

Nuxalk House of Smayusta



Ancestral Tide

Proposal to Continue Protection of Scw7cwlk Valley and other Sacred Sites within Nuxalk Nation Territory

By Ray Morton

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The Nuxalk Nation is a small indigenous community of about 1300 individuals. These people are from various locations within Nuxalk Territory. They amalgamated after the smallpox epidemic in 1862. This territory is also known as Bella Coola Valley, a steep sided valley within the coastal temperate rainforest ecosystem of the central coast of British Columbia. The Nuxalkmc (Nuxalk People) have traditionally depended on a diverse and healthy diet based on salmon, other seafood, root vegetables and greens, wild berries and game from their home territories. Like other small coastal communities, the Nuxalkmc have encountered major economic and social change over the past two hundred years, and they have, as a group, incurred a myriad of health problems related to loss of traditional foods and altered life styles.

Inherent strengths of traditional knowledge provide the basis for physical, emotional, spiritual and physiological health and well being. Today, as with many first nations, we are determined to continue to hold onto what is not exploited, and in some cases have been successful in holding corporations at bay. We have been fortunate to have allies with like minded values and have shared victories. The corporations have moved on and allies seek other assignments, however Nuxalk Territory is home to the Nuxalkmc.

In 1997 a young couple built a home, and reoccupied traditional territory. The driving force behind this endeavor was to stop the area from being logged. The area is now protected, but no longer occupied. Visits are made when a boat is available to take the people there. Most Ancestral homes and Spiritual Healing Areas are accessible only by boat. The people from other areas such as Qwalhna have a dream to return to their ancestral homes and to their spiritual healing areas. Traditional food and medicines are free of contaminants in these areas, because of their remoteness.

We will continue to oversee the protection of the Scw7cwlk Valley and other Sacred Areas by continued presence, carrying on with observing the threatened Queen Charlotte Goshawk; a study which was done by the TRRP (Temperate Rainforest Research Project) in 1996-98, the Marbled Murrelet, and will also observe the return of the Salmon and harvest traditionally.

Traditional ocean and river fish weirs will be constructed to practice the 'old' way of harvesting. Cedar bark and spruce roots will be also harvested for the construction of the river weirs. We will transport genuinely interested people to visit their ancestral homes; to check out the viability of relocating / reoccupying their traditional location. We will mill material required for building and or repairing or completing contemporary shelters for those who desire to stay to participate in this endeavor.

A pithouse will be rebuilt by youth interested in such a traditional construction. An unfinished one will be brought to completion. To teach hands on methods of harvesting and preparation of contaminant free traditional foods and medicines. (Local areas within Bella Coola are presently being studied for contaminants, therefore at this time inedible.) To educate, and harvest traditionally and ceremonially. To educate and transport people who want to use Spiritual Healing areas such as our Hot Springs. Carry out planning, monitoring and evaluation of project activities will be ongoing, verbally and by simple evaluation by participants and by visitors.

Participants in the Project

Ray Morton: Researcher for the Nuxalk Nation for Traditional Land Use. He is also an archeologist for the Nuxalk Nation, with much expertise of Nuxalk Traditional pithouses. He will return to the area to complete a pithouse, teaching hands on knowledge.

Lance Hans: Nuxalk youth leader in carving masks and totems using red and yellow cedar and alder. He will be teaching hands on carving of models of totems and ceremonial masks. The end of the season will see participants with a finished piece.

Melford Nelson: Teaches identification, harvest and preparation of traditional food plants and roots.

Joyce Webber: Traditional singer and mother will bring her knowledge of Nuxalk songs and dance. She will also teach working with cedar.

Melvina Mack: An elder in training will oversee the ceremonial aspect of the camp: drug and alcohol free, participant screening, and will include all participants in preparing evaluations, trouble shooting, and safety. She will be a part of the circle.

The base camp will be in Scw7cwlk, where projects began in 1997. The plan is to be out there in early March of 2007, earlier, weather permitting. It is a 5 hour boat ride to Scw7cwlk. We have access to an 32 foot ex gill netter, which will be our main source of transportation.

- Cedar Bark can be harvested at this time
- Cedar poles will also be harvested and peeled for completion of the pithouse
- Spruce roots will also be harvested
- Medicine barks will also be harvested
- Plots of root food will be sectioned and weeded for fall harvest
- Digging tools will be harvested
- Ongoing observation of Goshawks, Murrelets and Salmon will be documented
- Sites for fish weirs will be established and work begun and completed at seasons end
- Seasoned cedar bark worked and used for river fish weirs
- Sacred sites will be visited
- Ceremonies and traditional songs and dances will be practiced

The anticipated endeavors must be in time with the season and the tides, ever changing here on the coast of Nuxalk Territory. The goals will be met on time and observation and appreciation of this pristine valley for it to remain as is.