Gitxsan Hereditary Chief's

"The Gitxsan Experience with Mineral Exploration"
Minerals North 2007

Gitxsan Basics

- Gitxsan Society is matrilineal; that is, membership to and inheritance of property follows the mother's side
- The most fundamental entity of Gitxsan society is the wilnaathl (sometimes referred to as the Wilp (singular) or Huwilp (plural, traditional large extended families each with a population estimated between 200-600).

Characteristics of Gitxsan Society

- *Liligit*: The feasting is where one witnesses the fullness of being Gitxsan through a protocol that publically declares Wilp business for endorsement of the Huwilp Gitxsan.
- *Ayokim Gitxsan:* Ancient laws that dictates the conduct of the Gitxsan Huwilp around inheritance, marriage, adoption, access to property, trespass, injury, redress of injury, and the like.

Gitxsan Pdeek

- The Gitxsan have 4 Pdeek (Clans):
  - Ganeda/ Lax Seel (Frog)
  - Giskaast (Fireweed)
  - Lax Skiik (Eagle)
  - Lax Gibuu (Wolf)

Gitxsan Gwalyeinsxw

Each Wilphl Gitxsan has it treasure; in inherency assets that are real and unreal handed down from generation to generation in perpetuity never diminished or extinguished. Wilnaatahl, lax yip, adaawx, ayook, limx oo'ii, waaim taa, pstaan, en'aat, these are parts of the Gwalyeinsxw held by the Wilp and Huwilp, and collectively as a nation.

