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Lynne Davis

The High Stakes of Protecting Indigenous Homelands

Coastal First Nations' Turning Point Initiative and Environmental Groups on the B.C. West Coast¹

Abstract

In 2000, eight First Nations and the Council of the Haida Nation formed an alliance to protect their traditional territories from powerful economic, political and ideological interests that were moving to determine the future of coastal British Columbia. Their organization, Coastal First Nations (formerly, the Turning Point Initiative), has become a significant player with governments, industry and environmental groups in defining the parameters for transforming coastal B.C. into a conservation-based economy, following ecosystem-based management principles. Because environmentalists initiated their Great Bear Rainforest Campaign in the homelands of Coastal First Nations members beginning in 1995, Coastal First Nations provides a window into understanding the complex unfolding of relationships between First Nations and major environmental groups. Based on an analysis of interviews with First Nations and environmental group leaders, it is proposed that their relationship has evolved through four phases (confrontation, relationship building, becoming allies, and shifting terrains). By speaking with one voice while respecting the autonomy of its members, Coastal First Nations has provided a strategic vehicle for increasing Indigenous self-determination and self-sufficiency in First Nations homelands in the face of ongoing colonization and global forces.

Résumé

En l'an 2000, huit Premières Nations et le Council of the Haida Nation ont formé une alliance en vue de protéger leurs territoires traditionnels contre des intérêts puissants sur les plans économique, politique et idéologique qui s'apprêtaient à décider de l'avenir de la région côtière de la Colombie-Britannique. Leur organisation, Coastal First Nations (précédemment, Turning Point Initiative), est un acteur important auprès des pouvoirs publics, de l'industrie et des groupes environnementaux dans la définition des paramètres visant à transformer la région côtière de la Colombie-Britannique en une économie fondée sur la sauvegarde des ressources naturelles, en s'inspirant des principes de la gestion écologique. En raison du fait que des environnementalistes ont lancé leur campagne Great Bear Rainforest dans les réserves des membres de Coastal First Nations en 1995,

cette dernière permet de mieux comprendre les relations complexes de plus en plus apparentes entre les Premières Nations et les groupes environnementaux importants. À partir d'une analyse des entretiens avec des dirigeants de Premières Nations et de groupes environnementaux, on constate que leur relation a connu quatre phases (la confrontation, la création de liens, l'établissement d'alliances et la compréhension des points de vue réciproques). Étant l'unique porte-parole de ses membres tout en respectant leur autonomie, Coastal First Nations offre un moyen stratégique d'accroître l'autodétermination et l'autosuffisance des peuples indigènes dans les réserves des Premières Nations devant les forces constantes de la colonisation à l'échelle mondiale.

The North Pacific Coast is a rich, varied and fragile part of the natural world. The connection of land and sea with people has given rise to our ancient Northwest cultures. We recognize this life source is under threat like never before and that all people must be held accountable. This united declaration is the foundation for protecting and restoring our culture and the natural world. We are the ones that will live with the consequences of any actions that take place in our territories. We declare our life source is vital to the sustenance and livelihood of our culture and our very existence as a people. The First Nations of the North Pacific Coast inherit the responsibility to protect and restore our lands, water and air for future generations. We commit ourselves: to make decisions that ensure the well-being of our lands and waters; to preserving and renewing our territories and cultures through our tradition, knowledge and authority; to be honest with each other and respectful of all life. We will support each other and work together as the original people of the North Pacific Coast, standing together to fulfill these commitments.

Declaration of First Nations of the North Pacific Coast, June 13, 2000.

The West Coast of Canada is home to nearly sixty culturally and linguistically diverse Indigenous First Nations whose territories stretch along the Pacific Ocean from the U.S.-Canada border to Alaska. Renowned for their rich biodiversity including sea mammals, fish, wildlife, temperate rainforests, mountains and glaciers, First Nations' territories supported countless generations of Indigenous peoples prior to European colonization. Today, their homelands continue to provide the economic and

cultural base upon which each First Nations community is seeking sustainability for future generations.

The efforts of First Nations on the West Coast to secure their future survival are being played out in a highly complex socio-political environment in which a web of external forces and actors are challenging their right to self-determination. Governments, industry, and Canadian citizens in their varied capacities take policy positions or engage in actions that may support or hinder First Nations' aspirations to have their Aboriginal rights and self-determination recognized.

Environmentalists are among the many actors whose interests have come to intersect with First Nations of the West Coast. Some First Nations and environmentalists have found common ground and have chosen to work together in particular contexts or on specific projects. Others have found themselves locked in antagonistic relationships (Hoberg and Morawski; Hoberg et al.). Through research in the Alliances project, we have worked to document and better understand the nature of relationships between Aboriginal peoples and those working for social and environmental justice: what motivates people to work together, what they achieve, what works well in their relationships, where the tensions are and what they learn from working together (see Davis, O'Donnell and Shpuniarsky; Davis and Shpuniarsky).

This paper explores First Nations-environmental group relationships within the broad context of First Nations' pursuit of self-determination. A case study of Coastal First Nations' Turning Point will be used to bring into focus the dynamic relationships that have evolved between First Nations and environmental groups on the West Coast. This organization, which represents an alliance of First Nations from the North Pacific Coast, came into existence in 2000 at a critical historical juncture.²

In this study, twenty-four interviews were conducted with most of the First Nations leaders and staff of Coastal First Nations (11) in 2005. In addition, interviews were undertaken with leaders (7) from four environmental organizations that have built relationships with Coastal First Nations. Because First Nations leaders and environmental leaders are often involved in relationships at the community level as well as through Coastal First Nations, those interviewed were invited to speak about their relationships more generally as they form part of the broader context for understanding First Nations-environmental group relationships. On the advice of Coastal First Nations staff, interviews were conducted with government (3) and forest industry (3) representatives. This proved to be very valuable for understanding the network of relationships within which Coastal First Nations is operating.

