Islands' Spirit Rising

Reclaiming the Forests of Haida Gwaii

LOUISE TAKEDA

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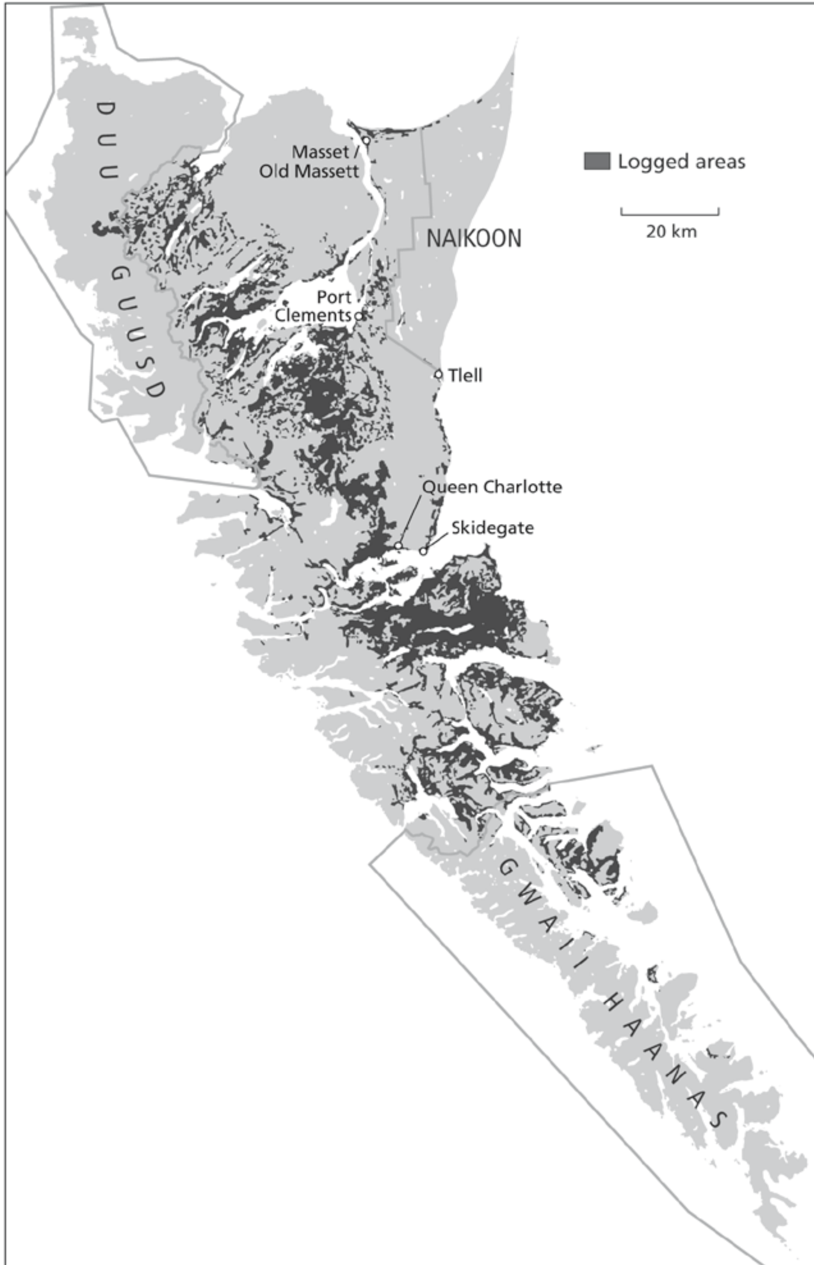

1 Logging Haida Gwaii 1990-2004. *Source:* Gowgaia Institute (John Broadhead). Adapted by Eric Leinberger

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1
Navigating Change on Haida Gwaii

We have an insatiable appetite for trees, an age-old pattern that stretches back to the dawn of time. Wood and the numberless things we make of it are so much a part of us that it is impossible to imagine a life without it. Perhaps the only thing equal to the extent of our interdependence with trees is the extent to which we take them for granted.

– John Broadhead, "Islands at the Edge"

The land and waters of Haida Gwaii can and must be made well again. Our economic needs can and must be brought into balance with the capacity of the land to function and provide. We have the political will and we accept the responsibility to see that this is done.

