

## Reconciliation in Action

Celebrating a Place We All Call Home: Reconciliation in our Relationships on Vancouver Island's West Coast



Credit: Melody Charlie

A Reflection Paper prepared for the Canadian Commission for UNESCO

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## About the Author

### Erinn Linn McMullan

West coast based writer-editor Erin Linn McMullan has an MFA in Creative Writing from UBC and a focus on community history, regional issues, marine science, and conservation. She is author of *Northern Medicine* and editor of *Sambaa K'e Then and Now*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., including residential school survivors' stories translated from South Slavey and contemporary issues facing this remote NWT Dene community. She has worked with Indigenous scholars from universities of Alaska and Lethbridge studying clan history, impacts of colonialism, traditional arts and culture, including editing online curatorial exhibit, "Hands of Time: Bush Women on the Land". She completed a feasibility study for CAFN, and coordinated Bravo-award winning conference "Governing Under the Midnight Sun", celebrating 30 years of YFN self-government, Yukon Legislation's centenary, and Alaska's semicentennial. She attended hišinq'wił on September 17, 2017. In addition to "Celebrating a Place We All Call Home", articles examining Indigenous issues include: "Ancient Coin Sheds Light on the Yukon's Diverse History", "Pocketful of Change", and reviews of Glenbow Museum's Blackfoot Confederacy exhibit and of books, *These Mysterious People: Shaping History and Archaeology in a Northwest Coast Community* and *Bill Reid: The Making of an Indian*. She is proud mother of a daughter with Indigenous heritage.

## About the Clayoquot Biosphere Region

Clayoquot Biosphere Region was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2000. Biosphere Reserves are areas of terrestrial and coastal/marine ecosystems or a combination thereof, which are internationally recognized under the UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme. The MAB Programme, created in 1971, aims to support the implementation and sharing of best practices in local and regional sustainability methods, and relies on interdisciplinary research, dialogue among various partners and community engagement. There are currently 18 BRs in Canada, including the Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Region, which are located across nine provinces and territories.

It was during the 4<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Biosphere Reserves that the Lima Action Plan for the MAB Programme and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves was endorsed. In line with its vision and mission statement, the Lima Action Plan places strong emphasis on thriving societies in harmony with the biosphere for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Through the Lima Action Plan, the World Network of Biosphere Reserves is engaged to protect and promote Indigenous and local knowledge systems and develop partnerships with Indigenous communities living in Biosphere Reserves. The hisinqwiit-regional gathering demonstrates how the Clayoquot Biosphere Region is meeting its international mandate in the context of the Lima Action Plan and its national mandate as well, in the context of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions' Calls to Action.

## About Clayoquot Biosphere Trust (CBT)

<http://clayoquotbiosphere.org/>

The Clayoquot Biosphere Trust conducts and supports research, education and programs that advance conservation, build our understanding of natural processes in the marine and terrestrial ecosystems, and promote the health of individuals and communities throughout the Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Region. As a community foundation, the CBT has managed an endowment fund and administered program funding from the income earned from the fund since 2000.

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada and the Community Fund for Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> contributed to the event. We are grateful to the Canadian Commission for UNESCO for providing the financial support to create this reflection paper and video as part of their Reconciliation in Action series.



Credit: Melody Charlie

# Introduction

## Language lesson

### *hišinqʷiit: to gather together indoors*

Dr. Bernice Touchie led the audience in a language lesson on how to pronounce hišinqʷiit, the Nuu-chah-nulth name given by the elders for this event, and shared its meaning: to gather together indoors. All eight of Vancouver Island's west coast communities and an estimated 800 plus people were gathered under a massive tent shelter erected in the Kwisitis Visitor Centre parking lot at the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve (PRNPR) on a rainy Sunday, September 17, 2017. This regional event, which would observe cultural protocols, including a date coinciding with the new moon and chosen by traditional means, was hosted by Yuutuʔiʔaṭḥ, on whose traditional territory and village site it was held, in partnership with Clayoquot Biosphere Trust (CBT) and Parks Canada.

"This place that we're at is really special, Kwisitis is a village site, it's our home," said Tyson Touchie, who earlier welcomed the crowd into Yuutuʔiʔaṭḥ territory. "It's where we feel at peace, and we want you to feel that way too."

Speaking on behalf of the Ha'wiih (Hereditary Chiefs), he was accompanied by the Tyee Ha'wiltḥ, Hereditary Chief Wilson Jack, in traditional cedar hat and ceremonial regalia.

"I just want to acknowledge our ancestors, this place that we call home. I think that's what makes it really special is that we feel them. They come check in on us every now and then." Touchie explained how he was taught to speak on behalf of his people by a Hesquiaht elder, who put her hands on his shoulders and said, "When you speak you feel you grandparents' hands on your shoulders, and whatever you say will be a good thing."

