

Smoke Signals

Lhut Beh Nehudanih – They Told Us By Smoke



Volume 6, Issue 06

Du•goos oo•za ɔW^s ɔC June

JUNE 2026 EVENTS

A Month of Celebration,
Governance Engagement, and
Community Milestones

Indigenous-Led Assessments at the FNMPC Conference

Driving Sustainable Prosperity
for Future Generations:
Generate 2026

YOU DO WHAT YOU CAN, WHERE YOU CAN

Melanie Labatch Looks
Back on Fear, Family,
and the Frontlines of the
Pandemic

AGA Q&A Form
Pre-Submit Your
Questions for the
Upcoming AGA

Governance and Land & Resources Department Update

The sun is starting to shine, and spring is in the air! We have many exciting things in the planning stages to get out on the land and harvest.

Field Operations and Monitors Program

The work of the environmental monitors and field crew in May included:

- Forestry Block Assessments
- Supporting the Stoney Creek Elders Fishing Derby (May 16-18)
- Attended the Water and Fish Forum
- Water Quality Monitoring

Juvenile Sturgeon Release Event

Date: June 5th

The Details:
Commemorating the 100-year-old birthday of Vanderhoof, the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative is planning a special release event! This themed "100" recognizes

that Sturgeon live to be over 100 years old.

Invitation: An open invitation has been announced for Elders and families to come witness the release of a special leucitic sturgeon.

Governance

We continue our work to gain back jurisdiction over our children and of co-managing and making decisions about our territory. Together, Elected Leadership with Traditional Governance are building a Saik'uz governance system with greater community involvement in decision making.

The Clan meetings and Traditional Governance Oversight Committee (TGOC) are key to this

work. We are in the early stages, and we welcome community participation.

Please Note: Kelsey shared that no jurisdiction meetings have been held recently and there are no meetings scheduled for June.

Water & Fish Forum Recap (May 22 & 23)

The water and fish forum was a great success and was attended by community members. While low attendance numbers are never welcomed, the group that did attend participated with keen interest, leading to excellent conversation.

Presentations included:

Kassandra Turbide:
The relationship of water & fish, land use



planning, and responses to range use plans and development.

Jason Yarmish: An overview of the territory and Saik'uz interest in fishing regulations. On Day 2, he reviewed the 5-year monitoring plan.

Christina Lehtila (CSTC): An overview of their fisheries work.

Pete Erickson: Introduced the Nak'azdli Hatchery program.

Ashley Raphael & Rebecca Broadbent: Discussed their water quality program.

Saik'uz Lands & Resources: Presented on the Yinka Dene Water Law and the Nulki Tachek Tsinkut water quality monitoring program.

Kelsey Antoine: Presented on the Harvest Calendar Plan.

Clan & Balhats Work

Clan Night

We are once again starting up our clan night!

Next Meeting: June 24th
Topic: We will discuss paying for a name!

We encourage everyone to come out and learn!

TGOC & Keyoh Meetings

About the TGOC
The Traditional Governance Oversight Committee (TGOC) is a group of Saik'uz family representatives who have knowledge of the traditional territory, Saik'uz peoples, and our practices, and who are interested in participating and learning.

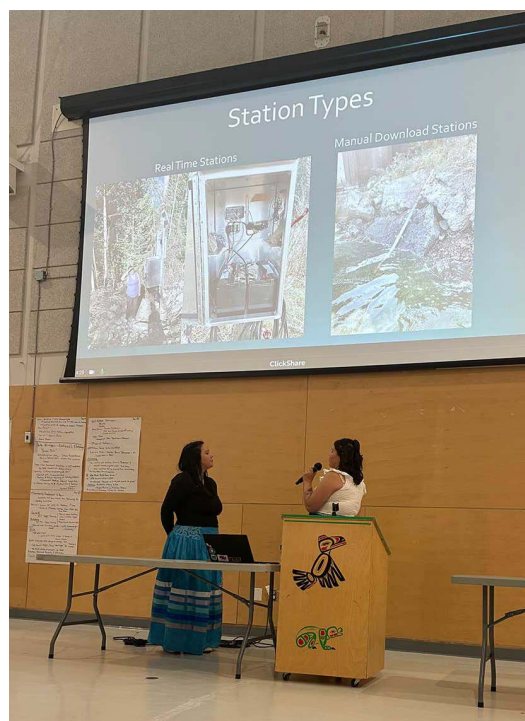
The purpose of the TGOC is to bring traditional governance into practice and work with the elected government and Land and Resources department to support, offer guidance, and provide traditional and current

knowledge about Saik'uz territory. We have sought input on who would like to join the committee as their family representative, and we continue to be open to your feedback.