– Council of the Haida Nation, Haida Land Use Vision

The enchanted islands of Haida Gwaii contain some of the richest natural, cultural, and political landscapes in the world. Known for a time as the Queen Charlotte Islands, Haida Gwaii is the homeland of the Haida Nation, an indigenous people whose way of life has been intertwined with the land and waters of the islands for millennia. Located at the edge of Western Canada, this isolated archipelago is also home to some of the

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world's last remaining tracts of intact coastal temperate rainforest and is a globally significant repository for biological diversity.

Over the past century, however, the forests have been logged at an ever-accelerating rate. This has threatened not only the irreplaceable biodiversity and habitat values, but also the cultural and social values of the forests that the Haida have relied on for centuries. In response, the Haida, together with their local environmental and community allies, have launched political campaigns, blockades, and lawsuits to demand logging reductions. At the same time, they have pressed for greater local control through community-based forest tenures and legal recognition of Haida title to the land. Since the 1980s, this grassroots indigenous-environmental-community movement has evolved into a powerful force with the capacity to take on the multinational forest industry and the political structures that enable it.

This book traces the evolution of this dynamic force, from the early days of Haida resistance to the modern context of alliances, movement building, and evolving forms of governance. Within this broader context, the study focuses on the latest stages of the conflict and the provincial government's efforts to ameliorate it through collaborative ecosystem-based planning.

Islands at the Edge of the World

The natural wonders of Haida Gwaii were first brought to the attention of a wider public in the 1980s, when the Haida and their allies launched a successful campaign to protect the old-growth forests of Gwaii Haanas. Since then, Haida Gwaii's reputation as an environmental jewel has spread.

Haida Gwaii is geographically positioned on the edge of the continental shelf, nestled under the Alaska Panhandle to the north and separated from the mainland of British Columbia by the treacherous Hecate Strait. It consists of two main islands, Graham and Moresby, which are surrounded by hundreds of smaller islands and islets. Its isolated geography and role as a glacial refugium during the last ice age led to the evolution of at least thirty-nine plant and animal species and subspecies found nowhere else on earth (Holt 2005). These include the Haida Gwaii black bear, ermine, pine marten, dusky shrew, and a number of plants and mosses. Because of this ecological distinctiveness, environmentalists in the 1970s strategically dubbed the islands the "Galapagos of the North."

Whereas the unique ecological features of Haida Gwaii have only recently become well known, the Haida's relationship to the land stretches

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back more than 10,000 years. Haida oral history traces their roots on Haida Gwaii to before the last ice age, recalling, among other things, two great floods, rising and falling sea levels, and the coming of the first tree (Council of the Haida Nation 2004, 3). This oral history is supported by recent archaeological evidence, showing that people hunted bears on Haida Gwaii as far back as 13,000 years ago and have deepwater fished since 10,700 years ago (Fedje et al. 2005).

Over the centuries, the Haida have relied on the ocean and forests for their material, cultural, and spiritual well-being. Culturally modified trees can be found throughout the forests of Haida Gwaii, providing evidence of occupancy and forest use going back centuries. The Haida have used a variety of trees for food, teas, medicine, fuel, and building materials. The red cedar has been, and continues to be, of particular cultural significance. Its durable wood has been used for longhouses, canoes, totem poles, rope, mats, and storage boxes. The bark of the red and yellow cedar has been used for clothing, hats, and baskets. The Haida have also used over sixty species of plants for sustenance, health, and medicinal purposes (Nancy Turner 2004, 57-61).

The historical profusion of seafood allowed a relatively dense and sedentary population to flourish on Haida Gwaii. Combined with the Haida's sophisticated boat-building and fishing technologies, this natural marine abundance allowed leisure time for the Haida to develop their world-renowned art forms. Despite recent declines in fish stocks and aggressive logging of the forests, the Haida's intimate connection to the land and waters of Haida Gwaii continues to this day. As ethnobotanist Nancy Turner (ibid., 23) writes: "The mountains, the waters, the plants and the animals of Haida Gwaii are all part of a magnificent system, supporting and nourishing the Haida, and in turn, respected and embraced by them as an integral part of their culture and identity."

Nevertheless, the delicate balance that existed between the Haida and their natural surroundings during the long pre-colonial period was radically affected by the arrival of Europeans.