In the twenty-four interviews, all were asked their views about the Coastal First Nations' Turning Point Initiative. Coastal First Nations and environmental leaders and staff were asked about their experiences of working together: why they had come together; what they felt worked well in their relationships; where the tensions were; what they had learned about each other in working together; what they felt that the other did not understand about them; and advice they would offer others who might form such relationships. Forest industry and government representatives were asked about their working relationships with Coastal First Nations and environmental groups, and how they perceived First Nations-environmental group relations.

All interviews were conducted on a confidential basis and individuals are not named in reporting this research. Interviews were transcribed and entered into an NVIVO 7 database for analysis. Using a grounded theory approach, thematic analysis was undertaken, identifying common themes and sub-themes. These were coded across interviews.

In the Alliances research, grounded theory has been of particular relevance because of the danger of colonizing Indigenous perspectives through the imposition of Western theoretical perspectives that read Indigenous experience through non-Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies (Davis, O'Donnell and Shpuniarsky; Davis). The overall strategy of the Alliances project has been to do multiple readings of the data, first through a grounded theory reading and then through relevant Western theoretical lenses that may illuminate the data in relevant ways. The analyses have then been returned to the organization (in this case, Coastal First Nations) to verify interpretations. As a non-Indigenous scholar, it is my aspiration to follow research processes that are consistent with the ethical practices for respectful Indigenous research that have evolved over the last two decades (Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics; Wilson; Smith; RCAP). In this case study, as in others, the grounded theory reading has been central and it is the focus of the findings reported here. It is but one way to tell this story. Further theoretical analyses and comparative analyses with other case studies in the Alliances research have also been undertaken (Davis and Shpuniarsky), but are reported here briefly because of space requirements.

This paper will begin by introducing the organization, its goals, context and work. I will then offer an analysis of First Nations-environmental group relationships based on interviews with leaders from Coastal First Nations, environmental groups, industry and government. Supporting literature which provides fuller context is referenced for readers who wish to gain a deeper understanding of the historical conjuncture.

Coastal First Nations' Turning Point Initiative

The founding of Coastal First Nations grew out of the need to directly challenge the forces that were undermining First Nations self-determination and the integrity of their territories, livelihood, and cultural practices through the 1990s. This coming together of First Nations on a regional basis, crossing tribal and territorial boundaries, was strategic and unusual. The inaugural meeting, organized in co-operation with the David Suzuki Foundation, was held in March 2000. Environmental organizations and labour were also invited to this initial meeting. After the first meeting, eight coastal First Nations and the Council of the Haida Nation agreed to work together on a time-limited initiative. A second meeting was held months later and a declaration of co-operation was produced, the Declaration of First Nations of the North Pacific Coast cited at the beginning of this paper.

The members of Coastal First Nations include Wuikinuxv Nation, Kitasoo/Xaíxaís, Heiltsuk, Gitga'at, Metlakatla, Haisla, Old Massett, Skidegate, the Council of the Haida Nation, and more recently, Homalco (2006). At the time of its creation, the main goals of the Turning Point Initiative were threefold.

- To determine land and marine use plans on a government-to-government basis with Canada and the Province of British Columbia.
- To find economic measures to diversify First Nations' economies based on their land and marine resources
- To establish First Nations interests in the ongoing management of land and resources. (Staff Interview, 2005)

These goals point to some of the significant forces that were heavily impacting the First Nations of the West Coast through the 1990s.³ First, most Nations were engaged in a tripartite treaty process with the federal and provincial governments to recognize their ownership of their traditional territories and their Aboriginal rights and title (McKee; Woolford). However, the treaty process was stalling, largely due to the very limited mandates of government negotiators and various government policy positions. Second, while the treaty process was going on, large resource developers such as multinational forest companies were scooping out the resources from their territories on a massive scale without local benefits, and the First Nations wanted "interim measures" to prevent this. Third, the provincial government had initiated a process to produce regional land and resource management plan (LRMP) throughout the province, involving multiple "stakeholders" in land and resource planning decisions within the Nations' traditional territories, even though treaty processes were underway. Fourth, environmental groups had become very active on the

West Coast and had initiated actions throughout the First Nations' traditional territories, including the Great Bear Rainforest Campaign in 1995 (specifically the Rainforest Solutions coalition involving Sierra Club of B.C., Forest Ethics, Greenpeace, and Rainforest Action Network). They had become major players in influencing government land use policy and industry actors (Hoberg and Mowaski; Hoberg, Morishita, and Paulsen). Fifth, the sea resources upon which First Nations of the North Pacific Coast depended traditionally and commercially, had been heavily depleted, resulting in economic tragedy in coastal First Nations communities (Edwards and Glavin). Sixth, First Nations had begun to win several landmark Supreme Court decisions, which recognized Aboriginal title and rights, and checked the ability of governments and industries to move unilaterally within First Nations' territories without taking into consideration their interests.⁴

The goals of Coastal First Nations, then, were designed to assert their right to self-determination in relation to their territories in the face of the multiple forces that were challenging their authority to govern in their own territories. They needed to rebuild their economies and create jobs for their members. Moreover, they needed external parties to recognize their authority over their lands and resources so that their traditional riches would become the basis for strong futures in their homelands.

