

Squamish Nation Stewardship

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What's happening?

The Squamish Nation has started work to develop their own plan for Howe Sound, which is the next step in painting a holistic vision for Squamish Nation territory. It will build on the land use plan for the upper watersheds, **Xay Temíxw** – Sacred Land, by incorporating plans for the marine environment and stream catchments to the mouth of Howe Sound.

The Squamish Nation has a vital, long-standing and future-looking interest in the environment of their traditional territory, which includes all of the islands in Howe Sound and the entire Squamish Valley and Howe Sound drainages. The Nation has used and occupied the various islands located in Howe Sound for all time and maintains rights and title over its entire territory.

A top priority of the Squamish Nation is to protect its rights and title. A priority for all Howe Sound communities is the practice of stewardship, which calls on current generations to care for the environment and manage resources sustainably on behalf of generations to come. This concept has always been integral to First Nations culture and way of life, and protecting rights and title is a modern manifestation of this stewardship ethic.

How does Squamish Nation governance work?¹

Under the mandate of the Squamish Nation membership, the Squamish Nation Chiefs and Council work to protect and enhance the quality of life of the **Skw̓w̓w̓ú7mesh Úxwumixw** (Squamish people and communities).

The Squamish Nation governance model is unique. Sixteen **Síyam̓** (Chiefs) remain from a long line of leaders, and current **Skw̓w̓w̓ú7mesh** generations can trace their connections to one or more of the strong leaders and speakers who signed the Almagamation on July 23, 1923. The Almagamation established the Squamish Nation Council of Hereditary Chiefs to conduct the affairs of the Squamish Nation and to guarantee good government and equality to all Squamish people. This model modified the traditional custom of consensus-based decision making through the long house.

The governance structure was further modified in 1981, shifting it from a hereditary system to a democratically elected system. Sixteen councillors are elected for four-year terms (plus an elected Band Manager). The sixteen councillors elect Co-Chairs of the Council instead of a Chief, and two political spokespersons.

The Department of the Squamish Government most relevant to Howe Sound stewardship is the Intergovernmental Relations, Natural Resources and Revenue (IRNR&R) department. The department's mission is "focused on building our nation and protecting

our land and resources. We support the needs of our people by creating opportunities for our membership and generating revenue. We improve the lives of our people through economic development, and by protecting and asserting Aboriginal Rights and Title."



Photo: Gary Fiegehen

“The Squamish word for gathering fish for food is *scháyilhen*. In the old days, the Squamish people used nearly everything in the water as a source of food, including kelp and seaweed, which supplemented their diet. Sea urchins and abalone were especially prized. Mussels, clams and oysters were smoked for winter consumption or eaten fresh. Trout and all five species of salmon were caught throughout the year. In March, Squamish fishers collected herring, the first fresh food source after a long winter of dried foods, followed by oolichan and smelt. They rendered oil from the oolichan as an important trade item. Specially trained hunters harvested seals and sea lions from *Swéspéps ta Kwenís*, a rocky outcrop off Gibsons Landing on the Sunshine Coast.”

Reproduced with permission from “Where Rivers, Mountains and People Meet”, Squamish Lí’wat Cultural Centre.

Why is it important?

The Squamish Nation's responsibility for the stewardship of Howe Sound includes protecting and restoring the environment while realizing benefits to the *Słwǰwú7mesh Úxwumixw* and defending their rights. To do this, they rely upon their cultural teachings and traditions. Their approach to their responsibilities is based upon the principles of respect, equality and harmony for all.

The Nation has its own established customs, laws and governance systems that apply in Howe Sound. Court decisions have increasingly recognized the authority that First Nations hold in their territories, and recent court settlements place the Squamish Nation in a position of power, with the ability to continue asserting title. The *Tsilhqot'in* Supreme Court decision² stated:

(p.8) The nature of Aboriginal title is that it confers on the group that holds it the exclusive right to decide how the land is used and the right to benefit from those uses, subject to the restriction that the uses must be consistent with the group nature of the interest and the enjoyment of the land by future generations.

D. [94] ... this is not merely a right of first refusal with respect to Crown land management or usage plans. Rather, it is the right to proactively use and manage the land.

First Nations may soon be able to directly apply plans, laws and policies for their territories, especially as the implications of the *Tsilhqot'in* decision come into play. Continuing affirmation of Aboriginal rights and title through treaty, litigation and other means will

further strengthen the Squamish Nations' ability to implement and enforce provisions resulting from its plans. Enforcement officers could include guardians and/or watchmen appointed by First Nations.



There are two categories of stories in Squamish tradition: accounts of events that happen in the physical world; and mythology or legend, stories that take place in the spiritual world. Physical-world accounts include stories of the Great Ice Ages or the Great Flood, for example, and Ancestors' accomplishments. Mythological stories feature animals, mountains and supernatural beings journeying through different realms. (Photo: Gary Fiegehen) Reproduced with permission from "Where Rivers, Mountains and People Meet", Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre.

What's the current state?

As court cases have been decided in favour of First Nations, there has been an evolving establishment of First Nations rights and title along with the duty to consult and accommodate. For example, the provincial and federal governments have a duty to consult with First Nations on any shoreline tenure applications to ensure that they do not significantly affect aboriginal or treaty rights. Accommodation of First Nations interests is not optional.