Legacy of Colonization and Resource Extraction

With the arrival of the maritime fur trade in the eighteenth century, Haida Gwaii became known to the outside world for its superior and profitable raw materials. First contact – with the Spanish explorer Juan Peréz – was recorded in 1774. Thirteen years later, Captain George Dixon arrived in

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Haida Gwaii as part of a sea otter trade mission and gave the islands their colonial name, "Queen Charlotte," after his ship and the queen consort of England. By the 1780s, the maritime fur trade had established itself, and within a few decades, increasing European presence and trade generated an intensifying clash of economics, nature, and culture. An 1852 gold rush created a new frontier economy and the establishment of the islands as a Crown colony.

More devastating than the political, economic, and cultural upheavals that followed from colonization were the successive waves of epidemics introduced by the newcomers. The worst smallpox epidemic hit Haida Gwaii in the 1860s, eventually reducing the Haida from their pre-contact numbers of 10,000 to 15,000 to an estimated mere 588 by 1915 (Van den Brink 1974, 77; Fedje et al. 2005, 119).[1] The survivors of about twenty permanent villages regrouped into two villages: Old Massett at the north end of Graham Island and Skidegate at the south end. Both remain to this day as the two Native reserves in which most of the islands' Haida people reside. The abrupt and tragic depopulation, which occurred among so many First Nations in British Columbia, facilitated the imposition of new forms of governance.[2] The colonial government designated small reserves, and though BC First Nations never ceded their rights and title to the land, the remaining land was claimed by the Crown.

With European settlement and control over resources, Haida economies were soon replaced by colonial economies. Historian Richard Rajala (2006, 15) notes: "A society based upon Euro-American settlement and capitalist enterprise dictated that from the outset land and resources would be allocated to those deemed able to extract the highest value from their market potential." In British Columbia, the clearest example of this was the forest industry. Government policies transformed the land into a form of private property that could be leased cheaply to timber corporations for development and short-term profit extraction. First Nations people were sometimes employed as loggers, but they were systematically excluded from entrepreneurial and personal access to timber (Marchak 1995; Harris 2002; Rajala 2006). Meanwhile, they would bear the brunt of the ecological and social impacts. Despite First Nations' consistent defence of their land title, the BC government ignored their concerns in favour of resource extraction and profit for multinational corporations.

Logging on Haida Gwaii increased exponentially through the twentieth century. Corporate domination of the forests was well established by the onset of the First World War and the drive for high-quality Sitka spruce to build fighter planes. Although most logs were processed elsewhere,

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several sawmills were built on the islands at that time. However, when the brief war-inspired boom ended, most of Haida Gwaii's industrial infrastructure disappeared (Rajala 2006, 2-40). The islands subsequently reverted to their role as supplier of raw materials to processing facilities in Victoria and the southern mainland, with little or no manufacturing occurring locally. In an extensive historical study of the forest industry on the BC north coast, Rajala (ibid., 7) concluded that Haida Gwaii "represented the clearest example of hinterland resources being drawn off without appreciable local benefit."

An estimated 105 million cubic metres of raw logs, valued at over $12 billion, left the islands during the twentieth century (Gowgaia Institute 2007, 9).[3] Rather than supporting the long-term social and ecological interests of the region, resource extraction on Haida Gwaii (as in many other resource-rich regions of the world) has enabled the development of distant political and financial centres. Modern technology has simply exacerbated the impact of logging and increased the speed at which the most accessible and valuable resources are depleted. The associated threats to local livelihoods, culture, habitat, and biodiversity has never been figured into the prices paid for the resources.

This problem of the unequal distribution of costs and benefits between primarily extractive and manufacturing regions has been extensively discussed by such well-known social theorists as Andre Gunder Frank (1969, 1975) and Harold Innis (1936, 1956). More recently, the field of ecological economics has extended these insights by examining energy and material flows to reveal the ecologically unequal exchange associated with resource extraction (see Bunker 1985; Martinez-Alier 1987; Giljum and Hubacek 2001). Ecologically unequal exchange highlights the fact that local resources are sold at prices that do not take into account the local environmental and social impacts or the exhaustion of natural resources caused by overextraction.

