




## SIX FIRST NATIONS WORK TOGETHER FOR BETTER STEWARDSHIP OF EIGHT MILLION-ACRE TERRITORY

by Nanwakolas Council, May 9, 2022

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Western science and Indigenous environmental stewardship team up to protect culture and environment

**Cape Mudge, BC (May 9, 2022)** – After a two-year hiatus due to the COVID pandemic, environmental and cultural Guardians from the Nanwakolas Council's six member First Nations are gathering in person for a week of specialized training with Indigenous, provincial and federal environmental experts, starting May 9<sup>th</sup>. The training includes strategies to better protect local ecosystems and cultural resources within their territories, where presently, only 20 young Guardians are on duty to monitor eight million acres on Northern Vancouver Island and the adjacent mainland south-central coast of the Great Bear Rainforest.

The Guardian programs of the individual Nations (Mamalilikulla, Tlowitsis, Da'naxda'xw Awaetlala, Wei Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, and K'ómoks) are supported by the Council's Ha-ma-yas Stewardship Network (Ha-ma-yas), which aims to build indigenous' stewardship capacity to ensure the effective management of cultural heritage resources, ecological values, and economic development opportunities. While Ha-ma-yas does not operate its own Guardian program, it works with each Nation on their stewardship interests and focuses on regional issues like standardized training, monitoring and data collection, acquiring recognized compliance and enforcement powers, and finding funding to expand the Nation's Guardian programs.

Each of the member Nation Guardian programs are involved in projects that their Nation has identified as priorities, such as protecting cultural and ecological values, ensuring the Guardians are prepared for marine incidents on the water, participating in forest stewardship within the Great Bear Rainforest, and old growth management on Vancouver Island. The work the Guardians undertake builds new information that is added to each Nation's database. The monitoring and data collected is valuable to the Nations in building their own inventory and repository of information that is used in decision making and interactions with industry, government, and other research/academic institutions.

The gathering at the Cape Mudge Reserve on Quadra Island, May 9-13, includes specialized training on land and water provided by current guardians, provincial natural resource officers, experts from the Hakai Institute, Canadian Coast Guard, Provincial Natural Resource Officers, and BC Institute of Technology. Key topics of the Gathering include; bathymetry training (study of ocean, lake and river terrain), grizzly bear camera use, archaeological survey methods, marine search and rescue, vessel towing, dockside booming, hypothermia treatment, compliance monitoring and enforcement networking.

"Our Nations have ancestral responsibilities to take care of the lands, waters, wildlife, and food sources for future generations," said Dallas Smith, Board President, Nanwakolas Council. "Our upcoming gathering plays an important role in ensuring the Guardians have the training and education they need, as well as professional standards, and a good understanding of data collection methodology so the data they collect is standardized and consistent for analysis and reporting. It's also a valuable opportunity to once again share experiences and knowledge with Guardians from other parts of BC, Canada and the United States."

Across the territories of the Nanwakolas Council Nations, there is a growing need to expand the role and size of the Guardian programs so they can more actively be engaged in monitoring forest harvesting, hunting activities, assess important habitats, protect cultural sites, rehabilitate damaged areas, assess resource development referrals, and ensure compliance with land use plans that have been agreed to. There is also an immediate need to increase the Guardians' capacity to respond to environmental disasters such as the sinking and pollution caused by the Nathan E. Stewart tug/barge near Bella Bella in 2016, as well as the growing impacts of climate change-related disasters such as heat domes, forest fires and floods.

"The Guardians are the eyes and ears of our Nations in this vast territory, and they know more about our land than anyone," adds Smith. "The integration of western sciences with Indigenous knowledge based on thousands of years of environmental stewardship greatly enhances our ability to monitor the land and prepare and respond to the effects of climate change."

Currently, the limited funding for the Nations' Guardian programs comes from revenue sharing through the "Great Bear Rainforest" (GBR) agreement and Marine Plan Partnership (MaPP) with the Province of BC and the Oceans Protection Plan (OPP) with the Federal government, as well as annual grant applications and the philanthropic support of organizations such as the Nature United, Hakai Institute and Coast Funds.

Access to ongoing sustainable funding would enable the Guardian programs to address key human resources needs, such as: hiring additional Guardians; increasing participation in academic programs like the Vancouver Island University's Stewardship Technicians Training Program (STTP), where Ha-ma-yas students have a 100% graduation rate; and providing competitive wages for Guardians so young Indigenous people can live and have long-term careers in their home communities. Increased funding is also required to address infrastructure capital and equipment needs, such as acquiring and maintaining specialized vehicles and boats, and acquiring meeting space, communication technology, software and hardware to meet growing data management needs.

The return on investment in the Guardian programs was confirmed in the 2016 Business Case Report on Coastal Guardian Watchmen Programs, which found on average that "investments made in Coastal Guardian Watchmen programs generated, on the low end, a 10 to 1 annual return and on the high end a 20 to 1 annual return for participating Nations."

"As Premier Horgan noted when the Province launched the Declaration Act Action Plan, 'By working together in partnership, we are creating more opportunities, better jobs and stronger environmental protections,'" said Smith. "I think our Guardian programs epitomize that spirit of cooperation and working together to achieve shared goals and a brighter future for our Indigenous Nations and people."

### About Nanwakolas Council

Nanwakolas Council provides services to the member First Nations (Mamalilikulla, Tlowitsis, Da'naxda'xw Awaetlala, Wei Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum and K'ómoks), including specific technical expertise, operational support and information, facilitation, advice, and coordination of the work of the individual Nations in their stewardship of lands and waters. It also supports the work of the First Nations' Guardians through the Ha-ma-yas Stewardship Network and advocates for the protection of the member First Nations' Aboriginal rights when engaging with governments. The member First Nations also work collectively through Nanwakolas Council as a united voice when dealing with matters of collective interest. For more information, visit [www.nanwakolas.com](http://www.nanwakolas.com)