

Graduate Internship Opportunity

SUMMER 2026

Project Title

Advancing Nature-Based Investment for Watershed Security in the Syilx Territory for Headwater Protection and Restoration

Organization

Okanagan Nation Alliance

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

Watersheds within the Syilx Territory face increasing pressures from climate change, land-use intensification, water scarcity, and ecosystem degradation. These pressures threaten not only ecological integrity but also cultural values, food systems, and long-term water security for Syilx communities and regional residents.

Nature-based solutions (NbS)—such as wetland restoration, riparian enhancement, floodplain reconnection, and forest stewardship—are increasingly recognized as cost-effective and resilient approaches to watershed security. However, while British Columbia has begun exploring innovative financing mechanisms for watershed security, there remains a gap in **place-based, Indigenous-informed investment models** that reflect Syilx governance principles, responsibilities to water, and long-term stewardship values.

This project builds on emerging provincial conversations around scaling watershed security funding by focusing specifically on **nature-based investment opportunities within the Syilx Territory**. The internship will support applied research, stakeholder engagement, and policy analysis to identify pathways for mobilizing sustainable funding for NbS that align with Syilx knowledge systems and regional governance structures with a priority focus of headwaters springs protection and restoration and ecological flow.

Project Description & Key Responsibilities

Project Objectives

This project aims to:

1. Identify existing and emerging **nature-based investment mechanisms** relevant to watershed security in British Columbia and customized within a syilx world view/needs (transboundary context).
2. Assess how these mechanisms can be adapted or redesigned to support **Syilx-led or Syilx-aligned watershed priorities**.
3. Map key stakeholders, governance structures, and funding flows influencing watershed investment in the Syilx Territory.
4. Develop practical recommendations and tools to advance **equitable, long-term financing for nature-based watershed solutions**.

Methodology

- Review of existing watershed investment and biodiversity credit frameworks in BC and internationally.
- Review and synthesis of existing GIS, hydrological, salmon habitat, and wetland inventory data to inform understanding of priority watersheds
- Engagement *as appropriate and guided by project mentors* with Syilx knowledge holders, water practitioners, and local government to ensure alignment with community priorities.
- Synthesis of findings into a report and pilot concept framework suitable for further funding or program development.

Project Scope

Specific priorities within this scope will be refined collaboratively at the start of the internship, based on organizational needs and the Scholar's strengths.

Activities:

- **Literature and Policy Review**
 - Review academic, policy, and grey literature on watershed security financing and nature-based solutions.
 - Examine existing models such as watershed funds, payment for ecosystem services, green bonds, and public-private partnerships.
- **Jurisdictional and Case Study Analysis**
 - Analyze relevant case studies from British Columbia and other jurisdictions where nature-based investments support watershed outcomes.
 - Identify lessons applicable to the Syilx context.
- **Stakeholder and Governance Mapping**

- Identify Indigenous, municipal, regional, provincial, and non-governmental actors involved in watershed management and investment.
- Explore governance considerations related to Indigenous rights, title, and stewardship.
- **Synthesis and Knowledge Mobilization**
 - Produce a summary report outlining investment opportunities, gaps, and recommendations.
 - Support the development of briefing materials or presentations for internal or external partners.

Research Questions:

1. What funding models are currently being applied to support local/regional-scale watershed stewardship, restoration, or governance projects globally?
2. What other funding models are currently being applied to support local/regional-scale nature-based solution, nature restoration, or climate projects that could be applied in the Syilx Nation?
3. What types of nature-based investment mechanisms (e.g., biocredits, ecosystem service financing) could be applied in the Syilx context?
4. How can these mechanisms be adapted to value ecological functions beyond carbon, such as biodiversity, salmon habitat, and water flow regulation?
5. Which restoration interventions provide the greatest co-benefits for water security, biodiversity, and cultural values?

Deliverables

By the end of the internship, the following outcomes are expected:

- A **written report** outlining nature-based investment opportunities for watershed security in the Syilx Territory.
- A **comparative overview** of funding and financing mechanisms relevant to Indigenous-led watershed initiatives.
- **Actionable recommendations** to inform future policy, partnership development, or pilot projects.
- Strengthened organizational capacity to engage in watershed finance and nature-based investment discussions.

Learning Outcome for Student

The internship will provide the graduate student with opportunities to:

- Apply interdisciplinary research skills in a real-world policy and planning context.
- Gain experience working at the intersection of **Indigenous governance, environmental economics, and watershed management.**

- Develop professional skills in policy analysis, stakeholder engagement, and applied sustainability research.
- Build networks with practitioners and decision-makers in watershed security and nature-based solutions.

Time Commitment + Timeline

- **Weeks 1–2:** Orientation, background research, project scoping
- **Weeks 3–6:** Literature review, case study analysis, stakeholder mapping*
- **Weeks 7–9:** Synthesis of findings, drafting report and recommendations
- **Weeks 10–12:** Final deliverables, presentations, and knowledge sharing

*Research Trip to the Okanagan if funding permits.

Required / Preferred Skills and Experience

Required:

- Excellent research, writing skills, and analytical skills
- Demonstrated interest in sustainability, environmental governance, or Indigenous-led initiatives
- Ability to work independently and manage deadlines
- Demonstrated experience: Indigenous Legal Orders

Preferred:

- Background in environmental studies, public policy, geography, economics, law, planning, or related field
- Familiarity with Indigenous governance, watershed management, or nature-based solutions
- Experience conducting stakeholder engagement events, including facilitation skills
- Familiarity with research methodologies and survey techniques
- Experience with financial modelling and analysis

Additional Information

Ally to indigenous peoples and Nations.

It would be great for the scholar to be able to do one research site visit to Okanagan Nation Alliance, Westbank. Happy to cost share their travel expenses.

Given the intersections of the project with Indigenous watershed work, we would love to support a student who identifies as Indigenous or with lived experience relevant to the project. There could be many disciplines that would be a fit, including Public Administration, Environmental Studies, Geography, Business/Economics, Finance, Law, and Natural Sciences.