

# Great Bear Sea PFP



Our model for stewardship, conservation, and sustainable economic development

**“ We’ve always been involved with taking care of our resources. It would be easy for us if it was only about money, but there’s cultural and natural values out there that are worth more than money.**

—Wigvilhba Wakas Harvey Humchitt, Hím’ás Hereditary Chief,  
Haítzaq Nation

**“ We have so many young, talented people that live on the land—it’s neat to see it come forward in a way where their knowledge and their perspectives are respected.**

—Chris Roberts, elected Chief Councillor, Wei Wai Kum First Nation

**“ The coastal First Nations identified a need for sustainable funding that puts us in the driver’s seat. With the Project Finance for Permanence initiative, we’ve been having key conversations around what the dollar needs are to complete this work and to make sure it’s sustainable over the years.**

—Danielle Shaw, elected Chief Councillor, Wuikinuxv Nation



A photograph showing two individuals, Caelan McLean and Cedar Frank, wading in a river. They are pulling a long, green fishing net that is buoyed up by a series of white floats. The net is partially submerged in the water. The background is a dense forest of tall evergreen trees. The water is a deep green color.

“The water is my second home. What makes me hopeful is the science and data that we are collecting.

—Cedar Frank, Guardian, K'ómoks First Nation

ABOVE K'ómoks Guardians Caelan McLean (left) and Cedar Frank (right) carry out fisheries surveys to monitor salmon populations. (Photo: Josh Neufeld / Nq̓nwaq̓olas Council)

COVER 'Fed Bear,' an illustration by Anuximana of a sea bear

# Signatories



**Haida**  
Haida Gwaii



**Gitga'at**  
Hartley Bay



**Gitxaala**  
Kitkatla



**Haisla**  
Kitamaat



**Kitselas**  
Terrace



**Kitsumkalum**  
Terrace



**Metlakatla**  
Prince Rupert



**Hałtzaqv (Heiltsuk)**  
Bella Bella



**Kitasoo Xai'xais**  
Klemtu



**Nuxalk**  
Bella Coola



**Wuikinuxv**  
Rivers Inlet



**Da'naxda'xw**  
Knight Inlet



**K'ómoks First Nation**

**K'ómoks**  
Comox



**Kwiah**  
Phillips and Frederick Arm



**Mamalilikulla**  
Village and Compton Islands



**Tlowitsis**  
Johnstone Strait



**Wei Wai Kum**  
Campbell River



**Government**  
of Canada



**Province of**  
British Columbia

# Our Vision

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Indigenous-led governance and stewardship, supported by durable, self-determined finance, secures the well-being of people and ecosystems across the Great Bear Rainforest and Sea.

“ As Guardians, we take looking after our marine and land environment very seriously.

—Gina Thomas, Senior Guardian, Tlowitsis Nation



Tlowitsis Guardians carry out a biomass survey to track the health of bull kelp.  
(Photo: Josh Neufeld / Ngnwaḱolas Council)

# Building a Conservation Economy

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Our vision for the Great Bear Sea is built on deep knowledge, understanding, and respect for our homelands. These waters contain some of the richest and most productive cold-water marine ecosystems on Earth, and the Great Bear Sea remains a source of sustenance, culture, and livelihoods for our own communities and for all British Columbians. Our marine spaces have been stewarded and cared for by our Nations for tens of thousands of years. Today marks a milestone achievement in the continuation of Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship for our Nations, British Columbia, Canada, and the world.

From stewardship practices to an innovative finance model, the following pages showcase the ingenuity and creativity of our people. At the centre of our work is the Great Bear Sea Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) initiative, a tool that will deliver durable, long-term financing for projects that support ecological, economic, and community sustainability.

We have had the privilege of working closely with community leaders, Elders, and community members to co-create innovative solutions that honor our knowledge systems and history. Stewardship is more than just a concept: it is our responsibility, and it is our way of life. It is about understanding our interconnectedness with the land, the waters, and all living beings.

