



# 30 Years of Proving the Possible

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Annual Report **2024**



3 years

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## Mission

Proving it's possible to build an economy that provides for life.



## Vision

Vibrant human and natural communities are connected and supported by thriving, just, and sustainable place-based economies.



## Board Letter

Thirty years ago, Ecotrust Canada emerged from a time and place where the environment and economy were seen as contradictory forces that worked against one another. Tension had just erupted with the so-called War in the Woods in British Columbia, and so, with Jacqueline Koerner as board chair and Ian Gill as executive director, the organization set out to chart a different course. It was a vision for a world in which the economy and environment could not only coexist but mutually support each other.

Early on, this vision was realized in partnership with the Haisla First Nation, when Ecotrust Canada supported the creation of Huchsduwachsd Nuyem Jeess (the Kitlope Heritage Conservancy), a park that encompasses the world's largest intact coastal temperate rainforest. This collaboration demonstrated our commitment to Indigenous sovereignty, ecological stewardship, and long-term partnerships.

Further collaborations followed as we supported communities in making informed decisions about managing their lands and waters—what we called “information democracy.” Using geographic information system (GIS) technology, we worked with community partners to build the information infrastructure needed to map and analyze scientific, economic, and traditional Indigenous knowledge related to land use frameworks and infrastructure that still exist in those communities to this day.

Other legacies from our early history include the Coastal Loan Fund, which provided \$10.7 million in loans to rural entrepreneurs running triple-bottom-line businesses. This approach to conservation finance would go on to inspire bold initiatives, including the Great Bear Rainforest agreements and many other conservation finance strategies that are increasingly deployed around the world today.

We are proud of these legacies. The values, partnerships, and entrepreneurial spirit that launched us have directly inspired our most recent strategic plan and our core mission of proving it's possible to build an economy that provides for life. Likewise, each of our programmatic priorities—Community Fisheries, Community Energy, Climate Resilience, Indigenous Homelands, and Food Systems—can trace their origins back through 30 years of our effort, inspiration, and investment.

Moving forward, we acknowledge that the world we live in is rapidly changing, especially for rural, remote, and Indigenous communities that find themselves facing accelerating ecological and economic instability. We are clear-eyed about the challenges, but also optimistic, not least because of the wellspring of energy and innovation that arises from the communities with whom we work. We believe the road forward will require partnerships and collaborations that can boldly reimagine and rework how communities and ecosystems can thrive together. It will demand governance rooted in humility, strategy grounded in relationship, and leadership that reflects the world we want to build—attributes that Ecotrust Canada has carefully cultivated for the past three decades. ➡

Alex Loeb  
CO-CHAIR

Velma McColl  
CO-CHAIR





## CEO Message

Ecotrust Canada was born from a belief that a conservation economy could be co-created with local communities that saw themselves as part of, and not separate from, the natural world. Our organization has changed a great deal since then, but the throughlines that shaped those beginnings remain intact, including a dedication to working alongside rural, remote, and Indigenous communities; an emphasis on people in relationship with place; and centring our work on tangible, on-the-ground economic solutions.


The continuity of this work reflects our spirit of innovation and a commitment to learning, listening, and adapting along the way. It is also the case that many of our solutions aren't truly novel but are instead a rediscovery of what has come before. This is particularly true of work with Indigenous communities where notions of sustainability, place, community, and economy have been part of a more holistic way of life for millennia.

Let me highlight just a few examples of how our project work has evolved.

- Since our beginnings, we have been involved in **community-based fisheries** on the Pacific Coast of Canada. After three decades of engagement and effort, we are positioned to support coastal communities in a radical realignment of the legal, political, and economic basis for **how fish harvesting is managed for community benefit in British Columbia**.
- Our work on forest conservation and climate change, now taking shape through the **BC Interior Climate Resilience Network**, is built upon a long line of community partnerships including the **Cheakamus Community Forest Carbon Project**, our partnership with **Wahkohtowin Development**, and even further back to our collaboration with the Haisla First Nation to conserve the old-growth forests of the **Kitlope watershed**.
- Our partnership with Metlakatla First Nation in creating a **Regenerative Ocean Farm** and our community collaboration to establish an urban food hub in Prince Rupert, BC, all emerged from seeds sewn by the **North Coast Innovation Lab**. We launched the Lab 10 years ago in Prince Rupert, where we have lived and worked for 28 years.
- In 2024, our Community Energy team successfully advocated for the Province of BC to **provide full cost coverage** for installing heat pumps for lower- and moderate-income households throughout BC. This transformative policy win has its origins in years of on-the-ground involvement by our Energy team in **housing retrofit projects**.

- Our new **Routes to Roots program**, which focuses on developing regional circular economies in BC, originates from what was once our **Tree-to-Home program**. The two decades between these projects are bridged by a deeper, more traditional understanding that meaningful economic development begins with reciprocal connections between people and the land.

One essential learning from our history is that systems transformation takes time, and along with it, a meaningful investment in the communities where we are working. Thirty years ago, we set out to walk alongside communities and places in building a different kind of future. The journey continues, and across every place we work, communities are not only adapting—they are transforming the systems around them. Their leadership shows us the way forward: a future where notions of equity and sustainability are not just ideals, but realities rooted in the lands and waters we all depend on. ➡



Chuck Rumsey  
PRESIDENT AND CEO



30  
years

## ○ Celebrating 30 Years

1995

Ecotrust Canada became a registered Canadian charity grounded in the belief that healthy communities, resilient economies, and thriving ecosystems are inseparable.



1996

Huchsduwachsd Nuyem Jeess, or the Kitlope Heritage Conservancy — established with the Haisla Nation and Ecotrust (US), protecting one of the world's largest unlogged temperate rainforests.

1996-1998

GIS Technology — was used to support “information democracy,” and Ecotrust Canada trained Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners to map ecological, cultural, and economic data.

1998-2009

Coastal Loan Fund — extended 87 loans to entrepreneurs worth \$11 million and unlocked a further \$40 million in capital, helped create 900 jobs.

1999

The Aboriginal Mapping Network — developed with the Gitksan and Ahousaht Nations, to create the first Indigenous GIS user group in North America.

2001

Koeye River Lodge — purchased 74 hectares of land on the Central Coast of BC, protected the entire Koeye River watershed, and returned the property to Heiltsuk Nation ownership.

In blue, an outline of the Huchsduwachsd Nuyem Jeess/Kitlope Heritage Conservancy

Trilogy Fish Co. Acquisition — helped broker and finance the purchase of a sustainable seafood processing plant and store in Tofino by locals and First Nations, strengthening community control of sustainable seafood production.

2005-2009



New branding reflected a pivot toward a new mission statement: Building the conservation economy.

2007

Climate Smart program — initiated to equip small businesses and non-profits to help track and reduce carbon usage. Later launched as an independent social enterprise.

