



# Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy Management Plan

March 2013



Gwa'sala-  
'Nakwaxda'xw  
Nation



BC Parks



# Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy Management Plan

## Approved by:



Paddy Walkus (Wa'nuk')  
Chief Councillor  
Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation

13/04/13

Date



Thomas Henderson (Hetlamas)  
Hereditary Chief  
'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation

13/04/13

Date



Don Cadden  
Regional Director, West Coast Region  
BC Parks

MARCH 15/13

Date



Brian Bawtinheimer  
Executive Director, Parks Planning and Management Branch  
BC Parks

March 15/13

Date



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# Table of Contents

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Management Plan Purpose .....	1
1.2	Planning Area .....	2
1.3	Management Commitments .....	2
1.4	Adjacent Patterns of Use.....	4
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Roles and Values of the Conservancy .....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1	Cultural Heritage .....	7
2.2	Biological Diversity and Natural Environment .....	10
2.3	Recreation .....	12
2.4	Resource Use .....	12
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Management Direction.....</b>	<b>14</b>
3.1	Vision .....	14
3.2	Recommended Marine Boundary .....	14
3.3	Conservancy Zoning .....	15
3.4	Management Objectives, Issues and Strategies.....	18
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Plan Implementation .....</b>	<b>23</b>
	<b>Appendix A – Appropriate Uses Table .....</b>	<b>25</b>
	Figure 1: Conservancy Context Map .....	5
	Figure 2: Photo of Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy and the Gwa’sala- ‘Nakwaxda’xw “sea gardens” .....	6
	Figure 3: Harvesting and Processing of Seaweed by the Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw School .....	8
	Figure 4. Former Village Site at Mahpahkum (IR No. 4) in 1940.....	9
	Figure 5. Zoning Map.....	17



# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Management Plan Purpose

Conservancies are set aside for four main purposes:

- for the protection and maintenance of their biological diversity and natural environments;
- for the preservation and maintenance of social, ceremonial and cultural uses of First Nations;
- for protection and maintenance of their recreational values; and,
- to ensure that development or use of their natural resources occurs in a sustainable manner consistent with the purposes above.

This management plan sets out the long-term direction for Mahpakhum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy<sup>1</sup> and provides guidance for how the conservancy will be managed.

In 2006, the provincial government and First Nations across the province initiated a new relationship. On the central coast, a collaborative approach has been taken with regards to management planning and operation of protected areas. This management plan is the result of a collaborative planning process between the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation and BC Parks.

This management plan describes the conservancy's important cultural heritage, natural, and recreational values and presents a vision for the future of the conservancy. In addition, this management plan:

- addresses current issues affecting the long-term vision for the conservancy;
- guides day-to-day management for the protection of cultural heritage, natural and recreational values;
- identifies appropriate types of recreational activities;
- identifies zones; and,
- provides management direction related to allowable activities and acceptable uses of the conservancy's natural resources.

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<sup>1</sup> For ease of reference, the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation prefers this spelling, which differs slightly from the legal spelling of the conservancy in Schedule E of the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*.

## 1.2 Planning Area

Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy is a group of islands in Queen Charlotte Strait between northern Vancouver Island and Shelter Bay on the mainland coast. The conservancy was established on July 14, 2006, pursuant to the *Park (Conservancy Enabling) Amendment Act, 2006*. The conservancy is named and described in Schedule E of the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act* and is administered under the *Park Act*.

Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy is located 32 kilometres northwest of Alert Bay, 12 kilometres northeast of Port Hardy and 235 kilometres northwest of Vancouver. In addition to the Deserters Group (Wishart Island, McLeod Island, Echo Island, and the majority of Deserters Island) and the Walker Group (Hosford Island, Kent Island, and a portion of Staples Island), the conservancy also includes Redfern Island, the Hedley Islands, the Millar Group of Islands, Barry Islet, and a number of other named and unnamed islands and islets in Queen Charlotte Strait (Figure 1). The total land area of these islands is 931 hectares. This management plan recommends that an additional 6,445 hectares of marine foreshore surrounding the islands be included in the conservancy (see Section 3.2, Recommended Marine Boundary and Figure 5).

The Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy is located in part of the “sea gardens” of the Gwa’sala-’Nakwaxda’xw Traditional Territory in the central coast of British Columbia. Mahpahkum and Ahkwuna are two former ‘Nakwaxda’xw village sites located on what are now known as Deserters Island and Wishart Island, respectively.

The Gwa’sala-’Nakwaxda’xw First Nation is currently involved in comprehensive treaty negotiations with Canada and British Columbia. British Columbia recognizes that protected area status does not prevent a First Nation from identifying these lands as areas of interest in the treaty process.

Access to the conservancy is by boat from Port Hardy. Kayakers also access the conservancy by several means, including a water taxi service from Port Hardy, a wet launch service offered on BC Ferries’ Port Hardy-Bella Coola route, and a paddling route from nearby God’s Pocket Marine Park.

## 1.3 Management Commitments

### Collaborative Management

A collaborative management agreement (CMA) between the Gwa’sala-’Nakwaxda’xw First Nation and BC Parks outlines the relationship that the Gwa’sala-’Nakwaxda’xw and the province have in the planning and management of the protected areas within Gwa’sala-’Nakwaxda’xw First Nation Traditional Territory. The CMA commits the parties to plan, manage and use these protected areas in a manner that:



- Recognizes and affirms aboriginal rights and provides the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation with continued access to land and resources necessary to exercise these rights, subject to measures necessary for conservation and public safety;
- Protects natural, cultural and recreational values for future generations;
- Provides the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation with enhanced access to economic opportunities in the protected areas that are compatible with the protection of natural, cultural and recreational values;
- Integrates ecosystem-based science and traditional ecological knowledge;
- Builds capacity for the parties and provides opportunities for the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation to be involved in the planning, management and use of the protected areas;
- Promotes communication between BC Parks and the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation, and;
- Makes the protected areas available for the use, recreation and enjoyment of all British Columbians.

