



PROJECT PROFILE

CORMORANT ISLAND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

'CONSULTATION', 'COLLABORATION', 'community engagement' and 'partnering with First Nations' are all phrases that often make their way into economic development proposals. The challenge is to go beyond the words and actually do the hard work that moves communities to action and results.

On Cormorant Island, the Village of Alert Bay and the 'Namgis First Nation have done just that. Their joint economic development strategy is called 'Tides of Change'. It's a model for the ICET region, show-casing how groups can work cooperatively to leverage strengths into a project that exceeds any individual stakeholder's capacity.

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"The 'Namgis First Nation and Village of Alert Bay knew that Cormorant Island needed a strategy to develop our local economy," said Adriana Proton, Deputy CAO of Alert Bay. "Some of the priorities our citizens identified were attracting new businesses, increasing the number of entrepreneurs and managers, and creating good jobs."

Diversifying the economy, attracting and retaining residents, and increasing self-sufficiency are other key objectives of the project. The Cormorant Island strategy is not only focused on collaboration internally; the stakeholders are connecting to other plans and tactics underway across the region. With many communities embarking on harbour and marina development, creating joint harbour and marine tourism products and promotions makes sense.

"For this plan to work, it had to be a true partnership between the Village and the 'Namgis, and from the beginning, we all focused on ensuring the entire community was engaged," said Sharon Gordon, 'Namgis First Nation. "From the initial resident survey to the creation of the implementation plan, there was a tangible sense of working cooperatively for the good of the project."

Tides of Change has five core categories of action: harbour development; business support and entrepreneurship; quality of life; downtown revitalization; and tourism. The categories include short, medium, and long-term actions. Several categories have actions listed as 'quick-start', and those pieces are already underway.

One of the actions from the plan was to hire an Economic Development Officer to implement Tides of Change. However, it would take time to find the right person and the partners wanted to ensure immediate implementation. To this end, one of the project consultants from Tides of Change, Colleen Hamilton from EcoPlan, relocated to Alert Bay for part of the Spring to begin implementing some of the 'quick start' actions from the plan. Hamilton's work included supporting the farmers market, developing heritage signage, litter control programs, and helping with the recruitment of a permanent Economic Development Officer.

"It's important that strategic plans like this one have defined implementation steps and timelines, and it's great to get something 'on the ground' quickly to begin building momentum," Hamilton explained. "Going forward, ensuring that we're measuring, monitoring, and evaluating our progress is a key factor in the success of large projects like this one."

The long-term economic vision for the people and communities of Cormorant Island is that coordinated investment, promotion and development will build on the existing economy, culture, history, and infrastructure.

Adriana Proton commented that there was strong community agreement on top priorities, and that any development needed to be in-line with community values. "Working together, we're going to improve the business environment and create a solid base for entrepreneurs and small business," she explained. "That means improved vibrancy and a stronger year-round economy based on community values."

