

A stylized illustration featuring a Haisla mask in the upper left corner, set against a dark blue background with white, wavy lines. Below the mask, a white, jagged mountain range is depicted. In the foreground, there are green, stylized, leaf-like shapes. The text 'Community Profile' is located in the upper right, followed by the title 'KITIMAT AND KITAMAAT VILLAGE' and the subtitle 'Dreaming Big in the Land of the Haisla'.

Community Profile

KITIMAT AND KITAMAAT VILLAGE

Dreaming Big in the
Land of the Haisla

T. Smith 2015



**The Community
Transformations
Project**

The
ENERGY  **MIX**

IRPP

At the head of the Douglas Channel, on British Columbia's northwest coast, lie the ancestral lands of the Haisla people. Land, water and fishing have long been central to their way of life.

The arrival of European settlers ushered in a period of disease, oppression and discrimination from which the Haisla people are still recovering. But the Haisla have recently taken control of their destiny by dreaming bigger than others thought possible.

The area, which includes the municipality of Kitimat and the Haisla Nation's Kitimaat Village, has attracted big industrial projects for decades because of its deep-water port that provides ready access to global markets.

The region has been a hub for industrial development since Alcan first arrived in the early 1950s to build an aluminum smelter and hydroelectric facility. More recently, LNG Canada, led by a consortium of companies, has built a \$40-billion liquefied natural gas processing and export facility on the doorstep of the Haisla Nation.

The Haisla historically saw little benefit from industry, and significant harm. That changed when they negotiated a share of natural gas from the Coastal GasLink pipeline feeding the LNG Canada terminal and embarked on their own LNG project. Construction of Cedar LNG, a floating LNG processing facility that is majority owned by the Haisla Nation, is now underway and is expected to launch in late 2028, three years after LNG Canada's project.

As Canada faces a changing trade relationship with the U.S., the prospect of reaching Asian markets is making Kitimat an increasingly appealing location. There have been suggestions of reviving the idea of oil exports from there, a prospect that the Haisla and others in the community say they would oppose.

The Haisla Nation has thrown its support behind the burgeoning LNG industry because it says it displaces coal power in Asia, helping to reduce global greenhouse-gas emissions. Others in the community and province have argued that the new projects will hinder the attainment of climate-change goals.

The success of these major projects shows that big things can get built in Canada, and in ways that provide lasting benefits to Indigenous Peoples and limit environmental harm. But the delicate balance achieved may be tested if growth expands.

And some have raised concerns about whether the renewed industrial activity will increase Kitimat's reliance on a boom-and-bust economy.

THE TOWN ALUMINUM BUILT

When the [Alcan aluminum smelter](#) opened in Kitimat in 1954, it was the world's largest smelter powered by hydroelectricity. It was a time when big things were being built. In five years, the company constructed a hydroelectric dam on the Nechako River, a tunnel through a mountain, a powerhouse, a transmission line, a smelter — and the town of Kitimat. Alcan spent about \$500 million on the project, which was the equivalent of 2 per cent of Canada's GDP at the time.

The project was not without its problems. Sixteen workers died building Alcan's 16-kilometre tunnel through DuBose Mountain. The damming of the Nechako River flooded 92,000 hectares, covering the territory of the [Cheslatta Carrier Nation](#). Cheslatta people were forced from their homes and their village was burned by Alcan. After suing the federal government in the 1980s, the First Nation received \$7.4 million in a 1993 settlement.

The smelter is located across the Douglas Channel from Kitamaat Village, where many people from the Haisla Nation live. Tensions flared between the First Nation and Alcan over many years, largely because of the project's impacts on fish that were essential to the Haisla's livelihood and culture. Alcan also took some reserve land from the Haisla in the 1950s. A proposed hydroelectric dam expansion in the 1980s, the Kemano Completion Project, was halted in 1995 by the B.C. government due to the impact on salmon and sturgeon, and opposition by the Haisla, other First Nations and environmental groups.

In 2007, Rio Tinto, a multinational metals and minerals company, [bought Alcan](#). At the time, the Haisla had already approached Alcan with the hopes of establishing better relations, which set the stage for Rio Tinto to [sign an agreement](#) with the Haisla Nation in 2010 that provides a 30-year framework for a collaborative working arrangement. The [agreement](#) includes a Legacy Trust Fund for Haisla community development and provides Haisla members with the opportunity to receive benefits from the facility through training, employment and procurement. Rio Tinto also signed an [agreement](#) with the Cheslatta Carrier Nation in 2020 that includes support for a training centre, scholarship fund and environmental stewardship.

In 2016, Rio Tinto completed a \$6-billion [modernization](#) project to upgrade the aluminum smelter. The modernization increased the smelter's [production capacity](#) by 48 per cent to 420,000 tonnes of aluminum a year while lowering its greenhouse-gas emissions by more than one-third. Rio Tinto is also part of an effort in Quebec to develop a [new aluminum technology](#) that could further reduce emissions in the sector in the coming decades.

The company built another tunnel in 2022 through DuBose Mountain to secure power to the smelter. A new wharf, also completed in 2022, will be used by Rio Tinto to import alumina, anodes and other supplies and to export finished aluminum.

The investments seem prescient as Canada's aluminum sector faces U.S. tariffs. The smelter's aluminum is currently shipped largely to the U.S. and the deepwater port provides the



*A view of Rio Tinto's
Kitimat smelter on
Jan. 10, 2012.*

*THE CANADIAN
PRESS/Darryl Dyck.*

possibility to increase exports to other markets. [Global aluminum demand](#) is expected to grow as countries increase investment in clean energy and electric vehicles.

Rio Tinto employs about 1,200 people at the site and is a significant source of tax revenue for the community.

A NEW INDUSTRY IN TOWN

In 2019, construction began on a new major project in Kitimat, a [\\$40-billion liquefied natural gas processing and export facility](#), the Coastal GasLink pipeline and natural gas production in northeastern B.C. It is the largest private-sector investment in Canadian history, according to LNG Canada and the federal government. The project, a joint venture of Shell Canada, Malaysia's Petronas, PetroChina, Mitsubishi and Korean Gas Corp., is expected to export [14 million tonnes](#) of liquefied natural gas a year to Asian markets when it begins operating later in 2025.



Construction is under-
way at LNG Canada's
\$40-billion liquefied
natural gas processing
and export facility on July
20, 2024.

Photo courtesy of
LNG Canada.

At a time when Canada is looking to expand its exports to non-U.S. markets, the LNG Canada project is a lifeline. Phase 1 will enable exports of around [11 per cent](#) of Canada's natural gas production to Asia.