In the words of Councillor Chris Lewis: “All good things start at the top of a mountain, and flow their way into the sea — that is a teaching of our elders.” Squamish Nation interests and concerns for Howe Sound range from loss of access to resources to hopes for increased benefits, concerns about pressures on Howe Sound ecosystems, and opportunities and issues related to ecosystem recovery.

Management priorities from *Xay Temíxw*³ that can apply to water as well as the forest and wilderness of the Squamish traditional territory include:

- protecting the rights and interests of the Squamish people;
 - sustaining the traditional territory for our children’s children, looking ahead seven generations;
 - planning ahead instead of always reacting to problems and conflicts;
 - protecting heritage, traditional use, sacred and cultural sites;
 - providing opportunities for hunting, fishing and gathering;
 - repairing damage to the land and water, and reducing soil, water and air pollution;
- getting Squamish Nation members into the traditional territory for health, education, recreation, spiritual and cultural purposes, including camps for children and youth;
 - regulating tourism, and minimizing impacts of tourism and recreation, while increasing benefits to Squamish members (e.g., as guides in ecotourism); and,
 - getting Squamish members more involved in resource management.

While the Squamish Nation accepts its role as a steward of the environment, it has a right to economic viability — to realize economic benefit and well-being for the *Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw* from Howe Sound resources. This could include employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, impact-benefit agreements between the Squamish Nation and businesses, and revenue sharing agreements with Federal and Provincial Governments.

But economic development has to be sustainable. Chief Gibby Jacob has pointed out that the Squamish Nation fought the fight against polluters virtually alone for decades, “so in the end we have a lot invested in ensuring our environment stays as clean as can be.” In the words of Chief Ian Campbell,⁴ “We make it an article of faith to protect the valuable marine resources of the Squamish estuary and Howe Sound, both within our traditional territory. ... If our lands and waters are not protected LNG plants or other industrial operations simply won’t get built. Period.”

What's being done?

Squamish Nation is taking leadership in Howe Sound planning. The Squamish perspective is holistic — from height of land, across the Sound, to height of land. The plethora of non-First Nations jurisdictional divisions in Howe Sound is inconsistent with this. As a Squamish member commented,⁵ “All the different ministries have their own ways of protection and techniques. The municipalities also have their own land ethic. All these entities cut up the pie and then set out to looking after different pieces in different ways.”

Planning is a means for improving decision-making about the use of resources and space, and the Squamish Nation has an effective land use plan for the upper

forests and wilderness of their territory: **Xay Temíxw** — Sacred Land. A Howe Sound plan will take the next step in painting a holistic vision for Squamish Nation territory, building on **Xay Temíxw**. While Squamish territories extend beyond Howe Sound into the Salish Sea, Howe Sound is a good starting-point for marine planning. A goal of the Howe Sound Marine Use Plan is to identify areas in the marine environment to protect, as the Wild Spirit Places do, stemming from **Xay Temíxw**.

The Howe Sound Plan will be the Squamish Nation's foundational document for guiding Howe Sound management in a new, post-Tsilhqot'in era.



As stewards of the land, we are, in a way, the original environmentalists. And the gravity of that responsibility has been handed down from generation to generation. (Photo: Gary Fiegehen) Reproduced with permission from “Where Rivers, Mountains and People Meet”, Squamish Líl'wat Cultural Centre.

What can you do?

- Support a collective approach

The concerns and interests of Howe Sound communities beyond the Squamish Nation significantly overlap with those of Squamish Nation members and leadership. Local and regional governments, several organizations, and some federal and provincial government agencies are taking an increasing interest in a sustainable future for Howe Sound.

At the Howe Sound Aquatic Forum in April 2014, Chief Ian Campbell emphasized that the best approach to planning for Howe Sound involves good governance: “We must work collectively and ensure strong community and connectivity to reach our goals. It is important to recognize that many key issues are multidimensional. ... Open approaches are important. Continuity is important.” Chief Gibby Jacob noted that the Squamish Nation has a duty to engage in the issues that concern their territory and Nation. The

Squamish people will be here forever; they are not going anywhere. At the same time, finding a commonality of purpose and objectives with others is important. Councillor Chris Lewis summarized the challenge as being how to sustain **Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw** livelihoods as well as the livelihoods of neighbouring communities and still protect the ecosystem. He also pointed out that rights and title can be integral to the planning process without precluding cooperation with other governments. The Squamish Nation can drive the process at the same time as it works collaboratively with NGOs and local governments, being clear the plan is a Squamish Nation plan.

At a pragmatic level, Squamish Nation laws, federal laws and provincial laws are all relevant to plan implementation, and the limited capacity of any government makes a collective approach necessary.

Footnotes

¹Much of the information in this section comes from <http://www.squamish.net/about-us/governance/>

²On June 26, 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada granted declaration of aboriginal title to lands outside of a reserve for the first time in Canadian history. Decision accessed Nov 7, 2016. <http://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/14246/index.do?r=AAAAAQAFMzQ5ODYB#>

³See <http://www.squamish.net/about-us/our-land/xay-temixw-sacred-land-land-use-plan/>

⁴<http://www.squamish.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/SN-WoodfibreUpdate-Summary-03.pdf>

⁵During consultations for Xay Temixw.