

VALUES STATEMENT

About West Coast Environmental Law

Who We Are

West Coast Environmental Law is a non-profit group of environmental law strategists, analysts and communicators working in the public interest and dedicated to safeguarding the environment through law.

Transforming the Legal Landscape

West Coast is committed to transforming the legal landscape in ways that are more sustainable, more democratic, and more just.

We recognize the jurisdiction and laws of Indigenous peoples who have actively governed their territories for millennia. Their land and marine stewardship has played an integral role in shaping the ecological conditions that have allowed all beings to thrive through time. Working side-by-side with them, we seek legal solutions that bridge Canadian and Indigenous law to build greater sustainability for all.

We understand that healthy, fully functioning ecosystems are the essential foundation of healthy cultures and economies, and that human cultures and economies are part of a web of life that includes all parts of the ecosystem and all beings. This is also referred to an “ecosystem-based” approach to planning and management.

We are leaders in the field of environmental law, using legislation and case law in strategic ways to advance environmental goals. At the same time, we are committed to shining the light on laws that are not working for nature and communities, and to building well-researched, comprehensive, practical legal solutions.

We support the self-determination of Indigenous peoples and the revitalization of strong, living Indigenous laws, consistent with the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and calls to action such as those of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This understanding is foundational to our mandate, and enriches and strengthens our shared legal landscape.

We believe that diverse communities must be involved in developing, applying and upholding the law in order for legal orders and human societies to thrive, and to protect the environment we rely on. We are committed to building community and individual capacity to engage with law and environmental decision-making to achieve shared environmental goals. Through deep community connections and mutual learning, we build more resilient solutions and become more effective legal practitioners.

What We Do

West Coast Environmental Law harnesses the power of law to solve complex environmental challenges. We are transforming environmental decision-making and strengthening legal protection for the environment through collaborative legal strategies that bridge Indigenous and Canadian law. By putting the law in the hands of communities and creating legal risk for those who would harm our land, air and water, we are building the collective power to achieve a more just and sustainable future for all.

We provide hard-hitting legal analysis to allies, influencers and decision-makers. In doing so we:

- motivate and enable allies to use their unique and varied sources of power to implement creative legal solutions to environmental challenges that are shaped in collaboration with our legal team;
- position ourselves as a knowledgeable expert resource for decision-makers; and,
- identify and amplify the legal risks of unsustainable activities or proposals to move toward more sustainable outcomes.

We work with Indigenous clients and allies to identify principles of Indigenous law, develop contemporary Indigenous legal instruments and implement strategies grounded in both Canadian and Indigenous law to care for land, air, water and communities and to improve environmental governance.

As a public interest law organization, we are committed to advancing access to justice and public legal education so that individuals and communities have the tools and legal support they need to use the law effectively. This includes a commitment to the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, gender, (dis)ability, age or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental law, regulations and policies. In particular, we recognize that Indigenous, Black, people of colour and low-income communities disproportionately shoulder the burden of climate change and other environmental harms. We work to ensure the voices of racialized and marginalized individuals and communities are at the heart of environmental decision-making.

We advocate for, lead and engage in participatory, deliberative processes to involve communities in shaping legal solutions. We view this work through an environmental justice lens, conscious of the importance of breaking down silos between environmental and other social justice movements, and seeking to address environmental challenges while simultaneously promoting an equitable society. This includes prioritizing an active antiracist and decolonial practice within our work to build legal solutions that defend people and the planet from environmental harms.

Our North Stars

In preparation for the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, West Coast's Boards of Directors identified three "North Stars" that provided guiding direction for the development of the plan, and its goals, objectives and strategies. These North Stars are intended to be considered and acted upon by all staff, across all organizational programs, to ensure the alignment of West Coast's collective work with these guiding priorities:

- **North Star 1:** Addressing the urgency of the climate and biodiversity crises.
- **North Star 2:** Advancing environmental justice (including Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion)
- **North Star 3:** Uplifting and centering Indigenous Law (and weaving Indigenous and Canadian law together)