"It is here where my ancestors used to live, harvest traditional foods, and bring their canoes ashore," said Jeneva Touchie, who is an elected member of Yuutuʔiʔaṭḥ Legislature, and serves on the Executive, Community Services Portfolio. "In fact, there are remnants of an old longhouse here on Wickanninish. This land is special and sacred for Yuutuʔiʔaṭḥ. Although this land is now part of the Pacific Rim National Park, UFN still has treaty settlement lands inside this park, in fact, just a short walk away from where we are standing."

"Parks Canada and Yuutuʔiʔaṭḥ are partners who work together. It is amazing what we can do if we support each other and that is why we are here today. It is important for working together to achieve a better future, not just for this generation but for generations to come."

The day would include sharing the salmon harvest, and traditional stories, song, and dance, but its centrepiece was a heart-to-heart conversation between communities rarely gathered together in one place, in part due to geographical isolation: the municipalities of Ucluelet, Tofino, and Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District Area C, and all five First Nations: Hesquiaht, Tla-o-qui-at, Toquaht, Ahousaht, and Yuutuʔiʔaṭḥ.

Leaders from all eight communities were given time to speak and to share a cultural display, resulting in a vital cultural exchange and an education in Indigenous tradition and protocols for non-Indigenous participants.

Transportation, which was identified as a regional challenge, was a key support piece with people traveling from remote communities by water taxi and by bus from as far as Port Alberni, over 100 km away.

“In the days leading up to the event, I was literally laying 2,000-lb. concrete blocks with a crane (to anchor the tent) and coordinating with water taxis and coordinating with contractors and just getting it all there,” said Brooke Wood, CBT’s outreach coordinator, who described her role on the day as “coordinating everything”.

“The buses arrived and the people arrived,” including the first 60 people from Ahousaht. “We had three people come from Ahousaht and they were soaking wet and looking for a nice, warm tea and I knew it was okay,” said Wood. Despite the rain and a shortage of volunteers, a core group of 26 volunteers pitched in.

As partners in the event, Parks Canada staff were on hand to assist with hosting, and with interpretation, logistics, and parking. “Pacific Rim Park works really hard to build relationships with all of our nine Nuuchah-nulth nations, and we really honour working with them,” said Karen Haugen, superintendent of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, who identified herself to the audience as coming from the Huu-ay-aht First Nations. “Nuuchah-nulth people are always so good at not only welcoming people, but for hosting, and that’s what we do here in Pacific Rim, is we really work with our Nuuchah-nulth partners to host the many visitors who come to this wonderful, wonderful area.”

The Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Reserve is located on the west coast of Vancouver Island, in British Columbia, Canada. In addition to the Biosphere Reserve area, as a community foundation the CBT serves all communities of the west coast region.

## Perspectives on moving forward together

### Active listening

“The regional gathering was an awesome day to listen,” said Rebecca Hurwitz, CBT’s Executive Director, “to hear the perspectives of all of the community leaders on how we move forward in a positive direction together. The regional gathering was one way that we can reach the UNESCO mandate for building peace in the minds of men and women, in a relatively peaceful country.”

### Acknowledging regional diversity

“In 2016, CBT’s board first started having conversations about Canada’s 150<sup>th</sup> celebration and we talked a lot about what it means to celebrate or to recognize this anniversary in a place where people’s Canadian identity is really varied,” she explained. “Some people have a strong Canadian identity and some people have a Nuuchah-nulth identity, or a Japanese identity, or an identity that’s more mixed.”



