

JULY 2023 | ISSUE 1

AROUND THE LAX'YIP



GITANYOW HEREDITARY CHIEFS

Simgiget, Sigadem Hanak gunth Guuba Wilsip,

Welcome to our first newsletter! We are very excited to begin sending you quarterly updates to inspire members and ensure everyone knows what is happening throughout our Lax'yip and within the Community.

In this issue, Gitanyow will fight Canada in court for Aboriginal Title in 2024, ancestral remains discovered close to the museum date back 800 to 900 years, our Nation's internet will soon be more powerful, and this year's pre-season salmon projections are now in.

All this and more is below.



GITANYOW TITLE CASE UPDATE

Malii vs. The King

In the 80s and 90s, Glen Williams was the youngest witness to testify for the Gitxsan Nation in the historic Delgamuukw title case.

Hereditary chiefs of Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en Nations took Canada to court for recognition of ownership of our traditional lands, to confirm our right to govern our territories, and for compensation for loss of land and resources.

Although we didn't win Aboriginal title, the groundbreaking decision in 1997 set a precedent for Indigenous rights and recognized oral history as valid evidence. The landmark ruling affirmed that Confederation did not extinguish Indigenous title.

Fast forward 25 years, Glen - now Simogyet Malii, is busy preparing to take Canada back to court on behalf of Gitanyow Nation. We are pursuing title to our full traditional territory, payment for damages and loss of stolen resources, and we've included an important challenge on water protection.

Malii vs. The King is scheduled to be tried in a three-month hearing on October 1st, 2024 in Vancouver, BC.

* In 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada recognized the Tsilhqot'in as the true title holders to almost 1,800 kilometres of their traditional territory. The unanimous decision marked the first time in the history of Canada that Aboriginal title was declared.



GITANYOW ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

Site work on our new administration/governance/training building kicked off this spring! The original plan was to build next to the museum, but following an archaeological investigation, the site was moved to the current highway location (more on this below). Funds for the building were acquired through savings and mortgage, and completion is expected next summer.

Project Timeline

- * Summer 2023 - Start Infrastructure & Excavation
- * Winter 2024 - Interior Finishing
- * Spring 2024 - Exterior Finishing & Substantial Completion
- * Summer 2024 - Opening Celebration



*Elderberry seed deposits.

ANCESTRAL REMAINS FOUND

In 2021, an archaeological study was launched after possible cultural artifacts and human remains were found during site preparation for the initially proposed Gitanyow Administration Building.

Geophysical surveys using non-invasive Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), magnetometry surveys, and radiocarbon dating were conducted. Collectively, the investigation shows a long history of occupation, resource use, and ancestral burial in Gitanyow village that stretches back at least 4000 years.

Below are the detailed findings and interpretations.

Survey Area 1

Located to the north and south of the existing museum was found to have a high amount of subsurface disturbances which reflected buried archaeological features, such as hearths, pits and possibly burials.

Survey Area 2

Located on the lower terrace was found to have several linear subsurface features. The features are situated in a row, along the lower terrace overlooking the Kitwanga River and have been interpreted as the archaeological remains of plank houses from a much earlier occupation.

Smaller anomalies were also identified within Area 2, west of the linear depressions. These are interpreted as being associated with the linear features and may be cultural depressions indicative of pits, hearths, or burials, as seen elsewhere in the project area.

Machine-assisted geotechnical testing was conducted on the upper terrace, north of the Gitanyow Museum. Shortly after starting the excavation several archaeological features and ancestral remains were exposed. All work was immediately stopped and the geotechnical, archaeological, and development programs were put on hold. It was decided that the remains would be sampled for radiocarbon dating and carefully reburied in the original context and sediments in which they were identified.

Six samples were submitted for radiocarbon analysis. Samples were collected from the ancestral remains, as well as from the charcoal associated with the pit in which the remains were found, and from the other identified features.

* Results show the ancestral remains date to around 800 to 900 years old.

* Results show the charcoal associated with the deposit of elderberry seeds produced dates ranging from 4006 to 4245 years old.

There were anomalies next to the museum that could be more unmarked graves, but there was a lot of interference to the equipment from other modern materials now part of the site. The GHC are recommending no further buildings in this area.

The plateau below the museum was also assessed. Oral histories spoke about unmarked graves in this area due to first contact and the 1918 pandemic. There were several anomalies from the assessment strongly suggesting this to be true. However, it could not be confirmed without disturbing the sites with an archaeological dig, therefore the Chiefs chose not to disturb these areas.

This is why it is crucial for people to tell their children to respect these areas and not use ATVs and snowmobiles within these areas.



GITANYOW ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & GREEN ENERGY

Installation of high-speed pure fibre internet access to more than 500 households in Gitanyow is currently underway! The Algyax Anuuhlx (Talking Drums) project is being built and operated by the Meziadin Junction Limited Partnership, a company owned by our Nation.

Once complete, this infrastructure will ensure every community has better access to jobs, education, training, and health care.

The project expects to be finished by December 2023.



GITANYOW SALMON PROJECTIONS

The Gitanyow Fisheries Authority (GFA) is the technical arm of the Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs (GHC) and provides fisheries, wildlife and overall environmental expertise and services.

GFA conducts salmonid stock assessment, watershed restoration, environmental monitoring, fish and wildlife habitat assessment, environmental impact assessment, and research and planning, primarily within our Lax'yip.