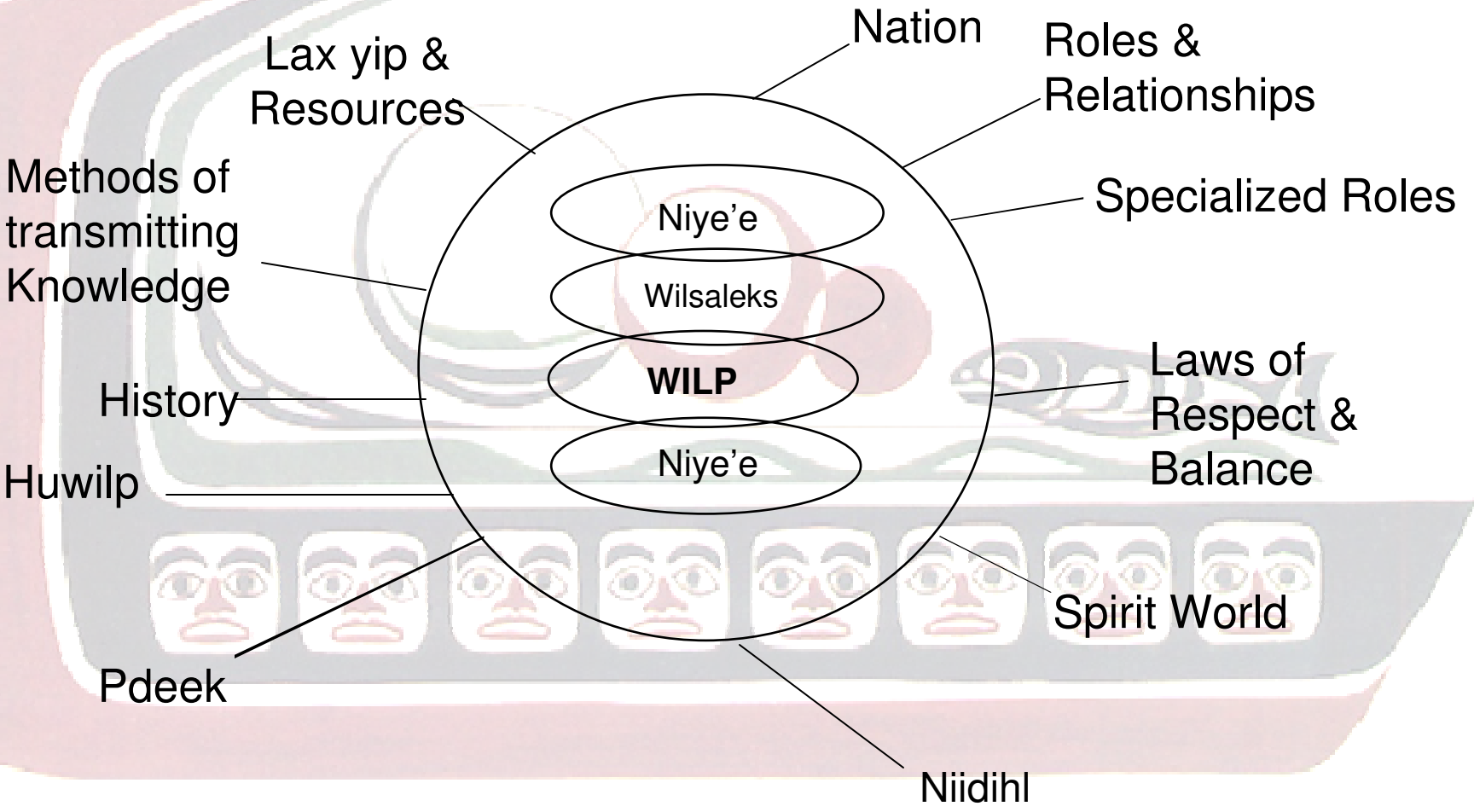
Important Dates for the Gitxsan

- The Gitxsan have had many important dates marking historical events:
  - Late 1800's first contact
  - Indian Act implemented 1951
  - 1977 Gitxsan Wet'suwet'en Declaration
  - 1984 Filing of Writ for Delgamuukxw & Gisday'wa
  - 1987 Court commences Delgamuukxw & Gisday'wa

