

TEACHING

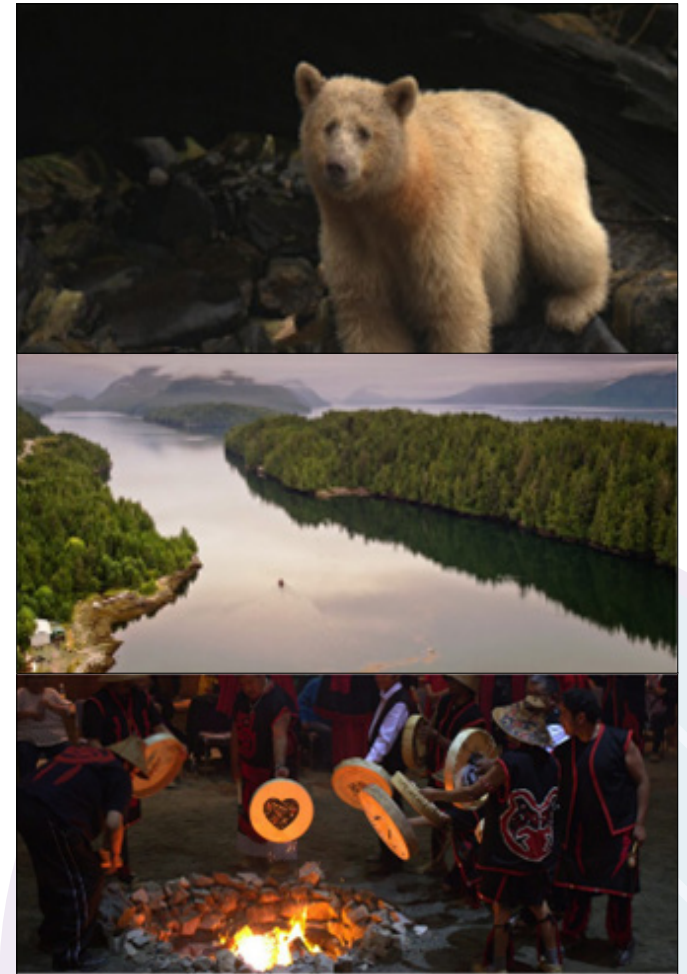
Partnership and Legacy-building through Seven Fundamental Truths¹



The Coastal First Nations are a regional alliance of nine nations: Wui-kinuxv, Heiltsuk, Kitasoo/Xaixais, Nuxalk, Gitga'at, Metlakatla, Old Massett, Skidegate, and Council of the Haida Nation that inhabit British Columbia's North and Central Coast and Haida Gwaii. The seven fundamental truths have guided these communities in the care and stewardship of their ancestral marine and terrestrial ecosystems, cultural knowledges, and practices for millennia.

The lands, waters, animals, and plants are our oldest relations and teachers and they nourish and sustain the diverse peoples of Mother Earth. We have a responsibility to live in respect, balance, connectivity, and reciprocity with the lands, waters, and all beings. The Coastal First Nations have been living on and caring for the lands and waters of their ancestral territories since time immemorial, and will continue to do so for the next seven generations and beyond.

1 - Brown, F. and Y.K. Brown (compilers). 2009. "Staying the Course, Staying Alive – Coastal First Nations Fundamental Truths: Biodiversity, Stewardship and Sustainability." Biodiversity BC: Victoria, BC. 82 pp.



Top: white bear, middle: river, bottom: circle with fire and drums
Credit: Coastal First Nations Great Bear Initiative²

2 - <https://coastalfirstnations.ca/>



Credit: Haida Gáa'aang (Totem Pole) Credit: Tanya Chung-Tiam-Fook

Each of the seven fundamental truths is grounded in the particular language, connectivity to, and understanding of land and place, maps, stewardship practices, and stories from different Coastal First Nations. Consolidated as a set of truths from the wise counsel, experiences and stories of three matriarchs and sacred knowledge-keepers: Hilistis Pauline Waterfall (Heiltsuk), Wikalalisame'ga Gloria Cranmer-Webster (Namgis of the Kwakwaka'wakw), and Kii'iljuus Barb Wilson (Haida Nation), these core values encode the deep connection of each Nation to their ancestral territories and have been passed from one generation to another through stories.

