

KU·KUU

**XAAYDA GWAAY.YAAY
KUUGAAY GWII
SDIIHLTL'LXA**
THE SEA OTTERS
RETURN TO
HAIDA GWAI

SUMMER 2022

Ku·Kuu design © Yahl' Aqaas Cori Savard
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“Ku•Kuu are returning to Haida Gwaii. It’s expected to take decades, so let’s use this time to listen, learn and share what we know about how to live with

ku•kuu as neighbours.”

— Nadine Wilson,

Gulxa T’aa.a Gaagii.ngang

Gwaii Haanas

CoRe Project Manager

“Our work now until 2023 will focus on learning from

communities on Haida Gwaii, and communities who are living

with ku•kuu. This knowledge will help us build ecosystem

models to explore future

management options. These community conversations and

tools will help us be as

prepared as possible for the expected impacts and

opportunities.”

— Vanessa Bellis, Sgiids Kung

Haida Fisheries Program Manager

Ku•Kuu sea otters are returning to Haida Gwaii – migrating from the central coast of British Columbia, the north end of Vancouver Island, and possibly Southeast Alaska. In the past few decades, ku•kuu have been seen in Haida Gwaii waters more and more often. By 2017, at least one small group, including moms and pups, was established in Gwaii Haanas.

Today we are in a unique position to learn what changes ku•kuu’s return will have on the ecology of the area – both positive and negative. Their return offers the chance for us to reflect on our past with ku•kuu and consider new relationships based on historical connections and today’s values. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to learn from their return and shape how we move forward in co-existence with ku•kuu.

The Haida Fisheries Program and Gwaii Haanas are working together to monitor ku•kuu’s return and study changes to the land, sea and people. Some changes will be expected and others unexpected. We are co-leading a larger project team to inform management planning for Haida Gwaii ku•kuu. This project team includes knowledge holders, researchers, academics, and representatives from government, fishing industry, environmental organization, coastal communities and other Nations and Tribes – some of whom are already living with ku•kuu.

Together, this group is documenting, analyzing and modelling ecological, social and cultural changes that ku•kuu are expected to have on coastal ecosystems and that people can have on ku•kuu. We will be integrating this knowledge into the Xaayda Gwaay.yaay Kuugaay Gwii Sdihtlt’lxa *The Sea Otters Return to Haida Gwaii* project.



what we know

- Haida and ku•kuu co-existed for thousands of years. Ku•Kuu were integral to the ecosystems that provided food and resources to Haida society over that long time.
- Ku•Kuu were hunted for the international maritime fur trade and extirpated around Haida Gwaii as a result.
- Without ku•kuu, Haida Gwaii’s coastal marine ecosystems began to change. Guudangee•Guuding.ngaay red urchin and other shellfish increased and kelp forests and biodiversity declined.
- Ku•Kuu are now known to be re-established in Gwaii Haanas.
- One or two ku•kuu have been seen at K’iis Gwaay, but no surveys have happened here and this is not enough to signify re-establishment.

what we expect

- The ku•kuu population in Gwaii Haanas will grow slowly and their expansion throughout Gwaii Haanas will take decades.
- Small groups will establish themselves in areas of Gwaii Haanas with available food and good site conditions.
- Ku•Kuu migrating to Gwaii Haanas are likely to originate from the central coast and the northern end of Vancouver Island.
- Ku•Kuu may also migrate from Southeast Alaska and establish themselves around K’iis Gwaay and Duu Guusd.

how the project will proceed

- The Council of the Haida Nation and Gwaii Haanas are exploring ways to approach the return of ku•kuu. This includes listening to community expectations and questions, as well as discussing options based on Haida worldviews, cultural knowledge, local knowledge, and science.
- Your knowledge and opinions about ku•kuu are important. Bringing forward your understanding is critical for defining a new relationship with ku•kuu based on the values of our communities today.
- We will be reaching out to hear from you in community meetings in the fall of 2022. In the meantime we welcome your response to the questions on the second last page of this newsletter.



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10,000 years before present

- Haida and ku•kuu co-existed on Haida Gwaii.

- The presence of people, hunting and other activities kept ku•kuu away from important food harvesting areas.

- Other strategies like clam gardens likely helped to maintain clam harvesting areas.

Late 1700s & 1800s

- Ku•Kuu were hunted intensively during the maritime fur trade.

- Ku•Kuu became ecologically extinct in local waters.

- Guudangee•Guuding.ngaay and other shellfish started to increase.

- Kelp forests and biodiversity began to decline.



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1900s

- Guudangee/Guuding.ngaay and other shellfish dramatically increased.

- Kelp forests continued to decline, impacting rockfish, herring, and salmon.

