

**APPENDIX 30-D  
GITXSAN NATION TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE  
AND USE DESK-BASED RESEARCH REPORT**

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Seabridge Gold Inc.

# KSM PROJECT Gitksan Nation Traditional Knowledge and Use Desk-based Research Report

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# KSM PROJECT

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# KSM PROJECT

## GITXSAN NATION TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND USE DESK-BASED RESEARCH REPORT

### Table of Contents

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- Table of Contents ..... i
- List of Figures ..... ii
- List of Tables ..... ii
- Acronyms and Abbreviations ..... iii
- 1. Introduction ..... 1-1
  - 1.1 Project Proponent ..... 1-1
  - 1.2 Project Overview ..... 1-1
    - 1.2.1 Project Location ..... 1-1
    - 1.2.2 Overview ..... 1-1
  - 1.3 Gitxsan Nation ..... 1-4
    - 1.3.1 Governance ..... 1-4
    - 1.3.2 Location of Gitxsan Communities ..... 1-7
    - 1.3.3 Fisheries Agreements ..... 1-8
- 2. Purpose ..... 2-1
- 3. Methodology ..... 3-1
  - 3.1 Approach ..... 3-1
  - 3.2 Desktop Ethnographic Information Collection and Analysis ..... 3-1
  - 3.3 Data Challenges and Limitations ..... 3-1
- 4. Results ..... 4-1
  - 4.1 Background ..... 4-1
    - 4.1.1 Traditional Territory ..... 4-1
    - 4.1.2 Language ..... 4-1
    - 4.1.3 Social Organization ..... 4-2
    - 4.1.4 Traditional Economy ..... 4-2
    - 4.1.5 Spiritualism and Ceremonies ..... 4-3
    - 4.1.6 After European Contact ..... 4-3
  - 4.2 Traditional and Current Use ..... 4-5
    - 4.2.1 Fish ..... 4-5
    - 4.2.2 Wildlife ..... 4-6

4.2.3	Plants .....	4-7
4.2.4	Travel.....	4-7
5.	Conclusion .....	5-1
	References.....	R-1

**List of Figures**

FIGURE	PAGE
Figure 1.2-1. KSM Project Location .....	1-2
Figure 1.2-2. KSM Project Layout and Road Access .....	1-3
Figure 1.3-1. Proposed KSM Project and Gitxsan Nation Traditional Territory .....	1-5
Figure 1.3-2. Gitxsan Nation Indian Reserve Locations .....	1-6

**List of Tables**

TABLE	PAGE
Table 1.3-1. Gitwangak Reserves .....	1-7
Table 1.3-2. Gitsegukla Reserves .....	1-7
Table 1.3-3. Gitanmaax Reserves.....	1-7
Table 1.3-4. Glen Vowell Reserves .....	1-8
Table 1.3-5. Kispiox Reserves .....	1-8

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

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Acronyms and abbreviations used in this document are defined where they are first used. The following list of abbreviations will assist readers who may choose to review only portions of the document.

<b>AANDC</b>	Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada
<b>AFS</b>	Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy
<b>BC</b>	British Columbia
<b>BC EAO</b>	British Columbia Environmental Assessment Office
<b>CEA Agency</b>	Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency
<b>CEAA</b>	<i>Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, S.C. 1992, c.37</i>
<b>DFO</b>	Department of Fisheries and Oceans
<b>EA</b>	Environmental Assessment
<b>EAA</b>	<i>Environmental Assessment Act, SBC 2002, c. 43</i>
<b>FSC</b>	Food, Social and Ceremonial
<b>GCO</b>	Gitxsan Chiefs' Office
<b>GTS</b>	Gitxsan Treaty Society
<b>GWA</b>	Gitxsan Watershed Authorities
<b>HBC</b>	Hudson's Bay Company
<b>KSM</b>	Kerr-Sulphurets-Mitchell
<b>the Project</b>	the KSM Project
<b>Rescan</b>	Rescan Environmental Services Ltd.
<b>SRMP</b>	Sustainable Resource Management Plan
<b>TK</b>	Traditional Knowledge
<b>TMF</b>	Tailing Management Facility
<b>TU</b>	Traditional Use

# 1. Introduction

---

This report has been prepared using desk-based research from publicly available information sources. Information included herein was reviewed and received input from the Gitksan Chiefs' Office (GCO) related to their historical and current use downstream of the KSM project area (see below).

The Project is subject to an environmental assessment (EA) review under British Columbia's *Environmental Assessment Act* (EAA) and Canada's *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (CEAA). This report is intended to help Seabridge Gold Inc. (Seabridge) fulfil the requirements of the KSM Project Application Information Requirements issued by the BC Environmental Assessment Office (BC EAO) on January 31, 2011. Information from this report will be incorporated into the EA Application for the proposed KSM project.

## 1.1 PROJECT PROPONENT

Seabridge Gold Inc. (Seabridge) is the proponent for the proposed KSM Project (the Project), a gold, copper, silver, molybdenum mine.

## 1.2 PROJECT OVERVIEW

### 1.2.1 Project Location

The Project is located in the coastal mountains of northwestern British Columbia. It is approximately 950 km northwest of Vancouver and 65 km northwest of Stewart, within 30 km of the British Columbia-Alaska border (Figure 1.2-1).

### 1.2.2 Overview

The Project is located in two geographical areas: the Mine Site and Processing and Tailing Management Area (PTMA), connected by twin 23-km tunnels, the Mitchell-Treaty Twinned Tunnels (Figure 1.2-2). The Mine Site is located south of the closed Eskay Creek Mine, within the Mitchell, McTagg, and Sulphurets Creek valleys. Sulphurets Creek is a main tributary of the Unuk River, which flows to the Pacific Ocean. The PTMA is located in the upper tributaries of Teigen and Treaty creeks. Both creeks are tributaries of the Bell-Irving River, which flows to the Nass River and into the Pacific Ocean. The PTMA is located about 19 km southwest of Bell II on Highway 37.

The Mine Site will be accessed by a new road, the Coulter Creek Access Road, which will be built from km 70 on the Eskay Creek Mine Road. This road will follow Coulter and Sulphurets creeks to the Mine Site. The PTMA will also be accessed by a new road, the Treaty Creek Access Road, the first 3-km segment of which is a forest service road off of Highway 37. The Treaty Creek Access Road will parallel Treaty Creek.

Four deposits will be mined at the KSM Project—Kerr, Sulphurets, Mitchell, and Iron Cap—using a combination of open pit and underground mining methods. Waste rock will be stored in engineered rock storage facilities located in the Mitchell and McTagg valleys at the Mine Site. Ore will be crushed and transported through one of the Mitchell-Treaty Twinned Tunnels to the PTMA. This tunnel will also be used to route the electrical power transmission lines. The second tunnel will be used to transport personnel and bulk materials. The Process Plant will process up to 130,000 tpd of ore to produce a daily average of 1,200 t of concentrate. Tailing will be pumped to the Tailing Management Facility from the Process Plant. Copper concentrate will be trucked from the PTMA along highways 37 and 37A to the Port of Stewart, which is approximately 170 km away via road.



