

# BACKCOUNTRY MANAGEMENT APPROACH IN GWAII HAANAS NATIONAL PARK RESERVE AND HAIDA HERITAGE SITE

*Anna Gajda*

*Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site, P.O. Box 37,  
Queen Charlotte BC V0T 1S0*

## **SUMMARY**

Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site (hereafter referred to as Gwaii Haanas) has developed a proactive visitor management program to protect ecological and cultural heritage and provide a quality wilderness experience. This program was developed by taking actions to control use until impacts could be evaluated, and then establishing a rigorous monitoring program to gain baseline measurements of impacts and measure changes in impacts over time. The Visitor Experience and Resource Protection model was used as a guide. This paper discusses (1) the initial management actions, (2) development of a formal visitor management program through the backcountry management plan, (3) a review of indicators that were used to measure the effectiveness of the plan's implementation, and (4) changes to the plan resulting from the review.

## **1. GWAII HAANAS IN THE CONTEXT OF HAIDA GWAII**

Gwaii Haanas is located within the archipelago of Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte Islands, which are found between 50–130 km off the coast of British Columbia (Figure 1). Gwaii Haanas is located in the southern portion of the archipelago, and is accessible only by water or by air; there are no roads.

There are many factors that have moulded the place we now call Gwaii Haanas. The most fundamental of those factors is the ecology of the archipelago of Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte Islands.

### **1.1 Ecological Context**

Haida Gwaii is a rainforest environment with strong maritime influences. Scientific research is verifying traditional knowledge about the inextricable links between the terrestrial and marine ecosystems on the Islands. For example there are strong connections between salmon runs, bear predation, and riparian tree growth. The ocean's richness has spawned an equally rich human culture of the Haida, whose history on the Islands reaches back at least 10,000 years.

More recent human activities have had a profound effect on the ecology of the islands. Extirpation of the sea otter has resulted in a massive increase in urchin populations, which in turn have significantly decreased kelp forests. The actual effect that the loss of kelp has on the rest of the marine and terrestrial ecosystems is unknown. However, it is thought to be very significant due to the importance of kelp forests as habitat for many marine species. Development of a number of fisheries has further altered marine ecosystems. Concurrently, a timber extraction industry has altered forest ecosystems, though no one truly understands the extent of these changes either. The introduction – both intentional and accidental – of foreign species such as raccoons, rats and deer, has in turn resulted in significant declines in seabird and songbird populations, understory diversity, and cedar regeneration, and probably many more as-yet unknown consequences.

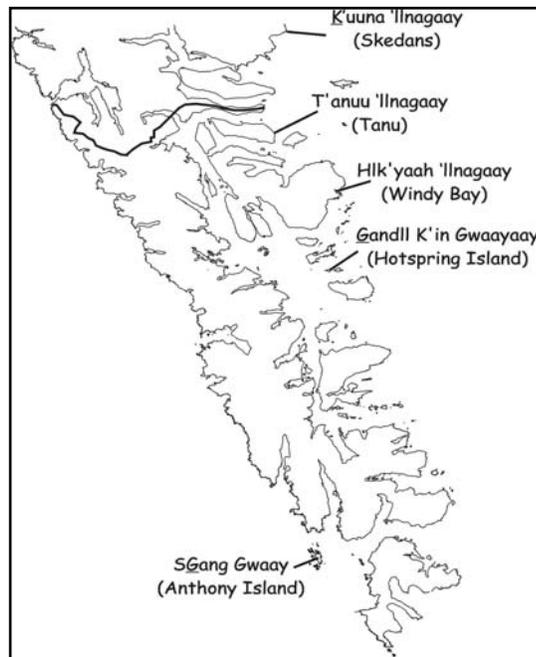


*Figure 1: Gwaii Haanas is located within the archipelago of Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte Islands, off the coast of British Columbia.*

## **1.2 Cultural Context**

As mentioned above, the Haida culture is a rich one, doubtless due to the abundance of raw materials and food that, in turn, allowed time for the development of their unique artistic interpretation of the world. Traditional food gathering, weaving, and carving continue to be critical to the Haida, and the negative impacts from industrial activities on this way of life has resulted in a strong political determination to regain some level of control over all activities that occur on the Islands.

