EVALUATION REPORT

Gitdisdzü Lugyeks (Kitasu Bay) Marine Protected Area

**Location:** Kitasoo Xai’xais Nation Territory - British Columbia, Canada

**Blue Park Status:** Nominated (2022), Evaluated (2023)

**MPAtlas.org ID:** unregistered

**Manager(s):** Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority

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Figure 1: Gitdisdzu Lugeks (Kitasu Bay) Marine Protected Area (MPA) is located along the central coast of British Columbia, west of Swindle Island, within the Kitasoo Xai’xais territory (Kitasoo Xai’xais Reserves shown in black) of the Kitasoo Nation. The MPA covers 33.5 km² and is surrounded by the Kitasoo Spirit Bear Conservancy (green), which is co-managed by the Kitasoo Nation and the Province of British Columbia. The MPA has three zone types. The General Protection Zone (28.0 km², blue, zone score of 4) permits shellfish aquaculture, the communal herring spawn on kelp fishery, traditional uses of marine resources, and several types of floating structures. The Restricted Access Zone (2.5 km², blue - dotted, zone score of 4) permits only members of the Nation and their guests to visit; tourism and recreational activities are forbidden, along with all fishing apart from the communal herring spawn on kelp fishery, and traditional fishing and hunting. The Habitat Protection Zone (1.4 km², blue - striped, zone score of 4), does not permit any extraction aside from traditional fishing and hunting. The color of each zone corresponds to its Regulation-Based Classification score (blue = 4) – see section 2.1 for an explanation of the Regulation-Based Classification scores. (Source: Marine Protection Atlas, Marine Conservation Institute., 2023)
Figure 2: Gitdisdzu Lugeks MPA (number 190 on the map) is a member of the proposed Northern Shelf Bioregion MPA Network, a proposed network of MPAs being planned and managed by 13 First Nations, the federal, and providential Canadian governments. The proposed network would protect 28% of British Columbia’s Pacific coastline, and 2.8% of the Pacific waters of Canada. *(Source: Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority, 2022)*
1.1 Eligibility Criteria: Biodiversity Value (must satisfy at least one)

1.1.1 Includes rare, unique, or representative ecosystems.

Located within an area known as the Hectate Lowlands, Gitdisdzu Lugyeks MPA is in the North Coast Fjords Ecosection of British Columbia’s marine area. It is located on the coast of the Great Bear Rainforest and is home to many different shallow marine ecosystems such as tidal lagoons, estuaries, sea grass meadows, and kelp forests. Ocean waves and currents mix marine water with freshwater from the mountains in this shallow marine area, creating nutrient rich ecosystems.

The MPA is one of the most important herring spawning areas on the British Columbian coast. Eelgrass meadows and kelp forests serve as spawning grounds for Pacific herring (*Clupea pallasii*), and nurseries for other juvenile fish. Many small-to medium-sized salmon streams support chum (*Oncorhynchus keta*), coho (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), pink (*Oncorhynchus gorbuscha*), and sockeye (*Oncorhynchus nerka*) salmon species. Additionally, the open ocean and deep sandy bottom areas in-between Jux’wada and Wingate Point are habitat for culturally significant bottom-dwelling fish, such as halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*) and other species.

1.1.2 Includes area of high species richness or endemism within the context of the biogeographic region.

The MPA protects hundreds, possibly thousands, of distinct species of plants and animals. Herring spawns attract marine predators, including humpback whales (*Megaptera novaengliae*), Steller sea lions (*Eumetopias jubatus*), and harbor seals (*Phoca vitulina*). Grey whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*), Dall’s porpoises (*Phocoenoides dalli*), and harbor porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) also feed in the MPA.

The nearshore ecosystems in the MPA also support many birds, including, dabbling ducks (*Anatinae*), diving ducks (*Aythyinae*), gulls (*Larinae*), marbled murrelets (*Branchyramphus marmoratus*, EN/IUCN 6), ancient murrelets (*Fratercula cirrhata*), common murre (*Uria aalge*), geese (*Anser*), pelagic cormorants (*Urile pelagicus*), loons

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(Gavia), grebes (Podicipedidae), Cassin’s auklets (Ptychoramphus aleuticus), and tufted puffins (Fratercula cirrhata).  

1.1.3 Includes demonstrated historic or predicted ecological refugia (e.g., climate refugia) or populations with known or predicted tolerance or adaptive potential.