Figure 1.2-1



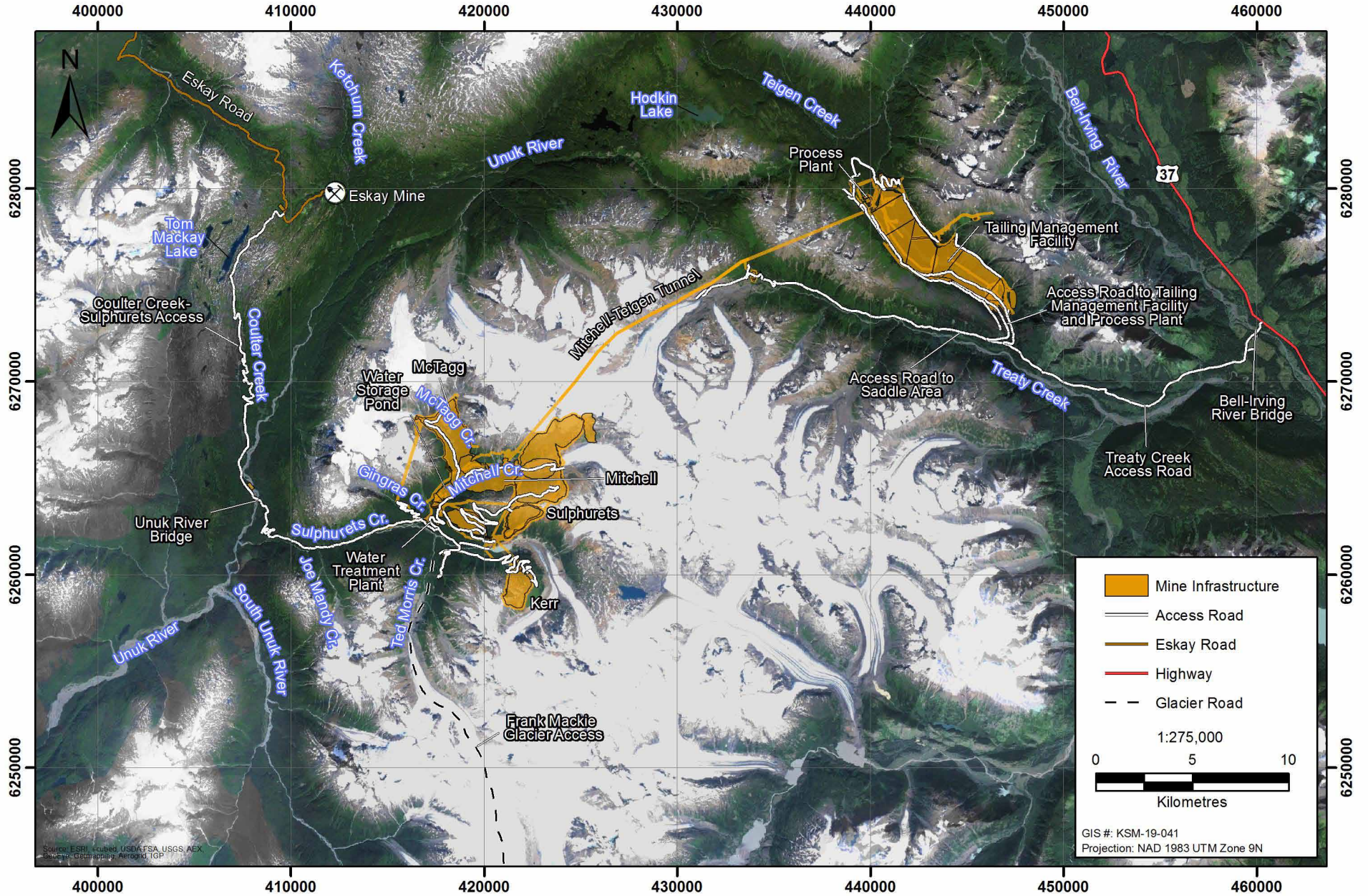


Figure 1.2-2

Figure 1.2-2

The mine operating life is estimated at 51.5 years. Approximately 1,800 people will be employed annually during the Operation Phase. Project Construction will take about five years, and the capital cost of the Project is approximately US\$5.3 billion.

### 1.3 GITXSAN NATION

The Gitxsan Nation is part the Tsimshianic language family and occupies lands in upper Skeena River watershed. The English translation of the term *gitxsan* is “People of the River of Mist” (Gitxsan Nation n.d.) otherwise known as “people of the Skeena River” (M. M. Halpin and M. Seguin 1990). It is the Gitxsan people’s name for themselves in their own language, and not a term applied to them by neighbouring groups or by early explorers or ethnographers. Gitxsan *adaawk* (oral history) states that certain clan ancestors also settled in the north areas of the Nass watershed, near its headwaters and in ice-free areas along the river valleys (Sterritt et al. 1998). The Gitxsan say that they have exercised Aboriginal rights and title in the Upper Nass and Upper Skeena watersheds since time immemorial (Gitxsan Chiefs’ Office 2003).

The Gitxsan traditional territory is approximately a 33,000 km<sup>2</sup> area in northwestern BC (Figure 1.3-1). The territory overlaps a total of nine watersheds: Upper Skeena, Middle Skeena, Lower Bulkley, Suu Wii Ax (Amazay and Thutade Lakes), Babine, Kispiox, Xsi Teemsim (Nass), Gitsegukla, and Sxi Tax (Lower Skeena) (Gwaans 2007; Gitxsan Chiefs’ Office 2010). Today, there are five Gitxsan communities (Gitwangak, Gitsegukla, Gitanmaax, Kispiox, and Glen Vowell). The Gitanyow Nation (formerly known as Kitwancool), originally considered a Gitxsan community by the Department of Indian Affairs, identifies itself and is formally recognised by provincial and federal governments as a separate nation, though it admits a close cultural lineage with the Gitxsan. Other villages, such as Kisgaga’as (at Kisgegas IR) and Galdo’o (at Kuldoe IR 1), were abandoned in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the residents of these villages becoming members of other Gitxsan communities (Sterritt et al. 1998; see also Figure 1.3-2).

#### 1.3.1 Governance

Gitxsan governance is based on the *wilp* system. As of 2012, there were reported to be 64 *huwilp* within the Gitxsan Nation (Canadian Press 2012), however it has varied in the past between 45 and 65 *huwilp* (Gitxsan Nation n.d.). All houses of the Gitxsan belong to one of four clans (see section 4.1.3 for details). Each Gitxsan member belongs to a *wilp* that has a traditional territory within the broader Gitxsan territory. The *wilp* is responsible for managing lands and resources within the *wilp* territory. Each *wilp* is led by a hereditary chief.