Want to find your representative? Please contact Amber Teed or Kelsey Antoine if you would like to know who your family representative is.

May Report

The TGOC agreed that the Water and Fish Forum would be a great opportunity to further explore the priorities of the TGOC, so the May meeting was included as part of the Forum events.



Saik'uz First Nation

INFORMATION SESSION

LEARN MORE | PICK UP FORMS | ASK QUESTIONS

If you or someone you know was affected by the Indian Boarding Homes program, please join us for information and support.

June 10, 2026



5:00pm - 7:00pm
Dinner Provided



The Gathering Place
135 Joseph St, Vanderhoof, BC
V0J 3A1



INDIAN
BOARDING
HOMES
Class Action

FOR MORE INFORMATION

1-888-499-1144

outreach@boardinghomesclassaction.com



ESS Vanderhoof and Saik'uz staff stand in solidarity for community safety and MMIWG awareness during the May 4th and 5th emergency training session.

ESS Vanderhoof Conducts Emergency Support Services Training Session

When emergencies or natural disasters strike our region, the immediate safety and well-being of displaced residents depend on swift, organized action. That is where Emergency Support Services (ESS) Vanderhoof steps in.

As a crucial part of our local emergency response, ESS Vanderhoof is dedicated to meeting the essential needs of individuals and families who have been evacuated

from their homes. For the first critical 72 hours of an emergency, dedicated ESS teams provide rapid, short-term support, ensuring evacuees have access to:

- Safe temporary lodging and shelter
- Food and clean water
- Clothing and basic incidentals
- Family reunification services and reliable information updates

Because regional safety requires continuous

preparation and seamless collaboration, our community recently took an important step forward in sharpening these crisis-response skills.

May 4th and 5th Training Highlights: Setting Up for Success

On May 4th, a specialized ESS training session was successfully held in the community. Spearheaded by

Economic Development and expertly conducted by ESS Vanderhoof, the session carried an added layer of community significance as it was held in honor and recognition of the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). Bringing people together to build safety and support systems on this meaningful day underscored the shared dedication to protecting, honoring, and uplifting all community members.

The hands-on training focused on three primary areas:

- **Identifying Vital Roles:** Participants mapped out key leadership

and support positions required to run a successful emergency operation, ensuring everyone knows exactly who to turn to when a crisis hits.

- **Optimizing the Reception Layout:** The team practiced designing and setting up an ESS Reception Centre. Trainees worked creating a layout to create the most effective, stress-free area possible—ensuring a smooth, compassionate flow from the moment an evacuee walks through the door to registration and support delivery.
- **Navigating the Paperwork:** To round

out the practical session, attendees were given a comprehensive sneak peek into how to accurately and efficiently fill out the



necessary emergency forms. Mastering these forms ahead of time ensures that vital resources can be dispatched to families without administrative delays when minutes matter.



ESS Training - Day 1

By proactive planning, training together, and strengthening our internal networks, Saik'uz band office, Vanderhoof and its surrounding partners continue to ensure that if a crisis ever knocks on our door, our emergency response teams are fully equipped, organized, and ready to help the community.

Economic Development Initiatives

Advancing Indigenous-Led Assessments and Clean Energy Partnerships



Chief Priscilla Mueller (left) in her white, black, and red Saik'uz color and Angel Ransom of Firelight Group in the 2026 First Nations Major Projects Coalition (FNMPC) Conference

2026 FNMPC Conference

Saik'uz First Nation participated in the First Nations Major Projects Coalition (FNMPC) Conference, where Chief Priscilla Mueller joined Angel Ransom of Firelight Group for a presentation titled Culture at the Centre: Indigenous-Led Assessments and the Spirit of the Land Toolkit. The session explored the importance of Indigenous-led approaches to major project assessments and decision-making on



From left to right: Rod Juanillo (Economic Development Assistant), Chief Priscilla Mueller, and Vincent Wickham (Economic Development Manager).