Nevertheless, the prevailing economic model relies on high levels of material extraction and cheap resources for continued industrialization and economic growth. The ideology of developmentalism, with its uncritical emphasis on the benefits of resource development, job creation, and capital accumulation, is largely shared by resource managers, industry proponents, and state officials alike. Monetary value is the assumed operational definition and neutral standard of value, whereas the interests and concerns of host communities are often discounted as parochial or vested (Howitt 2001). Moreover, the priorities of corporate actors are reflected in state policies and legislation that ensure continued access to

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resources by the powerful of the world. This overarching institutional and ideological framework has made it exceedingly difficult for resource-rich regions like Haida Gwaii to avert the destructive social, cultural, and ecological consequences of resource development.

In response to this concern, political ecologist Stephen Bunker (1985) suggested, in his extensive study of resource extraction in the Brazilian Amazon, that either central political and institutional structures must work to protect the long-term interests of local communities, or the communities themselves must develop their own politically effective social organization and self-sustaining economies in order to resist exploitative extractive enterprises. The former proposition includes such things as government-backed collaboration and resolution of conflicts in a way that respects the long-term interests of place-based actors. The latter proposition suggests the need to build a cohesive collective movement to challenge structures of domination and to implement alternative community-based strategies. The case of collaborative planning on Haida Gwaii contains elements of both these propositions, offering an interesting entry point to examine state and grassroots responses to resource conflicts.

Power and Collaborative Planning

The 1980s saw opposition to industrial logging rise dramatically in British Columbia, with conflicts erupting in one valley after another. The need to restore social order and end the escalating "war in the woods" compelled the BC government to make a conceptual shift from top-down technical approaches toward more democratic and inclusive approaches to resource management. In 1992, the government introduced an inclusive decision-making approach for the province that incorporated comprehensive community-based participation into resource management planning. Its stated intent was to empower "those with authority to make a decision and those who will be affected by the decision ... to jointly seek an outcome that accommodates rather than compromises the interests of all concerned" (CORE 1992, 25).

Yet, past inclusive decision-making forums in British Columbia and elsewhere have often fallen short of expectations (see Wilson 1998; Brosius 1999a; Burrows 2000; Mascarenhas and Scarce 2004; Whelan and Lyons 2005). Although incorporation into decision-making institutions may appear to offer indigenous and other marginalized groups a chance to be

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heard and to achieve their goals, such processes have often served to limit debate on substantive issues and to exclude the moral and political imperatives of grassroots groups. The experience of indigenous peoples, moreover, has often been that state planning processes are unable or unwilling to understand and respect their distinct needs in the use and management of land (Gedicks 1994; Howitt 2001; Lane 2006). At the same time, inclusive processes have provided a degree of political legitimacy to dominant actors and decision-makers, which they might not otherwise have had.

Despite these caveats, the collaborative land use planning process on Haida Gwaii had several promising aspects. First, from a process angle, it had progressed farther than most planning efforts in terms of levelling power imbalances. The process was co-managed by the provincial government and the Council of the Haida Nation, a unified political body of the Haida people. Co-management not only gave the Haida greater control over the direction and design of the planning process, it also acknowledged the authority of the Council of the Haida Nation in land use decisions.

Recommendations for land use were to be made by an inclusive Community Planning Forum consisting of representatives from the Haida Nation, provincial government, forestry and mining industries, local environmentalists, local government, businesses, and community members. In addition to co-hosting the process, the Haida ensured that their values and concerns would play a central role by requiring that the process be guided by the *Haida Land Use Vision* (Council of the Haida Nation 2004), a planning document developed by the Council of the Haida Nation. In addition, land use recommendations were to incorporate the principles of ecosystem-based management as laid out in a framework developed specifically for the three coastal planning tables (north coast, central coast, and Haida Gwaii). A technical team of experts from the Haida Nation, the Province, industry, and the community was also put in place to provide key pieces of information and analyses, and to ensure that all parties had equal access to relevant data.

The Haida Nation had previously acquired substantial philanthropic resources for mapping and planning purposes. In addition, a mitigation fund was set up for the three coastal planning tables to compensate industry and workers for losses that they might incur as a result of planning outcomes. An alliance known as the Coastal First Nations also created the Coast Opportunity Funds, a substantial trust fund, to assist communities with the transition to more sustainable forms of economic development.