Heiltsuk Elder and knowledge-keeper, Hilistis Pauline Waterfall contextualizes the application of the seven fundamental truths as sacred teachings and protocols gifted by the Creator in her piece, *Coming of Age and Making It Right: Our Moral and Ethical Responsibility*³. The truths prepare people for their life journey, teaching them how to live in balance with the lands, waters, and animal and plant relations:

Our stories affirm our values and truths and validate who we are and where we come from. It is a custom among Coastal First Nations to have a coming of age ceremony when a child becomes a young adult. The young person is provided with gifts and teachings in preparation for their life's journey. In 2008 British Columbia celebrated its first 150 years as a province, which may, in some respects, be considered its "coming of age". The teachings that we are sharing may then be regarded as gifts from Coastal First Nations to mark this coming of age. They reflect the core values that have enabled us to live sustainably

2 - Ibid.

within our homelands for the past several thousand years.

We are stewards of the land on which we live, knowing that our health as a people is intricately tied to the health of the land and waters. It is with this in mind that we must continue to exercise stewardship to maintain biodiversity and enrich our homelands so as to sustain them as the most beautiful place on the planet.

We need to stay the course in order to stay alive. We need to revitalize the teachings our ancestors left us, affirm our identity and reconnect to the land and sea, and share our traditional knowledge within our nations and with those around us.

From *Staying the Course, Staying Alive – Coastal First Nations Fundamental Truths: Biodiversity, Stewardship and Sustainability* (Brown and Brown, 2009):

The seven truths flow naturally from one to another and together form an integrated set of beliefs about the relationships of first peoples with nature and about the practices our ancestors evolved since Creation to sustain life in all its forms. Living in the same place where our ancestors have always lived, we naturally came to understand the interconnectedness and equality of all life. That understanding in turn fostered an intimate relationship with and knowledge of nature and its cycles, and an appreciation that the survival of the natural world required careful and constant stewardship. But we also recognize that stewardship by itself is not enough.

For our own strength and survival, we must accept our responsibility to share with and support all other beings to keep them strong too and to be prepared to continually adapt to change.



Respectful harvesting of cedar bark from the tree of life by shirl 'yvxmi hallfrom and was taken from: Brown, F. and Y.K. Brown (compilers). 2009. "Staying the Course, Staying Alive – Coastal First Nations Fundamental Truths: Biodiversity, Stewardship and Sustainability." Biodiversity BC: Victoria, BC. 82 pp

- **Fundamental Truth 1: Creation**
We the coastal first peoples have been in our respective territories (homelands) since the beginning of time.
- **Fundamental Truth 2: Connection to Nature**
We are all one and our lives are interconnected.
- **Fundamental Truth 3: Respect**
All life has equal value. We acknowledge and respect that all plants and animals have a life force.



Credit: KRISTY CAMERON, *The Seven Sacred Teachings Of White Buffalo Calf Woman* (Niizhwaaswi Aanike'iniwendiwon Waabishiki Mashkode Bizhikiins Ikwe) 2009

- **Fundamental Truth 4: Knowledge**
Our traditional knowledge of sustainable resource use and management is reflected in our intimate relationship with nature and its predictable seasonal cycles, and indicators of renewal of life and subsistence.
- **Fundamental Truth 5: Stewardship**
We are stewards of the land and sea from which we live, knowing that our health as a people and our society is intricately tied to the health of the land and waters.
- **Fundamental Truth 6: Sharing**
We have a responsibility to share and support to provide strength and make others stronger in order for our world to survive.
- **Fundamental Truth 7: Adapting to Change**
Environmental, demographic, socio-political, and cultural changes have occurred since the creator placed us in our homelands and we have continuously adapted to and survived these changes.