We also acknowledge the invaluable contributions of those who have come before us. The tireless efforts of past leaders laid the groundwork on which we stand today. They provided us with a solid foundation on which to build and innovate. Their legacy serves as a guiding light, inspiring us to uphold the principles of integrity, resilience, and progress.

We also extend our heartfelt appreciation to our partners and allies whose unwavering support and collaboration have been instrumental in helping us achieve our shared goals. Together, we have forged strong alliances, leveraged collective expertise and resources, and collaborated to find solutions and make transformative change on the coast.

The work of Indigenous people on the coast instills hope for the future by demonstrating resilient and sustainable approaches to environmental stewardship, cultural preservation, and community well-being. Together we can build a future where diverse voices are united in a shared commitment to protect our oceans and restore a healthy coastal economy.

**K'áwázit Marilyn Slett**

President, Coastal First Nations

**Dallas Smith**

President, Nq̓nwaḱolas Council

*June 25, 2024*

# Our Path

## Indigenous Stewardship Traditions

For tens of thousands of years, coastal First Nations have cared for, managed, and relied upon the lands, waters, and life in their territories. To sustain ecosystems and communities, Indigenous peoples used their knowledge of seasonal patterns and relationships to develop stewardship traditions and place-based governance systems.

2006

## Great Bear Rainforest and Reconciliation Protocol Agreements

In February 2006, the Province of British Columbia, First Nations, environmental groups, and forest companies stood together to announce the Great Bear Rainforest Agreements. These agreements protected more than 6.4 million hectares of ancient coastal temperate rainforest. The agreements also established a new model of collaborative, ecosystem-based management and secured over \$120 million in new funding. The funding supports ongoing stewardship and has catalyzed the transition to a sustainable, conservation-based economy.

2007

## Coast Funds

First Nations established the world's first Indigenous-led conservation finance organization, Coast Funds, to hold and manage public and private funds invested in the Great Bear Rainforest initiative. Since 2007, First Nations have used these investments to build stewardship and Guardian programs, create new jobs and businesses, and support culturally-appropriate training. The Great Bear Rainforest Agreements, together with this model of innovative finance, have since been recognized as the world's first Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) initiative.

2008 to 2015

## Pacific North Coast Integrated Management Area and Marine Plan Partnership

British Columbia and First Nations collaborated through the Marine Plan Partnership (MaPP) to develop marine spatial plans in four sub-regions: the Central Coast, Haida Gwaii, North Coast, and North Vancouver Island. Implementing these plans has complemented related tripartite activities, such as the Pacific North Coast Integrated Marine Area Initiative (PNCIMA) and the development of a marine protected area network for the Northern Shelf Bioregion.

The Great Bear Sea, one of the most productive cold-water ecosystems in the world, has sustained coastal peoples for tens of thousands of years. (Photo: Moonfish Media)

2015 to 2023

## MPA Network for the Northern Shelf Bioregion

Over a period of many years, First Nations, Canada, and BC brought together Indigenous knowledge, academic sciences, and the perspectives of local communities and industries. Together, they developed the world's largest and most ecologically robust Indigenous-led and collaboratively developed network of marine protected areas. In 2023, at the 5th International Marine Protected Area Congress (IMPAC5), First Nations, Canada, and BC shared and endorsed the Network Action Plan to guide implementation of Canada's first MPA network.



Photo: Emilee Gilpin / Coastal First Nations

2018 to 2021

## Reconciliation Framework Agreement on Bioregional Ocean Management and Protection

The Reconciliation Framework Agreements for Bioregional Oceans Management and Protection brought First Nations and Canada together to advance collaborative planning, development, and implementation of initiatives related to ocean protection, and emergency response along with existing marine planning initiatives. BC joined the Framework Agreements in 2021.

