

Gitxsan Seasons

Dim lipgyathl huwilphl Gitxsan.

Vol 3 Num 2 August 2003

I bet on the Gitxsan!

Gitxsan moments of the future

By Skalun, July 2003.

The ancient Stekoydin remembers all that is along Xsan, the Skeena River. *It must be in their character to never relent, not even to their close cousins and allies. And lo, the script, written eons ago, is seemingly now permanently etched in their remembrance. To show their metal, the Gitxsan will always fight, even at their own folly, and, yet again, against themselves, just to demonstrate foolish pride and autonomy as a wilphl Gitxsan. Is it different this time? Will the Simgigyat overcome their ancient rivalries, so old that nobody remembers their origins? The next ten years will be telling. Xsan, I bet on the Gitxsan!*

2005, Wilps Gali Aks

Gitxsan, the Daxgyathl Huwilphl Gitxsan, formerly known as the Gimltxwit. Sixty high ranking chieftains assemble in the ten million dollar cultural center to give assent to the ayokim Gitxsan regarding the priceless water within the Gitxsan territory. The elaborately designed kaat, the talking stick, hits the floor three times. *Box, box, box.* The High Chieftains for each wilphl Gitxsan take their place in the Wilphl Gali Aks Gitxsan, ready to give expression, one more time, to their ancient Daxgyat, the strength, authority, and jurisdiction accompanying the high name they carry. Sigidimhanak Meenhl Side Wan's voice is amplified to reach throughout the great hall, "Simgigyat, sigidimhaanak', ganhl k'ubawilxsihlxw ..." After days of

consideration and debate, the High Chiefs are now ready to give their final approval to the over-arching law of the water within Gitxsan territory. Sigidimhanak 'Tiis, Simogyat Hon, Simogyat Aks, and Sigidimhanak T'aa rise. 'Tiis proclaims, "The Gistkaast give assent!" Hon echos what he was instructed, "The Lax Seel give assent!" "The Lax Gibuu give assent!" declares Aks in the traditional fashion of not hurting the ears when speaking, in character with Gitxsan elegance. Finally, T'aa firmly reaches out, "The Lax Skiik give assent!" Sigidimhanak Meenhl Side Wan nods acceptance for Gali Aks Gitxsan, "Then it is now law. Water is sacred as a life-giver.

The Gitxsan are assured sustainability forever. The excess will be available to the Crown for distribution for the agreed price. Chieftains, thank you for setting aside your disputes. Thank you for looking after Gali Aks Gitxsan. Beginning next week, we will deal with gaming. And now, let us celebrate our reconciliation amongst ourselves and the Crown!" Both the Gitxsan and lixgigyatimgyat celebrated for five days.

2010, Gitanmaax Gas Bar. Wild Man Jase, a Simogyat of Wilps Ts'ok, Gistkaast, parks his brand new Eddie Bauer Ford Explorer aside the pump, "Fill her up, Joe!" Bad Joe, first in line nephew to Wilps Sim

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We are now online.
[http://
www.gitxsan.com](http://www.gitxsan.com)
News, Events, Chat,
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Updates.



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Confident Gordon Sebastian Wins Executive Director Competition

For Immediate Release
Saturday, June 21, 2003, 12:29 PM

Hazelton, BC. Gordon Sebastian, Anuthembuhn of the extended Gitxsan family of Lutkudziiwus, Lax Seel (Frog phratry), wins the job competition and was introduced as the new Executive Director of the Gitxsan Treaty Society at the Monday, June 16, 2003 Gitxsan Treaty Office Team meeting.

On why he competed for the position, Sebastian says “I realize that the core of hereditary chiefs are changing due to aging and this is having an effect on the importance of Gitxsan culture and the need for the lax yip (traditional territory attached to each extended Gitxsan family). The younger or newly appointed chiefs, even though are told, lack a clear understanding of the Gwalx ye’insxw. With my legal knowledge of the Gitxsan and what I have learned by attending many feasts over the years, I am confident that I can be very effective as an executive director.”

On the importance to being Gitxsan, Gordon responds “The Gitxsan are traveling down many paths and, in my opinion, it is important that each path accommodate the Gitxsan inheritance: governance, economic benefit, shelter and connection to the lax yip. Most of the evidence in our court cases rely on the Gitxsan culture, liligit and laws, however this is being forgotten as Simgiigyat seek minute economic benefits. These small and quick economic benefits will not alleviate living in poverty on reserves. The rule should be if the wilp will not benefit then more is needed.”

