to find out about the program. We’re very proud of that. Collaboration among the First Nations is essential. I learned that at the Hakai conference, and I can’t emphasize enough how valuable that experience is.”

“This has been such a worthwhile experience,” concludes Leslie Walkus. “Every member of our crew just loves their job and the experiences we all have out there on the water. The things that happen to you—the things you see, and knowing what you are doing is so important—it just takes you back to the very core of who you are, and why we have to do this. I love being a Guardian Watchman. I just want to keep doing this as long as I can.”



GETTING ON BOARD: K'ÓMOKS STARTS WORK ON A GUARDIAN WATCHMEN PROGRAM

“There are a couple of different reasons we want a Guardian Watchmen program,” says K'ómoks Chief Rob Everson.

“Part of it is taking back our traditional decision-making approach to protecting our lands and waters, the way we did before contact. The other aspect of it is education. Our territory, which includes Comox, Courtenay and Denman and Hornby Islands, is very urbanized and heavily developed. We know we can't bring everything back to its original natural state, but with so much over-fishing, misuse of forests and rivers and environmental degradation, we do see this as a really substantial opportunity to educate everyone using the lands and waterways in our territory about these issues, and to work with them as partners to protect these resources from further degradation. That's why public education is a really key element of the program.”



The Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'aw hosted K'ómoks Chief and Council on a Guardian Watchmen field trip, and subsequently visited K'ómoks to provide a full presentation on the program and what K'ómoks would need to know to undertake its own Watchmen initiative. Since then, K'ómoks has been researching its training and capital equipment needs, and is now working on developing its own program, tailored to its territory. Everson says he hopes that the program will be underway by spring 2015.

While the Guardian Watchmen program has traditionally monitored coastal waterways, K'ómoks is interested in protection of its lands as well and is researching development of a program that can cover both bases. “From a regional perspective, Nānwakolas also wants to focus its support to the member First Nations on territorial issues as well as marine protection,” says Nānwakolas Executive Director Merv Child. “The responsibilities and desire of the First Nations to protect their territories isn't limited to the marine areas by any means.”

Having the support of Nānwakolas Council to coordinate a network of First Nations on the east coast of Vancouver Island with common interests is “a good end game,” adds Everson. “Cooperation with other First Nations to share experiences and information is going to be very key to leveraging our collective knowledge for our mutual benefit.”

Anyone wanting to know more about the work that K'ómoks is undertaking should contact K'ómoks Councillor and assistant negotiator, Melissa Quocksister.



NANWAKOLAS: REGIONAL SUPPORT FOR GUARDIAN WATCHMEN EFFORTS

One of the strengths of the Nanwakolas Council, says Executive Director Merv Child, is that the member First Nations speak together through a Nanwakolas mouthpiece about their common interests. “That enables Nanwakolas to use that strong, collective voice to move those interests forward at a regional level,” says Child. “The concept of a Guardian Watchmen network of the member First Nations fits right into that.”

While Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nations have led the way in creating their community Guardian Watchmen program over the last two years, the interest of all the Nanwakolas member First Nations in re-establishing a stewardship role over their lands and waters goes much further back than that, says Nanwakolas Planner Scott Harris. “We’ve been told for a long time that there’s a big need for this,” says Harris.

Funding provided in 2011 by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation for the [Marine Planning Partnership for the North Pacific Coast \(MaPP for short\)](#), a partnership between eighteen First Nations and the provincial government created to co-lead the development of joint marine plans, opened a window of opportunity to make progress on the issue (to read more about the MaPP process and Nanwakolas’ work on MaPP, see the June 2014 issue of *Aweenak'ola*). “A consistent theme in the marine planning process was the idea of reviving the concept of active marine monitoring, so it was a great time to pick up the Guardian Watchmen issue and run with it,” says Child.

A VISION FOR REGIONAL SUPPORT

The vision is that Nanwakolas will provide behind-the-scenes support to the member First Nations who want to set up their own Guardian Watchmen programs. “It’s important that each First Nation determines what its program will look like and leads its development, and implement that program with its own staff and equipment,” says Child. “But there are many issues of common interest between the member First Nations at a regional level, both in marine and territorial stewardship, and as K’ómoks Chief Rob Everson has pointed out, that’s where Nanwakolas can play an active support role.”



