

The Tsawalk Partnership Introduces New Tools

Inspired by the Nuu-chah-nulth philosophy of hishukish tsa'walk, (everything is one), the Tsawalk Partnership continues to ensure that Nuu-chah-nulth people and communities have a voice in coastal planning. Spearheaded by West Coast Aquatic (WCA) and supported by partners including Uu-a-thluk, the Tsawalk Partnership has been underway since 2009.

“Admittedly, many community members have become frustrated with ‘plans’ or ‘processes,’” says Ken Watts, Tsashaht member and community liaison project manager, “but the Tsawalk Partnership is different because it is community-driven and oriented towards the future of the West Coast.”

The first phase includes identifying local priorities, visions and values for the region. Na-a-qu-us workers—community liaison workers hired through a partnership between WCA and Uu-a-thluk—are conducting community surveys with elders, family members, and the public to identify common hopes and goals for the region. This is the first step in developing an ecosystem-based coastal plan that ensures healthy resources and economies.

WCA’s goal is unquestionably ambitious. In order to achieve coast-wide participation, the organization is engaging residents on an unprecedented scale. Its methods include traditional face-to-face interactions such as festivals, interviews, and workshops with groups like the Nashuk Youth Council. WCA has also launched a number of online tools.

Kelly Poirier, Tsawalk marketing director, points out: “digital tools and media allow for two-way communication, so we are not just giving information or presentations, but also receiving feedback in real time.”

Watts adds that digital tools help offset the remoteness of some Nuu-chah-nulth communities. “Our families—from children to elders—are relying more and more on technology and the internet to

find out information, to communicate, and to work for their people.”

The digital tools include a Facebook page, a Twitter feed, and a new website which, says Watts, “not only provides information, but also allows people to join and post comments or photos, make suggestions about projects, read blogs, watch videos, connect with other people, and learn about issues.” Members can also post their own videos, and find job and volunteer opportunities dedicated to the health of the region.

Poirier is most excited about community-created videos—a modern twist on traditional Nuu-chah-nulth storytelling culture. “People’s stories have a way of inspiring others to think about what they can do in their community,” she says, “...by providing examples of what is possible in big and small ways.”

One of the central concepts on the website is ‘Acts of Tsawalk.’ As Watts explains, “these are small everyday actions people are doing to improve the health of their local marine environment, build upon their community pride and culture, support training and economic opportunities, and advance good management.” Some Acts are geared towards individuals, while others are an opportunity for local groups to recruit volunteers.

In addition to the website, the Tsawalk Facebook page has 150 members who discuss regional marine issues. The Tsawalk Twitter feed sends updates whenever new content appears on the website, as well as announcements and interesting links. WCA is currently developing an email newsletter to keep people in touch with WCA and its partners’ activities.

The response to the website and online tools has been good, says Andrew Day, director of the Tsawalk Partnership. “People appreciate the local content and flavour. There are some amazing people and things happening in this area, which people locally and internationally can now appreciate more fully.” The breadth of topics on the website highlights the notion that, although the coastal plan will be one outcome of the initiative, its long-term goal is a shift in attitudes and awareness about the region. Bruce Lucas, Na-a-qu-us worker for the Hesquiaht Nation, sums this up succinctly: “Our livelihood depends on the resources from the ocean. Take care of the ocean, and the ocean will take care of you.”

To use WCA’s online tools, visit these links:
www.tsawalk.ca
twitter.com/TsawalkPartners
Log in to Facebook and search for ‘Tsawalk’

Large photo: Missy Charleson (Hesquiaht) and Vanessa Ratjen talk to Hesquiaht children about sea creatures as part of World Oceans Day celebrations. This event is an example of the sort of activity encouraged by—and shared through—the new Tsawalk website.

Right (top): a sign put up in Port Alberni by the Tsawalk Partnership to raise awareness about Oceans Day, **(middle):** Na-a-qu-us community liaison workers, **(bottom):** gathering information from the community about visions, values and priorities for the region.



Uu-a-thluk
 P.O. Box 1383
 Port Alberni, B.C.
 V9Y 7M2

Ph: 250.724.5757
 Fax: 250.724.2172
 info@uuathluk.ca

www.uuathluk.ca