

YOUTH CHANGEMAKERS

FOR

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

**2025
ANDREW
THOMPSON AWARD**



Envisioning the Future of Environmental Law

THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS

OUTCOMES FROM THE YOUTH-LED DIALOGUE

TRANSFORMING THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE FOR 50 YEARS

Fifty years ago, a dedicated group of law students came together to kick off an innovative summer project: providing legal information and advice to residents concerned about environmental problems. Although envisioned as a temporary project, it quickly became clear that there was an ongoing need for legal services in support of environmental and community health in BC. This humble student-run law clinic soon became West Coast Environmental Law (“West Coast”). In 2024, West Coast celebrated our 50th anniversary – marking five action-packed decades of transforming the legal landscape in service of nature and communities.

WEST COAST ENVIRONMENTAL LAW TODAY

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

ABOUT THE ANDREW THOMPSON AWARD

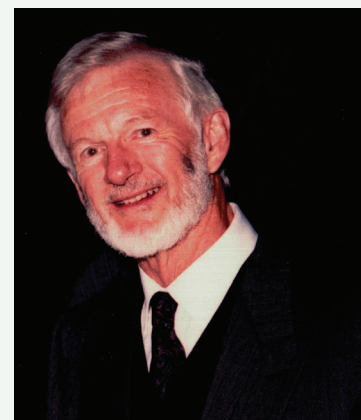
The Andrew Thompson Award (ATA) was established in 2002 by West Coast and the Thompson family as a legacy to Dr. Andrew Thompson, a ground-breaking BC environmental lawyer who was one of West Coast’s first directors. In celebration of West Coast’s 50th anniversary year, West Coast honoured a number of individuals who have demonstrated an outstanding contribution to environmental protection and sustainability in BC through the law with the Andrew Thompson Award.

ATA YOUTH CHANGEMAKERS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

ATA Youth Changemakers for Environmental Justice recognized youth (ages 16-35) who have made important contributions to environmental justice in BC, and their vision for how strong Canadian and/or Indigenous laws could contribute to ecological and community resilience in BC over the next 50 years.

The youth changemakers were honoured on May 12th, 2025, during a ceremony and reception at the Polygon Gallery in North Vancouver. They participated in a facilitated dialogue session – **Envisioning the Future of Environmental Law: The Next 50 Years** – where they discussed their visions for how strong Canadian and Indigenous laws could contribute to ecological and community resilience in BC over the next 50 years.

This report summarizes highlights of those discussions.



Dr. Andrew Thompson served as one of West Coast’s first directors.

TRANSFORMING THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS

Indigenous Law is Everywhere

Revitalizing and Expressing Law

RELATIONSHIPS

LEGAL PLURALISM

Moving Consultation from: **CONSENT**

an OPEN DORRWAY for a lot of YOUNG PEOPLE

Convert be incorporated into Canadian Law?

Sacred & place-based

POWER of ART a TOOL of Resistance

THIS NETWORK IS SO IMPORTANT

WE FELT HEARD

RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE

Embodied GOVERNANCE

BEING AWARE of my body

UPLIFTING EACH OTHER

SO INSPIRING!

NEW LEARNINGS

LAND-BASED LEARNING

REGENERATION

STORY OF CEPRA DISAPPEARING AND COMING BACK

Abundance

Maintaining & restoring

PRIORITIZE CONCRETE ACTION

WAYS of REVITALIZING INDIGENOUS LAW

START with Ceremony

LIVING

RECIROCITY

LAND BASED LEARNING

DISMANTLE HEAL RESTORE

DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT OF HARM

TOGETHERNESS and INTERSECTIONAL JUSTICE

integration

contribute parts of yourself to a COMMON CORE AND keep yourself

ACROSS MOVEMENTS

- housing justice
- disability justice
- drug policy

LISTEN TO OTHER LIBERATION MOVEMENTS

RETHINK AND RECREATE

WHAT IS LAW?