The *Gwaii Haanas Agreement*, which was signed by the Government of Canada and the Council of the Haida Nation in 1993, allows for the continuation of traditional Haida activities in Gwaii Haanas. The continuity of Haida culture is evident in the Haida Gwaii Watchmen Program. The program, which predates the establishment of Gwaii Haanas, began in 1981 when volunteers went down to some of the old village sites to protect them from “pot hunting” and other inappropriate activities; Figure 2 shows the location of the five Haida Gwaii Watchmen sites managed through the Gwaii Haanas Archipelago Management Board. Since then, the Haida Gwaii Watchmen Program has evolved into one where young people can work side by side with elders to learn food gathering, weaving, language and interpersonal skills while providing visitors with an opportunity to understand the Haida culture in the 21st century. A Haida cultural camp was established in Gwaii Haanas several years ago, with the intent of providing young Haida and non-Haida with the opportunity to experience a lifestyle focussing on traditional Haida values.



*Figure 2: Location of the Haida Gwaii Watchmen sites. Although T'anuu 'Inagaay is excluded from Gwaii Haanas, as an Indian Reserve, and K'uuna 'Inagaay is located north of the Gwaii Haanas boundary, both are National Historic Sites and are part of the Haida Gwaii Watchmen Program.*

### 1.3 Social Context

The social make-up of the Islands population seems simple at the surface: Haida and other islanders. However, one does not have to delve too deeply into this issue to learn that the social web of life is much more complicated. Within the Haida community is the clan system, which delineates the different families as well as their traditional territories. The attempted assimilation of Haida people into the “Canadian cultural norm” was done by moving Haida from many villages throughout the islands to two – Skidegate and Old Massett. The development of residential schools, where Haida children were taken to further speed assimilation, added to the separation between a people and their culture. The negative social impacts of this approach go far beyond the scope of this paper, but suffice it to say that they have – and continue to be – very deep. Fortunately, there is a strong movement to heal the wounds and strengthen the cultural connections while adapting to an ever-changing world.

On the non-Haida side of the equation, there are small business operators, farmers, artists, government workers, loggers, fishers, and “hippies” living in 5 communities with varying mixes of these groups of people. There are also groups of people living in more unstructured assemblages on both the north end of Graham Island, and on an exclusion area in southern Gwaii Haanas.

Haida – non-Haida relations vary from community to community, but intermarriages, along with the Haida’s generous sharing of their culture with others on the Islands, makes the relationship amiable. Over the last few years, however, the issue of land ownership has been taken to a new level, the result of which is a dramatically shifting political landscape.

#### **1.4 Political Context**

The politics of the Islands could be mistakenly described as “small p”, but the issue of land ownership has capitalized, bolded, italicized, and underscored that “P”. Last year, the Council of the Haida Nation initiated court action to resolve the issue of ownership of the Islands and the waters surrounding them. Islanders live and work in an atmosphere of international negotiations, and at Gwaii Haanas, staff have become accustomed to working in this environment. The Haida demanded an equal say in all aspects of planning, management, and operation of Gwaii Haanas, as well as job opportunities relating to these various facets, and they achieved this goal – the Government of Canada has been working in a cooperative management framework with the Council of the Haida Nation since the signing of the *Gwaii Haanas Agreement*. Initially, there was only slow progress to mould Gwaii Haanas from a mix of tree farm licences, mineral exclusion areas, freehold land, and other interests into a national park reserve and Haida heritage site due to lack of trust between the two parties. Over time, however, the trust has grown as both sides see that the drawbacks of working together are much smaller than the benefits.