Kitimat was chosen as the site of the facility because of its year-round ice-free, deepwater port and its proximity to roads, powerlines and an airport. The project includes natural gas liquefaction and storage facilities, a marine terminal and a pipeline. The [proposed second](#) phase of the project, if it goes ahead, would double production.

Teresa Waddington, vice-president of corporate relations at LNG Canada, noted that the shipping schedule should be manageable. "LNG Canada's Phase 1 will bring one LNG carrier into the Douglas Channel every second day, while Phase 2 will bring one every day."

Gas extraction to supply the facility is already underway in northeastern British Columbia where some residents have complained about the [fracking operations](#) used to produce the gas. Fracking involves injecting water, sand and chemicals into the ground at high pressure to release the natural gas trapped in rock formations. Among other things, fracking is thought to cause [earthquakes](#).

The gas is already being shipped in small amounts along the 670-kilometre [Coastal Gas-Link pipeline](#), owned by TC Energy, to the LNG facility in Kitimat. The construction of the pipeline, which was completed in 2023, was also controversial and divisive. Some of the hereditary chiefs of the [Wet'suwet'en Nation](#), through which the pipeline runs, and their supporters strongly opposed its construction, pitting them against the community's elected chiefs and the Haisla Nation, whose members largely supported it.

Since construction began, close to 70,000 Canadians have worked on the LNG Canada project, including the pipeline. Up to 350 full-time, permanent jobs are expected to be created once it becomes operational. While significant numbers of local workers were hired, the range of skills and number of workers required meant many workers came from elsewhere in Canada, and a small number from other countries. To accommodate the workforce, the company built a temporary lodging centre adjacent to the worksite, which can house up to 4,500 people.

The massive project, which at peak construction employed 9,000 workers, has caused remarkably few disruptions to Kitimat, thanks to a concerted effort by LNG Canada to support the workforce on site, the company said.

"Camp life can be hard," said Waddington. To help workers cope, LNG Canada invested in on-site activities, hired counsellors, brought in therapy dogs and provided mental health support, she said.

LNG Canada has also emphasized local procurement. The company estimates the value of project contracts and subcontracts awarded at more than \$5.5 billion, including \$4.6 billion awarded to local and Indigenous businesses. The amount includes a \$500-million contract with [HaiSea Marine](#), a joint venture between the Haisla Nation and Seaspan to build and operate battery-powered low-emissions tugboats, which will provide ship-assist and towing services to LNG carriers.

The project has brought renewed optimism to the community. When the decision to build the LNG Canada facility was announced, "people were excited," recalled Louise Avery, a retired executive director of the Kitimat Museum and Archives. "Kitimat needs large taxpayers to fund the municipal government because the town is only here due to industry," she said.

HAISLA NATION PRIDE

Over the past decade, the Haisla Nation has achieved remarkable success, which has brought pride to its more than 2,000 members.

The Haisla Nation has close working relationships with Rio Tinto and LNG Canada, which have led to employment and business growth in the community. The relationships have also allowed the Haisla to play a strong role in protecting the environment and local fish populations such as the culturally important oolichan. Haisla Chief Councillor Crystal Smith led benefit agreement [negotiations with LNG Canada](#), achieving a deal that allowed the

Haisla to receive 400 million cubic feet per day of natural gas from the Coastal GasLink pipeline, paving the way for the Haisla Nation to develop its own LNG project.

The \$6-billion [Cedar LNG](#) development, a floating facility, is expected to employ up to 500 people during peak construction and 100 full-time workers once operational in 2028. The Haisla Nation is the majority owner of the project, a partnership between it and Pembina Pipeline Corp. that is expected to produce three million tonnes of liquefied natural gas a year. It is the largest Indigenous-led investment in Canada and one of the most environmentally friendly LNG projects in the world, according to the Haisla.

“Cedar LNG is a shining example of how natural resource development should work in our province — in full partnership with First Nations and with the lowest emissions possible,” said [B.C. Premier David Eby in 2024](#). “By working together, we can build a stronger and cleaner economy that creates opportunities and benefits for all.”

The Haisla Nation received support from the First Nations Finance Authority to fund their [20 per cent equity contribution](#) to the Cedar LNG project, and the federal government said in March 2025 that it would [contribute \\$200 million](#).

Economic success represents a turning point for the Haisla people, following more than 100 years of oppression and discrimination. “We now have control over our finances and

“We now have control over our finances and can invest in education and social supports for our people without having to ask the government.”

CANDICE WILSON, ENVIRONMENT MANAGER OF THE HAISLA NATION



Photo by
Spruce Tree
Media.



A rendering of the Cedar LNG development, a floating liquefied natural gas facility that is majority owned by the Haisla Nation.

Courtesy of Cedar LNG.

can invest in education and social supports for our people without having to ask the government,” said Candice Wilson, environment manager of the Haisla Nation.

“Reconciliation has been playing in the background for everything that we have been doing,” with Haisla leaders and all levels of government “coming to the table to have that open and honest communication upfront and anticipating what’s to come,” she said. If economic transformation initiatives are going to succeed, officials need to give “us that leeway of time to process what is essentially going to be our future,” she said.

She noted that LNG Canada approached the Haisla Nation 15 years ago to develop the project, and that this type of early engagement is necessary for all initiatives proposed by industry.

“We are closely linked with the environment, and we rely on it for our culture and traditions,” Wilson said. “So, we are going to do what we can to protect it. That is the biggest strength of our people.”

PEOPLE OF THE SNOW

Long before the existence of the town of Kitimat, the land at the mouth of the Douglas Channel in northern British Columbia was home to the [Haisla](#) people. Kitimat's name comes from the Tsimshian term for the Haisla — Kitamaat, meaning “People of the Snow.”

European settlement brought waves of infectious disease to the region, and the 1918 influenza epidemic decimated the Haisla population. The population decline slowed around 1930, and afterwards the survivors united to occupy a common winter village, the Kitamaat Village.

The traditional Haisla territory is vast, but the reserve land allocated by the federal government is small in comparison. The Haisla Nation has been working for many decades to expand its reserve land, successfully adding [120 hectares](#) in 2022.

[The Meaning of Reconciliation](#), the Haisla Reconciliation document, recounts the impact that European contact has had on the community, including insufficient reserve land, the [potlatch ban](#) and the creation of residential schools. Many Haisla children were sent to live in schools far from their community, in Port Alberni and Coqualeetza. Others were sent to the [Elizabeth Long Memorial Home](#), a former day school in Kitamaat Village that was used as a residential school.

The Reconciliation document also recounts the devastation of the oolichan, a culturally significant smelt species known for its high oil content. Untreated effluent from the municipality and the pulp and paper mill was dumped into the Kitimat River, destroying the fish.