CHALLENGING TO WRITE DOWN

IRREPLACEABLE RELATIONSHIP with the LAND

INDIGENOUS LAW

RESPECTING IMPLEMENTING CENTERING

STORIES

INTERSECTIONALITY

DIVERSITY OF STANDPOINTS AND EXPERIENCES

EMBODYING THE THINGS YOU DO every day

ROLE OF ART

REDISTRIBUTION OF POWER

HOPELESSNESS IS HOPE

STRUGGLE DUE TO POLITICAL CLIMATE

RESILIENCE

REBUILD



Transforming the Legal Landscape for the Next 50 years
May 12, 2025



Setting the Table for Dialogue

As part of the nomination process, youth submitted a short statement about their vision for environmental justice through law in the next 50 years (see pages 13-28). These reflections formed the basis for the **Envisioning the Future of Environmental Law Dialogue**. The dialogue took place at the Polygon Gallery in North Vancouver and was planned and hosted by West Coast's Indigenous Youth Directors.

While youth participants brought to the table each of their own unique visions, the synergies and alignment in the room were truly remarkable.

The workshop participants identified four key themes that they wanted to discuss more deeply together.

“In the face of the enormous challenges facing our planet, it gives me great hope to experience the strong vision of these talented young people for a more just and sustainable future. I am very pleased to be walking alongside youth who share West Coast's commitment to catalyzing the deeply systemic changes that are needed to begin to heal our relationship with the planet.”

—**Jessica Clogg, Executive Director and Senior Counsel.**

“Law should be relational, generative and reflective of all beings in which it serves. We come from the land as we come from our Mothers. This is reflected in our adaawx (oral histories) and ayaawx (laws). Our ancestral laws connect us back to the land and our inherent birthright, continuing to govern us in perpetuity. The work we do today with respect to the law is to ensure a future worthy of both our children and ancestors.”

—**Amy Jeffrey-Uehara, West Coast Indigenous Youth Director and student from Lax Kw'alaams First Nation.**

Graphic recordings illustrated by Miranda Maslany. Dialogue themes illustrated by Benjamin Foucault, West Coast Summer 2025 Law Student. Cover artwork by Karissa Chandrakate. Report design by Hanna Araza. Special thanks to West Coast Summer 2025 Law Students Avishka Lakwijaya, Benjamin Foucault, Chantal Bacchus, Kai Fig Taddei and Sophie Harrison for their contributions to the workshop and report.