First Nations territories. Chief Mueller shared the importance of ensuring that cultural rights, community values, and Indigenous governance are embedded throughout project planning and development.

The presentation introduced the Spirit of the Land Cultural Rights & Interests Toolkit, a framework designed to support free, prior, and informed consent and strengthen partnerships between First Nations, industry, and government.

The discussion highlighted the importance of respecting Indigenous knowledge, building meaningful relationships, and ensuring future generations have a voice in the stewardship of their lands.

Generate 2026

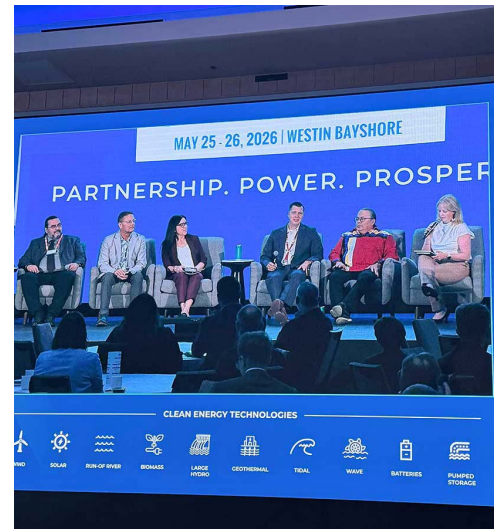
At Generate 2026, Chief Priscilla Mueller participated as a guest speaker on a panel discussion focused on Indigenous ownership, governance, and leadership in British Columbia's growing clean energy sector.

The session brought together First Nations leaders participating in the 2025 Call for Power initiative to discuss the importance of meaningful equity partnerships and Indigenous involvement in project development. Chief Mueller emphasized that First Nations should not be treated as a checkbox in project approvals and that proponents must seek consent through genuine engagement and relationship-building. She highlighted the importance of respect, trust, and collaboration to ensure projects align with Indigenous values,



rights, and long-term community priorities.

The discussion reinforced the growing role of Indigenous Nations in leading the clean energy transition while advancing economic reconciliation and sustainable prosperity for future generations.





Furbearer

FUR-BEAR-ER

(noun) any furry animal, especially one whose fur is of commercial value.

Since 1926 traplines have been assigned through the provincial government of British Columbia.

The implementation of this system caused a huge change in the management of BC's 19 mammal species known as furbearers. This new system disrupted traditional practices and eroded inherent rights.

The introduction of licenses fragmented traditional territories, contradicting traditional governance and the right to resource management systems that existed prior to colonialism.

Trapline regulations disrupt First Nations stewardship and have led to conflicts over land use.

Through the Councilor's Lens

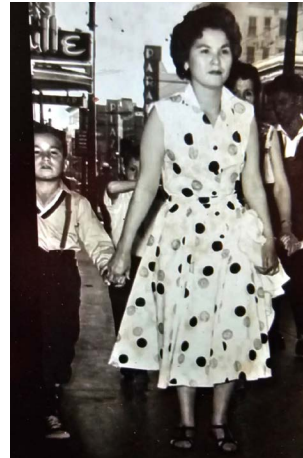
Snapshots from Melanie Labatch



Uncle Johnny, Auntie Arlene, Gradys, Mel, Polina, and Evan during visit for students to listen.



Polina, Evan and Aba on the Keyoh



Auntie Helen Jones in the 50s



Karlee, Hayden and Mel at GOV in Vancouver March 2026



Beautiful Kirsten Raphael with her precious children, Bridgette, (i have to get his name, i forgot!) and baby Jay, along with baby Morgan



Monica Weaver and Brinkley at the CSFS Women's Wellness Day in Saik'uz



Carlee Erickson from Nee Tahi Buhn and Chaylean Alexis, both youth delegates at the BCACCS



Evan cooking for the community breakfast



Graduate Samantha Teed and her family at the UNBC Graduation



Tracy at CNC Program Graduation



Auntie Arlene sharing what a doctor needs to know

Through the Councilor's Lens

Snapshots from Melanie Labatch



Mel and Chaylean biking in Stanley Park while at BCACCS conference



Locklyn and Polling overlooking the creek



Robin by the creek



Strawberry flowering



Anzel's baptism and Brothers Roy and Walter's last service in Saik'uz



Chilean at the BCASSC

PHRASE OF THE MONTH



Di tantnilh ka'ninzun?

