

# Gwa'ni Project - Plan Summary

## Introduction

This document summarizes the Gwa'ni Land Use Plan (LUP), a key deliverable being produced by 'Namgis First Nation ('Namgis) representatives of the Gwa'ni Project team. The Gwa'ni LUP introduces the plan area, roughly equivalent to the Nimpkish Valley, as well as 'Namgis as a Kwakwaka'wakw Nation. The word "Nimpkish" is an anglicized version of the name 'Namgis. As such, the plan area is, literally, the 'Namgis Valley. 'Namgis has always managed the forest resource within the Nation's territory, including timber and other tree and plant products. However, for 'Namgis, the most important resource within the Nimpkish Valley is salmon. The importance of salmon is evident within the 'Namgis origin story of Gwa'nalis, who chose to become a river so that his people would always be fed. This story is the source of 'Namgis name for the Nimpkish River, and it is the inspiration for the name of the Gwa'ni Project.

'Namgis objective to update land use planning over the Nation's territory long predates the Gwa'ni Project. The Gwa'ni LUP provides background for and intention of 'Namgis' duty to care for the land and resources of the Territory. 'Namgis have strongly advocated for increased focus on resource stewardship in its territory, and in 2016 authored a letter to the Province regarding the management of old growth forests, timber supply review (TSR), and land use planning. The 2016 letter prompted the Province to seek a mandate for a collaborative, modernized land use planning project between 'Namgis and BC: the Gwa'ni Project.

## Governance & Mandate

One of the first Modernized Land Use Planning projects in the Province, the Gwa'ni Project is a government to government (G2G) arrangement between British Columbia (the Province) and 'Namgis. It is a planning partnership based on the ideals of recognition and respect, consistent with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)*, the *B.C. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA)*, and in alignment with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) Calls to Action.

The Gwa'ni Project Team consists of a Technical Committee, which reports to a Steering Committee, which is then overseen by an Executive Committee. Each of these committees include representatives of 'Namgis and the Province.

Land use planning sets high-level direction to guide activities on portions of the land base that are outside municipal or federal jurisdiction, especially natural resource management. To remain effective, land use plans require periodic updates. Currently, the BC government is modernizing its approach to land use planning through the following key drivers:

- Reconciliation with Indigenous communities and the BC government's commitment to implement the DRIPA Action Plan

- Ensuring communities and stakeholders are engaged in land and resource planning
- A growing economy and increased demand on natural resources and the need to balance economic, environmental, social, and cultural objectives
- Increasing complexity as a result of climate change and factors that affect the land base, including species-at-risk management, wildfires, flooding, and drought
- Addressing cumulative effects on natural resource values

The structure and mandate of the Gwa'ni Project, was formalized by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed in January 2021. This MOU tasked 'Namgis and the Province to develop Consensus Recommendations for the purpose of achieving a set of objectives via Modernized Land Use Plan (MLUP) and other management options. Using MLUP or other management options, the Consensus Recommendations are intended to achieve the following objectives:

- To protect and manage the integrity of the ecosystems that sustain the lands, waters, resources, and wildlife of the Plan Area which 'Namgis relies on to exercise its Aboriginal Title and Rights
- To protect the integrity of areas and values that are culturally significant to 'Namgis
- To support the economic and social well-being of 'Namgis and other communities and stakeholders who use and rely on the resources contained in the plan area
- To inform, guide, and structure future discussions on the use of lands, resources, and wildlife in the Plan Area consistent with the DRIPA, s. 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and the intent of UNDRIP
- To reduce conflicts between 'Namgis and BC regarding the use of the lands, waters, resources, and wildlife in the plan area
- To increase clarity on the processes, policies, and structures that the G2G parties will use to achieve sustainable environmental management of lands, waters, resources, and wildlife
- To identify the strategies and resources needed to implement the MLUP and/or management options, which may include plans and strategies for operational decision-making processes

The Gwa'ni Project mandate addresses the increased concern for land use and forest ecosystems, as well as the need to advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. The resulting Consensus Recommendations are intended to refocus Nimpkish Valley land use direction on the health and connectivity of nature's systems, especially in relation to the Nimpkish River.

