

## Clean-up Ushers in New Era

Volunteers and staff worked over three days to clean up the shoreline near Grappler Creek.

Grappler Inlet is cleaner this week following a community event that saw two derelict boats and four truckloads of garbage removed from the beach near a former village site. Organized by Uu-a-thluk (Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council fisheries) and Huu-ay-aht First Nation with help from the Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre and West Coast Aquatic, the clean-up involved more than 25 volunteers and staff working over three days. It also marked a change for the site, which

had housed the debris for more than three decades.

“At one time there were ten families living here,” said Larry Johnson of the village known as Grappler Creek. “Everyone made a living fishing. That’s all there was.”

Johnson, who spent his childhood in one of the now empty houses, is the Director of Lands and Natural Resources for Huu-ay-aht First Nation. Growing up in Grappler Creek, he and much of his extended family spent their time on boats, fishing or learning how to fish.

His father, Kenny Johnson, taught several generations on a boat known as the *Northern Pacific*. That boat now sits half-submerged at the end of the inlet, near the mouth of Sugsaw Creek.

Before the clean up, three other derelict boats once owned by Huu-ay-aht fishermen joined the *Northern Pacific*, harsh reminders of a community unable to survive changes to the west coast fishery. Whether abandoned because of a lack of resources or a lack of opportunity, the boats tell a similar story. “When the *Northern Pacific* sank the first time, we brought it up and repaired what we could,” said Johnson, explaining how he

and his cousins had planned to re-caulk the hull when the marine weights became available.

At the time, Johnson’s father had already sold his fishing licence to one of the government buyback programs and had moved to Port Alberni. Most of the Grappler Creek families had been lured to Anacla decades earlier by the promise of new houses from hereditary chief Art Peters (Tliishin). For Johnson, the writing was on the wall.

“The docks were emptying. The ladies no longer went out in their day-boats and the men’s seasons were getting shorter.” Johnson and his cousins continued fishing where they could, taking opportunities in forestry and shingle bolt salvage.

“When the *Northern Pacific* sank a second time, it was the end of an era—and my father’s legacy.”

“I didn’t think when we arrived yesterday that it was possible. Now I can see it was.” —Clean-up volunteer

Today the *Northern Pacific* recalls a day when Grappler Inlet was rich with fish and shellfish, when children explored beaches and adults subsisted on what they caught, dug, or gathered from the shore and nearby waters. But for Johnson and everyone involved in the recent clean up, the boat and garbage removal signals movement back in the right direction.

“That’s what cleaning this place up is going to do—allow things to come back,” Johnson said, referring to the diversity of marine species that he and his family used to depend on.

He isn’t alone in his optimism. Others involved in the clean up remarked how the event had transformed the site and started

a process that was long overdue. Leaving the inlet on the third day, one volunteer looked back at the shoreline, now devoid of the debris and garbage that had marked it for so long. “I didn’t think when we arrived yesterday that it was possible. Now I can see that it was.”

*Northern Pacific* take note. Your turn is next.



Larry Johnson with children who took part in the clean-up. From left to right: Megan Netzer, Jaden Warner, and Molly Lane.

The two boats removed from Grappler Creek were the *Shannon Rose* belonging to Ha’wilth Art Peters and the *Three Stars* belonging to Tom Joe. Joe originally suggested the clean up and was on hand to help out with the event.

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The *Northern Pacific* (far left) is one of two remaining boats in Grappler Inlet following the clean-up.