

SIERRA REPORT FALL 2024

Building a brighter future, together.

New Indigenous-led conservancies protect massive swaths of old-growth forests

Great news! Almost 300,000 hectares of new protected areas were announced earlier this summer. These are the largest conservancy additions B.C. has seen in years!

The Ahousaht, Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation, and the B.C. government announced 76,000 hectares of new conservancies in Clayoquot Sound, nearly doubling the protected old-growth rainforest within the iconic region. The Saulteau and West Moberly First Nations announced that the Klinse-za Park will be expanded, permanently protecting 200,000 hectares of endangered caribou habitat. We applaud these Nations for their visionary leadership in safeguarding the biodiversity of these globally unique territories.

The new conservancies, years in the making, will also support the development of sustainable economic opportunities for the Nations toward conservation and community well-being.

These announcements move us closer to the goal of protecting 30% of the lands and waters by 2030, an important step to reverse the extinction crisis. This model and the leadership of these Indigenous Nations can serve as inspiration for people and communities across British Columbia and around the world. Let's keep the momentum going!

We are also so grateful to everyone, including Sierra Club BC supporters, who have used their voice to call for support of Indigenous-led conservation solutions. Public pressure from people like you helped make these historic milestones possible.



Photo by Mary Paquet/Sierra Club BC on the territory of the Pacheedaht First Nation.



One year of moving the dial for biodiversity at city council!

It's been an amazing year for supporting biodiversity in local communities since our Move the Dial project launched in May 2023. With the support of people from across the province we have passed 14 pro-biodiversity resolutions, including one at the Union of B.C. Municipalities.

Our goal has been to invite residents from across B.C. to go beyond petition signing and gain the inspiration, resources, and tools necessary for conservation and climate action.

To accomplish this, we collaborated with a former council member and an expert in municipal law to offer workshops and materials for residents to approach their local councils. 'Dial movers' contacted champion councillors and presented at city councils across the province. As a result, a wave of city councils across the province have passed resolutions requesting provincial funding to protect and restore biodiversity at the local level.

In addition to these resolutions, our committed network of hundreds of 'dial-movers' rallied support for an effective Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework by sending personalized letters to the provincial government. Their letters made clear the importance of protecting the spectacular biodiversity in B.C., and the policies needed to achieve that.

With the rising impacts of climate change, protecting natural areas that cool the air, filter water, and host abundant life is essential to our collective wellbeing. We are so grateful to all those who have taken action with us!

To learn more about this program and how you can get involved, please contact our organizer David Quigg at DavidQ@sierraclub.bc.ca

OLD GROWTH IS GOING VIRAL

While we cherish time spent among old-growth forests, many of us are filled with questions about these awe-inspiring places.

Have you ever wondered, what does "old growth" even mean? Why are these ecosystems so important? Are ancient forests a renewable resource?

That's why we created a popular video series all about the wonders and misconceptions of old growth in B.C. This series helps foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of these forests with the goal of inspiring more people across B.C. to better care for them.

And it's working. These videos have been viewed thousands of times on social media, and led to hundreds more people joining in to help keep these ecosystems standing.

Check out our Old Growth 101 video series at sierraclub.bc.ca/OldGrowth101. Please share it with your friends and family!



Turning down the heat

In August, over 1000 people registered for our latest webinar with remarkable individuals, who shared their experience and perspectives on how we can reduce the severity of wildfires in this era of climate change.

They included John Vaillant, best-selling author of *Fire Weather* and journalist; Joe Gilchrist, Salish Fire Keeper and leader in the practice of cultural burning; Meghan Fandrich, writer, poet and parent who's cafe burned down in the Lytton Fire; Scott Rennick, Wildfire Officer and former incident commander in charge of the Lytton area; and our organizer David Quigg who moderated the session.

Together, we shared stories and solutions to move forward together to protect the people and places we love by preventing intense wildfires. To watch the webinar, visit sierraclub.bc.ca/turn-down-the-heat.



Photos: (Left) A bald eagle on the territory of the Qualicum First Nation (photo by Mya Van Woudenberg/Sierra Club BC); Old growth appreciation at Tl'qwxwat, on Pacheedaht territory (photo by Mya Van Woudenberg/Sierra Club BC)

(Above) View of the Fraser River at Kumsheen (Lytton) (Photo from Canva).

(Right) Portrait of Mother Tree Local Leader alumni Sophia Kooy (Photo by Sophia Kooy).