The Gwa'ni Project provided 'Namgis with an opportunity to express a vision for forest values that encompasses the duty to ensure that the cultural, environmental, and spiritual vitality of the waters, lands, and resources are protected and used sustainably for future generations of people, plants, and animals. This is a holistic vision supported by the Province that recognizes the connectivity of all planning values.

## Planning Framework

Concurrent with the work of the Gwa'ni Project Team, a parallel opportunity arose to advance plans about land use within portions of the Nimpkish Valley. In anticipation of amendments to BC's *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA), five pilot projects were initiated to proceed with the development of Forest Landscape Plans (FLPs). FLPs are intended to replace FRPA's existing Forest Stewardship Plans (FSP), as a tactical level plan to bridge land use direction between the higher-level land use plans, and more site-specific operational plans. FRPA now includes the following FLP objectives that must be considered in developing and approving these plans:

- (a) supporting the production and supply of timber in the forest landscape area;
- (b) supporting the protection and conservation of the environment;
- (c) managing the values placed on forest ecosystems by Indigenous peoples;
- (d) managing the values placed on forest ecosystems by local communities; and
- (e) preventing, mitigating, and adapting to impacts caused by significant disturbances to forests and forest health, including wildfire, insects, disease, and drought.

Tree Farm Licence (TFL) 37, held by Western Forest Products (Western) is an area-based forest tenure that overlaps with a large portion of the Gwa'ni plan area. Through the sponsorship of BC's Office of the Chief Forester, 'Namgis and Western developed a FLP Pilot Project Charter, for the purpose of developing a FLP and decision-making recommendations.

Together, the MLUP and the FLP Pilot, presented a unique opportunity to revisit and revise the structure of the land use planning framework over significant portions of 'Namgis Territory. Integration and consistency of the two planning initiatives benefitted from the commonality of 'Namgis representatives at both tables. This also allowed the messages heard through the MLUP's engagement to inform the direction of the FLP along with Gwa'ni Project. Had the concurrent TFL 37 FLP Pilot opportunity not been available to operationalize stewardship, the Gwa'ni Project recommendations would likely be different.

## Background & Plan Area

'Namgis owned and managed the resources of the Nimpkish Valley for millennia. The last two-hundred-fifty years brought abrupt changes, that were likely at one time unthinkable to 'Namgis leadership. The Gwa'ni LUP describes some of these changes in governance and land and resources use.

Forestry has long been a key economic driver in the plan area. By the early 1900's the first commercial timber operations had begun within the Nimpkish Valley. Like other locations along the coast, the evolving system of timber grants and tenures brought changes in ownership as logging entrepreneurs came and went. After a few decades a pattern of progressive clearcuts along the rich, lower valley bottoms, emerged. By the 1950's a railway system allowed access to forests further up the valley. Around the same time new types of forest tenure were amended into the *Forest Act* and Tree Farm Licence (TFL) 37 was created, also known as the Englewood Logging Division, now based in the community of Woss.

Pursuant to the 2003 *Forest Revitalization Act*, in 2005 portions of TFL 37 were returned to the Province to become a Timber Supply Block within the Pacific Timber Supply Area (TSA) to support the creation of BC Timber Sales (BCTS) and the provincial Market Pricing System. It also resulted in replaceable Forest Licence A92106 within TFL 37, held by ‘Namgis.

The later years of the twentieth century brought greater awareness of fish and aquatic values within management practices associated with logging. While the management of freshwater lies within Provincial jurisdiction, the management of wild Pacific salmon species is under federal control through Fisheries and Oceans Canada. ‘Namgis has been alarmed by the impacts to the valley’s salmon populations for generations and remains adamant to advance and lead ecosystem recovery. The Gwa’ni LUP details these efforts, including decades of salmonid enhancement work and the formation of the Nimpkish Resource Management Board.

Today most of the Nimpkish Valley is considered provincial land, making it available to the public for many purposes. BC natural resource legislation continues to evolve to reflect changing social expectations. Over the last quarter century, concerns about climate change and environmental impacts have increased, both at the global and regional scales. Provincial initiatives such as the [Old Growth Strategic Review](#) were developed to help address these concerns, among others.

