

Kitsumkalum Governance

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Skeena River Fisheries Governance Document'

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Kitsumkalum (also referred to as Gitsm'geelm) is an original Tribe of the Tsimshian Nation. As such, Tsimshian Ayaawx (laws) both shape and guide the governance process. The government model described herein is the hereditary system of governance that has been intrinsic to Tsimshian culture and society, as opposed to the Kitsumkalum Indian Band Government model that fulfils contemporary Band administrative requirements under Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development Canada. The Kitsumkalum hereditary government is one that has been maintained through colonization and exists alongside new western forms of governance. Following Tsimshian governance through the Ayaawx is necessary for proper and long term management of all Kitsumkalum lands and resources, including the paramount fishery resource. This hereditary system of governance that links the Kitsumkalum people to the land works alongside Band departments dealing with lands and resources. Further, elders of Kitsumkalum have talked about the ancient concept of *Ganimx* (phonetic spelling) that describes a time when all nations were together and worked together to ensure the land and waterways, and therefore resources, were properly taken care of (Chief Don Roberts, 2017). This concept, together with *Gawagani* – the act of making peace- are guiding principles for Kitsumkalum with the goal of shared protocol agreements on the stewardship of the Skeena River Watershed.

Pteex



GANHADA



LAXSGIIK



LAXGIBUU



GISBUTWADA

Villages/communities, or Galts'ap are comprised of four Pteex (clans): the Laxsgiik (Eagle), the Laxgibuu (Wolf), the Ganhada (Raven) and the Gisbutwada (Blackfish). There can be one or more house group (Waap) in each Pteex. Tsimshian protocol through the Ayaawx dictates that individuals practice exogamy and marry outside of their Pteex. This system serves to connect different Pteex through marriage alliances, connect families throughout time, and allows for the sharing and distribution of land and water-based resources within a galts'ap and between various galts'ap. Membership in a Pteex requires individuals, despite their social standing within their hereditary unit, to take responsibility for their corresponding lands and resources in assisting with resource management and stewardship.

Waap

A Waap is referred to in English as a 'house group' and is a hereditary unit whose members are part of the same matriline, often referred to as the maternal bloodline. The Waap, also known as a corporate group, hold exclusive title to and are solely responsible for their territories, they are the communal identity of the Kitsumkalum tribe. Under traditional law the laxyuup may only be harvested and/or occupied by the Waap. Anyone who wanted to access those lands and are not part of that Waap must seek permission from Waap leadership. An exception can be made for the wilksibaa, or paternal side, as well as the related convention that a wife would have rights and privileges in her husband's territories and vice versa. In the end, the stewardship of and authority over territorial lands and resources rests upon the Waap leaders and members.

Membership

Descent is reckoned matrilineally and it is ones bloodline that determines ones Waap (house) and corresponding Pteex (clan) membership. Through matrilineal descent an individual inherits social identity, status and rights within the Waap. It is the bloodline that provides the guidelines for determining whom is next in line to be a Sm'ooyget (Chief), a Sigidimnak (matriarch) among other high Waap positions. The rules for succession are determined through the Ayaawx.

Wilnaat'aat

Wilnaat'aat describes a group of Waap of the same Pteex who trace their lineage to a common ancestor. Wilnaat'aat connections can traced back through migration stories, common names and common crests resulting from connections in the distant past. The concept of the wilnaat'aat is important to because it connects Waap through a shared Pteex to other Tsimshian Galt'sap and other house groups in other nations: the commonality being the Pteex. With the Wilnaat'aat comes rights, privileges and responsibilities, which can include the rights to and responsibility for resources and resource harvesting sites.

Assets

- Members of the Waap
- Laxyuup
- Rights and privileges for the paternal (wilksibaa)
- Rights and privileges of the Wilnaat'aat
- Tangible and intangible Waap property

Laxyuup

Members of the Waap are an asset because they form the corporate group itself and are necessary to the continued existence of the house and bloodline. Importantly, all members are responsible for ensuring their lands and resources of the Laxyuup are protected.

