



## The Spirit of Kiid K'yaas

Haida Gwaii is a small group of islands that lie about 100 miles off the Northwest coast of British Columbia, Canada. Covered in lush temperate rainforest, these islands provide habitat for a broad range of unique plant, animal, fish and bird species. For at least 10,000 years, Haida Gwaii has also been home to the Haida First Nation, one of the most powerful and enduring Pacific Northwest Native tribes, famous for their warrior culture, their myths, and their totemic art forms.

One of the most enduring mystical stories derived from Haida folklore is that of Kiid K'yaas, or "Old Tree". Haida legend tells the story of a young man who was disrespectful of Nature's ways. Soon after, his village was destroyed by a snowstorm. Only a boy and his grandfather were able to flee the village. Despite warnings not to look back, the boy disobeyed and instantly his arms were turned into branches and his legs became roots, and he turned into a magnificent Golden Spruce tree. This tree became sacred to the Haida people.

Although genetically a Sitka Spruce, this tree's unique ability to survive over 300 years has defied all conventional scientific explanation. Lacking carotenoid, a sort of arboreal sunscreen that protects the tree from excessive sunlight, the Golden Spruce should have withered and died. Instead, it flourished in its place on the bank of the Yakoun River, and its inability to photosynthesize sunlight gave its needles a magnificent golden hue.

All this came to an end on January 24, 1997 when an unemployed forester named Thomas Grant Hadwin cut the tree down and sent a Unibomber-type manifesto to the Haida First Nation, environmentalists and several newspapers. Hadwin was a vocal critic of logging industry practices in British Columbia. He was particularly angered by what he perceived to be MacMillan Bloedel's hypocrisy of clear-cutting hundreds of thousands of trees, while at the same time professing to be good corporate citizens by cordoning off a small segment of rainforest around the Golden Spruce in order to build a proverbial shrine around this one particular tree.

His letter proclaimed that "I didn't enjoy butchering this magnificent old plant, but you apparently needed a wake-up call that even a university-trained professional should be able to understand." Hadwin was arrested and charged, but he mysteriously disappeared before ever coming to trial.

The Haida First Nation was devastated at the loss of Kiid K'yaas, because they considered themselves responsible for its stewardship and protection. Biologists were rushed to the site, and using special cuttings taken from the living root of this sacred tree a new seedling was nurtured to life.

The Haida held a special Aboriginal Day ceremony on June 21, 2001. During this event, prayers and gifts of sacrifice were offered and the now 4-year-old seedling was planted alongside the stump where it had originally fallen.

This effort has given the Haida tremendous hope for the future, because their prophecies proclaim that if Kiid K'yaas is ever allowed to die, the Earth is soon to follow.

As an act of homage to this sacred tree, Canadian artist Donna Bisschop has painted a special artwork entitled *The Spirit of Kiid K'yaas*. The original of this artwork has been donated to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) so that it can be offered to the Haida First Nation as a gift and as a gesture of hope that the Spirit of this magnificent tree continues to endure.

The inspiration for this work lies in its message, which is to remind us of our unique connectedness to all living things, and of the ongoing human responsibility to be stewards of this planet.



## Forest Stewardship Council Canada

The FSC is an international non-profit organization founded in 1993 to support environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests. It supports the development of national and regional standards to be used to evaluate whether a forest is being well-managed.

It is an association of members consisting of a diverse group of representatives from environmental and social organizations, forest and product industries, Indigenous People's organizations, community forestry groups and certification bodies from around the world. Membership is open to all who are involved in forestry or forest products and share its aims and objectives.

FSC Canada is a working Group of FSC. It is governed by an elected Board which consists of people from industry, environmental, social and labour groups, Indigenous People's representatives and others.

### What is Forest Certification

People around the world want to be assured that the products they buy are not harming the environment. This is particularly true for forest products. Forest certification is one way that forest companies can prove to people that the way they harvest does not damage the health of the forest or the stability and livelihoods of local communities.

Forest certification is voluntary — no one forces a company to become certified — and it is done by an independent organization. A forest company is certified once it can show that its practices meet a high standard for environmental protection, recognition of Indigenous Peoples and treaty rights, and social responsibility.

Once certified, a company can then put a logo or a label on its forest products such as lumber, flooring, paper or even maple syrup. By buying forest products with a certified label, consumers can support good forest stewardship practices. An independent certification label helps concerned consumers and responsible forest managers buy and sell wood products that come from well-managed forests.

### Indigenous Peoples Involvement

Indigenous Peoples rely on Canada's forests for their livelihood, culture and spirituality. It is crucial that these forests continue to support Indigenous Peoples' ways of life.

In recognition of the importance of forests to Indigenous Peoples, the Forest Stewardship Council adopted Principle 3 and its four criteria that recognize Indigenous People rights to lands and resources. Any forest company wanting to get FSC certified must demonstrate that its forest practices meet or exceed these criteria. For more information on these criteria as well as FSC ongoing happenings, visit [www.fsccanada.org](http://www.fsccanada.org).

### Contact Information

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