2007

Cheakamus Community Forest — worked with Lil'wat and Squamish First Nations, and the Municipality of Whistler to establish the first carbon offset project in BC.

2008

ThisFish — launched a seafood traceability program, which became an independent social enterprise, to empower consumers to trace their seafood back to the harvester who caught it.

2008

Fisheries Monitoring Program — federally designated by Fisheries and Oceans Canada to provide at-sea and dockside monitoring and training.

2010

Qwii-qwiq-sap “Standing Tree to Standing Home” — launched with Nuuchah-nulth First Nations to use local forest resources to build culturally and climatically appropriate homes while creating jobs and developing a circle of community wealth.

2010



## Celebrating 30 Years continued...

2011

Fisheries monitoring program — partnered with Area A crab fishery to provide service on the north coast of BC.

2012

Partnered with the Northeast Superior Regional Chiefs Forum to create a conservation economy. This led to establishment of Wahkohtowin Development, a social enterprise wholly owned and managed by Indigenous communities in the region.

2014-2020

The Amp — established a co-working space in downtown Vancouver for social purpose organizations and mission-driven social entrepreneurs.

2016

Atlas of Cumulative Landscape Disturbance in the Traditional Territory of Blueberry River First Nations — published to show the cumulative effects of industrial development on the area, which sparked legal and policy reform.

2017-2024

Heat Pump Pilot Project with Hałtzaqv Nation — replaced diesel furnaces with electric heat pumps. Over the years, we helped provide fundraising initiatives and coordination and retrofitted around 300 homes in Wágłisła (Bella Bella, BC)

2017-2020

Operated the North Coast Innovation Lab out of Prince Rupert, BC — connected graduate students from all over Canada to work with community partners as project coordinators.

Fisheries for Communities Gatherings — convened the first gathering in BC (followed by two more in 2020 and 2023) to discuss solutions to advance federal policy for the benefit of working fish harvesters and their communities.

2018-2023

Teem Fish Monitoring Inc. — launched our fifth social enterprise after 8 years of developing a cost-effective Electronic Monitoring system for BC fishery partners.

2019



25th anniversary — we revealed our new logo, website, and a new strategic vision introducing four major programs: Community Fisheries, Community Energy, Climate Innovation, and Indigenous Homelands.

2020

Regenerative Ocean Farm project — launched with Metlakatla First Nation in Prince Rupert, BC, on Coast Ts'msyen Territory, combining food security, environmental restoration, and circular economy.

2021

Indigenous Housing and Homelands Toolkit — published as a resource to support First Nations in their housing and governance needs.

2022

Home Energy Savings Program — launched in North Vancouver Island and Prince Rupert to provide free personalized guidance on making homes more energy efficient through upgrades and funding access.

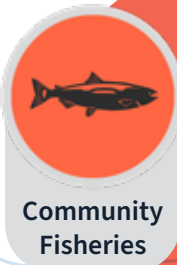
2024

Ecotrust Canada marked three decades of supporting community-led solutions.

2025

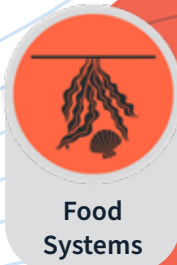
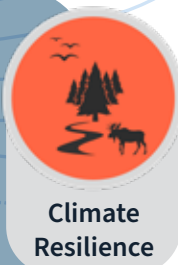
\*For a more detailed summary visit <https://ecotrust.ca/timeline/>

# 2024 Program Highlights



The Department of Fisheries and Oceans initiated the West Coast Fisheries Modernization engagement process in fall 2024 as a direct result of our collaborative policy efforts with industry partners, which included contributing to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans’ 19 recommendations on foreign ownership and corporate concentration in the fishing sector.

In 2024, the Climate Innovation program pivoted to Climate Resilience, sharpening its focus on supporting community-led land and water stewardship that integrates climate action, creates meaningful jobs, and protects cultural values and biodiversity.



The team joined Metlakatla First Nation’s aquaculture crew to distribute approximately 15,100 locally harvested scallops to community members and visitors across multiple events.

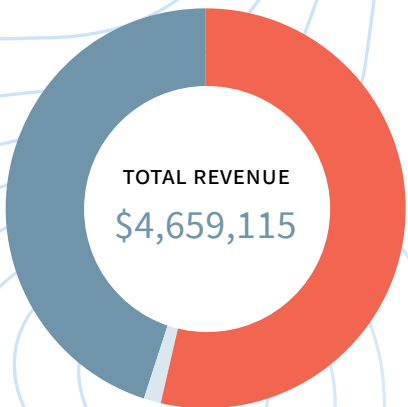
In 2024, the Homelands team completed extensive research that culminated in a 90-page Landscape Report, identifying three essential elements for Indigenous housing solutions—community-led governance, holistic approaches to “home,” and stronger cross-sector collaboration, complemented by a systems map visualizing how major actors connect geographically and demographically across Canada.



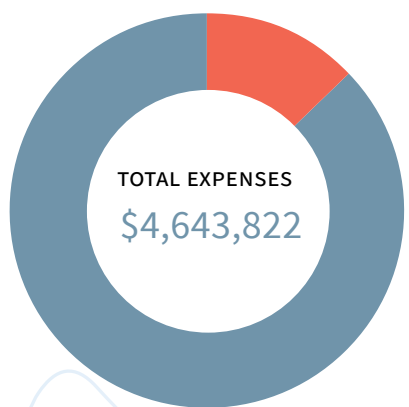
The team launched the Home Energy Savings Program to address barriers preventing energy-efficient home upgrades across northern Vancouver Island and Prince Rupert, providing 35 homeowners with completed renovations and engaging 120 others throughout their renovation journey—potentially saving them \$1,000–\$2,000 annually while reducing carbon emissions equivalent to removing two cars from the road per household.

# 2024 Financial Summary

Our 2024 Annual Report showcases how we’re proving it’s possible to build an economy that provides for life alongside our partners in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. This report captures our achievements and challenges, emphasizing the deep connections between people and place that drive our work. For detailed metrics measuring our progress against organizational goals, please see our companion 2024 Impact Report.



- Fee for Service: \$2,336,913
- Grants & Contributions: \$2,211,976
- Investment Income: \$110,226



- Programs: \$3,946,246
- Administration: \$697,576

Expenses by Program		
Administration	\$697,576	15%
Fundraising & Business Development	\$128,656	3%
Climate Resilience	\$490,406	11%
Community Energy	\$668,678	14%
Community Fisheries	\$1,658,004	36%
Food Systems	\$411,949	9%
Indigenous Homelands	\$261,032	6%
Learning Agenda	\$327,521	7%
Total Expenses	\$4,643,822	100%
Net Surplus/(Deficit)	\$15,293	





## STRATEGIC PRIORITY

# Community Fisheries

## About the Program

We are committed to revitalizing sustainable, fair, and prosperous commercial fisheries on the Pacific Coast, and providing innovative fisheries monitoring services and programs to First Nations and coastal communities.