Since it began, Coastal First Nations has tackled all three of its goals at once. Each of the First Nations engaged in preparing a land use plan. As this process unfolded, the organization's effectiveness depended upon understanding the negotiating positions of other parties that were trying to influence the provincial government, the ultimate arbitrator of land use plans coming from the Central Coast Land and Resource Management Plan (CCLRMP) and its counterpart the North Coast Land and Resource Management Plan (NCLRMP), as well as the land use plans of neighbouring First Nations.

In 2001, the Great Bear Rainforest campaign resulted in an agreement with the Province of British Columbia to undertake land use and resource management using an ecosystem-based management approach. This brought Coastal First Nations into the heart of a complex conversation with environmental groups, industry representatives and the provincial government. "Ecosystem-based management" (EBM) is a contested term that points towards undertaking resource management in a way that respects whole ecosystems.⁵ Its definition and the methods of implementation implied have been the subject of a high stakes debate. The provincial government, together with the forest industry, environmentalists, First Nations representatives and scientists initiated a working group process whose mandate was to come to agreement about the meaning of EBM and what it would look like when implemented. These discussions were

expected to produce a new regulatory regime for all parties to follow in the future. The timetable for completion of this process was 2009.

From the interviews, it is clear that environmental groups felt that they had to influence not only the forest industry and the provincial government, but also First Nations, in the land use planning process and the adoption of EBM principles. In fact, First Nations held the key to maintaining their traditional territories in a way that would protect ancient ecosystems. At the same time, in asserting their right to self-determination, First Nations are sensitive to any group that tries to impose its own agenda or attempts to speak for them.

As various parties have engaged in debate about EBM, Coastal First Nations has been very active on ideas for economic diversification. Its approach has been to assess the feasibility of different land and resource-based initiatives and to think about locating them strategically in different First Nations' territories, depending upon comparative advantages. In taking this approach, board members had to agree that not everyone would have the same configuration of economic enterprises. For example, they evaluated the feasibility of high-end tourist lodges in three locations in First Nations territories. At the same time, Coastal First Nations initiated a shellfish farming pilot project to evaluate the feasibility of different locations for rearing shellfish. It has also explored forestry opportunities and non-timber forest products. In short, Coastal First Nations has been committed to working carefully to determine what enterprises have a high probability of successful implementation, and also to diversify local economies in ways that promote complementarity and maximum profits.

The Coastal First Nations members collectively have opposed fish farming. This position was taken based on research undertaken by the David Suzuki Foundation and other environmental organizations. Despite this, the Kitasoo/Xaíxaís First Nation has opened a fish farm, indicating the independence of First Nations to make their own decisions, however persuasive the collective voice. This difference of opinion has not prevented the Kitasoo/Xaíxaís from participation in Coastal First Nations. Oil and gas development is another controversial issue on the West Coast. Coastal First Nations have opposed oil tankers in their traditional waters and have held the position that science and knowledge gaps need to be filled in before making a decision.

In trying to influence the land use decisions of First Nations, environmental groups put forward the idea of conservation financing: "Conservation Investment and Incentive Initiative". The C-Triple I (CIII, now called the Coast Opportunities Fund) is a unique initiative that was originally proposed by environmental partners (Greenpeace, Sierra Club, Forest Ethics, and Rainforest Action Network) in conversation with the First Nations. The Conservation Investment and Incentive Initiative was

envisioned as a fund of capital that can be accessed by First Nations to build economies based on principles of sustainability, particularly ecosystem-based management. Coastal First Nations challenged the environmental groups to raise money for the fund, and they succeeded in getting American foundation commitments for \$60 million. In turn, the environmental groups challenged governments and industry to match their contribution. Negotiations garnered a financial commitment of \$30 million each from the provincial and federal governments. The establishment of the Coast Opportunities Fund was announced in January 2007.

Coastal First Nations was established with a time-limited mandate. The initiators did not intend that it become a program and service delivery agency. Rather, where ongoing structures are needed to implement economic development and political agreements that arise from its work, such structures will be established. Since its inception, Coastal First Nations has been a vehicle for negotiating agreements with the various parties that directly impact First Nations territories on the Central and North Coast. They have come together to work strategically. They have access to professional and technical expertise and information that forms the basis for considering policy options. As one interviewee put it "... [with] a common vision, good leadership, and strong technical kind of support, you can exhibit a lot of power if you play it correctly."

Coastal First Nations has opened doors to government and industry that had been shut to individual First Nations. Through collective negotiations, important gains have been made in forestry and other areas, and these gains can be transferred into the treaties being negotiated by individual First Nations. Coastal First Nations has put into place a strategic planning capacity that is hard for any one individual First Nation to sustain on its own. Moreover, through Coastal First Nations, funding has become available for community initiatives and jobs. This sense of optimism about working together has been all the more remarkable because of difficult issues among First Nations, such as historical tensions and common use, which still have to be resolved.