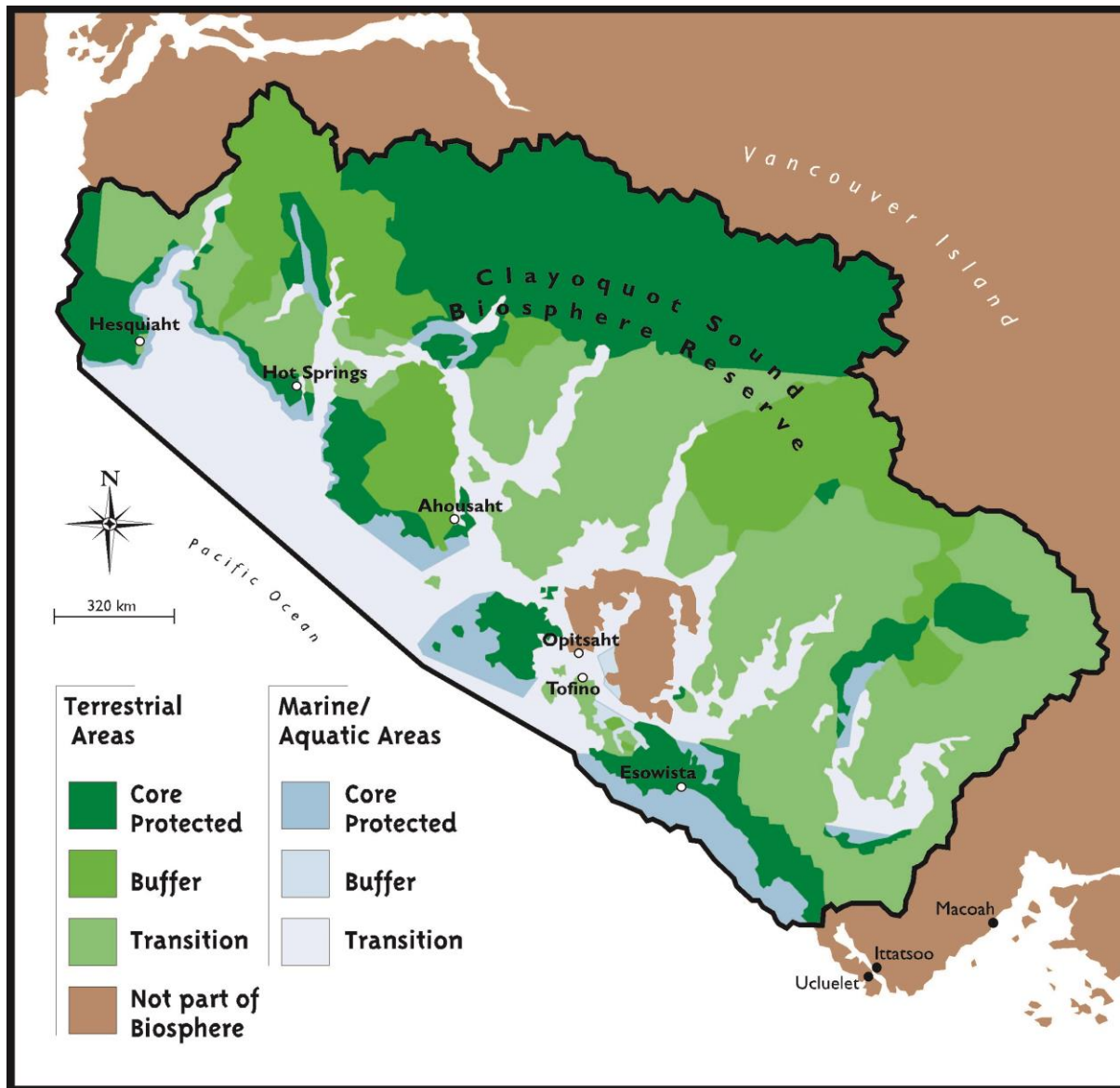


Figure 1: Geography of the territorial and marine/aquatic areas of the Vancouver Island' west coast

Clayoquot Biosphere Trust is the only west coast organization that includes members from all the communities on its board, pointed out Cathy Thicke, CBT's Co-Chair, appointed by the District of Tofino for the past six years.

"In many ways we are a beacon across Canada," said Hurwitz of this diversity, explaining that as CBT staff they were responsible for bringing the board's vision into action.

While this regional gathering wasn't a Potlatch, *hišinq'wiił* elicited ongoing discussion of the Potlatch Ban by the Canadian government from 1885 to 1951 because the right to gather, and to share songs, dances and stories, as the communities were doing on September 17, 2017, was prohibited for 66 years.

"Potlatch is a word that comes down to us from the Chinook language," as Chief Maquinna, Tyee Ha'wilt for Ahousaht First Nation, would point out during the event, along with acknowledging the revitalization of drumming going back 17 generations which accompanied the Ahousaht dinner song.

“I think that’s worth reflecting on for a moment,” said Tofino’s Mayor Josie Osborne during the event, “that we could not have done what we’re doing here today until 66 years ago when the laws changed.”

The act of working together to prepare, share, and clean up after a communal meal, however, was emphasized by CBT’s Nuu-chah-nulth partners as key to celebrating community connections and customary in traditional teachings on peace-building and collaboration. One of the considerations for the timing of the event was to schedule it after the salmon harvest, and on a date deliberately separate from the sesquicentennial of Canada’s Confederation.

“I think that reconciliation is a very difficult concept,” said Tammy Dorward, CBT’s Executive Co-Chair, chosen to represent Tla-o-qui-aht by the Ha’wiih. “I’ve struggled with it for a year and half from the time of the announcement of the funding from CFC (Community Foundations of Canada) to the day of the event.” As she pointed out, “Celebrating Canada’s 150<sup>th</sup> can be hard for Indigenous people when we look back and reflect on the historical injustices that have occurred, not only in this land but around the world.” Instead, by connecting to the themes of “a sense of belonging, a sense of community, a sense of place”, she discovered a way that Indigenous people involved with the CBT could support both the process and the project.



Credit: Melody Charlie

Dorward, who advised on protocol throughout the planning process, had sought the advice of an elder, who encouraged her to focus on her own role. “I had to figure out what I had to do to ensure that the future generations would be taken care of and would be able to live in a healthy place.”



