

Located between Lytton and Boston Bar in British Columbia's Fraser Canyon, the Kanaka Bar Indian Band is a rural community within the *Nlaka'pamux* Nation with a history going back more than 8,000 years. Residents of Kanaka Bar are also known as "The Crossing Place" people (*T'eqt'aqtnmux*). This is a story of their values, vision, proactive thinking and perseverance.

Climate Resilience is Not Optional

On a global scale, remote communities and Indigenous populations are among the most vulnerable to disasters arising from extreme weather events caused by climate change. For Chief Patrick and his family, climate change doesn't get more real than the recent wildfire that wiped out the village of Lytton displacing 1,200 people – all within 20 minutes.



Caption: Chief Patrick's youngest daughter with two of his grandchildren at their home in Lytton, BC

It's yet another wake-up call urging humanity that climate adaptation is not a "concept" reserved for scientists, idealists, and activists. Individual and collective action is needed now.

Like most Canadians, Kanaka Bar has witnessed firsthand growing precipitation irregularities, increased droughts, unusual heat levels and wind events, resulting in increased wildfire threats and other ongoing ecosystem shifts including the loss of salmon and disappearing vegetation. In combatting wildfire threats, Kanaka Bar has worked towards reducing risk and potential damage by wildfires via pruning, thinning, and burning proximal watersheds and clearing the land around homes of cedar hedges, tall grass and removing outdoor combustibles near buildings. Kanaka Bar is considered a leader in its FireSmart initiatives.

A 2004 partnership with Innergex resulted in a 2014 operating Kwoiek Creek power project located on the west side of the Fraser River (generating enough electricity to fuel 22,000 homes annually). The cost of the project was in excess of 180 million and Kanaka Bar takes the profits from this project and puts them back into the region to strengthen community resiliency, including water security, housing, food security and small-scale renewables (solar and wind).



Caption: Kwoiek Creek Hydro Project - ground breaking Dec 15, 2011

Just completed is a new community resiliency centre that has battery storage (can run a minimum of 36 hours in the event hydro grid goes down). A new housing initiative set to break ground is “The Crossing Place” – a multi-phase housing complex that includes another resiliency centre and 24 affordable housing units that’s inclusive (for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people). While grid connected, all these new facilities will be powered by hybrid renewable energy sources and backup batteries.



Caption: Upper Kanaka Resiliency Centre

In 2015, Kanaka Bar started planning its priorities around the vision to maintain a self-sufficient, sustainable, and vibrant community not just for today – but for the environment and economy of tomorrow. In keeping with that vision, a written climate adaptation strategy was developed, focusing on 6 areas of priority: water resources, forest fires, traditional foods, access roads, supporting self-sufficiency and youth, and community engagement and education.

On June 30th, 2021, Chief Patrick Michell and his family lost their home in Lytton along with their belongings. While Kanaka Bar, 14 kilometres south of Lytton, was safe from the fires, several other Kanaka Bar members also lost everything in the fire, and they all remain evacuees to this day. In his typical style, in less than a week, Chief Patrick pulled together the right people over a zoom meeting to plan how Kanaka Bar can help the evacuees with short and medium-term housing needs and set up temporary businesses and essential services – all at Kanaka. True resilience starts with the will and tenacity to act, transform, collaborate, and help one another live and thrive.

Indigenous Sovereignty and Partnerships

Unity is the key to overcoming challenges. It's important to understand what's meant by "Indigenous Sovereignty" and not mistaken it for isolating oneself. Chief Patrick's leadership puts relationships at the top. Commenting on the temporary housing project initiated at Kanaka to help Lytton evacuees, Chief Patrick said "Kanaka is advancing these projects. The order for the buildings has been issued. The machinery is showing up on Monday. But Kanaka Bar is not doing this alone. We need the Village of Lytton. We need Siska. We need Skuppah. We need Boothroyd, Boston Bar and Spuzzum. We're the Fraser Canyon, and together we can do something." The Lytton rebuild efforts need support from all levels of the government.



Caption: Chief Patrick with David Suzuki

The necessity to work together is critical for the recovery and well-being of the Lytton evacuees as well as for BC and Canada's ability to transition to the environment of tomorrow.

Investing in Sustainable Excellence

Chief Patrick is known for his trademark-like sayings that embody his own beliefs and *T'eqt'aqtnmux* traditional values that have existed for a long time: "take what you need, no more"; "If you take it in, take it out"; "When you are done, clean up after yourself"; "what we do to the Land, we do to ourselves"; "First comes the awareness, then comes the choice". If you look at these statements together, it's easy to see that traditional values and codes of conduct have been upheld at the highest level in Kanaka Bar. They are the foundation on which this community is built.



Caption: Kanaka Youth Engaging in Heritage Activities



Caption: Chief Patrick Michell with Kanaka Bar "indigenous Business of the year Award" in 2018

As a recipient of the 2019 MNP-AFOA *Canada Indigenous Community Excellence Award*, Kanaka Bar believes that a successful community is a strong community with a sustainable future for its descendants. To Chief Patrick, wealth is not defined by money, but by quality of life for children and grandchildren.

“Sometimes achieving goals comes at the expense of two things: profit and money in the bank. Being proactive means investing your money today so you can have a life tomorrow” says Chief Patrick.

Kanaka Bar’s approach to investment is guided by a seemingly obvious strategy that boils down to four things: air, water, food and shelter certainty with

resilient supporting energy, communication, and transportation systems. However, actualizing a vision takes work, resources, time, and the right people. Over the years, Kanaka Bar has invested in strategic planning at different junctions of its quest for community resilience. In 2020, the band started working on an inaugural Community Resilience Plan (CRP 2021). First of its kind among Indigenous communities, the CRP is the product of natural evolution from the previous Land Use Plan and Community Economic Development Plan. It tackles priority areas through the lens of climate resilience. This medium-term strategic plan is a blueprint to stay focused and on track with achieving the collective vision. It was done in the familiar “made for Kanaka, by Kanaka, for Kanaka” fashion – the result of 12 community engagement sessions accurately capturing people’s voices. Honoring transparency and open communication, a StoryMap is available online for community members and Canadians to view and track progress against the implementation plan.



Caption: Community Resilience Plan Tree

The process of making the CRP showcased an important Kanaka Bar value: active community engagement, giving the people a voice, and conducting all businesses with transparency around financials, plans and communication.



Caption: Chief Patrick with his youngest grandchild

When asked what his secret is, Chief Patrick said it's the combination of traditional knowledge, science and technology. Kanaka Bar remembers what happened "yesterday" but to have a plan for tomorrow – one needs site specific data. This commitment is reflected in the community's weather monitoring stations as well as watershed monitoring activities. To the many praises and accolades he's received, he insists that none of what he does is innovative, ground-breaking, or different and he is merely doing things that need to be done for his children, grandchildren and the Crossing Place people.

To learn more about various projects Kanaka Bar is engaged in, and to reference replicable models, planning tools and initiatives please visit the Kanaka Bar Indian Band website

www.kanakabarband.ca