To the Friends of the Gitxsan: “Our Friends must realize that the ancient Gitxsan connection to the land is being recognized and this sets a precedent for possible government accommodation of their system. However, unfortunately, most of our Friends rely heavily on the way the Indian Act is administered. Accommodation of the ancient Gitxsan system may provide opportunity for them to shed the shackles of poverty on reserves.”

To What do you want to do better for the Gitxsan?, he answers, “I want to preserve the ancient core of the Gitxsan. The liligit, and the protocol between Simgiigyat and Sigidimhanak, are so important. As these are the basis for the treaty process, my efforts will be expanding the organization that already exists amongst the core group of Simogyet. It is time we give ... a hand and continue our Gwalx ye’insxw that they treasure.”

To the Simgiigyat and the Sigidimhanak, Sebastian advocates, “We have personal differences and hereditary differences that are important. However, we must try to set them aside when we gather to make important decisions regarding our relationships with governments, Industry and the general public. The core Simgiigyat and Sigidimhanak must be realized by the (novice) Simgiigyat and the only way to do this is not to miss a liligit.”

Gordon advises Gitxsan citizens, “Find out your inheritance and go to (your respective) lax yip and fishing sites. Assist your Simogyet and Sigidimhanak by helping them fulfill their obligations at the liligit. Obligations at the liligit, although falls on the main wilp, requires the participation of every member: e.g., pick berries and given to your Sigidimhanak for the liligit, give a few dollars to your Simgiigyat to lighten the load at the liligit and make your family strong by getting off the reserve and on to your lax yip. You have responsibilities.”

He encourages the Gitxsan youth to “Be young and enjoy life. Use the lax yip for recreation and health. As you grow older you will be blessed with the knowledge of the lax yip and will understand the laws of the Gitxsan. You would be ready to implement the proper protocol as you attain certain levels in the liligit.”

Regarding the Gitxsan Treaty Office team, his assessment: “As with the Gitxsan society today, the team is a reflection. There is a core within the team that understands the strengths of the established core of Simgiigyat and Sigidimhanak and their connections to the

“The Gitxsan are traveling down many paths and, in my opinion, it is important that each path accommodate the Gitxsan inheritance ...”

liligit and lax yip. It is this core in the team that I will build on. It is a strong core and this results in the team having potential.”

The competition for the Office of the Executive Director began May 2, 2003.

Gordon Sebastian's Background

Gordon Sebastian, Anuthembuhn (“Drum Belly” in Gitxsanimax) was born in Wrinch Memorial Hospital, Hazelton, BC, in 1950. He is the eldest of nine children of Joseph and Elsie Sebastian. He was raised in Hagwilget, the same village his father was born. His mother is related by blood to both the late Art Ridsdale and Ben Mckenzie. This results in Art Ridsdale appointing Gordon to hold the name Lutkudziiwus of the Gitxsan frog clan.

Gordon attended Prince George College High and graduated from the Hazelton Amalgamated High School (the predecessor to the Hazelton Secondary School) in 1969. Beginning in 1965, when not being educated, he spent all his time working in sawmills

between Hazelton and Prince George. He attended Malaspina College in the Forest Tech program nearly becoming a pulp and paper technician. After working as Native Court worker from 1975 to 1978, he applied and was accepted to the Native Law program in the University of Saskatchewan, later obtaining a law degree from the University of British Columbia in 1982.

In addition to being the main speaker for the Gitxsan, he is past director of the Kitimat-Stikine Regional District and Trustee for the school board. He worked many years as volunteer, with others, on the Gitxsan Watershed Authorities, Gitxsan Litigation Team, and Chiefs' Advisory Team.

He has seven daughters, and one grandchild on the way. His specialty is to use criticism as a building block towards success. The nest is empty and Gordon has more time to devote to the Gitxsan. During his career as a lawyer, he advanced the philosophy, culture, and laws of the Gitxsan in all forms.

His purpose is to rebuild the trustworthiness Gitxsan people expect of their Simgiigyet. ■

Check out *Gitxsan Chat* at <http://www.gitxsan.com>

2010 Winter Olympics: What does it mean to the Gitxsan?

Big government and big business spent millions in securing the 2010 Winter Olympic Games for Vancouver-Whistler. Why? To stimulate the sagging BC economy? For bragging rights? So the rich could get richer?

