

Gwaii Trust chair Brad Setso reflects on the past three years

It's not always an easy undertaking to work with a board made up of a diverse group of islanders with strong opinions, but Massett resident Brad Setso has welcomed that challenge for the past three years as chair of the Gwaii Trust Society. In his role as chair, he has helped to oversee an in-depth review of the Trust's operations, taken a close look at board governance, and worked with his fellow board members to reach decisions by consensus. It's an important role: almost everyone who lives on Haida Gwaii makes use of programs, services or infrastructure associated with the Gwaii Trust.

In his day job, Brad works as the manager of the Haida Fisheries Program, a position he has held since 2010. He's worked for Haida Fisheries for many years, holding positions including crew supervisor, fish guardian, dive team member and assistant manager. It was through his work at Haida Fisheries that Brad first heard about the Gwaii Trust, back in the early 1990s. The fisheries program staff shared an office building with the Council of the Haida Nation, and Brad remembers hearing talk about the Gwaii Trust Interim Planning Society.

"I knew it was a bunch of money from the government arising from the actions at Lyell Island," he said. Back in 1985, Brad had almost joined the protestors at Lyell Island, but his parents asked him to stay home as he was only

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15. As a young man, Brad lived with his cousin Ernie Collison, the administrator of the CHN. He learned a lot from Ernie, including some of the history behind the Gwaii Trust and how it was formed by a cooperative effort of Haida and non-Haida community representatives, who convinced the federal government to give islanders control of a \$38 million fund that had been earmarked for community development as part of the agreement that created Gwaii Haanas.

During the 1990s, Brad devoted himself to his job and family; he and his wife have three girls and a boy who are now young adults and teenagers. Looking for new challenges, he ran for a seat on Old Massett Village Council in 2002 and was elected. Less than six months into the first of his two terms, council asked for

a volunteer to represent the community on the Gwaii Trust board, and Brad stepped forward.

"I'm not one to sit back and just listen, I'm always active," he said. "I get bored easily, so I like to find new challenges."

He ended up serving six years as a Gwaii Trust director, including several years as vice chair. During that time, the Gwaii Trust was instrumental in forming the GwaiiTel Society and bringing broadband internet to Haida Gwaii. It also repatriated the \$24 million South Moresby Forest Replacement Fund, now known as the Athlii Gwaii Legacy Fund.

Passionate about sports, Brad has volunteered for many years to help organize the annual Christmas Classic basketball tournament in Old Massett. He also served one term as the Area D director for the Skeena-Queen Charlotte Regional District, but this was the only elected position he's held that he did not enjoy, mostly because he found that the SQCRD - which also governs mainland areas of the north coast - does very little that directly benefits islanders. That experience, however, did give him more insights into the need for Haida Gwaii to have its own form of governance.

"Being that I am Haida, I obviously see it as differently as some people see it," he said. "But I think we're going to have to all work together, it doesn't matter if we're Haida or other."

When the CHN was looking for a new chair three years ago, he put his name forward. "It's been a bit of a passion," since he first joined the board, he said. "I had some interest and I believe I had some ideas that would help."

Early in his term, he met with executive director Errol Winter to discuss what he wanted to achieve, and decided to tackle board governance, one area that really hadn't been looked at carefully since the Gwaii Trust was formed in 1994. Another focus, he said, has been trying to develop a way to measure exactly what the Gwaii Trust has accomplished with its grants, and where its programs are making the most difference.

"We know Gwaii Trust has done a lot of good over the years, but can that be measured?" he said. "We want to start developing some sort of baseline socioeconomic monitoring to show



Brad Setso, Gwaii Trust Chair

how much of a difference it is making."

Looking over the Gwaii Trust's accomplishments over the past three years, Brad said he is particularly proud of the board's decision to hire UBC's Sauder School of Business to conduct a five-year review of its operations, and how quickly directors agreed to contribute after GwaiiTel requested funding last year to install a fibre optic network. The project should result in significant improvements to internet service here. (The Gwaii Trust contributed \$2.4 million, which allowed GwaiiTel to leverage a much larger grant from the federal government.)

"I'm very proud of the board. When this GwaiiTel opportunity came, the board was unanimous in supporting that," he said. "It would be good for islanders to see how passionate their directors are and how supportive of their own communities, but also cognizant of how we have to work together."

Brad's term as chair will end in April, and he's now thinking about a whole new challenge: more education. He completed a business administration diploma at NWCC, and is giving serious consideration to pursuing a Masters in Leadership at Royal Roads University. "Since 2008 I've been threatening to go back to school," he said. "I want to get my Bachelor's or Master's before my daughter does."