

CASE STUDY

Projects for permanence and prosperity

Long-term finance as a catalyst
for a new economic model

GREAT BEAR RAINFOREST AND HAIDA GWAIL,
BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA



DRIVER

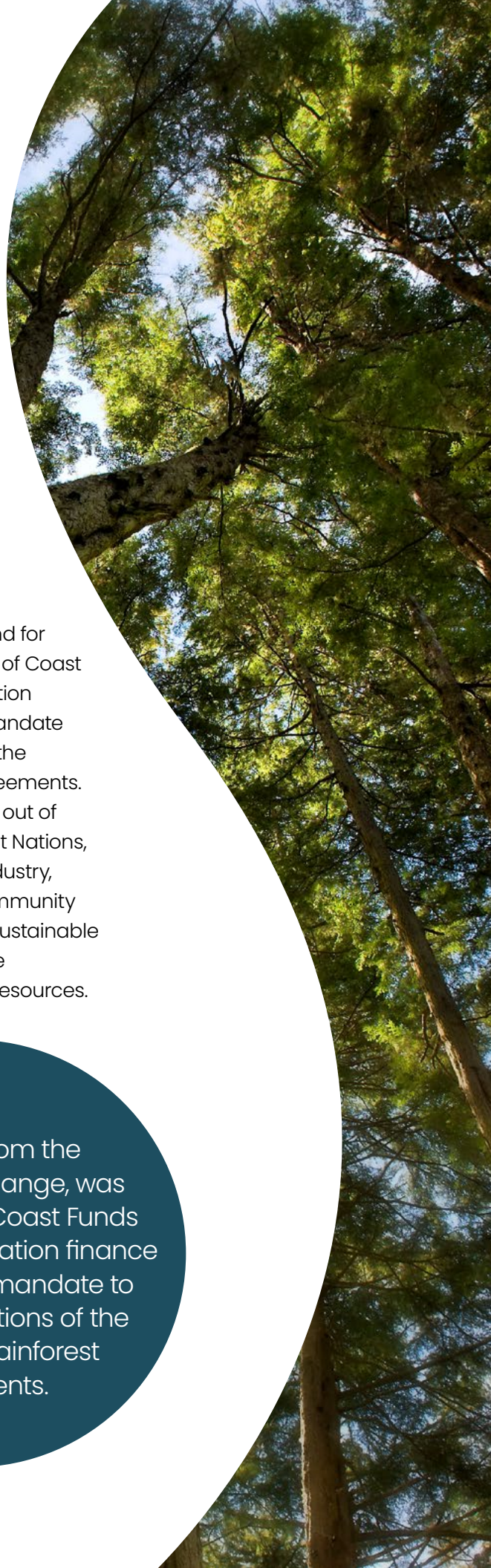
Long-term conservation finance steered by First Nations' vision for economic development and conservation is multiplying the magnitude and durability of opportunities for communities, businesses, and nature conservation.

A crisis in First Nations community well-being and an economy heavily reliant on extractive industries in B.C. in the 1980s and 1990s, underpinned the growing conflict over natural resource management and limited economic and community development opportunities resulting in First Nations with unemployment rates as high as 80%.³⁷ This unsustainable model came to a head in the 1990s.

The First Nations-led movement, including War of the Woods, the historic Clayoquot Sound Protests in 1993, and with support from environmentalist groups, demanded protection of First Nation's territories and access to economic opportunities. This movement led to the B.C. government initiating a strategic land use planning process. This was a key step in making way for transformational change where prior piecemeal attempts had failed to improve community well-being, and economic and environmental conditions.

Resulting from the demand for change, was the creation of Coast Funds in 2007, a conservation finance institute with a mandate to implement portions of the Great Bear Rainforest Agreements. Coast Funds was created out of mutual recognition by First Nations, environmental groups, industry, and government that community well-being is critical to a sustainable economy and responsible management of natural resources.

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MECHANISM FOR CHANGE

First Nations and environmental organizations raised \$60 million in private funds in 2006 to create the Coast Conservation Endowment Fund Foundation, with \$4 million of those funds going towards conservation planning and operational start-up costs. One year later, the provincial and federal governments came to the table with matching funding, and the conservation endowment fund was born. These two funds, initially amounting to \$120 million, are governed by the Coast Fund's board of directors, which are appointed by First Nations, the B.C. Government and philanthropic foundations. The board oversees the funds' finances and investments in Nations, who bring forward projects for the board to review.

