

# HOME OR GLOBAL TREASURE?

## *Understanding Relationships between the Heiltsuk Nation and Environmentalists*

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**O**UR TERRITORY IS OUR HOME. It's our home, it's where we've lived our whole lives, it's what we're about. It's where we get our food. And I said [to the environmentalist], "Okay, how about I come to your house, I come unannounced, I walk in without knocking, and I start moving your furniture around and telling you where I think it best fits. You know, I slide your couch under your window or in front of your front door and whether you like it or not, that's where it stays." And she still totally missed the point of what respect meant ... And yet, in essence, that's what they continually do to us. (Heiltsuk leader)

Living in the Great Bear Rainforest, as we would call it, which is a source of conflict on its own ... is in some ways both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing for people who truly belong there, who truly have roots in such a magnificent part of the world. And it's such a rich and staggeringly beautiful and incredibly bountiful ecosystem, and to have such millennia-deep roots there is a real blessing for the communities. It's a curse because it is globally rare. It is one of the rarest forest ecosystem types on the planet. And there is global awareness of this area as being more than just the home of the Indigenous people, but truly a global treasure. And that's going to lead to outside interference and outside interest, and demands for protection, and demands on the communities around what they should and shouldn't be doing ... that's what comes with being the inheritors of a global treasure. (Environmental leader)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The environmental leader was non-Heiltsuk and not associated with the Heiltsuk community. The interview was undertaken as part of a case study of the Coastal First Nations Turning Point Initiative (Davis 2009).

## INTRODUCTION

“Home” or “global treasure”? The views expressed above represent divergent ways of understanding the world. Both leaders are concerned with creating a sustainable future in a particular territory in coastal British Columbia, but they are driven by different paradigms. Since the early 1990s, the goal of environmental groups to protect the “pristine wilderness” from resource extraction has brought them into relationship with First Nations on the West Coast of British Columbia and in other parts of Canada (such as the boreal forest). As Canadian and transnational companies seek trees, oil, gas, uranium, diamonds, and other resources highly valued in the global economy, they move into the homelands of Indigenous peoples, whose food sources, ceremonies, and identities are rooted in their traditional territories. Haida Gwaii, Clayoquot Sound, the Stein Valley, the Great Bear Rainforest, and Fish Lake are sites of mass mobilizations that have brought First Nations together with environmental and social justice groups in the BC context. From the wider Canadian context, Mississauga scholar Leanne Simpson observes: “From Grassy Narrows to Burnt Church, from Caledonia to Ardoch Algonquin First Nation and from Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug to the Lubicon, to name just a recent few, we have sought out supporters in Canadian society to assist us in our work ... Building relationships with our supporters has been a key strategy in our movement for change. But these relationships do not always come easily” (Simpson 2010, xiii).

In their struggles to protect their homelands, assert their sovereignty, and create jobs, Indigenous peoples have found common interests, sometimes with environmental groups and sometimes with resource companies. Krech (1999) challenges the common stereotype of “the ecological Indian,” dispelling the suggestion that the goals of First Nations perfectly parallel those of environmental groups. He offers numerous examples in which values and priorities come into conflict. As documented by Davis (2009), these relationships can be quite complex. Based on interviews with First Nations and environmental group leaders in a case study of the Coastal First Nations Turning Point Initiative (an alliance of First Nations in coastal British Columbia), I have reported elsewhere on the evolution of relationships between coastal First Nations and major environmental groups through the 1990s into the late 2000s. It was found that the relationships unfolded through a number of stages: confrontation, learning, alliance building, and shifting terrains. Such relationships were not only sites of intense

learning and transformation for the parties involved (particularly non-Indigenous people) but also represented a microcosm of the colonial relationships that exist in the wider society (Davis and Shpuniarsky 2010).<sup>2</sup>

This case study of the Heiltsuk First Nation builds on the case study of the Coastal First Nations Turning Point Initiative in three ways: (1) by looking at one First Nation's experience and perceptions of relationship building with environmental groups, (2) by showing how working relationships have evolved, and (3) by addressing the areas of tension that have surfaced. I offer this analysis to help inform the alliance-building efforts of all parties in achieving the self-determination of First Nations and in creating sustainable communities.

The Heiltsuk Nation has inhabited its traditional territories on the central coast of British Columbia since time immemorial.<sup>3</sup> The main village site of the Heiltsuk is Bella Bella on Campbell Island, located on what is called the "Inside Passage," a protected water route used by commercial and local marine traffic to avoid the rough waters of the outer Pacific Ocean. This is the largest regional centre in the area. By the turn of the twentieth century, epidemics had reduced the population from an estimated 20,000 before European contact to just over two hundred people (Heiltsuk Nation 2002). But the population has rebounded, with the current band numbering around 2,246 members (Heiltsuk College 2010). Just over 50 percent of band members live in urban centres, particularly Vancouver, Victoria, and Nanaimo, where there are more postsecondary education and job opportunities.

The Heiltsuk culture and economy have always been based on the abundance of fish, wildlife, and plant life found in Heiltsuk lands and waters. Heiltsuk homelands have never been surrendered, and no treaties have been signed with respect to Heiltsuk lands, waters, and resources. In addressing the McKenna-McBride Commission in 1913, Heiltsuk chief Bob Anderson strongly asserted Heiltsuk ownership of these territories: "The government have [sic] not bought any land from us so far as we know and we are simply lending this land to the government. We own it all. We will never change our mind in that respect and after we are dead, our children will hold the same ideas" (Heiltsuk Nation 2002, 15). His words would be prophetic. Nevertheless, apart

<sup>2</sup> Sharing their first-hand experiences, Smith and Sterritt (2010) also discuss the evolution of the Great Bear Rainforest Campaign and their First Nations-environmental group relationship over this time period.