## Land Use Planning

In the Land Use Planning Agreement-In-Principle (AIP) signed in 2006 between the province and the First Nations of the southern central coast, the parties agreed on the primary roles for Mahpakhum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy: protection of First Nation cultural resources, and protection of marine-based backcountry tourism and recreation values. The AIP also lists specific, primary roles for Barry Islet: cultural heritage use, and habitat conservation/protection, with ecosystem representation as a secondary role for this islet within the conservancy.

Previously, the Central Coast Land and Resource Management Plan (CCLRMP, 2004) identified Mahpakhum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy for protection and recommended that the principles of ecosystem based management (EBM) be applied to land management throughout the central coast, including conservancies. The two overarching goals of EMB are to maintain the ecological integrity of terrestrial, marine and freshwater ecosystems, and to achieve high levels of human well being.

The CCLRMP listed protection of an area associated with rich marine biodiversity as the primary role for Mahpakhum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy. Filling a gap in representation of a specific ecosystem was a secondary role identified for this conservancy. As well, backcountry recreation was noted as a secondary role for Barry Islets. In addition to identifying these roles, the CCLRMP also recommended that recreation activities in the conservancy be low impact and sensitive to the marine environment.

The islands and surrounding waters in Mahpakhum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy were also included as a planning unit within the North Island Straits Coastal Plan (NISCP), which recommended that this area be managed to protect marine conservation and recreation values.

In this management plan, the roles for the Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy have been adopted from the more recent AIP, with consideration given to the recommendations in the CCLRMP and NISCP.

At the time the central coast conservancies were announced, the Minister of the Environment also made a commitment that existing tenured uses may continue.

## 1.4 Adjacent Patterns of Use

Land uses and marine activities occurring adjacent to Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy include the following:

- A Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Indian Reserve (IR No. 4, Mahpahkum) at the northwest tip of Deserters Island (Figure 1);
- A private land parcel on the west side of Staples Island (Figure 1);
- An active salmon aquaculture operation in Shelter Passage off the west side of Wishart Island (see Section 3.2, Recommended Marine Boundary and Figure 5);
- A Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) Rockfish Conservation Area around Kent and Staples islands (Figure 1);
- A well-established marine transportation corridor for vessels of all sizes; and,
- Sports and commercial fishing, including salmon troll, gillnet and seine fisheries, as well as hook and line and longline ground fisheries.

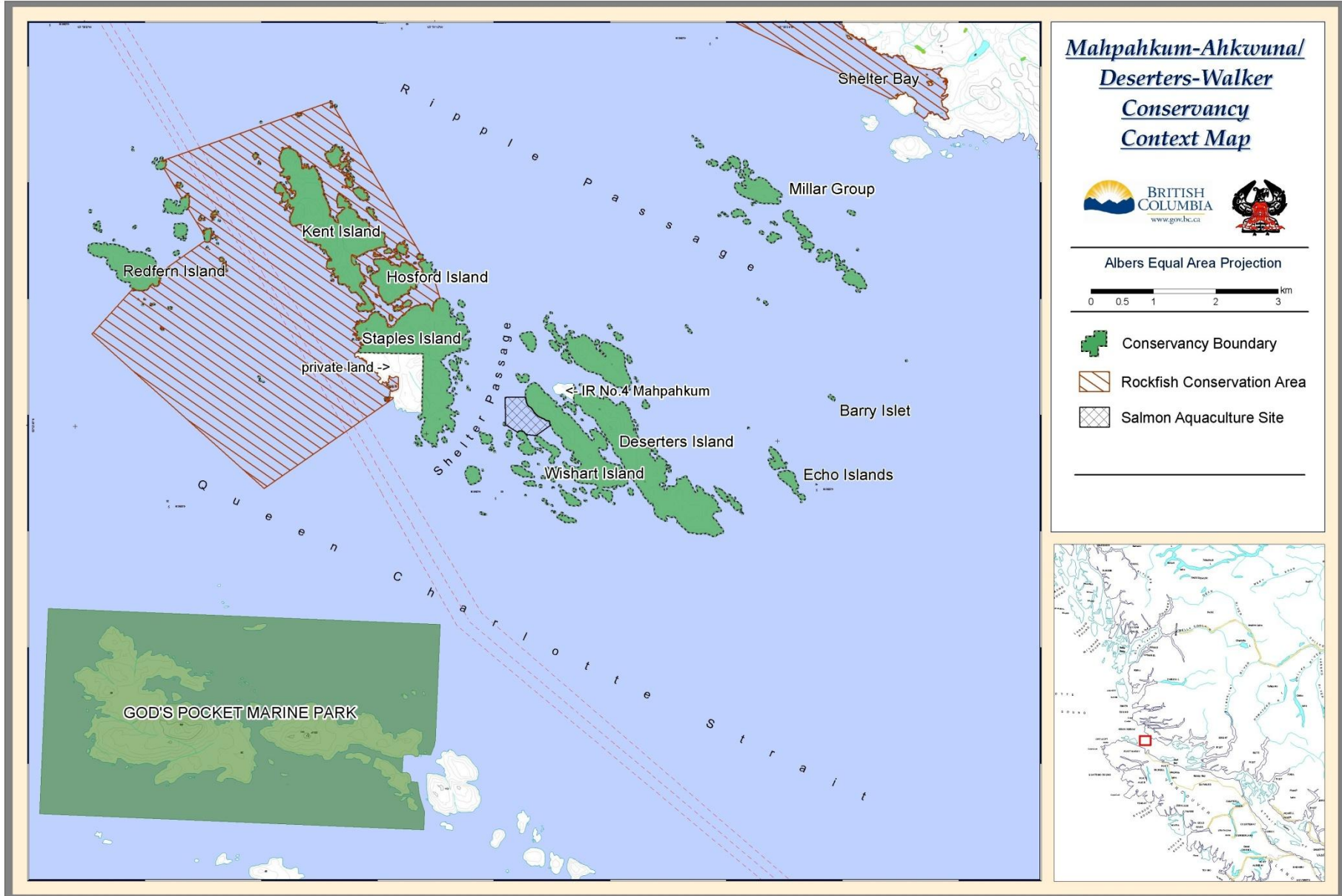


Figure 1: Conservancy Context Map

## 2.0 Roles and Values of the Conservancy



**Figure 2: Photo of Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy and the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw "sea gardens"**

Under the Agreement-in-Principle between the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation and the Province of British Columbia, the primary roles identified for Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy are to protect First Nations cultural resources and to protect marine-based backcountry recreation and tourism values.

