

Nuxalk Nation Government



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Nuxalk Traditional Structure

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"First of all; we acknowledge and recognize Tatau, the Creator through Manakays, the Great Spirit for all that is provided for us since the beginning of time and still is today."

In the Nuxalk Nation the social, religious, political, and economic aspects of life are interwoven, they are not considered as distinct subjects. Each Nuxalk's birthright is contained in a structure, which dictates their position under each of these subjects. This structure is unique to the Nuxalk nation and is considered law. The foundation for the laws comes from the Smayustas. The Smayustas are the origin stories of the Nuxalk Nation. These stories are the direct link to the Creator, and in turn it is their duty as a citizen to uphold the laws. When compared to the European structure the Smayustas are considered as the word of God in the same way the bible is. However the laws are not separate from the Smayustas, unlike the distinction existing between European churches and courts. This is because there is no man made law. Nuxalk laws are Natural laws from Manakays (God).

These laws and social positions are officially recognized and carried out in the Potlatch system. The Potlatch system is where important legal, political and economic decisions are made. It is also a special time for religious ceremonies. During the Potlatch the whole community comes together to witness these events. It is their presence that validates the decisions should discrepancies arise in the future. At the Potlatch, the Smayustas are passed on through oral traditions and customs, including; story telling, songs and dances. The Smayustas also contain information about special regalia and name giving ceremonies.

The regalia's significance is relayed in this Smayusta told by hereditary Chief Nuximlayc (Lawrence Pootlass). "In the beginning of time along the walls of Nusmata (Heaven) hung the

coats of the Grizzly Bear, the Raven, the Eagle and the Killer Whale. The first ancestors had a choice to what they wanted to ascend to Earth with. When they descended to Earth, the coats of the animals went back to Heaven. This is our direct link to Manakays (God).”

These animal symbols are still worn on the blankets of each Nuxalk. In wearing the regalia each Nuxalk is connected to the Creator and is recognized as citizen of the Nation. This citizenship ordains certain rights, however, the sacred responsibility it includes must be upheld. This responsibility is to Manakays and directs each citizen to Nuxalk Law by preserving traditional life ways. This includes the great task of protecting the land and animals within the territory entrusted to the Nuxalk when the first ancestors descended. There is also special regalia worn by certain members of the Nation such as the headdress worn by the Hereditary Chiefs. This regalia signifies their social and political status. Much the same as a King or Queen wears a crown in other Nations. The Chief's headdress indicates membership in the Society of Chiefs. According to Smayustas, this Society dates back to the time when the first Nuxalk was born. This ancient headdress and the leadership it represents is still recognized today by the Nuxalk Nation and other Nations.

A Nuxalk's most treasured possession are the names brought down from above (Heaven) by his ancestor in the beginning of time. Names embody similar rights and responsibilities to the regalia. It is through naming that a person becomes a citizen of the Nation. This naming ceremony is complete. In the Nuxalk law when a name is given at a Potlatch, the recipient must take on the obligation to Manakays to protect the Nuxalk Territory and traditions.

The names contain important information, which links the people to Manakays and the land. Names are passed down from one generation to the next, this is how ownership of land is passed on. Under Nuxalk law a name can certify ownership of land the same way land deeds do in European law. Skuclikwana (Lucy Mack) is a woman with such a name. The translation of Skuclikwana is “She who invites people to feast.” In her Smayusta, her grandparents told her it was explained that the name comes from two islands. She always knew that Nuxalknalus (King Island) was one of them and the other may be in the Queen Charlotte Islands. This name was not simply made up, its legal and literal meanings can be traced back to the beginning of time. This is her connection as a Nuxalk to the land and Manakays.

The land and animals are regarded as from the same order as the Nuxalkmc (Nuxalk People), because they were all created by the same power. To a Nuxalk nationhood is recognized as a sacred responsibility to Manakays to protect Nuxalk Territory and Tradition. This is why the Nuxalkmc have the God-given Right to exist peacefully on the land and to live under their own law. These rights and responsibilities are passed on through the ancient Potlatch system, which exists today.

For the future of our children, grandchildren and those yet to be born . . .

**Head Hereditary Chief Nuximlayc (Lawrence Pootlass)
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