**BUILT INTO
INDIGENOUS LAWS**

EMBODIED

**WHAT ARE THE THINGS
THAT GOVERN YOU?**

ACCESSIBLE

REPATRIATION

**ART AS A
MOVEMENT**

**ART MEANS SOMETHING
DIFFERENT TO
EVERYONE**

UNDERVALUED

PRESENCE

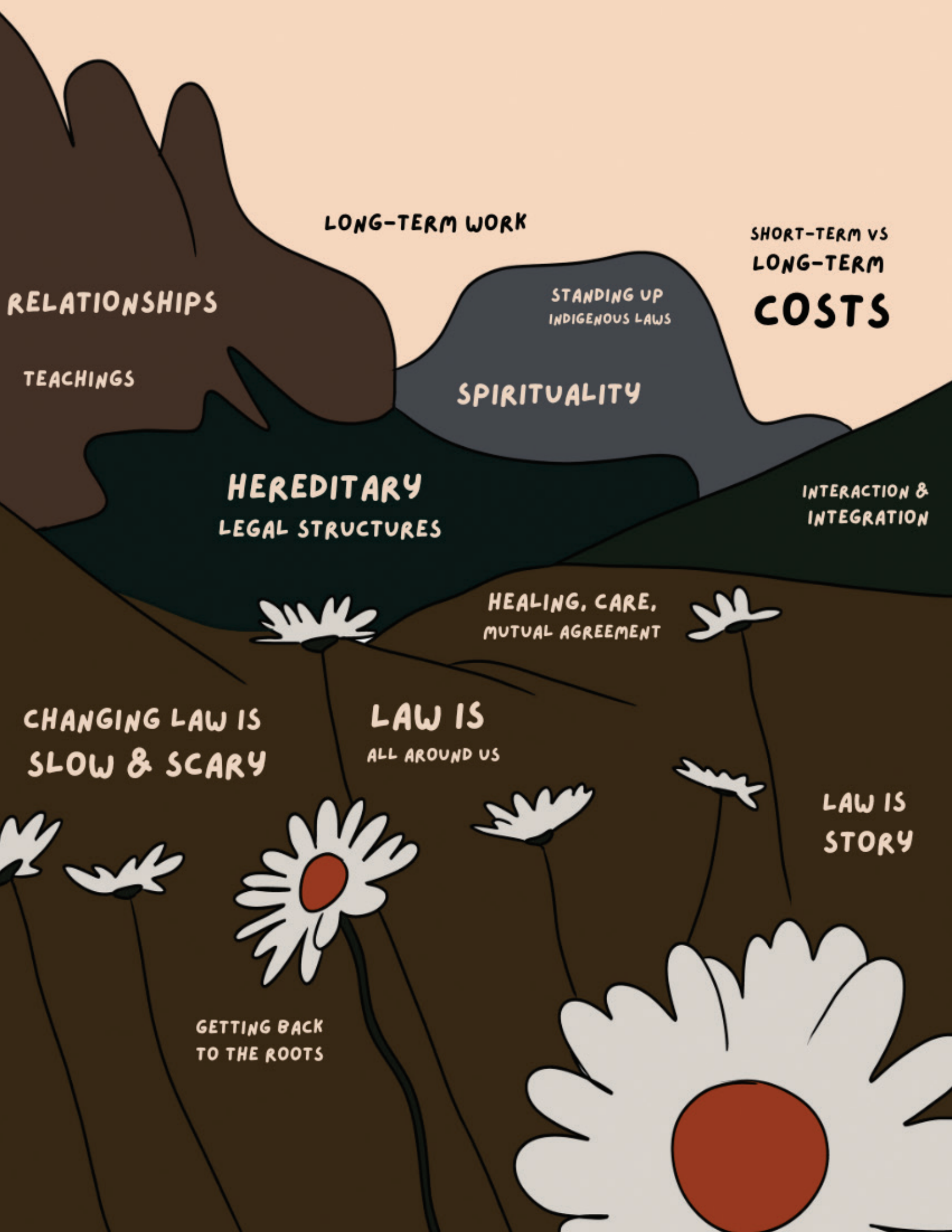
**GENERATIONAL
KNOWLEDGE**



The Power of Art

Art was viewed as an open doorway for a lot of youth and marginalized voices to participate in changemaking in a deeply personal way. The group discussed how art was inherently built into some ways of expressing Indigenous laws (through things like crests and regalia, beadwork, and drumming). Sacred and place-based, art was seen as a way to express and communicate oral traditions and help in the process of generational knowledge transfer. In this context, it was viewed as a potential tool of resistance against empire and colonialism.

Towards the end of the workshop, the conversation shifted to discussing how to interweave art into how we envision the legal future in the next fifty years. Some participants asked questions such as whether it's possible to incorporate art into Canadian law or what would art be like in the context of a courtroom?



LONG-TERM WORK

SHORT-TERM VS
LONG-TERM
COSTS

RELATIONSHIPS

STANDING UP
INDIGENOUS LAWS

TEACHINGS

SPIRITUALITY

HEREDITARY
LEGAL STRUCTURES

INTERACTION &
INTEGRATION

HEALING, CARE,
MUTUAL AGREEMENT

CHANGING LAW IS
SLOW & SCARY

LAW IS
ALL AROUND US

LAW IS
STORY

GETTING BACK
TO THE ROOTS

Legal Pluralism

Legal pluralism can be defined as the co-existence of more than one legal system within a country or territory. In the Canadian context, this looks like the co-existence, recognition and upholding of Indigenous legal orders alongside Canadian laws. Some of the sub-themes that emerged during discussion were questions about the interface between starkly different legal orders, such as written and oral traditions, long-term worldviews and the pervasive sense of urgency that colours Canadian legal practice, and differing values around natural resources and what defines a thriving economy (i.e. profit vs. sustainability).

The conversation deepened around the ways in which the Canadian legal system falls short of true legal pluralism. For instance, the constitutional duty of Canadian governments to consult First Nations falls short of ensuring consent and/or respecting decisions made under Indigenous law. Ultimately, the group felt that relationships were paramount. The discussion highlighted the importance of education, sharing knowledge across generations and between cultures, the need to continue to find ways to communicate in the face of challenge, conflict and disagreement, and the prioritization of broadening perspectives – particularly those that embrace the reality that law is all around us, and that there are ways to heal through dialogue and collaboration.