No known evidence.

1.1.4 Includes area important for threatened species (including those identified by the IUCN Red List or national legislation), keystone species, or foundational species. Important areas include migration pathways and breeding, nursery, feeding, or assembly areas.

Gitdisdzu Lugyeks MPA is home to many different species that are listed on British Columbia’s Red and Blue Lists of conservation concern, are listed through Canada’s Species At Risk Act, 8 or are listed on the IUCN Red List. British Columbia’s Red List signifies species and ecosystems that are at risk of being lost and the Blue List signifies species and ecosystems that are of special concern. 9

Gitdisdzu Lugyeks has been formally qualified as an Important Bird Area (IBA), but its designation has not yet been formally published. 10

Gitdisdzu Lugyeks has not yet been established as a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), but it is under consideration for this designation and will likely earn it in the future. 11

Table 1. Marine Species at Risk that are Present in Gitdisdzu Lugyeks MPA 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th>Species At Risk</th>
<th>IUCN Red List</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ancient murrelet</td>
<td>Synthliboramphus antiquus</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Special Concern</td>
<td>Least Concerned 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassin’s auklet</td>
<td>Ptychoramphus aleuticus</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Special Concern</td>
<td>Near Threatened 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo / Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 19 October 2022
11Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo / Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 19 October 2022
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Threatened</th>
<th>Endangered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>common murre</td>
<td>Uria aalge</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Least Concern15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fin whale</td>
<td></td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>Vulnerable16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grey whale</td>
<td>Eschrichtius robustus</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Special Concern</td>
<td>Least Concern17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harbour porpoise</td>
<td>Phocoena phocoena</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Special Concern</td>
<td>Least Concerned18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humpback whale</td>
<td>Megaptera novaeangliae</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Special Concern</td>
<td>Least Concern19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orca (NE Pacific Offshore Population)</td>
<td>Orcinus orca</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>Data Deficient20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orca (NE Pacific Transient Population)</td>
<td>Orcinus orca</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>Data Deficient21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leatherback sea turtle</td>
<td>Dermochelys coriacea</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Endangered</td>
<td>Vulnerable22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Pacific right whale</td>
<td>Eubalaena japonica</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Endangered</td>
<td>Endangered23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>northern abalone</td>
<td>Haliotis kamtschatkana</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Endangered</td>
<td>Endangered24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>northern fur seal</td>
<td>Callorhinus ursinus</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>Vulnerable25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sea otter</td>
<td>Enhydra lutri</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Special Concern</td>
<td>Endangered26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2 Eligibility Criteria: Implementation (must satisfy all)

1.2.1 The MPA is designated by a legitimate and functional government representing the interests of civil society, and the MPA’s implementation meets the IUCN standards for recognizing indigenous peoples’ rights.

Gitdisdzu Lugyeks is an Indigenous protected area rooted in the exercise of inherent and constitutionally upheld Indigenous rights in accordance with Indigenous laws. The Kitasoo Xai’xais Nation exercises Inherent and Aboriginal title and rights within their territory, which are both recognized by the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples and provided constitutional protection by section 35 of the Canadian Constitution Act. Numerous court rulings, Federal and Provincial legislation, and policies have affirmed the recognition, respect, and understanding of these rights and the importance of reconciliation and respectful relationships between Nations and governments.

Gitdisdzu Lugyeks was designated according to the Declaration by the Kitasoo Xai’xais Hereditary Chiefs on June 21, 2022. The management plan was developed by the Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority with the direction and guidance from Kitasoo Xai’xais hereditary chiefs, community knowledge holders, community members, and Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority staff, researchers, and advisors. It builds upon objectives of the Central Coast Marine Use Plan.

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The Kitasoo Xai’xais Nation has 517 band members. It is governed by a chief and six council members. Council members and the chief are elected every two years. Along with the elected Band Chief and Band Council Members, the Kitasoo Xai’xais Nation has hereditary chiefs. They bear the responsibility of using traditional knowledge to guide governance and they hold exclusive authority for specific areas within the territory.