<sup>3</sup> The traditional territories comprise about 35,735 square kilometres. To date, archaeological evidence indicates continuous habitation in traditional Heiltsuk territories for at least 9,700 years (Heiltsuk Nation 2002).

from twenty-three parcels that are designated as “Indian reserves” under the federal Indian Act, the Province of British Columbia has assumed control of and jurisdiction over the terrestrial resources of Heiltsuk traditional territories, calling them “Crown Lands.” The federal government controls marine resources and the seabeds of Heiltsuk traditional territories.

Since the early 1990s, environmental and conservation groups have had an increasing presence within the territories of the Heiltsuk Nation. Their work to protect the “pristine wilderness” has taken them into the traditional territories of the Heiltsuk Nation and neighbouring First Nations, which contain intact temperate rainforest and a high degree of biodiversity. In 1995, a coalition of environmental groups launched the Great Bear Rainforest Campaign, just one of several initiatives undertaken by environmental groups in traditional Heiltsuk territory. Inevitably, environmental groups encountered the original peoples of the territories – coastal First Nations.

Figure 1 shows traditional Heiltsuk territories<sup>4</sup> (Heiltsuk Nation 2002), indicating the Heiltsuk Nation’s location in relation to other First Nations on the Central and North Coasts. Figure 2 of the Great Bear Rainforest overlays the unceded traditional territories of coastal First Nations. Cronin (1995) and Braun (2002), among other scholars, have studied the cultural politics of the environment and the social construction of “wilderness” and “nature,” pointing out that “what we mean when we use the word ‘nature’ says as much about ourselves as about the things we label with that word” (Cronin 1995, 25). Challenging nature-culture dualism, Braun advances the concept of “social nature” to foreground the idea that what we understand to be “nature” is the product of specific epistemologies and discursive practices that reflect historical and contemporary relations of power. In looking at the social construction of the temperate rainforest, his concern is with “ongoing political struggles over what counts as nature and over whose voices should be heard in conflicts over land, resources, and environment” (Braun 2002, 20).

Certainly, the strategic move by environmentalists to create the Great Bear Rainforest as a “global treasure” in order to advance their goals has mobilized resistant discourses as First Nations, such as the Heiltsuk Nation, continue to articulate ownership and control over their traditional territories. In relation to environmental and conservation groups, the Heiltsuk Nation maintains a strong position that emphasizes its right

<sup>4</sup> More detailed maps can be found in the monograph *Bella Bella: A Season of Heiltsuk Art* by Martha Black. Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1997, 4-5.



Figure 1. Map showing the location of the Heiltsuk Nation. Map by Eric Leinberger.

to self-determination, self-sufficiency, and control over its territories and resources. Its position and perspectives have solidified over nearly two decades of environmental and conservation group activities in its traditional territories. At times, Heiltsuk-environmental group relationships have been confrontational; at other times, they have been collaborative.

In 2005, I approached the Heiltsuk Nation about documenting the evolution of Heiltsuk-environmental group relationships.<sup>5</sup> The research

<sup>5</sup> This study is part of a larger research project (the Alliances Project) whose purpose is to understand relationships between (1) Indigenous people and (2) social justice and environmental groups. It looks at why they choose to work together, what they accomplish, what works well in their relationships, what the tensions are, and what they learn from working together. This research was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Lynne Davis is a non-Indigenous researcher and faculty member in the Department of Indigenous Studies, Trent University. Since 1980, through professional and familial relationships, she has had an ongoing relationship with the Heiltsuk Nation.



Figure 2. Great Bear Rainforest - State of the Region (October 1, 2008). An overview of the region showing old growth vs. logged forest. This map is reprinted with permission from Rainforest Solutions, February 7, 2011.

documents the perspectives of the Heiltsuk regarding the dynamics of these relationships, as expressed by fifteen Heiltsuk community leaders in interviews conducted between July 2006 and July 2007. An ethics protocol was negotiated with the Heiltsuk Tribal Council, this being the recognized standard of ethics in Indigenous research both in Indigenous Studies and in the new Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethics (CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC 2010). The Heiltsuk agreed to help identify the leaders who had had the most experience in working directly with environmental or conservation groups. Because there are known differences of opinion in the community about these relationships, the sample was constructed to include the range of views that are known to exist. Both elected Band Council and Traditional leaders were included. Several non-Heiltsuk residents were also interviewed because of their direct involvement in the subject of the research. The interviews were analyzed for key themes, and these are what inform the analysis presented here. A document review complemented the analysis of the interviews. The completed case study was reviewed by the Heiltsuk Tribal Council to ensure that there had been no misunderstandings, and some minor factual changes were made based on feedback. The case study was then sent to those who had been interviewed in order to provide an opportunity for their comments and feedback. Again, this is in accord with contemporary ethical standards of Indigenous research. The case study was approved by the Heiltsuk Tribal Council in 2009.

I begin the case study by introducing the contemporary context of the Heiltsuk Nation and some of the strong forces affecting its ability to exercise its right to self-determination and self-sufficiency. Then, I outline some of the key relationships the Nation has had with environmental groups, focusing on three stories that illustrate very different experiences. Next, I present key Heiltsuk perspectives based on interviews with community leaders. For the most part, these illustrate a strong consensus regarding the overall direction of the Heiltsuk Nation. I then assess what brings the Heiltsuk and environmental groups together as they pursue their respective goals. And, finally, I consider the Heiltsuk Nation's position in relation to the global forces that affect its future.

## UNDER SIEGE: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT FROM THE 1990S

To understand Heiltsuk relationships with environmental and conservation groups, it is important to grasp the larger context of the Heiltsuk Nation in the 1990s and early in the new millennium. At least five major external forces were directly affecting the Heiltsuk: (1) the treaty process, (2) the collapse of the commercial fishing economy, (3) the land- and resource-use planning processes, (4) key decisions by the Supreme Court of Canada, and (5) the focus of environmental groups on the West Coast.<sup>6</sup>

In 1980, the Heiltsuk First Nation filed a statement of claim under the comprehensive claim process of the federal government, declaring its ownership of its traditional territories. After nearly a century of delay, the BC Treaty Process was launched in 1992, and the Heiltsuk First Nation became a part of a larger process to negotiate First Nations ownership and jurisdiction in relation to their homelands and citizens. A Heiltsuk treaty office was established, researchers were put under contract, a geographical information system unit was set up, and treaty negotiators were designated. Substantial foundational research related to history, culture, traditional land use, and resource inventories was reviewed or initiated as needed. The treaty process proved to be very frustrating, however, with the federal and provincial government negotiating teams having very limited mandates. In 2001, as a result of the poor prospects of concluding an agreement that it could accept, the Heiltsuk Nation decided to put the treaty process on hold.