The management of old-growth forest (>250 years old) is a critical issue which contributed to the establishment of the Gwa’ni Project. In 2004 the Province set [non-spatial objectives](#) for old growth by landscape unit, following the biodiversity guidance contained within the *Forest Practices Code*. Such targets consider Biogeoclimatic Ecosystem Classification and patterns of natural disturbance, but they also included adjustments meant to limit impacts to timber supply.

Within the plan area, the Upper Nimpkish Landscape Unit was assigned an intermediate biodiversity emphasis, and the Lower Nimpkish Landscape Unit received a low biodiversity emphasis. Approximately a year after the non-spatial order became effective, Biodiversity Chapters for both Nimpkish Landscape Units were released and a legal order established spatially identified Old Growth Management Areas (OGMAs) for the Nimpkish Valley. The non-spatial OGMA order and its associated Landscape Unit orders will continue to apply to the plan area for the purpose of meeting legal OGMA targets, regardless of the Gwa’ni Project’s recommendations relating to the recruitment and protection of late seral forests.

## Planning Outcomes

The Gwa’ni Project provided an opportunity for ‘Namgis to engage with its members and leadership building upon decades of internal work, including projects such as the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) and others, to identify and refine the vision and objectives for ‘Namgis territory. In addition, engagement with local communities, stakeholders, and government helped inform land use planning direction and confirm planning values. A separate [What We Heard Report \(2024\)](#) summarizes Gwa’ni Project public engagement efforts undertaken throughout the pre-planning and plan development phases of the project. Key themes identified through engagement include:

- Find balance among all the identified land use planning values;
- Ensure local input is a primary focus for land use planning and implementation;

- Maintain a sustainable, productive, land base for forest harvesting; and
- Recognize the forest values held by ‘Namgis.

The Gwa’ni Socio-economic and Environmental Assessment (SEEA) captures impacts for both a projected base case scenario, or status quo, as well as the plan case scenario that incorporates proposed land use changes. This assessment is a key component of land use planning to ensure benefits and impacts of proposed changes are understood.

The Gwa’ni LUP includes an overview of ‘Namgis traditional system of government and a brief introduction to traditional natural resource management prior to colonization by European settlers. Including the Indigenous perspective as a foundation of land use planning is one way that the Gwa’ni Project displays a contemporary approach in the era of DRIPA.

Through collaboration and community engagement, the Gwa’ni Project confirmed planning values in the plan area. As the Gwa’ni Project proceeded, cedar and climate resiliency and carbon were added to the [Gwa’ni Planning Values](#) to reflect a modernized approach that were incremental to those already legislated in BC.

The Gwa’ni Project considered these planning values within two broad categories, those of natural systems, and those of human uses. Nature’s values, such as biodiversity, water, and aquatic habitat contribute to the health of ecosystems. Human values relate to society’s experience with nature, such as recreation and timber. Through a holistic approach, when resource management supports thriving ecosystems, people and communities also benefit.

## Consensus Recommendations

During the Gwa’ni Project the joint technical team discussed a range of recommendations that were out of scope of the original mandate to amend VILUP, but were important to the ‘Namgis to achieve the Gwa’ni Land Use Vision. The parties agreed that as part of implementing the amendments to VILUP, ‘Namgis and the Province would continue working together to find pathways to advance these Consensus Recommendations. The exact mechanism for each to be advanced is subject to further development of an implementation plan, will require appropriate mandates being secured by ‘Namgis and the Province, and will involve further collaboration between ‘Namgis, the Province, other agencies, and partners. Although discussions on some of these recommendations have already commenced, it is expected that implementation will occur over several years.

### ***Remove the Vancouver Island Land Use Plan Higher-Level Plan Order Enhanced Forestry Zones, Special Management Zones, and General Management Zone from the Gwa’ni Plan Area***

VILUP, and its associated *Higher Level Plan Order* (HLPO), created three zones of resource use intensity. The General Management Zones (GMZ) are the medium level of resource use. GMZ 13, Woss-Vernon, overlaps a large portion of the plan area, however this GMZ is not specifically referenced in the VILUP Order. Instead, in this GMZ, land use direction relies on the non-legal Vancouver Island Summary Land Use Plan (VISLUP) and status quo of the relevant Provincial legislation. GMZ 7, one of two legal GMZs included in the VILUP HLPO, overlaps minor portions of the plan area.