Communities across B.C. are working together to better care for the land and water.

We know that acting in the face of the climate and biodiversity crisis can feel overwhelming. But you are not alone in this work. That's why SCBC supports local leaders creating positive change in their communities. We connect communities with resources to help people step into meaningful action. **Throughout this report you'll find spotlights on local leaders who are finding creative ways to build a brighter future.**



CLIMATE LEADER: SOPHIA KOOY

Sophia Kooy is a podcast producer and master's student researching how religious communities are engaging with the challenges of climate change. As an alumni of SCBC's Mother Tree Local Leader Program, they work on several podcasts including Earth Oasis which amplifies stories of climate optimism and community advocacy. Sophia shares, "One thing that took down a barrier to taking action for me was realizing that I don't have to go further than the communities that I am already a part of to start, and that I don't necessarily have to do anything that is too far outside my comfort zone. Recognizing the interests and skills that are specifically yours and bringing them to the table where you are is already a meaningful contribution."

Just because TMX is active does not mean we are standing down

Looking out from Whey-ah-Wichen (Cate’s Park) in North Vancouver, a tanker was visible on the Burrard Inlet when Rueben George, a member of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation and manager of the Sacred Trust Initiative, welcomed everyone who gathered for an important, and heart-breaking, moment. Despite years of opposition, the Trans Mountain pipeline and the Burnaby terminal are now fully operational.

On May 1st of this year, the Trans Mountain pipeline commenced running bitumen through its pipeline from the tar sands in Alberta, across B.C. and through the Burrard Inlet to its shipping facility in Burnaby. The pipeline brings a sevenfold increase in tanker traffic in the Inlet, resulting in a major increase in the likelihood of an oil spill in these precious waters. An incident like this would devastate marine and terrestrial ecosystems as well as surrounding communities in the Vancouver area.

But we are not standing down as the health of the waters and our communities are at stake.

On June 9th, Sierra Club BC and our Mother Tree Local Leader Program participants had the honour of joining the Tsleil-Waututh Sacred Trust Initiative in hosting an interfaith water ceremony. This event affirmed our solidarity with the Nation and our continued obligations to the Burrard Inlet. The gathering brought together faith and spiritual leaders from

over 12 different spiritual traditions and over 200 community members. In this moment of transition, we stood together and renewed our commitment to this fight by listening to each other’s prayers and reflections.

After hearing from many diverse faith perspectives, Elder and Tsleil-Waututh matriarch, Xaliya (Ta7ah – Amy George) offered teachings and gratitude to close the work.

“Our teachings from when I was a very tiny girl is that water covers everything, water is very sacred. Thank you all for coming out, and thank you for your support, and thank you for getting out in the canoe and paddling to the inlet and to the big oil tanker out there. If there is one dump from these big oil tankers, over 1 million people will be sick. So, what we are doing is we are not only sticking up for ourselves but for our children and our future generations. We are doing the right thing. So don’t give up and keep fighting.”

Coming together, we affirmed that this work is not over. The Tsleil-Waututh Nation (TWN) have been caring for the inlet since time out of mind and this will not stop just because oil has commenced flowing through the pipeline. At SCBC, we stand with the TWN and are committed to upholding our obligations to the communities of these lands and waters. As Rueben George says, prayer is only the beginning.

Stay tuned for future ways in which you can support this work.



Education program updates

This school year was one for the books.

We are so grateful for the time spent with youth across B.C. as we helped them connect with nature in their own backyards. We made tons of great memories with learners new and old, as we got creative in the outdoors. Together, we learned about fascinating plants, built bird nests, created environmental portraits and learned about the salmon run through interactive games, just to name a few! These unique experiences foster a deeper appreciation for the web of life, so that youth are empowered to better care for the ecosystems and climate which sustain us all.

People from all backgrounds deserve to have opportunities to connect with the lands and waters. That’s why we prioritize working in communities with limited access to services and resources, offering all workshops for free. By actively removing entry barriers in the environmental movement, we make our land-based learning opportunities accessible and enjoyable for all ages.

Our programs embrace diverse abilities, perspectives, and culturally relevant ways of knowing. We are dedicated to decolonizing our learning process by respectfully incorporating local Indigenous knowledges into our workshops and resources. By collaborating with Indigenous partners to include traditional ways of learning and knowing, we create workshops that are hands-on and intercultural. This intersectional approach helps facilitate a shift to respectful, reciprocal relations with the land, water and all living beings.

