UVIC SUSTAINABILITY SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Graduate Internship Opportunity

SUMMER 2026

Project Title

Understanding how aquifers are connected across the unceded and unsurrendered territories of the lək̓ʷəŋən and SENĆOŦEN speaking peoples a.k.a Southern Vancouver Island

Organization

NatuR&D/Partners

About the Opportunity – Sustainability Scholars Program Info

These 250-hour internships are offered in partnership with community organizations and provide UVic graduate students from any discipline with opportunities to gain applied sustainability research experience. Scholars work under the guidance of a partner mentor and contribute to projects with real community impact.

The 2026 pay rate is approximately $34.72/hour. To apply, visit the Sustainability Scholars Program website and review the application guide to confirm eligibility and required materials. Applications close at 11:59 pm PT on Sunday, February 1, 2026. Questions? Contact Laurel Currie: sustainability-scholars@uvic.ca.

Project Background

The Resilient Urban Systems & Habitat (RUSH) Initiative https://whatstherush.earth/ is a website of maps for the non-technical audience to understand the risks and fixes to long term health on the South Island. Our goal is to support neighbourhoods in becoming climate ready and built for a culture of belonging.

The federal and provincial governments have mandated housing targets for all the municipalities and many developers are saying that attending to urban ecosystem connectivity is not cost effective. Without planning for connectivity, we risk creating concrete jungles that do not support the health of the intended inhabitants and increase the overall community's vulnerability to extreme heat and flooding events. This risk is often disproportionately experienced by neighbourhoods with lower incomes.

Additionally, nature-based solutions such as canopy cover, wetlands and restored watersheds, are well known to increase climate resilience. The recharging of aquifers is critical to water security and emergency access. More information is needed for informed planning.

How can a development proposal be an opportunity to increase climate readiness, ecosystem performance and access to all the health benefits Nature provides?

Project Overview

RUSH is a mix of community generated data, visualized government reports and science communication tools to support communities in advocating for features that make them resilient to climate events.

Understanding how aquifers are connected is important in maintaining access to water in an emergency and for biodiversity year-round.

We are looking for a Scholar to compare the data on well depths to determine which aquifers are connected so that we can be more intentional about protecting volumes and access to water supplies. We also need a ballpark calculation on aquifer recharge based on % of absorptive surface and precipitation. This may inform where impervious surfaces are located, how areas of access are maintained and what watershed restoration measures are needed to facilitate salmon returns.

Project Scope

Using readily available data sets on aquifers and wells in the Capitol Regional District, the Scholar will compare well depths to establish aquifer connectivity.

With these findings the Scholar will interview people with experience and observations related to water supply. They may include First Nations, hydrologists, farmers, residents and others.

The scholar, as a representative of RUSH and our many partners will also request permission from the CRD to access and integrate “The Water Balance Express” - a comprehensive web-based tool that is available to the CRD. This would provide a visual evaluation tool to allow a homeowner to optimize and evaluate possible installations in comparison to established watershed targets. The Express provides training opportunities as well as detailed descriptions of absorptive alternatives that can be compared for effectiveness. This is an existing tool that is available to all of the members of the Partnership for Water Sustainability in BC, which includes the CRD.

We are also interested in a ballpark calculation on aquifer recharge based on % of absorptive surface and precipitation.

Deliverables

The final deliverable will be a series of data sets, resources and an ArcGIS storymap explaining the reasons neighborhoods should care about ensuring aquifer recharge, access to locations with springs and watershed restoration planning.

Time Commitment + Timeline

The Scholar will work approximately 250 hours on this project between May 1 and August 15, 2026. This will be a mix of independent and team work as well as community consultation with support from RUSH and partners.

Required / Preferred Skills + Experience

- Excellent research and writing skills
- Demonstrated interest in sustainability
- Community engagement experience
- Strong analytical skills
- Ability to work independently
- Deadline oriented
- Project management and organizational skills
- GIS training or experience
- Comfortable interacting with strangers to conduct public/in person surveys
- Design and layout skills

Additional Information

An interest in hydrology, water policy and ecology are desired.