



BY NAK'AZDLI  
FOR NAK'AZDLI



# THE VISION OF OUR PEOPLE

NAK'AZDLI WHUT'EN'S  
COMMUNITY VISION PLAN

Current Version: December 2025

## INTRODUCTION

This document is Nak'azdli Whut'en's Community Vision Plan (CVP), and it aims to reflect the voices, values, and vision of our community. This plan has been created with input from community members and brings together the ideas and hopes of our people. The purpose of this Plan is to help Nak'azdli move forward together strengthening our community in a way that honours who we are and where we come from.

Nak'azdli is a strong and proud Dakelh community, with a deep connection to our territory and a long history of responsible stewardship. Guided by generations of knowledge, we plan not just for today, but for the future we are actively shaping. The Community Vision Plan reflects this forward-thinking spirit, it helps Chief and Council, staff, and all Nak'azdli members stay aligned on what matters most, ensuring that the choices we make today support a vibrant future for generations to come.

This Plan is organized around eight central pillars—key areas of life that our community identified as most important. Each section includes a shared vision, what we heard from members, and the goals we will work toward as a community. This is a living document. It is meant to be used, updated, and returned to often. It belongs to all Nak'azdli Whut'enne and together, it will help guide us on our path forward.





# COMMUNITY HISTORY OVERVIEW

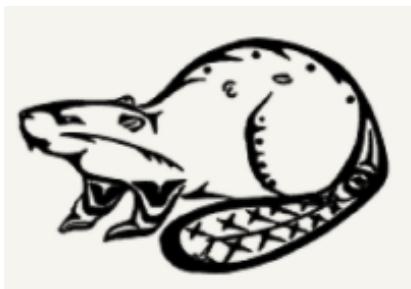
Nak'azdli Whut'en is a Dakelh/Carrier non-treaty First Nation located adjacent to Fort St. James, BC. Our people are Dakelh which is part of the larger Dene (Athapaskan) language family. The meaning of Dakelh is "People Who go Around by Boat".

Nak'azdli Whut'enne is based on the Clan System. Currently there are four clans: Lhts'umusyoo (Beaver); Lusilyoo (Frog); Kwun Ba Whuten (Caribou); Lohjabou (Bear).

Nak'azdli has eighteen reserves in total in and around Fort St. James. Most community members live on Indian Reserve (IR) #1 which is separated from Fort St. James by Kwah Road. There are also a few families on IR #1A up the North Road at Four-Mile and William's Prairie Meadow.

Our people have a rich and enduring history that stretches back to time immemorial, deeply connected to the land, waters, and customs that continue to guide us today. Known as "Where Arrows Were Floating," Nak'azdli has long been home for generations of families who maintained our territories through the Balhats and Keyoh systems. Despite the profound disruptions of colonial encounters, Nak'azdli Whut'enne have continually demonstrated resilience, strength, and leadership. This history is not only a record of survival but also a testament to the determination and vision of a people who continue to uphold Dakelh values while shaping a thriving, self-determined future.

A more detailed account of our community's history and can be found at the end of this document.





1940's

# IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS AND COMMUNITY HISTORY TIMELINE

## Definitions:

- **Dak'elh** = people who travel on water; a term to describe ourselves. When speaking we may use it to ask if a person is Indigenous.
- **Dak'elh'ne** = Dak'elh people
- **Nak'azdli** = the place name or name of our lands, i.e. Nak'azdli territory
- **Nak'azdli Whut'en** = translates to 'the People who live in Nak'azdli' and was chosen as the name of our Indian Band Council, previously Nak'azdli Band and Necoslie Indian Band.
- **Nak'azdli Whut'tenne** = people who live in Nak'azdli
- **Carrier** = the name given to us because we carried the ashes of our deceased for a year after death; we carried them from the central community to the Keyoh or wherever we travelled during the grieving period; we did not carry them constantly, only while moving from place to place.
- **Yinka Dene** = people of the land/earth, may also mean 'people of the universe' when we speak of the stars and comets as it reflects our awareness of how all creation is connected.

The history of Nak'azdli Whut'en is rich and complex. While a more detailed community history is shared later in this document, we also wanted to highlight a ***“Timeline of Important Dates in the Nechako Plateau Area”*** developed by Marlene Erickson. This timeline spans the years 1745–1982 and provides valuable historical context for Nak'azdli and the surrounding region. It can be found on the Nak'azdli website under the Comprehensive Community Plan page, or accessed directly at the following hyperlink: <https://www.nakazdliwhuten.ca/NakazdliCommunityPlan>





# THE STORY OF NAK'AZDLI

## The Little Dwarves and the Creation of Nak'azdli

**'Uda yinka da', Dunet'um-ne, 'Utna-ne yaz ubuhutni, enne. Nak'al Dzulh bet whuhut'i. Lhelhdun Keyoh whut'en-ne lhts'odutni 'ink'ez lhehuzudla inle'. 'Et huwa, 'Utna-ne yaz 'ink'ez Nak'azdli whut'en-ne te lhat lhuhugan inle'.**

Long ago, there were little people called dwarves that lived in the Nak'azdli area. It used to be that people from different places didn't get along and sometimes even hated each other. That is why the Little Dwarves and the people of Nak'azdli were often at war with each other.

**'Ilhoh, 'Utnane yaz 'ula'ts'i be Nak'alghun ts'e hutizba.**

One time the Little Dwarves came down to the south end of Nak'al Bun in their bark canoes to war with the people of Nak'azdli.

**'Ohda', Nak'alghun whut'at, 'et ts'o 'ulh ti nanint'i.**

In those days, the south end of the lake was blocked off by a great causeway.

**Lhuhugan whutoh, lhai k'aza hutizso k'et, dut'si bet whuts'un, nyoo 'ulh dube'hidunilhtso whe nda' huntiz'il.**

During the battle, the Little Dwarves shot so many arrows from their canoes that the arrows broke through the dam, causing it to float downstream.

**'Ulh dube'hidunilhtso whe nda' huntiz'il 'ink'ez noo suli". 'I'unt'oh 'andit "Noo Yiz" ts'utni, ookw'uzts'e cha "Tl'otizdli" ts'uwhutni.**

When they shot the dam open it floated off and formed an island which is now called "Noo Yiz", or "Long Island". One side of the island is called "Tl'otizdli", or "Grassy Outlet", the grass where the arrows floated off.