The Nation will work with other government partners on initiatives related to the planning and management of Gitdisdzu Lugyeks. Federal and provincial governments will work with the Kitasoo Xai’xais towards the following:

1. Respect for the direction set out by Kitasoo Xai’xais in this Plan by the federal and provincial governments and other users.
2. Alignment of federal and provincial laws, policies, and plans to support the direction set out in this Plan, and the adoption of collaborative governance/management structures that uphold the authorities of the Kitasoo Xai’xais Nation and Crown governments.
3. Recognition by the federal and provincial governments of the Kitasoo Xai’xais hereditary chiefs and our rights and responsibilities.
4. Recognition by the federal and provincial governments of the authority of the Kitasoo Xai’xais Guardians to conduct compliance and enforcement of the management direction in the Gitdisdzu Lugyeks MPA.

Now that Gitdisdzu Lugyeks is established, the government of Canada has made plans to designate it as a National Marine Conservation Area in June 2024. They are currently in the final stages of feasibility assessment. Once this designation has been implemented, managers expect increased funding for management and operations through the Parks Canada budget. The Kitasoo Xai’xais Nation will co-manage Gitdisdzu Lugyeks with Parks Canada and BC Parks.

1.2.2 The MPA is designated to enhance the biodiversity value of the site.

Management of Gitdisdzu Lugyeks follows guiding principles based on Kitasoo Xai’xais laws, customs, ethics, and values: loomsk (respect), sagayt k’uulm goot (interconnectedness), sityaaw (reciprocity), and gugwilx’ya’ansk (intergenerational knowledge). With these in mind, the main goals of the MPA are to:

1. Maintain and enhance the ecological integrity of Gitdisdzu Lugyeks.

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2. Protect at risk ecosystems, fish, and wildlife in the marine environment.
3. Protect cultural and archaeological sites and features.
4. Protect historical and current Kitasoo Xai’xais habitation, harvesting, hunting areas, and uses, including the communal herring spawn on kelp (SOK) fishery and other sustainable fishing activities.
5. Protect the wilderness values that in turn support opportunities for eco-tourism in Kitasu Bay.
6. Support Kitasoo Xai’xais governance and management of Gitdisdzu Lugyeks and other MPAs in the territory. 39

1.2.3 The MPA designation is permanent or is effective for at least 25 years.

Gitdisdzu Lugyeks was declared an MPA by the Kitasoo Xai’xais Nation on June 21, 2022 with no end-date. 40

1.2.4 The MPA has a management plan that has been updated within the last 15 years.

The current MPA management plan was completed in September 2023, 41 and went into effect on October 31st, 2023. 42

The Nation worked with users of the area to negotiate the date for fully implementing the MPA. In early 2022, there was a commercial geoduck fishery (the most affected fishery) operating within the MPA boundary. These fishers asked that the MPA’s implementation, which removed the geoduck fishery from the MPA, be pushed until after the 2022 fishing season. Since the implementation of the current management plan in October 2023, all fisheries have been closed, except for the communal herring SOK (spawn on kelp) that the Kitasoo Xai’xais Nation operates. 43, 44

1.2.5 The MPA implements strategies to achieve high compliance that are appropriate to its ecological context, size and threats. These strategies must include clear communication to users and local communities about the regulations and MPA zone boundaries as well as enforcement strategies appropriate for the MPA’s size, location, and poaching threats. Additional strategies may include incentivizing compliance or leveraging social influence through community engagement. Managers report high compliance in the MPA, and available evidence does not indicate high levels of non-compliance.

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40 Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority (2022) Declaration of the Gitdisdzu Lugyeks (Kitasu Bay) Marine Protected Area, p.3.
41 Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 30 October 2023.
42 Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 12 December 2023.
43 Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 30 October 2023.
44 Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 12 December 2023.
Public information about Gitdisdzu Lugyeks MPA is posted on the Kitasoo Xi’xais Stewardship Authority website. The Spirit Bear Lodge and the park Guardians also have brochures with MPA rules and regulations that they distribute to fishers, commercial operators, and the public.\textsuperscript{45,46}

Additionally, The Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) electronically monitors all British Columbia’s commercial hook and line and trap groundfish extraction.\textsuperscript{47} This electronic monitoring system is part of the Groundfish Hook and Line Catch Monitoring Program. Vessels in the region are equipped with electronic monitoring systems which include a control center, up to four cameras, GPS, and winch and hydraulic sensors. The electronic monitoring sensor data tracks and confirms the vessel’s fishing location in the fisher logs. This information is used by the DFO to conduct automated checks for fishing in closed areas, including Gitdisdzu Lugyeks.\textsuperscript{48} As all groundfish extraction is electronically monitored in this way, illegal commercial fishing in MPAs is rare.\textsuperscript{49}