Could the fiscal resources have been better spent on health and education? Towards the homeless of whom many are aboriginal? Towards relief from the desparate economic depression rampant in Gitxsan territory?

What are the prevailing issues for the Gitxsan? Will Gitxsan Rights and Title be infringed and trampled upon, yet again, in the name of economic stimulation? Will the Gitxsan be marginalized?

If the Gitxsan were to position themselves to benefit from the 2010 Winter Olympics, how should it be done? Who should do it? When?

What do you think? Let's talk about it!

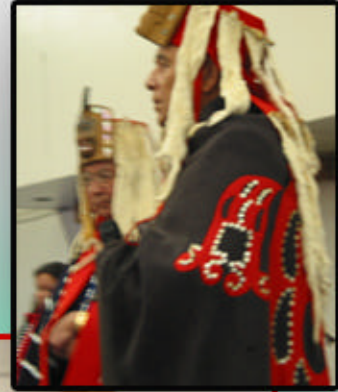
Dolly Dimples says: "Good question! I think the Gitxsan should stop all the fighting amongst themselves and start working together. We're the only ones holding ourselves down. Can you imagine all the possibilities for the tourism industry and potential for small business in Gitxsan Territory. We should be thinking Resorts! Casinos! Spas! Let's all be ready by 2010. Everyone can benefit. The North is prime for development. The umsiwaa are going to do it if we don't. Sign me up!"



Sii Yaahlaakw

Opening Up The Way

The Gitksan & British Columbia Sign The Forestry Interim Agreement, June 1, 2003
Kispiox, BC



FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Who are the Gitxsan?

The Gitxsan are the People of the Xsan, the River of Mist, also known as the Skeena River of Northern British Columbia. About 10,000 strong, *the most fundamental entity in Gitxsan Society is the wilphl Gitxsan*, the matrilineal extended family, about 40 to 60 in number, pending latent fission and fusion dynamics. Each wilphl Gitxsan is autonomous and independent, attested by the omnipresent *daxgyat*, real strength and authority, and typically given expression by the powerful *simogyat*, the male hereditary leader, and *sigidimhanak*, the female hereditary leader.

Associated with each *wilphl Gitxsan* is the *pdek*, also known as the *phratry*, a grouping of *huwilphl Gitxsan* who claim a common ancestry or common origins. In Gitxsan domain, there are four: the *Gistkaast* also known as the Fireweed Clan, the *Lax Seel* or the *Ganada* also known as the Frog Clan, the *Lax Gibuu* also known as the Wolf Clan, and the *Lax Skiik* also known as the Eagle Clan.

Q: Who are the decision-makers within each wilphl Gitxsan?

Assets, including territories and resources therein and thereon, are directly attached to and inseparable to their owners, the *wilphl Gitxsan*. The unit of analysis, planning, and implementation is the *wilphl Gitxsan*; example, the *liligit* or *feast* or *potlatch*. Not only is the *wilphl Gitxsan* set into motion to plan and implement a *feast* but the whole *pdek* or *phratry* have the tribal obligation to support and assist the hosting *wilphl Gitxsan*.

The family members of the *wilphl Gitxsan* gravitate to the 'go to' person in the extended family for direction. At critical times, the 'go to' person will be the *Sigidimhanak* because the Gitxsan are matriline. So, not only is membership to the *wilphl Gitxsan* and transfer of ownership of assets determined matrilineally but it makes sense that the transfer of power from a deceased chieftain to the heir be finally determined by the matriarches of each *wilphl Gitxsan*.

The *daxgyat* of the *wilphl Gitxsan* properly sits squarely on the lap of the *Simogyat* to manifest but

almost never without consulting the internal advisors including the *Sigidimhanak*. The more weightier the decision the more critical the internal dialogue. Once a determination is made, the pronouncements are made by the *Simogyat* and or the *Sigidimhanak*.

Q: How do the Gitxsan make decisions?