2024

## Great Bear Sea PFP

First Nations, the Government of Canada, and the Province of BC sign the closing agreements for the Great Bear Sea PFP, securing long-term funding for stewardship and community prosperity and establishing collaborative governance agreements to guide the establishment and management of MPAs and the ongoing implementation of the MPA network.



In Dec. 2022, the Government of Canada announced up to \$800 million in support for four Indigenous-led PFPs, including one in the Great Bear Sea. (Photo: Coastal First Nations / Nnwaqolas Council)

# Great Bear Sea PFP

The Great Bear Sea Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) initiative will deliver stable, long-term funding to support our Nations in continuing to exercise our stewardship responsibilities, invest in our communities, and work collaboratively with one another and with Crown governments to manage our marine territories.

Our PFP is supported by contributions from the Government of Canada, the Province of British Columbia, and our philanthropic partners. Together, we have developed funding streams that will enable us to continue caring for our marine territories, while creating new opportunities for everyone on the coast.

## Through the Great Bear Sea PFP, our Nations will invest in:

**Biodiversity and ecosystem protection**, including Guardian and stewardship programs, research and restoration projects to benefit key species, culturally-relevant training and supports for stewardship staff, and implementation of collaborative marine use plans. Our marine protections and stewardship programs will help sustain habitat for 84 species of conservation concern, including sea birds, rare corals and glass sponge reefs, kelp and seagrass, fish, and marine mammals like whales, dolphins, and porpoises.

**Co-governance and reconciliation** through new collaborative governance agreements at the Nation level and for the MPA Network as a whole. Our collaborative governance framework aligns with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), advances reconciliation between Indigenous and Crown governments, and supports consensus-based recommendations and decision-making on the planning, establishment, and management of marine protected areas.



On Dec. 5, 2023, the Province of BC announced its \$60-million contribution to stewardship of the Great Bear Sea. (Photo: Government of British Columbia)

**Community prosperity**, including new and expanded Nation-owned businesses, community infrastructure like wharfs and boat charging stations, and new jobs and training opportunities for people in coastal communities. Over the next 20 years, we expect to support more than 3,000 new jobs and 200 new businesses in marine stewardship, transportation and renewable energy, sustainable fisheries, eco-cultural tourism, and manufacturing and processing.

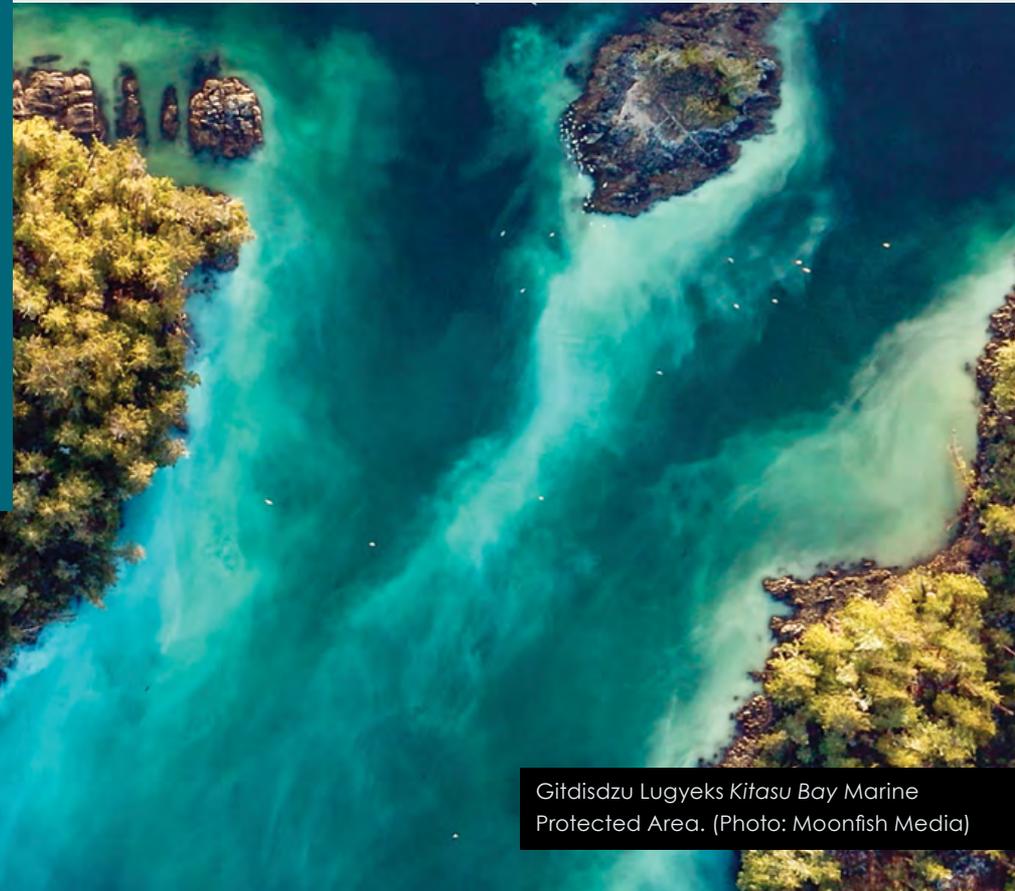
**Cultural vitality and opportunities for youth**, including culture and rediscovery camps, language programs, Junior Guardian and stewardship intern programs, and local training opportunities in stewardship, business development, and job skills. Through these investments, we will support youth to strengthen their cultural knowledge and prepare for meaningful careers and leadership opportunities in their communities.