The Terrain of Shifting Relationships

This research is focussed on relationships. Although the main interest is First Nations-environmental group relationships, it must be recognized that Coastal First Nations represents a convergence of diverse relationships that interact with one another. In fact, although Coastal First Nations began its life within a strong relationship with a leading environmental organization, it has taken on a strong independent existence and voice. Its current relationships are most strongly established with government agencies (particularly the provincial government), with industries, and with a coalition of environmental organizations. Nevertheless, interviews with leaders from Coastal First Nations, key environmental groups, the forest

industry and government reflect an evolution of First Nations-environmental group relationships from the early 1990s to the present day, particularly in the Central Coast. Over that time period, roughly four discernible phases of relationship appear to have unfolded: a confrontational stage, a relationship-building stage, an alliance stage, and a new phase whose character is still revealing itself. In this broad-brush analysis, the Coastal First Nations' Turning Point Initiative belongs to the third stage of relationship. To give full context to this relationship, the historical evolution will be discussed, using quotations from both the First Nations and the environmental leaders interviewed in this study.

Stage 1 – Confrontation

The direct action tactics of environmental groups in the early 1990s had strong impacts on relations with First Nations on the Central Coast. Having engaged in a large civil disobedience action in Clayoquot Sound, environmentalists enlarged their scope of activity along the West Coast. First Nations found environmentalists engaged in direct action campaigns within their territories, most often without their consent. Further, environmental groups often developed relationships with First Nations community members and began advancing their agenda in a First Nations community, ignoring local protocols and established power structures. This led to considerable conflict. The protocol errors of one environmental group had significant consequences for the ability of other environmental groups to establish relationships with First Nations. Here are some of the ways that First Nations and environmental leaders talked about this early period.

Our first interaction was probably not a good interaction. You know they were full into their campaign, 'Stop the logging, no more clear cutting, protect the White Bear, Kermode Bear, Spirit Bear,' I don't remember what they called it back then. But it was their assumption that they could speak for people, that had no voices themselves, and I personally took great offence to that. But one of our top Hereditary leaders was a member of Council and he said [to them], 'Don't ever assume that because we're a First Nations or we're Native that we don't have a voice of our own. Nobody speaks for First Nations, nobody speaks for [our] people other than [our] people themselves. First Nations Leader

Different organizations bring different feelings here, you know in the environmental world there. Greenpeace, they were using images of our people for their purposes during that really strong campaign. Greenpeace came here and actually climbed the scaffolds and chained themselves to machinery. We didn't really have a relationship... [but] they were the first environmental group that we really had a relationship with because [the Chief] went out there and talked with them ... about just what we're doing in treaty,

just what we're trying to do in dealing with our land use issues. We had just started working on our land use plan. And we felt that if there's going to be anybody speaking for the trees or any of the resources within our territory, it would be [our] people. And the people from Greenpeace, they sat there and they understood without raising too much of a fuss and said, 'thank you,' and picked up their stuff and left. First Nations Leader

These early encounters had important implications for the relationship building with environmentalists:

You walk in wearing the baggage of any environmentalist who walked through that community ... So any group that did anything ... decades ago, you know, that's going to be deeply ingrained in them. Environmental Leader

This initial encounter between First Nations communities and environmentalists was often one of conflict, but not uniformly so. For example, the David Suzuki Foundation had begun relationship building very early on, and some First Nations, notably the Haida, had engaged environmental allies in their struggles to protect Haida Gwaii. This early interaction led to a second phase as both First Nations and environmental groups began to understand the priorities and concerns of the other.

Stage 2 – Relationship Building

Environmental groups who had begun to have regular contact with First Nations were beginning to understand that First Nations were concerned not only about protecting the integrity of their territories but that they were desperately concerned with the long-term well-being and sustainability of their communities, including immediate job opportunities. Cultural, economic, and environmental integrity were integrally connected. This seems to have been a time of important learning and transformation, particularly for environmental groups. Their vision needed to expand to embrace the concerns of human relationship with the territories that spanned thousands of years. The devastating impact of colonial rule, with its deep reach into the lives of so many First Nations people, had scarred First Nations communities economically and socially. Current leaders were looking for wholistic solutions. Here are some of the ways environmental leaders talked about this time.

When I asked people how they saw the problems and what their priorities were, they said, "Look, you know, we had 2 more suicides last week ... we've got 90% unemployment ... community economic development's what we need. We've got to get some more jobs." And I could certainly see that there's no way that any enviro or any other outsider could ever say, turn down those jobs with forestry ... And so, we, as an environmental group, had no

experience in economic development. But we had to ... get some.
Environmental Leader

I really was not in a position to have any impact, truly, on the big underlying factors, which were that the [First Nation] had no control over the land use decisions, and that ... unless there was some kind of real economic alternatives, then the offers being made by the logging companies, which they were doing, the logging company had put somebody into the community who lived there half-time and ... they were sending people away to get forestry training at universities and supporting their schooling, I mean ... how could I condemn the [First Nation] for deciding to go log this area in conjunction with the logging company, I mean, we [were] just providing alternatives. Environmental Leader

With the continuing assertion of their needs by First Nations leaders and the growing understanding by environmental groups, various small projects were beginning to take place. Environmental groups raised funds to enter into partnerships with First Nations to address economic, cultural and land use priorities, or they were able to offer some of their own expertise.

And we opened an office and we got some really good people on staff, and we started trying to develop job creation projects in the communities, but we didn't have a huge budget. So they had to be relatively small. We did different projects in every community. But they had varying degrees of success. I mean, they were successful as far as they went, but I knew that they were just a drop in the bucket, and they were really only stopgaps, like just a step on the way to something else. Because for one thing, we could never fund them to the level that would be necessary to really make a difference. Environmental Leader

Environmental groups were also learning how to establish respectful relationships with First Nations, observing cultural protocols:

We made this decision that in each community we'd go in the front door, and by that we meant ... communicating with the Chief and Council ... rather than doing an end-run around and going to the Traditional chiefs, because ... actually, we tend to have easier relations with the Traditional chiefs, because they are often fighting for more of the kind of protecting the diversity of the territories. But the Chief and Council have the challenge of creating jobs and dealing with the social issues and the costs of unemployment and everything. And so they have to be more practical and they've got to deal with forestry companies and so on. Environmental Leader

First Nations and environmental groups, as part of their project development, were also entering into protocol agreements that governed their relationships. An important part of the statement of principles was the

acknowledgement of First Nations' inherent rights to their territories and their right to self-determination. This was a significant development, one that would set the stage for any future work together.