At the same time the Province of British Columbia launched its province-wide land and resource planning process – a very provocative move since treaties are outstanding in most of British Columbia. It established working groups around the province, bringing together different levels of governments, industries (e.g., forestry), local stakeholders, and First Nations. The Central Coast Land and Resource Management Process (CCLRMP) was set up in 1996 to determine land use on the central coast, including traditional Heiltsuk territories. A number of those interviewed talked about their experiences with the CCLRMP. One of the Heiltsuk leaders interviewed commented:

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<sup>6</sup> Some of this contextual analysis was undertaken as part of a case study of Coastal First Nations (formerly, Coastal First Nations Turning Point Initiative) (Davis 2009). This case study includes interviews with First Nations leaders and environmental leaders who were engaged with Coastal First Nations.

We actually had the Chiefs come and do a dance in front of ... over ninety participants – different groups – at the LRMP. It was a huge gathering and that was one of my proudest moments. All our hereditary Chiefs came and they did their dance and we made a statement saying who we were and that we really didn't approve of their participation in determining the future of our lands. And, of course, they applauded but they just ignored us.

Another Heiltsuk leader explained:

The province told Council: ... "We're going to do this plan." Council said, "We don't want you to." And they said, "Well, you can come or not. We're going to do it if you're there or not." So basically we felt like we were compelled to take part so we could safeguard our rights ... And it was a stakeholder-based process, so everyone had equal say and it was consensus-based. Which sounds really good in theory but what it meant was ... undermining our majority and our territory ... but basically it was a way to shoehorn in industry, like logging companies and the big environmental groups. We had different relationships within that process, depending on who the group was, and somewhat the issue, and somewhat our political leadership.

As noted, initially the First Nations were acknowledged simply as one of several stakeholders at the table in mapping future land and resource use. This was unacceptable to the Heiltsuk as it ignored their ownership of the land. In 2001, as part of a new comprehensive agreement, the Province of British Columbia agreed that First Nations would outline their own land- and resource-use plans and that these would be harmonized through government-to-government negotiations as the provincial land-use plan was finalized. The CCLRMP's time frame was extended several times, and the work was finally concluded in time for the province to finalize its plan by 2006.

Land- and resource-use planning was particularly critical because of the collapse of the commercial fishing industry on the West Coast. The Heiltsuk Nation had been an active player in the commercial fishing industry throughout the twentieth century. Commercial fishing boats lined the local wharfs, and whole families participated in the industry either as direct fishers of salmon or as shore workers in the nearby canneries, particularly at Namu, a traditional Heiltsuk village site (Brown 1994).

By the early 1990s, few locally owned commercial fishboats remained. In one generation, the commercial fishing industry had changed substantially, resulting in high unemployment rates in Bella Bella. With a

fast-growing and young local population, Heiltsuk leaders were under substantial pressure to create new jobs that were both sustainable and well-paid. Logging appeared as an attractive alternative to fishing.

The Heiltsuk had an important breakthrough as a result of *R v. Gladstone* (1996). Although its season is very short, the herring spawn-on-kelp fishery produces a coveted product that is sold to the Japanese market. The Supreme Court of Canada confirmed that the Heiltsuk have an Aboriginal right, predating contact, to collect and sell this herring roe commercially. The herring roe fishery is highly regulated by the federal government, and this major court victory forced it to come to the table to deal with the Heiltsuk and their right to sell the roe commercially. Unfortunately, commercial overfishing of herring, under federal government stewardship, had resulted in heavy depletion of stocks.

Concurrent with the decline of the commercial fishing industry, forest companies on the West Coast were coming under intense pressure from environmentalists because of non-sustainable logging practices. Following massive civil disobedience actions in Clayoquot Sound, environmentalists initiated the Great Bear Rainforest Campaign in 1995.<sup>7</sup> As one environmental leader explained to me, while environmentalists had been preventing the clear-cutting of Clayoquot Sound, the forest companies had been moving elsewhere in British Columbia to clear-cut other old-growth forests. The forest industry was moving southward from the north and northward from the south to converge in the Central Coast. The shift in focus to coastal British Columbia brought environmentalists into relationships with the coastal First Nations, including the Heiltsuk Nation, as they tried to shape the land-use and economic decisions by making funds available for pilot projects and conservation-oriented economic alternatives. In 2001, in response to this solutions-oriented dialogue and the growing collaboration of Coastal First Nations, the provincial government agreed to a new framework for coastal planning and management. One component of this framework involved the adoption of an ecosystem-based management approach to land and resource management. It also included a three-year moratorium on logging in the Great Bear Rainforest, essentially freezing the prospects of logging. At this time, the Heiltsuk were negotiating the purchase of a forest licence from a major forest company.

The intense pressures of external parties were being felt not only by the Heiltsuk Nation but also by other First Nations on the West Coast.

<sup>7</sup> For more detailed discussion, see Smith and Sterritt (2010); Riddell (2005); and Shaw (2004).

In 2000, under the auspices of the David Suzuki Foundation, eight First Nations, including the Heiltsuk Nation, formed their own alliance. This was called the Turning Point Initiative and is now called Coastal First Nations.<sup>8</sup> Their decision to speak with one voice had immediate results. Governments, industry, and environmentalists understood the power of a coalition of coastal First Nations.