From the perspective of the federal government, the management of Gwaii Haanas as a wilderness area demands a fairly rigorous visitor and commercial management approach. It is doubtful that implementation of this approach, which is described in the following pages, would have been possible without the political backing of the Haida Nation. From the Haida standpoint, they have regained some control over at least part of Haida Gwaii until the land ownership issue is resolved, and have secured career opportunities for Haida through a 50% Haida employment commitment and ongoing funding for the Haida Gwaii Watchmen Program.

#### **1.5 Economic Context**

Until recently, the logging and fishing industries were the dominant drivers of the Islands economy. As in other parts of the world, history is repeating itself as resource depletion has resulted in a steep economic decline. While the multi-national corporations move on to search for more profitable pastures, Islanders are left wondering how they will survive on the leftovers.

Gwaii Haanas was established a decade before the real decline hit, not to say that this decline was not predicted – indeed, it was inevitable. But many people thought that this day would never come, and so to try to convince them of the benefit of establishing a national park reserve on Moresby Island, provincial politicians promised that Gwaii Haanas would become a “world-class tourism destination,” drawing as many as 70,000 visitors per year to the Islands.

There was just one problem. National and international support for Gwaii Haanas’ establishment came because it was to be protected from resource extraction as a wilderness area and traditional homeland for the Haida. Bringing 70,000 people/year to Gwaii Haanas could not be done in a way that the perception of wilderness and the integrity of ecosystems and cultural sites could be maintained, particularly since weather limits tourism activities to the spring and summer. For example, as Gwaii Haanas gained notoriety, more visitors began to arrive, many in “pocket” cruise ships – vessels that carried 40–100 passengers. The Haida Gwaii Watchmen tried to accommodate these large groups, but they were too large to manage properly, and so the Watchmen asked each vessel to bring its passengers on site in groups of 10 people. That group size was manageable in itself, but 10 groups of 10 still meant the same number of footsteps. It also had the unfavourable result of having one vessel monopolizing a cultural site for a entire day, much to the disappointment of other commercial and independent groups trying to access the same site. In the early 1990s the Haida asked the cruise ships to stop coming – they simply had too many people resulting in unacceptable damage to the cultural heritage, as well as the spiritual nature of many of these areas.

There have been several attempts to bring the Island communities together to develop a vision for tourism development on the Islands. Until recently, however, there did not seem to be the incentive for people to accept that cooperation was crucial to development of a successful and

socially acceptable tourism industry. The Gwaii Trust, which was created from federal, Gwaii Haanas establishment funding, was initially earmarked for tourism development. However, its purpose was broadened into a “locally controlled, interest-bearing fund to advance economic diversification and sustainable development on Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte Islands ... (and) to enhance understanding between the communities and cultures of the Islands through the process of joint community economic planning and development” (1). It was a wise move, since the shift from one single-industry (extraction) economy to another – tourism – would probably not result in the economic stability for which Islanders were looking.

Recently, two initiatives have rekindled discussions about the role that tourism should play in the Islands economy. The first is the Qay ‘Ilnagaay Heritage Centre. The concept of developing a Haida heritage centre is not new. Discussions have been ongoing for over a quarter of a century. Now the Qay ‘Ilnagaay Heritage Centre Society is coordinating a dream-come-true. It has partnered with many groups, including the Parks Canada Agency, to build the centre on the present site of the Haida Gwaii Museum. The intent of the centre is (i) to provide a home for a Haida art school, the current museum, the Haida Gwaii Watchmen Program, and the Gwaii Haanas administration office, and (ii) for these and other partners to share their awareness of the Islands with visitors. The raising of six new poles at the site in 2001 marked the start of the Heritage Centre, which should open in 2005.

The second initiative is the Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte Islands Heritage Tourism Strategy. The Parks Canada Agency provided some funding to facilitate discussions about Islands tourism development with any Islanders who were interested in committing to the process. The introduction to the strategy states “This document was developed through consultation with Islanders by Islanders, and outlines what is important about where and how we live and what we must do to protect, celebrate, and share our heritage ... We welcome all visitors to Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte Islands who will respect and honour our definitions of heritage and the linked objectives and actions in this strategy” (2).