### Long-term Goal

To enable resilient fisheries systems on all coasts, where marine resource use meets the social and economic needs of society without compromising ecological integrity or the ability of future generations to thrive.

Over the next five years, our partnerships will prove the possible by:

- Supporting communities and governments on the Pacific Coast of Canada to create a regulatory environment where the benefits of fisheries contribute to the well-being of fish harvesters, First Nations, and coastal communities.
- Delivering tailored and innovative fisheries monitoring programming to rural, remote, and Indigenous coastal communities to enhance the sustainability of communities and the marine environment on the Pacific Coast of Canada.
- Creating transparency around illegal, under-reported, and unregulated fishing, and how such activity is defined and enforced in Canada.



30  
years



## Pushing for Policies That Support Fishers in Owning and Controlling Their Licences for a Fair and Sustainable Seafood Economy

Community fisheries are vital for local food security, our cultural connection to the sea, and supporting rural and remote economies. Yet, over the past several decades, West Coast fisheries have suffered due to a federal policy that shifts fishing benefits away from working fish harvesters and their communities toward large multinational corporations and speculative investors.

In 2024, our collaborative work with industry partners led to important developments addressing corporate concentration and non-Canadian ownership in the fishing sector. At the end of 2023, the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans (FOPO) sent the federal government 19 recommendations along with its report on *Foreign Ownership and Corporate Concentration of Fishing Licences and Quota*. In April 2024, the federal government acknowledged most recommendations, indicating that any changes would be implemented through stakeholder engagement via the West Coast Fisheries Modernization initiative in 2024–2025.

The FOPO report drew from 37 testimonies, including that of our senior policy advisor, Tasha Sutcliffe, who has worked in fisheries for nearly 30 years, and many of our partners from the *Fisheries for Communities Network*. This grassroots movement works to ensure the many benefits of BC fisheries flow to the people on the water, on the dock, and in adjacent communities. We have facilitated three gatherings between 2018 and 2023 to build industry-wide consensus for policy change, bringing together Indigenous leaders, fish harvesters, small businesses, fishmongers, chefs, restaurateurs, fishing families, researchers, and community organizations.



Building on this momentum, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans initiated the engagement process with First Nations and the fishing industry for **West Coast Fisheries Modernization** in fall 2024. This process, concluding in 2025, explored adapting “Owner Operator” and “fleet separation” rules for Canada’s Pacific Coast.

Political support for updating fisheries licencing policy exists across federal parties through FOPO and from the BC government. In July 2024, BC released its new **Coastal Marine Strategy**, which included clear support for a made-in-BC Owner-Operator fisheries licensing policy. BC Premier David Eby also endorsed this approach in a letter to the prime minister in May 2024.

Implementing this licensing policy would transition ownership regulations to a system where commercial fishing licences are owned and operated by active fish harvesters and First Nations. This would make licence ownership more accessible and keep the benefits of fishing within local communities.

Ecotrust Canada continues working closely with Network partners to co-create resources that inform policy discussions. As we see positive change on the horizon, we remain committed to advocating for government policies that make community-based fishing more viable and equitable alongside active fish harvesters in coastal communities. ➤

## On-the-deck and Dock Monitoring Work Expands into New Communities

Ecotrust Canada has been developing locally based fisheries monitoring programs in our mission to enhance the economic sustainability of communities and the marine environment since 2011. Our charity is federally certified to provide at-sea and dockside monitoring services to First Nations and fish harvester organizations up and down the Pacific Coast of BC, including the T’aaq-wiihak Fishery in Nuuchahnulth Territory on the west coast of Vancouver Island and fish harvesters in Coast Tsimshyan Territory on the north coast of BC. In 2024, we trained and employed 28 local people to deliver regionally tailored fisheries monitoring and data collection services, supporting more than 500 fish harvesters.

This work expanded in 2024 when the Council of the Haida Nation asked Ecotrust Canada to partner in delivering designated fisheries monitoring services for the first-of-its-kind

Haida Community-Based Fishery, established through the historic **Fisheries Resources Reconciliation Agreement**. The Haida Community-Based Fishery aims to support a thriving, close-to-home, multi-species, small boat fleet operated by Haida citizens. We trained **12 Haida citizens** as dockside monitors for the six-week fishery. We are honoured to support this landmark in fisheries history. ➤





Dyhia Belhabib Honoured with  
Pew Fellowship for Combating  
Illegal Fishing.

Dyhia Belhabib, our Principal Investigator of Fisheries, received the 2024 Pew Fellowship in Marine Conservation. Her research focuses on exploring how technology and community engagement can reduce illegal fishing activities within artisanal zones and marine protected areas in Senegal.

Illegal fishing is a global challenge that threatens ecological, social, and economic security, and many regions lack the resources to tackle this issue effectively. Belhabib has been leading this initiative to create transparency around illegal, underreported, and unregulated fishing. In 2019, she created *Spyglass*, an open-access record on criminal activity by fishing vessels from across the globe. *Spyglass* now has 9,000 boats in the database and 200 individuals and continues to grow annually.



Gear Recovery Program

Before the Dungeness crab fishery opened in June 2024, we helped coordinate Area A’s annual *gear recovery program*, recovering 450 traps in the Hecate Strait between Prince Rupert and Haida Gwaii, BC. Useable gear was returned to vessels, and the rest was recycled or disposed of.

For over 20 years, the Area A Dungeness crab fleet has led the development and implementation of innovative practices to reduce and remove lost traps from fishing grounds, contributing to a more sustainable fishery overall.





PROFILE

**Kirstyn Bruce** coordinates monitors' shifts at the docks and collects high-quality fisheries data for the T'aaq-wiihak Fishery on the west coast of Vancouver Island. She has conducted fisheries monitoring duties aboard packer boats collecting catch from fishing grounds and on beaches during seine net salmon fishing—all demanding, long days.

In Gold River, on Mowachaht/Muchalaht Nation Traditional Territory, Kirstyn validates inshore saćup (chinook) and cuwít (coho) salmon deliveries. Most harvesters fish overnight in 15–16 foot “tinnies” with side-mounted lights illuminating their gill nets. They dock at Ahminaqis Boat Launch each morning, where our monitors validate their catch, often drawing crowds.

*“At the offloads, other Nation members come to see how they can help the fishermen unload. You’ll see families, too. They bring their kids and pass on the knowledge.”*

— Kirstyn Bruce, Northern Project Coordinator, Fisheries Monitor, Ecotrust Canada



STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Climate Resilience

About the Program

Our Climate Resilience program works in deep collaboration with rural, remote, and Indigenous communities to co-develop and implement strategies that safeguard the health of their lands and waters. Guided by community values, Indigenous laws, and ecological knowledge, we co-create innovative land and water stewardship models designed to protect intact natural ecosystems and improve management in degraded ones. These efforts address climate mitigation and adaptation, encourage economic prosperity, and protect cultural values and biodiversity.