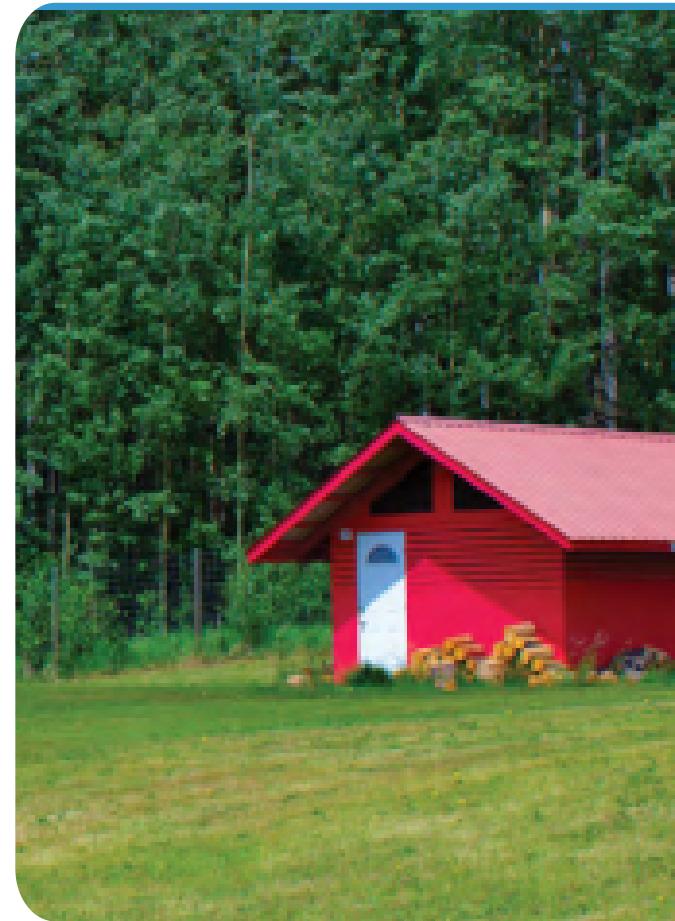
**'Utnaneyaz k'a lhai tahalhtseh, 'i k'a tizdli. "Utnaneyaz k'a bulh tizdli", ni whe 'utni, ndi khuni.**

After that the people called that place "Utnaneyaz k'a bulh tizdli" or Nak'azdli, which means "the place where the Little Dwarves' arrows floated off".

**'Et 'awet za**

The End





# WHAT IS A COMMUNITY VISION PLAN?

A Community Vision Plan (CVP) is a document that helps a community come together around a shared vision. This is our CVP, and it reflects who we are and what is most important to us. This plan has been developed based on feedback from the community and identifies community priorities that can form the foundation of future decision making.

This plan is meant to be high-level, and it is only step-one in the planning process. This plan sets the stage for a more detailed Strategic Plan and departmental plans (i.e Land Use Plan) that will follow. The goal of this plan is to document community priorities so we can be proactive in shaping our own path instead of reacting to outside pressures.

Our CVP was created by the community, for the community. It helps Chief and Council, staff, and all community members stay focused on what matters most.

In short, our CVP helps Nak'azdli Whut'en:

- Plan for the future we want.
- Protect our values and way of life.
- Make decisions that reflect our priorities.
- Use our time and resources wisely.
- Open the door to new opportunities that are still grounded in our ways.

The CVP is our guide. It reminds us of where we come from, and where we are going, together.



2023

# HOW TO USE THIS CVP

## HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

The most important thing about this Plan is that it gets used. This is not just a document to sit on a shelf, it's a living guide that should be returned to regularly as we make decisions and plan for the future.



This Community Vision Plan belongs to all Nak'azdli Whut'enne. It reflects the vision, values, and voices of our people, gathered through community conversations, and is meant to guide us moving forward.

Chief and Council can use this Plan to set direction and make decisions rooted in community priorities. Staff and departments can use it to design programs and services that reflect what matters most to Nak'azdli. Future leaders and community members will be able to look to this document to understand where we've come from and where we're going, and to carry the vision forward.

This CVP is the foundation for a larger planning process. It will guide us in making a Strategic Plan, which will set more specific actions, timelines, and responsibilities. From there, each department can build their own plans based on the CVP's goals and identified actions. This means the ideas in this Plan will directly shape the programs, services, and decisions that affect daily life in our community.

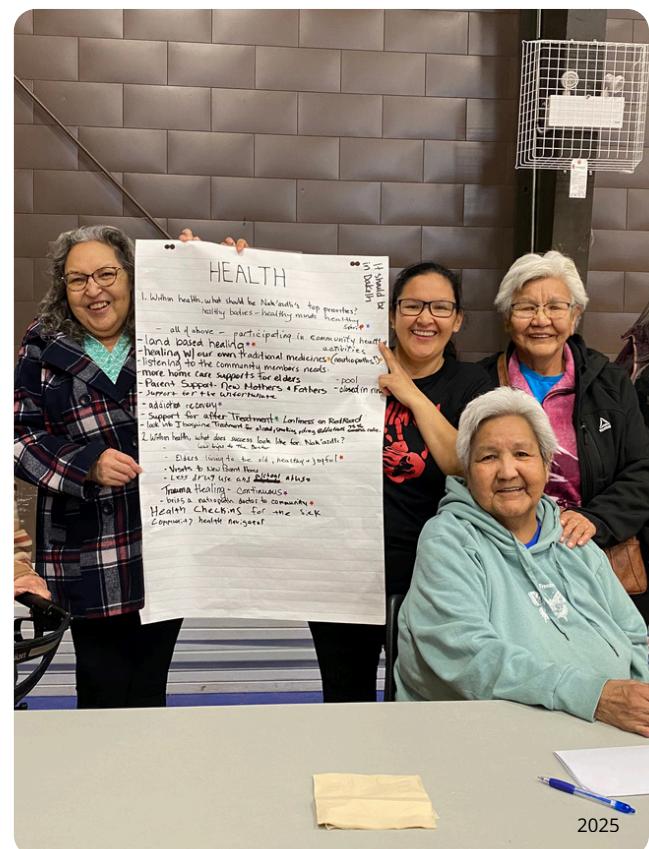
It's important that this Plan stays alive and active. It should be read and understood by all leadership, staff, and community members and revisited regularly. Every few years, we can reflect on our progress, make changes if needed, and keep moving forward in a good way. Everything in this Plan comes from Nak'azdli people. It is our map, our guide, and our commitment to a strong future rooted in who we are.

# HOW THE CVP WAS DEVELOPED

In 2024, our community made the decision to develop a Community Vision Plan (CVP) to guide us into the future. We knew that it was time to bring our voices together to reflect on where we have come from, where we are now, and where we want to go as a community. We wanted this plan to capture the voices of our community today but also to build on the past work done including the *2013 Comprehensive Community Plan*, *Draft 2021 Nak'azdli Strategic Plan*, *Yinka Huwunline Strategic Plan (2023)*, *the Nak'azdli Community Land Use Plan (2024)*, *the Health Centre 10-Year Plan (2022)*, and existing Departmental Plans.

At the start of 2025, Nak'azdli put together a working group to help support and facilitate this process. The work has been led in close collaboration with core team members from Nak'azdli Whut'en staff to ensure that every step of the way was grounded in our community's needs, values, and ways of working together.

For this plan to be successful, it must reflect the lived experiences and knowledge of our members. Our first step was to conduct strong and meaningful community consultation reaching as many voices as possible.



Nak'azdli Whut'en Community Vision Plan - 8



## HERE'S HOW WE DID THAT:

- We formed a team of Nak'azdli Whut'en staff members to guide and lead the process.
- We held a group session with department managers and directors to gather insight from different departments and programs.
- Chief and Council were engaged throughout the process, both as a group and through individual conversations with the Chief and several Council members.
- We held over 30 one-on-one conversations with community members including managers, directors, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and language speakers to hear directly from those working on the ground.
- A community-wide survey was launched to invite all members, both on and off-reserve, to share their thoughts and priorities. Over 80 people responded.
- We hosted a "World Café" event both in person and online—that brought together 63 participants. At this gathering, community members shared their thoughts on community vision, values, and goals.
- Chief and Council reviewed the draft CVP and then it was shared openly with the community and online for general feedback.
- On December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025 Chief and Council passed a Band Council Resolution in support of this Community Vision Plan in its "draft" form with an understanding that this document will continue to be updated.