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Due to these promising institutional, procedural, and monetary factors, the collaborative planning process on Haida Gwaii appeared to present a real possibility for resolving conflict in a way that might respect ecological and cultural values. Perhaps most importantly, Haida Gwaii is a place rife with agency – individual, organizational, and cultural. With a history of strong leadership, grassroots institution building, broad community alliances, and multiple victories on the ground and in the courts, the Haida have become a formidable force. If collaborative planning were ever to result in outcomes that not only reflected the priorities of the indigenous community but also transformed an unsustainable and inequitable model of development, Haida Gwaii was the kind of place where it would happen.

A Political Ecology Approach

Several studies have examined collaborative planning in British Columbia (see Salazar and Alper 1996; Duffy et al. 1998; Owen 1998; Burrows 2000; Gunton, Day, and Williams 2003; Mascarenhas and Scarce 2004; Frame, Gunton, and Day 2004; Jackson and Curry 2004a). Some of these studies have taken a primarily consensus approach to power, focusing on the components for successful collaboration, often in reference to the objectives set out by government policy. Such studies pay little attention to broader power relations and the problems that they present for traditionally marginalized groups. Other studies have taken a conflict approach to power, often concluding that collaborative planning processes constrain grassroots actors from challenging the status quo and fail to address their concerns. Whereas such studies suggest the need for greater power symmetry so that marginalized voices may be heard, they barely explore how this might be achieved. This book aims to broaden the discussion by exploring both the relations of power and domination at work in the collaborative planning process, as well as the ways grassroots actors might use such processes to enhance their collective power in order to counter domination. The emphasis is on understanding how relations of domination and oppression can be changed.

The approach adopted for this research is that of political ecology. At a general level, political ecology examines the way in which environmental change and ecological conditions connect to political processes and power relations (Robbins 2004, 5-7). The analytical focus is "on factors that shape power relations among human groups, and that influence relations between

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these groups and diverse aspects of their environment" (Paulson, Gezon, and Watts 2003, 205; see also M'Gonigle 1999). A common feature in political ecology research is an interest in furthering political and social justice. Thus, it often strives to expose, from a bottom-up perspective, the problems with the dominant approaches to resource management that are generally favoured by corporate and state actors. Individual cases are contextualized within a broader understanding of economic, political, and cultural forces. At the same time, political ecology inquires into the alternative development strategies and innovative actions taken by those who face environmental change resulting from mismanagement and exploitation.

The field research for this book was conducted concurrent to events unfolding inside and outside the land use planning process. The author made four research trips to Haida Gwaii to attend Community Planning Forum meetings and to speak with participants. Twenty-three forum participants were interviewed at three different points: March 2005 immediately following the final Community Planning Forum meeting, July 2005 shortly after a blockade action, and six years later, when the outcome of the process was becoming clearer.[4] A range of documentation was reviewed, including policy papers, the local newspaper, meeting minutes, agreements, academic literature, and a wide range of research and reports prepared specifically for the planning process. The POLIS Project on Ecological Governance at the University of Victoria provided the institutional home base from which to follow events.

The conflict on Haida Gwaii, like environmental conflicts more generally, can be understood as fundamentally about clashes between different systems of thought or languages of valuation. These include monetary values, indigenous rights and title, biodiversity conservation, wilderness, environmental justice, and others. However, as ecological economist Joan Martinez-Alier (2002) points out, the critical difference between them is not in their epistemological understandings, but, rather, in their power to influence land use outcomes.

To help unravel the complexities of power, Chapter 2 introduces various theoretical perspectives on power, including the insights of Habermas (1987), Lukes (1974), Foucault (1977, 1988), and Giddens (1984). A three-layered analytical framework is presented that offers both a methodological and theoretical framework for examining power and reflecting on outcomes. Although a theoretical understanding of power is useful, the events on Haida Gwaii can be appreciated without it. For this reason, some readers may wish to skip Chapter 2 and go directly into the story. However, the intent of providing this theoretical toolbox is to invite readers to generate

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their own analyses and conclusions on the situation in Haida Gwaii, and, indeed, many others.

To better understand how certain forms of valuation have become dominant in land and resource management, Chapter 3 turns to four central forces that have shaped resource conflicts in British Columbia during the twentieth century. These include imperialism, indigenism, industrialism, and environmentalism. The histories, ideologies, and practices associated with each of these are reviewed and their implications analyzed within the context of British Columbia.

