

# FORESTRY COMMUNITY: NANWAKOLAS

By Robin Brunet

The Campbell River-based Nanwakolas Council is described on its website as “the vehicle through which the member First Nations regionally pursue land and marine resource planning and management, and resource-based economic development activities.”

But as for its ultimate trajectory, President and CEO Dallas Smith describes the five-member council slightly differently. “As advocates of First Nations on northern Vancouver Island and the neighbouring southern Central Coast region, we are an emerging government,” he says.

Smith adds, “Governance has been our objective since being established 13 years ago, and in some ways it is already being achieved as many land use decisions now undergo an agreed upon consultation matrix that we jointly developed with the Province. Plus, we’ve just begun negotiations with Victoria for more joint decision making.”

But as an emerging government, and despite gaining prominence over the years, Smith and his colleagues find themselves sharing the same frustration as non-native contractors throughout BC: namely, the inability to control their own economic destiny in the logging sector with any degree of certainty.

The affable and engaging Smith, who tends to see the humorous side of things and frequently punctuates his discourse with hearty laughter, can’t disguise that frustration as he admits, “the only solution is to obtain tenure, and we all know how difficult that is in general. For us to purchase tenure, the costs would be astronomical. So until we come up with a strategy, we’re finding much more value as a council in resource protection. If nothing else, we’re not simply standing by as the land of BC continues to predominantly benefit the major licensees.”

Nanwakolas, which in Kwak’waka means ‘a place we go to find agreement’, advocates for the recognition, protection, and promotion of its member First Nations’ aboriginal rights and interests in land and marine resource planning via management discussions with the provincial and federal governments, as well as with industry and stakeholder groups.

The Council was created in 2007 to provide member Nations (the Mamalilikulla;

Tlowitsis; Da’naxda’xw Awaetlala; Wei Wai Kum; and the K’omoks) with the tools needed to implement their 2006 Land Use Plan agreement-in-principle. “Further back than that we basically got our start through the Great Bear Rainforest process,” says Smith. “We had endured the Commission on Resources and Environment [CORE] process, and most of the provincial parks on Vancouver Island had been designated with no input from us; so when Victoria came to us in the late 1990s to ask for our participation in spatial planning, our immediate reaction was to get together—15 band leaders in all—to discuss the pros and cons of engaging.”

Smith was 21 and getting ready to attend university when the bands agreed to engage and wanted him as one of their representatives. “Addressing what CORE had left out was supposed to be a two-year undertaking,” he says. “But as everyone knows, the *Great Bear Rainforest Land Use Order* and the *Great Bear Rainforest Forest Management Act* wasn’t ratified by the Liberal government until 2016.

“So I didn’t make it to university—but over the years I developed allegiances with government, industry, and environmentalists that proved beneficial when the Nanwakolas Council was formed.”

Initially funded by the provincial government and now supported by its own source revenue, the Province, and some US foundations, the Council has created a number of land use and marine plans as well as strategies for economic development. For example, in 2012 the Nanwakolas Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan was completed with the participation from seven First Nations; it was designed to inform and strengthen the business activities and potential of the individual member First Nations.

In 2014, the Council unveiled the Nanwakolas Community Wellbeing and Capacity Strengthening Plan, to fortify communications processes and leadership skills as well as database/information systems management. The plan has since led to resource management education and training, the support of cultural well-being projects, and increased youth engagement.

Two years later, the Nanwakolas Training and Employment Strategy was completed, based on the tenet that meaningful employment is a key foundation of community well-being. The strategy is now being implemented and supports training, education, and employment needs.