Thus it appears that Islanders are now beginning to embrace tourism. Gwaii Haanas has been in the tourism “business” since the area became established, and the remainder of this paper will describe how Gwaii Haanas has positioned itself to contribute to the tourism industry while meeting its political obligations in a way that does not sacrifice ecological or cultural integrity.

## **2. USING INDICATORS AND STANDARDS TO MANAGE VISITOR USE IN GWAII HAANAS**

### **2.1 Initial Visitor Management Policies**

The vision statement in Gwaii Haanas’ management plan states that “With the coming of summer, visitors from all over the world begin to arrive. Each one of them shares the sensation of being the first person to set foot here. Advance information provides the visitor with the necessary knowledge to respect the land. In this way, the need for more direct management controls is reduced” (3). The vision goes on to describe an interaction between visitors and the Watchmen. These few phrases give managers a clear picture of the type of visitor experience that Gwaii Haanas is intended to provide.

Wilderness implies a predominance of nature and opportunities for solitude and reflection. In order to provide this opportunity, there must then be some level of control to limit use to minimize feelings of crowdedness, and to manage use to avoid significant negative impacts to ecological or cultural integrity as well as to protect the opportunity for visitors to experience an untrammelled environment.

To do this, the Gwaii Haanas Archipelago Management Board (AMB), which is composed of two members each from the Council of the Haida Nation and the Government of Canada, took initial steps in 1996 to control potential growth until appropriate use levels could be established:

- It placed a freeze on new business activities, and established visitor use allocations for all businesses that had operated in Gwaii Haanas prior to 1996.
- It capped daily use to 175 users (commercial staff and visitors).
- It developed a group size policy of no more than 12 persons ashore any one time, in any one place.
- It established a campsite monitoring program to determine the baseline impacts related to the current level of use.
- It established independent and commercial trip logs to collect site and time-specific information on visitor activities.

For several years, tour operators had been calling for some level of control over visitor use, and the AMB consulted extensively with them before putting these actions into place. The final formula for calculation of visitor use allocations was fairly generous, with many operators receiving allocations well in excess of what they would conduct in an average year. Regardless, the operators were not too excited when this suggestion became a reality, and some local politicians objected to the allocation system, citing the provincial promise during establishment days.

## **2.2 Development of the Backcountry Management Plan**

In late 1997, the AMB began a formal review of visitor management issues in Gwaii Haanas. The objective was to complete a thorough analysis of these issues, including interrelationships, and to develop visitor management actions that would help the AMB achieve the goals set out in the management plan. Public and stakeholder involvement was extensive to encourage a broader understanding of vision for Gwaii Haanas, as well as to solicit alternative suggestions for management action. It was emphasized that the consultation approach was not a voting process, but an opportunity to share “good ideas” with the AMB.

The plan was finalized in 1999 and included a number of actions to help the AMB achieve appropriate visitor management in Gwaii Haanas (4). Because of the political sensitivity of visitor limits, specific emphasis was placed on creating a rigorous process to evaluate visitor impacts on the area and on other visitors, and to establish some thresholds of impact above which management intervention would be required in order to continue to achieve the objectives of the management plan. The Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) model was used to guide development of appropriate standards, and advice was sought from visitor management experts Dr. David Cole and Dr. Robert Manning. The actions that were linked to specific standards or limits are as follows:

- ◆ No more than 20% of surveyed campsites should have obvious visitor impacts. There should be no threats to sites where the potential for damage to ecologically or culturally sensitive sites are extreme or high, except where closure would result in an increased risk to public safety. There should also be no net increase in the number of distinguishable campsites, nor a net increase in the total area of impact.
- ◆ No more than 10% of independent visitors should report seeing more than 12 persons on shore during the low and mid-seasons (April 1 – July 14; August 21 – September 20); in the peak season (July 15 – August 20), the standard is 20%.
- ◆ A secondary visitor experience standard is extent of crowding; no more than 10% of independent visitors should report feeling at least slightly crowded at any of the Haida Gwaii Watchmen sites.
- ◆ Initial crowding standards for all other sites (defined as access areas or wild places) is 5% outside the peak period, and 10% during the peak period.
- ◆ Establish an overall limit of 33,000 user-days/nights from April 1 – September 30

