

Gitxsan Country  
G J Sebastian  
**Happy Valentine - February 14, 2011**

This office of the Gitxsan Hereditary Chiefs (Gitxsan Chiefs) was established in 1986 to serve 13,000 Gitxsan people. It is only an office; it is not a governance structure at all.

The Gimlitzwit (Gitxsan Governance) is made up of at least 65 head chiefs. This *innovative* forum was established in 1994 to oversee the 33,000 sq km of Gitxsan country that is made up of nine administrative watersheds. There are a number of head chiefs with corresponding *lax yip* in each watershed. The purpose of this *innovative* approach is to do business with corporations (proponents) and governments - simplifying a process over a vast area of lands and resources.

In terms of resource development projects, the Gitxsan are a regulatory body within our 33,000 sq km of Gitxsan country. The *ayookw* (Gitxsan laws) have been in existence for over 6,000 years for the purpose of sustaining our lands, waters and resources for future generations, *gwalx ye'insxw* (inheritance). A great deal of money was spent developing detailed Gitxsan policies on lands, fish, water, minerals, forestry and oil and gas. The Gimlitzwit are ready and have the capacity to harmonize with government policies in these areas. (To date our requests for detailed discussion of such harmonization have not be answered)

In the past four years of planning the Gitxsan Chiefs are in a final process of establishing a **Gitxsan Development Corporation** to act as an overall holding company for initiatives we are developing or contemplating in forestry, carbon credits, energy, transmission lines, and the fishery and so on. The opportunity is for all our companies (e.g. GFEI) to be independent subsidiaries thereby gathering all our assets to establish a huge “bankable” company – attracting investment and building infrastructure for job creation.

Thus the opportunity is here, today, for *business managers* in these various corporate structures. As well, there is ample opportunity for educated and business minded *directors* – credible and bankable folks to attract huge investment to the northwest – for job creation. These structures are the foundation for continued job creation and a better quality of life for Gitxsan and other people.

As in the past five years, all our bookkeeping is being done by Vandergaag & Bakker, chartered accountants in Smithers. An expensive undertaking however it is necessary to keep proper accountability and transparency – building credibility and trustworthiness for our people.

**We are poised for progress.** There are many potential economic projects large and small that are presently employing many members of our house groups (*huwilp*) in some of our watersheds. We do not measure progress by the number of economic projects alone. We measure progress by the success of our people. By the jobs they can find and the quality of life those jobs offer.

There are many Gitxsan people that can probably remember a time finding a job meant travelling to the canneries in Prince Rupert, phoning the boss at the pole yard in New Town or showing up at the local sawmill at south town. You didn't always need a university degree and your only

competition was your neighbour – you just had to wake up 10 minutes earlier than him. If you were a hard worker you had a job for life, a decent pay check.

**The world has changed.** And for many people here in the northwest the change has been painful. Technology has transformed the way we live. Machines do all the work we used to do in the mills, canneries and even in the bush – loggers are unemployed.

Yes, the economy in the northwest has changed. The competition for jobs is real. It is now a challenge for us – and we as Gitxsan have the largest potential for a prosperous economy. Our people, here in the northwest know how to work. Gitxsan country continues to be the foundation of a prosperous economy – our feasts continually gather at least \$18K per feast, there are at least three feasts per month, and sometimes, three feasts a weekend! Proudly, we are home to a large amount of students funded by our band councils, from elementary to high school to colleges – a university is down the road at Prince George.

**The first step** is to continue the innovation process began by the Gitxsan in 1986. The Hereditary Chiefs will continue to invest in the research in the northwest. History is the strength of ownership of the lax yip, the fishing sites and now the Gimlitzwit. Gitxsan innovation has established the Gimlitzwit as a governance - a forum of head chiefs - to strengthen Gitxsan sustainability on the land, protect the resources for the people of the northwest, and the ability to create countless new jobs for our people – by attracting global investment.

The Suskwa watershed sustainability project, stimulated by the federal government brought \$1 million over two years into our local economy. The Gitsegukla watershed forestry pilot project injects thousands of dollars each year into this economy. GFEI is now actively harvesting logs in our watersheds – a good number of our people are working their own lands.

Potential projects will do the same: Northwest Transmission Line (\$600 million project) has brought at least \$1 million into the Gitwangak watershed. CN Railroad to the Klappan is another major project just getting started. And now, Northern Gateway Pipeline promises to provide equity and yearly dividends to the Gitxsan – we suggested that we would rather have \$5 million contributed to the **ice arena** immediately, \$1.5 million to fund a equipment for a local grocery store and a few thousand dollars to relevant watersheds – protection of fisheries and water.

This is what the Gitxsan have done for over 100 years: **reinvented ourselves**. The purpose of the Gimlitzwit is not just handing out money - we are re-inventing how we lived off the land for 10,000 years. The Gitxsan hereditary chiefs are issuing a challenge: we must assemble the best educated personnel in our wilp and focus on the hardest problems in re-establishing our wilp as an economic entity – a cornerstone of the northwest economy.

Maintaining this leadership is crucial to success in the northwest. If we want this innovation to produce and create jobs, then our women and men must **win the race to educate our kids**.

**All jobs require an education** that goes beyond a high school education. That responsibility begins not in our classrooms, but in our homes and our wilp. It is the family (wilnadahl) that instills the love of learning in a child. This is **the second step**.