The conservancy and recommended marine addition are significant in the protected areas system because they:

- Protect numerous culturally important sites, traditional use areas and culturally significant species, including a diversity of marine resources in the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw "sea gardens";
- Provide opportunities for marine-oriented recreational activities such as kayaking and scuba diving in a scenic, backcountry setting, and offer a strategically important safe anchorage for boaters crossing Queen Charlotte Strait;
- Protect a complete island group, sea cliffs, rocky intertidal and sheltered marine areas, rocky islets, shore scrub forest, and seabird breeding colonies, Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy contributes to filling key gaps in the

representation of the Queen Charlotte Strait Ecosection in the provincial protected areas system.

This section describes the key cultural heritage, natural, recreational and resource values in the existing terrestrial component of the conservancy, as well as marine values in the recommended foreshore addition.

## 2.1 Cultural Heritage

The conservancy makes a significant contribution to the protection of Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw cultural heritage values. The conservancy provides opportunities for social, ceremonial, cultural and economic uses of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw core territory so that members may once again benefit from this area. The conservancy also offers opportunities for the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw membership to educate future generations and the public in the traditional ecological knowledge and practices of the First Nation.

### Marine Resources of the “Sea Gardens”

The lands and waters surrounding the conservancy represent an important part of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw “sea gardens”. In years past, the marine resources harvested from the waters adjacent to Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy were brought back to the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw main winter village at Tekwokstaie (Nugent Sound) and later at Paas (Blunden Harbour) to be distributed through the Pasa (Potlatch) ceremonies, or traded with other First Nations up and down the coast.

Fishing stations were scattered throughout the islands, with Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy being an important harvesting and preparation site for halibut. Halibut were wind-dried, smoked and stored in bent boxes for winter food supplies, or traded with other First Nations.

Many other marine resources were harvested seasonally from the sea gardens, including seaweed, seagull eggs, ducks, eelgrass, ground and rock fish, salmon, seals, sea lions, clams, mussels, cockles, crab, sea cucumbers, urchins, Northern Abalone, and other species. The “sea gardens” were diverse and productive, making the conservancy an ideal location for Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw families to flourish.





**Figure 3: Harvesting and Processing of Seaweed by the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw School<sup>2</sup>**

Seaweed is still a common food today, and is gathered in the spring from small rocky islands around the conservancy. When the seaweed turns the appropriate colour and texture, it is harvested, sorted, broken into small pieces, and dried. Rich in vitamins and minerals, the seaweed is eaten as a snack, added to soups, or sprinkled on fish. Traditionally, seaweed and eel grass were also used to generate steam for cooking, and for bending cedar boards into bent boxes. The photographs above illustrate Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw school children gathering and processing seaweed from Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy.

### **Cultural Heritage Sites, Features and Knowledge**

In addition to the cultural resource uses described above, there are many documented cultural heritage sites and features on the islands, as described by ethnographers Galois and Boas. Archaeological sites on the private land adjacent to the conservancy on Staples Island indicate a long history of First Nations presence in the area prior to European contact. These sites, as well as numerous shell middens, a sealing station, halibut fishing stations, culturally-modified trees, and two former 'Nakwaxda'xw village sites, all point to the historic use and importance of the conservancy, adjacent lands, and surrounding marine area to the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation.

The Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw connection to the conservancy is also evident through the ceremonies, songs, artwork, dances and stories that originate from this area. There are a number of locations among the islands that are sacred to Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw families. The seasonal harvesting and processing that occurred on these islands provided important opportunities to pass on traditional knowledge from generation to generation. The abundance of marine resources offered opportunities for the community to work together to prepare for important ceremonial events such as Pasa (the Potlatch). Through

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw School, 2008.



appropriate protocols, these islands and their abundant resources were also shared with other Nations.

The Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw connection with the conservancy changed considerably in 1888 when only one of the two former village sites on the islands was recognized by the Canadian Government during the Indian Reserve allocation process (Indian Reserve No. 4 on the northwest tip of Deserters Island).

Soon after the allocation process, federal laws and regulations restricted Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw activities with regards to marine and terrestrial harvesting in the area. The Gwa-sala and 'Nakwaxda'xw First Nations were relocated in the 1960s to Tsulquate Indian Reserve on northern Vancouver Island. This halted the intergenerational transfer of traditional knowledge of the sea gardens and the traditional values of communal harvesting and respecting protocol. Figure 4 portrays the 'Nakwaxda'xw village located within Mahpahkum (IR #4) as it stood in 1940.



**Figure 4. Former Village Site at Mahpahkum (IR No. 4) in 1940<sup>3</sup>**

The Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation has a strong desire to re-establish a connection to the islands and revitalize the traditional practices of the Ninogad (knowledgeable ones). The conservancy provides opportunities for the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw to apply traditional ecological knowledge to the stewardship of cultural heritage and ecological values in this core area of the First Nation's traditional territory, and to pass on this knowledge to future generations. The conservancy also offers opportunities for the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation to pursue traditional use activities, cultural interpretation/education, the development of a First Nations Guardian Watchmen program, and other cultural activities that may be supported by the establishment of small shelters or buildings.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Stories Volume 1 - The Ministry of Education, 1997.

## 2.2 Biological Diversity and Natural Environment

The conservancy makes a significant contribution to the protection of biodiversity and other natural values. Marking the transition point between the protected waters of Queen Charlotte Strait and the exposed waters of Queen Charlotte Sound, the conservancy's forested islands, tidal flats, cliffs, rocky islets, reefs, and foreshore support rich marine biodiversity values.

The conservancy and adjacent foreshore are important for the protection of:

- Seal and Stellar Sea Lion haul outs;
- Seabird habitat and breeding colonies;
- Kelp beds and a tidal lagoon, and;
- Lingcod and rockfish habitat.