- ◆ Establish daily limits for low (167 users/day), mid (225 users/day) and peak periods (300 users/day), and split these limits between independent and commercial access according to traditional levels (33% independent; 67% commercial).
- ◆ Split total visitor use in thirds and provide 11,000 user-days/nights to independent visitors, 11,000 user-days/nights to non-Haida commercial operators, and 11,000 user-days/nights to Haida operators.
- ◆ Re-evaluate non-Haida allocations based on the average of their best three years of use. Create a visitor use allocation pool for redistribution if total cumulative allocation is less than 11,000 user-days/nights.

### **2.3 Three-Year Review of the Backcountry Management Plan**

The plan called for a review in three years (i) to determine if the AMB was achieving the goals set out in the plan, and (ii) if these goals were not being achieved, recommend alternative strategies to achieve them. The Board initiated the review process in the summer of 2002 with an internal examination to determine what changes were required. It then took a list of proposed changes to the tour operators in the fall of 2002. After consideration of their input, the AMB then developed a public questionnaire, which it sent to all interested stakeholders, all 2002 visitors who were willing to participate in surveys, and other interested members of the public who responded to an advertisement in the local Islands newspaper. The AMB also asked the Parks Canada Western Canada Service Centre to conduct a five-year review of Gwaii Haanas' visitor statistics to assist the Board in determining if standards for visitor experience were being exceeded, or if any significant upward or downward trends in the number of visitors were apparent (5).

The AMB completed the review at the beginning of May, 2003 (6), and the remainder of this paper discusses the standards evaluation, as well as changes to improve implementation of the backcountry management plan

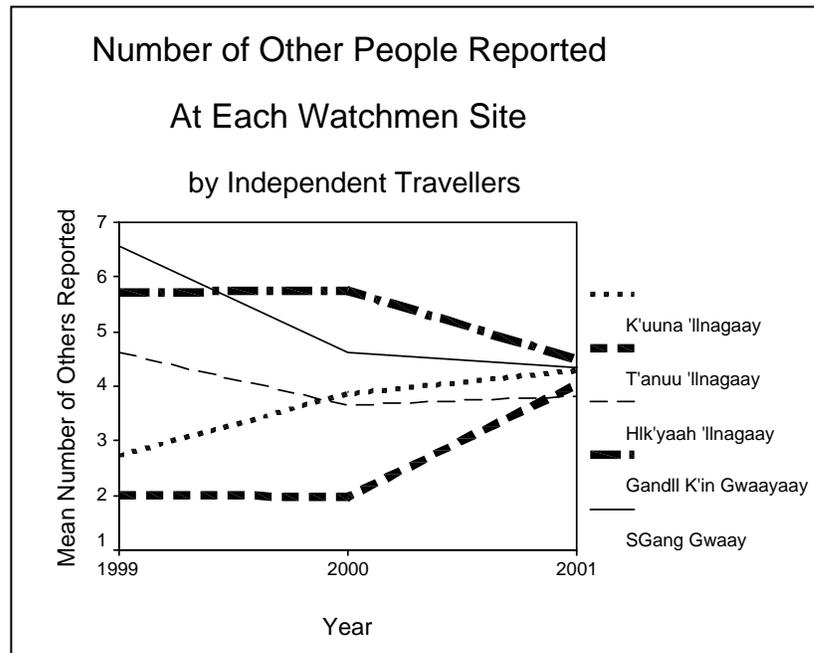
With respect to heritage protection, the AMB completed a review of extremely and highly sensitive sites, and approved permanent access closures to eight areas, camping closures to three areas, and a temporal closure to one area. These closures were implemented because ecological or cultural heritage was either too sensitive to sustain either camping activity specifically or any visitor activity generally. For example, some seabird colonies cannot withstand foot traffic because burrowing activities make the substrate very susceptible to damage. Thus access must be restricted regardless of whether the birds are actually on the site.