We recognize that broad community involvement is essential to building a Plan that reflects our whole community. While we have engaged as widely as possible, we know more work is needed. This Plan is a living document that will continue to be shaped by community feedback.

### A Note of Appreciation

We want to say a big thank you to everyone who contributed to this plan. In particular, thank you to all of the community members who shared your knowledge and vision for Nak'azdli's future, to Elsa Berland, Rhoda Gregg, and Catherine Lessard for your commitment to moving this forward, and to Chief and Council for your support, guidance, and leadership throughout this process.

# COMMUNITY VALUES

Identifying community values is a key step in building a plan that truly reflects who we are and what matters most to us. Knowing and seeing our values can serve as a way of keeping us grounded and help shape decisions, priorities, and actions moving forward. As part of this process, we gathered input on community values through one-on-one conversations, an open community survey, and the in-person and virtual World Café events. Community members shared what they value most about Nak'azdli and these values will act as a compass to ensure that future decisions and plans remain rooted in what the community cares about most.

The most commonly identified values for Nak'azdli community members were:

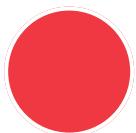
- Family
- Connection to Tradition and Our Ways
- Respect
- Supporting Our Community Members
- Staying Connected as a Community
- Protecting Our Lands
- Language Preservation
- Health and Wellness
- Balhats

## COMMUNITY VISION

*"To be a thriving, self-determining Dakelh community, championing our ways, acting as stewards of the land, and evolving through education, healthy lifestyles, and economic progress."*

# COMMUNITY PILLARS

Through conversations, surveys, and engagement at the World Café events, community members identified the eight areas of life that matter most to the future of Nak'azdli. These became the central “pillars” of our Community Vision Plan. Each pillar reflects a key aspect of our community, and they form the foundation for a strong and connected future. These pillars are important because they were shaped by the voices of our members and represent what our community believes should be protected, strengthened, and supported. The rest of this plan is organized around these pillars, with each section highlighting the community's vision, what we heard, and the goals for each pillar.



**OUR DAKELH  
WAYS &  
LANGUAGE**



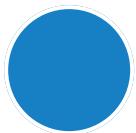
**GOVERNANCE**



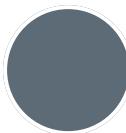
**LAND &  
RESOURCES**



**INFRASTRUCTURE**



**ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT**



**HEALTH**



**EDUCATION**



**COMMUNITY SAFETY**



THE VISION FOR

# OUR DAKELH WAYS & LANGUAGE

*Nak'azdli Whut'en will be a community where our Dakelh ways and language are alive in every part of daily life. Our ways of knowing, speaking, and teaching will guide how we live, learn, and lead. Elders will be honoured as knowledge keepers, youth will carry our teachings forward, and every member on and off-reserve will feel a deep connection to who we are and where we come from.*

## OUR DAKELH WAYS & LANGUAGE GOALS

- Support the revitalization and everyday use of Dakelh language across all generations.
- Create more opportunities for community members to connect to Dakelh ways through gatherings, teaching opportunities and land-based learnings.
- Integrate Dakelh culture and teachings into all community programs and services.
- Celebrate and uplift Elders as teachers and engage youth to see themselves as the carriers of Dakelh ways.
- Build dedicated spaces where our ways of being can be shared, practiced, and protected.

## WHAT WE HEARD

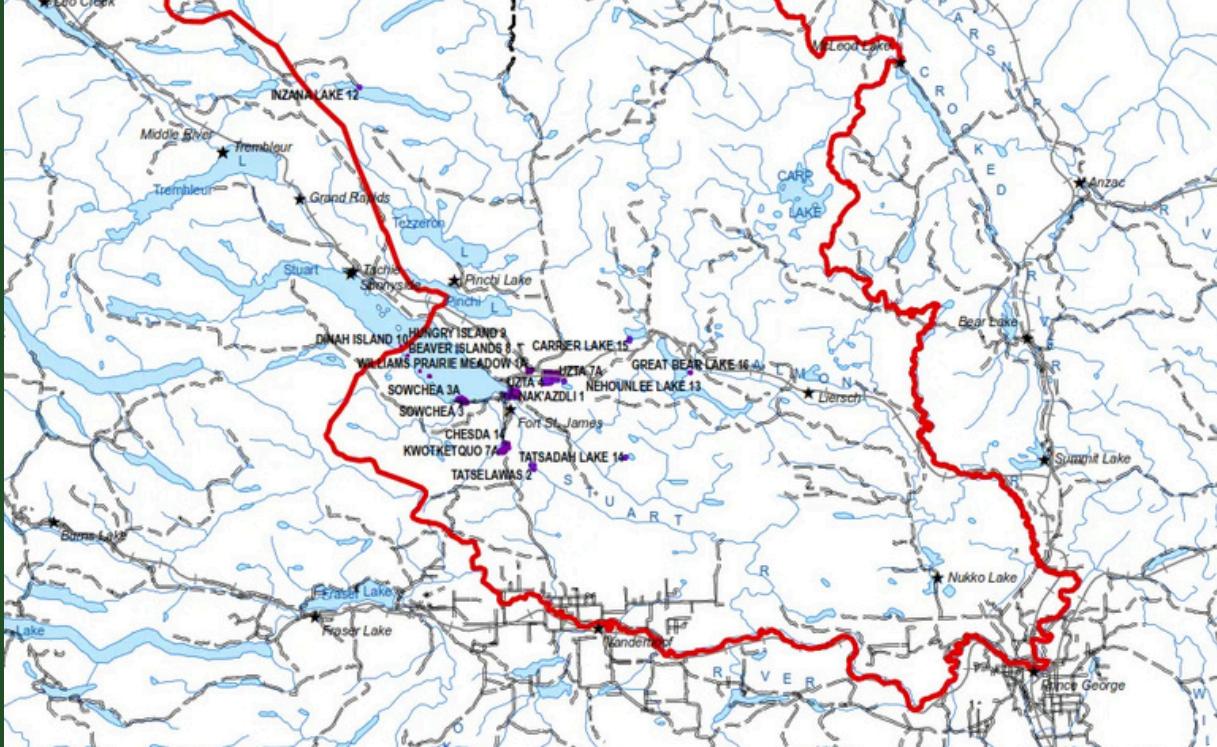
When we spoke with community members, the importance of language and remaining connected to our traditional ways were consistently raised as a top priority. Members emphasized that revitalizing Dakelh language and traditions is essential to healing, identity, and community-building. People spoke with urgency about the need to support fluent speakers, host more language camps, and teach youth not only to speak Dakelh, but how to remain connected to our traditional ways.