The Laxyuup refers to the core/traditional territories of the Waap, the associated resources and extends to include resource gathering sites that Waap members are responsible for upholding including those down the Skeena River and in long held Coastal areas. The Laxyuup is the economic, social, and spiritual foundation of the Tsimshian. Names are rooted in the land and it is the chiefly names that are passed down through the maternal bloodline that determine each subsequent steward of the Laxyuup resources such as traplines, berry picking areas, fishing sites, seaweed harvesting beaches, medicinal plant gathering sites, clam beaches, sites for raw materials for tool making, and everything else that provides for life and culture. The Laxyuup embodies Tsimshian ownership, stewardship of the environment, culture and heritage, and traditional ecological knowledge. This traditional ecological knowledge is important in its specialized knowledge of resource gathering techniques specific to a Laxyuup and/or resource site are passed down through the generations within a Waap.

Laxyuup are an example of tangible Waap property. Other physical Waap property includes regalia and crest poles. Intangible Waap property assets include the Waap Adaawx (true histories), songs, Dzepk (crests). The Adaawx:

1. Delineate migration of Waap and settlement on territorial lands: tells us who we are, where we belong, and how we belong
2. Provide guidance through stories and associated Ayaawx (laws) for how to govern the land and resources according to Tsimshian principles

Each Waap holds its own Adaawx and associated songs and Dzepk and these can extend to other associated waap who belong to the same Wilnaat'aał. The two attached Kitsumkalum Tribal Declarations clearly demonstrate our commitment to our Laxyuup.

The Feast Hall

The accumulation of resources is essential for holding feasts. Feasting is central in the governance of each galts'ap and of the Tsimshian as a whole. It is in the feast hall that a Waap carries out its business, including the giving and strengthening of names, shows its wealth through the distribution of resources to those witnessing the business taking place, where Adaawx are spoken, songs sung, and dzepek displayed. Land and resource management regimes are closely connected to the various social interactions and ideologies of the community through the feasting system.

Leadership

The responsibilities of leadership a Waap resides in the Sm'gyigyeyet (Cheifs; Singular Sm'ooyget) and Sigidim hanak (Matriarchs; singular Sigidimnak). Each Waap has a head Sm'ooyget and Sigidimnak who are recognized as leaders and final decision makers for their Waap after consultation with Waap members. Other Sm'ooyget within a Waap, lineage sub-chiefs or wing-chiefs, are included in important decision making.

Decision Making

Kitsumkalum protocol dictates that authority over decision making resides with Kitsumkalum Waap leadership: the Sm'gyigyeyet and Sigidim hanak. It is the responsibility of the leader of a Waap to settle disputes and to ensure the safety and security of Waap members and of the lands and resources that are necessary to sustain the Waap and to keep the Waap strong through the feast system. The caretaking of resources and resource use sites is necessary to social, cultural, spiritual and political life for Kitsumkalum. The responsibility for this lies with Waap leadership, but in a contemporary world it also requires protocols around consultative structure within the Band administrative departments.

Internal Consultation to Ensure Kitsumkalum Governance Structures

The duty to consult within the Kitsumkalum administration lies with departments dealing with any real or perceived alterations to lands and resources that fall within Kitsumkalum Laxyuup territories. For consultation and referrals purposes, if a referral comes through that department which might or will impact a Waap Laxyuup, the leadership of that Waap is contacted to alert them to potential changes to their territories, including compromised access to resources. It is the responsibility of leadership to take that information to Waap membership and to bring concerns back to the department head. In this way, hereditary leadership can be actively involved with decisions regarding their Laxyuup and aware of any changes to the lands and/or any administrative changes to the land.

For the community of Kitsumkalum today, the consultative boundary incorporates the resident Waap of the Kitsumkalum Tribe, their territories and key resource use and residential sites from the Kitsumkalum and Lakelse watersheds, down the Skeena and to the coast (see Attached map).

Kitsumkalum First Nation Leadership

Current resident Waap Sm'gyigyet and Sigidim hanak¹ of Kitsumkalum hold title throughout the Kitsumkalum Territory such as in the Kalum Valley, Lower Skeena River system and the Marine Coast as shown on the attached map. Chief names are the communal property of the tribe.

This summarizes the governance system followed by Kitsumkalum to work together amongst ourselves and with our neighbours and to co-manage the resources and systems that we share.

¹ Compiled by Office of the Gitksan Hereditary Chiefs for the Skeena River First Nations.