Long-term Goal

Rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Canada lead natural climate solutions projects in the places they call home, stewarding their lands and waters while bringing about society-wide benefits for climate and biodiversity.

Over the next five years, our partnerships will prove the possible by:

- Working with community partners to support Indigenous sovereignty through land and water planning that upholds Indigenous law and governance to achieve climate and biodiversity goals.
- Enabling a planned transition toward the stewardship of natural forests and better management of secondary forests by creating innovative models that inspire sustainable economic opportunities and draw in long-term funding.
- Improving the ability of communities and nature to adapt to the effects of a changing climate through natural climate solutions.







## From Climate Innovation to Resilience — a Strategic Shift to Focus on Community-led Land and Water Stewardship

What started as our Climate Innovation program back in 2019—focusing on delivering climate finance tools for rural, remote, and Indigenous communities—pivoted to **Climate Resilience** in 2024. Under the leadership of Michelle Connolly, our new Program Director, we’ve sharpened our focus on supporting community-led land and water stewardship that integrates climate action, creates meaningful jobs, and protects cultural values and biodiversity.

Connolly brings exactly the perspective we need for this work. Based in the wet spruce forests of Lheidli T’enneh territory in north-central BC, she’s a forest ecologist with deep expertise in carbon dynamics in natural ecosystems. Her years of collaboration with First Nations and various levels of government on land management and conservation policy have shown her what works on the ground.

As our team builds place-based climate resilience with rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, we’re guided by what traditional knowledge systems and ecology tell us about the right relationship with nature. We believe that when a community decides to maintain and care for a natural ecosystem like a forest, wetland, or grassland, it simultaneously addresses climate mitigation and adaptation, strengthening its ecological and economic resilience to a changing world. ➤

## Wahkohtowin

While we explore new partnerships in BC’s Interior, we continue to walk alongside long-standing collaborator Wahkohtowin Development, a leading example of community-driven land and water planning in the Northeast Superior region of Ontario.

Wahkohtowin Development, a social enterprise comprising Chapleau Cree, Missanabie Cree, and Brunswick House First Nations, collectively advances sovereignty, well-being, and jurisdiction over their shared territory. In February, our Climate team participated in Wahkohtowin’s Conservation Days in Timmins, Ontario. The sessions focused on developing a conservation vision that honours culture and biodiversity, while maintaining the millennia-long connection between communities and forests in their traditional territory. This vision will also contribute to protecting 30% of the forests in the Northeast Superior region by 2030.

*“Our communities maintained a sacred balance for generations, now our decisions on the land demonstrate to others what a strong way forward looks like.”*

—Isabelle Allen, project forester, Wahkohtowin Development

“

*“Our traditional territories are intact and whole. They have been passed down to us over thousands of years through an unbroken lineage, and it is our responsibility to ensure that the generations to come, benefit from the land, water and air as we have. Ecotrust Canada has become a trusted partner in this work, and we are truly grateful for their support.”*

—Jennifer Loring-Zyp, Ankhla, Wilp Gwininitxw Spokesperson

## Partnering with First Nations to Finance Natural Climate Solutions Projects

In 2022, Ecotrust Canada **witnessed a historic moment** when Wilp (house) Gwininitxw, of the Gitxsan Nation, issued a Protected Area Declaration in accordance with their ayook (traditional law) at the Gitanmaax Feast Hall.

This declaration established that their ancestral lands—Maxhla Didaat and Galaanhl Giist, a 170,000-hectare area in the upper Skeena River watershed in northwest BC—would be protected from industrial activity to ensure the future health of their land, culture, and communities.

Responding to their newly established protected area, Ecotrust Canada committed to supporting Gwininitxw’s work and began a collaborative relationship-building process to implement the Protected Area Declaration.

We played an important role in supporting Gwininitxw to secure a major grant from the federal government’s Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund (NSCSF), which will allow them the capacity and resources necessary to carry out the creation of their protected area. This success was replicated with three other Nations, who benefited from our expertise in crafting and submitting NSCSF applications that yielded significant public funding for conservation. The Gwininitxw Protected Area is a natural climate solutions project that not only upholds Gitxsan ayook but also delivers remarkable carbon storage and biodiversity benefits in a region that provides crucial habitat for wildlife, including grizzly bears, wild salmon, and mountain goats. ➤



## Launching the Climate Resilience Network

Over the last 100 years, forests and watersheds of BC's Central Interior have experienced significant ecosystem degradation from extensive resource extraction, reducing the region's natural resiliency to climate change impacts. Despite this history of disturbance, the region still contains significant natural areas vital to healthy ecosystem function, and equally critical to rural, remote, and Indigenous communities for sustenance, culture, and economic well-being. Our newly forming regional Climate Resilience Network aims to support these communities in reclaiming their role in land and water stewardship, simultaneously addressing climate adaptation and mitigation.

One example of our priorities in this network is the important partnership we are fostering near Fort St. James, BC, with the Maiyoo Keyoh, an ancestral territory of 21,867 hectares that has been home to the same extended Dakelh family since time immemorial. Starting in the 1970s, industrial logging has heavily impacted their lands, with about 90% of the harvestable areas in the Keyoh logged and fragmented by road networks. The creation of 400 km of roads has damaged streams, fish habitat, plants, and wildlife that Keyoh members remember once thrived throughout their territory. To help heal these lands, we are working with Maiyoo Keyoh on a strategy to create new ecological mapping that can help update land use plans and better protect the remaining intact natural systems while guiding much-needed restoration projects.

Meanwhile, throughout our Interior BC Network, we're building connections among the region's forest-based communities while providing:

- Regional analyses to support community forest stewardship
- Protection strategies for remaining natural ecosystems
- Climate adaptation planning
- Support with community visioning and land planning, including meeting facilitation, information synthesis, and funding assistance

Moving forward, we'll grow our team to develop economic opportunities that support climate-friendly land management practices throughout the region. ➤







## STRATEGIC PRIORITY

# Food Systems

### About the Program

Our Food Systems program partners with First Nations, local communities and schools to address food insecurity, improve food sovereignty, and increase local food access in Prince Rupert and on the north coast of BC. Through this effort, we seek to contribute to a collaborative and vibrant local food economy built by and for communities on the north coast and Skeena Bulkley Valley regions.

### Long-term Goal

Collaborative, vibrant, and innovative local food economies are built by and for communities, supported by local and regional food production and marketplaces that are resilient and sustainable.

