



MEDIA RELEASE

HONOURING FIRST NATIONS IN THE FOREST ECONOMY

We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, and K'ómoks First Nations and the Nanwakolas Council are gathering with honoured guests to celebrate their history and participation in the forestry economy

Date: August 27, 2025

Time: 8.30 to 10.30am: opportunity for media and VIPs to visit H'kusam Forest and witness traditional cultural forestry practices, and view carved in situ living poles

10.30am to noon: welcome, VIP speakers, naming and blessing of carved traditional canoe and Large Cultural Cedar Logs

Noon to 1pm: Lunch provided to all

1pm to 3.00: opportunity to paddle traditional canoes, conduct interviews

Location: Kelsey Bay dry log sort, Sayward: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/q2e5D9xZFdNjLxGZ9>

(parking and meeting place for shuttle to H'kusam Forest will be signposted)

Welcome, speakers, blessings, naming will take place here. Canoes will be launched at the Kelsey Bay log sort boat ramp.

On August 27 the First Nations, honoured guests, and community members will be celebrating our culture and history, First Nations' investment in the forestry economy, and our vision for the future of forestry in the territories.

First Nations have always been engaged in the forest economy in our territories. Since time immemorial, we have harvested trees for building, making canoes, and for cultural and ceremonial purposes. H'kusam Forest, near Sayward, is a shining example of the longstanding sustainable forestry management approach and cultural practices of the We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, and K'ómoks First Nations: containing evidence of how the Nations once harvested not only trees but parts of trees, planked cedars, bark-stripping, and the carving of living poles. In 2024 and 2025, carvers from the three Nations carved two xwax'wana, or canoes, from windfall cedars in H'kusam Forest, and living poles celebrating the Nations' culture and forestry history.

First Nations are also determined to exercise our rights and participate meaningfully in the contemporary forestry economy, building on our significant investments in the sector. On Vancouver Island, for example, Tlowitsis, We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, and K'ómoks First Nations collectively invested \$35.9 million in the La-kwa sa mukw Forestry Partnership with Western Forest Products in 2024.

Through the 2009 British Columbia-Nanwakolas Framework Agreement, the First Nations have also worked with the provincial government and tenure applicants on an orderly, collaborative referrals process that has resulted in far fewer delays and disruptions on Vancouver Island over the last fifteen years. That has also contributed significantly to positive relationships between the Nations and forestry companies operating on Vancouver Island.

“This is a great start, but it doesn’t stop here,” says **Dallas Smith, President, Nanwakolas Council**. “The First Nations have a vision of Indigenous businesses, contractors and crews working on the ground everywhere in our territories, participating on a level playing field in the industry for the first time since the 19th century.”

“The world has changed in 2025,” says **Chief Ronnie Chickite, We Wai Kai First Nation**. “As First Nations we are exercising our inherent rights to govern, manage, and participate in the forestry industry. We have a proven track record of success in the forest economy, providing significant investment and employment. That’s to be celebrated in a time when there is so much uncertainty in the sector.”

“Today is an opportunity for real reconciliation: not only to honour our culture and our history but to uphold our rights under the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which have been recognized by the Governments of Canada and British Columbia, and to recognize our rightful place in the forestry sector in our territories,” says **Chief Christopher Roberts, Wei Wai Kum First Nation**. “Bringing our stewardship values and responsibilities to the land for resource management into forest operations is vital to providing the stability that everyone wants, and confidence that we all can enjoy balanced and responsible long term forestry operations in our territories.”

“There is a long and unhappy history of First Nations being excluded from the sector, beginning with the mass taking by governments of unceded forestry lands for railway building in the 1800s,” says **Chief Nicole Rempel, K’ómoks Nation**. “It continued with legislated constraints on First Nations owning and working in many industries that lasted until the mid-20th century. First Nations are determined now to exercise their rights and participate meaningfully once again in the forestry economy. I’m proud to celebrate that today.”

“Through the La-kwa sa muqk Forestry Partnership, Western is proud to work alongside Tlowitsis, We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, and K’ómoks First Nations to build a more inclusive and resilient forest sector, where everyone has the opportunity to fully participate and benefit,” said **Steven Hofer, President and CEO of Western Forest Products**. “Predictable, sustainable timber from La-kwa sa muqk is key to the success of our sawmills on Vancouver Island and to the broader regional economy. We are proud to join in celebrating this partnership and the Nations’ visions for forestry in their traditional territories.”