We're just one small nation, so if we tried to oppose the companies and the big environmental groups on our own, we wouldn't have gotten anywhere. But, when we banded together with each other and with some of the environmental groups that were more, I would say, realistic about how things in the world works on the Coast, we had a lot of power and strength. (Heiltsuk leader)

Coastal First Nations turned its attention to: supporting the development of First Nations land- and resource-use plans, identifying conservation-based economic opportunities for coastal communities, and negotiating a role for coastal First Nations in the future governance and management of their lands and resources. Today, the organization is independent and represents the voice of Coastal First Nations.

These major forces in the external environment set the stage for the relationship that would develop between the Heiltsuk and environmentalists. The Heiltsuk Nation was committing considerable resources towards the treaty process; the need for economic diversification had never been greater; and enormous external pressures were building on the Heiltsuk as outside parties, including the provincial government, multinational industry, and environmentalists, were all actively engaged in processes that would affect present and future generations of Heiltsuk people.

#### KEY RELATIONSHIPS WITH ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSERVATION GROUPS

The Heiltsuk Nation has had a wide range of relationships with environmental and conservation organizations. These diverse relationships could be characterized along a spectrum from confrontational, to co-existence, to shorter- and longer-term collaborative partnerships. Each kind of relationship comes with a set of complexities.

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<sup>8</sup> A discussion of Coastal First Nations and the evolution of relationships between large environmental groups and First Nations can be found in Davis (2009).

The organizations that were spoken about most prominently in the interviews with Heiltsuk leaders were Ecotrust Canada, the David Suzuki Foundation, the Sierra Club of BC, the Raincoast Conservation Society (now two organizations: [1] Pacific Wild and [2] Raincoast Conservation Foundation), Greenpeace, and Living Oceans. Rainforest Solutions (Greenpeace, Forest Ethics, Sierra Club of BC, and Rainforest Action Network), the main initiator of the Great Bear Rainforest Campaign and the coalition that formed a relationship with Coastal First Nations Turning Point Initiative, was also mentioned by some. In interviews, one activist organization was repeatedly referenced as an environmental group that has had limited contact with the Heiltsuk and was perceived to use divide-and-conquer tactics. Round River Conservation Studies, a research-oriented environmental group, was also noted. The Nature Conservancy of Canada and its US counterpart, along with the Wilburforce Foundation, are other environmental groups that have been active in Heiltsuk traditional territories.

Those interviewed made a strong distinction between (1) activist groups and (2) organizations that are more professionally based. In the words of one Heiltsuk leader: “We didn’t want to have a relationship with activists. I think what we wanted was a relationship with somebody who could help us develop a good conservation plan.” In interviews, people generally expressed a level of discomfort with environmentalists who pursued direct action tactics. They preferred to work with environmentalists who provided financial or technical resources to assist the Heiltsuk in pursuing their own agenda.

The science-oriented environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS), such as the former Raincoast Conservation Society and Round River out of Utah, tend to hire local individuals to work on their research projects. Other organizations, particularly Ecotrust Canada, work directly with the Heiltsuk Tribal Council on projects that have been negotiated. Heiltsuk perspectives on relationships with Ecotrust Canada are discussed in later sections.

It becomes clear from various stories told by those interviewed that organizations differ in their approach to working with the Heiltsuk. What emerges is a picture of antagonistic and collaborative relationships. Three stories, the details of which are based on different interviews, illustrate how different approaches are tied to different outcomes.

### *The King Island Story*

In 1997, some traditional chiefs of the Nuxalk Nation, together with four environmental groups (Forest Action Network, Greenpeace, Bear Watch, and Peoples' Action for Threatened Habitat), set up a blockade to protest the logging of King Island. The action became the subject of intense media attention in British Columbia and internationally. The Heiltsuk consider King Island to be part of their traditional territory; however, the Nuxalk Chiefs also claim strong historical and spiritual connection to this territory. The Heiltsuk were not consulted by the environmental groups or by the Nuxalk Chiefs prior to the blockade. Heiltsuk Chiefs went to King Island and asked the protesters to leave. The protesters declined this request but left after twenty-four days, when arrests began. Following this incident, the Heiltsuk Tribal Council banned environmentalists from the community for a period of time. The perceived interference and breach of protocol on King Island has remained a vivid memory among the Heiltsuk.

### *The Ocean Falls Story*

Ocean Falls is a traditional Heiltsuk village site. A pulp-and-paper mill operated on the site from early in the twentieth century until it closed in 1980. In late 2001, the provincial government leased the site to Omega, a subsidiary of a large multinational fish farming corporation, to build a salmon hatchery. Omega was expected to produce at least 10 million Atlantic salmon smolt for the fish farming industry on the West Coast, what one person interviewed called "a superstore for fish farms." Construction began in late 2002.

The Heiltsuk have opposed open-pen fish farming because it results in pollution, antibiotic wastes, sea lice contamination, and the potential escape of fish farm stock, all of which pose dangers to the survival of West Coast wild salmon stock. This position is in accord with that of many environmentalists who oppose fish farming.

In collaboration with the Heiltsuk Chiefs (Hemas), Raincoast Conservation was a key player in organizing an international protest against the Omega fish farm project at Ocean Falls, mobilizing local and international First Nations, commercial fishers, and environmental groups from California to Alaska. They converged on the coast on 25 October 2002, protesting the construction and opening of the plant. The Heiltsuk Hemas and community members participated in this action, arriving in their regalia. This event attracted a strong international media presence. By all accounts, it was a day of great dignity and

peaceful protest. However, Heiltsuk leaders noted that members of one of the environmental groups who were also demonstrating took action to destroy a wall of the plant that had just been built. This destruction of property was disturbing to the Heiltsuk Chiefs: they considered it to be inappropriate and distanced themselves from it.

### *The Koeye Story*

Traditionally, the Heiltsuk occupied a large village site at the mouth of the Koeye River; however, outside interests have controlled this territory for some time. Private investors purchased the site and established a lodge there. The property was sold in 1996 and the lodge was upgraded. At the same time, the territory was slated for logging by Weyerhaeuser, who held the Tree Farm Licence in that area.