Over the next five years, our partnerships will prove the possible by:

- Demonstrating that regenerative ocean farming is viable and sustainable on the west coast of Canada.
- Re-establishing the infrastructure, facilities, and partnerships necessary to revive a regional mariculture economy for the north coast of BC.
- Supporting specific place-based and Indigenous food sovereignty projects and initiatives.



## Partnering with Metlakatla First Nation for Local Seafood Security

In northern BC, the Pacific waters surrounding Prince Rupert are rich and abundant in marine life, yet the region's 14,000 residents have limited access to locally harvested seafood. Much of the catch is exported to international markets, with a small fraction sold locally at prohibitive prices. In response to this challenge, Ecotrust Canada partnered with Metlakatla First Nation in 2021 on a regenerative ocean farming project that's bringing healthy, locally harvested seafood to community tables.

There are four farming sites in Metlakatla's territorial waters, where various kelp species and shellfish thrive in the nutrient-rich harbour. Throughout 2024, our team worked alongside Metlakatla's aquaculture team to distribute scallops to community members while sharing this local delicacy with visitors to the region.

Our first major distribution event took place at the All Native Basketball Tournament in February of 2024. This event draws approximately 4,000 athletes and spectators from across the province. Working together, our team and Metlakatla's ocean farming crew set up outside the basketball venue, sharing approximately 3,500 freshly harvested scallops with appreciative tournament attendees.

The year's efforts concluded with a December harvest just before the holiday season. Metlakatla's aquaculture crew and our Food Systems team shared fresh scallops directly with members of the Metlakatla First Nation and Lax Kw'alaams, a Ts'msyen community near Prince Rupert. Each community member who attended received 25 scallops—approximately 11,600 scallops in total—just in time for holiday celebrations.

This continued partnership between Ecotrust Canada and Metlakatla First Nation demonstrates how local, Indigenous knowledge and sustainable practices can support food sovereignty and build community resilience. As we enter 2025, we will continue working on more community distributions and with more north coast Nations to tackle shared shellfish growing and monitoring challenges.





## Prince Rupert Harbour Cleanup and Restoration


The scallops harvested and shared throughout our community are the result of an environmental restoration project. Since 2022, we have partnered with Metlakatla's Aquaculture crew to recover abandoned equipment from former farms at two derelict sites in the Prince Rupert harbour.

This cleanup effort has cleared previously unusable waters into viable sites for future Metlakatla First Nation initiatives, renewing opportunities for economic growth and community well-being. Removing abandoned equipment has created a cleaner, safer marine environment for whales, marine mammals, and professional and recreational users along the north coast of BC.

By the end of 2024, the crew restored three of the four farm sites. We recovered valuable equipment that can support future farm operations for several years. In addition, we worked together with the Nation to raise \$100,000 needed to upgrade an otherwise derelict boat. Once the boat is ready, the crew won't need to contract boats from other businesses, and the team will have more flexibility to do more work on their own.

The environmental impact of this project has been substantial:

- Removed 36,000 kg of gear from farm sites
- Cleared 5,000 kg from the former plant site
- Recovered over 50 buoys for reuse in farm operations
- Salvaged usable anchors and long lines

As a direct benefit of our cleanup efforts, we recovered 8,000 lbs of fresh scallops, which were then distributed throughout the surrounding community. This enhanced access to nutritious, locally sourced seafood while demonstrating the tangible rewards of environmental stewardship. 

## Kelp Husbandry, Research, and Experimentation

The three types of kelp that grow on Metlakatla's regenerative ocean farm are winged, sugar, and giant kelp. These marine plants create vital habitat for marine species and contribute to healthy ocean ecosystems. As knowledge about ocean farming and kelp husbandry continues to emerge in the North Coast region, our team has made significant strides in research, community engagement, and product development.

In January, we published "[A year on a regenerative kelp farm in northern BC](#)" to share our learning journey with Metlakatla members and regional residents. This comprehensive blog, featuring an interactive timeline, has become a living resource on our website that is frequently viewed by community members, partners, and the public at large who are seeking to expand their understanding of kelp husbandry practices and benefits.

Our capacity grew over the summer through the Canada Summer Jobs program, which brought a master's student to our team for an eight-week internship. Their contributions were incredibly valuable—from research, to supporting daily farm operations and environmental monitoring to designing community feedback surveys and collaborating with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on regulatory documentation. [Their reflections](#) highlighted how environmental and community-focused initiatives can help drive sustainable change.





Throughout the year, we explored kelp product development, including several niche products, like kelp soap, pickles, furikake, a dry Japanese seasoning made with dried seaweed, and kelp salt. Our experiments revealed important challenges—kelp quickly degrades after harvest, suggesting the need for stabilization methods such as drying or freezing. Our research also identified immediate applications for fresh and decaying kelp, such as fertilizer and compost, offering practical product alternatives that don't require complex stabilization processes.

Ecotrust Canada and Metlakatla took a pause from growing kelp during the 2024–2025 growing season to evaluate what we learned from our market trials and streamline the shellfish operations. We look forward to stepping back into seaweed growing and R&D in 2025. ➤

“

*“The work on the farm changes a lot, which has its benefits and challenges. There’s a lot of trial and error learning how to grow a new crop better. I really hope seaweed is the big break that brings sustainable work and business into the area. But it’s nice that most days look a little different and especially getting to see the different crops that we’re caring for grow throughout the year and distributing them with community.”*

— Andrew Llewellyn, Metlakatla Development Corporation,  
Aquaculture Technician

### Collaborating with the Community to Improve Local Food Access

In 2024, we continued our work with Royal Roads University and the Public Health Association of BC (PHABC) on the [Reimagining Food Systems project](#). This project brings communities together to rethink how food is grown, shared, and accessed. It focuses on building more socially just and inclusive food systems by centring community voices, especially those that have been historically marginalized.

Earlier workshops in 2022 and 2023 explored how to make local food systems more equitable. The insights from those sessions led to two practical tools: a [Food Justice Community Planning Tool](#) and a [Just Food System Evaluation Framework](#), both created by PHABC.

In October 2024, we hosted two more workshops in Prince Rupert. Participants from urban and rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities came together to share ideas, learn from one another, and build a stronger, more connected regional food system. The conversations focused on how to share resources more fairly and make sure everyone has access to healthy, affordable food. ➤

In the fall, Dianne Villeséche, Program Manager for Community Food Systems Innovation, harvested and delivered approximately 250 pounds of fresh veggies to the Prince Rupert School Lunch Program on behalf of Tea Creek Farm in Kitwanga, BC. After an early frost hit the farm, a quick response was needed to prevent the produce from going to waste—and thanks to this collaboration, the food was instead put to good use, nourishing local students.





## STRATEGIC PRIORITY

# Indigenous Homelands

### About the Program

Though our program focuses on housing and homelands, at our roots, we are really about community well-being. We cannot have a truly sustainable society if our culture, economy, and environment are not taken care of. The Homelands program's vision is rooted in this holistic focus on well-being. We aim to break down barriers that prevent Indigenous community members from being able to return to and thrive in their homelands.