In examining the indicator of campsite condition, 31% of campsites surveyed in 1999 and 2000 had impacts that exceeded the standard of low impact (10-25% vegetation loss), and had at least moderate impacts (26-50% vegetation loss). In 2002, the percentage had dropped to 26%, but it still exceeded the standard of 20%. The AMB re-evaluated its standard in light of the vision, but also in light of the realities of camping activities: there are a limited number of camping areas within a safe staging distance from the attraction sites – the Haida Gwaii Watchmen sites. The most sensitive sites had been closed to camping by 2001, and vegetation impacts were predominantly loss of moss. Given these factors, the AMB decided that it would increase the standard from low impact to moderate impact within a certain radius of each Watchmen site. The radius around each site will be determined this year in consultation with tour operators and in consideration of public safety issues. With respect to visitor experience indicators, the standards for seeing more than 12 other people ashore during a trip was exceeded in both the peak and non-peak periods in 1999, in the non-peak period in 2000, and not at all in 2001 (Table 1).

**Table 1. Percentage of visitors reporting seeing 12 or more other visitors at a Watchmen site during the non-peak and peak periods.**

Year	Percentage of Independent Visitors Reporting 12 or More Other Visitors at a Watchmen Site During their Visit in the Non-Peak Period (minimum one occurrence; standard is 10%)	Percentage of Independent Visitors Reporting 12 or More Other Visitors at a Watchmen Site During their Visit in the Peak Period (minimum one occurrence; standard is 20%)
1999	22%	24%
2000	22%	13%
2001	6%	15%

Figure 3 shows that independent visitors have reported lower numbers of visitors at the busiest sites (SGang Gwaay and Hlk'yaah 'Innagaay), but an increase at T'anuu 'Innagaay. In general, the information in Table 1 and Figure 3 indicate that implementation of the group size policy has improved over time.



*Figure 3. Change in the mean number of other visitors reported at Watchmen sites by independent visitors between 1999 and 2001.*

Perception of crowding is considered a secondary indicator because it is a subjective assessment of the respondent. It does, however, still provide an indication of overall visitor satisfaction. The

standard was that no more than 10% of respondents would report feeling at least slightly crowded (rating of 3 on a 9 point scale) at one or more of the Watchmen sites. For comparison purposes, Table 2 shows respondents' values for the non-peak, peak, and entire season. The percentage of people that found the crowding to be a detraction has also been included to estimate the negative impact that crowding had on the respondents.

**Table 2. Percentages of independent trip log respondents that felt crowded at Watchmen sites (1999 – 2002), as well as the extent that crowding detracted from the experience.**

Year	Percentage of independent trip log respondents that felt slightly to extremely crowded at one or more Watchmen sites			Percentage of independent trip log respondents that felt that crowding was a detraction at one or more Watchmen sites		
	<i>Non-Peak</i>	<i>Peak</i>	<i>Full Season</i>	<i>Non-Peak</i>	<i>Peak</i>	<i>Full Season</i>
<b>1999</b>	21%	21%	21%	12%	15%	13%
<b>2000</b>	22%	6%	14%	15%	9%	12%
<b>2001</b>	8%	5%	6%	7%	14%	10%
<b>2002</b>	5%	23%	14%	13%	20%	16%

There was no significant change in visitation during this period, and although there is no discernible trend in detractions, at least 10% of independents per year felt that the number of other visitors at the Watchmen sites had a negative impact on their experience.

There was a definite pattern of association between crowding and number of people. Table 3 shows the number of people which would produce a perceived crowding score of 3 or greater.

**Table 3. Results of a regression analysis showing the number of other visitors required to predict a crowding score of 3 (slightly crowded) at each of the Haida Gwaii Watchmen sites.**

Haida Gwaii Watchmen Site	Number of other visitors required to predict a crowding score of 3 (slightly crowded)
<u>K</u> 'uuna 'lnagaay (Skedans)	14
T'anuu 'lnagaay	11
Hlk'yaah 'lnagaay (Windy Bay)	15
<u>G</u> andll K'in Gwaayaay (Hotspring Island)	10
<u>S</u> Gang Gwaay (Anthony Island/Ninstints)	12

These numbers are all close to the 12 person ashore limit established back in 1996, with the value averaged over all sites being 12.4.