The “Lax Yip” is the land tenure system which Gitxsan have used since time immemorial. The nine Gitxsan watersheds are managed by the Gitxsan houses (G. Sebastian, pers. comm. 2011). The land tenure system is alive and well and the community lives with it on a daily basis (G. Sebastian and C. Sampare, pers. comm. 2011).

The Gitxsan communities follow the *Indian Act* electoral system. Each of the five Gitxsan bands is governed by a chief and councillors who are elected every two years. Each band office, as opposed to the Gitxsan Chiefs’ Office, is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Indian reserves and act as an agent of the federal Crown (AANDC 2012).

The Gitxsan Chiefs’ Office is an instrument of the Gitxsan Hereditary Chiefs, and acts as a spokesperson in matters dealing with resource management. For reasons of practicality, it is a centralized authority with which federal, provincial, regional and municipal governments engage, as well as companies involved in resource development through the EA process. The Gitxsan Treaty Society (GTS) was created under the *Societies Act* of British Columbia to administer treaty funds and to negotiate a Final



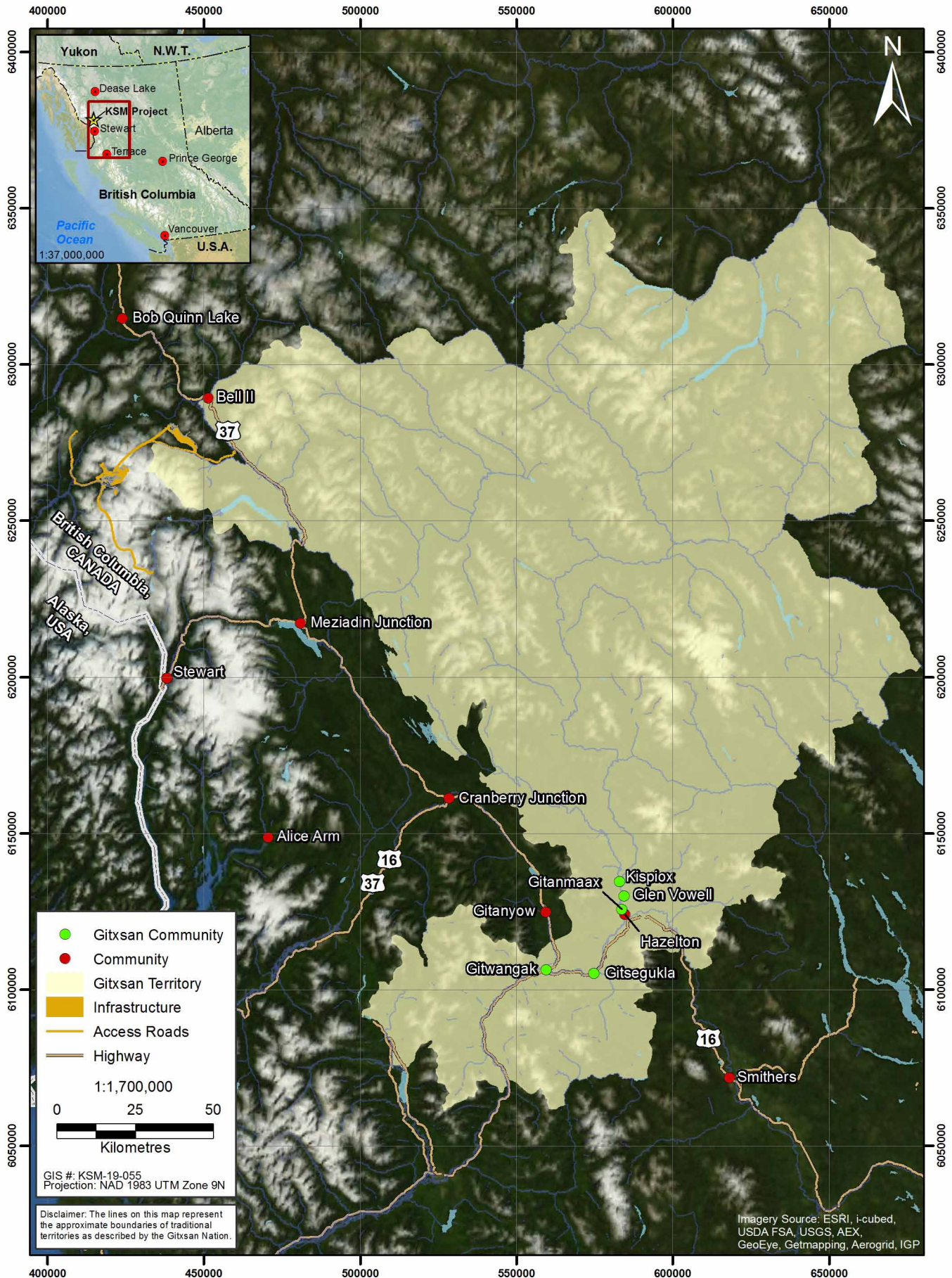


Figure 1.3-1



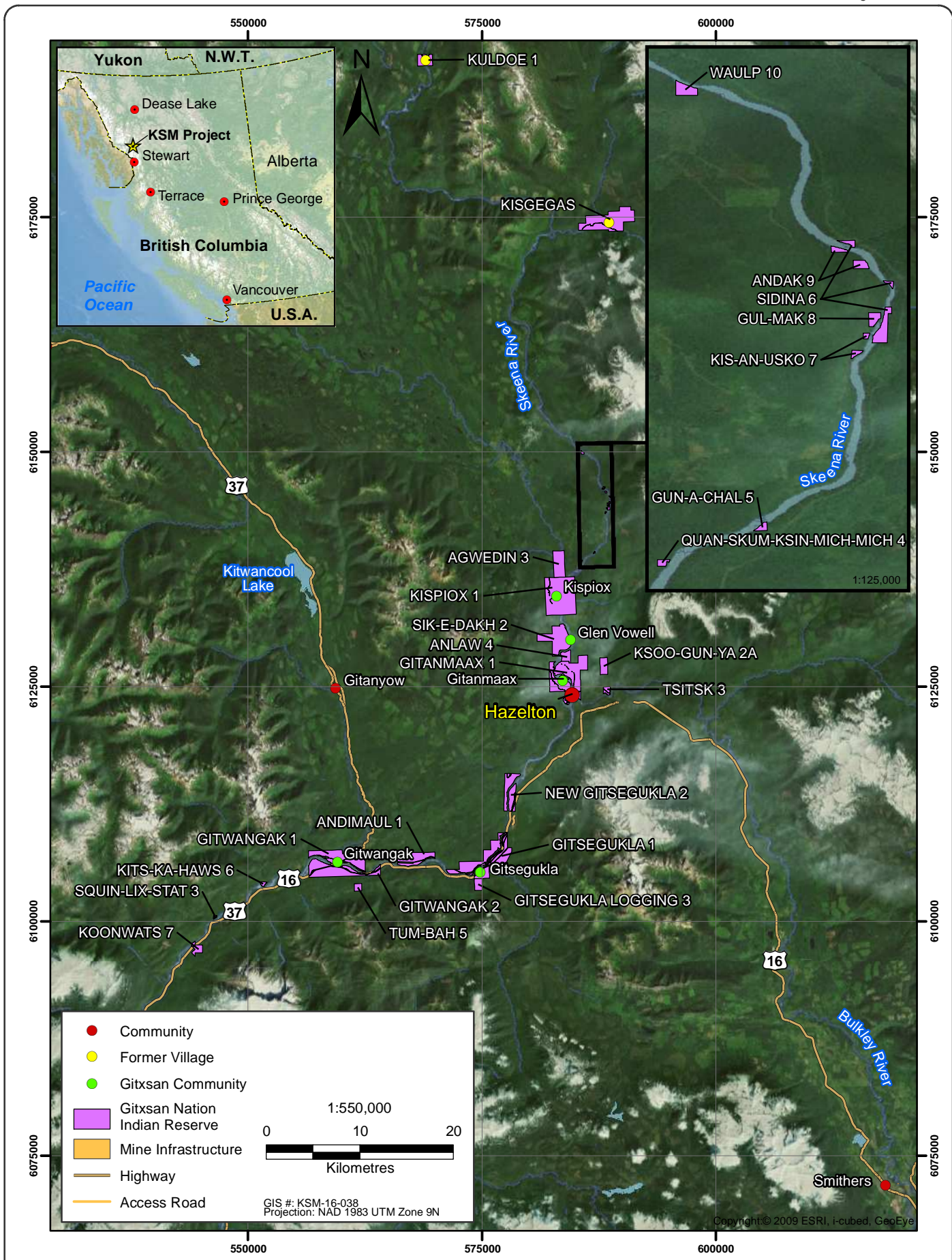


Figure 1.3-2

Agreement with Canada and BC on behalf of the Gitxsan Hereditary Chiefs. At the time of writing, the Gitxsan Hereditary Chiefs had renewed the mandate of the GTS to “support the Simgiigyet (chiefs) and the Gitxsan people in their efforts to advocate for Gitxsan aboriginal rights in treaty negotiations and other forms of reconciliation with the Crown” (Gitxsan Chiefs’ Office 2012).

### 1.3.2 Location of Gitxsan Communities

The five separate communities of Gitxsan Nation – Gitwangak, Gitsegukla, Gitanmaax, Kispiox, and Glen Vowell – are located in the upper Skeena River area, mostly clustered in close proximity to the Hazeltons. Each community has their own Indian reserves (Figure 1.3-2). The community of Gitwangak has eight reserves and the band has a registered population (on and off-reserve) of 1,216 (Table 1.3-1).

**Table 1.3-1. Gitwangak Reserves**

Reserves	Res. #	Hectares
Chig-in-Kaht	8	25.90
Gitwangak	1	1,236.70
Gitwangak	2	70.40
Kits-ka-haws	6	22
Koonwats	7	65.60
Kwa-tsa-lix	4	79
Squin-lix-stat	3	7.60
Tum-bah	5	64.70

Source: AANDC (2012)

The Gitsegukla community has four reserves and the band has a registered population (on and off-reserve) of 956 (Table 1.3-2).

**Table 1.3-2. Gitsegukla Reserves**

Reserves	Res. #	Hectares
Andimaul	1	409.10
Gitsegukla	1	1,025.50
Gitsegukla Logging	3	87.80
New Gitsegukla	2	408.10

Source: AANDC (2012)

The Gitanmaax community has five reserves and the band has a registered population (on and off-reserve) of 2,252 (Table 1.3-3).

**Table 1.3-3. Gitanmaax Reserves**

Reserves	Res. #	Hectares
Anlaw	4	114.90
Gitanmaax	1	1,084.60
Kisgegas [Kisgaga’as]	n/a	977.30
Ksoo-gun-ya	2A	145.60
Tsitsk	3	55.40

Source: AANDC (2012)

The Glen Vowell community resides on one reserve, and the band has a registered population (on and off-reserve) of 400 (Table 1.3-4).

**Table 1.3-4. Glen Vowell Reserves**

Reserves	Res. #	Hectares
Sik-e-dakh	2	632.70