The Haisla abandoned the oolichan harvest in the early 1970s because of its bad taste. “It took 40 years and more than one legal action to end the tainting,” according to the document.

Efforts by the Haisla Nation to conserve oolichan populations are ongoing, with support from [Rio Tinto](#) and [LNG Canada](#). LNG Canada also founded the Social Management Roundtable in 2019, which meets multiple times a year to address various concerns from residents.

“We need to acknowledge that, while we can’t change this history, we have a duty to understand it and to construct a future that takes the past into account,” the Reconciliation document concludes. “If we can do that, then we have made some progress and we have started to lay a foundation for real discussion.”



The spirit of Reconciliation has also led to a closer relationship between Haisla Nation Council and the District of Kitimat. The two groups participated in [the First Nation-Municipal Community Economic Development Initiative](#), or CEDI, a national program administered by the Council for Advancement of Native Development Officers and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. From 2022 to 2024, the program facilitated monthly meetings between Haisla Nation Council and District of Kitimat representatives to collaborate on joint community economic development initiatives.

At the end of the program, the two governments signed a [friendship agreement](#) titled *gi guáłap nis*, meaning “working together and helping each other.”

Wilson said that working with the District of Kitimat on the initiative “was a big step for our governments to come together to find areas we are working towards.”

One outcome has been the Haisla Nation’s curbside recycling program, which was launched in March 2024 in collaboration with the District of Kitimat.

Before the initiative started, Haisla Nation Council and the District of Kitimat would often work far apart, said Louise Avery. “I think CEDI helped them in meeting and seeing each other as counterparts.” Even though members of both communities run into each other at local shops, “we can be culturally far apart,” she added. “It is a matter of trying to get to know people and coexist in a friendly way.”

Dialogue is a key part of the Reconciliation process, she added. “I think recognition of the trauma that the Haisla Nation has endured over many, many decades — especially the residential school and day school in Kitamaat Village — a lot of different things have happened over the decades that have never been explored or talked about outside of the [Haisla Reconciliation document](#).”

*The spirit of Reconciliation
has led to a closer relationship
between Haisla Nation Council
and the District of Kitimat.*

*Photo by Spruce
Tree Media.*



COMMUNITY CHALLENGES

Boom-and-bust economy

From the time of its founding, Kitimat has existed because of heavy industry, from aluminum smelting to pulp and paper production, and now liquefied natural gas.

The reliance on heavy industry has implications for the town's workforce, its economic development and the services and amenities it provides. [More than 70 per cent](#) of Kitimat's municipal tax base comes from industry.

Although the renewed industrial activity has brought benefits to Kitimat and the Haisla, it also raises questions over whether it deepens the community's ties to a few large resource companies and the boom-and-bust economy on which it has historically relied.

After the aluminum smelter opened in the early 1950s, other major industries followed, including a pulp and paper mill that opened in 1969 and a methanol plant in the 1980s, both of which have since been shut down. Methanex [closed](#) the methanol plant in 2005, leaving more than 100 people unemployed. Five years later, West Fraser Timber [closed](#) the pulp and paper mill, displacing more than 500 workers.

The loss of these major industries reduced funding for local amenities and community services. "When [the] Methanex [plant] was being built in the 1980s, the Kitimat population was at its highest, 13,000, and now it is down to just under 9,000," said Phil Germuth, Kitimat mayor.



Lis Stannus
Retired teacher and
member of the Kitimat
Airshed Group and
Kitimat-Terrace Clean
Air Coalition
Photo by Spruce
Tree Media.

The town has also struggled to sustain small independent businesses. “As a small-business owner myself, with the advent of online shopping and our population drop, some small businesses that we enjoyed in the ’80s would have a tough time being successful now,” said Germuth.

“The town has had trouble providing amenities that would attract residents to a community, like local coffee shops,” said Lis Stannus, a retired teacher and a member of the Kitimat Airshed Group and Kitimat-Terrace Clean Air Coalition.

She noted that the presence of large industry has also affected the local workforce. Between 2005 and 2010, “we lost a lot of small businesses as [residents] went to work for industry because they pay more,” she said. “The things that citizens enjoyed here were eroded by big industry projects.”

Even in good times, finding workers can be a challenge for grocery stores, pharmacies and other small businesses because the large industries pay so much more, said Laurel D’Andrea, executive director of the Kitimat Chamber of Commerce. “Small businesses can’t compete,” she said, which means towns like Kitimat have to make do without the amenities larger cities take for granted. A McDonald’s restaurant just opened in the town, she noted. “When you are an industry-rich town that pays those kinds of dollars it’s a struggle for small and medium-based businesses for sure,” she said.

Stephan Nieweler, a researcher at Simon Fraser University, has studied the downtowns of Kitimat, Terrace and Prince Rupert. His [research](#) on “path dependency” — the influence of historical decisions and events on planning and development — found that Kitimat’s downtown vitality was hindered by poor historical planning because the townsite was designed by Alcan to serve industry.

Despite the economic revival of the last decade, there have been minimal changes to the downtown, namely a new hotel and two restaurants, [Nieweler](#) reports. One exception is the [Haisla Town Centre](#), a mixed-use development planned by Haisla Nation Council. Completed in 2017, it includes condos, a hotel, a commercial building and a restaurant in the downtown core. Nieweler’s [key recommendation](#) was for politicians to focus on directing growth and development to the downtown core.

Nearby regions are also seeking a greater share of revenues from large projects, since they also face increased demands for services. The [Northwest BC Resource Benefits Alliance](#), which includes 21 local governments, argues that it should receive more of the revenues associated with major projects to support the community infrastructure and capacity needed to accommodate increased economic activity and workforce growth. The group states that nearly 74 per cent of all major projects related to mining, oil and gas, wood manufacturing and petrochemical manufacturing recently completed or already under construction in B.C. are within its region. Yet many municipalities lack sufficient revenues to upgrade physical infrastructure, such as roads and airports, and services, such as health care and first responders. In 2024, the B.C. government [announced \\$250 million](#) over five years for critical infrastructure in the 21 communities represented by the alliance.



Kitimat and Kitamaat Village provide stunning vistas of mountains, trees, the ocean, rivers and lakes.

Photo by Spruce Tree Media.

Balancing climate action and development

The climate change impacts of large industrial facilities in Kitimat are a source of controversy within the region and without.

Local developments claim top environmental credentials relative to global competitors. Rio Tinto has reduced the emissions per tonne of aluminum produced at its Kitimat smelter by 50 per cent. Similarly, LNG Canada says its export facility is designed to operate with [35 per cent lower emissions](#) than the world's best performing LNG plants operating today. Cedar LNG's floating terminal uses little land and the company promises it will have [one-third the emissions](#) of the global industry average for an LNG plant.