An analysis of the relationship between the extent of crowding and encounter rates at other locations in Gwaii Haanas was done on 1997 – 2001 data, but the number of crowding events was too small to establish a correlation with the number of encounters. However, it is useful to examine the

number of times independent visitors felt at least slightly crowded by the number of kayaks or motorboats while they were travelling on the water or camping. The non-peak period standard (5% feeling slightly crowded) was exceeded for kayaks seen while camping in only one year between 1997 and 2001, but exceeded for motorboats while on the water in four out of five years. Peak period crowding occurred in two years for kayaks seen while camping, for two years for motorboats seen while on the water, and for one year for motorboats seen while camping.

After reviewing the results of these analyses, the AMB decided that, although there were concerns about exceeding standard for visitor experience at the Watchmen sites, these would be most efficiently addressed by:

1. reviewing our information to potential visitors so that expectations of seeing no other visitors during low and mid-seasons is not created;
2. reinforcing to tour operators and independent visitors the need to abide by the group size policy, and for the Watchmen to enforce the group size policy at the Watchmen sites; and
3. investigating ways to make group size management more effective for vessels carrying more than 11 clients. One means that the AMB has taken to address this issue is to limit tour operators to no more than 22 clients per day, which is equivalent to two groups of 11 clients, plus a guide.

Total use levels to date are far below the maximum allowable 33,000 user-days/night (Figure 4).

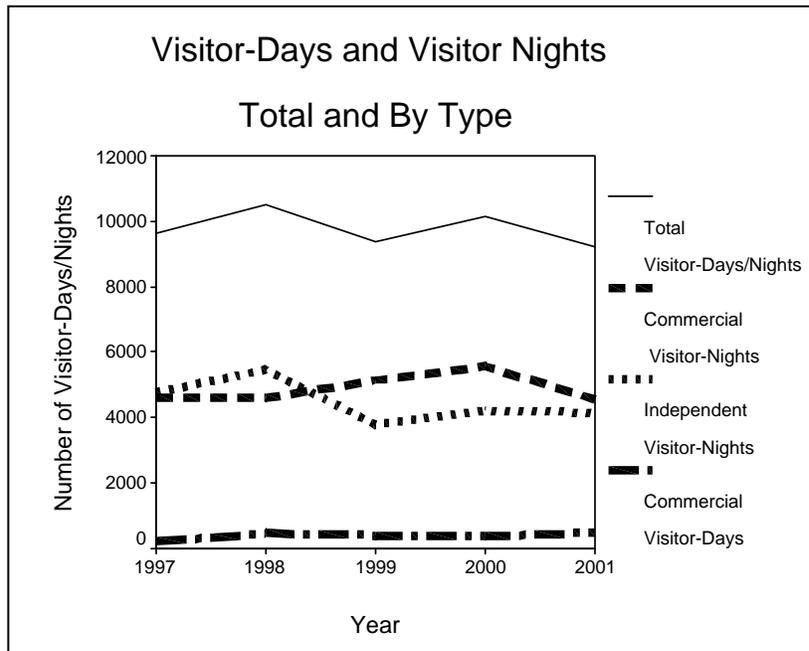


Figure 4: Visitation between 1997 and 2001 for independent and tour visitors . Tour operator staff (approximately 2,000 user days/nights per year) is also considered in the monitoring program

That being said, the other standards are already showing signs of pressure, and so it may be that the “carrying capacity” of Gwaii Haanas is closer to 12,000 user-days/nights rather than 33,000 user-days/nights. However, the AMB is comfortable leaving the group allocations at 11,000 user-

days/nights each, as the ability of tour operators to fully utilize their allocations is already limited by market factors, and independent visitation appears to be in slow decline. All standards will continue to be evaluated on a yearly basis to look for signs of over-capacity, and another full review of the plan will occur in conjunction with the Gwaii Haanas Management Plan review, which will occur in 2008.