The Kitasoo Xi’xais Guardians are responsible for the monitoring and compliance of the MPA and are the primary contacts for all vessels entering the MPA. Guardians are also responsible for collecting ecological and visitor use data. If necessary, Guardians, British Columbia Parks, the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service and Canada’s Department of Fisheries and Oceans collaborate on compliance monitoring and managing of special incidents or issues.\textsuperscript{50} The Guardians operate as an individual entity under the Kitasoo Band Council.\textsuperscript{51}

The Kitasoo Xi’xais Stewardship Authority possesses two, two-person mobile boat units which the Guardians use to patrol the MPA. The frequency of these patrols vary, with patrols carried out daily during higher use seasons. During the summer, a team of two Guardians are also stationed at a centralized cabin to monitor visitor activities. Through a recent Memorandum of Understanding and supporting framework with the Province of BC, Guardians now have the authorities of BC Park Rangers. This allows them to issue fines and tickets for minor offenses and pursue charges for more major offenses (under

\textsuperscript{45}Kitasoo Xi’xais Stewardship Authority (2023) \textit{Gitdisdzu Lugyeks (Kitasu Bay) Marine Protected Area Management Plan, Version 5}, p.37.
\textsuperscript{46}Coastal Guardian Watchmen (2023) \textit{Kitasoo / Xi’xais Guardian Watchmen}, pp.1-2.
\textsuperscript{49}Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 12 December 2023.
\textsuperscript{50}Kitasoo Xi’xais Stewardship Authority (2023) \textit{Gitdisdzu Lugyeks (Kitasu Bay) Marine Protected Area Management Plan, Version 5}, p.38.
various provincial and federal statutes). For fisheries violations, Nation Indigenous Law is applied until an arrangement is worked out with the government of Canada.\textsuperscript{52,53}

Managers report that there has been virtually no illegal fishing in the MPA since its establishment in June 2022. On one occasion, the Guardians encountered a member of the public fishing within Gitdisdzu Lugyeks, but they were able to inform him of the rules and regulations to which he voluntarily complied. There have also been a few instances of members of other First Nation communities fishing within the MPA. This is reportedly a compliance issue with the Food, Social and Ceremonial (FSC) fisheries, which needs to be addressed. Managers will continue to track non-compliance incidents.\textsuperscript{54}

1.2.6 \textit{The MPA has a budget and staff.}

The MPA has a budget that is based on available resourcing, cost, feasibility, and the overall benefit toward their objectives.\textsuperscript{55} Approximately $50,000 has been spent since the MPA was declared, including operating costs to monitor the MPA, and building a shelter to house the Guardians.\textsuperscript{56} The source of these funds comes from revenue from an existing conservation endowment fund. Funding is also expected to increase dramatically following the planned designation of the MPA as a National Marine Conservation Area.\textsuperscript{57}

The staff consists of eight coastal Guardians of the Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority. The Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority is the stewardship planning and management organization for the Kitasoo Xai’xais First Nation, and includes the following branches: planning, research and monitoring, policy and regulation, data management, client services and engagement, and compliance and enforcement. Guardians, or Guardian Watchmen, are the acting First Nation field staff of the Central and North coast of BC. Annual training for Guardians is required, which is conducted both in house and in partnership with BC Parks.\textsuperscript{58}

2.1 \textbf{Award Status Criteria: Regulations}
\textbf{Scores 1-3 = Platinum, 3-4 = Gold, 4-5 = Silver}

\textsuperscript{52}\textsuperscript{53}\textsuperscript{54}\textsuperscript{55}\textsuperscript{56}\textsuperscript{57}\textsuperscript{58}
Classification and scoring (1-8) of zones based on fishing gear, bottom exploitation, aquaculture, anchoring, and boating.

The overall regulation score for Gitdisdzu Lugyeks Marine Protected Area is 4.