Relationships continued to evolve through a process of learning that was often painful:

Another huge tension is time, and just the time frames that we approach things in, or that we're willing to work within ... and the time frames that First Nations do things in. And that kind of links to culture ... which is just, we're a different culture, so there's cross-cultural tension. You know, we make lots of mistakes when we start wandering around that village ... when we get invited to speak at a chief's meeting ... when we have a meeting in Vancouver, even, there's lots of things that we do which are culturally inappropriate, which we don't mean to do, it's just that we don't know.
Environmental Leader

Even with protocol agreements in place, relationships evolved unevenly, with some strong relationships forming and other relationships becoming fragile:

In 2000, we got a very formal agreement for the entire coast to put 100 watersheds into moratorium. And that spawned very mixed reactions from the First Nations. Some of the First Nations were very supportive and said, great ... But a lot of other First Nations ... their public stance was how terrible we had been to negotiate about their land behind closed doors. And we were a little taken aback, in part because we were like, we're just getting a moratorium; this is not land use decisions. We've just stopped the companies from cutting these different places while land use [planning] is going on. But there was a severe backlash.
Environmental Leader

Given the diversity of the environmental movement, with its different ideologies and tactics, it is not surprising that there have been varying approaches to building relationships with First Nations. Some organizations have not been part of the evolving learning that has taken place.

I think some environmental groups try to pretend that they aren't environmental groups. They sort of claim to be one thing to First Nations, and then claim to be another thing ... in the public arena or whatever, to their members. Environmental Leader

Coming from this period of relationship building, much experience was gained from initial attempts to build relationships and to undertake some joint projects. First Nations leaders expressed varying views on the possibility for working together, either seeing potential or holding skeptical views about ongoing relationships:

We didn't understand the environmental organizations when they came in because all they were talking about was saving trees, this, that and everything else. The thing is they give you information as to why they're doing it. It's not just trees, there are other things that are tied into it. Trees are important to whatever, you know, the bears. By providing protection, saving the bears is important to the fish and you know everything is all tied in, and if you take the time to listen, you'll understand what their concerns are, and how they're tied in, and you know eventually you'll come to a place where you're saying, 'OK, I understand what you're talking about. Maybe I don't agree with everything that you're saying, but I understand what you're saying. You have the right to your opinion, and I think that we can sit down and talk about these things together, and work on things that we have in common together'".
First Nations Leader

What we realized at the time is, as First Nations, with certain rights and title, we had maybe ... 25, maybe even a 50% chance of some success in certain areas. But what the environmental community and the huge lobbying pressure that they were and they were able to bring some financial resources to the table, we probably increased our chances up to about 60 to 75% chance of success.
First Nations Leader

One of the areas of tension expressed by environmentalists interviewed is that of maintaining relationships at the community level. Individual environmentalists who have established relationships with community members expressed frustration at their own inability to sustain relationships by spending blocks of time in the community. Because of the considerable time commitments of their work and organizational capacity issues, environmental leaders' visits to communities tend to be abbreviated and less frequent than is desirable.

Stage 3 – Becoming Allies

By the time Coastal First Nations was established, a web of relationships both positive and antagonistic, had already developed between environmental groups and many First Nations on the West Coast. In 2000, when the David Suzuki Foundation (DSF) coordinated the inaugural meeting of Turning Point, relationships between the Foundation and many of the First Nations were already well developed. Valahala and Ecotrust Canada were also among the organizations working with First Nations communities.

By the early 2000s, other environmental groups were also poised to work with local First Nations. Greenpeace, Sierra Club of B.C., Forest Ethics, and Rainforest Action Network had already joined forces to campaign for the protection of the "Great Bear Rainforest", which includes the traditional territories of Coastal First Nations. Some collaborative projects had already

been established at the community level, prior to the emergence of Coastal First Nations. There was a base of learning that had been laid through their previous relationship-building processes.

At the same time, these four environmental organizations had formed working relationships not only with Coastal First Nations, but with the forestry industry and governments. The Joint Solutions Project (JSP) is the working group consisting of the four environmental groups and five major forest companies in B.C. For both the environmental groups and the forest companies, communication through this working group is an alternative to confrontation in the forests. From the perspectives expressed in interviews with forest company representatives, JSP is one way to deter environmental groups from reactivating the international market campaign which had substantial economic consequences during the mobilization at Clayoquot Sound in the early 1990s and later between 1996 and 2000.

These networks of relationships are even more complex when one considers that First Nations communities often have working relationships with forest companies at the community level, as well as with environmental groups. All parties have relationships with the provincial government.

An important dynamic between First Nations and environmental groups has resulted from the significant role that environmentalists have assumed in accessing funding for First Nations for joint projects. This is true not only for Coastal First Nations itself, whose own core funding has been channelled through environmental groups, but also for First Nations with whom environmental groups have undertaken community level projects. First Nations recognize that environmental groups have extensive international relations and in particular, have been able to access funds from large American foundations.