### Long-term Goal

Community members from remote First Nations can return to and thrive in their homelands in ways that honour their social, cultural, and environmental well-being.

Over the next five years, our partnerships will prove the possible by:

- Facilitating long-term community-led housing and infrastructure projects that are climatically and culturally relevant, and that focus on the diverse social needs of community members.
- Creating more sustainable circular economies by building regional housing supply chain networks.
- Supporting Indigenous sovereignty by enabling culturally based decolonial governance through innovations in land tenure and land management models.



30 years



## From Housing to Homelands: Supporting Nuxalk Nation's Housing and Governance Vision

In May, the Homelands team journeyed from Secwepemc to Nuxalk territory, travelling from Williams Lake to Bella Coola through a landscape of horses, snow-capped mountains, and grizzly bear cubs. Descending 1,225 metres from the Chilcotin Plateau into the Bella Coola Valley, we entered Nuxalk Nation—land surrounded by coastal mountains with the Great Bear Rainforest. This remarkable place is home to the Nuxalk people, who have stewarded these lands since time immemorial, and with whom we're collaborating on housing and governance priorities.

We met with Nuxalk Nation staff and worked together to hold a community housing workshop centred on our **Indigenous Housing & Homelands Governance Toolkit**. This workshop was the first of several engagement sessions aimed at identifying community members' top housing priorities, which will become the backbone of Nuxalk's new holistic community-based housing strategy.

Over 60 community members joined the conversation and shared their values and principles related to housing. They illustrated the impact housing has on their quality of life.

We heard of the urgent need for climate-appropriate housing, having consistent support to fund and implement projects, and prioritizing construction and material quality. Participants imagined with us what a thriving housing landscape could look like, such as yards to grow food and raise animals, houses spacious enough to live intergenerationally and comfortably, and housing appropriate for all community members so that no one is left behind.



In July, we welcomed Carrigan Tallio, a Nuxalk Nation member, as our first Homelands Program Manager. Carrigan has worked in housing for the Nuxalk Nation since 2018. She is passionate about finding ways to enrich the lives of people living on reserve in hopes that everyone can achieve their own Stl'mstaliwa, the full human experience.

Moving forward, our partnership with the Nuxalk Nation continues to deepen through Carrigan's leadership and community connections. Together, we're supporting their holistic vision for housing that honours cultural values and meets their needs—enabling community members to achieve Stl'mstaliwa for generations. This collaboration exemplifies our commitment to Indigenous-led housing initiatives that respect traditional governance and build thriving communities. »

“Stl'mstaliwa: a Nuxalk concept that translates to ‘the full human experience.’ The intention is that Stl'mstaliwa is something every Nuxalkmc (Nuxalk people) deserves—and that it is the community's and Nation's collective responsibility to support each Nuxalkmc to achieve their Stl'mstaliwa.”



### Creating Public Learning Opportunities for Indigenous Housing Knowledge

In 2024, the Indigenous Homelands program launched two education initiatives aimed at closing a long-standing knowledge gap around Indigenous housing and First Nations land tenure systems in Canada. These initiatives are designed to support First Nations in navigating housing and governance options while also challenging misconceptions among non-Indigenous audiences—helping to destigmatize and demystify the complex systems that shape housing on reserve and beyond.

The first initiative, **Democratizing Indigenous Housing Knowledge**, is a two-year public education project that will result in a curriculum for senior high school and adult education classrooms. The second, **Accidental Learning Opportunities**, is a one-year initiative that uses videos, visual storytelling, and interactive workshops to make this knowledge more accessible in everyday contexts—from community events to online platforms.

Both projects build on the **Indigenous Housing and Homelands Toolkit** launched in 2022, with the goal of making that resource more accessible to a wide range of learners and communities. While Ecotrust Canada will continue to support our core partners—from the Central Coast to the Central Interior of BC—the learning tools developed through these projects will be freely available to communities across the country. »





## The Indigenous Landscape Report

In 2024, we researched Indigenous housing across Canada, focusing on the contributions of non-profit, non-governmental, and community organizations in rural and remote areas. Through an extensive review of existing reports and literature and interviews with 10 experts, we gained insight into the key players in Indigenous housing and their interconnections.

This intensive yet short research period culminated in a comprehensive 90-page report covering all of Canada, with recommendations for the future of the Indigenous housing ecosystem.

*“Nations need building standards that complement cultural needs and climate.”*

—Richard Hall

Our findings revealed that sustainable and culturally relevant housing solutions depend on three essential elements: community-led governance, holistic approaches to “home” and well-being, and stronger collaboration among government, Indigenous leadership, and civil society groups.

To complement the narrative, we developed a systems map that visually illustrates how major actors are geographically and demographically connected. This report summarizes our findings, recommendations, and observations, and includes lists of key organizations, individuals, and events currently working across the Indigenous housing landscape in Canada.

While the report is yet to be released, we envision this project catalyzing the sector’s future development, addressing critical gaps and inspiring innovative collective solutions for a more community-centred Indigenous housing ecosystem throughout Canada. ➡

## Sharing the Indigenous Housing & Homelands Governance Toolkit

Since 2022, the Indigenous Housing and Homelands Governance Toolkit has become a valued resource supporting First Nations communities developing housing solutions that honour their culture and meet their specific needs. Throughout 2024, we actively shared this resource through various community engagement sessions, including workshops, presentations, and blog posts. The Toolkit’s online popularity grew significantly, with nearly 3,700 people accessing it—an impressive increase of over 80% compared to the previous year.

Our Rights of Nature module stands out as the most innovative and frequently referenced section in our Housing and Governance Toolkit. This approach recognizes natural entities such as mountains, rivers, or entire territories as legal persons, giving their custodians legal standing to protect them from harm. In early 2024, Kia Dunn, who is the Law and Policy Lead for our Indigenous Homelands program, explored this concept in a blog titled [“Standing for Nature – Giving natural territories the status of a legal person.”](#) This thoughtful piece resonated widely, becoming one of our most-read publications of the year.