It depends on the style of leadership of the incumbent *Simogyat* and *Sigidimhanak* and the weight of the matter at hand. Some summon their respective family members; thus, each time, affirming and adding to their *daxgyat*. Others do not, resulting in a *daxgyat* that becomes stale or stagnant. Frequently, the hereditary leadership opt to *not* manifest their *daxgyat* allowing family members to make their own choices and exercise discretion. The more the impact on the *wilphl Gitxsan* as a whole, the more vigilant the hereditary leadership become, the more they tend to invoke their *daxgyat* in favour of the *wilphl Gitxsan* insuring continuity and longevity.

Hereditary leadership that are exclusively autocratic will probably eventually find themselves alone and will soon find support and assistance from the extended family lacking especially at critical times. Decisions can be efficient and quick. Typically, the autocratic hereditary leader will ultimately carry the burden of decisions gone wrong.

Hereditary leadership that subscribe to democracy, one person one vote, will probably find plenty of support and assistance at critical times. Decision-making will be more time consuming.

Because of many distractions, many members may not cast their vote. An additional issue is what forms the majority? Correctly, the *wilphl Gitxsan* decides.

More likely, the hereditary leadership will invoke the consensus-building mode. Classically, after the situation is described at a duly convened meeting of the extended family, usually a significant member begins shaping a solution. Mature and tactful discussion ensues where family members further discuss the situation and continue to shape a solution. Debate is allowed to exhaust itself or the hereditary leadership imposes closure pending urgency and how critical the issue at hand is. Then the leadership pronounces a solution that is synergetic. Leadership double checks. If there is agreement signalled by head nods then a final decision is declared. If there is significant opposition, the process continues until the extended family is satisfied with the final solution.

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"... the most fundamental entity in Gitxsan Society is the **wilphl Gitxsan**, the matrilineal extended family ..."

Q: What gives hereditary leaders influence?

Hereditary leaders are selected by the respective *wilphl Gitxsan*. The *daxgyat* and character of the *wilphl Gitxsan* is directly related to the *daxgyat* and character of its leadership. It follows then that selection of the leadership is critical to the welfare of the *wilphl Gitxsan*. Typically, the leaders are always on scan-mode, constantly watching, measuring, and grooming a stable of potential heirs. Almost always, an heir becomes apparent. And at the passing of a leader, the heir-apparent is automatically robed as the succeeding *Simogyat* or *Sigidimhanak*. If the heir is not apparent, then a series of meetings ensue with the precise purpose of selecting the best candidate. Once the heir is selected, the *wilphl Gitxsan* immediately make it known to the other *wilphl Gitxsan* and formalized at the subsequent *liligít*. Together with the *pdek*, the *wilphl Gitxsan* would necessarily have to contribute about twelve thousand dollars, of which the incumbent would contribute between two and six thousand, to offset the expenses incurred for the funeral and memorial *liligít* for the deceased.

Thereafter, in about a year, the incumbent *simogyat* or *sigidimhanak* is required to ceremonially erect a grave headstone, in accordance to *ayokim Gitxsan*, memorializing the deceased hereditary leader the incumbent is replacing. Immediately thereafter, one the same day, a headstone raising *liligít* is hosted by *wilphl Gitxsan* the incumbent belongs to. Depending on the status of the hereditary leader and the *wilphl Gitxsan*, together with the *pdek*, to pay the expenses incurred, they would have to contribute *wineex* (foodstuff and dry goods) and *gwiikx* (groundhog skin; now Canadian currency) valued between twelve and seventy thousand dollars of which the incumbent contributes between two and six thousand.

Each subsequent death in the *wilphl Gitxsan*, the incumbent, together with the other matrilineal extended family, is required to organize the funeral, and *liligít* for the deceased.

If the hereditary leader does not fulfil the above, the incumbent's currency as a *simogyat* or *sigidimhanak* is debased; their candle cannot burn as bright as those who have fulfilled their tribal obligations. It follows then that their influence will also be debased.

If the incumbent is fluent in *Gitxsanimax* first, then the hereditary leader's status and influence inflates accordingly.

Their influence will be debased if they do not conduct themselves like chieftains. The protocol held in high regard amongst chieftains and noble persons is to continuously and constantly demonstrate *respect* to others with particular attention to those of equal rank and status. Another is to never embarrass their good name and the families. Another is to always posture themselves in an attitude becoming of a chieftain: regal, but humble, diplomatic, and unflustered. Another is to show compassion to those less fortunate. Another is to always speak in *Gitxsanimax* and in a manner that does not hurt the ears of the listeners; likewise in *Englishimax*. Another is to always attend *liligít*s especially if specifically invited by other *simigyat*.