Gitdisdzu Lugyeks is made up of three zones – a Restricted Access Zone, a Habitat Protection Zone, and a General Protection Zone. Finfish aquaculture, hunting, commercial fisheries, recreational fisheries, commercial floating accommodations, and all industrial uses are prohibited in the entire MPA. Community members are permitted to take personal crafts into the MPA for wildlife viewing, photography, or for safe anchorage. Small private yachts also visit the MPA, but they are asked to refrain from anchoring in shallow waters (<60 ft) to prevent damage to eelgrass beds that are nurseries for juvenile fish. Scientific research, education, filming, photography, monitoring, and restoration are permitted in all three zones.

Additionally, Kitasoo Xai’xais cultural activities and traditional uses are allowed in all zones of the MPA, consistent with Kitasoo Xai’xais laws and traditions and section 35 of Canada’s Constitution Act. Traditional uses include hook and line fishing, long lining for bottom fish, hand harvesting of bivalves and marine plants, and some limited traditional hunting of marine birds and mammals. Targeted marine birds and mammals include seals, sea lions and ducks. However, this specific traditional hunting activity is rare, with only one or two members of the community taking part. The Kitasoo Xai’xais Nation has the authority to manage Nation members, and will exercise its authority to close any of the cultural activities if it is deemed necessary to protect the wildlife or habitat. The Kitasoo Xai’xais Nation also operates the communal herring spawn on kelp (SOK) fishery which is permitted in the Habitat Protection Zone and the Restricted Access Zone. This “non-kill” fishery uses closed ponds with secured kelp and hemlock branches to accumulate the herring spawn. Once the spawning is finished, the fish are immediately released. The Kitasoo Xai’xais Nation has a dedicated management plan for the fishery.

General Protection Zone: 28.0 km²
Zone Classification: 4
  Number of Fishing Gears Allowed: 5
  Fishing gears list (r indicates recreational or subsistence): lines (r), longline bottom (r), hand harvesting (r), marine bird hunting (r), marine mammal hunting (r)
  Fishing Gear Impact Score: 5
  Bottom Exploitation and Aquaculture Index: 1
  Anchoring & Boating Index: 1

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60Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 14 October 2022.
Within the General Protection Zone, (see Figure 1), the following activities are permitted: tourism and recreation, the communal herring spawn on kelp fishery, shellfish aquaculture, and Kitasoo Xai’xais cultural activities and traditional uses. The following facilities are permitted within the General Protection Zone: safety and response infrastructure, anchorages, mooring buoys, docks, and Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority operational floating accommodations.\textsuperscript{64,65}

Habitat Protection Zone: 1.4 km\textsuperscript{2}
Zone Classification: 4
- Number of Fishing Gears Allowed: 5
- Fishing gears list (r indicates recreational or subsistence): lines (r), longline bottom (r), hand harvesting (r), marine bird hunting (r), marine mammal hunting (r)
- Fishing Gear Impact Score: 5
- Bottom Exploitation and Aquaculture Index: 0
- Anchoring & Boating Index: 0

The Habitat Protection Zone encompasses Kwi Kwi Lagoon and is south of Jux’wada extending from the intertidal zone to 300 m offshore (see Figure 1). Kwi Kwi Lagoon is a small bay with eelgrass beds that serve as a nursery habitat for many anadromous and marine species. Eelgrass beds provide essential habitat for the adjacent sockeye salmon spawning system. The lagoon also holds significant cultural and traditional harvests values for the Kitasoo Xai’xais. Within the Kwi Kwi Lagoon all salmon fishing is prohibited. Jux’ wada, has been identified by local knowledge holders as a critical habitat that includes primary spawning areas, and because of this, no extraction is allowed within the area, other than for Kitasoo Xai’xais cultural activities and traditional uses.\textsuperscript{66}

Tourism and recreation are allowed, but facilities, anchoring, and infrastructure are prohibited within the Habitat Protection Zone.\textsuperscript{67}

Restricted Access Zone: 2.5 km\textsuperscript{2}
Zone Classification: 4
- Number of Fishing Gears Allowed: 5
- Fishing gears list (r indicates recreational or subsistence): lines (r), longline bottom (r), hand harvesting (r), marine bird hunting (r), marine mammal hunting (r)
- Fishing Gear Impact Score: 5
- Bottom Exploitation and Aquaculture Index: 0
- Anchoring & Boating Index: 0