At that time, the Heiltsuk social development program wanted to reconnect Heiltsuk youth with the land. In one generation, traditional harvesting practices had declined alarmingly. As a result, traditional knowledge, skills, and stories were not reaching the next generation, which was not gaining experience of being on the land and the ocean. Moreover, there were strong indicators of social disruption among the youth, including substance abuse. The social development programming began with the plan to construct a number of cabins throughout the traditional territories and to use them as the basis of youth on-the-land activities. Koeye became one of the sites of interest for a youth camp.

For the Heiltsuk, Koeye has deep cultural and spiritual significance; for environmental groups, it has a “pristine” watershed. The Raincoast Conservation Society played an early role in working with the Heiltsuk to try to fundraise to purchase Koeye. After deciding that local fundraising would be insufficient, potential outside funders were considered and Ecotrust Canada was contacted. Through their connections, contact was made with US philanthropists Peter and Warren Buffet, who agreed to provide about \$1 million to make the purchase. The story was told in this way:

We realized that if we wanted to get to the big guys, we needed to go through somebody like Ecotrust who was so well connected. So, we went to see Ian [Gill of Ecotrust] and arranged a meeting with Warren Buffet’s son Peter because he’d already been to Koeye. And we said, “Well, Peter will help us get to the right people.” Instead he just wrote us a cheque for \$1.3 million and bought the thing for us, on our behalf. Well, we would never have gotten to Peter without our link to Ecotrust. That just never would have happened. We wouldn’t even

have been able to get a meeting. So, there is huge opportunity there.  
(Community leader)

In 2001, the deal resulted in the purchase of about 30 hectares (seventy-four acres), including the lodge. The adjacent parcel was purchased by the Nature Conservancy. The summer camp operates at the site, and a traditional big house has been constructed to establish a permanent cultural presence. Ownership of the site is held by the Qqs Projects Society, a registered charitable organization that focuses on social programming. Today the property has a master plan for future development.

The operations of the property and programs require an annual budget of about \$300,000 (2006), which flows through the Qqs Project Society, not the Heiltsuk Tribal Council. To cover these costs, Qqs has implemented an innovative strategy for attracting funding from both local organizations (e.g., the Heiltsuk Social Development Department, the RCMP, and Heiltsuk College) and a wide range of external sponsors, including foundations and environmental groups. Summer camps for youth and families are run for a week at a time throughout the summer. Each one is theme-specific, and the funding raised is related to the camp's theme. For example, camp themes have included wolves, salmon, grizzly bears, Heiltsuk language, and family healing. This funding strategy has drawn many sponsors, including the Raincoast Conservation Society, Greenpeace, Forest Ethics, and, the Sierra Club. Funds have come from the Muller Foundation, the Kennedy brothers, and the Rockefellers (channelled through the various environmental groups that they support).

Collectively, the foregoing three stories tell us about the diverse nature of the Heiltsuk Nation's encounters with environmental and conservation groups. At times, environmentalists have been banned from the community; at other times, there have been collaborative relations. There have been confrontations and there have been partnerships. Some joint projects have been considered beneficial, others not so much. Each relationship had its own unique challenges.

#### KEY HEILTSUK PERSPECTIVES

Is it possible to speak about a "Heiltsuk perspective" regarding environmental and conservation groups? My research suggests that there is a very strong consensus in the Heiltsuk Nation regarding Heiltsuk priorities and the place of environmental and conservation groups. First, the Heiltsuk know that the territory has survived in its current state of

richness because of their historical cultural practices as conservationists. Second, creating good jobs is a top priority and must be balanced with the importance of using the land and sea in a way that will ensure the survival of present and future generations. Third, it is the Heiltsuk who must exercise control of and self-determination within their homelands; others can only operate in their territory with their permission and free consent. These three perspectives, which were widely shared by those who were interviewed, are discussed below.

### *Heiltsuk as Conservationists*

The way our ancestors managed our resources, prior to contact, we did it conservatively. I've heard many stories about our old people really talking about not over-fishing or over-harvesting any one particular system. And when there were less resources available – that's why they had these relationships with other tribes – where there was sharing and a protocol to going to another area within the territories to take resources. So, that's always been there. (Heiltsuk leader)

The Heiltsuk have lived in Heiltsuk territories for countless generations. To sustain this relationship, they have lived with respect for the ocean, the rivers, the trees, the animals, and all life within Heiltsuk territory. Virtually everyone who was interviewed pointed to traditional Heiltsuk practices as having been environmentally sustainable over thousands of years. They spoke with pride about this rich tradition of living in balance with their environment. The Heiltsuk have used plants, forests, and the sea as a source of livelihood and social well-being. They have done this with moderation, thus ensuring the continuity of people and other life forms. The proof is the living, unique, biodiverse environment that survives today.

Many people said that environmentalists are arrogant and self-righteous. They do not understand that sound environmental practices were woven into the culture and traditions of Heiltsuk life. Grandparents and parents passed this knowledge on to their children and grandchildren through day-to-day learning and interactions. Many of these practices still survive, though some feel that they have been eroded in recent years. Both women and men talked about some of the lessons they had been taught as children.

I remember my mother, going out berry picking with her, and [her] saying, "Okay, that's enough now. You have to leave some for the birds

for next year.” And also being told to break off branches so that they could propagate better, for berries. (Heiltsuk female leader)

I always think about when I was a young boy and was going out to a trapline with my great-grandfather, and I used to ask him, “Why don’t we just cut down these trees and build a log cabin, and there’s so many small trees we could probably cut them all down.” And he says, “Well, if you cut all the trees down, the water will just run off and the mud will go with it, and all you’ll have is rock, so what good is trying to build a log house on just rock, on wood? You have to be careful in what you do, and besides, the trees give shade to the salal berries and everything else that grows underneath it, and for the deer and everything and for the otter and that to survive, they need those trees around.” (Heiltsuk male leader)

Heiltsuk traditional ecological knowledge is a finely honed body of operational knowledge that has developed through countless generations. Those interviewed offered examples of how Heiltsuk knowledge of the local territory sometimes challenges the scientific theories of the “experts,” whose claims may sometimes be quite amusing to the Heiltsuk. For example, one Heiltsuk leader explained: “Because we live here, we were brought up here, [while] they have a learned understanding of what should be happening. But it doesn’t always happen the way the books say it’s supposed to. Nine times out of ten it will, but there’s certain years and certain times of the year, things won’t happen the way it’s supposed to, and we get indicators of that.”