“I really don’t believe that reconciliation can happen at an abstract level, coming from the federal government, but that it happens in the relationships that we carry with each other. That we use each day to support and love, and work together, live together,” she encouraged the communities gathered at *hišinq’iit*.

“I just have to say, for the settlers, the *mumuthne*, the Canadians who have now built up their societies in our homelands,” she addressed the crowd, “that we’re here today to celebrate a place that we all call home.”

As co-MC with Celena Cook, of Yuutuʔiʔath, Hurwitz highlighted what an honour it was not only to be able to fulfill the vision set by the board the previous year but also to work for an organization that could hold all the complexity of both celebrating and recognizing, and resisting, Canada’s 150<sup>th</sup>.

In an article for *Ha-Shilth-Sa*, Canada’s Oldest First Nations newspaper, Carla Moss reported, “CBT Executive Director Rebecca Hurwitz was thanked for her decision to listen to the communities . . . and to act on their needs to celebrate regional relationships outside Canada Day.”

“Knowing that the celebration was to coincide with Canada Day, we say thank you to you, Rebecca,” said Ha’wilt Muuchinink. “The nations that surround and make CBT wanted to have our own celebration and not celebrate Canada Day. We appreciate and respect that you made the decision . . . to have this event for today.”

## A sense of belonging, a sense of community, a sense of place

### *Hishuk ish ts’awalk: Everything is connected*

All the partners, Yuutuʔiʔath, CBT, and Parks Canada, as well as the community-driven planning process, helped to create a safe space in which people could speak their truth. Truth was identified as a key component of reconciliation and the healing process by participating community leaders, as well as by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

A positive tone and spirit of welcome was set from the beginning, facilitated by invitations from Tyson Touchie, Yuutuʔiʔath’s representative, to remain seated according to their custom and from Cathy Thicke, CBT co-chair and councillor for District of Tofino, encouraging people to introduce themselves at the next table. The communities discovered common ground: from discussions of intermarriage threading community members, resources, and traditional teachings together, to shared victories such as Ahousaht et al.’s precedent-setting Supreme Court case resulting in Indigenous economic fishing rights and the Maa-nulth Treaty enabling self-government (combining hereditary and elected leadership), for both Yuutuʔiʔath and Toquaht Nations, and disconnecting them from the *Indian Act*; and celebrating tradition by paddling together during the canoe journeys where political boundaries were set aside. Community leaders also shared struggles: from racism to the tragedies of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and enduring impacts of residential schools; daily challenges with healthcare costs exceeding incomes; and community stances on industry in their territories: fish farms, logging, and mining, coming from a deep respect for the environment and a desire to preserve the past and future for generations to come.

## Reconciliation

*“Reconcile means to right a wrong.”*

### Hesquiaht First Nation

“To reconcile, what does that mean?” asked Chief Richard Lucas, Tyee Ha’wilt̓h for Hesquiaht First Nation, explaining that he worked with residential school survivors for seven years and, through this process, with many lawyers. “We asked to look up the word ‘to reconcile’. I was really surprised at the definition of reconcile, in the legal dictionary. It means to right a wrong.”

Lucas, himself a residential school survivor, asked for understanding from the non-Nuu-chah-nulth people in the audience about its impacts. “It still affects us today. I have children. They don’t know what I went through yet, because I can’t tell them yet. But I can tell other people what my experience was, what I went through.”

Lucas offered to share some of the dark history and their struggles, not in a negative way but to promote understanding and provide education.

The impact of residential schools would be a recurrent theme addressed throughout the event. During Canada’s 150 years of Confederation, Indian Residential Schools (IRS) operated for 113 years, from 1883 to 1996, and an estimated 50% of children did not survive. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada reported that over 6,000 Indigenous children died, describing it as cultural genocide.

Lucas referenced an archaeological dig in the 1960s, which established that Hesquiaht had been on site at least 6,500 years, reminding the audience of the community’s long history in this place and of the importance of the salmon, synonymous with their people.

## Building relationships between communities

Addressing the CBT, Lucas said, “I hope that the relationship between the eight of our communities, through you, that we can start building a relationship where we can work together and understand (of) where our people come from... as Nuu-chah-nulth people.”

Lucas was the only participant from Hesquiaht, due to a death in the community, but attended *hišinqʷiit* briefly to speak out of respect for the personal invitation from CBT and Yuutuʔiʔaṭh.