There is resentment among First Nations that environmental groups receive funds for First Nations' work and then use part of these funds to subsidize their own operations such as hiring project staff who work directly for the environmental groups. Such well-paying jobs often go to non-Aboriginal staff. First Nations have questioned why environmental groups should be the conduit of funds for First Nations joint and community projects, and see the potential to deal directly with American foundations, eliminating the "middle man." Some First Nations leaders see environmental groups as subtly playing on the fears of funders about entering into direct relationships with First Nations.

These are very sensitive questions that relate to the self-determination of First Nations. On the one hand, First Nations are accustomed to direct fund transfers from federal and provincial governments for specific projects. On

the other hand, relationships with environmental groups have opened access to new funding and expertise that had not been available to First Nations before now. For example, the international Great Bear Rainforest campaign facilitated a number of initiatives with local First Nations communities. From the perspective of environmentalists, the funding enabled them to do more than talk about environmental and ecological values:

We got a lot of funding, funding like we had never seen. We actually probably started with a \$23,000 budget or something. So now we're suddenly doling out hundreds of thousands. Which got us more respect. Environmental Leader

Ironically, this role as “broker” for funding has many parallels in the lives of First Nations. Historically, for example, non-Aboriginal local school boards and municipalities used the proximity of First Nations to increase their access to population-based funding or grants to build local facilities such as schools and sports facilities. First Nations leaders often express resentment at being “used.” One First Nations leader commented:

They're not so much environmental groups as they are consultants and brokers. And they use First Nations to raise money. They go to foundations and they'd say, "We're doing this with the First Nations" or "We're doing this for the First Nations", and a lot of times the First Nations weren't even involved, and didn't know the extent of what was going on behind the scenes.

This has represented an important strain in the relationship between First Nations and environmental groups because First Nations are chronically short of funding for vital community projects and treaty-related research. Environmental groups are in a somewhat contradictory position in that their ability to offer funding, expertise and other resources has often opened the door to relationships in First Nations communities. One environmental leader pointed to efforts by some environmental groups to respond to negative feedback from First Nations by linking them directly to American foundation sources. What is at stake is the recognition of First Nations as self-determining. There is strong resistance to any party that tries to dictate terms to First Nations. At the same time, the importance of strategic alliances is well recognized by Coastal First Nations.

The interviews in this research revealed that the provincial government was fully aware of the potential for strong First Nations-environmental alliances to have a powerful impact on government decision making on the West Coast and potentially the province as a whole. Some of those interviewed believed that the provincial government has taken deliberate steps to disrupt First Nations-environmental alliances. For example, the decision of the provincial government to fund First Nations to undertake their own land use plans was construed as a deliberate attempt by the provincial government to minimize and contain the influence of

environmental groups in land use determination on the West Coast by limiting strong environmental perspectives. First Nations welcomed the independent land use planning process which recognized, if in a limited way, the legitimacy of First Nations' decision-making power within their traditional territories. However, a number of people suggested that the land use planning process masked the real motives of the provincial government, which exploited the importance attached by First Nations to entering into relationships with governments on a government-to-government basis. Some also directly charged that the provincial government was engaging in divide and conquer tactics to neutralize any threat of a market campaign by environmentalists, which would be risky for environmentalists if opposed by First Nations.

Stage 4 – Shifting Terrains

After over a decade of lobbying through the Great Bear Rainforest campaign, the Great Bear Rainforest Agreement, announced by the Province of British Columbia in February 2006, promised to save one-third of the territory from logging; the implementation of ecosystem-based management in the remaining territory; the involvement of First Nations in the management of the territory; and the diversification of the economy using conservation principles.⁶

As land use plans solidified in 2006 and were approved by the provincial government, funding for the Great Bear Rainforest campaign had come to an end. Environmentalists recognized that their relationships with Coastal First Nations were in the process of being transformed and in some ways, entering a new and risky stage.

I'm afraid of going into this new era, as RSP [Rainforest Solutions Project] morphs into something, hopefully, leaner and meaner, and our organizations see less funding around the whole Great Bear Rainforest thing. We aren't going to be able to bring the money into these communities that we have in the past. And have we built up enough of a relationship that the relationship can morph now? Or do they still just see us as money sources?
Environmental Leader

In many ways, the influence of the four environmental organizations with First Nations may depend upon their involvement with the Coast Opportunity Fund. On the one hand, Coastal First Nations and some environmental organizations now have more than a decade of collaboration, working through difficult issues, struggling with relationship issues and finding common ground. On the other hand, the role of environmental organizations in funding First Nations has set a precedent that may be hard to maintain. Their value to First Nations is still evolving, and their acceptance may be contingent on demonstrating a continuing solidarity:

We've been done a grave injustice through political means, and political legislation and laws. And these enviros, they live by them. They go by them. If they want to make some substantial change, or want to work with us or do things with us in a respectful manner, they need to step up to the plate and say, hey, this is what we can do for you ... if you can't do it, then don't bother coming up to the plate, don't bother knocking on the door. First Nations leader

Certainly environmental groups do assess strategically what resources they are able to bring to First Nations in working on common objectives. These include not only money, but technical expertise, knowledge of where specific resources can be located, media know-how, and extensive international networks. At the same time, they are now in the position of being expected to offer resources while also needing to find new ways to structure their funding relationships so that they do not replicate paternalistic structures.