### Ecosystem Representation

Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy contributes to filling key gaps in the representation of the Queen Charlotte Strait Ecosection in the provincial protected areas system.<sup>4</sup> The Conservancy contains: a complete island group, sea cliffs, rocky islets, shore scrub forest, and colonial breeding seabirds.

As an island group, the conservancy plays an important ecological role in limiting predator species, providing habitat protection to marine mammals and seabirds. The islands also act as stepping stones for species migration.

With the addition of the recommended marine component, the islands' ecological value would be enhanced by protecting the interface between the marine and terrestrial environments. If the recommended marine boundary is added to the conservancy, Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy would make an important contribution (7,376 hectares; approximately a third of the ecosection currently protected) to the representation of the Queen Charlotte Strait (QCT) Ecosection in the provincial protected areas system. Approximately 7% of the Queen Charlotte Strait Ecosection is within the provincial protected areas system.

The addition of the recommended foreshore component would make a considerable contribution to the representation of the Queen Charlotte Strait Marine Ecosection in the provincial *marine* protected areas system.<sup>5</sup> With this addition (6,445 hectares), Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy would represent approximately 34%

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<sup>4</sup> British Columbia's ecoregion classification system is a hierarchical system that divides the province into areas of similar climate, physiography, oceanography, hydrology, vegetation and wildlife potential. Ecosections are the narrowest in scope of the geographic units within this classification system.

<sup>5</sup> British Columbia's marine ecosystem classification system (MEC) divides the Canadian Eastern Pacific marine realm into areas of similar physiography, oceanography, and marine life potential.

of the total province-wide protection of the Queen Charlotte Strait Marine Ecoregion. Approximately 8.6% of the Queen Charlotte Strait Marine Ecoregion is within the provincial marine protected areas system.

The existing, terrestrial component of the Conservancy (931 hectares) is within the Coastal Western Hemlock very wet hypermaritime biogeoclimatic variant (CWHvh1).<sup>6</sup> Mahpakhum-Ahkwuna/Deserters Walker Conservancy contributes more than half of the area of the CWHvh1 variant in the Queen Charlotte Strait Ecoregion that is protected by the provincial protected areas system. Other contributions come from God's Pocket Marine Park (598 hectares) and Duke of Edinburgh Ecological Reserve (72 hectares).

When complete with the recommended marine component, Mahpakhum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy is of sufficient size and configuration to represent a coastal landscape with a high degree of ecological integrity.

## Marine Biodiversity

The conservancy is within one of the richest marine environments on the west coast of North America. Kelp beds located adjacent to the Walker Group and Millar Group provide important nursery areas for juvenile fish, and support complex food webs involving a diversity of invertebrates, fish, birds and mammals. Over 80% of marine invertebrate species found in British Columbia's coastal waters can be found in the conservancy. A tidal lagoon between Kent Island and Hosford Island supports a wide variety of intertidal organisms. Barry Islet, in particular, is renowned for its corals, including soft corals as well as large communities of rarely seen pink and white gorgonian (branching) corals.

A Rockfish Conservation Area has also been established by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to support the recovery of rockfish populations in Bolivar Passage. Rockfish Conservation Areas prohibit recreational and commercial rockfish harvesting to protect populations of inshore rockfish species found within British Columbia's marine waters (Figure 1).<sup>7</sup>

The conservancy and adjacent foreshore provide important habitat for numerous marine mammals, including the Stellar Sea Lion, a provincially blue-listed<sup>8</sup> species. There are at least nine seal and sea lion haul-outs in the conservancy, with two islets in the Millar Group supporting one of the largest Stellar Sea Lion haul outs on British Columbia's southern coast.

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<sup>6</sup> British Columbia's terrestrial ecosystems are also divided into biogeoclimatic (BEC) zones where specific types of soils, plant and animal communities develop.

<sup>7</sup> Other recreational and commercial fishing restrictions also apply. Information on Rockfish Conservation Areas (RCAs) is available on the Fisheries and Oceans Canada RCA web page at <http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/maps-cartes/rca-acis/index-eng.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Species and ecological communities are assigned to the red or blue list on the basis of the provincial Conservation Status Rank (SRANK) assigned by the B.C. Conservation Data Centre. The red list includes species/ecological communities that are extirpated, endangered or threatened. The blue list contains species/ecological communities that are considered to be of special concern.

This winter haul-out in the Millar Group is documented as a blue-listed species occurrence by the British Columbia Conservation Data Centre.<sup>9</sup> The Queen Charlotte Strait also hosts red-listed populations of Killer Whale, and blue-listed populations of Grey Whale, Humpback Whale, and Harbour Porpoise, as well as Pacific White-sided Dolphin and Dall's Porpoise. As well, Harbour Seal and River Otter are also reported to inhabit the Deserters and Walker Group islands.

## Birds

The conservancy and surrounding marine area support a high diversity of bird species. Among these are several provincially red and blue-listed species, including Northern Fulmar, Peregrine Falcon and Red-necked Phalarope. The conservancy is also moderately important for pelagic seabirds, including Sooty Shearwaters, petrels, Black-footed Albatross (blue-listed) and loons. Other marine bird species reported to be present in the conservancy include the Harlequin Duck, Pigeon Guillemot, and Rhinoceros Auklet. As well, Bald Eagle nests and prey remains have been found on numerous islands and islets.

There are breeding colonies of Black Oystercatcher and Glaucous-winged Gull on Deserters Island, Bleach Rock, and Joan Island, as well as a Glaucous-winged Gull colony on Barry Islet. In addition, the conservancy also provides moderate habitat for Marbled Murrelet, a blue-listed species that can be found dispersed throughout the area in the summer months.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.3 Recreation

Mahpakhum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy offers opportunities for remote, marine-oriented backcountry recreation. Recreational activities in the conservancy and surrounding marine area include pleasure boating, sport fishing, scuba diving, sea kayaking, and wildlife viewing. The conservancy foreshore offers a strategically important safe anchorage for boaters crossing the Queen Charlotte Strait. As well, the waters off Barry Islet are a popular cold-water scuba diving destination.