### Yuutuʔiʔaṭh

### Restoring our voice and language

“We have a legacy of hurt with our people,” said Dr. Bernice Touchie, commending her son, Tyson, for “the spiritual strength to continue speaking for our people. The trauma is so bad that our voice is silenced

sometimes.” Standing in front of Yuutuʔiʔath’s ceremonial curtain, emblazoned with its crest and acknowledging Yuutuʔiʔath territory, Touchie thanked CBT: “for putting our culture on a pedestal; for recognizing our chiefs; for inviting and giving us transportation to get here. For the first time, thanks to CBT, we’re putting our writing system in our own community.” Nuu-chah-nulth signage, a CBT-supported community initiative, would be visible soon. “For 150 years, I wanted to replace what we saw in symbolism, for our people to see this place is Yuutuʔiʔath.”

## Ahousaht First Nation

### *“Reconciliation begins with the self”*

“We all have different definitions, meanings of reconciliation,” said Greg Louie, Chief Councillor (Elected Chief), Ahousaht First Nations, accompanied by the Tyee Ha’wilth, Chief Maquinna and members of the community who had just performed the Ahousaht dinner song. Louie believes that reconciliation “begins with the self, starts with one: who I am,” as well as by “recognizing the people and society you’re amongst and whose territory you’re in.”

Louie told the audience that Ahousaht Council is in the process of finalizing a protocol agreement with the Tofino Council. “In there, I say to the mayor (Mayor Josie Osborne), ‘How can we reconcile with each other?’ A protocol is a piece of paper. It can give some guidelines. But the real act, is how we live and treat each other.”



Credit: Melody Charlie

### *“Sitting together is a form of reconciliation”*

“This event here, us sitting together, is a form of reconciliation,” emphasized Louie. “We can sit across each other, be respectful, knowing that yes, we do have differences but respect them.”

“And reconciliation doesn’t only have to happen between Quuʔas and mumuthne,” emphasized Louie. “It needs to happen individually. It needs to happen within our families. It needs to happen in Ahousaht. It needs to happen within our households. Within our nation, and nation-to-nation. We need to reconcile.”

“One of the things that I saw, of really coming together and working together was this summer, the first time I had an opportunity to witness the canoe journeys,” said Louie.

“In the canoe journeys, I saw Ahousaht, Tla-o-qui-at, Hesquiaht, Ucluelet, Tseshaht, all coming together, working together, all Quuʔas people literally and physically paddling together. Tyee amongst each other, talking and supporting. No boundaries.”

*“They paddled into each other’s territory as one.”*

### **We’re still here**

“There are still some people, maybe amongst us, or in Tofino, or in this land, who still believe that we are not originators, who are first people to this land,” said Louie. “We’re not going anywhere. We’ve been here for many tens and thousands of years. We’re not going anywhere. This is who we are. This is our land, our territory. You’re welcome.”

### **Redressing current challenges**

Chief Maquinna told the audience, “I had a chance, because our Chief Councillor Greg (Louie) wasn’t able to meet with the Prime Minister of Canada. He asked if I could go sit in on a meeting. They gave us three minutes to speak to the prime minister. And, what am I going to say in three minutes to the prime minister? So I had to cut it down, and I said to him, ‘Mr. Prime Minister, you need to come to Ahousaht, you need to come see for yourself and not just talk for three minutes. But you need to listen to our people. We took the previous government to court and for years now, we haven’t gotten anything sorted out with our fishery.’”

““We won that court case,”” he referred to the precedent-setting Supreme Court case against Canada for Indigenous economic rights to fish including Ahousaht, Ehattesaht, Hesquiaht, Hupacasath, Huu-ay-aht, Mowachaht/Muchalaht, Nuchatlaht, Tla-o-qui-aht, and Tseshaht Indian Bands and Nations et al.<sup>1</sup>”

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“Nuu-chah-nulth Nations celebrated a major legal victory today when the Supreme Court of Canada refused to hear Canada’s appeal in the *Ahousaht et al. vs. Canada* court case. The country’s highest court issued its ruling early this morning, effectively ending more than a decade of legal proceedings between Canada and the five nations (Ahousaht, Ehattesaht/Chinekind, Hesquiaht, Mowachaht/Muchalaht, and Tla-o-qui-aht) with a final affirmation of the Nations’ aboriginal economic fishing rights.”

“We’re able to catch the fish and still we’re struggling with that. The bureaucrats keep stopping us from doing our fishing.”

He pointed out to the prime minister that two Ahousaht fisherman helped to prevent a greater tragedy during the sinking of the Leviathan II and that Ahousaht and Tla-o-qui-aht worked together in rescue efforts.

## Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation

### Totem poles as constitution

“This kind of a thing we’re talking about here today, reconciliation and Canada’s 150<sup>th</sup> birthday but our people have been here for many, many generations,” said Joe Martin, traditional canoe carver after the Tla-o-qui-aht people shared a paddling song. “The village of Opisaht is one of the oldest villages on the island. People have been using that village site for about 10,000 years.”