Environmental groups, forest industry representatives and government officials all commented on the importance of the personal dimension of relationships in working together with First Nations. Trust is established with specific individuals and these linkages become the stable points of interaction with a community, particularly where relationships with external parties may be controversial in a community. When individuals change, new relationships must be built. This is undoubtedly true given that Band Council elections take place every two years. However, these observations are also ironic because First Nations communities constantly face turnover in the external parties with whom they deal, including government officials, industry representatives and environmental staff. Many Coastal First Nations have had very stable leadership over time.

Relationships between Coastal First Nations and the four environmental groups (Sierra Club of B.C., Greenpeace, Forest Ethics, and Rainforest Action Network) are projected to continue as the Coast Opportunity Fund has come to fruition. Relationships have also continued through the process of defining ecosystem-based management and the regime that will govern forestry on the West Coast and in the province of B.C. In interviews, forest company representatives saw the year 2009 as pivotal because it was projected to mark the end of negotiations about ecosystem-based management and the beginning of implementation. From a business perspective, this would give them a sense of certainty in planning and carrying out their operations. It also appeared in these interviews that they saw the role of environmentalists changing once key decisions about ecosystem-based management have been made. On the other hand, the forest industry was poised to continue working with individual First Nations in mutual ventures:

Some of those communities want pretty simple things. They want the freight to be cheaper, or they want scheduled air flights

everyday in the winter, not once a week. I mean it's things like that and the members of those communities who are looking ahead and see that they are going to have to build an economy in their area to do that. And I look at us and I say, "Well, we can provide some of what they need". The day of us providing or telling them what they need is long over. Forest industry representative

A significant dimension of this current conjuncture is recognizing that environmental groups are ultimately advocates for the environment, and that despite the relationships that have developed over time, environmental leaders may be critical publicly of decisions that First Nations make.

As the First Nations do gain greater control over the land ... they will do things that we don't like either. And at some point, we will have to say, OK, we are treating you like any other government, and we tried to talk to you about it, and you're still going to do this thing that we think is bad for the environment, and this is why we think it's bad for the environment ... so we are going to have to say so publicly. Environmental Leader

Environmental leaders who were interviewed indicated that they have tried to be good allies in the various processes that have unfolded. For example, they have supported the position of First Nations in promoting government-to-government relationships in the land and resource processes, they've lobbied for the Coast Opportunity Fund, and they themselves have supported the self-determination efforts of First Nations in their protocol agreements with First Nations.

We definitely learned early on to listen, and part of the respect for us was just to listen. And in doing that, we came up with, OK, control is their main issue and then having the ability to implement things, control over decision making on the land, and then having the capacity/capital to be able to implement what it is that they want to do. Those are key fundamental issues for them. So we developed things to try to support that. So when you ask what they understand about us, in a sense that's [sic] a sad thing is that we haven't really explained that, OK, we heard you ... we've changed culturally, we've changed to be supportive of First Nations' issues ... that we've strategically tried to put their demands in our demand sets and support them. Environmental Leader

Environmentalists also indicated that they proved their loyalty in negotiating the Great Bear Rainforest Agreement which included the involvement of First Nations in the management of the territory (See Rainforest Solutions website). Certainly, the durability of the social networks established over years will be tested as relationships enter a new phase.

Concluding Observations

The four-stage model, derived from a grounded theory reading of the interviews, well describes the flow of relationships that have evolved between specific First Nations and large environmental groups through nearly two decades. Another excellent thematic fit with the data is the grounded theory reading described in the case study of the Coalition for a Public Inquiry into Ipperwash, as reported in Davis, O'Donnell and Shpuniarsky. In the Ipperwash case study, the researchers found three significant patterns expressed in the workings of the coalition: coalition as a site of learning and transformation; coalition as a site of pain; and coalition as a negotiation of Aboriginal/settler power relationships. These three themes also appeared in the interviews on Coastal First Nations and environmental group relations. The cross-cutting themes are explored in some depth in Davis and Shpuniarsky.

First Nations-environmental group relations can also be analyzed using resource mobilization theory. Resource mobilization theory has evolved as a diverse approach to the study of social movements, from its narrow natural sciences roots in the 1970s, to more social constructionist, identity-based constructs in the 1990s, to the more synthetic models that are being elaborated today (Mueller; Morris). While there are various aspects of resource mobilization theory that can be applied to the emergence of Coastal First Nations (e.g. collective identities and frame analysis) and the relationship between First Nations and environmental groups (e.g. political opportunity structure), an obvious application rests in the fact that Coastal First Nations' Turning Point Initiative has become a focal point for mobilizing significant resources: influence, money, and expertise. Provincial and federal governments have paid attention to the collective voice of the Coastal First Nations, responding to the practical issues of planning and implementing land and resource use agreements, if somewhat sidestepping the deeper issues surrounding jurisdiction and self-determination of First Nations which are at stake in the treaty process. In 2005, the Province of B.C. introduced what they call a "new relationship" with First Nations in British Columbia. Coastal First Nations have seen an increase in financial resources as a result of this increased influence. At the same time, foundation resources have also found their way to First Nations, albeit through the conduit of environmental organizations. Through Coastal First Nations, forest companies have agreed to create pathways into the forestry industry for First Nations in whose territories they hold licences. All of these sources have increased the level of financial resources for Coastal First Nations.⁷

By acting together, the Coastal First Nations have been able to undertake studies utilizing expertise that they would not normally be able to access as individual First Nations. Coastal First Nations has contracted resource and economic development studies that offer First Nations important sources of

information for Nation decision making. Environmental organizations have also lent their own or contracted technical expertise that has allowed First Nations to increase their analysis of issues related to their interests. Most importantly, Coastal First Nations has created space and resources for strategic analysis that is crucial to its members.

