

ROUTES TO ROOTS

Revitalizing traditional corridors of exchange through intergenerational regional supply chain networks

Start Date | October 2025

Projected Length of Project | 4 years

Project Leads

Ashli Akins (Program Director, Indigenous Homelands Initiative)

Carrigan Tallio (Program Manager, Indigenous Homelands Initiative)

Community Partners

Nuxalk Nation and other interested Nations along the Central Coast and Central Interior corridors

This pilot project's aim is to build a framework for a self-sufficient regional supply chain network, which strives towards a socially and environmentally circular economy, driven by youth. This means retaining both the material and human resources within the region; providing educational opportunities for local youth to support the supply chain as future professionals; and fostering democratized knowledge-sharing across the region. The initial pilot project (based along the Central Coast & Central Interior of BC) will serve as a model for other regions to replicate and scale it across Canada; to do so, we will develop an open-access *regional supply chain* toolkit. We will launch a sister project in year three in a different region; both projects could complement one another through knowledge-sharing opportunities and by using best practices while adapting to local needs.

The essence of this project is based in the Nuxalk concept of **Stl'mstaliwa**, which translates to "the full human experience." **Stl'mstaliwa** is something that everyone deserves—and it is the community's and Nation's collective responsibility to support each person to achieve their Stl'mstaliwa. This also means breaking down the

systemic barriers that may be preventing community members from experiencing their full humanity. This project, etched in the understanding that—to have sovereignty and sustainability we ought to be *interdependent*, not independent —aims to collectively uplift youth to their full human experience, by returning to the land in an economically, environmentally, culturally, and socially viable way. This, to us, is the true meaning of well-being.

The project is 100% community driven. Activities and outcomes will be determined by the participating Nations themselves, ensuring that the work reflects local priorities and knowledge.

The name Routes to Roots is meant to be primarily oral rather than written, so that it can be understood in two ways:

"Roots to Routes" reflects the idea of digging deep into our roots, reclaiming Indigenous interdependence, and thus building pathways toward proactive, systemic success.

"Routes to Roots" highlights the routes that connect communities, leading us back to our homelands, and allowing us to have a house to call home. In this sense, routes ultimately bring us back to our roots.

Project Goals

1. To foster youth to become regional supply chain professionals, so that communities are interdependently able to thrive together on their homelands for future generations to come.
2. To bring youth and elders together with current leadership, to facilitate an understanding of traditional territorial land-uses and rekindle the economic connection across Nations through a decolonial lens, and in doing so, foster reconciliation across Nations for both today and tomorrow.

Project Objectives

1. To launch an educational curriculum and mentorship program, empowering youth to work in relevant trades that are necessary to sustain the regional supply chain network, with the ultimate goal of increasing the human resource capacity and local employment opportunities in the region, thus reducing the need to outsource contracting;
2. To sustainably source more local natural resources and raw materials that are needed for housing, food sovereignty, and other needs, while also innovatively using and trading excess materials for community-based economic development and cultural purposes;
3. To facilitate dialogue, networking, and knowledge-sharing across communities and professions, including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents in the region, through a toolkit and other mechanisms of support;
4. To foster the return of non-monetary economies and traditional trade mechanisms that nurture interdependence both within and across communities, which will support the regional supply chain from both an economic and social cohesion perspective;
5. To increase pride and understanding of cultural identity within local youth through the nourishment and rediscovery of Indigenous ways of trading, knowledge-sharing, and being on the land.

Who Will Benefit

This project is for all of the following people across the Central Coast & Central Interior of BC:

- Indigenous community members
- Indigenous youth
- Indigenous Elders
- Non-Indigenous community members
- Business leaders (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous)



Total Project Budget | TBD (approx. \$1.5 million)

Funded Amount (received thus far) | \$650,000

Funder(s) | McConnell Foundation, Koerner Foundation

How the Project Is Funded

Ecotrust Canada is responsible for the grant agreement and is expected to fundraise more money to meet the project's budgeting needs, based on partnering communities' future directions and desired outcomes for the project.

The current grant is allocated for salaries, honoraria, travel, community engagement sessions, administration, and project implementation across all participating communities over the first three years of the project.

First Steps & Expectations

- Secure participation from interested Nations along Central Coast & Central Interior of BC.
- Collaboratively establish collective governance procedures to guide decision-making, community engagement, and cultural protocols.
- Facilitate a community needs assessment with each Nation and/or area to identify greatest strengths and needs related to a regional supply chain network.
- Use assessment findings to co-develop practical, community-driven solutions.

The Project's Collective Leadership



We see the Indigenous Homelands Program of Ecotrust Canada acting as the nexus to facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue and innovation among various demographics; we do not see ourselves acting as “leaders” of this project, but rather as “facilitators.”

We believe in place-based work, built upon tangible outcomes and authentic relationships, and would like this project

to be collectively and locally stewarded by community youth.

