



Shared Histories: An Overview

Over the past decade, the Town of Smithers and the Wet'suwet'en people have been working to strengthen our relationship. In 2011, we formalized this relationship with a protocol agreement between the Town and the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs, in which we committed to mutual respect and frequent communication. This protocol began as an annual agreement and in 2013 was extended for a five-year period.

We have also embarked together on joint initiatives. The Wetzin'kwa Community Forest is a partnership between the Village of Telkwa, Town of Smithers and Office of the Wet'suwet'en that has successfully delivered local stewardship of forest resources and provided a source of revenue for community initiatives. The Bulkley Valley Economic Development Association is another collaborative initiative.

The next challenge remains: how do we deepen our relationship by gaining a shared understanding of our past? The Wet'suwet'en chiefs and elders have often expressed a desire to discuss the early relationships between First Nations and settlers within the Smithers town site.

In 2015, Smithers Town Council identified a Shared Histories project as a Town priority. Through a series of Community-to-Community forums between the Town and the Office of the Wet'suwet'en – made possible with funding from the Union of BC Municipalities – the project has taken shape. Recently, Tyler McCreary, a post-doctoral researcher with the University of British Columbia, secured funding to coordinate the project. An advisory committee with representatives from the two parties will help guide the research.

The Shared Histories project will involve interviews with elders and seniors in our community, as well as archival research. Once complete, it will be shared with the community in the spirit of understanding and reconciliation. The recent release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations make this work particularly timely.

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