

Summer 2022 Sustainability Scholars Program Internship Opportunity

The UBC Sustainability Initiative (USI) is pleased to offer current UBC graduate students the opportunity to work on funded sustainability internship projects. Successful candidates work under the mentorship of a partner organization, and are immersed in real world learning where they can apply their research skills and contribute to advancing sustainability across the region.

- Visit the [Sustainability Scholars Program website](#) to learn [how the program works](#) and to [apply](#).
- Be sure to review the [application guide](#) to confirm your eligibility before applying.

Applications close at midnight on Sunday January 30, 2022.

>> This is a Fraser Estuary Research Collaborative Project >>

The Fraser Estuary Research Collaborative (FERC) is focussed on advancing efforts to protect the Fraser River estuary in collaboration with key NGO and Indigenous partners. If you are interested in producing new knowledge and supporting Fraser estuary protection through scientific, technical, governance and policy innovations, the following project might be for you. Read on for more details.

Research Project Title: Exploring opportunities to accord the Fraser River Estuary legal personhood status

Project Background & Overview:

The Fraser River Estuary ('the Estuary') is a globally significant ecosystem that supports five species of Pacific salmonids, critical habitat for Southern Resident Killer whales, dozens of migratory shorebird populations, and a myriad of vegetation and invertebrates. Yet, despite this, 85% of floodplain habitat has been lost (Finn et al. 2021) and over 102 species are currently at-risk of extinction (Kehoe et al. 2020). Past efforts to stem ongoing habitat loss, including the now defunct Fraser River Estuary Management Plan (FREMP), failed to engage Indigenous Nations or include Indigenous Knowledge in their decision-making and management of the Estuary. The demise of FREMP in 2013 left a regulatory gap that has resulted in unchecked development and industrialization of the Estuary, culminating in an ecosystem that faces an uncertain future.

This project will address the ongoing threats to the ecological resilience of the Fraser Estuary by identifying the legislative pathways towards according the Fraser River Estuary 'personhood' status in the eyes of Canadian law. Personhood status has been provided to waterbodies across the world, including in New Zealand, India, Ecuador, Colombia, and the United States. Rivers that have been granted personhood status have been represented in court by the public on behalf of their interests, which include protection from development, pollution and damming. Canada set a precedent in 2021 by giving the Magpie River in Quebec legal personhood which will protect the river from ongoing hydroelectric dam development.

Central to the conceptual underpinnings of personhood status are core tenants of Indigenous knowledge and legal principles, which have long recognized water as a living entity that is connected to all living things. This project will draw on Indigenous knowledge and legal research that has examined the legislative levers for according rivers personhood status in Canada. Further examining this pathway will determine how the Fraser Estuary could be protected and conserved through representation of its

interests. Considering the breadth of threats facing the Estuary which include: extensive water pollution, loss of habitat, rising sea levels and ongoing development, this project has potential long-term implications for the future resilience of the estuary in a rapidly changing climate.

Project description

Better understanding how the Estuary could be protected through the colonial legal framework in place could advance the recovery of endangered species and stem the ongoing destruction of habitat. The 'white paper' report that would be produced at the end of this project would act as a catalyst for local, regional and provincial governments to act on conserving the estuary and considering its ecological interests in their upcoming plans for a regional management plan. Importantly, this case study will stimulate discussion on the possibility of granting legal personhood to waterbodies in Western Canada, which despite the extensive research that has been done on the legality of personhood, it has not been applied to the Fraser River or its Estuary, among other major river systems on the West Coast.

As the effects of climate change continue to drastically impact the Lower Mainland of BC, identifying the legal rights associated with this personhood has important implications for sustainability and climate adaptation for the entire region. Estuaries and their associated habitats, including salt marsh and wetlands, act as natural sponges for increased amounts of precipitation, flooding, sea level rise and storm surge. As these climate change symptoms will increase in severity over the coming decades, identifying how we can protect, conserve and restore the Estuary through its personhood status will have important implications for the future resilience of estuarine habitats and surrounding communities in the future.

Our intention is that the report produced by this project will act as a foundation for ongoing conversation, research and identification of opportunities to accord the Estuary personhood status in the coming years. As such, this project has the capability of informing important legal and conservation initiatives for the Fraser Estuary.

Project scope

Complete a literature review and background summary of research into providing legal status to rivers in Canada and the role that Indigenous leaders, knowledge and legal principles must play in advancing these efforts. Identify which legal frameworks or policies would enable personhood status being accorded to the Fraser Estuary. Scope conservation actions or protections that could be implemented if the Estuary was provided legal status in Canadian law.

Key questions:

1. What are the legal pathways in Canadian colonial law that would enable legal personhood for the Estuary?
2. How does Indigenous law, knowledge and culture inform and guide personhood for the Estuary?
3. What climate change and conservation actions could be advanced and implemented with personhood status accorded to the Estuary?
4. How would these actions support the long-term ecological resilience of the Estuary and facilitate adaptation to climate change?

Activities:

- Literature review
- Research of peer-reviewed papers, legal document analysis, compilation of written/recorded Indigenous knowledge and legal principles.
- Completion of a summary report outlining the above and identification of next steps (conservation actions that can be taken).
- Presentation of final report to regional environmental NGOs.

Deliverables

- A final report containing a summary of the work completed:
 - Background: current literature and Indigenous knowledge on legal personhood for waterbodies in Canada
 - Research findings: legal pathways for according Fraser Estuary legal personhood
 - Application of research: conservation actions that can be implemented with personhood status; implications for climate change adaptation
- A final report for the online public-facing [Scholars Project Library](#).
- Presentation of report to the Adapting for Ecological Resilience Network (AFER), which is a collaborative network of 30 NGOs in the Lower Fraser Region.

Time Commitment

- This position is for 270 hours of work.
- This project must be completed between May 2 and August 12, 2022
- The scholars are to complete hours between 9 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday, approximately 17 to 20 hours per week.

Required/preferred Skills and Background

- Excellent research and writing skills
- Demonstrated interest in sustainability
- Strong analytical skills
- Ability to work independently
- Deadline oriented
- Project management and organizational skills
- Familiarity with Canadian law and Indigenous law and knowledge systems an asset

Applications close **midnight Sunday January 30, 2022**

Apply here: [Click here to apply](#)

Contact Karen Taylor at sustainability.scholars@ubc.ca if you have questions

Useful Resources

We are holding a special **resume preparation workshop for prospective Scholars** on January 19. [Click here for details and to register](#). Below are some links to useful resources to help you with your resume and cover letter (there are many more online). Some of these resources also provide information on preparing for your interview.

<https://students.ubc.ca/career/career-resources/resumes-cover-letters-curricula-vitae>

<https://www.grad.ubc.ca/current-students/graduate-pathways-success>

<https://www.grad.ubc.ca/cover-letter-cv-resume-templates-ubc-career-services>