There is a strong desire for more events, ceremonies, and seasonal activities that bring everyone together especially Elders, children, and those living away from the territory. Traditional practices like Balhats, singing, drumming, storytelling, crafting, and harvesting from the land, were named as important anchors to our ways. Members also expressed the importance of embedding our traditional ways of being in programs offered to the community so that Nak'azdli values guide every part of community life.

Members shared that they want to see more spaces, like the creation of a cultural center, where Nak'azdli traditional ways and language can be practiced and prioritized. This includes creating spaces where people can learn, practice, and grow without shame. It also means supporting those who want to reconnect and ensuring that knowledge is passed on in safe, inclusive, and supportive ways.

With fluent Dakelh speakers aging, the preservation and revitalization of the language has become an urgent priority. There is a deep desire to ensure Dakelh is passed on to the next generation and to hear Dakelh spoken in homes, at events, and within the administration. We need to support our fluent speakers in passing on this knowledge and empower younger community members who want to learn. So much of Dakelh knowledge and way of life is connected to our language and we need to do whatever it takes to not lose that.





THE VISION FOR

## LAND & RESOURCES

*Nak'azdli Whut'en will be living our full responsibility as caretakers of the land and water. Our people will have a meaningful presence on the land for healing, learning, and livelihood. The land will be healthy, our connection to it strong, and our decisions guided by the values of respect, balance, interdependence, and community responsibility. The Keyoh system, together with our traditional clan and leadership structures, will guide how we protect and manage our territory.*

*We assert our inherent Rights and Title and our responsibility to uphold them for current and future generations. Any activities within our territory will proceed only with our free, prior, and informed consent.*

### LAND & RESOURCE GOALS

- Protect and restore the health of the land, watersheds, and wildlife across our territory.
- Ensure land and water stewardship is guided by Dakelh knowledge, Keyoh Governance and community values.
- Ensure community members can have a meaningful presence on the land.
- Support land-based education and mentorship programs for all ages.
- Strengthen Nak'azdli's role in deciding how land and resources are managed now and for future generations, grounded in our inherent Rights and Title.
- Increase capacity for the stewardship of our lands by promoting the work that Yinka Huwunline are doing with programs like the Guardians.

## WHAT WE HEARD

Connection to the land is the foundation of who we are as Dakelh People. It is essential to our members to foster this connection by being on the land in our traditional ways. This includes the ability for our people to hunt, fish, gather, travel and live on our lands in a sustainable way. When we spoke to members about their priorities related to our lands, it was emphasized that the land as a place of healing, learning and identity. Members want to ensure that they can always have a meaningful presence on the land and they see a strong need to prioritize passing down our traditional land-use knowledge to our youth. Members also spoke about the importance of community responsibility and stewardship in caring for our lands and resources.

We take seriously our role as stewards of the land and our members want to ensure our land is protected through community-led stewardship. Members want to see the Keyoh system actively involved in guiding how lands and resources are managed based on traditional knowledge and the responsibilities passed down through families. Many highlighted the importance of recognizing traditional clan and leadership systems in these decisions. This includes making informed decisions about development and resource extraction, planning for future land use activities, restoring damaged areas, protecting our wildlife, and making sure economic activity in our territory aligns with Nak'azdli values. Members also emphasized that any activities within our territory must proceed only with our free, prior, and informed consent, and that protecting our Rights and Title is essential for current and future generations. Yinka Huwunlene is already leading the way as stewards of our lands, and we want to build more capacity for this department to succeed.

There is also a strong desire to create more opportunities for land-based education not just for youth, but for all ages. People want to see more programs that take place on the land, where knowledge can be shared in meaningful ways, led by Elders, knowledge keepers, and experienced land users. Members emphasized the value of mentorship creating programs that connect younger generations with experienced hunters, trappers, harvesters, and language speakers to build skills and relationships over time. Members see these programs as opportunities to pass on traditional practices, strengthen our identity, and deepen connection to our lands.





THE VISION FOR

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*Nak'azdli Whut'en will use economic development as a tool for promoting community prosperity in a way that aligns with our values. We will strive towards a self-sustaining economy that promotes entrepreneurship and creates work for our members while balancing our role as stewards of the land.*

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- Move towards a self-sustaining and prosperous Nak'azdli economy
- Have our economic development decisions be grounded in our values and ways of being
- Expand community-owned businesses and social enterprises
- Create local job opportunities that support youth, families, and returning professionals
- Strengthen training and mentorship pathways for all community members
- Ensure that benefits from all economic development are community-directed and equitably shared
- Promote environmentally and culturally respectful economic activity that supports long-term sustainability
- Grow the Nak'azdli Trust and use it to fund projects that directly benefit the community

## WHAT WE HEARD

There are a wide variety of priorities held by our members related to economic development. We need to balance the objective of a self-sustaining and prosperous economy with the importance of responsibly stewarding our land. To do this, members want to see thoughtful economic development that clearly aligns with our values and goals.

Nak'azdli Development Corporation (NDC) is actively working towards strategic economic opportunities and members see great potential in the future of these opportunities. However, members expressed a desire to be more informed of what NDC is working on and would like greater accountability to the community. There is also a need to ensure that benefits from any development lead to lasting improvements for the community, especially for youth, families, and Elders. There is a strong desire to see more employment opportunities created within the community that could promote training and mentorship for youth. Entrepreneurship was also highlighted as a priority and more support should be provided to assist member-run businesses.

Many members want to reduce reliance on outside contractors and businesses by developing internal skills, supporting entrepreneurship, and strengthening Nak'azdli-led projects. There also needs to be more opportunities for our members to return to Nak'azdli after completing post-secondary education or professional diplomas. As society and the economy change, there is a desire for increased creativity around the types of businesses that Nak'azdli could support. This could include businesses like eco-tourism that go hand in hand with our priorities of supporting and stewarding our land. We want this type of economic development to be guided by traditional knowledge and to respect the rights of Keyoh holders.

Members also raised the importance of growing and protecting the Nak'azdli Trust. They see it as a powerful tool for future generations and want to see that the Trust is used to fund projects that directly benefit the community. Members want greater transparency about how the Trust works and how it can be used to support programs, infrastructure, and long-term community goals. We know economic development is essential to a strong and sustainable future and members are committed to moving towards this future in a good way.





THE VISION FOR

## EDUCATION

*Nak'azdli Whut'en will have full control over an education system rooted in Dakelh knowledge, language, and ways of teaching. Learning will be lifelong and intergenerational starting from early childhood through to adult education. Our members will feel supported, proud of who they are, and empowered to bring their skills home to strengthen the community.*

### EDUCATION GOALS

- Expand community jurisdiction over education, with locally governed schools and curriculum.
- Strengthen Dakelh language revitalization through immersive, land-based, and Elder-led learning.
- Create mentorship and leadership programs that guide youth and build community capacity.
- Support lifelong learning opportunities from early childhood to adult training that prepare members for meaningful roles within and beyond the community.