In summary, the chieftain must conduct themselves to never dirty their robes of power, their button blanket, and to position themselves to protect and defend the matriline extended family and attached assets.

Editorial: This article is not exhaustive; it is an interpretation only, never to be taken as an authoritative explanation of Gitxsan behavior and processes. The FAQ stimulates thought about organizational behavior towards the implications and consequences of disregarding Gitxsan norms and values. How we manage our individual and collective behavior as Gitxsan determines how we evolve as Gitxsan, individually and collectively. Since November, 1977 when the Gitxsan and the Carrier (now the Wet'suwet'en) formally launched the modern land question movement, never before have the Gitxsan progressed so far towards the reconciliation of the pre-existence of Gitxsan aboriginal society with the sovereignty of the Crown. The correct and strong position of the Gitxsan, crystallized in the evidence of the Simigyat and Sigidimhanak in the world renown Delgamuukw v. Queen, and subsequent Gitxsan positioning and lobby effort, is just now paying dividends, case in point: The June 1, 2003 Forestry Interim Agreement. It is interim and incremental by design. Interim because it promises more pending further lobbying and clever associated negotiations. Incremental because reconciliation by nature is not big bang; it is slow and tedious because the course and direction of big government machinery, in its apparatus and policy, is very onerous and difficult to change in favour of aboriginal rights in spite of the December 11, 1997 Delgamuukw Decision. Since the new legal bench mark on aboriginal rights and title established by the world renown Delgamuukw Decision, the Crown's apparatus has been in business-as-usual mode: denial, denial, denial. Up until now. There is clear and subtle signals being sent by the Crown Provincial, probably led by Minister Geoff Plante, towards the reconciliation of the pre-existence of aboriginal society with the sovereignty of the Crown; that is, dare I say, the recognition of aboriginal rights and title and its reconciliation with the Crown. There

"These questions are not questions to mull over the next few years; they have to be answered post haste, right now! Otherwise, ... tick, tick, tick."

Xdee of the Lax Seel, eyeing Wild Man's shiney SUV and tipping his chin up, "Hey! Family outing to Smidistown?" "Nah! Off to Vancouver for the big opening. Company got complimentary executive suite tickets from the Olympic committee for me and the kids!" Bad Joe envious, "Phewh! You must be right up there eh? You're company must be doing real good! Right on, Wild Man!" *Yeah, now there's someone I have to stay close to. He's one Gitxsan that's going places. Real family man. Successful. Decent. His own people and the government really have a big respect for him. To the official opening of 2010 Olympic Games eh? Wow! I bet his naks and kids are happy. I want to be like him. Rise above the petty Gitxsan politics and get on with the corporate side of being Gitxsan. Not worry about anything when he throws a big feast. Wow!* "Kay. There you go. Have a good time in Vancouver eh! Amhl jabin nay, Wak!" Wild Man slips his platinum Visa card into the pocket of his visor. "Thanks, Joe! Let's do lunch next week at Freda's restaurant. Talk business. Kay?" Bad Joe gives Wild Man a grateful Gitxsan grin, "Kay!" *I better polish my business plan right away.*

2010, Million Dallas Casino. Simogyat Biist of the Lax Gibuu, also known as Arnie and the Executive Director of Wilps Si'satxw Purification Lodge, in his custom tailored suit, opened the negotiations, "We will partner with the Million Dallas Casino to manage and administer the disruptive-side of gaming for a million a year." Basil, also known as Simogyat Sooks of the Lax Skiik, well schooled in big commerce and, more importantly, in Gitxsan diplomacy, allowed for the required pause before answering, "Could you do it for six hundred thou?" Not surprised, Arnie deliberately etched a concerned eleven on his brow, shaking his head, countered, "The disruption to the amsiiwa and the Gitxsan are huge. Problem gambling costs. Your casino is the source. For every dollar you make, set aside four cents for the disruption. Not a penny less or we'll go under. The government will not subsidize us. You pay. Nine hundred thou. Firm." Basil, anxious to wrap up the six month negotiations, "I've studied you're proposal. It's good! We'll pay! Our lawyers will be in touch for your signature!" Signalling the end of the meeting, Arnie stood up, reached over to shake Basil's outstretched hand, smiling, "It's a deal!"