\textsuperscript{64}Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority (2023) \textit{Gitdisdzu Lugyeks (Kitasu Bay) Marine Protected Area Management Plan, Version 5}, p.35.
\textsuperscript{65}Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 14 October 2022.
\textsuperscript{66}Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority (2023) \textit{Gitdisdzu Lugyeks (Kitasu Bay) Marine Protected Area Management Plan, Version 5}, pp.33,35.
\textsuperscript{67}Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority (2023) \textit{Gitdisdzu Lugyeks (Kitasu Bay) Marine Protected Area Management Plan, Version 5}, p.35.
The Restricted access zone of the MPA is only permitted for members of the Kitasoo Xai’xais Nation and their guests. Communal herring spawn on kelp collection is allowed to operate within the Restricted Access Zone as well as Kitasoo Xai’xais cultural activities and traditional uses. Tourism, camping, and other recreational activities are prohibited in the Restricted Access Zone. No facilities, anchorages, or infrastructure are permitted in the Restricted Access Zone.68

2.2 Award Status Criteria: Design, Management and Capacity
5 Attributes = Platinum, 4 Attributes = Gold, 3 Attributes = Silver

2.2.1 **Size:** \( MPA \geq 100 \text{ km}^2 \) or explicitly designed as part of a network of MPAs to support population connectivity.

Gitdisdzu Lugyeks MPA covers an area of 33.5 km\(^2\).69

2.2.2 **Ecological Isolation:** Ecological or other protected area buffers surround habitats targeted for conservation within the MPA (e.g., soft sediment or deep water surrounding coral reefs).

Gitdisdzu Lugyeks protects the entirety of Kitasoo Bay – it is bordered by land along most of its boundary (see Figures 1 and 2). The MPA is surrounded by and partially overlaps the Kitasoo Spirit Bear Conservancy which is jointly managed by British Columbia and the Kitasoo Xai’xais Nation through a Collaborative Management Agreement.70 The conservancy covers 1029 km\(^2\), encompasses parts of Princess Royal Island, Swindle Island, Price Island, Laredo Inlet, and parts of Laredo Sound, and includes both terrestrial and marine areas.71

2.2.3 **Age:** MPA is \( \geq 10 \) years old.

The MPA was designated on 21 June 2022 and became fully implemented in September 2023.72

2.2.4 **Effective Management Plan:** The management plan identifies

2.2.4.1 Measurable conservation targets

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69Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority (2023) *Gitdisdzu Lugyeks (Kitasu Bay) Marine Protected Area Management Plan, Version 5*, p.3.
The MPA is managed primarily for the purpose of protecting and conserving cultural and ecological value. The Nation is committed to restoring the bay to the healthy and functional ecosystem that existed before commercial fishing occurred there. A key component to the recovery, conservation, and long-term health of the MPA is restoring the Pacific herring populations, as they have a role in multi-species interactions that support the ecosystem. Maintaining herring abundance will require protection of key spawning areas from herring spawn fisheries and other stressors. The Kitasoo Xai’xais are developing an action plan for Pacific herring protection in Kitasu Bay, prioritizing measures that are most likely to improve herring populations within the MPA.73

The nation has listed four goals and eight objectives for the MPA, they are:
1. Protect, conserve, and restore marine biodiversity and ecosystems.
   1.1. Protect and conserve species, habitats, and food webs in the MPA.
   1.2. Restore species, habitats, and food webs in the MPA.
2. Protect and enhance the continuity of Kitasoo Xai’xais culture.
   2.1. Identify, protect, and maintain features and sites of spiritual and cultural importance.
   2.2. Protect and maintain activities and uses that support a living Kitasoo Xai’xais culture.
3. Support sustainable resource use and economic development that benefits Kitasoo Xai’xais and adheres to Kitasoo Xai’xais management principles.
   3.1. Ensure fisheries in the MPA are ecologically sustainable.
   3.2. Ensure tourism in the MPA is sustainable.
   3.3. Manage and Monitor vessels and air traffic to minimize impacts of the MPA.
4. Advance knowledge and understanding of Gitdisdzu Lugyeks.
   4.1. Support and further development of the MPA program.
   4.2. Promote and advance research that supports management and decision making in the MPA.74

For each of the eight objectives above, strategies and conservation targets are identified (see pages 21-30 of the management plan). Since many of the conservation targets refer to conserving or restoring particular populations and habitats within the MPA, measuring progress towards these outcomes will require baseline data.