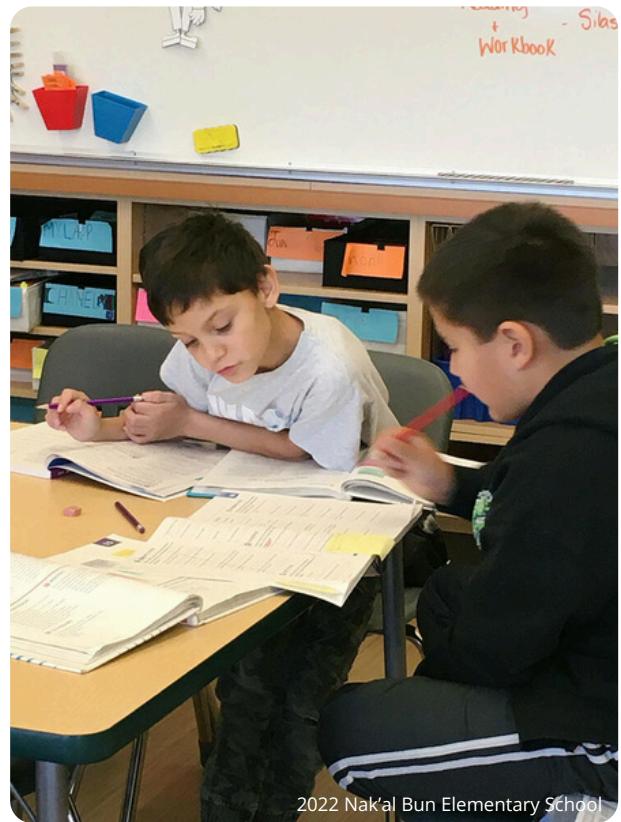
## WHAT WE HEARD

Education is seen by our members as a pathway to self-determination and community strength. Members expressed a strong desire for Nak'azdli to lead its own education system designing curriculum, hiring local teachers, and ensuring that learning is connected to the land, our ways, and community life. This extends to the desire to have greater opportunities to incorporate our ways of teaching into the high school curriculum.

We want to prepare our youth properly for all aspects of life. There is a need for teaching that goes beyond academic skills to include life skills, language, cultural knowledge, and leadership development.

Members want to see Dakelh language spoken fluently and confidently by future generations and there is an understanding that Elders need to play a vital role as language teachers. There is also a strong interest in land-based education that includes harvesting, food preparation, hide tanning/sewing, and ways of connecting youth to our existing land resources such as the Nak'azdli farm. Hands-on learning, mentorship programs, and land-based camps led by fluent speakers are seen as key tools to accomplish these goals.

Members want education to help youth build confidence and find purpose. We want to see youth excited to learn, prepared to take on professional roles, and proud to contribute to our community.





THE VISION FOR

# GOVERNANCE

*Nak'azdli Whut'en will be governed through inclusive and transparent systems that reflect the values of our people and are grounded in our traditional ways.*

*Governance will honour both traditional clan systems and modern leadership structures, ensuring all members have a voice in shaping the future.*

## GOVERNANCE GOALS

- Strengthen inclusive governance structures that integrate Keyoh and Potlach systems as well as elected leadership.
- Promote clear, regular communication between leadership and community members.
- Improve communication between departments.
- Support leadership development programs to prepare youth and young adults for governance roles.
- Establish consistent and transparent decision-making processes grounded in Dakelh laws and protocols.
- Ensure off-reserve members are informed, engaged, and able to participate in governance.
- Establish community jurisdiction over child and family services

## WHAT WE HEARD

It is important to our members to uphold and respect both the traditional and the elected leadership structure of Nak'azdli. The role of Keyoh holders and Clan structures were consistently highlighted as important aspects of governance and there is a strong call to uphold hereditary systems alongside elected structures. There is a desire to clarify the roles of these governance arms and improve communication and coordination between the two.

Governance was described not just as how decisions are made, but how respect, relationships, and responsibilities are upheld. There is a desire for stronger connections between community members, leadership, and traditional systems. People want decisions to be rooted in Dakelh ways and guided by open dialogue, accountability, and respect.

Community members emphasized the need for improved communication between departments to prevent duplication and increase clarity. Community members want to feel more informed and included, especially in decisions about land, programs, and future development.

Members want to make sure that youth are mentored into leadership roles to protect the strong future of Nak'azdli. Elders need to be listened to and respected as part of governance decision making and they need to play a key role in mentoring new leaders.

Good governance, as expressed by the community, means leading with integrity, listening deeply, and ensuring that all members see themselves in the decisions being made.





THE VISION FOR

## INFRASTRUCTURE

*Nak'azdli Whut'en will prioritize the development of infrastructure that is needed by the community, reflects our shared values, and supports our long-term vision. Our infrastructure will be community-designed and create safe spaces for members to live, work and gather.*

### INFRASTRUCTURE GOALS

- Build a central cultural center that honours Dakelh identity and brings generations together.
- Build a new Health Center.
- Develop a year-round recreation facility and youth space.
- Construct a single, unified administration building that improves service access and inter-department coordination.
- Modernize community infrastructure to meet current and future needs.
- Expand housing options and improve quality through new builds, renovations, and culturally appropriate designs.
- Expand sources of community funding to pay for infrastructure projects that benefit Nak'azdli.

## WHAT WE HEARD

Our members shared clearly that they want to feel like their input has been taken into consideration for the development of new infrastructure. This section captures what we heard from community members about their biggest infrastructure priorities.

Our community members want infrastructure that connects people and creates spaces where people feel safe, comfortable and supported. Many members shared that they feel as though the facilities are currently fragmented and you need to go to many different places throughout Nak'azdli to receive services or attend events. There is a strong desire to create more unified spaces where people can gather for more than one purpose.

In particular, community members identified the desire for a Nak'azdli cultural center to protect and celebrate Dakelh identity, a recreation complex for youth and families, an improved space for elders to gather, and a new centralized administration building that ensures programs and services are easy to find and access. The vision described by the community for these locations is of year-round spaces where members can practice cultural activities and where youth always feel like they have a place to go even if other places are closed.

Members also raised concerns over a shortage of housing and there is strong interest in building new homes that meet the changing needs of the community such as tailored housing for Elders and growing families.

Our priorities also include improving and upgrading essential infrastructure such as water systems, sewage, lighting, and roads to ensure long-term sustainability, safety, and reliability. A shortage of office space for band staff was also raised as a concern and there is hope that a new administration building would help in creating enough space for all Nak'azdli employees.

Lastly, our members want to see more diverse funding sources in the future to help Nak'azdli pay for community infrastructure projects. This includes the effective use of the Nak'azdli Trust to help fund projects that benefit the community.





THE VISION FOR

## HEALTH

*Nak'azdli Whut'en is a holistic community that believes in maintaining and enhancing traditional values by learning, living, and teaching our culture and heritage. Nak'azdli Whut'en is vibrant and self-determining; we are a community made up of diverse individuals and businesses working together to promote education, health, and economic progress.*

*(Please note that the Health and Wellness Vision was originally developed in 2022 and is currently under review and subject to revision. As the community continues to engage in ongoing reflection and planning, this vision may evolve to better reflect current priorities, needs, and aspirations)*

### HEALTH GOALS

- Ensure that our culture and ways of being are at the root of everything we do to support the health of our community.
- Use holistic approaches to support individual and collective mental health and wellness.
- Develop strong crisis response capabilities as a community.
- Improve the feeling of safety for community members when accessing community-based health care services.
- Deliver all health services in a way that is accessible and honours the diverse group of people we support.