“When first Europeans arrived in our part of the world, there were between seven to ten thousand Tla-o-qui-aht, and most people died from tuberculosis and smallpox brought upon by sailors who came here,” said Martin. “When they first arrived at Opitsaht, Opitsaht had totem poles in the front of it, and three or four totem poles in the front of every house. What those totem poles are to us, it was our constitution. Now certainly, when we first met Europeans we were illiterate and could not read what they had. But so were they, when they saw our totem poles,” said Martin, explaining, “they had no idea what those things are.”

“I look at this *muu ya pitum*—this crest here,” he pointed to the Yuutuʔiʔath ceremonial curtain with its crest behind the podium. “Immediately, if I come to Yuutuʔiʔath *haahuuli*, I know that they have laws and the teachings that go with those things, are that they have laws of the land, that everything is connected: the circle. *Hishuk ish ts’awalk* and that’s for all the people of Yuutuʔiʔath.

“We of Tla-o-qui-aht, each of our families has our own curtains, and we have our teachings that are depicted on there. And those teachings began as soon as our mothers conceived our lives.”

***“That was about the first law, or the first teaching: the first law is represented by the crest of the sun or the moon.”***

“The next most important part of these totem poles is what’s on the bottom: usually, the wolf, the bear, or the killer whale. And, they’re not the bottom because they’re the bottom, but because the people of these clans are the ones who uphold natural law.”

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“Today’s decision (January 30, 2014) from the Supreme Court of Canada represents the second time Canada’s highest court has refused to hear Canada’s appeal in the case. It means that the declaration of the Nations’ aboriginal right, first made by the BC Supreme Court in 2009 and twice affirmed by the BC Court of Appeal, is final and constitutionally protected.”

“Nuu-chah-nulth fishing rights upheld by Supreme Court of Canada,” *Ha-Shilth-Sa*, Jan. 30, 2014.

<https://www.hashilthsa.com/news/2014-01-30/nuu-chah-nulth-fishing-rights-upheld-supreme-court-canada>



“So, once you were born, elders would come along every time you’re being fed, and do this, what we call *ha-huu-pa* (time with the elders), the teachings about the first law about being respectful.”

“We were taught about these crests throughout our lives.”

“When these crests were painted on the inside of our homes, the totem poles stood in front of our houses.”

“So, around 1900 or so, all those totem poles that were in Opitsaht, many of them are now sitting at the field museum in Chicago. And our language was banned, so we have a long history here.”

“Those villages existed a lot longer than the *Indian Act* and we have been here a long, long time.”

***“Laws are in our art, in our songs and our dances”***

“People keep telling our people at treaty negotiations that we have to write down our laws, but,” he pointed once more to Yuutuʔilʔath’s ceremonial curtain, “their laws are right there: in our art, in our songs and dances.”

## Concerns that need to be addressed

Martin also said there were many concerns that needed to be addressed around raw sewage going into the water, fish-farming, and logging, which continues despite surveys with his people indicating over 90% are against clear-cut logging.

“It has to stop because what it’s doing is ripping off our young generations, for our forests, our culture. The canoes that we make; that I make.”

“I learned how to carve dugout canoes from my late father.”

“‘Get ready, we’re going: hunting, fishing, trapping or canoe-building.’ I learned the laws of the land from my father and grandfather.”

“There’s a strict protocol that we have to follow.”

“When I was able to make my first canoe, my dad was really proud of me. He put his hand on my shoulder, and said, ‘Son, now you don’t have to depend on anybody for anything. You have access to all the resources here.’”

## Toquaht First Nation

“Toquaht Nation is situated in Barkley Sound; we call it hiʔsuuʔis. It means ‘looking towards the ocean,’” said Chief Anne Mack, Tyee Haʔwiltʔ for Toquaht Nation. “We have a traditional territory of 33,000 hectares of land beginning at the mouth of Ucluelet Inlet, stretching along the shores around to Toquaht Bay and to Lyall

Point coastline and stretching back to the Broughton mountains, which we call the Ten Sisters, and into the Cataract area we call *Macoah*, Four Mountains. We're one of 15 nations in the Nuu-chah-nulth tribal council, previously called the West Coast District Council. These nations cover the west coast of Vancouver Island, from one tip to the other. It includes three sounds: the Clayoquot, the Barkley, the Nootka, and the Alberni Inlet."

### Maa-nulth Treaty Society and self-government

"Around 1996, the Nuu-chah-nulth sat at a table to try to negotiate a treaty with the government, but after four years of not great movement, we had a referendum for all Nuu-chah-nulth members to vote yes or no to the continuance of a treaty. There were five nations, including Toquaht, which were Yuutuʔiʔaṭh, Huu-ay-aht First Nations, Ucchucklesaht, Ka:ʼyu:ʼkʼtʼhʼ/Chekʼtles7etʼhʼ, who voted in favour of continuing, and we became what was known as the Maa-nulth Treaty Society, and we continued this journey. On April 1, 2011, the Maa-nulth five nations implemented and began as self-governing nations. Each of the five nations had ratified their own constitutions, which is protected under section 35 of the Canadian Constitution as the right to self-govern. This meant for Toquaht, we were given back 1,500 hectares of our land in fee-simple (ownership) and the right to be consulted on any initiatives that take place within our traditional territory. We are no longer connected to the *Indian Act*; we have no reserve lands and are not considered band members—we are Toquaht citizens."