כַּכְּפִּיּוּם יִפְרִינִם כַּ

What do you want to drink?
(Asking 1 person)

Di tantnilh ka'nahzun?

כַּכְּפִּיּוּם יִפְרִינִם כַּ

What do you want to drink?
(Asking 1 person)

Jason Alexis • 2nd
Cassandra Thomas • 3rd
Kassandra Turbide • 10th



June CELEBRANTS



JUNE 2026 Events

FIREHALL CONSTRUCTION AND GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY



**MONDAY, JUNE 1ST:
GROUNDBREAKING
CEREMONY
9:00 am**



BC HYDRO NORTH COAST TRANSMISSION LINE COMMUNITY UPDATE

JUNE 2, 2026
5 PM – 8 PM
The Gathering Place
Saik'uz Band Office



OFF-RESERVE GOVERNANCE MANUAL MEMBERSHIP CODE ENGAGEMENT

JUNE 6, 2026
1 PM – 7 PM
House of Ancestors
355 Vancouver St, Prince George,
BC V2L 2P1

SOUP AND BANNOCK



June 10
Saik'uz Health Centre
12 pm – 3 pm



June 2026 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**June 11, 2026
5 pm to 7 pm**

**Prevention/Jurisdiction
RCMP**

Father's Day BRUNCH



JUNE 14, 2026 • 9:30 AM

**At the Saik'uz Band Office
The Gathering Place**
with door prizes for
our father figures



**Economic Development
Community Engagement**

SESSION ONE June 16, 2026



**Saik'uz First Nation
Admin Building - 135 Joseph
St, Vanderhoof, BC**



**12-4: Open House (drop-in
anytime)
or
4-730: Dinner + Engagement**

FOR SAIK'UZ NATION MEMBERS

**Take the Economic Development Survey
YOUR VOICE. YOUR FUTURE.**



All Members 16+ are
eligible to take the survey

Everyone who completes it will get a
\$25 giftcard



EDUCATION CELEBRATION 2025-2026



**June 17
5 pm – 7 pm
The Gathering Place**

2025



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY CELEBRATION!

**JUNE 19, 2026 | 9 AM-6 PM
POTLATCH HOUSE, SAIK'UZ
776 Kenney Dam Road**

Clan Night



Paying for a name and
passing a name on

**June 25
The Gathering Place
4 pm to 6 pm**

**There will
be Soup &
Bannock**

A Pandemic Emerges. Self Awareness.

I am a mommy. I am a sister. I am an *ak'ai*. I am a daughter. I am a niece. I am a friend. I am a nurse. I am Indigenous.

I was working a casual community position in Nisga'a territory when I kept hearing about people getting sick in China. I remember thinking that this is getting big. I wasn't especially surprised when the WHO declared a pandemic. I thought maybe more could have been done sooner as we were watching things unfold. This was also a time when my best friend and I parted ways. I can remember thinking that we are in a f----ing pandemic - time to be real. If someone doesn't want to be in my life, I am okay with that and I wish them well.

My other job is a permanent part time position in a small hospital just under an hour drive from home. First work shift is in the emergency department, second shift is on the ward. This place was

my first job as a RN, I've been there six years now. (I remember during orientation shifts that I was scared. If you open up a book and just randomly put pinpoints on the pages, the book equates to nursing knowledge and the pinpoints equate to what we learn in school. I had and have so much more to learn.) My buddy nurse, John, told me it will take about six months to start to relax. I recall telling myself, while in school, that when I start

“This was also a time when my best friend and I parted ways.”

something new the first couple weeks will be draining physically and mentally so to expect that exhaustion. I remember walking into work at the hospital, it was right about the six-month mark, and I realized I wasn't scared sh----less. I smiled at myself, I was growing.

The pandemic. I was scared. We were

learning about the virus, speculating, watching other countries. Gleaning what we could. I think we were fortunate to have the wave hit us later, it gave us some time to prepare.

We started practicing skills at work. Refreshing safety- practicing donning and doffing equipment, observing one another; practicing codes and how to minimize risk to staff; learning how to manage a ventilator. Early in

the pandemic I came across a reading from a nurse from years gone by. She wrote 'there is no emergency in a pandemic'. Take the time to properly prepare yourself to stay safe. There is no emergency in a pandemic. I would think of that when someone would present and I would be getting 'geared up'.

