



GITANYOW HEREDITARY CHIEFS

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GITANYOW UNVEILS GROUNDBREAKING POLICY TO PROTECT TRADITIONAL WATERS

Gitanyow Lax'yip, September 19, 2023: The Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs have enacted the Gitanyow Aks Ayookxw / Lax'yip Water Policy to establish a framework for aquatic health within Gitanyow Lax'yip (Territory). The one-year pilot policy creates clear water management standards and procedures to evaluate existing and proposed activities with the overall intent to safeguard aquatic ecosystem health and operationalize cumulative effects assessment, particularly as the impacts of climate change amplify.

The Gitanyow Lax'yip encompasses an area of approximately 6,296 square kilometres within the northwestern region of British Columbia, containing numerous waterbodies; creeks, rivers, lakes, wetlands, snowfields, glaciers and groundwater. These bodies of water provide high-quality water and aquatic habitat supporting abundant marine and terrestrial ecosystems, human health, Gitanyow culture, and Wilp (House Group) sustainability.

“Wilp sustainability is a core value and vision and requires a strong ecological foundation to maintain ecosystem function, and socio-cultural and economic well-being within a framework of low risk to ecological integrity,” said Simogyet (Hereditary Chief) Malii. “Waterbodies and their aquatic ecosystems are a source of cultural and spiritual value for the Gitanyow people, who utilize all resources within the Lax'yip for fishing, trapping, hunting, food and medicinal plant gathering, spiritual worship, and upholding traditional laws.”

The Gitanyow Aks Ayookxw / Lax'yip Water Policy primarily applies to new and existing industrial development proposals, including but not limited to mining, energy development, forestry, transportation infrastructure, and commercial or municipal infrastructure. Moreover, the policy extends its reach to community development, agriculture, recreation, and other projects with the potential to impact water resources and bodies of water.

Proponents of all new activities with the potential to impact water resources must adhere to this policy. Implementation is triggered whenever an action is proposed with the possibility of affecting water quantity and use or impacting water quality through contributions of pollution, contaminants, excess nutrients, or erosional material. Project proponents are required to complete all steps in consultation and collaboration with staff of the Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs Office, and are financially responsible for covering costs associated with their compliance at all stages of the technical process.

“The Gitanyow Aks Ayookxw / Lax’yip Water Policy complements the Gitanyow Lax’yip Land Use Plan and upholds Gwelx ye’erst — Gitanyow’s rights and responsibilities to hold, protect, and pass down the land in a sustainable manner from generation to generation,” said Naxginkw, Tara Marsden, lead for Aks Ayookxw.

The Simigiyet’m Gitanyow (Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs) are an innovative, traditional Indigenous government mandated to protect Gitanyow Nation’s lands, resources, and laws. The Gitanyow have never ceded or surrendered title to their lands, rights to their resources, or the power to make decisions within their Lax’yip (Territory). The Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs’ goal is to establish government-to-government agreements that form the foundation of a modern-day treaty through an incremental treaty approach. In 2012, the Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs and the province of British Columbia signed the Gitanyow Lax’yip Land Use Plan to guide all industrial activity. Gitanyow Nation is part of the larger Gitksan Nation, encompassing 6,200 square kilometres in the Nass and Skeena Watersheds (Kitwanga and Kispiox Rivers).

Learn more by visiting gitanyowchiefs.com and following [@gitanyowchiefs](https://www.instagram.com/gitanyowchiefs) on Instagram.

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