



Working to Safeguard Ancestral Territories

For 26-year-old Dallas Nikal, protecting the environment and ensuring First Nations play a leadership role in managing natural resources in their ancestral territories is vital.

A member of the Wet'suwet'en Nation, Dallas is part of a First Nations team working on environmental projects in the Skeena region. Currently, these projects are focused on monitoring wetland health and function, fish habitat and watershed condition, moose habitat, Grizzly bear habitat and medicinal plants.

"We are dedicated to providing the highest quality information possible and helping our Nations manage and protect their resources," says Dallas. "This can only be achieved by government and First Nations working together as partners and the government is learning and respecting First Nations values."

Support for the work of Dallas and members of other First Nations in regions across northern B.C. is being provided through the BC Government's Environmental Stewardship Initiative (ESI).

"My goal is to work on Wet'suwet'en territory protecting the life and culture of our people,"

In addition to sitting on the Skeena region Scientific Technical Committee of 10 to 14 members, Dallas is also part of a smaller team that conducts water sampling of the upper Morice River using provincially-accepted monitoring methods. He is excited about the potential of what's being undertaken in the Skeena region and looks to the future with a strong sense of purpose and history.

"My goal is to work on Wet'suwet'en territory protecting the life and culture of our people," says Dallas. "Our stories about the land have always been an inspiration to me to protect what we have. I feel blessed that I'm able to be doing this work, not just

for my nation, but for the benefit of everyone in the Skeena region."



Graphic recording by Colleen Stevenson

Environmental Stewardship Initiative

The Environmental Stewardship Initiative (ESI) is an innovative form of collaboration and partnership between the Province, First Nations and industry designed to produce high-quality, accessible and trusted environmental information. Projects are being designed to focus on:

- Ecosystem assessment and monitoring;
- Ecosystem restoration and enhancement;
- Ecosystem research and knowledge exchange; and
- Stewardship education and training.

To date, representatives from approximately 30 First Nations, the natural gas industry, and the federal and provincial governments have participated in meetings and workshops to develop regional environmental stewardship projects and governance structures.

ESI working groups continue to implement demonstration projects and work on collaborative governance to ensure a positive environmental legacy in B.C.



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Current Projects

North Coast ESI Forum

The North Coast ESI forum is developing on-the-ground habitat restoration projects around the Douglas Channel and longer-term environmental monitoring and assessment in Prince Rupert harbor.

Northeast Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment Project

The Northeast Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment Project is a collaborative approach between seven Treaty 8 First Nations and the Province to assess the cumulative effects of natural resource development activities on Treaty 8 rights and to develop joint management recommendations.

Omineca ESI Demonstration Project

The Omineca ESI Demonstration Project is developing a cumulative effects assessment, management, and monitoring project with a focus on moose, fish, and forest biodiversity.

Skeena First Nations

Skeena First Nations have developed Nation specific projects that will focus monitoring on wetland health and function, fish habitat and watershed condition, moose habitat, Grizzly bear habitat, and medicinal plants. Methodology is being collaboratively developed to combine traditional knowledge and western science.



North Coast Region

In the North Coast region, significant progress has been made in identifying and defining opportunities related to ecosystem monitoring and assessment.

Six First Nations - Kitsumkalum, Kitselas, Metlakatla, Haisla, Gitxaala and Gitga’at - have come together in partnership to form the ESI North Coast Regional Stewardship Forum. This partnership has led to the development of two demonstration projects:

- ♦ The North Coast Ecosystem Restoration Project will identify and undertake restoration enhancement opportunities in the lower Nass, lower Skeena and Kitimat Watersheds and associated coastal marine areas. Projects will include bank stabilization, establish fish passages, watershed assessments and gathering and improving baseline data.
- ♦ The North Coast Cumulative Effects Demonstration Project will be conducted in the traditional territories of participating First Nations. Three key values identified at a workshop in Spring 2017 include salmon, access to resources, and aquatic habitat– estuary Work is underway on the aquatic habitat– estuary value with fieldwork commencing this summer. Plans will continue to be developed for implementing what has been learned and identifying areas where long term study is needed.

Moving Forward

North Coast ESI has received a second funding allocation of \$2 million from the B.C. government, to continue planning and implementing ESI projects.

Skeena Region

Summer and Fall 2017 is busy for the ESI team! Six Skeena First Nation Indigenous Stewardship Projects (ISPs) are proceeding to monitor key areas of interest including wetland health, fish habitat and watershed condition, moose habitat, Grizzly bear habitat, and medicinal plants.

Participating First Nations include: Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs, Gitxsan Nation, Lake Babine Nation, Moricetown Band, Nee Tahi Buhn Band, Office of the Wet’suwet’en (representing Wet’suwet’en Hereditary Chiefs), Skin Tyee Nation, and Wet’suwet’en First Nation.

Getting to where the Skeena ESI team is today has been no small feat and required a lot of communication, collaboration and consensus, but the hard work has only begun. Community engagement, training, data collection, analysis, and more are all on the 'to do' list for 2017. The team is building momentum and a strong working relationship.

Moving Forward

Skeena ESI has received a second funding allocation of \$2.9 million from the B.C. government, to continue planning and implementing ESI projects.

Omineca Region

The Omineca ESI Demonstration Project is changing the way B.C. and the Carrier Sekani First Nations (CSFNs) talk about land and resource stewardship issues. “The process is great for information sharing and building the level of trust. And we are finally working on cumulative effects” (Bev Boerson, Saikuz First Nation). The project team is building an understanding of the “current-state” of the CSFN’s territories and the broader Omineca region, including both natural and development-related disturbance.

Initial values to be examined in the first part of the demonstration project include moose and forest biodiversity. Next steps include more community and stakeholder engagement and exploration of management response options. Every step of the process is designed jointly between the Province and CSFN’s and is based on knowledge from the communities.

The project team funded an additional moose survey in the central/northern part of the CSFN territory. This compliments surveys in the south and west parts of the region and will result in an estimate of current moose numbers for the majority of the CSFN territory. CSFN experts participated in these helicopter surveys. Most counts are now complete and these new moose numbers will contribute to better understanding of moose populations in the CSFN area. “Moose is now a priority for collaborative action between the Nations and the Province and we are finally getting action” (Renel Mitchell, Tl’azt’en First Nation).

Moving Forward

Omineca has received a second funding allocation of \$2 million from the B.C. government to continue planning and implementing ESI projects.

Northeast Region

The Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment (RSEA) agreement between the Province and seven Treaty 8 First Nations (Blueberry River, Doig River, Halfway River, Prophet River, Saulteau and West Moberly First Nations, and McLeod Lake Indian Band) has laid the groundwork for ESI project development in the Northeast region.

The Province and the Nations have agreed to assess the cumulative effects of natural resource development activities on values associated with the practice of Treaty 8 rights. The project will identify the proposed study area near and overlaying the Montney shale gas basin and use the results of the assessment to inform and recommend management responses.

Moving Forward

The Northeast region has received a second funding allocation of \$5.3 million from the B.C. government to continue planning implementation on the RSEA project.

The team has completed a project work plan and terms of reference and established several working groups. Based on the values / key indicators identified for assessment identified to date (old forest, water, moose, and peaceful enjoyment). The team plans to focus on First Nations’ community involvement in the identification of areas of interest for inclusion in the project’s study area, data gathering, and scenario analysis.



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