

North Coast Development 9:30min

BRUCE WATKINSON Marine Program Coordinator, Gitxaala Environmental Monitoring

The North coast area is facing development issues like we've never seen before, with the race to move liquefied natural gas out of BC to Asian markets, with the Northern Gateway Enbridge project to move dilbit bitumen to Asian markets. It's putting a lot of pressure on the north coast area, in terms of transportation issues of large tankers, in terms of terminals in Kitimat and Prince Rupert.

So it gets back to the fact that these marine use plans that each community has are very, very important – to be able to put your community's voice forward to decision-makers in government, to stakeholders, and really to the world that we have to make right decisions, and that those decisions need time, and unfortunately those time frames do not always match up with our capacity to deal with those issues. It doesn't always match up with our community's decision-making process.

DON KRUSEL President & CEO, Prince Rupert Port Authority

Canada is a trading economy. Our economic livelihood depends on our ability to trade with the world, and the Port of Prince Rupert is that gateway. We really see our role as facilitating and enabling Canada to fulfill its trade objectives and to keep the trading economy going.

And Prince Rupert is being looked to as the solution to many of North America's and Canada's trade challenges, and as a result, we've planned for and we foresee tremendous growth. And with that growth comes jobs. I mean the liquefied natural gas industry is a good example. North America, British Columbia has a lot of gas that is quote trapped, and the only way it has value is if it gets to international markets. And this region is viewed as one of the gateways to those international markets.

DAVID LEASK Land & Marine Implementation Manager, Metlakatla Stewardship Office

We're in the, what we refer to as the estuary of the Skeena River, or the mouth.

The tide runs up the Skeena River about 60 to 80 kilometers. And so basically what's happening here is it's all the mixing, it's the mixing of the fresh and the salt water, and it's just really, really, really productive in terms of the juvenile salmon coming out, but also for shellfish and everything like that also.

Narrator

Three quarters of harvested fish and shellfish species depend upon estuaries during their life cycle.

The greatest threat to estuaries is, by far, their large-scale conversion by draining, filling, damming or dredging. These activities result in the immediate destruction and loss of essential marine habitat.

In and around the Skeena River estuary major industrial developments are now proposed.

DES NOBELS Director, Area A, Skeena-Queen Charlotte Regional District

People here have a very close tie to the region, to the water itself, the marine environment. We are people of place. There are families here that go back many generations, whether it be First Nations or European, many of us live off of the resources from the marine environment here and don't necessarily see what's being proposed as a fit for us.

If government is allowed to move forward with industry in terms of how they see the future, then this will be a complete industrial site. This will be a massive industrial zone all around Prince Rupert here, the Skeena Estuary and the surrounding areas. You will have massive LNG development. You will have massive oil by rail and pipeline out of there. You will have massive coal being distributed out of there.

You will have massive everything going out of this place, but there will be no consideration given to the marine environment around it.

Well we stand to lose many things, but I think what is first and foremost in many British Columbians' minds is our salmon. The wild salmon that presently exists here. We have the Skeena River, the second largest salmon-producer in Canada, and one of the largest salmon producers in the world. It's untouched. It's un-dammed. This is an incredible piece of water with a major productivity.

ROSS WILSON Director, Metlakatla Stewardship Office

When I came on board, this was little over two years ago, this LNG was just starting to put through applications for referral. And on our table today we have 19 major files associated to major activities, not all of them are LNG, but the majority of them are.

There are so many issues related to LNG that we have to address on the Stewardship program. We have to address the air emissions that come out of a facility that uses 100% power from gas. There's a disposal at sea issue here when a facility goes in a site and has to remove some soil and they want to pump it back into the ocean. There's the issue with the port in establishing additional anchorages outside of their boundary lines, without consulting Metlakatla. There's the issue of shipping, as it relates to the potential for ships to come out of Kitimat and out of Prince Rupert.

DES NOBELS Director, Area A, Skeena-Queen Charlotte Regional District

People really want to see responsible use in terms of the environment here, They want to see sustainable industry, industry that won't affect what we presently have so that we're building on what we have as opposed to removing from or watering down what we have so there is a great deal of concern over that.

The MaPP process, the Marine Planning Partnership...I have a little more faith in terms of the ability to at least implement it because it's a smaller plan. It's really between two governments, although communities would like to think of themselves as a third level of government within that structure also ensuring that that which we value the most is protected, and that's our access to the marine environment and the rich foods and tradition that it provides us.

DAVID LEASK Land & Marine Implementation Manager, Metlakatla Stewardship Office

This place is productive all year round. There isn't really a time where it takes a break that it would be really good to do any development. It's just important all year round for us. So it's highly utilized, not only by the Metlakatla, but by a lot of the First Nations throughout the whole North coast use the estuary here for various reasons.

ROSS WILSON Director, Metlakatla Stewardship Office

They call it their supermarket. They can go out there whatever time of the season to harvest, but if there are supertankers, either passing through there or anchored, which could be contaminating the region, nobody's addressing it. And that's where we have to address it.

So the bottom line is Metlakatla wants to be able to protect the lands, waters and resources so that their membership can harvest in perpetuity.

And that's what the Stewardship Program is doing, is to make sure that the childrens' childrens' children can go out and access that sockeye, or the seaweed, or that halibut, knowing that all this industrial activity is still ongoing. And that's our plan.

BRUCE WATKINSON Marine Program Coordinator, Gitxaala Environmental Monitoring

In the face of all of these proposed developments, we can't ignore the fact that we have unresolved rights and title issues with the federal and provincial governments. And really, in the end, I think that's where a lot of First Nations want to end up, with the ability to self-govern, with the ability to manage our resources as we did in the past, with the ability to determine what we want to develop in terms of an economy, what we want to protect in terms of certain ecological values, and how we want to evolve our culture.