Sea kayakers travelling a challenging paddling route from Port Hardy through God's Pocket Marine Park may camp at Mahpakhum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy en route to Shelter Bay on the mainland coast. At present, there are no recreational facilities or established camp sites in the conservancy. There is one cabin known as "Uncle John's cabin" on the east side of Staples Island, which is currently in a state of disrepair.

## 2.4 Resource Use

Natural resource use and development may be permitted in the conservancy, provided that this activity occurs in a sustainable manner and is consistent with the protection and

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<sup>9</sup> BC Species and Ecosystems Explorer. <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/atrisk/toolintro.html>

<sup>10</sup> Moderate habitat = key habitat features are present but patchy.

maintenance of biodiversity and natural environments, First Nations social, ceremonial and cultural uses, and recreational values.<sup>11</sup> There is one trap line area overlapping the Deserters Group Islands. There are currently no commercial resource uses occurring in the Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy.

The conservancy provides opportunities for further development of First Nations cultural, social and ceremonial uses of traditional marine and terrestrial resources.<sup>12</sup> The Gwa'sala-'Nakwada'xw First Nation is in the process of re-establishing cultural resource use activities in Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy. One example of this activity is the annual harvesting and processing of seaweed from the "sea gardens" by Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw school children (see Section 2.1).

Small scale, natural resource use activities such as commercial shellfish aquaculture, commercial harvesting of marine/terrestrial vegetation (e.g., seaweed, salal), and alternative energy generation (wind/tidal power to support cultural and/or recreational activities in the conservancy) may be appropriate in this conservancy if the activities are consistent with the purposes for which the conservancy was established.

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<sup>11</sup> Note: The *Park Act* prohibits commercial logging, mining and hydro-electric power generation, other than local run-of-the-river projects, in conservancies.

<sup>12</sup> Note: Management of most marine resources falls under the jurisdiction of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO).

## 3.0 Management Direction

### 3.1 Vision

The cultural heritage features and biologically important species in Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy are protected. Fisheries and other marine resources are thriving in the conservancy foreshore. Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Elders are reconnecting with the islands, passing on their traditional knowledge of the "sea gardens" to youth and visitors. The Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation is participating in economic opportunities that enhance the conservancy's cultural, ecological and recreational values. Visitors to the conservancy are enjoying a variety of marine-oriented backcountry recreation activities and gaining an appreciation of Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw cultural heritage.

The collaborative relationship between the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw and BC Parks is strong, ensuring First Nation involvement in the management and protection of the conservancy and the application of traditional ecological knowledge and scientific knowledge to management decisions.

### 3.2 Recommended Marine Boundary

Protected area recommendations from the Coastal Land Use Decision that led to the establishment of the conservancy did not address the marine environment. The Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw and other First Nations requested that the marine areas adjacent to the new central coast protected areas be considered for protected area status. The collaborative management agreement between the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation and the province provides that individual management plans for conservancies make recommendations respecting the extension of the conservancies in Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw territory into the marine environment.

This management plan recommends expansion of the original conservancy boundary to include the foreshore component illustrated in Figure 5. The proposed boundary protects a marine zone of significant ecological value, including kelp beds, corals, marine mammal haul outs, seabird colonies, and two Rockfish Conservation Areas, as well as cultural heritage features such as the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw "sea gardens".

The proposed boundary excludes a 0.3 hectare Licence of Occupation for a proposed marina immediately adjacent to the private land parcel on Staples Island, as well as a 56 hectare area that contains a Finfish Aquaculture Licence in Shelter Passage. The recommended foreshore addition has a total area of approximately 6,445 hectares.



### 3.3 Conservancy Zoning

Zoning assists in the planning and management of protected areas. In general terms, zoning divides an area into logical units to apply consistent management objectives. The zones in Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy reflect the intended land uses, acceptable types of development, appropriate activities, and degree of management required.

Two zones have been applied to Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy: Special Feature Zone – Wildlife Habitat Protection and First Nations Cultural Heritage Zone (Figure 5). These zoning designations have been applied to the existing lands within the conservancy as well as the foreshore area recommended for inclusion in the conservancy.

#### Special Feature Zone – Wildlife Habitat Protection

The Special Feature Zone – Wildlife Habitat Protection encompasses the Millar Group Islands in the northeast portion of the conservancy, as well as the adjacent foreshore recommended for inclusion in the conservancy. Access to this zone will not be encouraged to protect important cultural and biological values. The zone protects the Millar Group winter haul out for the Stellar Sea Lion, a provincially blue-listed species. The Millar Group haul out is documented by the British Columbia Conservation Data Centre, and is one of the largest haul outs on the southern coast of British Columbia. If the Stellar Sea Lion becomes red-listed, action may be taken to restrict access into this zone. Resource uses, recreational uses and facilities are not appropriate in this zone. Appendix A describes uses that are appropriate in this zone.