From a technical point of view, it's good to have good staff, well-qualified who can do the background work, prepare the papers and positions, so that the First Nations can look at those, make their particular judgements based upon sound information, solid research, good public policy. Coastal First Nations Leader

In fast-paced policy and business environments with many different interests at play, it is most important to have a capacity to do strategic analysis of changing circumstances that might impact communities. Cash-starved First Nations have had a very difficult time undertaking this kind of analysis across multiple sectors on an ongoing basis. Having a collective mechanism that can feed into local decision making is of considerable value.

Coastal First Nations can also be analysed with reference to the social capital it mobilizes. Social capital has been conceptualized as being comprised of three dimensions: bonding, bridging and linking. These dimensions refer to various forms of networks and their usefulness as sources of social capital. Bonding refers to one's strong ties (family, close friends) and bridging refers to one's weak ties (acquaintances, associates, colleagues) (Levitt; Woolcock; Gittel and Vidal). It is through these ties and networks that one can access opportunities, information, and resources. In a community context, bonding refers to relations *within* the community, bridging as relations with other communities, and linkage as relations with formal institutions, such as governments or financial institutions (Mignone and O'Neil).

Social capital thus has a vertical dimension. An important strategy for communities is to "reach out" to other communities through bridging activities, but also to "scale up"; that is, to "forge alliances with sympathetic individuals in positions of power" (Woolcock 13). Linking is regarded as key to successful community development, and in the context of this study, to successful collective action. "Edwards (1999:6) ... maintains that for social and economic transformations to be achieved, community members must make political alliances with groups other than their own (i.e. outside the clan, tribe or village)" (cited by Levitt 17). It is within this framework of social capital theory that alliances and coalitions between Aboriginal peoples and environmentalists can be studied; that is, how Aboriginal peoples are expanding their networks to leverage resources and opportunities, leading to improved social and economic conditions.

Many First Nations communities have a long history of effective bonding, bridging and linking. However, Coastal First Nations as an organization has strengthened these dimensions immeasurably. Despite historic differences amongst them, Coastal First Nations have been successful in crossing cultural and tribal boundaries to assert their voices in unison. The payback has been considerable in terms of multiplying resources and opportunities at a community level.

By acting at this point in history, the influence of Coastal First Nations over their own territories has substantially increased. Numerous networks have been activated through which individual Coastal First Nations have been able to assert their interests. One of the challenges for the organization, with its time-limited mandate, is to maintain the momentum that has developed through its actions to date, particularly since its effectiveness has depended upon speaking with one voice while honouring the autonomy of its members.

This is a time of transition as the entrenched interests of the colonial past and present have been challenged both economically and politically. Global capitalism, with an insatiable appetite for resources, has reached into local economies on multiple fronts. For First Nations, this flux has been daunting in some ways but also beneficial in that they have command over considerable resources and the opportunity to shape the decisions being made, despite the lack of treaties. At stake is not only the sustainability of First Nations' economies and governments, but also the future of power relations on the West Coast and future income streams for the provincial government, industries and non-Aboriginal communities. Coastal First Nations provides a window into a world of intense relationships through which the future is unfolding.

Notes

1. This research is one of three case studies undertaken in the Alliances Project, funded by SSHRC's Standard Research Grant Program (see Davis, O'Donnell, and Shpuniarsky; Davis and Shuniarsky). I am indebted to Coastal First Nations leaders and staff who agreed to have their important work documented in this case study. Likewise, I am grateful to the leaders of environmental groups and forestry companies, as well as government officials, who also agreed to contribute to this case study and analysis. I wish to acknowledge, with gratitude, SSHRC and the important contributions made by others to this paper: Heather Shpuniarsky who assisted with data analysis; Vivian O'Donnell who researched "social capital", and research assistants Rick Fehr and Paul McCarney who worked on the literature review. While the contributions of many people are substantial, I take full responsibility for the limitations of the analysis presented here.
2. While the organization was initially termed "Turning Point" or "the Turning Point Initiative", members have since referred to the organization as "Coastal First Nations". I have used both singular and plural verbs throughout to reference

- the organization as a whole and First Nations members. Background information and current initiatives are described on the Coastal First Nation's website.
3. For fuller background information, visit websites cited in the bibliography for Coastal First Nations, Greenpeace, Forest Ethics, Sierra Club of B.C., Rainforest Solutions Project, Joint Solutions Project, B.C. Treaty Commission, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, and Government of B.C. Integrated Land Management Bureau.
 4. Some key Supreme Court decisions include the Sparrow decision (1990) which affirmed the right to fish for food, ceremonial and societal purposes; the Gladstone decision (1996) which demonstrated the Aboriginal right of the Heiltsuk to sell their spawn-on-kelp (herring roe) in commercial markets; the Delgamugvw decision (1997) which recognized Aboriginal title to the land; and the Haida (2004) decision which confirmed that governments must consult First Nations before taking actions within First Nations' territories. Hence, governments have the duty to consult and accommodate First Nations' interests.
 5. There is a growing international literature since the mid-1990s on "ecosystem-based management." It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the development of this new paradigm which has far-reaching implications for the future of human relationships with the ecological systems with which we are interdependent.
 6. Available from <http://www.savethegreatbear.org> [retrieved 2009] and also Smith, Sterritt, and Armstrong (2007).
 7. Of course, the forest industry in British Columbia was caught in the global financial crisis that began in 2008, shifting the terrain once again in economic and political forces affecting Coastal First Nations.

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