



GITXSAN HEREDITARY CHIEFS PROHIBIT ALL RECREATIONAL AND SPORT FISHING IN 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HAZELTON, B.C., April 29, 2019 – Since September 2017, in a historic milestone for the Gitksan, 38 Hereditary Chiefs - dubbed the Huwilp Government - have been working together to protect the salmon habitat, as salmon are integral to the diet and culture of the indigenous peoples in the Skeena Watershed. The Chiefs are enforcing individual Indigenous rights to the fisheries and bringing awareness for the traditional Gitksan fisheries tenure (Anaat) along the Skeena River. Central to the Chiefs' working together, and building on the 2018 ban, is a recreational and sport fishing ban for all license/permit holders in the 2019 season.

“All persons holding recreational fishing permits and/or fish guiding licenses are no longer allowed to trespass in Gitksan territory. People need to know that when they fish here, they are trespassing in controlled territory,” says Brian Williams, Chair of Gigenix (Up River Chiefs).

An advisory committee called ‘Crisis Team’ has been created by the Chiefs to focus on discussing public access to fisheries tenure/Anaat for the year 2020. The committee’s mandate also includes an advisory role with stakeholders like BC and Canada and collaboration with other First Nations dealing with the salmon crisis, as part of the Skeena Nations Fish Forum Protocol.

The Crisis team is collaborating with the government to create a future process where all recreational fishers require permission from individual Chiefs to fish on the river. While the ban marks the beginning of an ambitious journey, the process fully respects the Daxgyet of the Simgiigyet and adheres to the tenets of the traditional system (Ayook, Adaakw and Lilliget).

“Our fish are in crisis and this is an ongoing situation with a track record that has been going downhill. We have to do something. The next step we talk about is to find a path to turn this around and banning recreational and sports fishers from fishing our traditional territory is a step in the right direction,” says Art Wilson (Wiimoulgxsw), Gitksan Hereditary Chief.

A communication platform that includes a website, newsletters and live streaming of meetings has been created to promote transparency around the decisions and actions of Huwilp Government. A full list of participating Chiefs is posted. While 38 Chiefs are currently participating, and the goal is to reflect all of the traditional Gitxsan Anaat.

Read more about the Huwilp Government at www.gitxsan.ca.

ABOUT THE GITXSAN NATION

The diverse Gitxsan Nation, in Northern BC, is made up of four clans and House Groups called Huwilp led by Simgiigyet who hold the governance authority (Daxgyet) . The traditional society is governed by a system of laws (Ayook) and oral histories (Adaakw), all carried out in feast hall (Lilliget). The Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en people made history and headlines in 1997 when, on appeal, together they sought the first comprehensive account of aboriginal rights and title in Canada in the Delgamuukw court decision. The Gitxsan Nation covers 33,000 sq km in Northwest BC; it is estimated that there are 14,000 people of Gitxsan heritage throughout the world.

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