"Toquaht was a nation that continued to govern under the hereditary system of governance. Another small nation in North Island is Nuchatlaht. They've always remained under their hereditary system of governance. For Toquaht, to continue under our hereditary system, we negotiated with Canada and BC to have an election of three councillors, to work with our two hereditary leaders, and this brings it to a democratic way of governing. And it's worked very well, because this new journey we're on is a very big job."

"It is with honour that I continue to work with the vision of my ancestors," said Mack, referring to her grandfather's direction to "continue bringing our people home to a healthy, sustainable community."

"All First Nations across Canada do not have housing, employment, or social services to support their citizens," she explained. "More than half the citizens on every community across Canada live away from home."

"Working together plays an important part of our existence," Mack reminded the audience. "Our common issues gain much more strength towards achieving success of our goals. I value the strength of all communities that have had to go through change due to economics or trends of global events."

### Creating a symbol of reconciliation in the event logo

*"Here on the West Coast, our identity is best portrayed through the ocean."*

"I feel like, here on the West Coast, our identity is best portrayed through the ocean. It really symbolizes our agreement and duty to protect the land," said Jaiden George, grandson of Chief Maquinna, Ahousaht First Nation, who was invited by CBT to design the logo. This was the first commission for the multimedia artist

and high school student. “In the logo, the person's hand (symbolizing the relationship between west coast people) is reaching out to shake the ocean's hand. The shaking of the hands visually shows the agreement we make to protect the land. After the handshake, we're able to begin the re-conciliating process.”



Figure 2: Logo of the hisinqwiit-regional gathering

In the main portion of the poster, he included a salmon, to stress this connection with the ocean and for its significance to his people, the Ahousaht Nation, and all the nations, as an important part of their history.

George created the logo in roughly two and a half months: using the themes of reconciliation and healing provided to execute the first draft, combining layers of photography and illustration, within a few weeks; then submitting a colourized version for constructive criticism at a CBT meeting on June 14, 2017, before creating the final design. “After that,” he said, “there were just minor adjustments with the text and colouring.”

## Reconciliation through working together

### *“The act of reconciliation was learned as much through the planning process”*

“The act of reconciliation was learned as much through the planning process,” observed Hurwitz, who volunteered her time and cited those awkward, teachable moments as the place where greatest learning occurred. “The fact that we were all there as volunteers really helped to ensure that we had a grassroots event that was meaningful to community members and that really reflected all the cultures of the region.”

## Raising awareness of cultural protocols

“I believe it created a lot more awareness on what it is to be a First Nations person,” said Celena Cook, who served on the core planning team and works in administration at Yuutuʔiʔath̓ Government. There’s a lot of tradition and culture in everything, so it was a learning experience for them, and it was also teaching that to them as well.” Cook supported CBT’s observation of proper protocols, from accompanying Hurwitz to personally inviting each of the communities to participate, and to following speaking order while sharing MC duties with her on the day. “I felt we built a stronger team with CBT and Ucluelet and Tofino Districts,” concluded Cook.

“It took a long time to figure out how to do invitations appropriately, and learning the proper cultural protocols associated with that, and that was a challenge but it was something we overcame,” said Brooke Wood. “Celena and I attended Hesquiaht together and did the invitation, and Rebecca and Celena attended Ahousaht and Tla-o-qui-aht and did the invitation.”

“I feel like all the challenges were just learning experiences,” said Wood, “and we really took a lot from it. It was really great working with Yuutuʔiʔath̓, specifically Deb and Celena, because they’re so competent, and we have a trusting relationship.”

## Planning process: partners and community representation

The planning process included meetings with two teams: the partners’ team consisting of Yuutuʔiʔath̓, CBT, and Parks Canada; and the core planning team, made up of alumni from Leadership Vancouver Island (LVI), who were invited by CBT to help design and shape the event. Both teams included Nuuchahnulth and mumuthne participants working together.

Including every community, LVI, a program also coordinated by CBT, which, as Wood pointed out, “helps build capacity locally and breaks down a lot of barriers between communities, so it seemed like a great idea to keep those people working together.”

“This event reinforced that we need to trust in the volunteers that the needs of the community will be met,” said Hurwitz. The core planning team included Celena Cook, Debbie Mundy, Leah Morgan, Abby Fortune, Katie Garner, Marilyn Touchie and Barb Gudbranson.