► [Learn more: ourgreatbearsea.ca](https://ourgreatbearsea.ca)

### Project Finance for Permanence

Project finance for permanence is a model of structuring large-scale conservation investments to support complete, lasting protection of ecosystems alongside human well-being.

Rather than looking for funding to protect one site at a time, the PFP model aims to secure everything an initiative needs to succeed in a single closing agreement: long-term financing, strong partnerships and governance agreements, and clear goals for conservation and community development.



Gitd̓isdzu Lugyek̓s Kit̓asu Bay Marine Protected Area. (Photo: Moonfish Media)



**“ We’ve had lessons learned from the Great Bear Rainforest agreement and the implementation of that and that’s changed our lives as far as on the terrestrial side of how things are protected.**

— Christopher Roberts, Wei Wai Kum Elected Chief Councillor

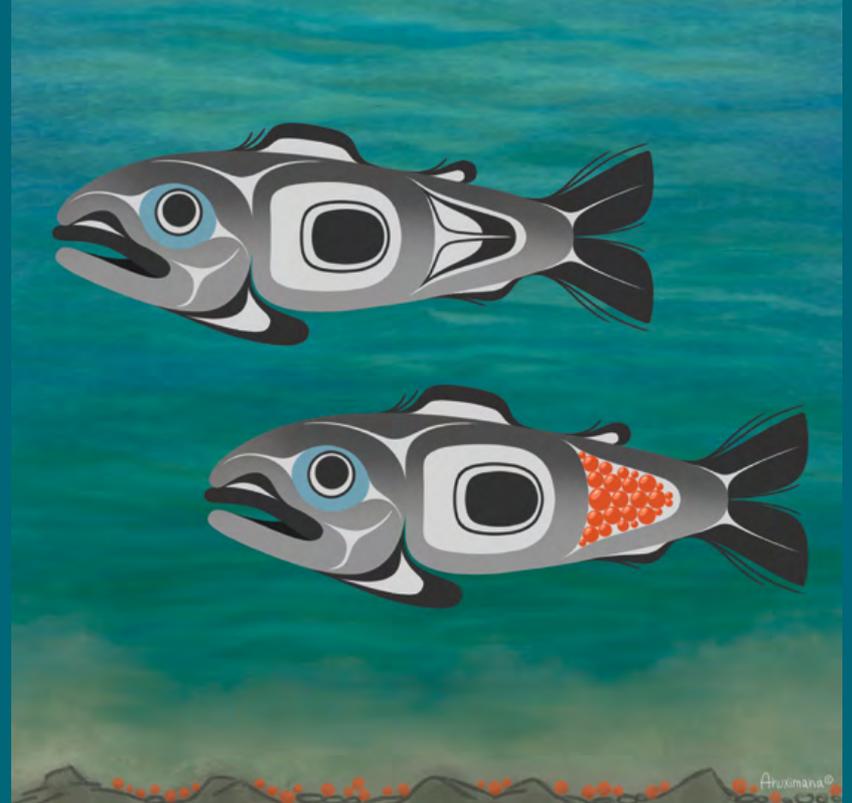
The Great Bear Rainforest covers more than 6.4 million hectares of coastal temperate rainforest along the north and central coast of modern-day British Columbia. (Photo: Andrew S Wright)