At the beginning of the pandemic I borrowed a camper from some beautiful, kind-hearted people so stay in, at home in the driveway. I had to protect my family. I wouldn't know if I had 'got it at work'. I had to keep them safe. We always had a family bed and a couple weeks into isolating from family I realized I hadn't slept by myself for that long in the past 18 years. I stayed in that camper for eight weeks. I wouldn't even risk hugging my kids- after about five weeks in I got a thick blanket and draped it over my kids and hugged them. I would carefully fold it with potential contaminated side inwards and set aside for the next time. Anzel slept on the living room floor in a makeshift tent to be close to Gramma. For me this was the first time in 18 years I slept alone that long, for Anzel it was the first time in her life. She was 10 then. When I was going to start working more and we had a family meeting. I let everyone know that I would isolate to keep others safe. The meeting blew up in a huge fight with me having a different opinion from

another family member on how to keep family safe. I remember a couple weeks later, I went to my Aba's house and was missing the boys so much. I opened up the back door and the boys saw me and yelled 'aunty mel!' and started to run towards me. My Aba yelled 'don't go near her.'. They stopped. They didn't understand. I felt mad and sad. Seeing their little faces light up to see me and have no understanding why I couldn't hug and pick them up.

The community I work in was hit hard that fall. There was a drop-in centre that people would come to when in town from other villages and have a coffee and a sandwich and visit. Someone there had covid and it spread out into the neighboring villages. We were the highest cases per capita at that time. So much sickness and fear. So many people lost. It's not just the virus that had such deep affects. The loneliness and isolation and fear were detrimental. People One neighboring village must have lost over 30 members in less than six months. Some

from covid, some from overdoses, some from suicide, some from accidents. Absolutely tragic.

At home, my nephew (God bless his soul) passed last winter. I rushed to attempt to help and was performing CPR without giving breaths as to ensure my safety. Other family members came to the house while we tried to revive him and I would explain there are new safety guidelines since we are in a pandemic. I can still hear the wailing. I can still hear the panic. I lived with heightened anxiety for months, checking in daily on family members to ensure they were alive. I would feel my stress rise if I could not reach them. No more loss. Please, no more loss.

We have had much loss in our family and community during this ongoing pandemic. Other family members passed on- covid, overdoses, lack of connection, lack of health services. Many attributing factors. Things could have been different. This year my little cousin has to have her first Christmas without her Gramma,

my auntie. Her grandma who lit up her life. Who loved her and her son unconditionally. Her grandma who was her rock. Her grandma who was her protector, her cheerleader.

I was scared at work. I didn't want to be infected. I wanted my family safe. I didn't want to leave my family. I would be decked out in protective gear- yellow gown, hair covering, goggles, visor, N95 mask, booties, double gloved. Sometimes the goggles became moist from sweat making it difficult to see. People, both clients and fellow staff, would have difficulty understanding me with my mask. I couldn't wear the disposable N95, my cheeks were too big and I needed the industrial reusable mask. The gear hindered movement and providing treatment at times. Everything took longer. One day I realized I could write my name on my chest with a sharpie so people could know who I was- and I added a happy face because they couldn't see my smile with my gear. Humanities in healthcare is so very important. Unfortunately, I think we

lacked that at times with the pandemic- the times that we needed it most.

I started writing Mel's psa on facebook. Sharing what I had read or seen, tips on keeping safe and caring for each other. I just wanted people to be aware. I wanted everyone safe. You could see people getting tired of this new 'norm'. We all struggled even if we weren't aware. You do what you can, where you can. Where have the public service announcements from leadership encouraging Vitamin D and C, zinc and quercetin? Encouraging people to exercise and laugh to boost their immune system? There are gaps. You do what you can, where you can.

“You do what you can, where you can”

I ended up contracting the virus this fall. It came on abruptly during work- general unwell feeling, achy, fatigued, fever. I came home and isolated in my room. Put

a towel against bottom of door and made myself hydrate and take vitamins. I left home to isolate in a hotel on day three, after receiving my positive test result. I was in bed for 17 days. At times it was difficult to make myself care for myself. I was scared of 'what could be'. It really gave me space to practice gentleness with myself. It really made me appreciate those few who helped me and checked in on me. There are definitely gaps in the system and I could have easily fallen through. I prayed, I mediated, I tried to find funny stuff to make me laugh when I had the energy. I love life. I always have and this made me want to live so much more fully.