## HEALTH GOALS

- Ensure the infrastructure we develop is sufficient for supporting and accommodating all age groups and community needs
- Better support the health needs of members living away from community
- Improve health advocacy for the community through forming partnerships that support community-based care
- Recognize the importance of integrated healing and ensure everything we do works to unite community members
- Build capacity in our members and employees through education, training, and meaningful employment opportunities

## WHAT WE HEARD

When we spoke with our members about health, they told us that real health is about more than just physical care, it's about feeling safe, supported, and connected as a community. Members shared that they want Nak'azdli health services to be rooted in our traditional ways and land-based practices. Connection to land was identified as a primary source of healing and healthy living that needs to be woven into how we provide health services. Members also emphasized the need for safe, welcoming spaces that support healing for all ages, including Elders, youth, and families.

Our members spoke about the importance of supporting mental health and wellness in a holistic way. There is a strong desire for programs that focus on prevention, healing from trauma, and offering land-based and cultural approaches to care. Members also told us that when people are in crisis, they need to know where to turn, and the community should be ready to offer quick, coordinated support in those moments.



## WHAT WE HEARD

Members want to make sure Nak'azdli's health services are accessible to everyone, including those who live outside the community. It is important that health programs and services honour the diversity of our members and meet people where they are physically, emotionally, and culturally.

Members also shared that the spaces where we offer health care need to feel safe and be big enough to properly support our growing community. As we develop new health infrastructure, we need to make sure it works for everyone and helps bring people together.

There are ongoing challenges with attracting and retaining healthcare professionals, particularly when housing and childcare are limited. Acknowledging this, building up Nak'azdli's own health care capacity was raised as a key priority. There is a strong interest in supporting education, training, and employment pathways so more of our own people can work in community health, both now and in the future. By creating more opportunities for Nak'azdli members to lead and deliver health services, we can make sure our programs stay connected to our values and our ways.

We heard that there is a big opportunity to strengthen partnerships that improve access to community-based care and advocacy for our members. There needs to be a strong focus on better coordinating health supports across departments and an understanding that health is tied into all aspects of daily life.

Most of all, members told us that health work should always bring the community together. Healing, safety, and well-being should never be separate from our traditional way, our values, and our relationships with each other.



2022



THE VISION FOR

# COMMUNITY SAFETY

*Nak'azdli Whut'en will be a place where all community members—children, youth, adults, and Elders feel safe, protected, and supported. Safety will be defined by our own standards, rooted in respect, our traditional ways of being, and collective care. From emergency response to community wellness, we will lead with compassion and strength.*

## COMMUNITY SAFETY GOALS

- Create culturally grounded safety programs that support community wellness and prevention.
- Expand trauma-informed and land-based services that help individuals and families heal.
- Build safe and welcoming spaces for community members to gather and access support.
- Promote respect, accountability, and collective care as core teachings within homes and the broader community.
- Strengthen emergency preparedness and local response systems for crises and natural events.

## WHAT WE HEARD

Our members shared that safety is about much more than enforcement, it's about feeling secure in daily life, having people to turn to in times of crisis, and living in a community where everyone looks out for each other.

Members shared clearly that there is a need for greater support for people struggling with violence, addiction, and trauma. Our members want to see more focus on addressing the root causes of mental health and addiction, with prevention playing a central role in our approach. There's a desire for safe spaces for youth and families, places to gather, talk, and heal. Cultural teachings, land-based therapy, ceremonies, and mentorship were raised as essential to building safer homes and relationships. Respect, especially for Elders and women, was highlighted as a foundation of safety that should be practiced and taught from a young age.

Concerns were also raised about how people in distress are supported. Members want a more coordinated and compassionate system especially when dealing with mental health, addiction, and family conflict. The presence of trained community responders, as well as clear, trusted systems of reporting and follow-up, were seen as important steps forward.

Nak'azdli also faces several acute emergency threats such as flooding and wildfires. Members recognize that a lot of work has been done to prepare for these possibilities, and we want to continue to prioritize proactive measures that keep our community safe. This will involve better communication with community members about the risks and actions the community can take to mitigate them. There is also a need for strong partnerships with collaborators including Fort St. James and the Provincial and Federal governments.

Members also spoke about the need to feel physically safe when walking around the community. This could include improving street lighting in key areas and addressing concerns about stray dogs. Creating well-lit, welcoming, and secure public spaces was seen as an important part of community safety.



# NEXT STEPS

## IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

This Plan is built on the voices and perspectives of the Nak'azdli Whut'enne. It is meant to serve as a high-level guide for decision-making, capturing the priorities, values, and goals shared by members throughout the planning process. The most relevant part of the plan though is how it gets implemented and used.

The next step is to take what's in this Plan and turn it into a much more specific "Strategic Plan". This Strategic Plan will break down the high-level goals into specific activities needed to move each one forward. Each activity will be prioritized, assigned a timeline, and given a clear lead within the community to make sure progress is being made. This plan will be developed by Chief and Council with support from the COO and department managers and directors. This Strategic Plan will then be used to create "Departmental Plans" that will guide the day-to-day actions of department staff.

To keep the community informed and engaged, updates on progress will be shared at each Annual General Assembly (AGA). This will be a time to celebrate successes, track progress, and identify any new priorities that may arise.

**Community Vision Plan**

**Strategic Plan**

**Departmental  
Plans**



# OUR COMMITMENT TO THIS PLAN

## UPDATING THE PLAN

This Community Vision Plan (CVP) is a living document and will need to be revisited regularly to make sure it continues to reflect the values, priorities, and direction of our people.

On December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025 Chief and Council passed a Band Council Resolution in support of this Community Vision Plan in its draft form with an understanding that this document will continue to be updated.

The Strategic Plan, which flows from the CVP, will be reviewed and updated every year. This ensures that the specific activities and timelines stay relevant and aligned with current needs.

The CVP itself will be formally updated every three years. As part of that process, Nak'azdli will host a community input session where members can come together to review and discuss the community vision, values, pillars, and goals. If changes are needed, they will be made to keep the Vision Plan strong and relevant.



2025



2024



2024



# APPENDIX A:

## Community History

### Preface

This history section is a draft and provides a high-level perspective of Nak'azdli Whut'en's past. The impacts of colonization have deeply impacted our work to write a comprehensive community history. Nak'azdli is actively working to develop a more detailed written history that will be guided by community members, Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Once this work is complete and approved, this Plan will be updated to include the full community history.

### Historical Overview of Nak'azdli Whut'en

Nak'azdli Whut'en is a Dakelh (Carrier) community situated adjacent to Fort St. James, British Columbia, and is part of the broader Yinka Dene. The name "Nak'azdli," meaning "Where Arrows Were Floating," reflects the historical presence and territorial significance of the people who have lived, gathered, and governed in this region for countless generations. Today, Nak'azdli Whut'en continues to uphold its responsibilities to the land and waters, honoring ancestral knowledge while actively engaging in contemporary stewardship and governance.