# Lessons from the Great Bear Rainforest

The Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii are home to one of the world's largest remaining coastal temperate rainforests. To protect our homelands and build sustainable local economies, First Nations worked with Crown governments, environmental organizations, forestry companies, and private funders to complete the *Great Bear Rainforest Agreements (2006)*.

As part of those efforts, our Nations secured \$120 million in conservation financing and established Coast Funds to manage and deliver funding for stewardship and Guardian programs, economic and community development, and sustainable energy projects. With those initial investments, our Nations are working to grow a conservation economy on the coast. Since 2008, we have created over 1,200 new jobs and launched over 200 new businesses, developed and expanded Guardian programs, and provided culturally-relevant training for community members.

As coastal peoples, our territories and stewardship responsibilities have always included both land and sea.



The Great Bear Rainforest agreements have helped to protect 6.4 million hectares of our Nations' terrestrial (land) territories, but did not cover our marine territories. The MPA network and Great Bear Sea PFP will extend our model of conservation, ecosystem-based management, sustainable development, collaborative governance, and conservation financing from the rainforest to the sea, completing our Nations' vision for the Great Bear Coast.

► **Learn more:** [coastfunds.ca/outcomes](https://coastfunds.ca/outcomes)

# MPA Network

After more than a decade of collaborative planning and stakeholder engagement, First Nations, the Government of Canada, and the Province of British Columbia have co-developed an action plan for a network of marine protected areas (MPAs) in the Great Bear Sea.

## Our Coast

The Northern Shelf Bioregion (Great Bear Sea) encompasses 102,000 km<sup>2</sup> of marine area covering two-thirds of the coast of modern-day British Columbia. The MPA network includes 30,493 km<sup>2</sup> of new and enhanced marine protected areas—about 30 per cent of the region. By linking these protected areas and managing them as a network, First Nations and their partners can help protect marine wildlife and sensitive ecosystems, preserve and connect marine habitat, restore productive fisheries, and steward areas of cultural importance.

## Collaborative Planning and Governance

Building upon previous marine planning and conservation work, First Nations and Crown government partners used traditional ecological knowledge and modern science to design the MPA network and identify sites and conservation objectives.

In 2023, the governance partners formally endorsed a network action plan, which outlines a recommended approach for establishing a network of existing and proposed MPAs. Following the endorsement, governance partners have begun work to advance and implement the action plan.

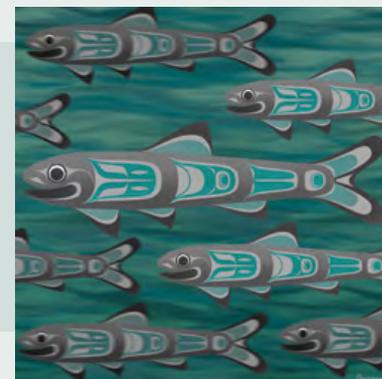
First Nations, the Province of BC, and the Government of Canada will advance and implement the MPA Network through collaborative governance structures and processes.