My family ended up contracting the virus. I took Gramma to the hospital after I came home from isolation. She received care there for eight days. Daily she progressed and we were so grateful. She too was diligent with her vitamins. I truly think our better outcome was attributed to that regime- strengthening our immune systems. My daughter just had the

sniffles and a cough. She was scared when I told her she tested positive- I could see it. I reassured her that most of the time in kids, it is minor. Her snuffies and cough were her symptoms and she was already healing. We have an amazing robust immune system now.

Other family members were not so fortunate. They were hospitalized and intubated, sent to different hospitals around the province. We lost a beautiful family member yesterday. Devastating. Life altering. May God bless her soul and may we honour her with full lives. I am mad. I am sad. What more could have been done? What more could I have done? I don't think she had to die. The frustration of seeing

lovely voice. I can still see vividly; the last time I saw her I had made the family dinner. She was sitting on the loveseat with her chi beside her. She was enjoying her meal. She was relaxed with family in the house (this was especially good to see as she had just lost her mommy less than two weeks previous after contracting covid while hospitalized for a fracture). I made brownies too and told her she could take them to nana's and give them to her siblings. She said 'I'm going to eat them!' ha I can see her smile. She had such a beautiful smile. A matriarch now gone from this world. Her beautiful children and grandchildren left to navigate life without their solid foundation anchoring them. I know

Now I sit, healing holistically. Seeing people's autonomy not being respected. Seeing divide. Unethical situations. Like I said, I have robust natural immunity now. Yet I am unable to go back to work, even though physically healing because I am concerned of a 'special emergency approval' vaccine. I want data. I want evidence-based data. I want truth. I want informed consent. Oh, how the narrative has changed from having drive by drumming and honking outside the hospitals in appreciation of healthcare staff to being a risk and not allowed to enter the hospital.

Our world has changed. I have changed. May each of us work on

“She had such a beautiful smile. A matriarch now gone from this world.”

treatments being used successfully in other countries and not using those treatments here. I haven't even processed it yet. I can still hear her

she taught them well and am grateful for her love. But we needed her to be here. There was so much more life to live.

knowing thy self and may we remember to work together and be kind.

By Melanie Labatch
December 10, 2021

Community Colouring Corner – Smoke Signals June 2026



Spot the Difference





2025-26 AGA Membership Questions

Questions will be accepted at the Band Office until 6:00 a.m. on Monday, June 8, 2026.

- [illegible]

- ☐ Administration
- ☐ Communications
- ☐ Culture & Language
- ☐ Daycare
- ☐ Economic Development
- ☐ Education, Training, & Employment
- ☐ Executive (General Manager/Chief & Council)
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Fire
- ☐ Firewood
- ☐ Health
- ☐ Housing & Membership
- ☐ Human Resources (HR)
- ☐ Land & Resources
- ☐ Operations & Maintenance
- ☐ Prevention
- ☐ Recreation
- ☐ Security
- ☐ Social Development

Thanks for your support and participation!

June 2026

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

June 11, 2026
5 pm to 7 pm

The Gathering Place,
Saik'uz Band Office

Prevention/Jurisdiction RCMP



ARE WE REACHING YOU?



At Saik'uz First Nation, we want to ensure that the information you receive is timely, relevant, and easy to find. This survey is designed to audit our current communication channels—from emails to town halls—to see what's working and what isn't.

Your feedback will directly influence our communication strategy to help reduce digital noise and keep everyone better informed.



SCAN HERE ^

COMMUNICATIONS
SURVEY



SAIK'UZ
FIRST
NATION

Share Your Stories, Ideas, and More!

This is your personal invitation to contribute to our next issue of Smoke Signals. We're always on the lookout for fresh perspectives, engaging content, and exciting new things happening in and around our community. Whether it's a personal essay, a photo series, a local hero spotlight, or an advertisement for your unique offering, your contribution could be exactly what our readers are looking for.

To submit your work, please email it to **communications@saikuz.com** with "Smoke Signals" included in the subject line.

Saik'uz First Nation

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