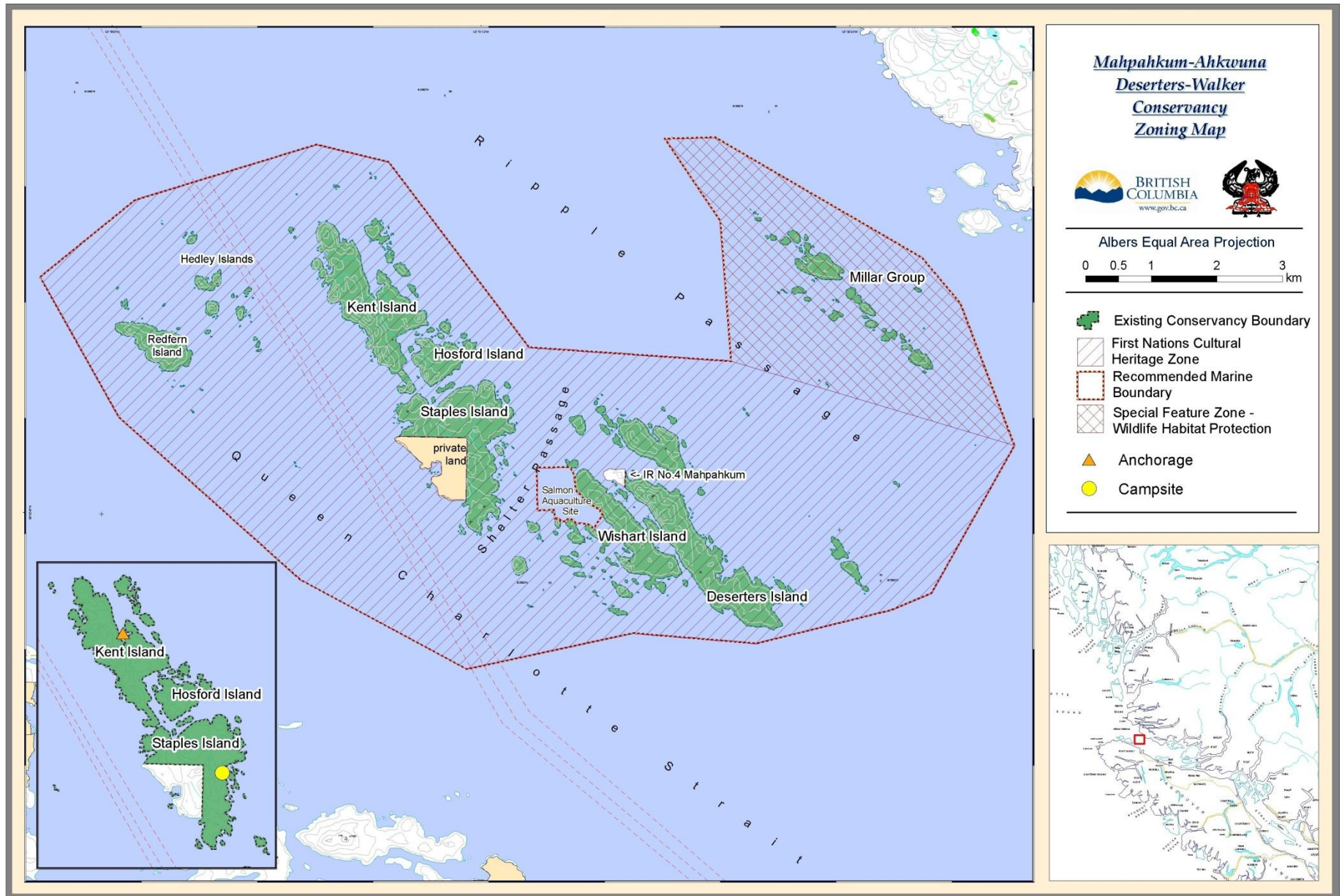
The Special Feature Zone - Wildlife Habitat Protection comprises approximately 15% of the conservancy, including 60 hectares upland and 1,070 hectares of the recommended foreshore addition.

#### First Nations Cultural Heritage Zone

The remainder of the conservancy, including the Deserters and Walker Group Islands and the adjacent foreshore recommended for inclusion in the conservancy, is designated First Nations Cultural Heritage Zone. The primary purpose of this zone is to provide opportunities for continued use of Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw cultural heritage sites for traditional activities. This zone also provides opportunities for marine-oriented recreational activities, including sea kayaking, boating, diving, day use and overnight camping.

Small buildings to be used for traditional use activities, cultural interpretation/education, and a First Nations Guardian Watchmen program, will be a possible future use in this zone. Once the cabin on the east side of Staples Island (known locally as Uncle John's cabin) is removed, this area will be designated as a day use and camping area. Fixed roof accommodation (small-scale, backcountry-oriented) and tent pads will also be considered as a possible future use in this location. Appendix A further describes appropriate uses in this zone.

The First Nations Cultural Heritage Zone comprises approximately 85% of the conservancy, including 871 hectares of upland and approximately 5,375 hectares of the recommended foreshore addition.



### 3.4 Management Objectives, Issues and Strategies

Eight broad management objectives have been identified for Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy. The following tables list key issues related to each objective, as well as management strategies to address these issues in the conservancy.

<b>Objective 1: Respect and protect First Nations social and cultural heritage values.</b>	
Issues	Strategies
Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw cultural heritage sites have been disturbed by visitors.	<p>Develop collaborative procedures for reporting incidents involving disturbance of Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw cultural heritage sites to the appropriate authorities.</p> <p>Develop a collaborative approach to monitoring, compliance and enforcement activities in the conservancy (i.e., between Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Guardian Watchmen, BC Parks Rangers, Conservation Officers, and federal authorities such as the RCMP/Fisheries and Oceans Canada).</p>
Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw concern that traditional marine resources in the waters adjacent to the conservancy have declined in abundance due to recreational and commercial harvesting, as well as pollution and physical damage from adjacent marine transportation/industrial activities (e.g., anchor damage, sewage disposal from marine vessels, waste disposal from aquaculture site).	<p>Amend the conservancy boundary to include the recommended foreshore component.</p> <p>Foster stewardship of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw "sea gardens" by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to monitor, and if necessary, limit harvest levels of marine resources.</li> <li>• Co-operating with other provincial and federal agencies to monitor impacts and manage adjacent activities (e.g., sewage disposal from marine vessels, waste disposal from aquaculture site) to minimize risk to marine ecological values.</li> </ul>
Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw concern that recreational use of the tidal lagoon in the "Walker Group" boat anchorage adjacent to Hosford Island may impact cultural values in this area (e.g., traditional marine food resources in these "sea gardens").	<p>Develop and implement a communication strategy to: discourage recreational boat anchorage in the tidal lagoon adjacent to Hosford Island (in Walker Group); encourage anchorage in the protected bay at the northern end of Kent Island; and inform boaters of the federal regulations that prohibit untreated sewage discharge in nearshore waters.<sup>13</sup></p> <p>Maintain the "Walker Group" boat haven as an emergency anchorage.</p>

<sup>13</sup> For complete information refer to the *Regulation for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships and Dangerous Chemicals*. Available at <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/SOR-2007-86.pdf>

**Objective 1: Respect and protect First Nations social and cultural heritage values.**

Issues	Strategies
Lack of visitor awareness of the significance of this conservancy to the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw.	Develop signage/communication materials to educate the public about the cultural heritage values in the conservancy.  Encourage visitors to contact the Hereditary Chief of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwada'xw First Nation to learn more about cultural protocol and cultural heritage values in the conservancy. Provide contact information for the Gwa'sala-'Nakwada'xw First Nation on the BC Parks website.