Source: AANDC (2012)

Finally, the community of Kispiox includes ten reserves with a registered population (on and off-reserve) of 1,571 (Table 1.3-5).

**Table 1.3-5. Kispiox Reserves**

Reserves	Res. #	Hectares
Agwedin	3	313.70
Andak	9	4
Gul-mak	8	6.10
Gun-a-chal	5	2
Kis-an-usko	7	2.80
Kispiox	1	1,142.30
Kuldoe [Galdo'o]	1	180.50
Quan-skum-ksin-mich-mich	4	2.20
Sidina	6	13.60
Waulp	10	8

Source: AANDC (2012)

### 1.3.3 Fisheries Agreements

The Gitxsan have had a Comprehensive Fisheries Agreement with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans since the early 1990s (J. Steward, Pers. Comm., 2012). This Agreement provides for the involvement of the Gitxsan in the management, protection and enhancement of fisheries resources and fish habitat along the Skeena River. The Agreement also outlines the provisions and process for a Food, Social and Ceremonial (FSC) Fishery<sup>1</sup> each season, and is supported by the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy<sup>2</sup> (AFS) of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). Provisions in the Agreement stipulate how many fish (of each species) the Gitxsan are allowed to fish per year, as well as the creation of a Fishing Plan which sets dates and times when fishing can occur, and the waters in which the Gitxsan may fish. Salmon or other fish caught through the FSC fishery may not be sold, traded or bartered. DFO provides the Gitxsan with a Communal Licence to catch the species and quantity of fish set out in the Agreement. The Gitxsan designate who is allowed to fish under the Communal Licence and issue designation cards to that effect. They are also responsible for monitoring and enforcement of fishery provisions and reporting harvest

<sup>1</sup> As opposed to a commercial fishery, in which fish can be sold, bartered or traded.

<sup>2</sup> The AFS, in response to the 1990 Supreme Court of Canada ruling on the *Sparrow* case (that Aboriginal groups had the right to fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes), was created to provide stable fishery management in areas of Canada where land claims settlements have not already put a fisheries management regime in place. The objectives of the AFS are to provide a framework for the management of Aboriginal FSC fisheries, provide Aboriginal groups with the opportunity to participate in the management of fisheries, and to contribute to Aboriginal economic self-sufficiency, among others.

data to DFO. DFO through this agreement also provides financial assistance to the Gitksan to conduct fisheries management activities.

Since approximately 2007, the Gitksan have also been provided a commercial fish allocation through a demonstration fishery (J. Steward, pers. comm. 2012), approved by DFO under an Aboriginal Communal Sockeye Salmon Fishing License .The 2012 commercial allocation of salmon for the Gitksan was approximately 60,000, and they harvested all but 5,000 of it, the under-fishing caused by the late fishing season on the Skeena River (J. Steward, pers. comm. 2012). Neither the FSC nor the commercial fishery is within the Nass or Unuk River watersheds and therefore will not be affected by the proposed Project.