"The plan is for Maddi to work for one of the companys in Japan when she is finished."

2020, Wilps Wide Du'uu family meeting in the huge family room of the 30-room resort-spa on the territories. Sigidimhanak Du'uu clears her throat, signalling the start of the formal side of the meeting, "Aunt Jordy is sponsoring Maddi's four year formal studies at the School of Gitxsan Strategic Studies. She is respectfully requesting from the family \$4000 for fees and \$24,000 living allowance per year for four years. Our accountant assures me that we have two hundred and fifty thousand in our educational account, and growing, for our kids. The plan is for Maddi to work for one of the companys in Japan when she is finished. To implement the 2005 decision of Wilps Gali Aks Gitxsan for the huwilphl Gitxsan to be lipgyat, I recommend that we agree with Aunt Jordy's sponsorship of Maddi." Everybody turns to Simogyat T'ee Saasxw for the official response on behalf of the wilp. He nods his approval. Maddi, not shy, walks across the room and gives uncle a big hug.

Teary eyed, Sigidimhanak Du'uu checks the other relatives. No one objects. "Then, we have a decision. Congratulations, Maddi! Let us know if you need anything else. Now, let us feast!"

True or false? Pipe dream or real?

True. Real. Pre-requisite: All the Gitxsan must behave like Gitxsan. They must all support their respective Simogyat and Sigidimhanak. Each wilphl Gitxsan must consolidate; that is, secure a current genealogy, inventory the assets both real and not real, develop a strategic plan for implementation that insures their sustainability in perpetuity, never to become extinct. Consolidate the huwilphl Gitxsan into a national government of the Gitxsan, and agree on the Gali Aks Gitxsan agenda and its implementation, without distractions; example, an over-arching ayokim Gitxsan for Water, Salmon, Wildlife, Watersheds, Oil and Gas, Tourism using 2010 as a lightening rod, and Gaming, and enforcement thereof. Build a Gitxsan cultural centre that will house the national government of the Gitxsan. Reconciliation amongst and between ourselves and with the Crown must be implemented. Explore the corporate side of being Gitxsan. ■

"Editorial, " continued from page 7

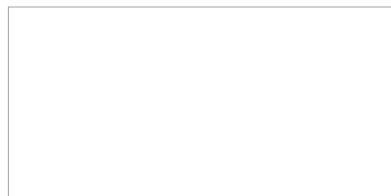
is a window for the beginnings of reconciliation with the Gitksan. But for how much longer? Another year when the Liberal BC government calls for an election? Probably, the Gitksan will have start from scratch again if the status quo is ousted. How will the Gitksan behave and manage the the opportunity that has landed squarely on the laps of the Simigiyat and Sigidimhanak? To reconcile. What is the Gitksan model? The Gitksan model for reconciliation is not extinguishment, not land selection. Will the Crown buy into it? Are the Gitksan ready to move on towards reconciliation? Or are they going to wallow in petty immature irresponsible wilp-politics that will most certainly drag down and even negate any progress garnered up to now? Will the Simigiyat and Signidimhanak breath life into, animate, and implement a Gali Aks government? What will it look like? Like the Gimlitxwit? Are they ready for it? Are the Gitksan ready to take their rightful place locally, regionally, nationally, and globally? The next decade will be telling. A good litmus test will be how the Gitksan will respond organizationally to subsequent negotiations and implementation of the Forestry Interim and subsequent Short Term and Long Term negotiations. How will the Gitksan respond to the looming spin offs

from 2010 Winter Olympic Games? How will the Gitksan respond to the identified potential of oil and gas within the Gitksan domain? Will the fresh water commodity be siphoned off from Gitksan territories without consideration for Gitksan society needs? How will the Gitksan position themselves to manage the existing fibre basket? What is the profile of Gitksan tenure? Are the Gitksan ready for implementation? These questions are not questions to mull over the next few years; they have to be answered post haste, right now! Otherwise, ... more of the same: denial, economic, and social depression. More internal fighting, more dependence on social assistance, more opportunity cost, more unbearable high level unemployment, more suffering, more pain, more hardship. Will the Gitksan ever realize "Dim lipgyathl huwilphl Gitksan"? Tick ... tick ... tick ...

By Skalun.



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