GREAT BEAR SEA

**10.2 million hectares**  
of marine area

MPA NETWORK

**2.8 million hectares**  
of new and enhanced MPAs

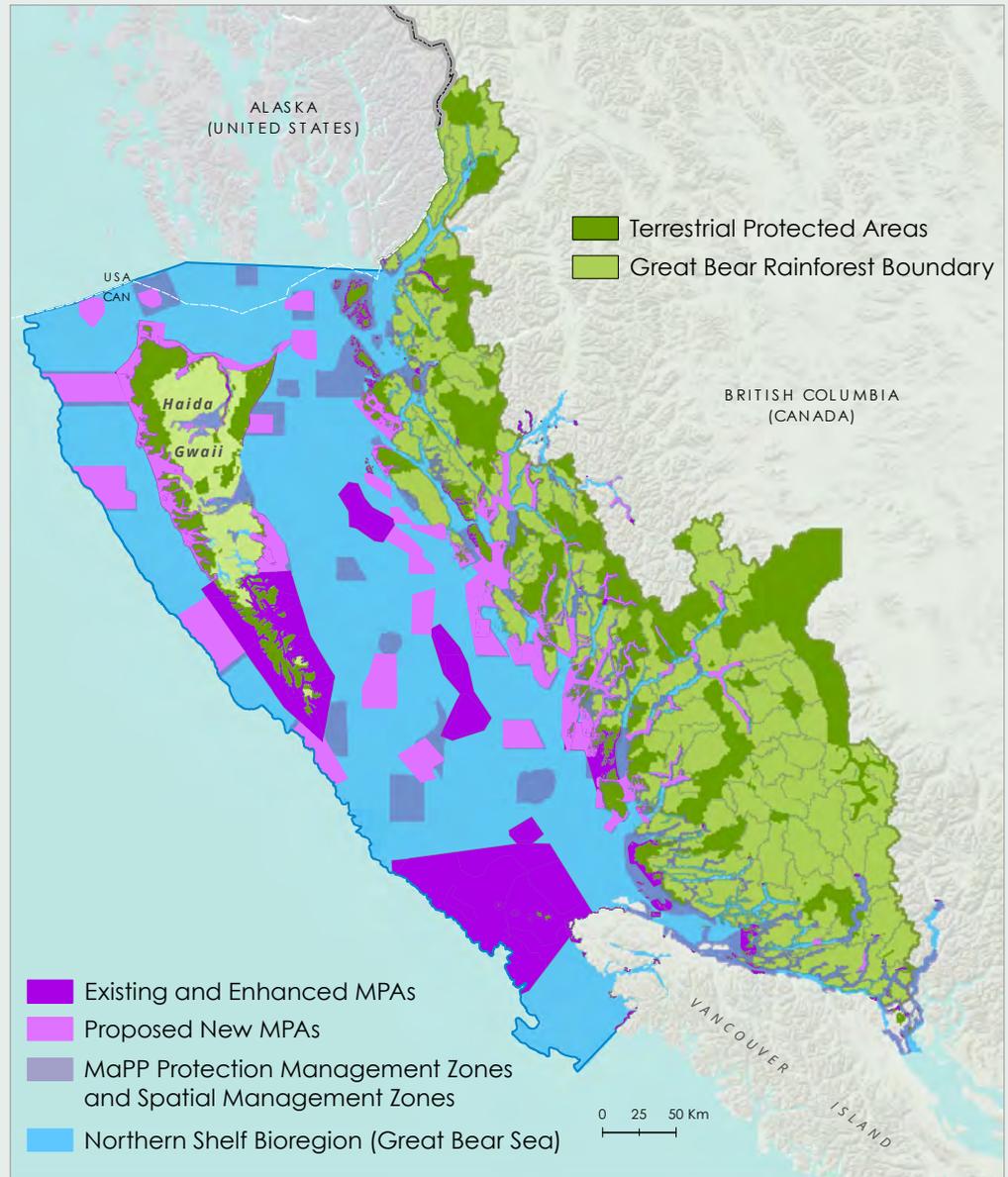


## Protecting Ecosystems and Cultural Sites

The west coast of Canada is a uniquely beautiful and special place where people and marine life co-exist within a vast land- and seascape of rocky shorelines, kelp forests, deep fjords, open ocean, and intricate archipelagoes. In recent years, the Great Bear Sea has been impacted by climate change and increased human activities such as shipping, fishing, and log handling.

Decades of experience have shown that MPAs can help address these impacts and protect sensitive ecosystems and important cultural sites, preserve and connect wildlife habitat, help reverse declines in fish populations, and support job creation in coastal communities.

► [Learn more: mpanetwork.ca](http://mpanetwork.ca)



# Our Partners and Supporters

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The Great Bear Sea PFP demonstrates the significant progress that can be achieved when many partners work together towards a shared vision for conservation, community prosperity, and co-governance.

## Coast Solutions Task Group

The Coast Solutions Task Group (CSTG) supported participating First Nations in developing the Great Bear Sea PFP and co-governance agreements with Crown governments.

CSTG co-chairs:

- Merv Child (Nanwakolas Council)
- Christine Smith-Martin (Coastal First Nations)

CSTG members appointed by:

- Coast Funds
- Coastal First Nations
- Central Coast Indigenous Resource Alliance
- Central Coast Nations
- Council of the Haida Nation
- Nanwakolas Council
- North Coast Skeena First Nations Stewardship Society

## Donor Council

The Donor Council includes representatives from the CSTG and the following organizations, who have supported fundraising and partner engagement:

- Coast Funds
- Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation
- Nature United & The Nature Conservancy (Global)
- Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies
- Sitka Foundation

► [Learn more: oureatbearsea.ca/partners](https://oureatbearsea.ca/partners)

## Contributing Partners

The Great Bear Sea PFP was developed by 17 participating First Nations, with financial support from the Government of Canada, the Province of British Columbia, and philanthropic partners who share our commitment to a sustainable future for the coast.