The failure of environmental groups to recognize Heiltsuk traditions, knowledge, and ethics is a cause of considerable resentment among the Heiltsuk. Environmentalists come across as assuming a moral superiority that displays an ignorance of Heiltsuk culture and history. As one Heiltsuk leader said: “My main issue with them is their inflexibility. They really think they know a lot more than you do. They may, but they should listen, at least, to what you have to say. And they’re not prepared to, and I know that from my experiences with them.”

Some Heiltsuk perceive environmentalists to be hypocritical. One Heiltsuk leader noted: “It’s ironic when they make applications through these philanthropists that they don’t realize where the money really came from ... It came from things like forestry; it came from things like mining.”

Those interviewed expressed confidence that the Heiltsuk are more effective managers of the environment than are outsiders. One Heiltsuk

leader declared: “I think we’re the only ones that are capable of doing something ... comprehensive ... because we have the pulse. We know what we’re dealing with. We live here twelve months a year.”

### *Balancing the Environment and Jobs*

One of the most critical issues for Bella Bella at this moment in history is creating jobs for community members. The rapid decline of the commercial fishing industry and the depletion of salmon stocks over the past twenty years have had a deep and serious impact on the community both economically and socially. Families in Bella Bella who were actively involved in the fishing industry can no longer depend on this income, which, for many years, rewarded people well.

You’re looking at 85 percent unemployment at the greatest part of the year. You need to put people to work. And [now] you have environmentalists coming across and putting preconditions on the economic progress – they’re environmental conditions that they come up with and they’re developing legal objectives. (Heiltsuk leader)

In response, the Heiltsuk Tribal Council has prepared a fifteen-year economic development plan aimed at diversifying the economy across many different sectors. Some of those interviewed tended to be sceptical of the kind of “green” jobs that have been proposed by environmentalists. Eco-tourism and cottage industry jobs are seasonal and low-paying relative to resource extraction jobs. Job creation has to fit with the cultural traditions of the community, as the following comment indicates:

I don’t think it’s ever been our intention to have our people carry suitcases for outside people. That’s what eco-tourism is all about. And, “Thanks but no thanks.” I think our people have a little more dignity than that ... [T]hey have the ability to go out there and do other things with land management, where they would be able to hold their heads up high, and do well, or better, than other people. (Heiltsuk leader)

For similar reasons, there is scepticism about small-scale home-based businesses. As one Heiltsuk leader asked: “What do you mean by saying that our people can survive on making jams and jellies year round?”

Logging is seen as one of the strong possible job generators for the future. In 1998, the Heiltsuk embarked on logging ventures, and then, in April 2001, a three-year moratorium on all logging was announced. There have been some serious challenges involved with moving into

the forest industry, since the industry has been in transition, with the economic recession that began in 2008 and new regulations associated with ecosystem-based management practices. The interviews reveal that some Heiltsuk regard environmental groups' views on logging issues as interfering with the promise of forestry jobs, while others welcome a move away from clear-cut logging practices. In other words, logging is a sensitive issue.

The Heiltsuk Nation is pursuing job creation on many fronts. Serious friction with environmental groups has emerged over the jobs they create using grant monies obtained to work with First Nations, including the Heiltsuk. The Heiltsuk may participate in developing a project proposal but not benefit equitably when the funding is secured. One Heiltsuk leader commented: "Once the relationships develop, they forget about you ... they go and get the money and they go and spend the money. A lot of the resources are kept with those organizations. You know, if they apply for a million dollars, they're lucky they're going to get a tenth of that in the community."

Environmental groups use grant monies to support their staffing costs on a project basis. This means that funding for specific projects often results in jobs for non-Indigenous environmentalists instead of for Heiltsuk. Given the desperate need for jobs in Bella Bella and the desire to train community members in new skills, many feel that the Heiltsuk are simply being used by environmental groups when the latter retain monies that could be used for Heiltsuk job creation. As one Heiltsuk leader pointed out: "When somebody works here and cashes their cheque here, that money turns over four or five times before it leaves the community. But when you have so-called experts coming here and then working in Vancouver, none of that money flows through here." For example, tensions have arisen with respect to the funding of joint projects with Ecotrust Canada, arguably the Heiltsuk's most enduring partner. Ecotrust's partnership to complete a land-use plan and to enhance Heiltsuk resource mapping capability was sustained for over a decade. Considerable funds were raised by Ecotrust for Heiltsuk partnership projects. Heiltsuk leaders expressed the view that most project funds go to the environmental organization and that they receive only a small share of the total funding allocated for each project.

The Heiltsuk Nation's elected Band Council has the mandate to create jobs. Current and past members of Council have an abiding commitment to create as many jobs as possible because they see a strong economy as fundamental to Heiltsuk self-determination, self-sufficiency, and

survival. Many of those interviewed expressed the desire to find a way to create jobs while, at the same time, ensuring environmental integrity. Community leaders do not expect to ever leave their homelands, and they want to operate sustainably. Finding a balance between jobs and conservation that is acceptable to the Heiltsuk is the immediate challenge.

