



HAIDA NATION: Backgrounder

The Haida Nation are the indigenous people of the North Pacific Islands called Haida Gwaii and the Kaiganiee Archipelago in Alaska.

Haida Gwaii

- The islands' forests have evolved since the last ice age 14,000 years ago. The stands are a mixed species with a wide range of ages, from seedlings to towering monarchs, to fallen decaying logs. The trees of Haida Gwaii are up to 1,200 years old and some measure over 20 feet in diameter.
- Temperate rainforests regulate the waters of a network of hundreds of salmon bearing streams emptying over inter-tidal estuaries and beaches into the sea. The islands are on the migration route of Pacific salmon runs as well as waterfowl and other birds.
- The waters surrounding Haida Gwaii make up one of the richest marine environments on the planet with an abundance of sea plants, all salmon species, halibut, cod and bass as well as crab, prawns, shellfishes and perhaps the largest living creature left on the planet, the living sponge reefs.
- The fossil records show Haida Gwaii imbedded in time, spanning the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous time.
- The lands sit on the outer edge of the continent nearly free of industrial exploration until the latter half of the 20th century.
- Canadian resource management regimes have shown little regard for the natural order of life or the people living on Haida Gwaii.

Haida Culture

Haida Culture has evolved at least since the last ice age when our people, free of the continental ice field knew *Kulga Jaad* (Ice Woman) who hovered in front of a local glacier. Our people also felt the wrath of two floods and saw the arrival of the first tree to Haida Gwaii.

Old-growth forests include monumental cedar trees, rightfully referred to as the cornerstone of Haida culture. A canoe requires an 800-year-old tree, while a totem pole requires a tree 400 or 500 years old. Second-growth forests do not yield the quality of tree needed and for the most part, they will be logged

before they are even half of a century old. The magnificent ones stand endangered, and could be wiped out in one short lifetime.

Haida Culture and Haida Gwaii in Peril

For the last 50 years, Canadian federal and provincial governments, together with corporations, have ignored the Haida's pleas to honour the land. Commercial enterprise has failed to respect the land causing depletion to resources.

- In the last 50 years, it is estimated that 80 billion cubic meters of timber have been taken from Haida Gwaii, worth over \$8 billion. 8,648 acres of forests are denuded each year, and 445,000 acres of the Islands' finest forests habitats have been degraded. Every year about two million cubic metres (850 million board feet) of raw logs are barged out of Haida Gwaii.
- There are about 300 primary salmon streams in Haida Gwaii, with about 5,000 smaller rivers, creeks and tributary streams that provide prime salmon habitat. At higher elevations, there are literally ten thousand streamlets that feed the salmon streams below. One quarter of the primary salmon streams is considered to have at least one population at risk of extinction.
- Our oceans have been harvested by outside interests to the point where some species are gone and many are on the verge of extinction (e.g. several species of salmon, abalone). Government and Industry are keen to explore the development of an offshore oil and gas industry..

The Haida Nation can claim some victories in protecting Haida Gwaii and upholding our rights to the land, but these victories pale in comparison to what has been lost.

The Haida have always lived on Haida Gwaii. We have never relinquished our legal title to Haida Gwaii. We have not negotiated a treaty with Canada, despite our efforts to work out our differences in a manner that provides real protection to Haida Gwaii.

We seek to honour our deep belief in the interconnectedness of all life forms, and the importance of living in harmony with the natural cycles of the seasons. We envision a future where the lands and oceans are managed according to nature's ability to produce. We see a future where our traditional ecological knowledge and principles are woven together with leading scientific opinions to create a model that is culturally, environmentally and economically sustainable.