In November, our team participated in a Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) webinar series focused on understanding and addressing housing needs. They presented insights from their CMHC-funded project, “Mobilizing the Indigenous Housing & Homelands Governance Toolkit,” to more than 50 CMHC officials nationwide. We will continue to share the Toolkit with decision-makers, community leaders, and community members across Canada. ➡







## STRATEGIC PRIORITY

# Community Energy

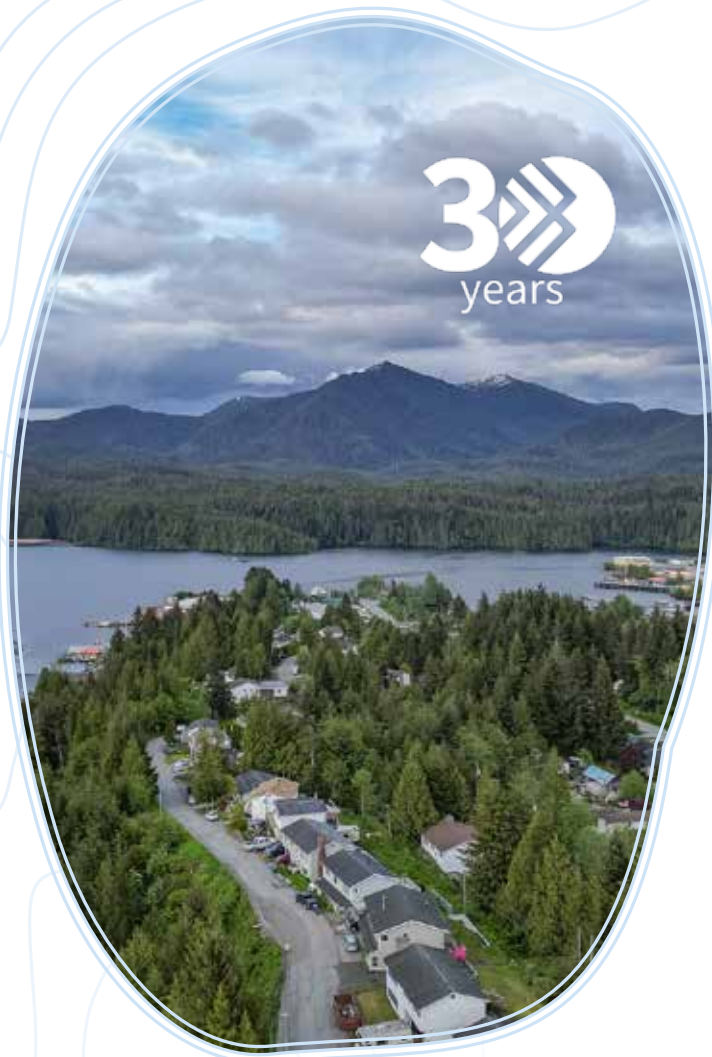
## About the Program

Having access to affordable, clean energy should not be a luxury in Canada. Yet, rural, remote, and Indigenous communities often face energy costs that are up to three times the Canadian household average. A million households in Canada experience energy insecurity. This means that many families are suffering from high rates of asthma, cardiovascular disease, and mould-related illnesses caused by living in cold, poorly ventilated homes. Too often, people must choose between paying their utility bills or paying for life's other essentials. These households are more vulnerable to extreme heat and a changing climate. It should not be this way. Ecotrust Canada believes that new, clean technologies combined with innovative policies and local expertise can come together to eliminate energy insecurity in Canada.

## Long-term Goal

Energy justice is achieved in Canada, where everyone has affordable access to essential home energy services while living in comfortable, healthy homes. This transition will also catalyze a future in which communities use localized, climate-safe, and resilient energy systems.

- Implementing home energy retrofits in BC communities that advance energy security, health, and climate resilience.
- Enabling public policy change that addresses barriers to energy justice by improving energy access, affordability, and home energy retrofit resources for the households that need them most.
- Supporting community aspirations around place-based energy economies by providing resources, guidance, and capacity-building.



## Home Energy Savings Program: Making Efficiency Upgrades More Accessible

Households across northern Vancouver Island and Prince Rupert face exorbitant heating expenses and discomfort due to temperature fluctuations and drafts. After conducting studies from 2021 to 2023 in these regions, we discovered residents could save \$1,000–\$2,000 annually on energy bills by converting from natural gas to heat pumps with insulation upgrades. These energy-efficient improvements also reduce carbon emissions equivalent to removing two cars from the road per household.

Despite these benefits, we identified several barriers preventing adoption: lack of awareness about available rebate programs, high upfront costs, difficulty finding suitable contractors, and complex upgrade processes.

To address these challenges, Ecotrust Canada launched the **Home Energy Savings Program** in 2024. We're partnering with municipal and district-level organizations to connect with coastal BC residents and enroll them in this free service designed to simplify home renovations.

Through this program, residents receive personalized guidance throughout their renovation journey, including:

- A dedicated project manager who offers tailored advice based on individual situations
- Assistance in sourcing and working with qualified contractors
- Navigation support for available home renovation rebates and loans





- Public information sessions and learning opportunities on various upgrade types (insulation, windows/doors, heat pumps)
- Our outreach strategy included creating a dedicated webpage that garnered over 3,000 views in 2024. We distributed two press releases, placed advertisements in community newspapers, and launched targeted social media campaigns that reached nearly 40,000 viewers. The Prince Rupert Northern View featured our program in April.

Establishing trust with rural households and combating misinformation about energy efficiency has been challenging. However, partnering with local not-for-profit organizations and spreading successful retrofit stories by word of mouth is attracting attention and trust in our program.

Natural Resources Canada supports this initiative through its Toward Net-Zero Homes and Communities Program. In 2025, we aim to expand the program to additional rural and remote communities throughout coastal British Columbia. ➡

### Home Energy Savings Program

*After the first year of the three-year program, we had 35 homeowners go through the program and 120 engaged in their renovation journey.*

*“Receiving funding through the various government programs makes home retrofits more accessible, but sometimes these programs can be overwhelming when navigating their processes. Having Ecotrust Canada in your corner providing guidance gives a homeowner the best chance to get all the support available.”*

—Patrick Donaghy,  
Operations Manager,  
Regional District of  
Mount Waddington

### Improving Heating and Cooling in Homes across Indigenous Communities

In ‘N̓amgis First Nation, on northern Vancouver Island, most houses on reserve were built between the 1960s and 1990s and are primarily heated by old, inefficient electric baseboard heaters. Diana Shaughnessy, the Housing Manager for ‘N̓amgis First Nation, said the heat loss is terrible.

In 2020, ‘N̓amgis First Nation and Ecotrust Canada’s Energy team connected during a visit to the North Island, where they were investigating high heating costs. Since then, we have been working together to improve heating and cooling in homes across the community by installing heat pumps, which can significantly reduce costs and add affordable air-conditioning to homes, an increasingly necessary and desired function amidst our changing climate. The Nation’s goal is to have all 218 homes retrofitted with heat pumps, including eight band-owned homes off-reserve. As of October 2024, ‘N̓amgis First Nation has installed 77 heat pumps with Elder’s homes prioritized in the first wave of retrofit funding.