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“We’re very lucky to have that opportunity to do things together as a region,” said Abby Fortune, Director of Parks and Recreation for District of Ucluelet and Chair and alumnus of LVI. Fortune said she learned how to

be more adaptive and work as a team member. “I think having all of us coming together, all the different personalities, the different groups pulling together and saying, ‘What do we want for our region?’ . . . that perspective became very, very important for the gathering and, I think, very successful.”



Credit: Melody Charlie

Fortune said she considered what reconciliation meant to her personally during the process. “How does that affect our west coast? How does that affect the world? How does that affect Canada, BC? I think it’s a very important time in history, where we’re looking at and wanting to move forward, and I think that one of the things I’ve learned from the reconciliation is listening to what people have to say, respecting what people have to say, and then learning how to move forward with reconciliation. And that is a learning curve for, I think, everyone. But just really having that respect for the process, that’s a big part of what I’m learning.”

“I think the reconciliation really worked for me,” said Leah Morgan, on the core planning team, it “really helped me to put into perspective everybody in the region—to be able to be aware of where they’re all coming from, and that those who did come understand what reconciliation should be.”

At the welcoming station, she found greeting guests easy. “When they started coming in from Ahousaht, for example, it was familiar because I know people from Ahousaht. It made it a lot easier to be friendly and open with them.”

Morgan felt CBT handled the protocols really well. “We were blessed with CBT to be able to do this and to offer such a great event to the community.”



“It was nice to work with CBT and people from the District of Ucluelet and Tofino,” said Debbie Mundy, core planning team member, who felt she became more comfortable working around the table with other community leaders. “It was good to work with other people from the region.” On the day, Mundy, who regularly cooks in her community of Hitacu, rose to the challenge of cooking for so many people, alongside a team of 10. They were further assisted by Ricardo Manmohan and the Warriors, young men in the community learning traditional skills, “who had a big fire on the beach and 30 fish around the fire.” Special consideration for traditional gathering of wood and use of bonfire was acknowledged by Parks for this occasion.

## Working together as partners

The partners’ team included representatives from Clayoquot Biosphere Trust (CBT), Yuutuʔiʔath, and Parks Canada.

### Parks Canada: Pacific Rim National Park Reserve

Parks Canada and Pacific Rim National Park Reserve were onboard from the beginning of the project, solving one of the greatest initial challenges—a venue that could hold a regional gathering and be meaningful—by providing space in kind at Kwisitis Visitor Centre, located on Wickanninish Beach. Parks also provided staff, assistance with planning, French language translation, logistics, an interpreter, organizing tools needed on the day, and parking assistance.

“It’s such an important event, especially the theme of reconciliation, which is a huge focal point of our current government,” said Dave Tovell, visitor experience manager for PRNPR and a member of the partners’ team. From his professional standpoint, “reconciliation means wanting to see First Nations using the park with family and friends in their own context, which is what the gathering was about: feasting, dancing, and sharing stories.”

“It totally changed me,” said Tovell, whose family moved to the region only last May. He emphasized how important it was to include Yuutuʔiʔath, CBT, and all communities. Because the event itself provided an open platform where everyone was given time and space, it brought him closer to understanding the relationships within the region, not just globally but on an individual scale. His exposure to the “incredible planning team” impressed him with the “consensus process where there was never any argument.”

From a personal standpoint, he said it has changed the way he will parent his two and three-year-old daughters about their relationships with Indigenous peoples in their community.

### Debrief

A debrief for the event was held during the CBT Directors Meeting, hosted by Chief Anne Mack at the Toquaht Nation office on November 9, 2017. “It is hard to hold that space to invite diverse perspectives and hard to envision how that day might look but, once it came, it was rewarding,” Faye Missar, CBT’s program coordinator, commented. “If you put your heart and spirit into an event, people will show up.”

Invitations were extended to federal and provincial politicians, but they were unable to attend in the remote community. However, in their absence, a more open conversation occurred between all participants.

## Next steps

“Our region, I feel, works very well together, like no other that I’ve ever seen so far,” said Ucluelet’s Mayor Dianne St. Jacques. “We have respect for each other, and we have consideration for each other’s challenges.

“We still have a lot more work to do in understanding each other and what we’ve been through, what our First Nations communities have been through,” she added. “It’s a learning experience for us to listen to what’s happened, not only in the past but also in the present.”

“There are many, many different layers of reconciliation,” Greg Louie, Chief Councillor for Ahousaht explained. “But really, when we walk away from here today, when we get into our cars or we walk away from this event here today, what are you going to truly do to reconcile: with me, Ahousaht, with each nation, with yourself, with your neighbour, the society, the world? It’s a huge, huge task, but it can be done.”

“I think there are a lot of events in our region that are bringing people together from different cultures, and I think if you’re looking for it, you could find a way to have this kind of healing and reconciliation conversation in different places,” said Rebecca Hurwitz, who suggested CBT would consider hosting another event in 2020 during the periodic review for the Biosphere Reserve Designation.



Credit: Melody Charlie

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