



GWA'SALA-'NAKWAXDA'XW
NATIONS
TREATY OFFICE

Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nations: An Overview



Our Past, Present and Future

Cover Photos: (L-R)

Ba'as, a 'Nakwaxda'xw Village

Giga'ak, a Gwa'sala Village

Gwa'sala- 'Nakwaxda'xw School, Ya'yuma

Nusəns Sax Gwigilas *"The Way We Do Things"*

Background

The Gwa'sala and 'Nakwaxda'xw peoples traditionally existed as two separate tribes. The Gwa'sala people inhabited their territory centered in Smith Inlet and the surrounding Islands north of Cape Caution. This includes the Giga'ak (Takush), Wyclese, and Nekite areas. The 'Nakwaxda'xw people's territory included Seymour Inlet, the Deserter's Group, Ba'as (also known as Blunden Harbour), Sagwambala and the surrounding Islands. Our traditional Homelands are located on what is now known as British Columbia's mainland coast, across the from the northern tip of Vancouver Island.

In 1964, the Gwa'sala and 'Nakwaxda'xw tribes were forcibly relocated from their Homelands and amalgamated with each other, and with the Kwakiutl temporarily. They were moved to the Tsulquate Reserve, which is adjacent to Port Hardy, on the north coast of Vancouver Island.

The Gwa'sala and 'Nakwaxda'xw have our own language dialects: Gwa'cala and 'Na'kwala. These dialects are also referred to as **Bakwam'kala**.

Socio-Economic Demographics

Population

Approximately 1,100
registered members

Members who Reside On-Reserve

Approximately 56%

Members Who Live Away (Off-Reserve)

Approximately 44%

Average Age of Members

28 years (2016 Census)



Governance

The Gwa'sala - 'Nakwaxda'xw Nation's governance structure includes a Chief and eight Councillors elected using a custom elections regulation. The Chief and Councillors are elected using staggered elections to limit the number of new Councillors to 4 and 5, rather than a complete change of Council every three years. The Chief and Council seek and support input from Hereditary Leaders as well as Elder and Youth representatives.

The Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nations has always acknowledged its traditional governance systems, led by the **Xamagame' Gi'gigame'** and the **Gi'gigame'**, (Traditional Leadership) whose ongoing role is to safeguard and make decisions about our territories, resources, history, and the wellbeing of all members of their respective **'Ni'namima** (extended family unit).



Photo: Elders at GNN Treaty Meeting: late Sarah Hunt, late Violet Walkus and late Girlie George



Photo: Elders at GNN Treaty Meeting: late Joe Pielle, Gertie Walkus and Mary Henderson



Photo: Elementary School



Photo: Children and Family Health Centre

Administration

The GNN Administration provides many programs and services and currently employs approximately 100 staff in the following departments:

- Finance
- Housing
- Education
- Natural Resources
- Social Development
- Language and Culture
- Capital/Public Works
- Health
- Child and Family Services

Central community buildings operated and maintained by GNN are:

- K-7 Elementary School
- Administration Building
- Health Centre
- Elder's Centre
- Eke Me Xi Learning Centre (operated in partnership with School District 85)
- Community Recreation Centre
- Carving Shed
- Recycling Depot

The Future of

Gwa'sala – 'Nakwaxda'xw Nations

The impact of forced relocation and many other colonial acts including residential schools were devastating to GNN. However, we have since been rebuilding the Nation. An important initiative for GNN has been entering into treaty negotiations with the Province of BC and Canada.



Photo: GNN children - Yayuma

1993

The GNN entered into the BC Treaty Process in 1993 with a vision to reclaim our territory, culture and governance, following 'Nusəns Sax Gwigilas' (the way we do things). Repatriation of the Homelands is a foundational piece of this negotiation process.

Other notable Nation rebuilding initiatives include:

- Land and Resource Management Planning
- Financial Administration Law
- Comprehensive Community Plan
- Language Revitalization Planning
- Health Care Planning
- Child and Family Services Planning
- Governance Strategic Framework
- Draft Constitution
- Custom Election Code

Modern governance built on traditional values and practices is the vision that the Gwa'sala - 'Nakwaxda'xw Nations is working toward. A key highlight in the process to create that vision is the building of our Gukwdzi (Big House), which has been initiated with the carving of the posts and crossbeams. It is a deeply significant act as the Gukwdzi is a central institution of our governance. Naming ceremonies, coming of age ceremonies, healing ceremonies and the confirming and transfer of ownership, rights and responsibilities are all part of our Gukwdzi. The Gukwdzi is more than a building, it is our future. It represents modern governance built on traditional values and practices.



Photo: Kwa'lilas Hotel

Economic Development

As a result of the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) that was done with members in 2010, the K'awat'si Economic Development General Partner Corporation (KEDC) was created. The creation of the corporation was built to capitalize on a strong desire by the community to grow opportunities. Their mandate is to investigate and realize revenue, prosperity, skills and development to the community. The KEDC functions as a distinct entity, reporting to Chief and Council. KEDC is tasked with creating, operating and supporting businesses that will be profitable, environmentally sustainable and culturally significant, while simultaneously respecting the unique cultural values of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw people.

Recent activity showcases the acquisition and rebuilding of the Kwa'lilas Hotel and Conference Centre with 85 rooms as well as the acquisition of the Pier Side Landing Hotel with 55 rooms. Other activities include tourism, fisheries, forestry, construction, and transportation.



Photo: late Hereditary Chief Willie Seaweed, Ba'as, May 1955



Photo: People at Giga'ak (Takush) in early 60s prior to relocation to Tsulquate Reserve



Photo: Groundbreaking for our Gukwdzi (Bighouse).
Hereditary Chiefs: Walter Brown, Wade Charlie and Henry Seaweed



Photo: Hereditary Chief Willie Walkus speaking at Treaty Meeting

This booklet was created in collaboration with Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nations' Treaty staff and consultants along with 50th Parallel Public Relations. A special thank you to Sharlene Frank for her writing contributions and dedication.



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