Photos: (Left) Folks gathered at the Water Ceremony beside the TMX shipping facility in Burnaby (Photo by Mary Paquet/Sierra Club BC)

(Above) Students gather for a session in Goldstream Provincial Park (Photo by Mya Van Woudenberg/Sierra Club BC)

HERE IS WHAT TEACHERS HAD TO SAY!

“The real-life stories and examples helped the students learn through the place-based approach and to show respect to everything that is around us, even if it does not seem like it is living. It was great to have the workshop within our school to raise awareness of what can be done to help respect and protect the land. It was a great learning experience for the children, and they really enjoyed using the magnifying glass to explore and learn. They were fascinated with the fire moss that was in our fields, as well as what they could do to help make homes for other bugs around the school. It definitely brought more awareness. There is a lot more that we can do within our school when it comes to learning and exploring about nature.”

“We are SO thankful that Sierra Club BC exists for schools who also have minimal budgets. Connecting students with experts to learn on the land and in the community is hugely valuable.”

“While I make every effort to be knowledgeable and engaging, I struggle to help my learners connect with the land. This workshop gave us some shared understandings about the land and relationships that we will be able to come back to in future lessons. We have several students in our group who routinely do not engage, and you managed to engage them! This was wonderful and inspiring to see. Thank you!”

This year, you helped:

Organize over 330 workshops throughout the Lower Mainland, Capital Regional District, and Mid/North Island Communities. Through these workshops we have reached over 7,500 learners!

Increase our capacity for teacher and parent support. This year we expanded our downloadable resource library by creating and publishing four new lesson plans on beings and seasonal shifts. This year we also ran four Professional Development Workshops for 90 participants!

Reach over 2,200 people through three Learn to Draw webinars on spiders, river otters and beavers. Over 300 of these people were teachers watching alongside their class, representing another 6,000 students! In all, our Learn to Draws reached 55 unique districts to help teach youth more about the fascinating beings that call B.C. home.



YOU'RE INVITED TO OUR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

We'd love to connect with you this September! Sierra Club BC will be hosting its Annual General Meeting (AGM) with an open invitation for members to attend virtually. We'll be going over our highlights from the past year and speaking towards our vision for the future. We hope you can make it!

Date: Thursday, September 19, 2024.

Time: 6 p.m. PT

Location: Online via Zoom

You can register at sierraclub.bc.ca/agm2024 or contact Sam Carpenter at sam@sierraclub.bc.ca.



BIODIVERSITY LEADER: BRAD FOSTER

Brad Foster has been working with SCBC, local governments and organizations to help promote the protection of a very special place in the North Okanagan called the Commonage. This unique area, located in Sylix Okanagan People's territory, is an important habitat corridor that supports rare and endangered species. It's at risk of being fragmented because of large developments. Thankfully, there's a growing network of people coming together to ensure this vital ecosystem remains intact. If you'd like to get involved, join the "Preserve the Commonage" Facebook page.

Enough is enough

The past few months have been heartbreaking.

Wildfires still burn near B.C. communities, and over the summer thousands of people were forced to flee or wait on evacuation alert, fearing for their homes and loved ones. A third of Jasper burned down along with the surrounding iconic national park. This year's heatwave broke multiple temperature records.

Enough is enough. Our provincial government needs to take the climate crisis seriously if they intend to keep communities and the places we love safe.

We cannot rely on fighting these intense and destructive fires over and over — we must address the root of the problem. That means reducing the climate pollution that is causing heatwaves and wildfires by winding down the production and burning of fossil fuels.

But right now, B.C. is doing the opposite. The province is rapidly expanding fossil fuel infrastructure like LNG pipelines and other fracked gas projects. This will increase pollution in B.C. and abroad, making unnatural disasters more frequent and severe.

And poor forestry practices are making matters worse, with clearcuts and young tree plantations acting as tinderboxes. Protecting old growth on the other hand helps keep our communities safer because they are more resistant to wildfire and drought conditions.

It's not too late to take action. By phasing out fossil fuels and protecting intact ecosystems, we can create a brighter future. Sierra Club BC has worked for decades to make these solutions a reality, and the stakes are higher than ever.