The Special Management Zones (SMZ) are areas of lower intensity land use. These areas evolved from the regionally significant areas identified during the Commission on Resources and Environment (CORE) process which occurred between 1992 – 1996. The Low Intensity Area Review Committee (LIARC) was tasked with reviewing CORE’s recommendations which resulted in VILUP’s SMZ designations. The VILUP describes the intent for the SMZ as “*vanguard areas for implementing the principles of sustainable forest ecosystem management*” (page 33/210). The original SMZs were designed to link areas designated by BC’s Park Act, but some of these connections were modified to limit impacts to timber supply as per provincial policy of the day.

The Gwa’ni plan area overlaps with portions of four legal SMZs. The VILUP HLPO requires between one quarter and one third of the SMZ forested area to be comprised of forests between 80 and 120 years old. The Order also speaks to a variety of silvicultural systems and sets a 5-ha limit on clearcut systems, and it provides some guidance on using structural forest elements to promote biodiversity.

Several Enhanced Forestry Zones (EFZ), including EFZ 6, 11, 15, 19, 21, and 28, overlap minor portions of the plan area, however EFZ 10 (Nimkish) occupies the vast majority of it. The EFZ prioritizes timber values by allowing larger harvest openings, reduced green-up heights, and simplified regeneration prescriptions, as well as relaxed requirements relating to CWHxm2 old forest targets. The HLPO includes a provision regarding the cumulative adverse hydrological impacts on watersheds designated with significant water and fish values. However, since the Nimkish watershed never received such a designation, fish values within the Nimkish system were minimized compared to the value of timber, and observed declines of salmon populations persisted in the Nimkish Valley.

The Gwa’ni Project analyzed the existing VILUP zoning to consider if it addressed the forest vision as expressed by ‘Namgis and as confirmed during public engagement. The project team identified concerns that existing VILUP zonation did not adequately balance values in the plan area, and posed risks to fish habitat, biodiversity, riparian health, and landscape connectivity.

Through forest modeling and analysis, consideration was made towards a long-term vision of land use patterns within the Nimkish Valley. As early harvest patterns focused on progressive development through low elevation areas, today there is a need to restore these valley bottoms.

### ***Establish new legal Gwa’ni Special Management Zones***

The Gwa’ni Project provides an opportunity to address increasing concerns about observed changes to the Nimkish River system, partly attributed to past harvest patterns. A newly defined SMZ will shift the location of areas with lower intensity of land use to the highly productive, low elevation valley bottoms where natural and human values are concentrated. Anchoring the new SMZ to the Nimkish River, its main tributaries, and lakes prioritizes the recovery and maintenance of mature and old forests for the benefit of fish and aquatic habitat.

Division of the new SMZ into two subzones provides a transition of land use intensities and is an example of the effort made to balance recovery of older ecosystems with a desire for a predictable local forest economy. The suite of forest management tools that could support the achievement of the Gwa’ni SMZ objectives—such as recruitment and conservation areas, opening sizes, and

rotation length—are best suited to tactical-level plans, such as FLPs, to provide flexibility for adaptive management.

The maḱik (sockeye) portion of the SMZ is centered on the valley's major streams which connect its largest lakes and consist of what has historically been considered among the best sockeye salmon habitat in the world. The dza'waḱ (coho) portion of the SMZ covers the valley's primary tributaries, characterized by steeper terrain and a more recent harvest pattern.

***Major tenure holders and BCTS to collaborate with the 'Namgis First Nation to jointly create and manage a spatially defined, multiple-value Conservation Network within the Gwa'ni plan area***

The Gwa'ni Project recommends the identification of a spatially-defined Conservation Network as part of tactical-level planning where primary forest activity is constrained to the purpose of a Conservation Network polygon or as required for access, to provide connectivity between designated areas (e.g., parks, OGMAs) and the Gwa'ni SMZs. The Conservation Network, building upon the 1995 Biodiversity Guidebook's Forest Ecosystem Network (FEN), will significantly increase the recruitment and protection of old forest ecosystems while also conserving values such as cultural sites, cedar, and carbon storage and sequestration in support of climate resiliency. In the TFL 37 portion of the plan area, the FLP Pilot has proven to be a suitable tool for the design and implementation of a Conservation Network within an adaptive management framework.