Apart from sourcing reliable long-term funding to assist in getting individual programs up and running, says Scott Harris, Nanwakolas is working on developing a regional framework, not dissimilar to the Coastal Guardian Watchmen Network (see “Who Are the Guardian Watchmen,” page 3) that could support these common interests, such as the coordination of staff training, housing of a cost-effective data collection system and support for information-sharing and learning among the First Nations about each other’s roles and experiences.

Over the long term, Nanwakolas is also interested in pursuing delegation of enforcement authority to the Guardian Watchmen. “We may also be able to help with discussions on how to approach shared territories and development of protocols on how to coordinate the programs in shared areas,” adds Child.

A Sense of Oneness: The Nanwakolas Community Wellbeing and Capacity Strengthening Plan



“The writing of [this] Plan is part of an obligation to fulfill the responsibilities set out for us by our ancestors. It is a reflection of our views of how our cultural values and teachings must carry on and be the foundation for all activities involving First Nations governments, their members, and the management of lands and resources within their territories.”

—NANWAKOLAS COMMUNITY
WELLBEING AND CAPACITY
STRENGTHENING PLAN, 2014

CHRIS ROBERTS AND
EMILY AITKEN

As far as I understand,” says Emily Aitken thoughtfully, “for our First Nations, everything always came from a sense of oneness, that everything and everyone had roles that were connected, and everyone took care of each other and the environment in whatever role they had. I see the Community Wellbeing Plan as a great step towards moving back into that place again, taking care of ourselves, the environment, and our future generations.”

Last September, Aitken, a member of Tlowitsis First Nation, joined a community wellbeing working group comprised of representatives of five N̄naw̄kolas member First Nations—Tlowitsis, Mamalilikulla Qwe'Qwa'Sot'Em, Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw, Da'naxda'xw Awaetlala and K'ómoks. The job of the working group, with staff resource support from Chris Roberts of N̄naw̄kolas Council, was to help guide and provide input into the process of drafting a Community Wellbeing Strengthening Plan, outlining what community wellbeing means to the First Nations involved; priority areas of common interest to the five Nations; and some specific strategies to work towards community wellbeing goals for each of them.

“It’s been an amazing process,” observes Aitken, “an incredible opportunity to share information and build relationships with all the First Nations in the group.” Nick Chowdhury, who represented Da'naxda'xw Awaetlala on the working group, agrees: “This opportunity to talk to each other about what community wellbeing means to all of us, to learn about each community’s challenges and to collaborate on strategies, has been very valuable.”



NICK CHOWDHURY

DEFINING COMMUNITY WELLBEING

One of the first tasks undertaken by the N̄naw̄kolas community wellbeing working group was a discussion of what community wellbeing means. “When we started the conversation we needed to ask ourselves, what is it? What indicators do we use? How does the wellbeing of an individual relate to the wellbeing in a community generally? There were many questions like these to think about,” says Da'naxda'xw Awaetlala’s Nick Chowdhury.

The working group concluded that community wellbeing must be understood on—and in—the First Nations’ own terms, and interpreted as referring to all things that contribute to and determine a First Nation’s wellbeing, their state of happiness, and the quality of life of all members belonging to a First Nation.

Measuring the wellbeing of a First Nations community therefore requires going beyond standard quality of life indicators for individual community members, such as education, health and employment, to understanding the contribution of areas such as the vibrancy of culture and the traditions of the collective.

Finally, progress in advancing the authority, accountability and jurisdiction of First Nations’ governments, and attaining the capacity to uphold these responsibilities, is also relevant to the determination of First Nations’ wellbeing.

Not least of all, it involves reconciliation of past injustices and the economic consequences of colonialism, and includes the acceptance by government and external stakeholders of First Nations’ authority over and interests in the lands and resources in their territories.

The interconnection of issues

The working group identified five main priority areas for community wellbeing strengthening that all the First Nations have in common: culture, community, health, resource management, and economic prosperity. “It’s common sense in many ways, of course, but until we all got together I didn’t realize just how much we all share in terms of our interests and a vision of what community wellbeing involves,” observes Chowdhury.

What struck all the participants in particular was how interconnected the various aspects of community wellbeing are. Aitken compares it to a circle in which none of the pieces can be separated out or the circle will be broken: “If you focus on one aspect of community wellbeing in isolation, you aren’t going to succeed. All the factors—culture, health, resources management, you name it—they are all intertwined and interdependent. They all have to be approached understanding how they relate to each other.”