Still, the facilities are [major emitters](#). Clean Energy Canada released a [report](#) in March 2024 that estimated that six ongoing LNG projects in the province, including Phase 1 and Phase 2 of LNG Canada and Cedar LNG, would increase GHG emissions by 13 megatonnes by 2030 and hinder B.C.'s ability to hit its goal of reducing emissions by [40 per cent below 2007 levels by 2030](#).

The B.C. government recently [eased rules](#) that require new LNG projects to achieve net-zero emissions by 2030. The [revised policy](#) requires new developments that rely on a clean electricity grid to reduce emissions to demonstrate that they are "net-zero ready" if it is not possible for them to access clean electricity by 2030. LNG Canada [received regulatory approval](#) for both phases of its project more than a decade ago, predating net-zero requirements.

Proponents of LNG have touted it as a cleaner substitute for the coal that Asian power plants currently use and argue that the projects lower global emissions. But others argue that 40-year projects such as LNG Canada may face [declining demand](#) toward the end of their lives as renewable energy and energy storage costs decline. In addition, there is significant competition in LNG markets, with major suppliers in the U.S., Qatar, Australia and Mexico. The B.C. coast has an advantage over existing U.S. LNG suppliers because it is closer to Asian markets, but that could change if new projects come online in [Alaska](#) and [Mexico](#).

Interview participants were divided on whether climate concerns should limit LNG development.

“We are looking at the issue of climate change, and here we are promoting LNG,” said Louise Avery, formerly with the Kitimat Museum and Archives. “Most people would say they want clean air, clean water and clean land, but when it comes to needing to make an income ... you end up working for [industry].” And then “a lot of people get angry and don’t want to talk about climate.”

Some fear climate action will threaten their jobs, she added. “What is really worrying is that LNG is still a fossil fuel.” As a result, projects such as LNG Canada are coming under attack. “We are in a situation where people are saying, ‘Why are we building more?’”

For others, policy and regulations aimed at industries were a sticking point. While seen as necessary to uphold environmental standards by some, others viewed them as overly restrictive.

“Everything takes so long that companies like Chevron go elsewhere, and it is frustrating,” said Ron Burnett, president of the Economic Development Association. Chevron Canada began site preparation for a [proposed LNG project](#) in Kitimat in 2011 but later [abandoned](#) the plan to focus on more cost-effective ventures.

“If our government wants to reap the economic benefits from our resources, then we need policy that supports that,” said Germuth, the mayor. “Canada has some of the toughest environmental, labour and consultation laws on Earth. That is great, but it also comes at increased costs for [industries] that they wouldn’t have elsewhere. To me, if industry is using currently available, leading-edge technology to curb emissions, and of course also benefiting the economy with jobs, taxes and royalties, then they should not be punished with further financial penalties related to emissions.”

The B.C. government has offered LNG Canada and other LNG export facilities a [two-year grace period](#) on carbon pricing to allow time for facilities to stabilize their emissions.

Reducing restrictions could ultimately help Kitimat contribute to the global push for climate action, Germuth added. “Kitimat’s greatest advantage is being a port city, and the opportunities to support a low-carbon future are numerous, be it for exporting value-added resources or even producing components for the renewable industry, such as solar panels or electric car parts,” he said.

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PHIL GERMUTH, KITIMAT MAYOR

Protecting ecosystems and air quality

Kitimat and Kitamaat Village provide stunning vistas of mountains, trees, the ocean, rivers and lakes. The ecosystem is rich with iconic species such as the spirit bear and bald eagle, oolichan and salmon, old-growth forests of western red cedar, and orca and hump-back whales. The natural environment is culturally significant to the First Nations in the region and is also a source of livelihood for many residents. Residents treasure the beauty and its many recreational activities. [Sport fishing](#) attracts tourists from all over the world.

In 2016, the B.C. government, Coastal First Nations, Nanwakolas Council, environmental groups and forestry companies signed the historic Great Bear Rainforest Agreement to protect the old-growth forests and other species of the north and central coasts of British Columbia. The agreement covers 6.4 million hectares extending from the Discovery Islands in the south to the B.C.-Alaska border and is home to 26 First Nations. The agreement covers much of the Douglas Channel, but the boundary falls to the west of Kitimat and Kitamaat Village.

[Rio Tinto works with the Haisla Nation](#) to provide stable water levels in the Kemano River, particularly during the time the oolichan migrate from the ocean to the river to spawn. LNG Canada has also [provided \\$2.9 million](#) to the Conservation and Recovery Research on Oolichan in Haisla Territory Project.

Concerns over local air pollution were raised by some interview participants. Some argued for more local input in emissions control. Industry emission regulations are developed and enforced by the B.C. government, leaving the municipality with no direct influence over environmental policies, they said.

The frustration of local residents came to a boiling point in April 2013, when the provincial Ministry of the Environment [approved](#) an increase in maximum sulphur dioxide emissions from the Rio Tinto smelter. Several residents reported experiencing asthma symptoms, and some said they were [forced to relocate](#) due to the poor air quality. A Rio Tinto investigation found very low emission levels, in some cases even lower than when the old smelter was operating.

Community members [appealed](#) the government's decision and the dispute was eventually resolved [by mediation](#) in 2019. "One of the outcomes of the mediation was to form the [Kitimat Airshed Group](#) as a way to engage all parties on airshed matters in this area and to increase transparency of information," said Stannus, a member of the group. She said it provides community involvement in decisions impacting the airshed in the Kitimat-Terrace corridor.

Comprising representatives from Kitimat, Terrace, Rio Tinto, LNG Canada, the Haisla Nation, the Kitselas First Nation and various governments, the group oversees 12 [monitoring stations](#) that provide daily air quality data in Kitamaat Village, Kitimat, Terrace and Prince Rupert.



The natural environment is culturally significant to the First Nations in the region and is also a source of livelihood for many residents.

Photo by Spruce Tree Media.

Candice Wilson, of the Haisla Nation, said air quality is important to First Nations people for cultural and health reasons. “We have the book called *Salmonberry Blossoms in the New Year*, which was developed a few decades ago, that highlights all of our traditionally used plants,” she said. She keeps the book on hand when she speaks to representatives of local industry. “We would like to know if there are any impacts to the plants we use in this area from the emissions.”

“We have brought vegetation experts that come in to do assessments on the effects of emissions in the area to ensure our culture is not impacted. So far, we have not found any impacts to our vegetation,” Wilson added.