***Develop an engagement framework between the 'Namgis First Nation and Ministry of Mining and Critical Minerals (MMCM) that is aligned with DRIPA***

Early in the process 'Namgis identified ongoing concerns with mineral exploration, its related authorizations, and First Nations engagement procedures. As a result, a No-Registration Reserve applied to the plan area was recommended.

In recognition of ongoing mineral tenure modernization initiatives, and until such frameworks are in place to ensure all mineral exploration within 'Namgis Territory is aligned with DRIPA and acquires 'Namgis consent, the Gwa'ni Project recommends the consideration of interim protection measures applicable to the mining sector for the plan area.

***Explore options for the future of the Agricultural Land Reserve as a zone within the Gwa'ni plan area.***

The Gwa'ni Project reviewed the appropriateness of areas designated in 1973 as Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). The ALR polygons exist within the plan area, are adjacent to areas with very high fish values, and have not yet been used for agricultural purposes. Further discussion with any registered landowners and the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) is required prior to making recommendations on the future of ALR polygons in the plan area.

***Remove the proposed lower and upper Nimpkish River protected areas from the Timber Harvesting Land Base (THLB) to restrict new forestry and other commercial developments***

Concurrent with the VILUP process three new provincial parks were established within the Nimpkish Valley, totalling five *Park Act* designations in the plan area.

Although all these parks protect beautiful areas with a range of significant values, none are easily accessible. Through engagement with 'Namgis and local communities the Gwa'ni Project heard desire for increasing the proportion of areas protected from logging and other types of resource extraction, and for locating these areas in sites that would be more accessible for human enjoyment. As such, two new areas, totalling approximately 1800 hectares, are proposed for protection from development. They are situated near the Nimpkish River estuary and north end of Vernon Lake, where they would enhance existing adjacent protected areas. Currently these two areas are referenced as proposed areas for protection, as the exact mechanism, extent, and land use designation will be determined through subsequent processes. Interim measures, such as Land Act section 17 designations, are being sought.

The lower Nimpkish proposed protected area provides additional protection to the lower River between the outflow of Nimpkish Lake and the Nimpkish Estuary, augmenting an existing Provincial Park and encompassing 'Namgis Reserves Ar-ce-wy-ee I.R. #4 & O-tsaw-las I.R.#5 and adjacent to Ches-la-kee I.R.#3.

The upper Nimpkish proposed protected area includes the existing Vernon Lake Recreation Site and is intended to allow for ecosystem and salmon habitat recovery along the Sebalhall River where it connects Vernon Lake to the Nimpkish River, including its confluence with Yookwa Creek. This proposed area is adjacent to the existing Nimpkish River Ecological Reserve.

### ***Explore carbon analysis in collaboration with 'Namgis to support potential carbon offset projects***

Today, carbon markets can provide an alternative to managing lands for resource extraction and offer an economic incentive to conserve lands. The Gwa'ni Project participants desire conditions that enable carbon offset projects in the newly proposed areas for conservation and the 'Namgis Conservation Network; both were conceptualized to increase carbon storage and sequestration additionality as compared to the status quo. Carbon project feasibility and process remain uncertain as the carbon economy and its policy framework evolve. It is essential to ensure that land use planning accommodates potential carbon projects.

In addition to having high concentrations of planning values, the proposed areas for conservation are comprised of very productive growing sites. Productive sites and long-term protection measures are key components of carbon offset project feasibility on public land.

### ***Revitalize and revise the existing collaborative management agreement (CMA) between 'Namgis and BC Parks***

The first of many BC Parks Collaborative Management Agreements (CMA) was enacted with 'Namgis in 2006. While the spirit of this agreement is positive, the outcomes derived from the CMA have been limited. As this agreement is dated, the Gwa'ni Project recommends a commitment to review and revitalize its content and structure.