The Gitksan Watershed Authorities (GWA), established in 1992 as the Gitksan Wet'suwet'en Watershed Authorities, manages fisheries to ensure strong salmon returns to Gitksan territories. Co-management is being attempted with DFO, primarily in the Skeena River watershed. Issues addressed in the co-management process have included power-sharing, differentiation between commercial and food fisheries, and enforcement. GWA has control over collection of Aboriginal fishery and stock data.

Several Gitksan *huwilp* are involved in sustainable watershed planning efforts, which incorporate employment for Gitksan people. An overall goal is to develop sustainable development plans for each watershed that will incorporate considerations with respect to Aboriginal title, contribute to capacity building, and enhance economic conditions (Gwaans 2007; Gitksan Chiefs' Office 2010).

## 2. Purpose

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Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Use (TK/TU) studies can provide important information on First Nations' interests and elucidate technical, academic, and indigenous information about the traditional and contemporary use and knowledge of areas within the vicinity of the KSM project. The overall purposes of the collection of TK/TU information are to document and understand the pre-contact, historic and contemporary Gitksan activities, practices and uses of the area downstream of the proposed location of the KSM Tailing Management Facility (TMF), located in the Nass watershed, and along the Project traffic route.

This report is based on desk-based research using publicly available sources as well as feedback provided by the Gitksan Chiefs' Office.



## 3. Methodology

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### 3.1 APPROACH

The study involved a desktop review of available ethnographic information for the Gitksan Nation as well as northwest British Columbia. A draft report was provided to the Gitksan Chiefs' Office in March 2011 for review. Feedback was provided and integrated into the report in April 2011.

### 3.2 DESKTOP ETHNOGRAPHIC INFORMATION COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Bibliographic and internet sources, including *adaawk* (oral histories), were searched to identify references for applicable ethnographic information. Topics for information collection included cultural setting (history, social organization, family and kinship, and language use), economic life, subsistence strategies, and spiritualism and ceremony. All identified journal articles, books and book chapters, reports and proceedings, as well as information from government and organization web sites, were reviewed. The analysis included studying pre-contact culture and historic patterns that occurred in northwest BC through to the modern period.

Publicly available documents produced for environmental assessments for other Projects, such as the Northwest Transmission Line were also reviewed for TK/TU information relevant to the Gitksan (Rescan 2009). Based on the results of the review, an analysis and synthesis of the available ethnographic information was prepared.

### 3.3 DATA CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Historical secondary ethnographic information from published sources has limitations and should not be considered conclusive or complete, or necessarily reflective of the values, interests, and concerns of Aboriginal groups in the vicinity of the Project. Ethnographic observations were recorded by Euro-Canadians in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; these observations were largely informed by a western worldview. Nevertheless, this work provides important accounts into daily life, social and political structures, and subsistence methods employed by members of the related First Nations. Similarly, First Nations typically passed on their history through oral stories (*adaawk*) which, though they may not provide complete accounts of past use and traditions, are still important sources of information, particularly from the point of view of the First Nations who lived in the area.

Data gaps within this study are expected due to a lack of site-specific information. It is acknowledged that there are unpublished primary source materials, including archived recorded oral history interviews, which may provide additional information on traditional knowledge and use areas downstream of the Project area. Historical and cultural overviews provide useful information, but are often broadly scoped, providing information about culture, land use, and travel with relatively few details regarding specific locations downstream of the KSM Project area.

## 4. Results

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### 4.1 BACKGROUND

#### 4.1.1 Traditional Territory

Gitxsan assert territory along the middle and upper Skeena River, above Kitselas Canyon, which stretches north to near the latitude of Bell II (Figure 1.3-1). The southwest boundary extends outward to approximately the Kitsumkalum River (Rescan 2009). All of their 33,000 km<sup>2</sup> territory can be found in the Coast Range mountains of the northwest coast of BC.

Gitxsan traditional territory lies at the intersection of three major North American ecological and climatic regions – Coast, Interior, and North (boreal). Coastal climate is mild and wet, with heavy snowfall at higher elevations, whereas the Interior climate is continental, with warm summers, cold winters, and variable precipitation. The northern (boreal) zone has a subarctic climate with cold winters, a short growing season, and low precipitation (Daly 2005).

Gitxsan territory is composed of rugged, glacier-capped mountains, lush forests and swiftly flowing rivers heavily influenced by the north Pacific Ocean climate. The Babine, Bulkley, Kispiox and Skeena rivers are all found in Gitxsan territory and they are home to abundant salmon and steelhead runs. Spruce, subalpine fir, hemlock, cedar and pine make up extensive forests within the territory (Gitxsan n.d.).

Much of the forest floor is moss-covered, providing fertile growing areas for mushrooms, many of which are edible. Open areas in the forested land provide prime growing locations for wild berries. The rich ecosystem supports a wide variety of mammals and birds. Small mammals, such as marten, are abundant, as are deer, moose and mountain goat. The land is also home to healthy populations of black and grizzly bears (Gitxsan n.d.).

Maps of Gitxsan territory with the locations and names of places significant to Gitxsan people are reproduced in Sterritt et al. (1998). Data from these maps, however, are difficult to derive or interpret due to their large scale. Moreover, most, if not all, of these sites lie east of the Project area. A map of Gitxsan house territories can be found in Daly (2005).

#### 4.1.2 Language

The language of the Gitxsan is known as *Gitxsanimaax*, part of the larger Tsimshianic language family (Hindle and Rigsby 1973; Rigsby 1986; Gitxsan Chiefs' Office 2010). According to recent language surveys conducted by the Gitxsan, of the people who claim Gitxsan descent (including the Gitanyow), there are 444 fluent speakers of *Gitxsanimaax*. Nearly 2,300 people understand and speak the language somewhat, and 617 people identified themselves as “learning speakers”(FPHLCC n.d.).

Sebastian and Sampare (pers. comm. 2011), stated that approximately 70% of Gitxsan people speak the Gitxsan language to varying degrees. Now, more than in recent decades, there is recognition of the need to pass the language on to young people. While language is not always taught in a school setting, children are increasingly learning the Gitxsan language in other ways. Traditional learning is increasing and children are again being given Gitxsan traditional names. Feasts occur on a regular basis – almost weekly – and are based around events such as weddings, births, and deaths.

#### 4.1.3 Social Organization

A Gitxsan person is born into a particular *wilp* (house) and clan, which are the most important societal and political units for the Gitxsan. *Wilp* membership is based on matrilineal descent. In recent years there have been between 45 and 65 *huwilp*, with membership ranging from 20 to 250 members. Members belong to one of four clans (*pdeek*): *Lax Gibuu* (Wolf), *Lax Skiik* (Eagle), *Lax Seel/Ganeda* (Frog), and *Giskaast* (Fireweed- Gitxsan Chiefs' Office 2010).