“Forests are more than just resources, they are places of culture, history, and identity,” says **Hon. Ravi Parmar, Minister of Forests**. “Today’s celebration is a powerful reminder of the deep connections the We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, and K’ómoks First Nations have with the forest economy. By honouring traditional knowledge and investing in shared opportunities, we are building a stronger, more sustainable future together, creating prosperity for generations to come.”

“Powerful, prosperous First Nations fully engaged in the forest economy in their territories is good for everyone in the sector,” says **Dallas Smith, President, Nanwakolas Council**.
“Reconciliation is good for everyone, and today is part of that journey.”

Media are invited to join We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, and K’ómoks Nations and Nanwakolas Council to honour and celebrate First Nations’ participation in the forestry economy since time immemorial, to learn about the history of H’kusam Forest and the fight to save it from logging, to hear about continuing barriers in the forestry sector to full Indigenous participation and reconciliation, and to share the vision for the future of First Nations in forestry in the territories.

VIP guest speakers will include the mayors of Campbell River and Sayward, and forestry company executives, among others.

On hand for interviews will be:

- Dallas Smith, President, Nanwakolas Council
 - Chief Ronnie Chickite, We Wai Kai; Chief Christopher Roberts, Wei Wai Kum, Chief Nicole Rempel, K’ómoks
 - Stephen Hofer, Western Forest Products
-

-30-

Media contact:

Katherine Gordon (250) 616-6031

Please RSVP if you would like to join a shuttle up to H’kusam site to see the living poles, or be at the shuttle meeting point at 8.30am.

Photographs available here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1kqM5Gjj5ulap9NjLHip3VlvCmVerfDO-?usp=sharing>

About Nanwakolas:

The Nanwakolas Council is comprised of six member First Nations whose traditional territories are located in the Northern Vancouver Island and adjacent South Central Coast areas of British Columbia (Mamalilikulla, Tlowitsis, Da’naxda’xw Awaetlala, We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum and K’ómoks). The Council supports the work of First Nations’ Guardians through the [Ha-ma-yas Stewardship Network](#). For more information, visit www.nanwakolas.com

About We Wai Kai First Nation

The We Wai Kai embrace their language and culture to build a proud, healthy, safe and self-sufficient community. We Wai Kai people support and encourage each other to thrive through following the footsteps of their ancestral history, as stewards of their lands and waters, while balancing their role in modern day society.

We Wai Kai's current population is approximately 1,200 Citizens, about 1/2 live on reserve (split between Cape Mudge Village and Quinsam Reserve), and the other 1/2 live off reserve. The Nation has 5 designated reserve lands covering 685 hectares (1,693 acres). We Wai Kai territory includes the east side of Vancouver Island from the Qualicum River in the south, to the Tsitika River in the north. Then on the mainland, from Toba Inlet to Jackson Bay, and all of the islands in between.

About Wei Wai Kum First Nation

The centre of Wei Wai Kum territory is Campbell River, on the east coast of central Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Based on the history of our ancestors, Wei Wai Kum territory today extends from the headwaters of Loughborough Inlet north of Campbell River to the Tsable River in the south. It goes westward to the chain of mountains on central Vancouver Island, and eastward midway through the Strait of Georgia.

The Wei Wai Kum First Nation (Campbell River Indian Band) engages in a range of social and economic programs, services and activities that promote the well-being and prosperity of our members. These include education, housing, health care, social development, and recreation. We also support activities that preserve and promote the Wei Wai Kum culture, such as training in the Lik'wala language and traditional dancing and singing.

About K'ómoks First Nation

For thousands of years Indigenous people occupied the shoreline of eastern Vancouver Island stretching from what is known today as Kelsey Bay in the north, down to Hornby and Denman Island in the south, and included the watershed and estuary of the Puntledge River. The people called K'ómoks today referred to themselves as Sahtloot, Sasitla, leeksun and Puntledge. They lived in Salmon River, Quinsam and Campbell Rivers, Quadra Island, Kye Bay, Comox Harbour and estuary, Baynes Sound, and many other locations throughout the territory.