UVIC SUSTAINABILITY SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Graduate Internship Opportunity

SUMMER 2026

Project Title

Nature-based Solutions and Natural Asset Management: Valuing Ecosystem Services for Cost-Effective, Sustainable Approaches to Municipal Asset Management, Climate Action, and Land Use Planning

Organization

Friends of Bowker Creek Society (FOBCS)

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 Friends of Bowker Creek Society (FOBCS) supports the restoration and enhancement of Bowker Creek and its watershed to a healthy state, guided by the vision and goals of the 100-Year Bowker Creek Blueprint. The Blueprint is a precedent-setting, inter-generational watershed action plan by the Capital Regional District (CRD), Districts of Oak Bay and Saanich, City of Victoria, FOBCS, community associations, and schools to restore the 1,850-hectare Bowker Creek Watershed, daylight the Creek, and help natural systems recover and thrive in an urban setting. Climate change, habitat loss, and increasing infrastructure costs are challenging municipalities' ability to manage stormwater, heat, and ecosystem health. Nature-based infrastructure and natural asset management offer cost-effective, climate-resilient alternatives to traditional engineered solutions, but are often under-valued in municipal asset management due to limited financial accounting of ecosystem services. This project addresses that gap by exploring how natural assets can support climate action, sustainable development, and biodiversity goals simultaneously.

Natural assets across Oak Bay, as well as ecological corridors between biodiversity hotspots, also support the functionality and survivability of the broader urban ecosystem, including the Bowker Creek Watershed and the Key Biodiversity Areas of Uplands Park-Cattle Point,

Gonzales Point, Trafalgar Park, and Sahsima (Harling Point), Kohweechela (Mary Tod Island), and the Trial Islands Ecological Reserve.

Project Description + Objectives

The purpose of this project is to demonstrate how ecosystem services and natural asset management can be incorporated into traditional asset management programs and provide data-driven cost-benefit analysis tools for multiple government departments, such as Parks, Engineering, and Planning, so they can best achieve the goals they set for levels of municipal service delivery.

Objectives

1. The Sustainability Scholar will review reports from other municipalities to look at the possibility of estimating ecosystem service values for natural assets (e.g., urban forests, riparian areas, wetlands, and coastal ecosystems) on public and private lands in Oak Bay and the Bowker Creek Watershed. The Scholar will apply methods used by other Capital Regional District (CRD) municipalities, Natural Assets Initiative, and standardized by the national CSA Group.
2. The Sustainability Scholar will also make suggestions for mapping ecological corridors between biodiversity hotspots.

Project Scope

Main Activities

- Review relevant literature, policies, and case studies on natural asset management and ecosystem service valuation
- Analyze municipal approaches in Oak Bay, the CRD, and comparable jurisdictions
- Conduct interviews with local government staff and key partners
- Estimate ecosystem service values using established frameworks and benefit-transfer approaches
- Identify opportunities for ecological corridors and nature-based solutions
- Synthesize findings into actionable recommendations

Deliverables

Final Report, Recommendations, and Presentation

- Create a report that includes estimated natural asset values, as well as actionable recommendations and timeframes for municipal Engineering, Parks, Planning, and Finance departments to move forward with incorporating natural assets into their asset management programs.
- Provide a map of possible ecological corridors between biodiversity hotspots, including how climate change and biodiversity loss are exacerbating the situation.
- Identify barriers and opportunities to implementing natural asset management and ecological corridors.
- Presentation to FOBCS Board

Time Commitment + Timeline

- The project is estimated to take **250 hours** and will run from **May 1 to August 15, 2026**.
- **May 1- May 15th**: Orientation, FOBCS introductions, stakeholder introductions.
- **May 15 - June 7th**: Review background material and prepare script for interviews. Set up interview dates with FOBCS board members, partners and local staff.
- **June 7 - June 30th**: Conduct interviews, analyze data, prepare draft recommendations.
- **July 1 - July 15th**: Circulate draft recommendations for comments and feedback.
- **July 15 - August 1st**: Prepare draft report for review.
- **August 1 - 15th**: Complete and submit report to the UVic Sustainability Scholar office. Prepare and present report to FOBCS board.

Required / Preferred Skills and Experience

- Excellent research and writing skills
- Demonstrated interest in sustainability
- Experience conducting stakeholder engagement events, including facilitation skills, is an asset
- Familiarity with research methodologies and survey techniques
- Strong analytical skills
- Ability to work independently
- Project management and organizational skills
- GIS training or experience is an asset
- Comfortable interacting with strangers to conduct public/in person surveys
- Experience with financial modelling and analysis

Additional Project Information

It would be beneficial to have taken courses in one or more of the following areas:

- Environmental economics
- Environmental management
- Adaptation Planning and the Built Environment
- Ecosystems of the World
- Green structures and materials
- Smart buildings, infrastructure and cities
- Sustainable water

Friends of Bowker Creek does not have an office so the student will be working from their home base and will need to have a means of transport to municipal offices, Bowker Creek Watershed rain gardens, and other natural assets in the Oak Bay area. Access to a phone will be needed for communication and coordination with staff and volunteers and to record photos of natural assets for reports. Some of the work will be conducted outside so the student should be equipped with suitable clothing for a range of weather conditions. Tools and gloves will be provided if any restoration work is needed.