Each *wilp* has autonomy over its own affairs, including rights, title, and jurisdiction pertaining to land and resources in its particular territory. These rights and title are consistent with *ayookim Gitxsan* (Gitxsan law). Each *wilp* has an *adaawk* connected to their territory, some of which is recorded on a totem pole created for the *wilp*. A number of assets are handed down through generations in each *wilp*. Economic, social, and political decisions are made in the *Liligit* (feast hall- Gitxsan Chiefs' Office 2010).

Gitxsan law holds that permission must be granted by the chief for any activity that is to take place within a *wilp*'s territory. This requirement extends to all trespassers who in the past would have been expelled or killed following a warning (Daly 2005).

A *wilp* chief is the highest authority and spokesperson for the *wilp*. In addition to hereditary chiefs, wing chiefs may have roles in various areas, including areas pertaining to aquatic resources (Gitxsan Chiefs' Office 2010). For example, the *wilp* chief holds authority and responsibility concerning that *wilp*'s fishing grounds, but may delegate fishing rights and authority to *wilp* sub-chiefs. The *wilp* chief's authority over fishing grounds is passed on to the chief's successor (Morrell 1989).

#### 4.1.4 Traditional Economy

Gitxsan traditional economy closely follows the patterns of other groups living within the upper Nass watershed, including a focus on fishing, wildlife harvesting, trapping, and medicinal and food plant gathering. Traditional resource procurement strategies follow a seasonal cycle that is focussed on salmon fishing sites and hunting areas within the upper Skeena and Nass watersheds (Daly 2005). Registration of traplines, initiated in the 1920s, brought the Gitxsan into conflict with their traditional concepts of matrilineal descent as provincial regulations stipulated that traplines pass from father to son.

An important aspect of the Gitxsan economy before contact with Europeans was trading natural resources, particularly salmon. Grease trails were prime locations for this trade, and the Gitxsan would trade with coastal First Nations for oolichan grease, among other items. The amount of salmon traded depended on fishing effort and fluctuations in seasonal abundance (GWA 2004; Gitxsan Chiefs' Office 2010).

Some Gitxsan people travelled to the Nass River in spring to acquire oolichan grease and dried oolichan. Nisga'a chiefs would formally receive them as they approached Nisga'a villages. Those Gitxsan without kinship ties to the Nisga'a were usually housed with groups of the same clan. In exchange for rights to use grease-rendering sites along the Nass River, they would provide items such as dried fish and meat, tanned hides, soapberries, horn spoons, and furs. Other items that Gitxsan obtained from the Nass River area included shellfish, goods made of shells, and painted wooden boxes. The Gitxsan and Nisga'a would harvest oolichan together. Gitxsan would also trade with other First Nations visiting the area (People of 'Ksan 1980; Daly 2005).

#### 4.1.5 Spiritualism and Ceremonies

Among the Gitksan, establishing and maintaining supernatural power and well-being was the responsibility of the hereditary chiefs. Their religious responsibilities included demonstrating respect for animals and spirits in all activities (such as hunting, fishing, and the consumption of animal foods), and also during the particularly volatile periods around rituals, birth, and death (M. M. Halpin and M. Seguin 1990).

Gitksan hereditary chiefs were responsible for the conducting of ceremonies and dances. In their role as house chiefs they were active in ritual occasions such as feasts and naming ceremonies; at these occasions they wore their crests and ceremonial robes and headdresses. In their role as *naḡnóḡ* or “power” dancers they dramatized and validated the powers of their ancestors and their house by masked dances and dramas. As *smhaláit* or “real dancers” they initiated young people into ritual roles. As a *wihaláit* or “great dancer”, he was the leader of four secret societies, into which many of the people were initiated (M. M. Halpin and M. Seguin 1990).

Feasting is a significant event in Gitksan culture and is filled with ceremony and symbolism. Resource management has historically been significant for the success of the *wilp*, and the social institutions of wealth and status have traditionally been closely tied to a system of feasting. The gifting of resources during feasts, particularly food from within one’s territory, is considered a significant act that affirms the status of a *wilp* and demonstrates its success. Chiefly status and even power sharing would be demonstrated in the orientation of seating during the feast. Chiefs with high social standing within any *wilp* command respect across all clans (*pdeek*).

A chief’s role in ordering sacred relations was complemented by the activities of specialists called *swánsk haláit* or “blowing shamans”, who were particularly active during serious illness or times of “bad luck” such as the failure of a salmon run. Illness was believed to be at least partly due to spiritual weakness or impurity, and the practices of the shaman marshalled the spiritual resources of the community to strengthen and purify the spirits of the patients, who were symbolically cleansed by the shaman sucking “dirty” objects from them and rubbing them with clean substances. The *swánsk haláit* were not a separate social stratum and in fact some hereditary chiefs were shamans as well (M. M. Halpin and M. Seguin 1990).

#### 4.1.6 After European Contact

The Gitksan were in contact with Europeans at Fort McLeod and Fort St. James during the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although the documented history of the Gitksan did not begin until the establishment of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) at Fort Simpson at the mouth of the Nass River in 1831. Incursion by Euro-Canadian settlers did not occur in any significant fashion until the late 1860s, when Gitanmaax became the site of the Skeena River trading town of Skeena Forks, now Hazelton (M. M. Halpin and M. Seguin 1990). The Gitksan’s location provided a favourable position to trade with groups both on the coast and the interior, acting as “middle men” (Daly 2005).

From 1750 to 1835, aboriginal fortifications were built at the Gitksan villages of Kispiox, Kisgaga’as, and Gitwangak, likely in response to trading networks that brought European goods into the area in advance of settlement. They were connected by “grease trails”, 22 of which have been plotted for the Skeena-Nass-Stikine river systems (MacDonald 1984). The fort at Gitwangak was located on a hill a few hundred metres from the Grease Trail connecting the Skeena and Nass rivers. The fort was occupied until 1835, when rifles obtained by trade at nearby Port Simpson rendered the fort indefensible (MacDonald 1989).

William Duncan, an Anglican missionary and lay preacher, arrived at Fort Simpson in 1857 and, in 1862, led a group of about 50 converts to establish a village at the site of the old winter villages on Venn

Passage. Soon after they departed, smallpox hit Fort Simpson, and others followed Duncan to the new village, known as Metlakatla. The community prospered; by 1879 the population of the village was about 1,100 (Duff 1964; M. Halpin and M. Seguin 1990). Additional missions were established in 1880 in Hazelton, and north of Kispiox in 1879 (M. M. Halpin and M. Seguin 1990; Inglis et al. 1990). In the 1900s, Gitxsan from the Skeena River watershed moved to Aiyansh and a mission founded there (Barbeau 1929).