### ***Ensure that use of pesticides only occurs in the plan area with 'Namgis consent***

'Namgis members recall the use of synthetic insecticide, specifically DDT which was sprayed over portions of the lower Nimpkish Valley in 1957 to treat spruce budworm. The documented dramatic

impacts on aquatic ecosystems have left ‘Namgis wary of all pesticides. Pesticide use remains a tool that must be used cautiously when there is no other option available to manage pests. Consequently, the Gwa’ni Project recommends that such treatments should only occur with ‘Namgis consent.

***Major Tenure Holders, BCTS and ‘Namgis First Nation to jointly create and manage a Cedar and Cultural Strategy within the Gwa’ni plan area.***

The importance of cedar to indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest is well recognized. Along the coast of BC, the redcedar tree is often referenced as “the tree of life”. In general, within the Nimpkish Valley redcedar grows at lower elevations and is replaced with yellow cedar as ecosystems transition into the submontane. In productive growing sites, given hundreds of years, cedar trees can obtain very large dimensions.

Large cedar logs are critical for certain cultural uses and have bequest and existence values for many. They are also commercially valuable and countless have been removed by previous logging. While cedar trees of all sizes are necessary for biodiversity, today there is uncertainty relating to remaining occurrence of very large cedars. Younger trees are ideal for cedar bark harvests, another cedar resource with continued importance to coastal first peoples.

In addition to cedar, many shrub and herbaceous plant species are culturally important for food, social, medicinal and ceremonial uses. Such plants are also recognized by contemporary land use plans, which provide management guidance to the forest industry.

In response to feedback from ‘Namgis membership, the Gwa’ni Project added “cedar” to the set of foundational planning values. The project’s recommendations include direction for all major forest tenure holders and BC Timber Sales operating within the plan area, to collaborate with ‘Namgis in the creation and management of a Cedar and Cultural Strategy. The essential components of this strategy include inventory, recruitment, harvest planning, regeneration and representation of a range of growing sites.

***Support ‘Namgis development of guidance for cultural and cedar strategies to inform licensees and proponents of activities in the territory***

A well-designed Cedar and Cultural Strategy can provide management direction for all forest plant species and requires involvement and guidance by ‘Namgis. Such strategies will require adaptive management to reflect learnings, new information, and changing conditions. To support the required Cedar and Cultural Strategy, the project recommends the development of guidance materials to inform tactical and operational planning within all resource sectors active in the plan area.

***Add bilingual signage to include Kwakwala place names to specific place names within ‘Namgis Territory***

Throughout the Nimpkish Valley, Kwakwala place names continue to be used, but through anglicization the origin of some of these words may have been forgotten. Creating bilingual English and Kwakwala signage is a visible step towards reconciliation and recognition of Kwakwala-speaking peoples place within the Nimpkish Valley. In the spirit of reconciliation and in recognition

of 'Namgis connection to the Nation's territory, the Gwa'ni Project recommends adding Kwakwaka place names to a selection of signage, as appropriate.

***Develop a task force focused on analysis of population, habitat, and management of healthy black-tailed deer populations across the 'Namgis First Nation Territory, and potentially across a larger regional level***

Concern for declining numbers of black-tailed deer is another topic which 'Namgis and north island residents raised through the Gwa'ni Project. Nimpkish Valley deer populations have been studied for over 50 years and through that time, a continual declining trend has been observed. Deer are a prey species and as such, they have a dynamic relationship with predator species such as cougar and wolves. Habitat availability of both prey and predator influence population cycles, and additional resources may be required to better understand the pressures within this system and address observed population declines.

The Gwa'ni Project recommends creation of a task force to analyse population, habitat, predators, and management of healthy black-tailed deer populations across the 'Namgis First Nation Territory, and potentially across a larger regional level.

***Form an implementation and monitoring committee to ensure that the intention of the Gwa'ni Project is being carried out and to monitor plan implementation progress and effectiveness***

Ensuring the success of the Gwa'ni Project's desired outcomes requires an implementation and monitoring committee tasked with evaluating the implementation of the Project's Consensus Recommendations and their effectiveness. Resourcing these important monitoring activities will require consideration by both 'Namgis and BC as to how they are implemented.

