

SPOTLIGHT

British Columbia's North Coast

First Nations launch shellfish culture industry in northern British Columbia

Pilot farms the first phase

By Brian Kingzett and Tammy Norgard

Central and North Coast First Nations in British Columbia are embarking on an ambitious shellfish aquaculture development program. Previously all but two small shellfish farms have been located on the south coast of British Columbia. With over half the BC coastline located north of Vancouver Island, the potential for shellfish aquaculture in this largely remote area has not been realized or for that matter even initiated. For more than thirty years most bivalve fisheries have been closed and aquaculture held back due to a lack of sanitary and marine biotoxin monitoring in this region, services that are provided by the federal government in eastern Canada and southern

BC.

Twelve First Nation Communities working with two native organizations, Turning Point Initiative Society (TPI) and the Tsimshian Stewardship Committee (TSC), have initiated a program of pilot farms, regional business planning and infrastructure development to test, explore options and hopefully establish a successful industry.

Both the Turning Point Initiative under guidance of Larry Greba, who as been integral in the Kitasoo salmon farming initiative, and the Tsimshian Stewardship Committee led by Bruce Watkinson of Kitkatla independently raised funds to explore this business opportunity. They and others are still engaged in fund-raising to assist with training and the transition to a full-fledged industry.

This project began early in 2003 with community meetings and assessments of suitable shellfish growing sites. Once the sites were chosen, the project reached full steam in June when each community built, anchored and seeded their own shellfish rafts or longlines. Tammy Norgard and Brian Kingzett (Kingzett Professional Services Ltd.) were retained to oversee technical aspects of the project. Ecotrust Canada, an environmental NGO working to establish a "conservation-based coastal community," is a partner in the project retained by the TSC to work with Tsimshian communities and oversee regional business planning. Other partners in the project include the North Coast Water Quality and Biotoxin Society and the Prince Rupert Economic Development Commission.

At a workshop held in Prince Rupert last spring, representatives of all Tsimshian and Turning Point Initiative communities resolved to work cooperatively on the shellfish business development project. This is the first time that so many communities in the North and Central coasts and Haida Gwaii have cooperated in such a large-scale exploration (22 sites) of shellfish aquaculture all at once.

During late June and early July, Tammy Norgard, Brian Kingzett (Project Coordinators), and technician Stephanie Richards used a local seine boat skippered by long-time north coast fishing captain Arnold Clifton, to set anchors, establish longline and raft

sites and deliver culture materials to each community. Communities participated in each step of the process, building sites and rafts and are responsible for seeding and husbandry. The process is providing a training experience for community members and with site areas within each community they are familiarizing residents with the concepts of shellfish aquaculture and promoting discussion on future development.

This is also a large science experiment. A variety of species and deepwater culture techniques are being tested at each site. Pacific Oysters are being grown in two styles of stacked trays, and in string-cultch methods, while Blue and Mediterranean mussels are both being grown in High Flow trays. Japanese scallop juveniles were seeded into pearl nets. Three species of kelp are also being tested at four sites. Seed from the same sources was deployed at each site and is being monitored almost simultaneously.

Ecotrust Canada provided its floatplane to facilitate the logistical challenges of seeding so many sites over such a large region. It is hoped that this will provide a significant comparison of growing potential across an extremely large region of coast spanning three degrees of latitude with more than 400km between the southern and most northern sites. A rigorous program of monitoring growth, survival and environmental parameters is being used. Early results have impressed the project teams and community participants with excellent growth and survival at most sites.

The pilot farms are the first phase of the project. In the second phase the TSC and TPI team members are working to establish regional business plans based on a series of case studies. These plans are intended to be market-driven and provide a basis for a future central and north coast industry. The goal of this exercise is to provide information on species choice, volume, marketability, processing requirements, transportation logistics and co-operative models for processing, marketing and governance. All communities and project



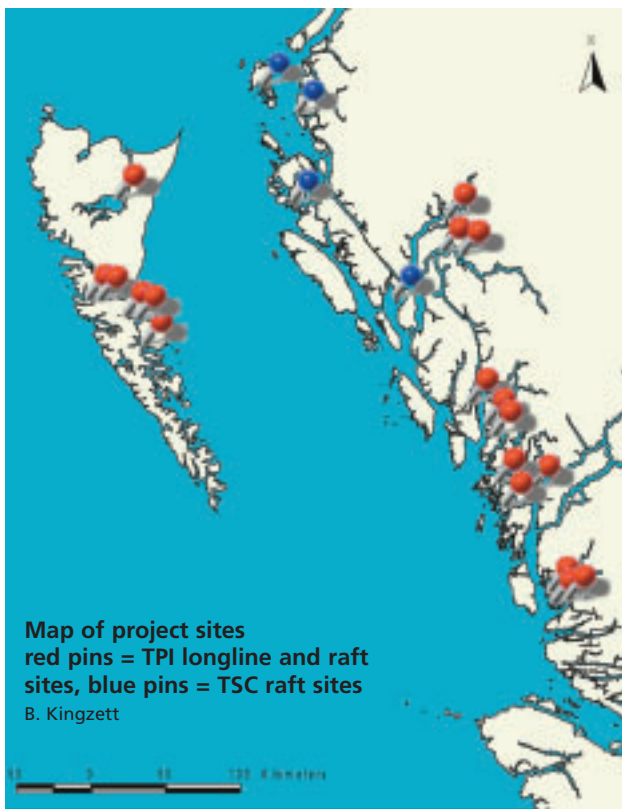
Mathew Tait (Lax Kw'alaams) measuring oyster seed at project site on Melville island near Alaska border.



Candace Wilson (Haisla) with a High Flow tray stack. T. Norgard



(top) Robert Nelson (Metlakatla) towing a shellfish raft out to project site. (below) Andy Tait (Lax Kw'alaams) assembles oyster trays at project site on Melville island near Alaska border. B. Kingzett photos



Map of project sites
red pins = TPI longline and raft sites, blue pins = TSC raft sites
B. Kingzett



Leah Young (Haida) with a tray of oyster in Cumshewa Inlet. T. Norgard Photo

partners acknowledge that there are considerable challenges ahead and that the development of a northern shellfish culture industry will not be easy or fast.

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