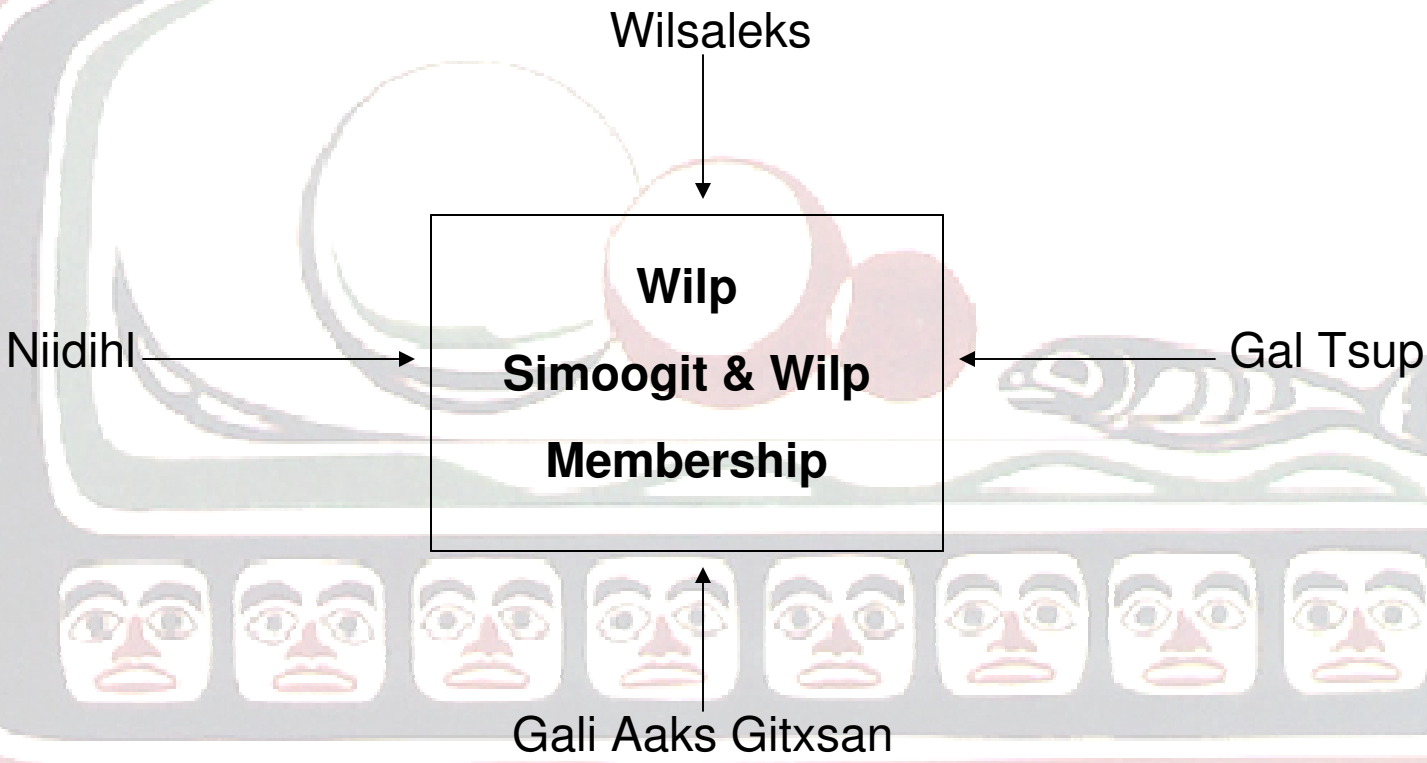
Important dates cont'd

- 1991 1st decision for Delgamuukxw
- 1993 2nd decision from the B.C. Court of Appeal
- 1997 Supreme Court of Canada Decision
- 1998 Reconciliation with the B.C. Crown
- August 2001 Return to Treaty Negotiations
- Dec 2002 sign off of Language & Culture Chapter
- Dec 2002 decision in Yal vs. MOF re: Forestry
- June 1, 2003 Interim Forestry Agreement w/ MOF

Wilp
Gitxsan!



Decision Making



Through out process….

- Complex relationships exist and connections are very intricate
- Terms for extended family and roles are clearly delineated.
- Support for issues must occur at many levels
- No one group can be completely independent the system is interdependent.

Impacts on the Gitxsan

The Gitxsan have experience the full force of Colonialism. From the flu epidemics, tuberculosis outbreaks, Residential Schools, Welfare sweeps of the 70's, Racism that has been institutionalized, to the Policies of the Crown designed to assimilate them completely into Euro-Society. Yet despite this our ancestor's held firm and actively resisted these continuous and repeated attacks on their "Oojin"(personal spirit)

The Gitxsan System

The Gitxsan have pursued everything from our own system. We show our respect to each of the Wilp through their Simgiigyet and Wilp members. We hold names that are eternal and new people take on the responsibility but the name lives on. This is different that the imposed Indian Act Chief's that are changed every two years. We are an ancient people that will go on for ever.

Sustainable Watershed Planning

- This has been the main tool we have advanced that articulates Gitxsan Interests.
- There are nine watersheds: Upper Skeena, Middle Skeena, Suskwa, Sustut, Babine, Kispiox, Nass, Gitsegukla, Lower Skeena.
- Delgamuukxw 1997 gave some very good tools to this process: rts & title exist, reconciliation of pre-existence of Gitxsan Society with the Crown,exclusive use &occupation, right to choose what uses the land may be put, sustainability, economic component, right to earn a modest living

Principles for Resource Extraction

- We have developed a framework of Gitxsan Principles for Resource Extraction.
- The intention is to set out our interests as Gitxsan Huwilp and begin a process of reconciliation of our respective interests with either the Crown and/or Proponent in creating a positive mutually beneficial working relationship.

Gitxsan Policies

- We have taken the time to create policies based on who we are as Gitxsan and also creating an opportunity to reconcile those interests with the Crown.
- We have policies for Oil & Gas, Forestry, and water which includes Fish. Currently we are formulating more detail on minerals but our framework of decision making is a central part of all the policies.
- Water is fundamental to life and for the Gitxsan the salmon. The Forest was able to provide an ecosystem that allowed our people to thrive.
- Our interest is to have sustainable decision making on the laxyip to ensure gwalyeinsxw can be passed to the next generation.