To ensure that the intention of the Gwa'ni Project is carried into future management decisions, the Gwa'ni Project recommends the creation of an implementation and monitoring committee, in the spirit of adaptive management.

***Subject to annual financial allocations, the Province will seek to provide capacity to 'Namgis to partner in monitoring activities and providing stewardship guidance for the Gwa'ni objectives***

Leveraging 'Namgis knowledge and on-the-ground monitoring capacity is a key tenet of the project. A commitment to ensuring dedicated funding for 'Namgis will support the Nation's co-leadership and participation regarding related on-the-ground monitoring and stewardship guidance. This will then provide information to support the desired adaptive management.

***Find appropriate mandates to support the Gwa'ni Project vision and applying the objectives to the remaining portions of 'Namgis Territory within the Vancouver Island Land Use Plan***

Significant portions of 'Namgis territory on Vancouver Island exist outside of the Gwa'ni plan area. These areas are also subject to VILUP and include landscape units where old growth management has yet to be spatially identified. There is a need to continue to modernize land use planning over these areas. The Gwa'ni Project recommends that an appropriate mandate is pursued to allow application of a similar management vision over the area of the adjacent Bonanza Landscape Unit.

## ***BC to apply a DRIPA approach to updating proponent resources for engagement with First Nations***

Both the Gwa'ni Project and the TFL 37 FLP Pilot are steps toward implementing a DRIPA approach relating to forest management within the plan area. Continued collaboration and application of DRIPA, including its Action Plan across all natural resource sectors will help advance a comprehensive vision for the stewardship of the Nimpkish Valley's resources beyond forestry.

The Gwa'ni Project recommends updating proponent resources for engagement with 'Namgis, such as the Building Relationships with First Nations: Respecting Rights and Doing Good Business; and Guide to Involving Proponents When Consulting First Nations guidance documents.

## **Conclusion**

Partnership in the Gwa'ni Project was an opportunity for 'Namgis to express elements of the Nation's Rights and Title within the Nimpkish Valley. As an early Modernized Land Use Planning process, it was a learning journey for all involved. Engagement with local communities and industry representatives not only ensured public input but also deepened understanding of 'Namgis interests and concerns.

While all parties entered the Gwa'ni Project with optimism, the complexity of addressing the full range of potential land uses in the Nimpkish Valley—such as forestry, tourism, and power generation—proved ambitious for a single initiative. Nevertheless, the project made significant strides. The greatest achievement of the Gwa'ni Project may be reaching agreement on the importance of restoring low-elevation areas to contain greater proportions of older forest and to stabilize critical fish habitats—important steps toward ecological resilience.

The current landscape is the result of generations of land use, and it will take time—perhaps decades—for the full benefits of the Gwa'ni Project and the TFL 37 FLP Pilot to become visible. Yet, the groundwork laid through this collaboration is already shaping a more sustainable future.

To implement the Consensus Recommendations, BC's Land Use Objectives Regulation (LUOR) for the purposes of FRPA will be used to remove VILUP HLPO zonation and replace it with the Gwa'ni Special Management Zones (SMZ). The SMZ objectives outlined in the Gwa'ni Land Use Objectives Order reflect modeled future conditions based on the cumulative stewardship strategies of the TFL 37 FLP Pilot. This modeling served as a valuable test case, demonstrating the potential outcomes and impacts of applying the shared vision of the Gwa'ni Project and FLP Pilot. Ongoing monitoring will be essential to track progress towards targets and guide adaptive management as needed.

Monitoring and adaptation are critical parts of resource management and are often overlooked. As elements of the Gwa'ni Project are evaluated and approved, the next phase will focus on implementation and assessment of effectiveness. Land use planning is a cycle that requires continued monitoring and adaptation to function successfully.

Ultimately, the Gwa'ni Project has advanced shared aspirations and laid a strong foundation for modernized land use planning in the Nimpkish Valley. 'Namgis is interested in exploring how the outcomes of this initiative might inform broader applications across its territory, offering a hopeful path forward for continued collaboration.