2.2.4.2 Threats to the conservation targets

The management plan identifies objectives to address the impacts of threats: infrastructure (i.e. docks), tourism and recreation, vessels and air traffic, traditional use of marine resources, and climate change. For each of these objectives, the management plan

outlines strategies and targets that aim to assess and mitigate threats through planned activities and monitoring efforts.\textsuperscript{75}

The Central Coast Marine Plan, which provides management direction for Gitdisdzulu Lugyeks MPA under the British Columbia-First Nations Marine Planning Partnership (MaPP), has also recognized that ecological and species values may be impacted by commercial fisheries, recreational fishing activity, transportation, and temporary port vessel anchorage.\textsuperscript{76}

The management plan also identifies commercial fishing as the single biggest threat to Gitdisdzulu Lugyeks.\textsuperscript{77} To address this threat, the MPA is closed to all fisheries, apart from traditional use.\textsuperscript{78} However, the lasting effects of previous commercial fishing activities, including a decline in the overall herring fisheries, continue to impact the MPA.\textsuperscript{79}

\textbf{2.2.4.3 Planned activities to mitigate threats and achieve conservation targets}

The management plan details goals, objectives, and strategies to guide the management of the MPA. The goals provide a broad guiding framework and are further detailed into specific components through the objectives. These objectives, in turn, consist of strategies and targets, enabling the Nation to assess and report its progress toward each objective. Within these strategies and targets, are specific management measures which highlight planned activities and implemented actions. (see pages 21-30 of the management plan). These broadly include employing regulations, research and monitoring, engagement with tourism operators, collaboration with Canadian agencies, and promotion of traditional values and customs. Several of these planned activities have specified years for completion.\textsuperscript{80}

\textbf{2.2.4.4 Monitoring plans to measure progress towards conservation targets}

The MPA uses adaptive management in order to continually revise and improve management objectives and strategies by observing and evaluating the parks outcomes. Results from monitoring are also used to prioritize research activities and identify research gaps.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{75}Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority (2023) \textit{Gitdisdzulu Lugyeks (Kitasu Bay) Marine Protected Area Management Plan, Version 5}, pp. 21-30.
\textsuperscript{77}Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority (2023) \textit{Gitdisdzulu Lugyeks (Kitasu Bay) Marine Protected Area Management Plan, Version 5}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{78}Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 30 October 2023.
\textsuperscript{79}Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 12 December 2023.
\textsuperscript{80}Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority (2023) \textit{Gitdisdzulu Lugyeks (Kitasu Bay) Marine Protected Area Management Plan, Version 5}, pp. 21-30.
\textsuperscript{81}Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority (2023) \textit{Gitdisdzulu Lugyeks (Kitasu Bay) Marine Protected Area Management Plan, Version 5}, p.38.
Kitasoo Xai’xais traditional knowledge, laws, and practices come from millennia of observing and learning from the environment. Alongside this traditional knowledge, the Kitasoo Xai’xais also conduct and participate in modern scientific inquiry to support management. Research and monitoring in the MPA will focus on key ecological and cultural species of importance, cultural impacts, and inventorying archaeological sites. 82 The Nation has set five strategies and targets to guide the MPA monitoring program, they are:

- The comprehensive Ecosystem Based Management (EBM) monitoring program is to be fully operational by 2023.
- Specific monitoring programs and datasets for priority species (e.g., herring, abalone, sea cucumber, kelp, cultural features) are acquired, maintained, or improved. Some of these datasets are held by the Canada’s Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Province of British Columbia.
- Invasive species are monitored and managed accordingly.
- New and existing partnerships are developed to support monitoring activities.
- The MPA monitoring activities are integrated with broader local and regional monitoring initiatives.83

The proposal for the Gitdisdzu Lugeyeks (Kitasu Bay) Monitoring Project details an objective, six planned activities, and seven key milestones with corresponding timelines for the Ecosystem Based Management (EBM) monitoring program. The planned activities include general methods for research (see page 3 of proposal), while the key milestones provide measurable objectives to be achieved by the respective season in the timeline (see page 5 of proposal).84

As of October 2022, dedicated funding for conducting comprehensive baseline monitoring has been secured which will form the foundation for an Ecosystem Based Management (EBM) monitoring program.85 Partnerships with Environment Canada, Birds Canada and Nature Canada will also support monitoring activities including bird research and baseline inventories. Current baseline data already exists for some species such as herring, urchin, geoduck, and sea cucumber. A significant grant has also been awarded by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to conduct further fish, marine mammal, and habitat baseline research.86 Baseline surveys were conducted in Spring 2023 for the Key Biodiversity Area designation.87