Local communities need the other levels of government to step up and protect their interests, said Stannus, explaining that the best approach is to “encourage putting policy in place for companies that engage in fossil fuel production — and that needs to come at the federal and provincial level.”

Need for clean electricity

Clean electricity is essential to support industrial growth in the region while also addressing concerns regarding climate change and air pollution.

The Rio Tinto smelter produces its own non-emitting hydroelectricity and sells the excess to BC Hydro, the provincial utility. However, the changing climate is altering conditions. In 2024, a drought affecting the [Nechako reservoir](#) led to insufficient power for the aluminum smelter to operate at full capacity.

About 98 per cent of B.C.'s electricity is [renewable](#), the majority of which is produced by hydroelectric power.

However, the B.C. grid is at [capacity](#), with growing demand for clean electricity. [B.C. imported electricity equivalent to 20 per cent](#) of its total use in 2023, a trend that is expected to continue. The situation is particularly critical in the northwest, where big projects like LNG Canada, as well as mines and a port expansion in Prince Rupert, are looking for additional clean power.

Michael Pucci, lands and economic development manager for the nearby City of Terrace, noted that the Terrace region is pursuing green energy projects, including renewable natural gas, hydrogen production and e-diesel. However, many clean energy initiatives have been delayed or shut down because of a lack of available power.

"The two facets of B.C. power are power generation and transmission, and B.C. is currently maxed out, with lines that are near capacity," Pucci explained. "You still need to build transmission capability for any power." A [new transmission](#) line is currently being built by BC Hydro to connect Glenannan to Terrace, which is expected to be completed in 2032. "We are behind the eightball in power generation in B.C.," said Pucci.

Clean electricity is essential to support industrial growth in the region while also addressing concerns regarding climate change and air pollution.

Photo by Spruce Tree Media.

A portrait of Alex Leiper, a man with a beard and short hair, wearing a black t-shirt. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is a light, neutral color.

Alex Leiper
Business
representative
and dispatcher for
UBC Millwright
Local 2736

Photo by Spruce
Tree Media.

Ron Burnett, of the Kitimat Economic Development Association, echoed these sentiments. “One of the biggest challenges is the lack of energy in one form or another. LNG Canada could be cleaner if it was powered by hydro power, but ... there is [not enough] power here to [do] it.”

LNG Canada runs a mix of energy-efficient natural gas turbines and renewable electricity from BC Hydro. Because of electricity constraints, the second phase of LNG Canada, when built, will operate on natural gas turbines, with plans to potentially switch to electric motors should power becomes available, according to a [news report](#).

Alex Leiper, a business representative and dispatcher for UBC Millwright Local 2736, who has worked on many hydro projects across the province, said “I don’t believe we’re in an area where BC Hydro would find it worthwhile to install power generation infrastructures like hydro dams,” because geographical features in other areas of the province might be better suited.

The Haisla Nation is part of the First Nations Climate Initiative, which advocates for government financial support for First Nations co-owned renewable energy projects in the region. Renewable energy projects such as wind and solar offer the potential to address clean power needs while also providing benefits for local First Nations communities. The federal government [announced \\$3.75 million](#) to support the initiative in February 2025.

Kitimat in a changing world

With a deepwater port providing relatively easy access to Asian markets, Kitimat is often at the centre of plans to diversify Canada’s exports. This has taken on renewed importance following the election of U.S. President Donald Trump, the [imposition of 25 per cent tariffs](#) on Canadian steel and aluminum, and the threat of additional tariffs on other Canadian goods.



In the rush to respond to shifting global trade and geopolitical circumstances, there is a risk that the delicate balance achieved in Kitimat could be undone.

Photo by Spruce Tree Media.

Several people outside the community have proposed reviving plans for an oil pipeline to Kitimat, either by resurrecting Enbridge's proposed Northern Gateway pipeline rejected in 2016 by the former Liberal government of Justin Trudeau, or by creating a [northern leg](#) of the TMX pipeline. In 2019, the federal government [passed legislation](#) banning large oil tankers on British Columbia's west coast, citing environmental concerns and opposition from First Nations. The devastating ecological consequences of the [1989 Exxon Valdez](#) oil-tanker spill off the coast of Alaska still serve as a stark reminder of the risks.

The B.C. government has also committed to [accelerating approvals and permits](#) for major projects including Cedar LNG, several wind energy projects, and the [North Coast Transmission Line](#), which runs from Prince George to Terrace. The projects will not have to undergo the provincial environmental assessment process, shaving years off project review. While some First Nations have expressed concerns about the fast-tracking process, the province said that it is seeking [a faster pathway](#) to a decision but will still allow First Nations to oppose projects.

In the rush to respond to shifting global trade and geopolitical circumstances, there is a risk that the delicate balance achieved in Kitimat could be undone.

The Haisla Nation, and many others in the region, would oppose any plans for an oil pipeline to Kitimat, said Candice Wilson. "We support LNG development because it helps to reduce global emissions and there is not a risk of an ocean spill like with oil. We would not support oil tankers in the Douglas Channel," she said.

Local climate action

Opportunities for environmental and climate action matter at the local level too.

In interviews, some community leaders said that little progress had been made on Kitimat's 2021 [Community Energy and Emissions Plan](#), which calls for a greenhouse-gas emissions target set at 20 per cent below 2007 levels by 2030 and 58 per cent by 2050.

In addition to the power constraints in B.C., there is a shortage of contractors who can provide energy-efficient upgrades, such as installing heat pumps. One problem is that many contractors are tied up with industry megaprojects. It is also difficult to find contractors with the necessary certifications, participants said.

"Victoria rolled out all of these local homeowner grants for heat pumps, and I fought for four years on council ... to do something to help local contractors to get the certifications they need," said Lani Gibson, a lawyer and a former town councillor. "There are so many people in Kitimat that want heat pumps, but you can't find a contractor."

The federal and provincial governments have good intentions, but in rural and northern communities, they "need to do more deep engagement to understand how to tailor the solutions to the community and then do capacity-building at the local scale, because they can't assume there is any capacity to roll these initiatives out," she explained.

Michael Pucci, of the City of Terrace, urged federal and provincial regulatory bodies to recognize clean technologies or products that have been certified and in use for decades in other countries. "There are dozens of models of hydrogen power plants in the United States" that meet the [American National Standards Institute's](#) certification standards, but only two of these have been certified by the [Canadian Standards Association](#), he said. "We can't legally use the ... ANSI-certified models here. That is a big challenge," he added.

Others said community leaders haven't given enough attention to how to communicate the benefits of local climate action. "I don't think we have heard enough about embedding climate change into more of our district policy," Stannus said.