The governance structure of the board has evolved as the foundations have consolidated their governance roles and relinquished their voting rights to elevate the influence of First Nations in steering the direction of Coast Funds, giving them equal control with Crown governments. This shift in governance advances the vision of Indigenous-led economic development and stewardship being led by Indigenous Nations.

IN THE MAKING

First Nations have invested more than \$120 million from Coasts Funds and leveraged \$324 million of their own funds and additional funding sources. The \$444 million has been invested across economic sectors, including tourism, manufacturing, forestry, and aquaculture.

Complementary to funds from Coast Funds, Nations are generating carbon credit sales under the Atmospheric Benefit Sharing Agreement between two regional Indigenous organizations, their respective First Nations member Nations, and the provincial government. These agreements lay out the framework for sharing carbon benefits like offset credits associated with the Great Bear Rainforest agreements that avoid deforestation.

Taan Forest, a Haida-owned forestry company, is one example of stacking funds and supporting carbon credit creation to advance sustainable forestry businesses. The company leveraged dollars from Coast Funds to develop an industrial park that enabled Haida entrepreneurs to participate in the value-add forestry sector.³⁸ Taan Forest provides economic opportunities while protecting the Nation's environmental and cultural assets by securing the forestry tenure for 60% of forestry operations on Haida Gwaii.³⁹

\$60M

Private Funds

\$120M

Initial Investment

\$444M

Invested Across Sectors

IMPACT

Coast Funds has been a catalyst for Indigenous-led-and-owned economic development initiatives, which includes the growth or establishment of 144 businesses, the creation of more than 1,400 jobs, including 850 fulltime roles, with salaries totaling more than \$70 million.⁴⁰

Recognizing the Nations' forestry stewardship and its role in climate action under the Atmospheric Benefit Sharing Agreement, the B.C. government has purchased more than \$56.5 million in carbon credits from the Great Bear Carbon Credit Limited Partnership and \$6.8 million from the Nanwakolas Offset Limited Partnership.⁴¹

On-the-ground, First Nations have led more than 444 habitat restoration and research

initiatives benefiting species with cultural and economic significance, including salmon, kelp and trees. Taan Forest's practices are aligned with Forest Steward Council Certification, Rainforest Alliance Certification, and the conservation standards of the Haida Nation's Land Use Order, enabling their sustainable forestry practices to be recognized by their supply chain. The latter ensures sensitive habitats are protected, including bear dens, bird nesting areas and reducing the allowable cut for logging, enhancing habitat protection and restoration.⁴²

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144

Businesses Grown

1,400

Jobs Created

\$56.5M

Carbon Credits Purchased
(Great Bear Carbon Credit LP)

\$6.8M

Carbon Credits Purchased
(Nanwakolas Offset LP)



Through the
Great Bear Sea PFP,
participating First Nations
receive a baseline of support
to advance their economic
development and
stewardship goals.

LESSONS

Funding allocation criteria focused on scale can lead to inequity.

The original Great Bear Rainforest funding allocation model incentivized higher levels of conservation by providing more benefits to First Nations that committed to large-scale biodiversity protection through the protection of intact forest ecosystems. As a result, First Nations with the largest conservation area and populations received the largest allocations, while First Nations whose lands had already been intensely logged, and those with smaller populations, received less.

Recognizing this challenge, First Nations decided on the funding allocation formula for the Great Bear Sea PFP to ensure equity and account for nuances in scale and impact. Through the Great Bear Sea PFP, participating First Nations receive a baseline of support to advance their economic development and stewardship goals.

³⁷ Coast Funds. Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii.

³⁸ Coast Funds. Project Investments.

³⁹ Coast Funds. Taan Forest: Protecting Haida Values through Sustainable Forestry.

⁴⁰ Coast Funds. 2024 Annual Report, 2025.

⁴¹ Coast Funds. Finance for Forests: A Guide to Conservation Finance Options for First Nations' Conservation and Stewardship, 2024.

⁴² Coast Funds. Taan Forest: Protecting Haida Values through Sustainable Forestry.

Case studies are originally published by RBC Climate Action Institute: [Unearthing Value: How nature can play a critical role in pro-growth agendas.](#)



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