### *Heiltsuk Self-Determination and Control*

The biggest issue that I have right now with environmental organizations is [that] they come in with this missionary mentality that they're going to bring us out of the wilderness and into their garden path of greatness. You know? That's the kind of mentality that they have. And we don't need that, as First Nations. (Heiltsuk leader)

At the heart of all relationships between the Heiltsuk and outside interests are issues of control and self-determination. These issues are paramount because the colonial context continues to impose itself upon the Heiltsuk people. Traditional Heiltsuk homelands continue to be occupied by the Province of British Columbia and the federal government, who assume jurisdiction and impose regulatory regimes. In the context of an uncertain treaty process, multinational economic interests extract millions of dollars annually while returning nothing to the Heiltsuk people who own the land. Canadian and American fishers blissfully come to catch their trophy fish, taking advantage of a sports fishery that is believed to flourish at the expense of local fisheries.

The goals of environmentalists to save the Great Bear Rainforest are yet another external agenda, and the resulting backlash is not surprising. The Heiltsuk insist that they must be in control of what happens in their territories. This sense of self-determination was strongly expressed by everyone interviewed.

I don't think they understand that we're as environmentally conscious as they are about the importance of having a sustainable economy.

I don't think they understand how fiercely we want self-government – that nobody is the keeper of the flame. We as Heiltsuk accept that any environmental initiative in the central area has to be driven by the Heiltsuk. (Heiltsuk leader)

One way in which the Heiltsuk have tried to ensure control of relationships with outside interests is through protocol agreements that spell out mutual understandings regarding how environmental groups will

operate in Heiltsuk territories. In 1999, the Heiltsuk Treaty Office signed a working agreement with Ecotrust Canada. A protocol agreement was concluded with Ecotrust in 2002. It clarified a number of issues, including recognition of Heiltsuk Aboriginal title and rights, the desire to work together on conservation-based development, information sharing and communication protocols, capacity building, equitable procedures for joint fundraising and fund allocation, and regular review of the relationship. In 2003, similar agreements were signed with the Sierra Club of BC, Greenpeace, and Forest Ethics; however, these agreements are less focused on joint fundraising and more focused on information sharing and joint media strategies.

In many ways, the protocol agreements reflect what the Heiltsuk consider to be a respectful alliance: recognition of each party's aspirations and independence; mutuality of purpose, which provides the ground for working together on specific goals; equality in determining joint projects; equitable sharing of funding resources; the presentation of a united front with respect to joint ventures; confidentiality; a regular relationship review; and efforts to resolve conflicts if and when they arise. However, some argue that the protocol agreements have not fulfilled their intended purpose. As one Heiltsuk leader commented: "Protocols don't mean anything. You could sign protocols and they'll turn around and they'll do their little back-of-the-scenes thing with the province. They'll put on ... pressure [regarding] how they want to see [things] develop."

Some leaders indicated that, after signing the protocol agreements, some environmental organizations have had little contact with the community. Most of the ongoing contact with the Rainforest Solutions organizations (Sierra Club of BC, Greenpeace, and Forest Ethics) has been taking place at Coastal First Nations Turning Point rather than at the community level (Davis 2009).

Of particular annoyance to the Heiltsuk is the role of environmental groups as funding brokers. These groups have developed strong relationships with American philanthropic sources, and they continue to be the conduit of funds that have been gained for joint projects. The Heiltsuk and other First Nations would prefer to have direct access to funds and then to involve environmental groups on their own terms. This lack of control results in further tensions in Heiltsuk-environmental group relationships.

We spent a lot of time in simplifying a protocol agreement, which was more aligned with ... Heiltsuk initiatives, Heiltsuk vision. We

wanted them to be ... consultants to us, rather than partners. Yeah, sure, help us put together funding proposals, but it's Heiltsuk that apply for them. It's Heiltsuk that get the funding. And we gratefully acknowledge the assistance and support and that kind of stuff from the environmental groups. (Heiltsuk leader)

One of the direct challenges in the relationship, then, is how environmental groups show recognition of Heiltsuk authority and control in their everyday interactions. There are many opportunities to demonstrate respect, recognition, and reciprocity through daily interactions. Seemingly small actions, such as never speaking for the Heiltsuk or sharing the credit for their accomplishments, are key indicators of how respectfully an organization can work as a partner.

Within the community, there are people who believe that conservation is the historical and contemporary legacy of Heiltsuk culture and that environmental perspectives are consistent with living according to traditional Heiltsuk values. They see a benefit in working with environmentalists because of the financial and professional resources that they can provide. However, like those who want to see the involvement of environmentalists minimized, they believe that issues of Heiltsuk control and benefit are paramount. In other words, there is a strong and consistent view that Heiltsuk self-determination and benefit are primary in any relationship with environmental organizations.

#### WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF THE HEILTSUK NATION

I approached the Heiltsuk Nation about documenting its experiences because I believed that much could be learned about current First Nations-environmental group relationships from the journey they had taken since the early 1990s. From what they have shared, we can glean cautionary tales and understandings that can help inform relationship building in the present and future. Environmental groups, whose goals are conservation and protection of West Coast ecosystems, can only accomplish these goals by working with First Nations. Even though Aboriginal title and rights in specific homelands have not yet been finalized, First Nations hold the key to conservation on the West Coast. Environmental and conservation groups know this and have initiated relationships in order to influence the actions of First Nations. The Heiltsuk and other coastal First Nations know that this is the agenda of the environmental groups.

The Heiltsuk Nation faces extreme pressures in its traditional homelands – pressures that have been created by many external forces. Their goals of self-determination and self-governance over traditional territories through building a strong local economy and sustaining local environments are reflected in their political statements, land-use plans, and economic and social projects. In order to accomplish their goals, selective strategic alliances with environmental groups make sense. The Heiltsuk continue to enter into these relationships while asserting their right to self-determination. The Heiltsuk Nation brings to these relationships Heiltsuk title and rights, traditional Heiltsuk knowledge, an intimate understanding of the local environment, and the certainty that they will occupy these homelands for generations into the future. All of this is of significant benefit to the environmental groups that enter into relationships with the Heiltsuk.