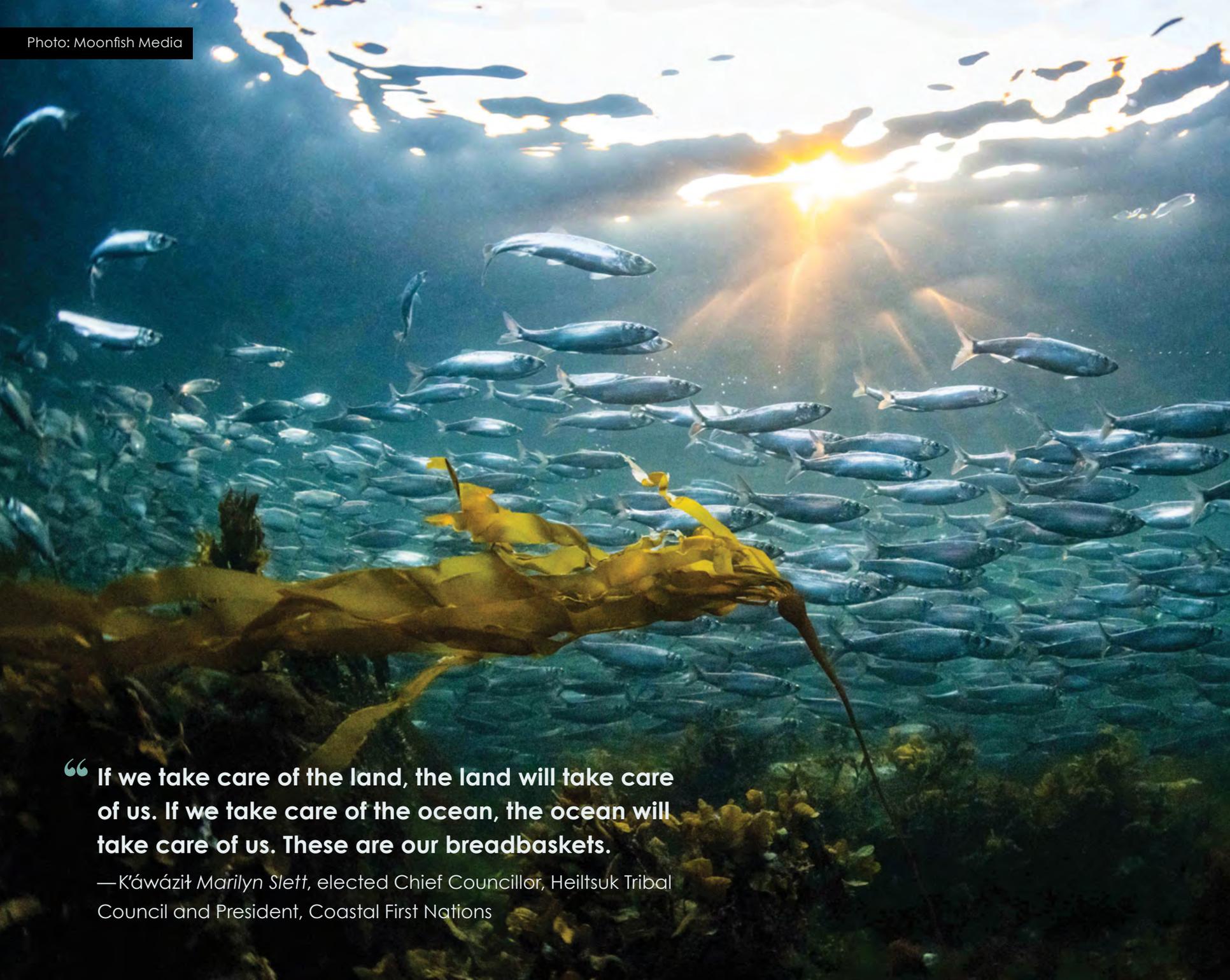
Nature United (Canada) is an affiliate of The Nature Conservancy (Global).



Marc and Sally Onetto  
Robert W. Wilson Charitable Trust  
The Rose Family Foundation  
Willow Grove Foundation

## A Special Thank You

We are grateful to Nature United and The Nature Conservancy (Global) for their financial and extensive in-kind support and partnership throughout the feasibility and development stages of the Great Bear Sea PFP.



**“ If we take care of the land, the land will take care of us. If we take care of the ocean, the ocean will take care of us. These are our breadbaskets.**

—K'áwázit Marilyn Slett, elected Chief Councillor, Heiltsuk Tribal Council and President, Coastal First Nations



“ We aren’t doing this work just for us, because we know everybody really loves our coast. This is important work because it’s our responsibility to ensure the Great Bear Sea is protected as best we can for the next generation.

—Christine Smith-Martin, CEO, Coastal First Nations

“ We’ve finally been able to get people to understand that we’re not dependent on ecosystems—we’re a part of them.

—Dallas Smith, Founder and President, Nḡnwaḡolas Council and Chair, Coast Funds



The illustrations in this booklet were created by **Anuximana Jade Hanuse**, an artist and carver from the Nuxalk, Wuikinuxv, and Kwagwł nations. She received her diploma in First Nations Fine Arts from the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art in 2020. In the same year, she also received the YVR Emerging Artist grant with Dempsey Bob and has been apprenticing with him ever since. Currently, Anuximana’s main focus is improving her skills to share with her community for future generations and the betterment of Nuxalk values, laws, and culture.

Booklet design by **Erika Rathje**