Similarly, efforts to lower GHG emissions in the transport sector are hampered by power-supply limits. Paul LeBlanc, general manager of Transdev West's operations in the District of Kitimat, said there is a desire to use electric school buses in the area, but more charging infrastructure is needed. Currently, there are only [four charging stations](#) in Kitimat.

Until better infrastructure is available, LeBlanc said, "we switched to renewable diesel to lessen our carbon footprint." According to LeBlanc, Transdev, which has a large electric bus fleet across Canada, has contracts with LNG Canada and other local operations to transport between 25,000 and 65,000 workers each month from the Terrace airport to Kitimat.

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS

Skilled workforce

The District of Kitimat boasts a highly skilled labour force thanks to local industries, including chemical, mechanical and electrical engineers.

According to Statistics Canada census data, manufacturing and construction are the [top two sectors](#) of employment in Kitimat.

Labour and skills shortages are often a major challenge in the area, for both big industrial projects and small businesses. The workforce is also aging.

However, the shift from the construction phase of LNG Canada to the operations phase will mean transitioning from thousands of workers to a few hundred. If there is an extended delay before construction of LNG Canada's proposed Phase 2, there could be local tradespeople looking for work for several years.

In 2021, Rio Tinto [reduced production](#) because of a strike after negotiations with the union failed to reach a new collective agreement. Union concerns included the use of contract workers, changes to pension plans and workplace safety. A [deal](#) addressing these

Workers at LNG Canada. The District of Kitimat boasts a highly skilled labour force thanks to local industries.

Photo courtesy of LNG Canada.



concerns was reached after a two-month strike. The collective agreement is up for negotiation again in July 2025.

The potential increase in available skilled construction labour could be an opportunity to ramp up local projects. The municipality of Kitimat has a [five-year plan](#) aimed at attracting and retaining skilled workers. New housing and promoting the growth of small businesses are key elements. It could also be an opportunity to improve the energy efficiency of local buildings and consider options for lower-carbon energy sources. One local suggested that waste heat from smelter operations could be a source of energy for municipal buildings, drawing on [district energy models](#) that are common in Europe but also growing in popularity in Canada.

Skilled workers will be key to any future development plans. LNG Canada said that finding and keeping the workers it needs is challenging. Workers moving from elsewhere are concerned about the availability and quality of housing, health care, education and child care options. Many are also looking for job opportunities for a spouse.

LNG Canada has made several investments in local services and amenities totalling more than \$13 million, according to the company, including \$1.25 million for a CT scanner for the local hospital and \$1.2 million for a high-capacity snowblower for the airport.

Developing skills in local populations is another way to address skills shortages. LNG Canada says it has provided more than \$10 million in funding for several [workforce development initiatives](#), including a power engineering training program developed in collaboration with Coast Mountain College and the British Columbia Institute of Technology. The company also provided more than \$2 million to the Trades Training Fund administered by the B.C. Construction Association, which goes toward building awareness about the trades available in LNG and other industries.

Rio Tinto partnered with the Haisla Nation to buy and operate the [Kitamaat Valley Education Society](#), which provides training and certifications for skilled labour.

Laurel D'Andrea, of the Kitimat Chamber of Commerce, said northern communities need government help to overcome local challenges such as the lack of regional transportation, and to aid small and medium-sized businesses in attracting workers.

Industrial partners and entrepreneurs

Economic growth in the area has been fuelled by major players like LNG Canada and Rio Tinto, which have contributed to a strong tax base and well-paid employment opportunities. Despite challenges tied to industrial dependence, many community leaders see industry as a key driver of the low-carbon transformation.

“The community should take advantage of the two major partners in town, Rio Tinto and LNG Canada. They have directives for low-carbon footprints,” said Paul LeBlanc of Transdev. “With the assistance of those two big industries and First Nations in the area, if we all came together, we can make Kitimat a low-carbon area.”

“The community should take advantage of the two major partners in town, Rio Tinto and LNG Canada. They have directives for low-carbon footprints. With the assistance of those two big industries and First Nations in the area, if we all came together, we can make Kitimat a low-carbon area.”



PAUL LEBLANC, GENERAL MANAGER OF TRANSDEV WEST'S OPERATIONS

“Hopefully, our big industries can provide leadership on this,” Stannus added. “They are studying this. Part of LNG Canada’s workforce is dedicated to carbon reductions. Once we start talking more about the role of climate change, and the realities we are already seeing, people will be on board.”

Efforts to reduce industrial emissions could lead to spinoffs for the local community, including clean energy development, opportunities for technology entrepreneurs and charging infrastructure. There is also potential for company efforts to be more closely interconnected with regional efforts to reduce emissions and develop new low-carbon businesses.

For example, the City of Terrace, a key supply depot for the region, has been pursuing renewable energy sources as a part of its economic development strategy. Michael Pucci said there is strong local interest in renewable fuels. “Terrace businesses are strongly looking at the transition fuel window, specifically e-diesel,” a synthetic fuel produced from renewable electricity, he said. “The belief is — we are hearing this often enough — that a wholesale switch of types of fuel, for instance converting from diesel to hydrogen or something similar, is not likely. The belief is there is too much risk in doing that. Anyone wanting to shift away from fossil fuels will choose an intermediary fuel, like e-diesel or sustainable aviation fuel. So, that is our next phase” in seeking economic opportunities in the region, he said.

Industry is hesitant about transitioning to alternative fuels because they are newer and less familiar than fossil fuels, he explained. “Second to that is the risk of availability of the product. What we have heard is not that we don’t want to transition. It is how do we de-risk the transition, so that is where the focus on intermediary fuel conversion comes from.”

There are also plans to explore the potential of hydrogen. In August 2024, the sustainable-energy company [Source3 Energy](#) announced a project to build the Skeena Clean Hydrogen Hub in Terrace, a joint venture with the City of Terrace and the Kitselas Nation. The facility is meant to produce up to [50,000 tonnes of hydrogen](#) using renewable energy and carbon capture technology to reduce emissions.

And the province is funding research in the area on hydrogen- and electric-powered vehicles through its Heavy-Duty Low and Zero Emissions Vehicles Trucking [project](#). Launched in June 2024, the project aims to collect data on three types of low- and zero-emission heavy-duty vehicles: two hydrogen-powered, one battery electric and one hydrogen-diesel co-combustion. Led by Innovate B.C. under the [Integrated Marketplace](#) program and based in Prince Rupert, the project will assess vehicle range, reliability and optimal uses.

Meanwhile, 11 First Nations in northwest B.C., including the Haisla Nation, have launched [K'uul Power](#), an organization focused on developing First-Nations-owned renewable energy transmission and generation infrastructure.