### Ancestral Foundations and Colonial Encounters

The cultural history of Nak'azdli Whut'en spans thousands of years, with families maintaining deep ties to the land through hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering. These practices are organized through the Balhats and Keyoh systems and prior to colonization, all lands were held in trust by women. Balhats and Keyoh systems are family-based practices of governance and land stewardship that continues to guide our community. Nak'azdli society is based on the Clan System. Currently there are four clans: Lhts'umusyoo (Beaver); Lusilyoo (Frog); Kwun Ba Whuten (Caribou); Lohjabou (Bear).

The arrival of European traders in the early 19th century marked a pivotal shift. In 1806, the Hudson's Bay Company established a post at Stuart Lake, transforming Fort St. James into a colonial administrative and trade hub. This development introduced new political dynamics and laid the groundwork for federal oversight of Indigenous communities.

## **Governance and Administrative Evolution**

Nak'azdli was formally recognized by the Government of Canada under the Indian Act, and over time, transitioned into a self-administered governance body. Today, Nak'azdli Whut'en operates under a Custom Electoral System, led by an elected Chief and Council. The Nation oversees 18 reserves totaling approximately 1,456 hectares, with most members residing on Nak'azdli IR #1.

The administration provides essential services in health, education, housing, infrastructure, and stewardship. It also plays a vital role in asserting Indigenous rights, engaging in intergovernmental relations, and fostering economic development.

## **Nak'azdli Development Corporation**

The Nak'azdli Development Corporation (NDC), established in 1987, marked a pivotal step in our journey toward economic self-determination. Originally formed to manage band-owned enterprises, NDC has since evolved into a dynamic force driving economic reconciliation and community prosperity. Operating across diverse sectors including forestry, construction, resource development, and retail, NDC fosters entrepreneurship and innovation while supporting sustainable growth. Its initiatives, such as the Timber House prefabricated housing project, reflect a commitment to cultural values and long-term financial autonomy for Nak'azdli members.

## **Nak'al Bun Elementary School**

Nak'al Bun Elementary School, founded in 1994 stands as a powerful symbol of reclamation and renewal. Originally purchased from the Catholic Diocese of Prince George, the school was built on land that once housed a residential school, transforming a painful legacy into a vibrant center for learning and cultural pride. Completed in 2013, the modern facility features geothermal heating, natural ventilation, and dedicated spaces for cultural education including an industrial kitchen and cultural room. As a certified independent school, Nak'al Bun integrates Dakelh teachings and seasonal cultural programming, empowering students from preschool to Grade 7 to thrive academically while staying rooted in their identity.

## Territory and Population

Nak'azdli Whut'en is a non-treaty First Nations community. Its members maintain authority over Dakelh territory identified through extensive interviews during treaty negotiations. Our people have a deeply connected relationship to the land and continue to act as stewards of these lands.

As of 2025, the Nation has approximately 2,000 members, with about 700 residing "on-reserve." Others live in Fort St. James, Prince George, Vancouver, and across British Columbia and beyond. Key reserves include IR #1, separated from Fort St. James by Kwah Road, and IR #1A, located at Four-Mile and William's Prairie Meadow.

## Cultural Continuity and Future Vision

Nak'azdli Whut'en continues to uphold Dakelh governance systems such as the Balhats (Potlatch) and clan-based leadership. This commitment to cultural integrity is balanced with the development of modern administrative capacity, forming the foundation of the Community's vision for sovereignty, sustainability, and community well-being.



## **APPENDIX B:**

# **Who we were and still are, in so many ways. - Dakelh, Yinka Dene, Nak'azdli Whut'tenne**

When asked how we got here, we say "The Creator put us here to look after the land". We have been here for a very long time.

Nak'azdli is a part of a huge Dak'elh territory that includes the Southern Carrier at what is currently Nazkoh, west to Hagwilget, north to Takla, and the Lhiedli Tenneh territory to the Rocky Mountains. The Dak'elh people stewarded the headwaters of the Fraser, Skeena, and arctic watersheds; we were the caretakers of the salmon spawning beds which nourished us through time. We called our rivers that flowed into the Pacific "Koh" and the waters that flowed to the Arctic "Kah". Today, you can see it in some of the names Omenikah (Omenica), Nechako, or Tahkoh in Quesnel.

Nak'azdli always played a huge part in the governance and stewardship of the Dak'elh nation. The Nazko people (Southern Carrier) used to say that "nothing happened in Dakelh territory without Chief Kw'eh (Kwah)". Chief Kw'eh was told by colonists that he needed to take an English name. He asked the settlers what they would call the son of their Kings and Queens and when he was told the word they would use is "Prince", he chose that as his English family name. Chief Kw'eh also had the name Tsoh Dih as a Balhats name that was handed down for hundreds of years.

There were many villages in Dakelh Territory with a common language but many dialects. Before contact, we looked after a huge territory by using the Balhats system to govern the lands and ourselves. We travelled as much as possible by water for ease and speed thus we called ourselves 'Dakelh', travel on water. One of our months states 'we travel on water, half of this moon'. We were strong and travelled far and wide, all over our territory as well as to the coast, over the Rockies, and met with different tribes all over the continent to trade and keep informed on how the other people and lands were doing.

Within our own territory, we used the Balhats to live a peaceful, busy, and abundant life. We had a clan system so that all Dakelh'ne belonged to a clan. Leon Cho used to teach that we became part of our nation and our community/clan through our mothers. It was easiest to track who we were born to through our mothers; our inheritance came through our mothers. We are born into a clan; as part of any clan, we learn to behave honourably, and to treat the land and each other with respect.

The Clan and Keyoh systems were a way to steward the land. Remember "we were put here to look after the lands, waters and animals" and they will look after us.

Everyone must look after/monitor the land, weather, plants, and animals to keep the land healthy. There was always so much to do, such as, the berry patches and swamps that needed to be burned, the beaver dams that needed to be attended to, the fish weirs that needed to be maintained to be ready for talo, and the spawning streams that needed to be raked/swept, etc. All this while catching fish and hunting other animals and birds for our families to eat every day. We also kept/prepared extra e.g. Ustunghee, dried berries and plants, medicines to share with the rest of the village, to help prepare for a Balhats, to trade, and for an emergency supply. We always helped each other out; we would often travel to other Keyoh to check on them and get together for spring beaver hunts, etc. We worked together and did everything with our nation in mind. When we gathered at our fish weirs, it was a busy time to manage the run, to harvest thousands of salmon, prepare them for storage in the cache pits. Imagine, we used to fill over two thousand cache pits with food at Chunlak!