The Guardian Watchmen program, says Chris Roberts [see Eyes and Ears on the Land and Water, page 2] is a perfect example of that interconnection: “It’s a practical initiative, monitoring the environment and regulatory compliance, but it’s one that also feeds right into community wellbeing goals because it involves training, employment, cultural practices



and recognition of authority as well as environmental protection. All those factors that contribute to wellbeing, they’re all there in that one program.”

Mapping out how the different aspects of wellbeing relate to each other, adds Roberts, is a vital aspect of the Plan. “It helps to understand why you might not be able to move forward on one aspect of wellbeing, because you need to deal with something related to

B.C.’S PERSPECTIVE

The five First Nations represented on the working group all signed a 2011 Reconciliation Protocol with the provincial government. Through the Protocol, Nānwākolas staff and leadership have embraced the responsibility set out for them by their ancestors to strengthen wellbeing. The government committed in the Protocol to supporting Nānwākolas staff in developing an implementation strategy to facilitate access to existing provincial government programs, including documenting, reviewing and prioritizing the community wellbeing strengthening priorities of the First Nations.

Provincial official Pamela Millar, of the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation’s Community Development Branch, has worked closely with Nānwākolas staff over the process and believes that one of the greatest strengths of the Plan is that community wellbeing has been defined in the First Nations’ own terms. “It’s a real opportunity for the province to mobilize its resources to build on what the First Nations themselves have identified as their vision for wellbeing,” says Millar.

“They didn’t simply use existing assumptions of what it is supposed to be or accept predetermined indicators or outcomes. This isn’t some arbitrary definition of community wellbeing. The communities involved have articulated their own wisdom as to what it means, and what they expect the standards and outcomes should be, knowing their own communities. It’s a remarkable document because of that. It’s a really strong foundational document for the future.”

that aspect somewhere else.” That in turn, he says, helps decision-makers determine the priority or sequence in which actions need to be taken to make progress on each aspect of wellbeing.

Putting the concepts into reality

Chris Roberts is now working with the provincial government and several organizations to secure funding to support some of the next steps identified in the Plan. In the meantime, Emily Aitken is hoping to see the Plan result in access to resources for language camps and workshops, youth stewardship programs and environmental projects supported by her First Nation. Nick Chowdhury has similar hopes to see specific initiatives put in place, helping both youth and adults in his community find a positive focus that will help them with the challenges they face. “We also plan to prioritize work on governance, and communications.”

“This process has been so important,” concludes Emily Aitken. “Our people really need a place to go to be whole. It can be hard for people these days to find a place in the world where they feel good about themselves. This work opens up great possibilities for us to rebuild those places and the connections we all have to one another that make up that oneness, that holistic wellbeing we always used to have. I’m so appreciative this work is being done.”



FORMER NANWAKOLAS STAFF MEMBER WALLY EAMER (RIGHT) AND EDUARDO SOUSA AT THE NANWAKOLAS COUNCIL CORPORATE CHALLENGE IN JULY.

Other News

- On July 21 Nanwakolas hosted the third Nanwakolas Council Corporate Challenge at Crown Isle Resort in Comox. All proceeds of the tournament are going towards the creation of the Stan Hagen Tl'axam Scholarship at North Island College, a fund dedicated to supporting prospective First Nations students. In excess of \$15,000 has been raised to date for the scholarship, thanks to all of the participants and sponsors.
- The First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) is accepting applications for the 2015 Aboriginal Arts Development Awards (AADA). Application forms and guidelines are available on the FPCC website: www.fpcc.ca. The deadline is October 31, 2014.

Newsletter of the Nanwakolas Council

AWEENAK'OLA



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The Nanwakolas Council is comprised of seven member First Nations whose traditional territories are located in the Northern Vancouver Island and adjacent South Central Coast areas of British Columbia.

Please Get in Touch

Please don't hesitate to let us know how you like "Aweenak'ola," and what else we could do with it to make it more informative, interesting and useful to you. If you have photo or story submissions, ideas on where else we should distribute the newsletter, or you would like us to email it to you whenever it comes out, please contact us at info@nanwakolas.com or call Coral Duncan at 250.286.7200.