“The First Nations term *k'uul* means coming together as one, and that is exactly what First Nations leaders in the Northwest are doing,” Ts'il Kaz Koh Chief [Wesley Sam](#), who is also chair of K'uul Power's board, said at a news conference.

In the coming years, K'uul Power, in partnership with BC Hydro and the provincial government, will work to secure funding for transmission assets that support CleanBC initiatives.

COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

Interview participants said communities in this region are close-knit, characterized by strong personal connections and a collective willingness to come together in times of need.

While there have been challenges in the past, many joint economic development initiatives among the Haisla Nation, the District of Kitimat and industry have emerged in recent years.

“When you look at the collaborations around LNG, it does show that if there is buy-in on a project, that yes, we can make things happen here,” said Gibson, citing this spirit of collaboration as one of the key strengths of the community.

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LANI GIBSON, LAWYER AND FORMER TOWN COUNCILLOR

Residents of Kitimat and Kitamaat Village face the challenge of transitioning to a low-carbon economy while safeguarding their livelihoods. To overcome this challenge, some community leaders have called for sustained federal and provincial support to ensure residents are meaningfully included in the transition.

“Election-cycle thinking does not work here,” said Gibson, the former councillor. Support for the energy transformation requires at minimum a 10-year plan, she added, and upper-level governments must support local governments with long-term programs that provide capacity-building, facilitation and compensation. “We will just be the victims of boom-bust industrial development cycles if upper-level governments cannot help provide solutions that will work and play a role in facilitation of the solution long-term.”

She emphasized the importance of deep engagement with local communities, facilitated by experts who can provide space for dialogue. This engagement would help the community overcome any barriers related to capacity and mindset.

“I have seen all the funding sources from entities such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. The federal and provincial levels are trying to do things, but they just don’t understand we don’t have the capacity to start the projects and do it on our own,” she added.

“I live in a place where you will never get traction here if you don’t get jobs. Progressives in our urban centres have no idea [of] the mentality here that people just want their children to live and have jobs here so that they can stay in the community and not have to move away for work. No one at a federal or provincial level is doing anything that I saw to offer a transition job to a community like ours,” she said.

Germuth, the mayor, sees LNG development, and the jobs it offers, as a pragmatic step in the energy transition.

“It would be great if all global energy could be produced by renewables, but the reality is that we are decades away from that,” he said. “There is also the fact of the amount of fossil fuels needed to mine, refine and produce the wind turbines, solar panels and EV batteries to replace non-renewables. The reality is that all energy sources have impacts, be that environmental or social. Nothing comes for free,” he said.

Frustrations in the community run deep over discussions about a fossil-fuel phaseout and its impacts. Ron Burnett put it this way: “I think the fossil-fuel phaseout is a joke from a livability standpoint. Everything that we use comes from petrochemicals,” from plastics to textiles, he said. “We are a resource economy. We are a huge country with huge resources, and we will have to continue to develop those. We will never become a Silicon Valley. Somehow, we have to come to grips with developing our resources responsibly and quickly.”

Gibson and others in the community want Kitimat to be recognized as more than an industrial centre. “Kitimat is so reliant on industry because people continually define us that way. There is a whole section of the community that is screaming, ‘We are more. We



The LNG Canada and Cedar LNG projects and the modernization of Rio Tinto's aluminum smelter are ushering in an era of renewed economic opportunity.

Photo by Spruce Tree Media.

choose to be here because of the gem of this ecosystem. We are in this temperate rain-forest, and we want to be here because of that.”

Several participants said provincial and federal government efforts for workforce and energy transition were not reaching their community. As LeBlanc put it, “government isn’t focusing on that too much here because we are a smaller community.” Progress on the low-carbon transition was seen as primarily driven by industry and the regulations it faces.

Others said that, while the federal and provincial governments advocate for a big shift, the conversation needs to focus on how to de-risk the transition to ensure its success. “It is not a ‘build it and they will come’ situation,” said Pucci. “Transition is a huge challenge,” he added. “No one is saying no, [but] it is that risk-to-reward conversation ... As of today, there are significant challenges to overcome, whether it is access to charging stations, access to fuel or the risk of utilizing a new technology.”

WHAT’S NEEDED

The LNG Canada and Cedar LNG projects and the modernization of Rio Tinto’s aluminum smelter are ushering in an era of renewed economic opportunity for Kitimat and the Haisla people. Excluded from past industrial development efforts, the Haisla have been at the centre of consultations with industry in recent times and the First Nation will see significant financial benefits as the majority owner of the Cedar LNG project.

But there are challenges too. Some residents expressed concern about whether the new industrial activity deepens Kitimat’s ties to the same boom-and-bust cycles it has experienced in the past and makes the town’s economy dependent on a fossil fuel that is destined to be phased out. Major shifts in the global trade and geopolitical landscape also mean that Kitimat could be targeted for [new developments to export goods](#) to non-U.S. markets, creating the potential for new sources of conflict and environmental risk.

Key themes that emerged from our conversations with community leaders included a perceived disconnect between local realities and higher-level policy decisions, insufficient support for meaningful change and a lack of community involvement in discussions about economic transformation.

The transformation to a low-carbon economy in this northern region is marked by a tension between ambition and practicality, with community members expressing both support for and skepticism about the process.

Across all participants, the need to be included in the transformation and heard by government was a unifying theme, as it has been in other communities we have visited and profiled. A one-size-fits-all approach will not work; economic transformation initiatives must be tailored to local needs.

The workloads of the municipality and the Haisla Nation exceed their capacity to manage the challenges of the transition. Government assistance is required on many levels but, most importantly, it must be designed to address the unique challenges of the region.

Despite the challenges, organizations are laying the groundwork for an economic transformation in this remote region. Kitimat and the Haisla community are leveraging their strength in collaboration, with pioneering efforts already setting the stage for progress.

Here are some issues that residents and community leaders say must be addressed for economic transformation initiatives to succeed:

- Governments and industry must provide early and deep engagement with Indigenous communities on all major projects, drawing lessons from the success of the Haisla Nation
- Communities, governments and industry must work collaboratively to balance economic prosperity with ecosystem protection and efforts to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions
- Industry should collaborate with local communities on reducing greenhouse-gas emissions, to identify shared opportunities and leverage local entrepreneurs
- Provincial and federal governments should work with industry, First Nations and local governments to increase the availability of clean and reliable electricity generation in the region
- Upper levels of government must provide support for small communities that lack capacity to manage major energy and workforce transformations, focusing on collaborative long-term planning that addresses challenges as well as opportunities
- All levels of government should work with large and small businesses to develop and implement plans to attract and retain skilled workers and young people in the community

A NOTE ABOUT THE PROFILE

The Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) has developed a methodology for measuring community susceptibility to workforce disruption as global efforts to address climate change expand. Using three indicators, the methodology scores and ranks census divisions across the country. Based on their ranking, each census division is assigned to one of six groups, ranging from “not susceptible” to “most susceptible.”