Smallpox, influenza, measles, venereal disease and other infectious diseases made their impact almost simultaneously with contact, perhaps indirectly even before contact. Smallpox seems first to have struck the Northwest Coast during the 1770s, but was not witnessed by Europeans. Further outbreaks, probably less severe because of acquired immunities among survivors of the early pandemic, struck the Gitxsan and other Tsimshian groups in 1836-38, and in 1862 (Boyd 1990).

Following the entry of British Columbia into Confederation in 1871 and during the next two decades, Gitxsan villages became “bands” under the *Indian Act*. Reserves were established for each band at traditional village, burial and subsistence sites (Figure 1.3-2), and the bands came under the administration of Indian Agents (Inglis et al. 1990), despite Gitxsan opposition of reserve allotments without acknowledgment by the government of aboriginal title (Sterritt et al. 1998; Daly 2005).

Glen Vowell was established before 1900 as a Salvation Army village by people from Kispiox. Kisgaga’as and Galdo’o, traditional Gitxsan villages further north, have been deserted since at least 1949 and 1939 respectively (Figure 1.3-2). These former villages were comprised of *huwilp* of the *Lax Gibuu* (wolf clan) and *Lax Ganeda* (raven/frog clan), who trace their origins to much earlier villages. Kisgaga’as was located on the Babine River near its confluence with the Skeena. Kisgaga’as territories extended northeast to beyond Bear Lake and the head of the Skeena, and north to include the Blackwater-Groundhog Mountain area in the Nass watershed. Galdo’o, located on the Skeena River west of Kisgaga’as, included territory in the Nass watershed to and including Bowser Lake and the Bell-Irving River (Sterritt et al. 1998). Due to population decline and non-Aboriginal settlement, Kisgaga’as and Galdo’o members moved southwards to Kispiox and Gitanmaax, where they have, over the past century, integrated their respective houses and clans from the northern villages into the interclan relations of these villages. In the feast, however, they continue to be recognized as descendants of their village of origin (Inglis et al. 1990; Daly 2005).

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Gitxsan began to work in the coastal fish canneries, one of which opened on the Skeena River in 1876. This new economic activity did relatively little to impede the Gitxsan people’s capabilities to obtain salmon for their own food supply. Sail boats (and later motorboats), factory-made nets, new techniques of preservation by salting and “canning” in jars, as well as a multitude of other innovations, enabled greater efficiency of subsistence activities.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Gitxsan villages enjoyed comparative affluence fed by income from fishing, trapping, and freighting. However, technological changes such as the introduction of gasoline-powered fishing boats, and the growth of large non-Aboriginal populations at Prince Rupert, Terrace and Hazelton after World War I, brought about a centralization of the area’s economy, drawing employment and capital away from the villages (Inglis et al. 1990).

With the onset of WWII, the economic picture changed dramatically. Aboriginal people benefited from the demand for labour and from the low prices placed on confiscated Japanese-Canadian fishing boats. After the war, Aboriginal people became concentrated in the fishing, logging and sawmill industries as casual, unskilled, and seasonal workers (Kew 1990). Today, with the proliferation of forestry and other industrial activities in Gitxsan territory, the Gitxsan people operate in a mixed economy. While their

living is earned mostly through wage labour, seasonal hunting and fishing is still important to their informal domestic economy (Daly 2005).

The continued assertion from the Gitksan that aboriginal title and rights had not been extinguished, culminated in the *Delgamuukw* case from 1984 to 1997, when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favor of the Gitksan based on oral history testimony (*adaawk*). It is arguably the most significant court ruling affecting aboriginal rights and title in British Columbia, if not all of Canada. In order to uphold the honour of the Crown, the federal and provincial governments are obligated to consult with an Aboriginal group in any instance where their rights or title could be affected. Moreover, wherever an infringement of Aboriginal rights or title occurs, that infringement must be justified, and compensation must occur where infringement is not justified. (SCC 1997).

## 4.2 TRADITIONAL AND CURRENT USE

Gitksan people historically lived off the land and continue to rely on the land and natural resources for food, culture, and economic pursuits. The integral nature of fish, wildlife, and waterways with the Gitksan lifestyle is apparent from the following Gitksanimaax words (from transcripts of testimony provided by Antgulilibix- Daly 2005):

- Lasa hu'mal (March) – when you can get around by canoe;
- Lasa ya'a (April) – when you start to catch spring salmon;
- Lasa yanja (May) – when leaves come out;
- Lasa maa'y (June) – when berries are forming;
- Lasa 'wiihun (July) – when fish come up the 'Ksan (Skeena River);
- Lasa lik'i'nsxw – when grizzly bears come and kill them [fish];
- Lasa gangwiikxs – when they begin to hunt groundhogs.

### 4.2.1 Fish

Salmon and steelhead trout are abundant in the water systems overlapping Gitksan territory, particularly the upper and mid-Skeena, upper Babine, lower Bulkley, and Kispiox rivers (Gitksan Chiefs' Office 2010).

Salmon is a traditional dietary staple for the Gitksan and the basis of their subsistence economy. The importance of salmon to the Gitksan is evident through oral histories that present salmon as a fraternal people with whom Gitksan have interacted, leading to a respectful and mutually beneficial relationship (Daly 2005). Gitksan harvest and process chinook, coho, sockeye, chum and pink salmon, as well as steelhead, near their spawning grounds (GWA 2004).

According to their *adaawk*, the Gitksan historically fished in areas such as Kispiox and Temlaxamid (the Skeena River area between Kispiox and Gitsegukla, where most Gitksan reserves are located) for sockeye, spring (chinook) salmon and steelhead, using gear such as pronged spears, and weirs with attached basket traps (*t'in*). Other methods have included gaff hooks, conical basket traps with funnelled entrances (*moohl*), dip-nets (*bana*) and traps specialized for certain sites such as waterfalls. Today, most fish are caught with gill nets. Preservation is through smoke-drying, canning, and freezing. Several parts of the fish are used, including the heads, eyes, necks, bellies, and eggs (Sterritt et al. 1998; GWA 2004; Daly 2005).

Summer sockeye and autumn coho salmon runs are harvested in the various rivers and creeks in Gitxsan territory, as well as steelhead during various seasons. Winter fishing occurs for char, Dolly Varden, and cutthroat trout. Lake trout have been important for food and trade. Some Gitxsan with kinship ties to the Nisga'a work at the same fishing sites on the Nass River every year (Daly 2005).

Sockeye are important in the Bell-Irving River up to Bowser Lake. Sockeye have been caught in the falls downstream of Meziadin Lake, and some sockeye also remain through the winter in the lake (Daly 2005).

River fishing has traditionally been a dominant activity in spring and summer. Travel to the river to fish is still an important part of Gitxsan cultural identity. Steelhead fishing in rivers marks the beginning of the spring harvest season. Gitxsan people travel to fishing sites when the weather warms around the end of April to harvest chinook and steelhead, cut wood, and prepare for the summer fishing season. Chiefs would historically provide direction with respect to setting up a fish weir. People would traditionally remain in these fishing sites through summer, dressing and smoking fish as they were caught. They generally stop fishing after the sockeye run (Daly 2005).

