

Introduction 5:45 min

Narrator

The year 2015 marked an important milestone for shaping the future of Canada's North Pacific Coast.

A co-led partnership between the Government of British Columbia and 18 First Nations – called MaPP - developed marine plans that will guide the marine management in a vast ocean area spanning from the Alaska border to Campbell River on Vancouver Island - the Great Bear Sea.

The marine plans designated four sub regions within the Great Bear Sea. Haida Gwaii, North Coast, North Vancouver Island and the Central Coast.

The Great Bear Sea

Reflecting on the Past – Planning for the Future

Narrator

Islands, rain forests, wild rivers, coldwater seas—

Traditional territory of First Nations for millennia - the Great Bear Sea is home to 20% of the world's remaining wild salmon,

Home to dolphins, porpoises, humpback and killer whales,

Home to wolves and the rare white Spirit Bears that live nowhere else on Earth.

Welcome to the Great Bear Sea.

WILLIAM HOUSTY Chair, Heiltsuk Integrated Resource Management Department

So, we've always depended on our ocean, you know there's a really close spiritual connection that our people have with the ocean. The killer whale for example has really healing sort of aura to it. The people used to look at the orcas as, you know, their power and strength – they used to draw from that. When people were really sick and the orcas were going by, they used to take the sick people and put them in the ocean, just in the shallow water so that they could be in the same vicinity as these killer whales and get some of that energy from them on their way by, in hopes that it would help them recover.

The connection to the land to the animals and to the birds, that really defines our culture, makes up who we are.

ARCHIE ROBINSON Hereditary Chief, Kitsoo/Xais'Xais Nation

In the early 1800's the Kitsoos were out there in different settlements all over Aristazabal and out here Higgens...different settlements all over the place... before we were taken.....again by the government....into the reserve system.

They, they moved about....they moved about...fishing...they stayed all over.....so there's places for everything.

Yeah, all the resources of the sea mean a lot to us. Everything....the sea prunes, the cucumber,..red urchins...we call them *Suitcha*??,,,,those all are put away...Everything, every kind of fish is put away for winter use.

WILLIAM HOUSTY Chair, Heiltsuk Integrated Resource Management Department

Everything we eat, whether it's inter-tidal, whether it's bottom fish, whether it's herring, whether it's herring spawn, whether it's salmon – everything comes out of that ocean. It's a lifeline. It's a lifeline for our people.

When you look at the intricate life cycle that exists between all the species that are in there, and if you remove one you start to have a collapse like dominoes.

So it's really important that we keep everything health so these life cycles can continue on and thrive off each other. From the top of the chain to the bottom of the chain, we all depend on one another, right through the top, right down to the bottom.

ARCHIE ROBINSON Hereditary Chief, Kitasoo/Xais'Xais Nation

All Nations have to work together....all Nations up and down the coast...the Haidas, Vancouver Island, the coastal people...Nations have to get together, work together...work together to protect what little we have left....

Respect 9:50min

Underwater Big House, Story of Gitnuganaks told by Vernon Brown, Kitasoo/Xai'Xais Nation

So the story I'm gonna tell you guys has to do with the big house that was in the forest here. And the story takes place on the south end of Aristazabal Island. There used to be a village in there, and the village was called Wit'ien So one day these four hunters decided to go out on a seal hunt, and they wanted to paddle from the south end all the way up to the north end of the island. It's a pretty big island, and after they started out hunting, over a week's time they had a very successful hunt, but a week later they were at the northern end of the island and all the men were kind of tired, and they didn't even bother to pull into the bay, they just decided to drop anchor.

So they dropped anchor and it was getting dark, and all of the – all the men in the boat decided to go to sleep. So only one of the guys couldn't go to sleep because he kept hearing a noise, and it was kind of like a slapping noise he kept hearing on the side of the canoe. So he got up and took a look, and then there wasn't anything there. So he tried to lie back down and go to sleep again, and he heard the noise again, the slapping noise. He jumped up, looked over the edge and he didn't see anything.

He was starting to get a little upset, so the third time he was actually kind of waiting there, he was waiting to hear the noise. And then when he heard the noise he jumped up, he pulled the, pulled the – it was a ratfish. He pulled it out of the water. As upset as he was, he grabbed its fins and ripped it off and he threw it back into the water. And then he actually managed to fall back asleep.

