

## **Hlgu Isgwit Hot Springs are Open for Business**

The dramatic landscape blended with rich Indigenous culture in the traditional territory of the Nisga'a Nation in Northern B.C., offers tourists a chance to explore many unique features, including the Hlgu Isgwit Hot Springs. The Hlgu Isgwit Hot Springs have been used for thousands of years for ceremonial, medicinal and spiritual purposes.

The growing awareness and the benefits of natural mineral hot springs have given the site rise in popularity due to its natural beauty, ease of access and location in the remarkable Nass Valley. The Nisga'a Lisims Government recognized that the increase in popularity is a tremendous economic opportunity and developed the Nisga'a Auto Tour. This tour guides visitors through 18 stops of interest throughout the region, with local information and history at each stop; the Hlgu Isgwit Hot Springs is stop number 14 on the self-guided tour.

Since the introduction of the Auto Tour, the hot springs have seen visitors increase from 1,500 per year in 2015 to 4,000 in 2017. This increase was putting pressure on the fragile infrastructure at the hot spring, which led to the decision to hire Mike Sato, a renowned expert in hot springs design, to help minimize the impact on the environment and maximize the visitor experience.

Sato found inspiration for the design of the hot springs from the Nisga'a peoples. He incorporated many elements with Cedar — often used in Nisga'a regalia, masks, implements and canoes — the traditional and spiritual connection to cedar is essential to the feeling of ownership to the site by the Nisga'a peoples. Word of the hot springs site improvements spread and by late 2017 visitor numbers had doubled from the same period the year before.

The hot springs have become a notable addition to the economic offerings during the tourist season, bringing more opportunity for the Nisga'a people to develop entrepreneurial-based businesses. Food and drink services, arts and craft stalls and new cultural tour products will be supported through the Nisga'a Lisims Government Business Incubator Program.

The Nisga'a Lisims Government actively supports and facilitates new initiatives to improve the Nass Valley, one of which is the Business Incubator Program. This program offers grant assistance for new Nisga'a start-up businesses and connects entrepreneurs to coaching, planning and business resource tools to start their new business. Membership to the Business Incubator Program is free for all Nisga'a citizens.

The Nisga'a Lisims Government is one of four winners of the Small Business BC, 2017 Open for Business Awards. The Open for Business Awards celebrate communities that are taking essential steps to create a business-friendly environment, inspiring other communities and to make it easier for small businesses to do business in their communities.