In exchange, environmental groups offer four things that are of value to the Heiltsuk: money, contacts, political mobilization, and professional expertise. These have been used to advance Heiltsuk goals, but not without tensions.

As with most First Nations, so with the Heiltsuk: funding for resource management and socio-economic projects is always in short supply. Because of the Heiltsuk's research and planning needs, since the early 1990s the support of ENGOS has been particularly important. In the words of one Heiltsuk leader, "The environmentalists' money is as good as that of the industrialists." The Heiltsuk have been gathering research data for many years, and while they were involved in the treaty process these data (which were gathered to support their negotiating position) were of a highly sensitive nature. Yet, if the Heiltsuk used federal funding related to the treaty process to gather additional data, the federal government required access to it. This despite the fact that, as a lead party in the negotiations, the Crown was in a conflict of interest. The funds made available through organizations such as Ecotrust Canada and the David Suzuki Foundation made it possible for the Heiltsuk to conduct and retain additional research with the requisite confidentiality.

From the mid-1990s, environmental groups, through their extensive networks with American foundations, opened access to funding that had never before been available to most First Nations.<sup>9</sup> Millions of foundation dollars flowed through environmental groups to the West Coast. These funds were often used to support environmental groups

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<sup>9</sup> The dynamics related to funding are also discussed in the case study of Coastal First Nations (Davis 2009).

in their work with First Nations rather than flowing directly to First Nations. First Nations have resented this access to funds, particularly the role that ENGOS have played as conduits for funding. The Heiltsuk, and other First Nations involved in Coastal First Nations, have expressed the desire to have direct access to these funds, thus removing the brokering role of environmental groups. But this is not as easy as might first appear. One Heiltsuk leader commented: “When you do research into that type of philanthropy, you find that it’s very hard to get money out of anybody. You have to know what you’re doing and those guys are experts at raising money ... I think it’s going to take some time before we have that ability, but in saying that, I think that it’s possible.” As the preceding quotation suggests, there is a perception that ENGOS have the potential to create stronger local capacity through, for example, training Heiltsuk in philanthropic fundraising. Capacity building is important to the Heiltsuk.

The Heiltsuk have identified organizations whose expertise, finances, and influence are useful to them in trying to achieve their goals. These relationships have posed challenges, and, over time, Heiltsuk expectations with regard to outside parties have crystallized, making it imperative that:

- Heiltsuk jurisdiction and self-determination be recognized and respected;
- any partnership bring benefit to the Heiltsuk people, for example, in terms of job creation, capacity building, or information;
- Heiltsuk play the lead role in controlling the finances associated with the project;
- financial and professional expertise be provided under the direction of the Heiltsuk;
- Heiltsuk Nation members be hired where Heiltsuk expertise exists; and
- relationships of respect be solidified through the signing of a protocol agreement that spells out key understandings.

The concept of “alliance” expressed by many of those interviewed is one that clearly sees the Heiltsuk as directing the relationship. This struggle over what constitutes a respectful, appropriate relationship is one of the ongoing tensions in the attempt to build sustained partnerships (Davis 2009). Expectations around funding, transparency, and capacity building are particularly sensitive. For the Heiltsuk, coming to

a shared vision with environmental and conservation partners remains a significant challenge in present and future relationships.

#### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Since the onset of British colonization, global forces have had a strong impact on the Heiltsuk Nation. However, in the past two decades, change has accelerated. The significant decline of the commercial fishery means that a new economy must be put in place to sustain present and future generations of Heiltsuk. At the same time, the BC economy has been absorbed into a global marketplace that is mobile in its demands and production.

Resource-based industries such fisheries, forestry, water, and oil and gas are subject to increasing international pressures, regulatory regimes, and scrutiny. The federal and provincial governments and industry, once the dominant controllers of commercial activity on the West Coast, have been forced to regroup in the face of mounting external pressures. These pressures are not only economic, they are also the result of key court decisions – such as *Haida* (2004), *Talku River* (2004), and *Mikisew* (2005) – that have affirmed a duty to consult and accommodate (Lundell 2006). In the midst of global pressures, the Heiltsuk have new opportunities to assert their self-determination.

The Heiltsuk are under the gaze of external parties who have “discovered” the “global treasure” of their homelands. Because of the location and richness of the Heiltsuk ecosystem, the Heiltsuk Nation has been negotiating the presence of environmental and conservation groups since the early 1990s. Involvement with environmental groups as well as with Indigenous neighbours such as Coastal First Nations have expanded Heiltsuk networks within global configurations of influence and power. Working with other First Nations collectively, it has been possible for the Heiltsuk to enter into relationships with environmental groups, industry, and governments in order to strategically shape the regulatory environment. It has also been possible to gain access to new resources, such as the \$120 million Conservation Investment and Incentive Initiative (Davis 2009) available to support conservation-based First Nations economies.

With the acceleration of resource extraction in the global economy, First Nations traditional territories are under increasing pressure. Environmental and social justice groups may offer potential support

(Davis 2010), but such support will be contextual and strategic.<sup>10</sup> In the case study of Coastal First Nations Turning Point (Davis 2009), I note the shifting terrains of the First Nations-environmental group relationship. In that case study, an environmental leader pointed to the possibility of publicly criticizing the actions of First Nations if they violated the environmental organization's goal of protecting the environment. Indeed, in 2011, in a carefully worded statement affirming its ongoing relationships with local First Nations, the Sierra Club of BC launched a lobbying campaign that opposed the application of the First Nations-owned logging company, Iisaak Forest Resources, to log in the "unprotected intact valleys of Clayoquot Sound" (Sierra Club of BC 2011). This indicates that contradictory and complex layers of relationship are likely to continue to be the norm as First Nations and environmental groups navigate their sometimes complementary, sometimes opposing goals within the context of the ongoing colonization of First Nations homelands.

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<sup>10</sup> Damien Lee (2011), using the example of the 2010 Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement, argues that the State is using environmental groups to bring First Nations into regulatory regimes that undermine their sovereignty.

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