That's why we've continued to mobilize folks, with thousands of letters sent to MLAs and MPs calling for bold action. We joined over 500 diverse organizations — including Indigenous leaders, faith groups, doctors, teachers and more — calling for a phase out in fossil fuels from the federal government. And we've connected with community leaders, helping folks talk to their networks about climate change to inspire local action. Soon, we'll have a new resource available to make navigating these tricky conversations easier.

And of course, we've continued to hold the B.C. government accountable, reporting back on the latest emissions data and trends. To make these conversations even more accessible, we shared policy breakdowns and updates on social media and email that help connect the dots between extreme weather, forestry practices and climate action.

It can feel like an uphill battle, but your support helps keep us going. We are so grateful you're on this journey with us. Together, we can build a healthier and safer future.

New B.C. old growth action plan needs short-term timeline

In May, the B.C. government released their latest old growth update "From Review to Action" which outlines their plans on old-growth protection and forest management in the province.

Considering the politically uncertain times, it is reassuring that in this update the B.C. government remains committed to working with First Nations to implement all recommendations from the strong 2020 Old Growth Strategic Panel report — a blueprint to achieve a paradigm shift in forest stewardship. However, this new old growth announcement does not contain the critical steps needed to achieve this promised shift in the near future.

A dramatic example of this lack of urgency is the status of the at-risk old-growth forests that were recommended for logging deferrals three years ago. More than half of these endangered stands remain open to logging. But instead of offering a renewed commitment and clarity around accessible funding for First Nations opting to defer logging in their territories, the update remains vague about efforts to safeguard at-risk old growth.

As Shelley Luce, SCBC's Director of Campaigns, says: "What's needed now is leadership at every level of government and in every ministry to protect irreplaceable old-growth forests before we lose any more. Meaningful action plans would move us beyond talking, to deliver on existing commitments and create change on the ground."

We won't stop working until these life-sustaining forests are taken care of. We will continue to advocate for a comprehensive action plan for old growth. With your support, this has included helping get public attention on this issue through social media campaigns reaching tens of thousands of people, and mainstream media stories putting old-growth conversations right on kitchen tables across B.C.

According to recent polling by Leger for Organizing for Change (which SCBC is a member of), 76% of residents believe it is important the B.C. government hold up their commitment to temporarily defer logging in the largest and most at-risk old growth forests in B.C. We are in the majority. Together, we can ensure future generations know the wonders of ancient forests too.

Photos: (Left) Biodiversity Leader Brad Foster (Photo by Brad Foster)

(Right) Two harbour seals on the territory of the Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish, and Musqueam peoples (Photo by Mary Paquet)



PROVINCIAL BIODIVERSITY LAW DELAYED

Unfortunately, in May, the province announced delays finalizing the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health (BEH) Framework which pushes it to 2025. This proposed framework will eventually outline a path to help reverse the extinction crisis in B.C. — including a provincial law co-developed with Indigenous Nations that prioritizes biodiversity and ecosystem health across all sectors. This postponement is worrying.

Every day this work is delayed, more at-risk ecosystems and species are irreversibly lost. British Columbians don't want to see iconic orcas, salmon, caribou and more disappear forever. That's why earlier this year, thousands of people provided input to strengthen the BEH framework, with support from our letter-writing tool. Sierra Club BC will continue to keep the pressure on, calling for interim protection measures and swifter action on a biodiversity law to ensure the web of life can thrive again.

THE B.C. ELECTION IS COMING UP THIS OCTOBER!

Don't forget to vote this election day on October 19th. This is a chance to have your say and help ensure a thriving future for the lands, waters, and all who call them home.

Leave a legacy of a brighter future

You can leave a legacy of healthy land and water by leaving a gift to Sierra Club BC in your will.

Since 1969, Sierra Club BC has been known for safeguarding biodiversity, protecting old-growth forests, advocating for meaningful climate action, and inspiring future generations to better care for the lands and water through our place-based environmental education programs.

Your legacy gift, no matter the size, will make a tremendous difference in ensuring we can continue this work into the future.

A charitable gift in your will can also reduce the taxable impact on your beneficiaries by reducing taxes on your estate.

When you add Sierra Club BC to your estate planning, you'll join dozens of our honored Red Cedar Circle legacy supporters. Join them in leaving a brighter future.

Visit sierraclub.bc.ca/donate/legacy-giving to learn more or contact Gabrielle Vacheresse at 250-386-5255 ext. 102 or gabrielle@sierraclub.bc.ca.

Photo by Troy Moth

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