**Objective 2: Protect biological diversity and natural environment values.**

Issues	Strategies
Anchoring and unauthorized sewage or refuse disposal associated with recreational use of boat anchorage in the tidal lagoon adjacent to Hosford Island may impact marine ecological values.	To prevent sewage/refuse discharge and sea floor habitat impacts in the ecologically sensitive lagoon adjacent to Hosford Island, develop and implement a communication strategy to discourage recreational boat anchorage in this area.  Also inform visitors of federal regulations prohibiting sewage discharge in any communications materials.
The conservancy is vulnerable to adverse effects from adjacent land uses and marine activities.	Build relationships with relevant provincial and federal agencies, the private land owner and tenure holders adjacent to the conservancy, and monitor adjacent activities (e.g., finfish aquaculture site, recreational and commercial fisheries) for potential impacts to conservancy values.  Engage with Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to monitor and protect marine species and ecological features in the recommended foreshore addition (e.g., kelp beds, eelgrass, Northern Abalone, shellfish, crab, etc.).
The foreshore recommended for inclusion in the conservancy supports lingcod and rockfish species, which have experienced population declines throughout British Columbia's coastal waters.	Engage with Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to ensure that the Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) is maintained and build a cooperative relationship to support the RCA.

**Objective 2: Protect biological diversity and natural environment values.**

Issues	Strategies
The breeding colonies of Black Oystercatcher and Glaucous-winged Gull in the conservancy may be sensitive to human disturbance.	Manage backcountry recreation activities and locate future backcountry campsites and other activities to prevent disturbance to Black Oystercatcher and Glaucous-winged Gull breeding colonies.
Lack of information on species at risk in the conservancy.	Encourage inventories of species at risk and monitoring of known species at risk and their key habitats in the conservancy (e.g., the Millar Group Stellar Sea Lion haul out).
The impact of increased aircraft or boat access on wildlife values in the Special Feature Zone is unknown.	Monitor aircraft and boat access and do not encourage access to the Special Feature Zone – Wildlife Habitat Protection. If aircraft or boat access increases, and adverse effects are identified, pursue a regulatory amendment to restrict access into this zone.

**Objective 3: Protect marine-based backcountry tourism and recreation values.**

Issues	Strategies
Lack of identified campsites presents challenges for visitors and may lead to <i>ad hoc</i> campsite creation.	Prepare a site plan to identify suitable campsite locations in the vicinity of the derelict cabin on Staples Island.
Kayak access to the Staples Island camping location is poor at low tide.	Identify other suitable location(s) for camping with improved kayak access, possibly combined with small buildings to support cultural interpretation/education activities and the Guardian Watchmen program (see Objective 6).
The conservancy is vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including sea level rise.	Identify the areas that may be inundated.  Utilize site specific information on shoreline sensitivity to sea level rise in site planning to ensure that any facility investments are sustainable.

**Objective 4: Ensure public safety and compatibility among recreational and cultural activities in the conservancy.**

Issues	Strategies
Current state of disrepair of cabin (Uncle John's) on Staples Island presents a public safety issue.	Remove cabin.



**Objective 4: Ensure public safety and compatibility among recreational and cultural activities in the conservancy.**

Issues	Strategies
Due to the conservancy's small size, hunting may pose a risk to public safety and conflict with other recreational activities (e.g., recreational boating/kayaking) or cultural activities (e.g., traditional resource harvesting/processing, inter-generational cultural education activities).	Recommend regulatory changes to prohibit hunting in the conservancy.

**Objective 5: Protect the integrity of the conservancy boundary.**

Issues	Strategies
The lack of a marine boundary impedes the ability of BC Parks to protect marine cultural heritage, ecological and recreational values.	Recommend the addition of the foreshore to the legal boundary of the conservancy.  At such time as the Shelter Passage aquaculture site is no longer in use, pursue inclusion of this foreshore area in the conservancy.
The Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker islands are not protected in their entirety due to a private inholding within the conservancy.	At such time as the private land parcel on Staples Island may become available, pursue acquisition of this parcel.

**Objective 6: Support First Nations engagement in conservancy management.**

Issues	Strategies
Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw desire to participate in monitoring of visitor activities, as well as compliance and enforcement activities, to protect cultural heritage and biodiversity values.	Develop a collaborative approach to monitoring, compliance and enforcement activities in the conservancy (i.e., between Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Guardian Watchmen, BC Parks Rangers, Conservation Officers, and federal authorities such as the RCMP/Fisheries and Oceans Canada).
Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw desire to be able to respond in the event of an environmental emergency that may impact the conservancy (e.g., an oil spill adjacent to the conservancy).	Engage with the appropriate federal and provincial agencies to understand environmental emergency procedures, and facilitate communication and engagement between Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw and these agencies.

***Objective 7: Ensure economic opportunities in the conservancy contribute to broader goals of human wellbeing on the central coast.***

Issues	Strategies
Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation does not participate in an equitable portion of the economic opportunities that exist in the protected areas within their traditional territory.	Implement Collaborative Management Agreement commitments to provide the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation with enhanced access to economic opportunities in the protected areas within their traditional territories.
Recreation and tourism opportunities are important for economic diversification in local communities on northern Vancouver Island and the mainland coast.	Encourage recreational users to use local transportation, tourism and guiding services.

***Objective 8: Ensure the use of natural resources is sustainable and consistent with the protection of the conservancy's values.***

Issues	Strategies
Resource use or development activities can occur if they do not impact identified values/roles and/or conflict with other management objectives of the conservancy.	Apply the BC Parks Impact Assessment Process to consider specific proposals for further evaluation once site and project-specific details are known.

## 4.0 Plan Implementation

An adaptive approach will be applied to the management of this conservancy. Adaptive management involves a five-step process of planning, action, monitoring, evaluation and revision of management strategies to reflect lessons learned. Adaptive management is flexible, collaborative, and responsive to public input.