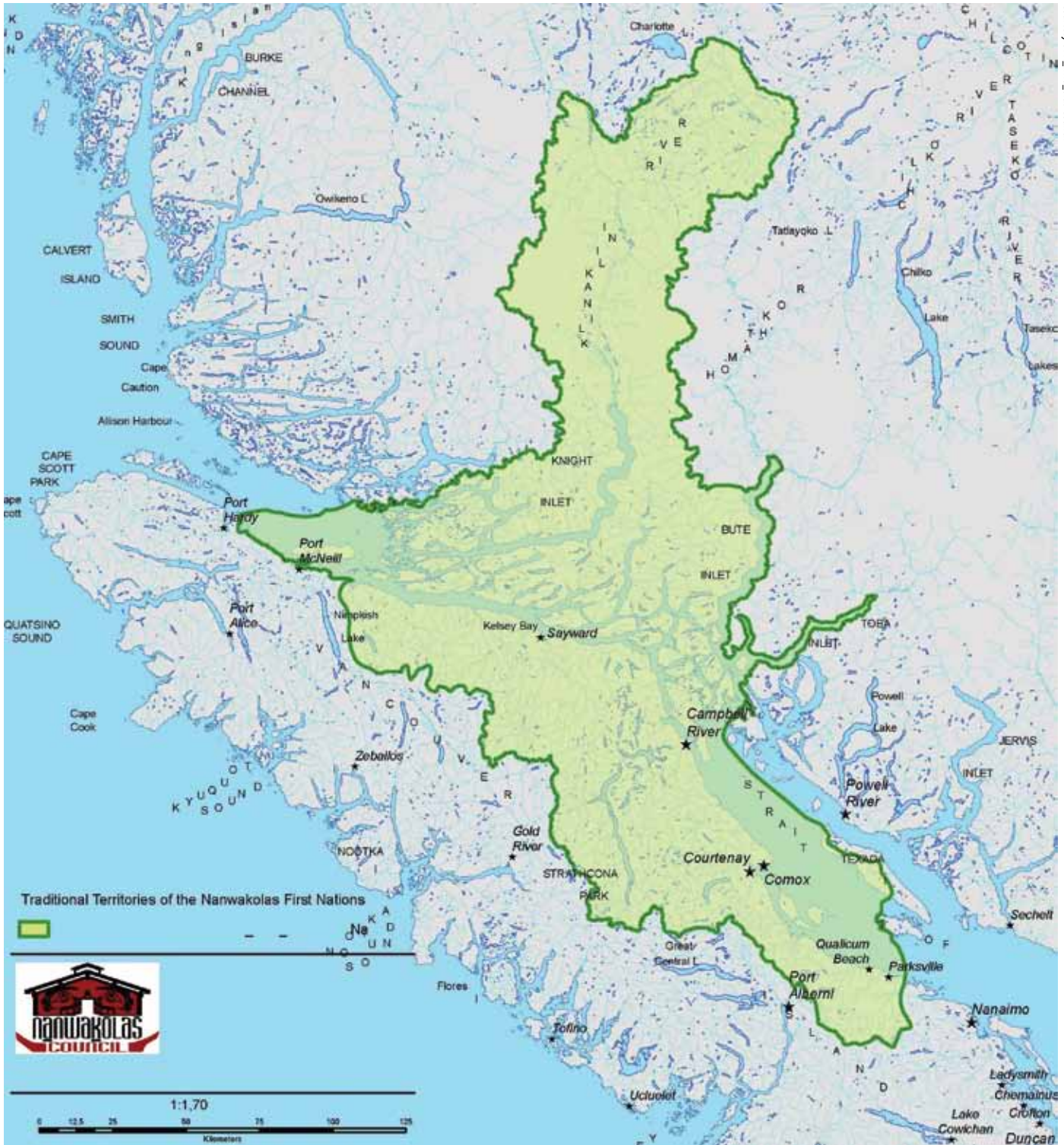
In the marine realm, the Nanwakolas has, since November 2011, been co-leading the Marine Planning Partnership (MaPP) under an agreement with the provincial government and First Nations partners for the North Pacific Coast. This has led to the Council signing a management and activities plan (including special zoning designations) for North Vancouver Island with the Province, which in turn will result in a regional action framework with the Province and First Nations partners in the Central Coast, North Coast, and Haida Gwaii.

Most importantly to the logging industry, Smith says, “We gained a great understanding of how the industry works due to our involvement in the Great Bear Rainforest process, which made us realize we had previously been a missing component in decision making. This realization underscores our desire to obtain tenure, which we would use to build working partnerships.” Smith adds that it was tacitly understood that when his colleagues supported the industry during the Great Bear process, it was partly “to get some skin in the game, so to speak.”

As such, the Council members are “getting impatient with the majors,” according to Smith. “They say they want to work with us, but so far there’s no tangible proof of that. Overall, we need something more than non-renewable licences. Granted, we make money from these five-year cut plans, but they don’t provide sustainability.

“As it stands, too much tenure is being held by too few entities, in an industry that needs serious re-tooling.”

Instead of being able to make headway as ‘sustainable’ participants in the logging business, the Council has enjoyed greater success acting as resource stewards. “We currently have 35 trained guardians who undertake wildlife and other monitoring, but this is not at the expense of our forestry goals,” says Smith. “It actually dovetails with our logging ambitions in that



as we obtain tenure down the road, our activities will be informed by what we've learned through stewardship.”

Smith adds that the environmental lobby may be disappointed by the Council when it comes to the way it perceives old growth. “We’re currently assessing stands in our jurisdiction with the view it is a harvestable resource as well as valuable for cultural practices. Yes, some of the arguments the environmentalists have made about the mismanagement of old growth are valid, but we’re not interested

in shutting down business. And we don’t have the luxury of trying to please everyone: our primary goal is looking after our people.”

Currently, the Council is nearing completion of an Old Growth Management Strategy that is expected to be implemented by the beginning of this summer. “Our findings will be disseminated to the major licensees under an information sharing agreement, and we’ll be consulting with them before cutblocks are engineered,” says Smith.

Perhaps most promising, Smith envisions real change in the industry coming about via his Council, contractors, and organizations such as the TLA presenting a united front to government. He explains, “We have so many of the same hopes and goals that it only makes sense to build our relationship.

“It’s coming slowly. We’re all in the same boat of wanting long-term stability, and I think making that happen is within the realm of possibility.”