

## **Coming to Nuu-chah-nulth Territory: exciting developments in ocean monitoring**

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It's always a pleasure to visit Port Alberni, an important partner for Ocean Networks Canada (ONC) and the home of the NEPTUNE observatory shore station. Recently, I travelled with our Indigenous outreach team, Jessica Brown and Mercedes Mclean, to this Vancouver Island community and Nuu-chah-nulth Territory, to introduce the latest proposed community observatory site in ONC's Smart Ocean? Systems project.

Building on the successful technology and data delivery of the NEPTUNE and VENUS observatories, ONC has developed a smaller, coastal observing system suitable for near-shore installations. The observatory proposed for Alberni Inlet would be equipped with an on-shore camera and weather station, as well as subsurface instruments that monitor and record local water quality, underwater sounds of whales and vessels, and live-stream video from an underwater camera.



An underwater installation takes many steps, starting with conversations and information sessions with local leaders and community members.

We believe that community involvement at all stages of the project is critical to ensure that data collected are relevant and useful to local residents and decision-makers.

Earlier this month, ONC business analyst Teron Moore visited Port Alberni to introduce the observatory at a City Council meeting. During our 20 ? 22 January visit, we presented to the Chief and Council of the Tseshaht and Hupacasath First Nations. We also hosted an information session at the NEPTUNE observatory shore station to start the conversation about potential sites for the community observatory. Around 20 community members attended, including Port Alberni Mayor Mike Ruttan. Topics such as local fishing practices, industry interests in the port area, environmental concerns, and existing monitoring in Alberni Inlet were all part of a lively discussion.



Discussion is key to determine the most desirable site for a proposed community observatory at Port Alberni.

Along with the proposed monitoring equipment, ONC is also providing a display for the new Aquarium and Stewardship Centre, opening this summer at the city's Harbour Quay. West Coast Aquatic is leading its development, which will let a visitor explore a salmon's habitat from fresh water spawning ground, through the estuary and out to the ocean.

No community trip would be complete without visiting local schools and educational partners. While I presented to a senior computer science class at the Alberni District High School, Mercedes and Jessica met with vice principal, Carl Poole, to invite students and teachers to participate in the Ocean Sense education program. We're also working with Uu-a-thluk (Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council Fisheries Department) to develop a set of ocean knowledge cards, which will link scientific descriptions of local marine organisms with their importance as Indigenous foods and remedies.

With all these exciting new initiatives underway, we look forward to building more local connections to ocean science and education in the Alberni Valley.



Jessica and Mercedes are helping Port Alberni's Canal Beach Park restoration effort by showcasing ONC posters in the waterfront kiosk.

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