Once we partner with a community like ‘N̓amgis First Nation, we fundraise to help them achieve their community goals. When the funding is available, we work with the band staff and leadership who identify homes that will receive priority. Then, we work with the Nation to help manage the contractors (electricians, HVAC technicians, energy advisors, etc.). There are a lot of challenges to navigate, especially the cyclical and highly administrative process of funding the work. That’s a lot of extra paperwork and demand for housing managers who already





shoulder the responsibilities of addressing housing shortages, new housing developments, maintaining the existing housing stock, supporting the well-being of their community, and much more.

*“In my experience of being a housing manager, Ecotrust Canada just gets it, and they treat us with a lot of respect and dignity and provide that flexibility where they can step in and help. The services that they’ve provided are filling in the gaps. As a housing manager on reserve, it’s a really challenging job. So, to have a team involved in a project and able to support with federal funding programs is phenomenal,”* said Diana Shaughnessy from ‘N̓amgis First Nation.

Since we began this work in 2017, we have supported community-wide retrofit programs for the H̓ai̓ẓaqv (Heiltsuk) Nation, Quatsino First Nation, ‘N̓amgis First Nation, Hupačasath First Nation, and more recently, Kwakiutl First Nation as well as two St’át’imc communities, T’it’q’et and Xaxli’p.

In 2024, we managed and coordinated the installation of 74 heat pumps across five community projects, raising over \$500,000 to fund these initiatives. These installations are estimated to reduce homeowner energy bills by \$1.7 million and eliminate over 1300 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions over 15 years. This effort positively impacted approximately 200 people by retrofitting their homes with heat pumps. 🏠

From 2017 to 2024, we have fundraised well over \$9 million and installed nearly 600 heat pumps, along with other housing upgrades, in Indigenous communities. Over 15 years, we estimate that these retrofits will reduce homeowner energy bills by up to \$14 million and eliminate nearly 20,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions.



## Efficiency Project Planning in St’át’imc Territory

Most of our energy project partners are on the coast. However, in 2024, we formed a partnership with two St’át’imc communities, T’it’q’et and Xaxli’p, located in the southwestern interior region of British Columbia. Residents experience some of the greatest temperature swings in the province, making managing home temperature and air quality critical to a healthy home.

St’át’imc Territory is drier and sunnier than the coast, with around 500 more hours of sun each year. In July, our Energy team visited to engage residents in discussions about their home energy systems’ safety, comfort, and affordability. This is the most crucial part of the planning phase. We want to be confident that the community understands what is going on, supports the work, and contributes to the strategy around. Ecotrust Canada brings a lot of helpful knowledge about energy efficiency, but they’re the ones who know their homes best. 🏠





## Energy Justice Policy Wins

While much of our work is about co-delivering on-the-ground solutions with our community partners, we are also behind the scenes working to advance public policy to help decision-makers have the knowledge they need to achieve energy justice across Canada. Our experts in the field bring their experience to bear in supporting research and examining existing policies and programs so that they can provide solutions and recommendations to government decision-makers.

### Expanded Heat Pump Program

In May of 2024, we celebrated a major policy win when the federal and BC governments announced up to \$24,000 in cost coverage for energy-saving heat pumps and electricity upgrades. The decision will provide transformative new funding for households across BC struggling with unaffordable energy bills, extreme heat and cold, and rising costs of home energy retrofits. Ecotrust Canada had been **calling on governments to strengthen this program** since June 2023, alongside 23 aligned organizations and First Nations.

This new investment reflects a major down payment on the resources needed to tackle energy insecurity and realize energy justice in BC. Over 210,000 households in BC face energy insecurity—a lack of affordable access to basic energy services. The \$254 million in new funding is supporting an estimated 16,000 lower and middle-income households to replace gas, oil, or propane furnaces with high-efficiency heat pumps.

### Advancing Tenants' Rights

In June, we released a report on **Advancing Tenants' Rights to Retrofits and Energy Efficiency** at the 4th Annual Retrofit Canada Conference in Vancouver, BC. Our findings were based on nine lived-experience interviews with tenants and 10 interviews with housing providers, tenant advocacy organizations, and poverty reduction organizations.




Tenants, who make up one-third of households in BC, typically have very little agency over matters that influence their energy bills or the health and comfort of their homes. As of Canada's 2021 census, 38% of tenant households in BC lived in unaffordable units, spending over 30% of their pre-tax household income on housing. The census found that 25% of tenants were in housing that did not meet their needs, yet they could not afford the median rent for an alternative unit.

Most BC buildings were not originally designed for extreme weather. ACORN Canada's 2023 Extreme Heat & Climate Justice Report found that a majority (79%) of tenants were impacted by extreme heat, and affordability was the top barrier preventing tenants from having access to cooling. However, tenants often fear losing their housing if they request improvements to their units and may choose not to pursue complaints.

Based on the experiences shared and research reviewed, we recommend combining three solutions:

1. Rental units need to be able to maintain safe temperatures and air quality, which can be regulated by municipal bylaws or provincial tenancy law.
2. Make energy cost and efficiency information available.
3. Provide government funding specifically aimed at supporting rental housing upgrades as a matter of public health, climate resilience, and poverty reduction.

We shared our impactful new report with key decision-makers, including the BC premier and five ministries, as well as BC Hydro, Vancouver Coastal Health, and other valued partner organizations. The report sparked significant media interest, with five stories across prominent national outlets including the Vancouver Sun, CBC, and the National Observer. Throughout the rest of 2024, the report reached an audience of nearly a thousand online readers. Our advocacy proved effective when the BC government took meaningful action on the third recommendation by introducing valuable new program funding for retrofit work in multi-unit residential buildings—including rental apartment buildings, stratas, and co-ops—in September 2024. 





○ More News

In 2024, we welcomed Jenn Meilleur as our new Director of Programs and Impact. Jenn is a compassionate and strategic systems leader who fosters equity, builds trust, and bridges diverse perspectives.

With extensive experience across public, non-profit, and private sectors, Jenn has advanced sustainability, reconciliation, and community well-being throughout her career. She has facilitated land-use planning frameworks, supported climate adaptation strategies, and led resilience initiatives that balance ecological, social, and economic priorities. Her work with First



Nations has focused on developing governance models that centre Indigenous leadership and knowledge, promoting equity and shared decision-making.

At Ecotrust Canada, Jenn plays a key role in strengthening our program delivery and impact strategy. Drawing on her background in program design, governance, and community engagement, she helps ensure our work remains rooted in local relationships while aligned with the systems-level change we're working toward. 🌱



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Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation  
Canada Summer Jobs  
Canadian Food Inspection Agency  
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Vancouver Coastal Health

First Nations

Ahousaht First Nation  
Brunswick House First Nation  
Nechako Nations (three of the Carrier Sekani communities)  
Chapleau Cree First Nation  
Council of the Haida Nation  
Gitga'at First Nation  
Gitxaala Nation  
Gwininitxw (Gitxsan Nation house group)  
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Hupačasath First Nation  
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Lheidli T'enneh First Nation  
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