Although certain land management practices have dominated on Haida Gwaii, they have not gone uncontested. A great deal of action has occurred in the courts and on the ground, particularly since the 1970s, which has influenced the direction and possibilities for alternative visions and strategic actions. Chapter 4 examines the recent resistance and opposition on Haida Gwaii, focusing on events that unfolded between 1974 and 2001. It explores the evolving relationship between the Haida, environmentalists, and local communities, and the emergence of a powerful movement poised to challenge the status quo.

In response to escalating conflict, the BC government introduced collaborative planning processes grounded in consensus decision making and the principles of ecosystem-based management. The secret to successful planning, as suggested by past studies of ecosystem-based management, lies in ensuring that all affected parties are equally and adequately represented and that power imbalances are addressed upfront (Grumbine 1994; Hartje, Klaphake, and Schliep 2003; Mabee, Fraser, and Slaymaker 2003). To understand how the planning process on Haida Gwaii attempted to address traditional power imbalances, Chapter 5 turns to its formative stages, examining the central agreements, foundational documents, and procedural framework. The planning process, however, was only one part of the Haida's larger strategy to take back control of the land and to secure their place in a changing order. The second half of the chapter turns to the wider politics, shifting alliances, and legal strategies that occurred outside the planning process.

Chapter 6 introduces the actors of the Community Planning Forum who were tasked with reaching consensus on land use recommendations. Their interest statements reveal a mosaic of concerns and seemingly discordant goals that were to be reconciled through the process. Although the institutional set-up for the planning process addressed various power differentials, early debate revealed some of the the ways that bias could be

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organized into and out of the process, and the opportunities and constraints this presented for the actors.

An important focal point is the role of ecosystem-based management and its potential impact on planning outcomes. With its emphasis on an ecological bottom line, ecosystem-based management appears to present a promising counterbalance to dominant forms of monetary valuation. Nevertheless, it remains a socially constructed concept, with many areas open for negotiation. Chapter 7 takes a closer look at the concept and methodology of ecosystem-based management and the challenge of balancing socio-economic and ecological concerns.

The goal of the collaborative process was to develop a strategic land use plan that would guide subsequent resource development and more detailed planning. Chapter 8 discusses the draft land use recommendations presented during the final month of Community Planning Forum meetings. It exposes the extent to which the process addressed certain power imbalances while naturalizing others. Outside the planning process, strategic alliances continued to grow as the Haida took on the government and industry at the Supreme Court of Canada.

When the Province ignored community recommendations and court decisions, a major collective action was launched. Chapter 9 highlights the discursive frameworks that each side employed in the battle and the strategic manoeuvring and incremental ratcheting that took place in public and in private. With one side pushing to expand the current social order and the other side fighting to maintain it, years of protracted negotiations ensued before an unprecedented land use agreement was finally signed.

The final chapter examines the outcomes of the planning process and the factors contributing to its success. It considers the strengths and limitations of collaborative planning as a tool for assisting progressive environmental and social causes, while highlighting the importance of power in understanding its transformative potential. It reflects on how collaborative planning might advance community capacity and collective power to challenge the status quo, while emphasizing the importance of engaging with the wider social, cultural, and political contexts in order for this potential to be understood and realized. The chapter concludes with an overview of the new ecological, economic, and governance arrangements emerging five years after the land use agreement was signed and what they might mean for the future of Haida Gwaii.

This book has many academic aims and interests, while its creation was motivated, above all, by a sense that the story deserves to be told for its

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own sake. As political ecologist Paul Robbins (2004, 190) notes: "By building a political ecological record of such movements and claims, research does some work towards both validating local accounts and challenging dominant ways of seeing economic and ecological change." Expanding on the implications of such research, anthropologist Peter Brosius (1999b, 180-81) comments: "We are now participants – mostly uninvited – in the production of identities or in the legitimation of identities being produced by others. To the degree that these movements represent an attempt to create new meanings and identities – which in turn have the potential to produce new configurations of power – such a role cannot remain unacknowledged."

The story of Haida Gwaii is rich and complex, and deserves to be told from many different angles. While much remains unsaid, my hope is that this book provides a useful account of recent events to give back to the people of Haida Gwaii, while inspiring the emancipatory imagination of people elsewhere.

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