Gitxsan Policies

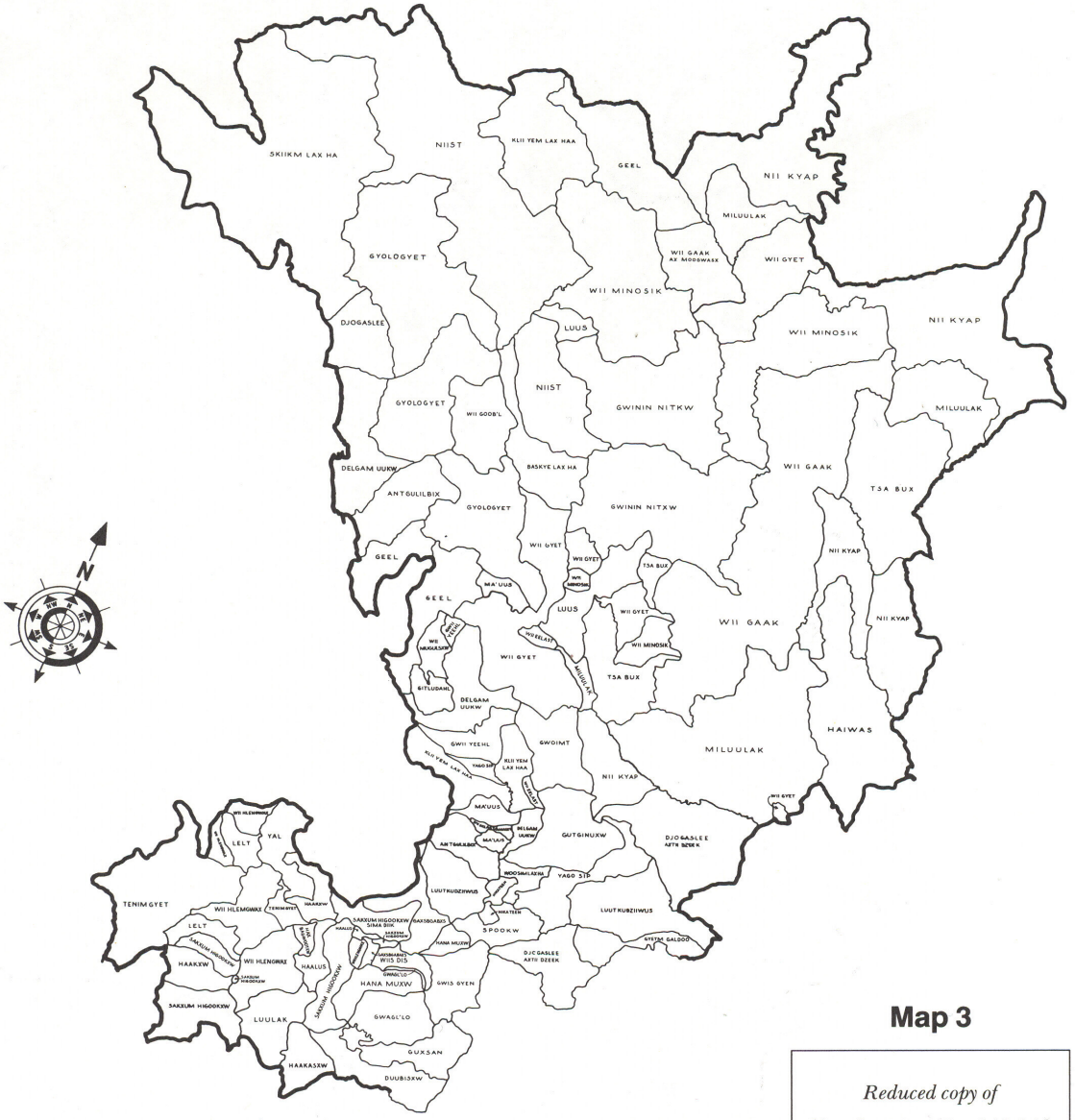
- The policies look at the environment and biodiversity
- They look at pollution and contaminants
- They look at protection measures
- They are based on our inherent right to decide land use and management of the resources
- The look at the conduct of user groups
- They deal with compliance and enforcement of Gitxsan Policies which are based on our ayookw.

We are Gitxsan, We will always be Gitxsan!

Within any activity on Gitxsan Laxyip (lands) it must be developed with our Interests at the forefront. Sustainability is key and it must look to benefit future generations.

We do not wish to see our Gwalyeinsxw diminished any more.

We live our life everyday according to our Ayookw.



Map 3

Reduced copy of Overlay Map (Ex. 646-9A) showing Gitksan Internal Boundaries.