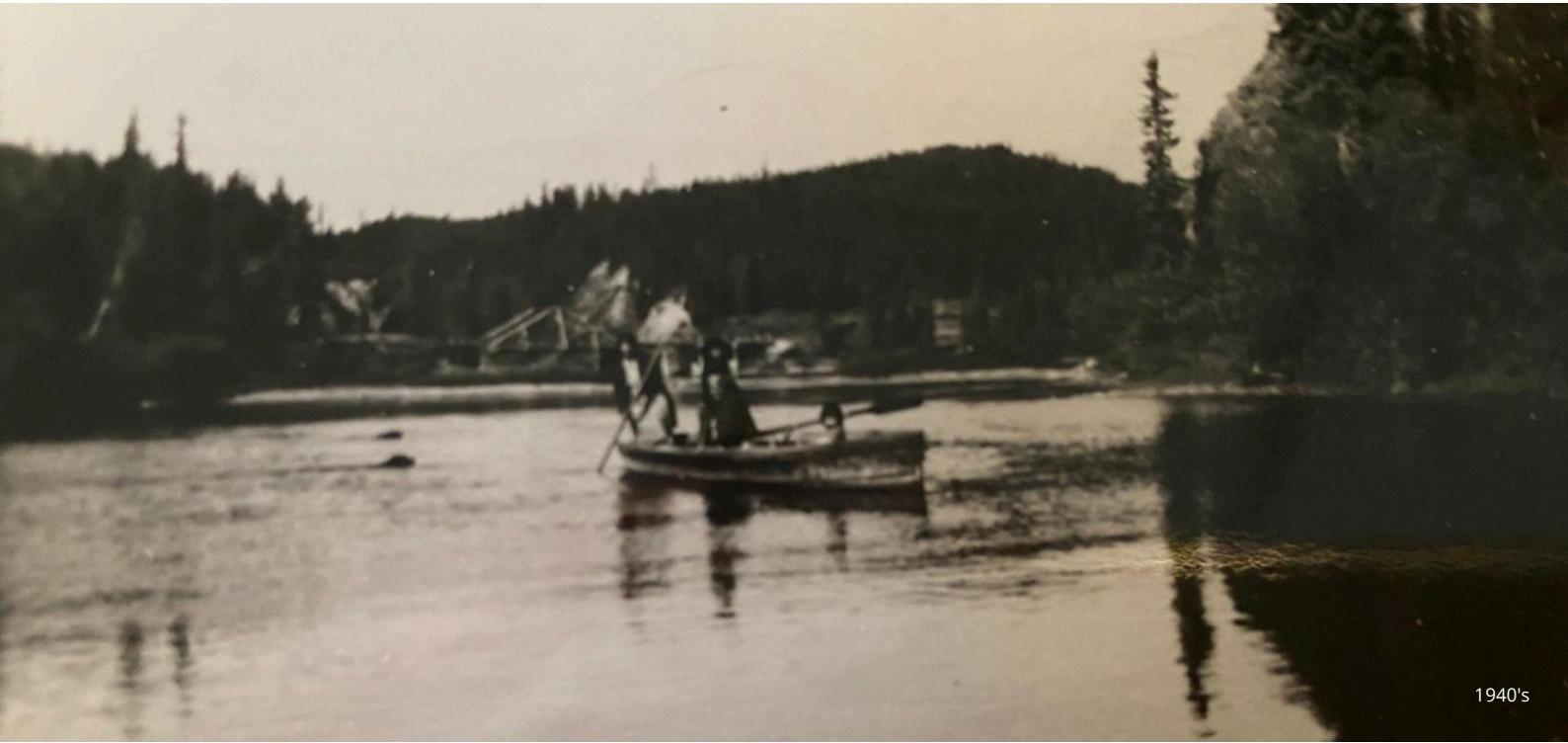
If a Keyoh was assigned to a specific clan, it did not mean that only this clan would work in a Keyoh. We married into different clans and usually the men would move to their wives Keyoh; so, there were often men from other clans working within the Keyoh. Because we were so community-minded, we were open to raising other people's children and 'custom adoptions' were common. On occasion, a clan might decide that taking care of a creek or meadow was too much, then all the clans would meet, talk about what could be done and decide that this Keyoh would be transferred over to another clan or rearranged into smaller more manageable pieces; once, all the 'Uzah-ne agreed, they would change the stewardship because the land needs to be looked after so the whole community can live well.



When you belong to a clan, you have a voice in Balhats, everyone has a voice. For most of us, our voice is given through our clan and our clan leaders, our 'Uzah-ne. Certain children were chosen and trained to become 'Uzah and sometimes adults through their community service or bravery could earn an 'Uzah name. 'Uzah-ne have a responsibility to their clan and to the community/nation. They cannot make decisions without thinking about their clan and the community at large. If an 'Uzah name has not been used for a long time, your clan can help you decide if it can be reinstated by deciding who should have it, then have a Balhats to make it good!

As clan members, we must always try to be honorable and respectful so that we don't shame our clan. We must always be mindful that we are representing our clan or Dakelh'ne; or today, Nak'azdli Whut'tenne. If we did things that were not right, we were sent to those who could help us change our ways. As children, when we misbehaved, we were sent to our mothers' sisters for discipline. As adults, the clan Elders would decide; if the behavior was severe, then all the clans would decide what needed to be done to change the behavior. If that did not help, the last resort would be banishment from the community, often from the territory.

Our Balhats were gatherings where we talked about or governed the lands and communities. At the Balhats, the L'ts'musyoo (Beaver) would report on their activities of keeping the peace, being ambassadors to our neighbors and while travelling through other territories. A Balhats would be held if they thought that we would have to go to war because they are the warriors and defenders; at such times, they got together with all the clans to plan. War was the last resort because our people were fierce warriors, and we had learned that our peace was the most sensible and spiritually right.



Or perhaps a Balhats would be called by Lusilyoo (Frog Clan) because it was their responsibility to take care of the waters. If they knew through couriers that the salmon run was going to be low and that all were needed to get to the spawning grounds, it was their duty to make it known to everyone that they should not fish so heavily. Lusilyoo would tell the tribes along the Fraser (river), and they would comply. At such a Balhats, all the clans would make a plan on where they had to go for a year's supply of fish and decide who would be sent. Imagine that they would have to send hundreds of people to pack the salmon back to the territories.

The Kwun'ba'whuten (Caribou Clan) had the responsibility of village caretakers. Perhaps a Balhats would be called by the Kwun'ba'whuten if they observed that some of the trees were dying and needed to do a controlled forest fire. They would call a Balhats to discuss how big the area was, whose Keyoh it was, when to burn, and how they could work together. Everyone had a voice in these meetings/Balhats, if there was a disagreement, everyone had to stay until there was consensus. We all had to agree and leave it on the floor. In other words, it was finalized there.

Balhats was also a gathering to acknowledge or honour life events. We celebrated our children's hair cutting, coming-of-age of our youth, marriages, and successful travels when we negotiated good relationships with other tribes. Balhats were also used as a form of restorative justice. We celebrated a bountiful salmon run, we honoured the tribes down south who helped us manage the salmon runs, etc. Kweh said he 'invited whole villages to come and feast with him' and his Lhts'musyoo clan hosted them. And lastly, we celebrated the lives of those who passed where we complete their earthly business.

We were self-governing, self-sufficient, and self-confident, as a nation, as clans and as individuals. We honoured each other, men and women were equal; we did not

assign children or work according to gender. Our children were called 'child/ren' and our youth were 'chilh' meaning young person. Work was seen as work; not women's work or men's work; men could stay in the community and nurture the children and women were hunters and trappers. If your spouse died you had better know how to nurture the child, light a fire, hunt and cook. Those were all survival skills but among the Dak'elh'ne they were skills that made us thrive. Our children were the most precious: Father Morice wrote that we had an "unnatural" liking of our children. How do you love your children so much? We never understood that.