During the oolichan fishing season in the early spring, the Gitxsan fished with the Nisga'a on the lower Nass River from Red Bluff to Fishery Bay (M. M. Halpin and M. Seguin 1990). Oolichan grease, obtained through trade, has historically been an important source of energy and vitamins, particularly in the winter. The *adaawk* refer to oolichan grease caches on the Nass River (Daly 2005).

The Gitxsan manage their salmon fisheries, recognizing that their survival is integrally connected to the abundance and health of the fish upon which they depend. Hereditary chiefs' decision-making authority in this respect is, at least partially, to ensure sustainability of the resource for immediate and future needs. The chief's responsibility includes correcting any problems that may arise with the fishery (Morrell 1989). Management practices involve site ownership by a hereditary chief; allocation of access; and control of harvest methods, timing, and numbers. Management methods balanced obtaining surplus and conserving the resource and its habitat, in an adaptive fashion based on changing natural conditions (GWA 2004).

#### 4.2.2 Wildlife

Mammals primarily hunted for subsistence are deer, moose, mountain goat, black bear, and grizzly bear. The Gitxsan trap beaver, mink, marten, fisher, fox, wolf, coyote, weasel, and otter for their fur (People of 'Ksan 1980; M. M. Halpin and M. Seguin 1990). Some traplines are accessible from river and lake valleys, and hunting territories may include salmon spawning and rearing habitat. In addition to their use for furs, some trapped animals have also traditionally been used for rendering grease. (People of 'Ksan 1980; Morrell 1989; M. Halpin and M. Seguin 1990; Daly 2005; Gitxsan Chiefs' Office 2010). Aquatic birds that have traditionally been eaten include geese, ducks, and swans (People of 'Ksan 1980).

The Gitxsan and Nisga'a, whose territories were further inland, had a greater emphasis on land hunting than groups along the coast, and a somewhat greater variety of game available: beaver, marmot and moose were more abundant, and the hunting of bear and mountain goats was a significant activity (M. M. Halpin and M. Seguin 1990). Woodland caribou can be found in the northern portion of Gitxsan territory, though there has been a significant decline in caribou numbers in their territory over the last century (Vescor 2009). Mountain goat was hunted along the Skeena and in the Stewart area, as well as in the upper Nass and Kisgaga'as areas. Marmot pelts were made into robes on the upper Nass and were trade items in Kispiox. Beaver was hunted for the making of robes at Meziadin Lake and along the Skeena and upper Nass. In the Stewart area and on the upper Nass marmot territories were extremely important because the pelts were a highly valued trade item (Daly 2005).

### 4.2.3 Plants

Saskatoon berries, hazelnuts, chokecherries, rosehips, gooseberries, squash berries, raspberries, thimbleberries and soapberries were among those eaten by the Gitksan (Rescan 2009). Interviews with elders as part of the *Delgamuukw* trial indicate that women in the western villages would pick blue huckleberries and blueberries at traditional sites in the mountains for several weeks. They also collected wild crab-apples, swamp cranberries, Saskatoon berries, and soapberries in the valleys. Thorn-berry and rosehips were also taken (Daly 2005).

Prior to laws put in place in the 1930s and 40s, the Gitksan used fire as a management tool to enhance growth of mountain blueberries and blue huckleberries (Gottesfeld 1994). Today, people collect berries in clear-cut areas opened by forestry and along roadsides (Daly 2005). A number of edible mushrooms grow on the moss-covered forest floor, including pine mushrooms, which are harvested primarily for export (Gitksan Chiefs' Office 2010).

Baskets for various functions were made of plant fibre from western red cedar, maple, and birch bark (M. M. Halpin and M. Seguin 1990). Of particular importance is the red cedar; its bark was used to make rope, clothing, baskets, and roofing, while its wood was used in fish traps, nets, house construction, poles, masks, bowls, and storage boxes (M. M. Halpin and M. Seguin 1990; Gottesfeld 1992; Daly 2005). Red willow branches and willow bark were used as construction materials (MacDonald 1989). Hemlock and pine cambium were used as food (People of 'Ksan 1980; Gottesfeld 1992).

Gitksan also harvest a number of medicinal plants (Gitksan Chiefs' Office 2010). Medicinal plants gathered from wet areas at lower elevations include devil's club (late October to spring) and yellow pond lily root (autumn).

### 4.2.4 Travel

There exist a number of trails throughout Gitksan traditional territory that connect fishing, hunting, gathering and trapping areas, camps, villages, and heritage areas such as the locations of culturally modified trees (Collier and Rose 2007).

One such trail travelled up the Nass River valley and then across to Kispiox, which the Gitksan used to reach oolichan fishing sites on the Nass, and to trade oolichan grease with their neighbours. Bridges were constructed by the Gitksan at strategic points along rivers, for example at the confluence of the Nass and Cranberry rivers (Daly 2005).

In both pre- and post-contact times, the Skeena River was used for transportation of goods and people between the coast and the interior. Canoes were used in the Skeena River, in smaller rivers, and in lakes; in later times, steamers travelled the waters up to Hazelton. Once the rivers froze, they could be walked upon. However, trails beside the rivers or overland provided the most reliable routes between seasons (MacDonald 1989).



## 5. Conclusion

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The Gitksan assert that they have resided in the upper Nass and Skeena river areas since time immemorial. The Gitksan have used, and continue to use, their traditional territory for a wide range of activities, including hunting, fishing, trapping, and berry and plant gathering, as well as for spiritual or ceremonial pursuits. The Gitksan *wilp* system possessed the authority and responsibility for the appropriate harvesting and sustainability of resources to fulfill the immediate and future needs of the *wilp*.

While the Gitksan themselves have limited use of the KSM project area, they have identified an interest in the potential aquatic and downstream effects of the Project on Gitksan traditional territory. The Gitksan have a long history of use and management of aquatic resources. Salmon, in particular, have been and continue to be a particularly important resource and are embedded in the Gitksan cultural identity. The importance of aquatic resources such as salmon and other fish to the Gitksan culture, economy, and diet cannot be overstated. Therefore, the health of fish habitat in the Nass River, a downstream receiving environment of the plant site and TMF, is of particular concern for them.

The nine watersheds which overlap in Gitksan traditional territory were used by the Gitksan for hunting, trapping and berry picking. Large ungulates such as deer and moose supplemented their stores of dried salmon during the winter months; however, beaver and marmot were abundant and hunted in great numbers. Berry picking after the salmon harvest was an important activity, and the burning of hillsides ensured the future abundance of berry patches in *wilp* territories.

Today, the sustainability of watersheds used by the Gitksan plays an important role in planning related to land development and resource extraction. With regard to fisheries, the Comprehensive Fisheries Agreement, and commercial allocations under that agreement, have allowed for the conservation of salmon species while maintaining traditional use of the resource and improving the economic outlook for the Gitksan.

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