The three indicators include Facility Susceptibility (emissions from large facilities relative to the size of the community), Intensity Susceptibility (proportion of employment in emissions-intensive sectors), and Market Susceptibility (proportion of employment in globally traded sectors expected to undergo market transformations).

The analysis is available in an interactive map, developed in collaboration with the Community Data Program of the Canadian Community Economic Development Network, on the IRPP’s website (<https://irpp.org/map-of-community-susceptibility/>). A detailed description of the methodology used is also available on the website.

To complement the mapping exercise, the IRPP selected 10 communities across the country to profile through a series of interviews with people who live and work in the community. Most of the communities selected are located within the most susceptible census divisions, but others were chosen because of anticipated developments or previous experiences. The profiles are meant to cover a diversity of regions of the country and types of economic activity. These snapshots are meant to provide additional insight into the challenges and opportunities the communities face and to reflect the perspectives of residents.

Kitimat and Kitamaat Village in British Columbia is one of the areas selected. While the region is not currently identified as susceptible, the assessment will change once the new LNG Canada and Cedar LNG facilities are operational and their greenhouse-gas emissions are captured in the data. The community was chosen because of the emergence of the new liquefied natural gas industry, and the opportunities and challenges it has brought to the District of Kitimat and the Haisla Nation.

The Energy Mix conducted interviews with community members in Kitimat and Kitamaat Village. The IRPP’s vice-president of research, Rachel Samson, also visited to meet with community and Haisla Nation leaders.

Below, we present a breakdown of the susceptibility analysis for Kitimat, B.C. Additional information not used in the analysis, such as population change, the unemployment rate and demographic characteristics of workers, is derived from the 2021 census. The number of facilities comes from Statistics Canada’s Business Register from June 2020.

If you have questions about the profile or the analysis, please contact communitytransformations@irpp.org.

Census Division

Kitimat-Stikine, British Columbia



Top Score

Less susceptible



Intensity Susceptibility

Less (above average but below 10 per cent)



Facility Susceptibility

Less (above average but below 10 per cent)



Market Susceptibility

Least (below the average)

2021 Census



37,790

Population

1.1%

change since 2016

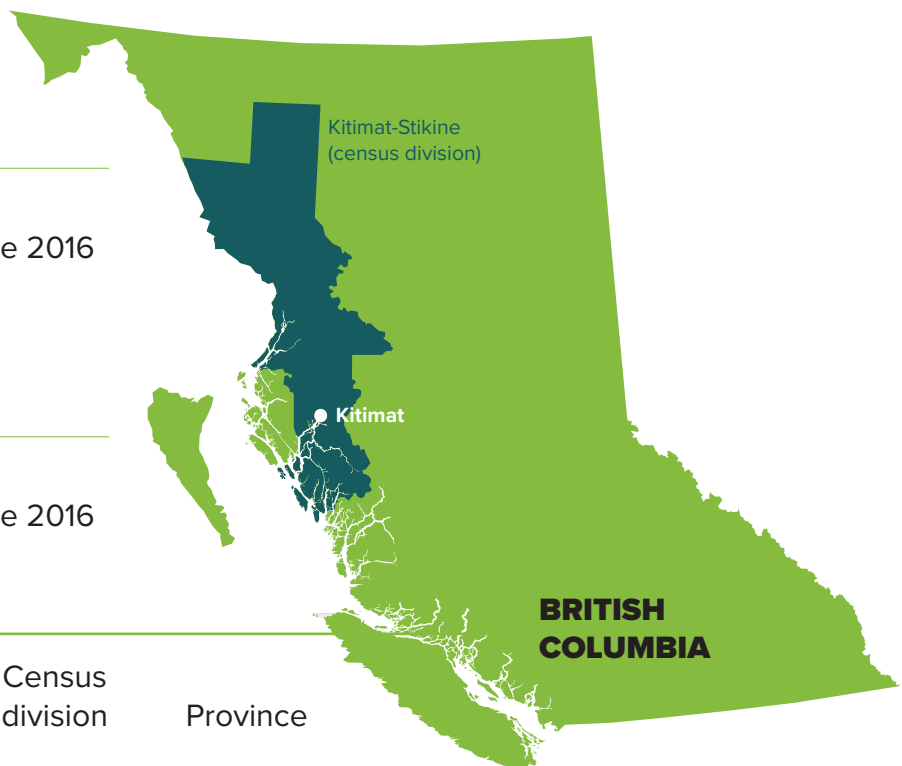


18,835

Workforce

-2.6%

change since 2016



Rate

Unemployment

Census
division

10.3%

Province

8.4%

Participation

61.8%

63.3%

All industries

# of workers	Median income	Over 45 years old	No post-secondary education	# of facilities with workers	# of large facilities (> 200 workers)
18,835	\$54,400	45%	46%	1,337	9

Susceptible sectors

# of workers	Median income	Over 45 years old	No post-secondary education	# of facilities with workers	# of large facilities (> 200 workers)
1,740 (9.2%)	---	51%	52%	81	1

Sector #1 | Alumina and aluminum production and processing

# of workers	Median income	Over 45 years old	No post-secondary education	# of facilities with workers	# of large facilities (> 200 workers)
925 (4.9%)	\$124,000	51%	41%	1	1

Sector #2 | Forestry and logging

# of workers	Median income	Over 45 years old	No post-secondary education	# of facilities with workers	# of large facilities (> 200 workers)
290 (1.5%)	\$67,500	53%	71%	51	0

Sector #3 | Metal ore mining

# of workers	Median income	Over 45 years old	No post-secondary education	# of facilities with workers	# of large facilities (> 200 workers)
265 (1.4%)	\$79,000	40%	57%	0	0

Sector #4 | Truck transportation

# of workers	Median income	Over 45 years old	No post-secondary education	# of facilities with workers	# of large facilities (> 200 workers)
260 (1.4%)	\$69,000	60%	65%	29	0

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The cover illustration is by Paul Windsor, a Haisla/Heiltsuk artist, who was born and raised in Kitimat, and is currently working and residing in Vancouver and Coast Salish Peoples' Traditional Areas. He is a widely publicized artist, networked with Native Northwest Publications and a productive muralist and private artist with several art originals going at one time. He was born of ancestral lineage of the Blackfish Clan of the Haisla by his mother Miriam Windsor. Find him on Instagram @paulwindsornwcoast.

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