The effectiveness of the management strategies identified in this management plan at achieving the objectives for Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy will be monitored and evaluated by the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation and BC Parks. Management strategies and actions may change over time to reflect new circumstances and information gained. Management strategies may also be revised to respond to the implementation of broader objectives of ecosystem based management in the central coast.<sup>14</sup>

Although no specific, future management planning is envisioned for Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy, the management plan may be amended as part of this adaptive management process. BC Parks will work with the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation to coordinate planning and management of the Mahpahkum-Ahkwuna/Deserters-Walker Conservancy, as required.

The BC Parks Impact Assessment Policy will also be applied in this conservancy. All reviewable actions will be subject to an assessment of the potential impacts, including consideration of the cumulative impacts of proposed actions on conservancy values.

Priority actions for implementation include:

- Developing collaborative procedures for reporting incidents involving disturbance of Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw cultural heritage sites to the appropriate authorities;
- Implementing Collaborative Management Agreement commitments to provide the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation with enhanced access to economic opportunities in the protected areas within their traditional territories;
- Recommending the addition of the foreshore to the legal boundary of the conservancy;
- Implementing a communications strategy to encourage recreational boat anchorage in the protected bay at the northern end of Kent Island, while maintaining the existing boat haven in the Walker Group as an emergency anchorage;
- Removing Uncle John's cabin on the east side of Staples Island and informing recreational users that this is an appropriate site for day use and overnight camping;

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<sup>14</sup> Information on the definition and implementation of ecosystem based management is available at [http://www.ilmb.gov.bc.ca/slrp/lrmp/nanaimo/central\\_north\\_coast/index.html](http://www.ilmb.gov.bc.ca/slrp/lrmp/nanaimo/central_north_coast/index.html)

- Identifying other suitable camping locations with improved kayak access, possibly combined with small buildings to support cultural interpretation/education activities and the Guardian Watchmen program;
- Encouraging visitors to contact the Hereditary Chief of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwada'xw First Nation to learn more about cultural protocol and cultural heritage values in the conservancy; providing contact information for the Gwa'sala-'Nakwada'xw First Nation on the BC Parks website;
- Developing a collaborative approach to monitoring, compliance and enforcement activities in the conservancy (i.e., between Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Guardian Watchmen, BC Parks Rangers, Conservation Officers, and federal authorities such as the RCMP/Fisheries and Oceans Canada);
- At such time as the fish farm tenure off Wishart Island is no longer in use, pursuing inclusion of this marine area within the conservancy, and;
- At such time as the private inholding on Staples Island may become available, pursuing acquisition of this parcel for inclusion in the conservancy.

The implementation of many priority actions outlined in this management plan is dependent on the availability of BC Parks and Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation financial and staff resources. Approval of this management plan does not constitute approval of funding for implementation.

## Appendix A – Appropriate Uses Table

The following table lists existing and potential future uses in Mahpakhum-Ahkwuna/Deserters Walker Conservancy. This is not an exhaustive list of uses that may be considered in this conservancy. The management direction for marine activities listed here will apply if the conservancy boundary is amended to include a foreshore component.

The table is provided to summarize the uses which the management planning process has confirmed are not appropriate in the conservancy. The table also gives a general indication of the management direction for other uses. The table must be reviewed in conjunction with the other sections of the management plan.

Activity/Facility	Zone	
	First Nations Cultural Heritage	Special Feature - Wildlife Habitat Protection
Access		
Air Access (pick up and drop off)	Y	N
Motorized Off-road Access	N	N
<b>Recreation Activities</b>		
Scuba Diving	Y	N
Camping - backcountry	Y	N
Commercial Recreation (guided kayaking)	Y	N
Hunting	N	N
Wildlife Viewing	Y	N
Cultural Tourism	Y	N
<b>Resource Use</b>		
Shellfish Aquaculture <sup>15</sup>	Y	N
Finfish Aquaculture	N	N
Trapping	Y	N
Commercial Harvesting of Marine/Terrestrial Vegetation (e.g., seaweed, salal)	Y	N
Alternative Energy Generation – Wind or Tidal (small scale, for use in the conservancy)	Y	N
Utility Corridors (non-intrusive power/transmission lines for power generated for use in conservancy)	Y	N

<sup>15</sup> Note that Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) is responsible for the management and regulation of aquaculture under the federal *Fisheries Act*.

Activity/Facility	Zone	
<b>Other Activities</b>		
Filming (commercial)	Y	N
Ecological Restoration/Enhancement	Y	Y
Scientific Research	Y	Y
<b>Facility</b>		
Buildings/Facilities for Cultural Interpretation/Education/Guardian Watchmen	Y	N
Commercial Fixed Roof Accommodation (small-scale, backcountry-oriented)	Y	N
Interpretive Signage	Y	N
Backcountry Campsite and Picnic Area	Y	N
Trails (hiking)	Y	N
Facilities for upland access to private land parcel or Indian Reserve (e.g., dock)	Y	N
Mooring Buoys	Y	N
Communication Sites	Y	N

### Legend for Appropriate Uses Table

<b>N</b>	<b>Not an appropriate use in this zone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It has been confirmed during the management planning process that this use is not appropriate in this zone.</li> <li>This may be an existing use which the management planning process has determined is no longer an appropriate use in this zone. The management plan details strategies for addressing this inappropriate use (e.g., phasing out, closing).</li> </ul>
<b>Y</b>	<b><u>May be an appropriate use in this zone</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This indicates that some degree or scale of this use may be appropriate.</li> <li>For existing uses, the management plan will provide guidance on the appropriate level or scale of this use (e.g., direction to reduce, restrict or increase the current level of this activity) and may address specific restrictions or enhancements (e.g., capacity, appropriate sites, designated trails, purposes, party size, time of year, etc.).</li> <li>For new or expanded uses, this does not constitute approval. This indicates that the use <u>may be considered</u> for further evaluation and possible approval (e.g., park use permit adjudication, completion of a review as part of the BC Parks Impact Assessment Process). In some cases the appropriateness may not be confirmed until further assessments are completed.</li> </ul>
<b>N/A</b>	<b>Not an applicable use in this zone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is applied where it is not feasible for the use to take place in this zone (e.g., mooring buoys in a terrestrial zone).</li> </ul>