The following salmon projections are summaries of GFA's 2023 forecasts, which vary by area:

Nass River

For 2023 the pre-season predictions are below average for Nass Sockeye and Chinook but above average return for Coho salmon. More specifically, we are expecting a total run of approximately 390,000 to 455,000 Nass Sockeye (the escapement goal for the Nass River is 200,000) before any fisheries are implemented. This compares to a long-term total run of 600,000.

However, returns to the Lax'yip should be good despite Alaskans not expecting a big Pink salmon fishery this year (many Nass Sockeye are harvested in this fishery).

Furthermore, the Canadian commercial harvest of Nass Sockeye in the approach waters and at the mouth of the Nass River is also expected to be modest this year given the recent trends that we have been seeing in those fisheries.

Despite all of this, we should see good returns of Sockeye to the Upper Nass and the Lax'yip allowing for FSC. Nass Chinook salmon are expected to be in fairly low abundance, but we do not expect to have to put any restrictions on FSC harvest this year to ensure enough spawners make it back to meet our escapement goals.

Lastly, there should be an abundance of Coho this year and no FSC restrictions are expected.

Skeena River

For 2023 the pre-season Skeena predictions are good for Sockeye (total run of 1.7M to 3.2M) but low for Chinook (total run of 21,000). Despite the low predicted Chinook returns, no restrictions on FSC harvest are expected this year because the returns should be above the minimum escapement threshold for the system.

There will likely be commercial and sport fisheries open for Sockeye, but reduced recreational Chinook opportunities in the ocean. The river will be closed to Chinook recreation fishers.





GITANYOW ELDERS HOUSING

The Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs Society is currently developing 14 units of affordable housing for Elders and families.

This exciting new project will be located across from the Gitanyow totem poles and will be a mix of one and two-bedroom units in a 2-story building. The homes will be durable and energy efficient, with four of the units designed to be accessible.

The concept captures a traditional longhouse style with wood features, Feast storage room, and display space for pdeek at the entrance of each door. Features also achieve a 'village' feeling in form and character, while maintaining a historic connection to the older buildings in the community.

The project will be owned and managed by the Gitanyow Housing Society. Through capital and operating support from BC Housing, affordable rents will be based on income. Elders will have priority in this building, and those with mobility challenges will have priority for the ground-floor units.

An info session and land designation referendum will be held in fall 2023.

*Please watch the digital walkthrough at the QR code below.





ANCESTRAL FIRE STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

Over the last year, the Gitanyow Lax'yip Guardians Program has been working on a Gitanyow Fire Stewardship Planning project, bringing together Gitanyow Chiefs and Wilp members to talk about cultural burning practices. We are planning out how fire can be used to enhance moose habitat, reclaim historic huckleberry patches, and protect cultural infrastructure from extreme wildfire.

Indigenous cultural burning was deemed illegal in BC for over 100 years, but we're now working with assistance from the BC Wildfire Service. Our first training burn was on April 4th, 2023, and our next is planned for fall.

The need for wildfire suppressors is high. Please contact Kevin Koch at kjk.gfa@gmail.com or Darlene Vegh at darlenevegh@gmail.com to learn how to get involved.



GITANYOW EDUCATION & TRAINING INSTITUTE

The Gitanyow Education & Training Institute (GETI) acts as our Human Resources department and collaborates with three organizations, Band, Health, and School. It is run by Beverley Russell, Cherilyn Gray, Colleen Martin, Sherri McLean, and Catherine Dworak.

The department provides training and skills development for Wilp members and community members, like assisting with resumes, cover letters, job applications, and more.

GETI recently conducted an 'Education Needs Assessment' to help educators identify, understand, and prioritize the needs that must be addressed to improve performance. Their findings will soon be presented and then implemented.

Next summer, GETI will be moving to the new Administration Building.

If you would like to learn about upcoming training initiatives, contact Beverley Russell at geti.projectmanager@gmail.com.



GHC SPONSORSHIPS

We proudly sponsor the following groups and community events:

Christmas Tree, Career Fair, Flying G's, U13 Guardians, Yow Storm, National Indigenous Day, Family Day, Gitwangak May Long Tournament, and the Grade 12 Graduates of each year, which includes both Gitanyow Wilp members and Band members.



MEZIADIN INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREA

Wilp Wii Litsxw invites you to join in the celebration and witnessing of the 2nd Anniversary of the establishment of the Meziadin Indigenous Protected Area on August 28, 2023.

This invite includes our neighbouring nations who joined us in August of 2021, including the: Nisga'a, Gitxsan, Wet'suwet'en, Tsimshian, and Tla'amin Nations. We also extend invitation to representatives of the Tahltan Nation, and other nations who have or are planning to establish their own Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas.

We continue to welcome representatives from the provincial, federal and local governments to join us as witnesses and partners in the protection of this important area. We also especially welcome our supporters and allies in the conservation sector.



GHC COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

Xbiisuunt Weh, Wilp Denimget, Lax Gibuu dim Gitwangak

My name is Chasity Daniels and I am the new Communications Coordinator for the Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs as of May 2023. I am looking forward to working for the Chiefs, their Wilp members, and the community members of Gitanyow. I have exciting plans for future newsletters and community events, and will soon launch a new GHC Instagram page.

If you have any questions or feedback, or know someone that should be added to our mailing list, please don't hesitate to contact me at ghc.communications2023@gmail.com.

T'oyaxsi' Niin