The ratfish, when it got thrown into the water, it managed to swim underwater, dove under, and managed to get into this underwater Big House. He walked through the door. As he walked through the door he transformed from a ratfish into a human. So here was this human with no arms, and he walked up to the master, the Chief of the Big House, and his name was Gitnuganaks. And Gitnuganaks said, "What happened? What had happened to you?" And the ratfish said, "Well look what they have done to me. They have torn off my arms. They tore off my arms."

So Gitnuganaks, the Chief of the Big House was really upset, so he left the underwater Big House and went up and grabbed their canoe and pulled them under. They dragged them underwater, formed a big whirlpool, and the men woke up and they're in this underwater Big House. And they started describing the big house they had seen in the story, described the big house as a starfish and sea anemones for the ceiling, giant halibut for a floor, grizzly bears holding up the Big House.

And Gitnuganaks was sitting there. The men are still sitting in their canoe yet – and Gitnuganaks said, "What have you done to my slaves?" And one of the men spoke up, and was trying to apologize to Gitnuganaks for the loss of his slaves. Gitnuganaks said, "Well how are you going to compensate me for the loss of my slave?" Well, one of the men spoke up and said, "We can give you all our seal meat and all our seal fat that we got from our, from our hunt. And Gitnuganaks agreed, and he took all their seal meat and said, "Well, I'm gonna take all your seal meat, but you guys have to stay here and potlatch for four days and four nights."

The men had no choice but to agree, and Gitnuganaks started inviting all the winds – he invited the north wind, he invited the easterly wind, he invited the westerly wind. Each and every one of them brought a form a gift or a form of a punishment. Gitnuganaks also invited the Chief of Skeena River, the Chief of Nass – he invited all these people from these neighboring communities to come in and potlatch.

So when the easterly wind came in he had a black face and black cloak on – he walked up to one of the men, and he kicked over the canoe and all the men fell out of the canoe. And the easterly wind said that, “If I see you out in the water, I’m gonna come kick your canoe over.”

The north wind came up to the men. He had an icicle kind of beard and he had a white cloak on. And he came over and he touched the ground around the canoe and started freezing all around the canoe. And he said, “If I see you out in the water, I’m gonna freeze the water around you.” Kind of like a form of punishment for what he had done to the ratfish.

Only the wind that kind of brought a gift was the westerly wind. It’s kind of a nice warm wind that we’re getting right now. It’s nice and warm, nice weather. And he gave the men a big drum, and the men received the drum. And he said, “If you hit it, and if you’re in my area here, the Kitasoo Bay, if you hear my drumbeat, that’s me.” Apparently when you get a good westerly wind in the Kitasoo Bay, it sounds like a drum beat.

Anyways, they stayed and potlatched, danced, and after four days and four nights it was finally coming to an end. And all the men were asking, “Gitnuganaks, can we go now, can we go now? We’ve been here. We’ve potlatched with you for four days and four nights.” And Gitnuganaks was kind of getting irritated and he got upset, and said, “Go!” And he kicked open the door of the Big House and started flooding under the water. All the men jumped back in their canoes and they managed to resurface, left the underwater Big House and resurfaced. And they dumped out their canoe.

They jumped back into their canoe, not knowing they were filled with barnacles and sea growth, and the men just started paddling. They wanted to get home, and they tried to paddle, paddle back home to Wit’ien Bay, and it got foggy and they couldn’t see where they were going, so they were paddling and paddling, hours and hours and hours. And they finally hit an island, and the man in the back of the canoe told the man in the front of the canoe, “Go climb the biggest tree, biggest spruce tree you can find. Go find the biggest spruce tree you can find and find out where we are.”

So the man – one of the men climbed up, and he climbed up and he was looking around, and he seen some mountains. And he said, “Well, we’ve gone the wrong way because those are the mountains of the Haida Gwaii.” So the men decided to get back in the canoes, left, and they came back across and the fog kind of cleared up. And the men could see their village. They could see the smoke coming from the bay and they paddled straight for Wit’ien and they managed to get home. As they arrived on the shoreline the community members were really shocked to see that they were there, and the men didn’t care, they just wanted to go home and tell their wives what had happened. As they walked up to their homes, all the four men, they realized that all their wives had been married off to other men.