We will therefore convene Steering Committees, made up of youth, Elders, community leaders, and community members of all participating Nations, who will be part of the collective leadership of this project with us – co-designing, implementing, and monitoring each stage.

What is a regional supply chain?

In typical linear economies, products and services go through a “take-make-waste” system, exiting our local supply chain after one use. This is especially true in rural and remote areas where supply is hard to come by, and where many materials and services need to be transported in at a high cost (both economically and environmentally).

In a circular economy, the goal is to keep as many goods and services circulating within the local and regional system as possible – to reduce, reuse, and recycle – while cutting down on economic costs and increasing local capacity in the local system. Looking at the sustainability of a circular economy also means tracing each step along the way – from the producer, to the transportation, to each manufacturing point along the way, to the consumer.

A successful regional supply chain network can reduce the number of steps in production lines and ensure they stay in our region, increasing local employment opportunities and options for both regional producers and consumers. In this way, communities across the region can rely on each other for products and services, rather

than depending on contractors or goods that need to be shipped in from afar.

This type of circular economy model is not only more environmentally sustainable but also contributes significantly to the local and regional economy, while supporting the social and cultural needs of each community. It also has the potential of creating opportunities for youth to move back home, due to increased housing and employment opportunities.



Sample Activities



Ultimately, all activities will be guided and determined by the participating communities themselves. These are just a few of the many possible activities, shared here to give an idea of what the project could look like in practice.

- Legitimize the Housing Manager position and build local administrative capacity by creating a curriculum for on-reserve housing managers (urban & remote)
- Establish a shared trades-training space for temporary cohorts, minimizing costs and encouraging apprenticeships in remote communities.
- Strengthen food security via farm partnerships, grants, subsidized wages, and centralized food storage.
- Establish an annual regional economic networking and knowledge-exchange event, rotating hosts among Nations to share successes, lessons, and resources.
- Create a community-based trade model for skill/labour exchange (e.g., tradespeople collaboratively building homes for one another), supported by subsidies for essential expenses.

Background in Circular Economies

Ecotrust Canada's Indigenous Homelands Program leadership team co-developed the Routes to Roots project, inspired by several prototype projects, lived experience, extensive research on circular economies, and direct work with our community partners.

The visionaries were Program Director, Ashli Akins, and Program Manager, Carrigan Tallio. From a personal level, the Routes to Roots vision stems from our Program Manager's lived experience as a Nuxalk member being born and raised in the region, working as a Housing Manager, and serving on Council for her Nation; as well as our Program Director's 20-year experience both in research and at the community level co-creating circular economies, including redefining the term to include social and cultural circularity as key parts of breaking down supply chains between producers and consumers. Our previous work

within Ecotrust Canada is the impetus for this project's organic development.

The Indigenous Homelands Program has been actively innovating in the regional economies sector for many years, in collaboration with our partnering communities, starting with *Qwii-qwiq-sap: the Standing Tree to Standing Home* project on the west coast of Vancouver Island in British Columbia with five Nations, then later helping inspire the launch Wahkohtowin and their Tree to Home project in the Northeast Superior region of Ontario with six Nations, then co-creating our *Forest to Frame* project with the Tsilhqot'in Nation.

Through our history of co-developing these multi-community projects, we have been working for two decades with our community partners to explore innovative ways for

Background in Circular Economies Continued



regional supply chains and localized circular economies to create interdependence and community resilience. The results of this work have truly shaped how we in the Indigenous Homelands Program define housing.

Further, throughout these projects, as well as in our ongoing work with our partnering communities to support housing strategies, housing ecosystem overviews, and housing needs assessments, we have repeatedly heard the same responses from multiple community

leaders and members about Indigenous housing. Such responses are that costs are too high; that supplies are too sparse; that more local youth need to be trained and employed; that there needs to be a localized supply chain to mitigate these issues; that the housing sector needs to be legitimized; and that the region needs to work together to become more resilient and interdependent. These project results and feedback from partner communities have directly shaped the development of Routes to Roots.

Sustainability Plan

This project needs initial capital investment to get it off the ground. However, we intend for this project to “walk the talk,” mirroring its values and objectives. Therefore, embedded in its working model, it will contribute to the local region’s economy, labour force, and human resources within four years, after the first cohort of youth is trained.

We believe that a truly circular economy is

not only environmentally circular, but also *socially* and *culturally* circular; this means ensuring that the fabric of our society and culture is upheld with dignity and that our people do not exit the system due to systemic barriers or a lack of opportunities, but instead can contribute in a cyclical way, as both small-scale producers *and* conscientious consumers. This is, in essence, place-based economies at their best.





FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Ecotrust Canada has been proving it's possible to build an economy that provides for life with our partners in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities for thirty years. Through strategic partnerships and on-the-ground initiatives, we strive to create thriving, just, and sustainable futures for both people and the environment.

Learn more at ecotrust.ca