2.2.5 Community Engagement: The local community is engaged in the management of the

82 Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority (2023) Gitdisdzu Lugeyeks (Kitasu Bay) Marine Protected Area Management Plan, Version 5, p. 29.
85 Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 14 October 2022.
86 Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 31 October 2022.
87 Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 30 October 2023.
Gitdisdzu Lugyeks is rich in cultural heritage and is often referred to as the Nations’ “breadbasket.” Since time immemorial, the Kitasoo Xai’xais have collected food and materials from the area, and today members of the Nation continue to fish, gather foods, medicines, and supplies from the area. The first catch of the season of each species is also shared with the community.

Gitdisdzu Lugyeks is governed by Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Board, which has a standing Marine Use Committee populated by Board members and interested community members. Members of the Marine Use Committee provide input for MPA planning and management. Kitasoo Xai’xais Nation and the community also receive regular updates on planning and management work.

Community members manage and operate the Spirit Bear Lodge. The lodge offers wildlife tours and indigenous cultural experiences that aim to connect the visitors to the land and the Kitasoo Xai’xais people. Commercial eco-tourism is an important economic driver for the community of Klemtu. There are currently nine boat based commercial tour operations and one kayak tour operation in the MPA. Eco-tourism operators and fishers have been engaged in the development of MPA management and are expected to be engaged in the future. Although there are no plans for a formal advisory committee, there is a commitment to engage with any stakeholders on a regular basis or as issues arise.

Additionally, the Supporting Emerging Aboriginal Stewards (SEAS) summer program provides a way for Kitasoo Xai’xais youth to become involved in the stewardship and management activities of Gitdisdzu Lugyeks MPA. The Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority also offers SCUBA open water courses in Klemtu so that interested community members may become involved in the Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority dive research team.

2.2.6 Resources and Capacity: The MPA has adequate resources and capacity (including budget, staff, training, and leveraged partnership) to implement its management plan and its compliance strategies.

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89Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority (2023) Gitdisdzu Lugyeks (Kitasu Bay) Marine Protected Area Management Plan, Version 5, p. 36.
90Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 31 October 2022.
93Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 31 October 2022.
94Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority (n.d.) Gitdisdzu Lugyeks (Kitasu Bay) Monitoring Project, pp. 3-4.
The Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority has a staff of eight guardian watchmen that are responsible for the MPA as well as the Kitasoo Spirit Bear Conservancy.95

The Kitasoo Xai’xais Stewardship Authority also has research partnerships with University of Victoria, University of British Columbia, and Simon Fraser University. Additionally, they recently partnered with Environment Canada, Birds Canada, and Nature Canada to establish Gitdisdzu Luggyeks as an Important Bird Area and Key Biodiversity Area. Gitdisdzu Luggyeks has already qualified as an Important Bird Area, however, no specific work plans or timelines have been established for the Key Biodiversity Area designation.96,97

3.1 System Priorities: Replicate Ecosystem Representation

Blue Parks prioritizes nominees and Blue Sparks protecting ecosystems that are under-represented within their biogeographic region (<30% are protected in Blue Parks) or are rare in the biogeographic region.

Gitdisdzu Luggyeks is located in the North American Pacific Fijordland Ecoregion, within the Cold Temperate Northeast Pacific Province of the Temperate Northern Realm of the Marine Ecoregions of the World.98

Kitasu Bay would be the first Blue Park within the Northern Shelf Bioregion.99

3.2 System Priorities: Ecological Spatial Connectivity

Blue Parks also prioritizes nominees and Blue Sparks that improve ecological spatial connectivity among existing Blue Parks.

There are no current Blue Parks that are close enough to Gitdisdzu Luggyeks to support ecological connectivity. The closest Blue Park to Gitdisdzu Luggyeks is the MPA Network Around the Channel Islands (2,176 km² away), and the nearest Blue Spark is the California Seamounts (1,409 km² away).100

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95Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 19 October 2022.
96Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 14 October 2022.
97Evan Loveless, Resource Stewardship Advisor for the Kitasoo/Xai’xais First Nation, personal communication, 30 October 2023.
Supplemental Information: Evidence of MPA Effects

No investigations of MPA effects are available, given how recently this MPA was designated.