UVIC SUSTAINABILITY SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Graduate Internship Opportunity

SUMMER 2026

Project Title

Tsawout First Nation clam population assessment for sustainable Food, Social, and Ceremonial harvest

Organization

Tsawout First Nation

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

On June 21, 2023, Tsawout First Nation (TFN) took a historic step by self-declaring its first IPCA within the Salish Sea and its ancestral lands. As signatories of the Douglas Treaty, Tsawout has endured over 170 years of exclusion from sustainable management of its traditional waters, which, in turn, has impacted the Nation's food sovereignty/security, health/wellness, economics, cultural protocols, and, *crucially*, the integral relationships Tsawout's People have always had with their marine relatives. Faced with the effects of unsustainable, Canada-led fisheries management and ongoing compromises to their way of life, TFN is now in the process of identifying, designing, and implementing culturally-grounded, community-directed stewardship protocols for marine life within this newly established IPCA, known as QEN,T (Protector), which spans approximately 150 km^2 or 3% of TFN's 4500-km^2 traditional territory.

Through this internship, the Sustainability Scholar will support applied research and data synthesis that contributes to Tsawout's community-led stewardship planning and long-term monitoring of clam populations within QEN,T.

Project Description

Tsawout's traditional territory has been significantly impacted by coastal developments, resulting in many traditional shellfish harvesting sites becoming inaccessible due to long-term

sanitary closures. To better understand the status of culturally important species within its territory, this project aims to identify which beaches in Tsawout's traditional territory remain viable for food harvesting and to assess the health of clam populations.

This project is a continuation of work completed in the Summer of 2025. This project will not only incorporate Western scientific methods (DFO clam surveys) but will also utilize traditional knowledge to identify important traditional harvest sites and species. Elders and community members will provide invaluable insights into historical harvest practices and locations, enriching the understanding of temporal trends observed in clam populations. While the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) has conducted some clam sampling along the British Columbia coast to understand population dynamics, their efforts do not specifically address the availability of food species within a Nation's territory. Additionally, intertidal clams in the South Coast remain listed as "uncertain" in DFO's stock assessments. By combining Western and Indigenous science, this project aims to achieve a holistic understanding of clam populations available for harvest in Tsawout's QEN,T MPA.

The Scholar will contribute to this work by supporting field data collection, assisting with analysis and synthesis of survey and interview data, and helping translate findings into reports and presentations for community and external audiences.

Project Scope

Under the guidance of Tsawout's Fisheries Department, the Scholar will support the following project activities:

- **Intertidal Clam Population Surveys**
  Conduct systematic surveys of intertidal clam beds to assess population health, species diversity and distribution, and biomass. Interviews will help us selecting locations and fill the gaps between historical vs modern traditional harvesting sites. The latter are the ones still relevant for community health, but we anticipate collecting additional knowledge to assess observed trends in clam availability that may be related to climate changes and other stressors. Surveys will help to inform sustainable harvesting levels, ensuring long-term availability for Tsawout harvesters.
- **Capacity Building and Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer**
  Active involvement of Tsawout community members of all ages in interviews and survey activities, providing training and employment opportunities. The project will prioritize the integration of Indigenous knowledge, fostering a collaborative approach to clam management. Community meetings will be held to inform Tsawout membership of the project and relevant results found.

Deliverables

The scholar is expected to provide a written report containing:

- A detailed assessment of intertidal clam populations in culturally important beaches to inform sustainable harvest guidelines.

Metrics demonstrating strengthened capacity within the Tsawout community for ongoing monitoring and resource stewardship.

Time Commitment + Timeline

The Scholar will participate in field surveys, data organization, preliminary analysis, and reporting activities across the project timeline (May 1 – August 15), as outlined below.

Intertidal Clam Population Surveys

Clam surveys will take place at the 5 selected areas using the DFO protocol as descried in *A Manual for Intertidal Clam Surveys* (Gillespie and Kronlund 1999). Each site will be surveyed once during the spring or summer of 2026 at lowest available daylight tide. The goal of these initial rounds of surveys is to create a baseline to inform an annual field survey program to track the clam populations long term. Tsawout community members will be consulted on modern and historic harvesting sites to select specific survey sites still relevant to traditional harvesters and to provide insights into stressors causing the loss of harvesting sites. Community members will also be consulted to select the most important clam species to be enumerated and to estimate biomass. The scholar will potentially aid with the assessment of knowledge gaps by recording/transcribing interviews.

Data analysis, communication materials and Final report

The scholar will aid with preliminary analysis of data collected in field surveys and produce a report and a presentation to be presented during a community event. Communication materials will be helpful to maintain the community throughout the project such as social media posts and articles for the community monthly newsletter.

A final report will be provided to DFO, which is the main funder of the project.

Required / Preferred Skills and Experience

- Excellent research and writing skills
- Demonstrated interest in sustainability
- Familiarity with research methodologies and survey techniques
- Statistical analysis & analytical skills
- Excellent public speaking and presentation skills
- Community engagement experience
- Strong analytical skills
- Ability to work independently
- Deadline oriented
- Programming skills
- Strong technical and drafting skills
- Demonstrated experience in: boat-based field work
- GIS training or experience
- Comfortable interacting with strangers to conduct public/in person surveys
- Criminal Record Check

Additional Information

We would like an independent scholar with some science background to support fieldwork and collecting data for our Fisheries department as well as analyzing data and creating reports to inform the community and external partners/funders.

Ideally an indigenous scholars would be hired, but we understand the under representation of scholars with indigenous ancestry. Someone culturally sensitive would be welcomed by our Fisheries team.

Access to a car, access to a phone and phone plan that accepts local calls or long-distance calls, access to statistical software, personal field equipment such as waders/rain gear.