Late 1960s-early 1970s

- Ku•Kuu were re-introduced from the Aleutian Islands, Alaska, to many places along the west coast, including the west coast of Vancouver Island, near Kyuquot.

2000-2010

- Individual male ku•kuu sometimes spotted around Haida Gwaii.



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- Guudangee•Guuding.ngaay and other shellfish started to increase.

- Kelp forests and biodiversity began to decline.



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Mid-2010s

- First sightings of moms and pups in Haida Gwaii waters in over 100 years.

2017

- Five ku•kuu, including at least one mom and pup pair, spotted in Gwaii Haanas.

- First interactive ku•kuu population growth model for Haida Gwaii developed.

2019

- 13 ku•kuu observed, including one mom and her pup during a collaborative CHN-DFO-PCA survey in Gwaii Haanas.

- The Council of the Haida Nation and Gwaii Haanas agree that ku•kuu have re-established themselves around Haida Gwaii.

2020-21

- Xaayda Gwaay.yaay Kuugaay Gwii Sdiihltl'lx̱a *The Sea Otters Return to Haida Gwaii* project begins. A focus is on community conversations about what co-existing with ku•kuu on Haida Gwaii can look like now and into the future.



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2022-23

- The Council of the Haida Nation and Gwaii Haanas host community meetings and a speaker series to discuss and plan for a growing population of ku•kuu.

- Haida citizens and residents of Haida Gwaii share their values, knowledge and views about ku•kuu and coastal ecosystems to inform management planning.

- Communities explore the gains and losses in future scenarios for how we can live with ku•kuu as neighbours on Haida Gwaii.

2024 and beyond

- Knowledge of ku•kuu and coastal ecosystems continues to be compiled and used in planning.

- Management actions are implemented by Haida Gwaii decision-makers.



Ku•Kuu design © Yahl' Aqaas Ori Savard



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what we've heard so far

Ku-Kuu have the most dense fur of any animal up to 120,000-140,000 hairs per square centimetre!

Ku-Kuu pelts have many uses for Haida ceremonial regalia, bedding and clothing.

Ku-Kuu eat 100 different kinds of seafood such as cockles, chitons, urchins, clams, crabs, abalone, octopus and many more.

In May 2021 and February 2022, Haida citizens and island residents participated in three presentations to listen and learn from other coastal communities living with ku•kuu.

When asked about benefits of ku•kuu returning, some said:

“It would seem to me that food sovereignty would be attained. Our Haida health would improve. Our traditions and language around this would be positive and support the next generations.”

“Harvesting and learning cultural use of sea otters!”

“To return the ecosystem to a more balanced state. Kelp forests provide for the breeding of so many species.”

“I’m hoping that the kelp beds flourishing will help k’aaw return in full force.”

When asked about concerns of ku•kuu returning, some said:

“The loss of certain cultural food sources – as those otters are voracious – and without balance, the end result could be disastrous.”

“[I am concerned about] shellfish decline and [the] impact on diet and access to healthy seafood.”

“If we are starting a community-based fishery, how will sea otters impact that?”

“We do not have a cultural management plan on how to control overpopulation of sea otters.”



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now we want to hear from you

Please take a moment to answer these questions.

1. In your opinion, what are some of the benefits of the natural return of sea otters to Haida Gwaii?

2. What are some of the things that you are concerned about in terms of sea otters returning to Haida Gwaii?

Email or mail your responses, or requests for more information, to: seaotter@haidanation.com
Haida Fisheries Program P.O. Box 87 Old Massett, V0T 1M0

Another option for you to share your knowledge and feedback is to take the survey on “Understanding Your Values on ku•kuu found at this link: <https://forms.gle/4bNaMZhrLADzSsi8>



Gwaii Haanas
National Park Reserve, National
Marine Conservation Area Reserve,
and Haida Heritage Site

Réserve de parc national, réserve
d'aire marine nationale de conservation,
et site du patrimoine haïda
Gwaii Haanas

Gwaii Haanas
'Laanaay 'waadluxan Tilga Kaaganda,
Tang.gwan 'Laanaay 'waadluxan
Kaaganda, ad Xaaydas Giinaa.ah 'Laana

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glossary

■ **HI**Gaagilda Skidegate dialect

■ **Gaw** Tlagee Old Massett dialect

Ku Sea Otter

Kuu Sea Otter

Guudangee Red sea urchin

Guuding.ngaay Red sea urchin

K'iis Gwaay Langara Island

Duu Guusd west coast of XaaydaGa
Gwaay.yaay linaGwaay Graham Island

For more information seotter@haidanation.com

Haida Gwaii ku.kuu web page available soon at www.haidanation.ca

This project is guided by the Council of the Haida Nation and Canada through the Gwaii Haanas Archipelago Management Board and is supported with funding from the national Parks Canada conservation program.

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