### **3. ONGOING VISITOR MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES AND INFLUENCES**

There are two main challenges to the maintenance of this visitor management program: staff turnover and changing management priorities. Though initial development of monitoring programs may attract personnel, a long-term monitoring program requires staff who are committed to the value of long-term studies. The Parks Canada culture is one which encourages movement on a regular basis, and this is not consistent with the needs of monitoring project management. This is particularly true in cases where monitoring involves some level of subjectivity in assessing changing conditions. The higher the changeover in staff, the less dependable the data due to introduction of multiple but perhaps unquantifiable biases. Gwaii Haanas' campsite monitoring program is moving into the hands of a fourth project manager in eight years, and some measurements are not reliable because of the high turnover.

Changing management priorities are also potentially dangerous to a monitoring program's stability. If staff are not available to enter, analyze, and interpret data on a regular basis, the job soon becomes insurmountable, and as a consequence, the value of the monitoring program is reduced. Proper data management is absolutely crucial to a good monitoring program, which, in turn, is essential to good decision-making. If the data are questionable, this can lead to less-informed and less defensible management decisions.

The implementation of a proactive and rigorous visitor management in Gwaii Haanas has not been an easy task. However, members of the AMB have looked at many other protected areas and seen the serious negative impacts of a reactive management approach. They are intent on keeping impacts to a minimum, even if initial decisions at times may seem heavy-handed. The Haida have more credibility with the public and stakeholders than the Federal Government in extolling the virtues of a conservative approach to human use management in protected areas, and that fact has certainly helped managers establish a proactive visitor management program at Gwaii Haanas. Open and ongoing communications with stakeholders have also been key to successful implementation of Gwaii Haanas' visitor management approach.

Taking a cautious approach to visitor use is certainly appropriate during the early stages of management, but after time, policy decisions must be supported by facts – and if decisions cannot be defended, then managers may be forced, through political pressure, to relax standards set for protection of heritage and a quality visitor experience. That is why it is so important to have ongoing monitoring for physical and visitor experience impacts – managers need to understand relationships between use and these impacts. The Gwaii Haanas data set is still small from a statistical perspective, but the fact that there is a good monitoring base in place will allow managers to better understand these relationships by the time the backcountry management plan receives another review.

In the meantime, the ecosystem of Haida Gwaii will continue to change, particularly on the political and economic fronts. The Haida are positioning themselves to provide a high quality cultural experience at the Qay 'Ilnagaay Heritage Centre. Visitor volume will be important to the ongoing operation of the centre, and it is anticipated that more Haida will become involved in the tourism industry on the Islands, including bringing visitors into Gwaii Haanas. Will this result in an as-yet untapped source of visitors, which will result in an increased use of Gwaii Haanas by the commercial sector? What effect could this have on the indicators that the AMB has chosen as the “canaries in the mine shaft”? These questions have yet to be answered, but the AMB's proactive visitor management approach has positioned them well to explain why existing policies are in place, and ongoing

monitoring will provide the information that the Board will need to evaluate whether Gwaii Haanas can sustain increased use.

#### **REFERENCES**

1. Gwaii Trust Society. 2003. Gwaii Trust Society Home Page. [www.gwaiitrust.com/home.htm](http://www.gwaiitrust.com/home.htm).
2. Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte Islands Heritage Tourism Strategy Working Group. 2003. Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte Islands Heritage Tourism Strategy.
3. Archipelago Management Board. 2003. Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site Management Plan for the Terrestrial Area.
4. Archipelago Management Board. 1999. Gwaii Haanas Backcountry Management Plan.
5. Parks Canada Agency – Western and Northern Canada Service Centre. 2003. Review of Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site Visitor Statistics 1997 – 2001.
6. Archipelago Management Board. In preparation. Gwaii Haanas Backcountry Management Plan (updated version).