And the men couldn’t understand what was going on. The men had no reason to be living there in Wit’ien Bay, but they told the story, where they were in this underwater Big House, and what had happened to them, that they got pulled under water and what they had seen. They described the Big House they were at, and describes the type of gifts they had received, and the punishments they received from doing that to the ratfish. And because they told their story, all the men got Chief names, but the men decided to leave Wit’ien Bay and they came across this way and they built a replica of what they had seen underwater.

I can go back to the story where the men first dropped anchor and that anchor hit the top of the Big House and made a big bang, made a big bang. And Gitnuganaks sent up his slave to go up and see that that noise was. And the ratfish was asking the canoe to move because they had dropped anchor on top

of their house. And because the men had ripped off the fins of the rat fish and threw him back in the water, it turned out that the four days turned out to be four years that they were actually under water for.

And this is the type of story that has always been told to me, the moral is about respect and respecting animals and respecting yourself and respecting others. You do this and this will happen to you.

So my grandmother used to tell me this story all the time when I was growing up, and she made sure that she kind of drilled it into my head that you have to respect animals and you have to respect yourself. Never get more than you need for salmon, and more than you need for hunting, stuff like that. The moral of that is about respect and sustaining the things that are around you.

And marine use planning, everything like that, if you look at our values, number one on that list is conservation. Number two is food fish, number three is economics. And we'd rather protect, protect the salmon and protect the bears before we even just talk about money, before we even talk about food fish. We'd rather have them protected and respect them.

Some of the Elders in Klemtu say that common theme of the circle of life. Take one out, you affect everything else. Take salmon out you affect the bears, you affect us. So we're exactly a part of that ecosystem around here. We're competing with the other animals as well, but we're people and we'll respect that and we'll take our share and leave the others for the animals.

Ratfish 4:00 min

Natural History of Ratfish (by Florian Graner)

Ratfish are relatives to sharks and rays, and resemble something like a crossover between them. Some also call them “Ghost Sharks” due to their ghostly appearance. Their large reflector eyes, flaring out greenish, spooky. The Manta Ray-like gentle up and down strokes of the pectoral fins are simply beautiful. They can glide through the water like a soaring bird in the air.

Their ray-like mouth is placed to easily grab prey on the sea floor. Ratfish have been around in their current shape for over 150 million years, and well before the dinosaurs ever walked on the surface of the planet. They must be doing something right.

For me, meeting them under water is like being eye to eye with a dinosaur. In fact, they are the most abundant fish in the Sound in terms of biomass. This is even more surprising when remembered how old they are as a species. Their trick is being perfectly adapted to the stable deep-water environment. Probably the most stable habitat on earth.

Next to the large eyes, sensitive to any speck of residual light, ratfish are equipped with an extensive sideline organ, which spreads and branches all over their head. This organ detects minute pressure differences and functions as a delicate motion detector.

Then they have pockets with specialized cell clusters around the nose. The Ampullae of Lorenzini – these electro-magnetic detectors. A little mussel twitching under the sand won’t go undetected by a ratfish. When searching for prey, ratfish hover just above the ground, ready to strike like lightning. Worms, shrimp, and small fish are all on the ratfish menu list.

It is a rare opportunity to see ratfish or chimeras in such shallow water, and observe them feeding. Most places in the world they inhabit the deep and dark places of the ocean. This proves how close the deep-water environment is all around of us due to the depth of the Sound.

To fishermen, a ratfish is a very unwanted creature. Their meat is not good for eating, and they have a long poisonous spine on their back, which can inflict painful wounds. No surprise they’re doing well, then. There are few things which will prey on the ratfish. The 6-gill shark being one exception.

Like sharks and rays, male ratfish have claspers so gender is easily determined. Additionally male ratfish have a strange organ on their head. It sits on a pocket on the forehead and can be moved and wiggled to impress the females.

Like with sharks, females actually grow bigger than males. They are all cartilaginous fish and have no bones. Ratfish really have two gears – the graceful Manta Ray stroke, and they can whip their rat-like tail vigorously to escape in a hurry.