BRAIDING TOGETHER

CAPACITY IS
CHALLENGING

SOLIDARITY
ACROSS MOVEMENTS

ACCESSIBILITY

IDENTITY
MATTERS

DIVERSE NEEDS
OF PEOPLE

INTEGRATION

POLITICAL CLIMATE

RESISTING
POLARIZATION

ORGANIZING

INCLUSION OF
YOUTH

MENTAL HEALTH
IMPACTS

HAVING SHARED
CONVERSATIONS



Togetherness and Intersectional Justice

People who live at the intersections of multiple systems of oppression often experience disproportionate environmental harms, but are also at the forefront of leading movements for change. We acknowledged the disproportionate risk marginalized people take when speaking out, as well as the importance of sharing that labour while following their leadership.

We talked about solidarity across movements, including drug policy, housing justice, and disability justice, and the potential of learning from each other. Understanding that experiences with the colonial legal process are often re-traumatizing, we discussed instead what it would look like for environmental law to be a place of healing, centring accessibility.



START WITH
CEREMONY

PROTOCOLS

HEALING IS CONTINUOUS/
NON-LINEAR

**FOCUS ON THE
CULTURAL ASPECTS OF
RECONCILIATION**

**ACKNOWLEDGE
COLONIAL HARMS**

STORYTELLING

WRITING INDIGENOUS LAW
IS COMPLEX

**LAND-BASED
LEARNING**

**SAME CONVERSATION,
DIFFERENT CONTEXT**

LIVING LAW

Revitalizing Indigenous Law

Viewing law as both living and breathing, participants discussed a multitude of ways to revitalize Indigenous law. As a start, the group recognized the importance of ceremony and protocols to honour all relations and how this work must be done with thought and care. The group then discussed the importance of shifting away from western settler world views and making space for land-based teaching (e.g., through language revitalization camps, storytelling, hide tanning or ethnobotany walks).

The discussion touched upon how historical and ongoing colonial discriminatory policies have made folks wary of the future legal landscape. They reflected on the importance of acknowledging colonial harms, how different nations are at different places in their journey, and how healing is non-linear. At the end, the group also touched upon some of the inherent challenges and complexities posed by developing written expressions of Indigenous law.

LAND-BASED LEARNING TOUR

with Seraphine Lewis (Kwii Gee Iiwans)

Talaysay Tours



DIALOGUE IN ACTION

After the dialogue, Youth Changemakers embarked on a nature walking tour with Seraphine Lewis (Kwii Gee Iiwans) from Talaysay Tours, through what is today Capilano Regional Park, North Vancouver. She shared stories of how her Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) ancestors have been utilizing the land for food, medicine and technology for thousands of years.

Words from the Youth Changemakers

?

What is your vision for how strong Canadian and/or Indigenous laws could contribute to ecological and community resilience in BC over the next 50 years?

AISH MANN • As a newcomer immigrant in Canada without permanent residency, I live daily at the intersection of ecological urgency and legal vulnerability. My vision for environmental justice in BC is rooted in the deep belief that the law must be more than a tool of governance—it must become a mechanism for repair, protection, and belonging.

Over the next 50 years, I envision Canadian and Indigenous laws working in relationship—not hierarchy—to build ecological and community resilience. In BC, where much of the land remains unceded, the full recognition of Indigenous legal orders must form the foundation of any meaningful environmental future. These laws carry generations of knowledge on stewardship, reciprocity, and right relationship—and must be upheld, resourced, and respected. At the same time, we must confront the injustices within Canada’s own legal systems, including immigration law. I am currently advocating for the creation of a new “Green Stream” immigration category under Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)—one that provides permanent residency to individuals already advancing sustainability and climate goals across Canada. This legal reform would acknowledge and protect the people who are already doing the work—often in silence, and without status.

I bring this forward not as someone watching from the sidelines, but as someone still living that reality—a newcomer without permanent residency, whose contributions are real, yet whose presence remains conditional. I’ve seen peers with multiple degrees and deep experience working low-wage jobs while bringing rich knowledge from their home countries. Meanwhile, the climate crisis accelerates. These contradictions make it clear: we need systems that see people not as burdens, but as bridges—to new solutions, to global wisdom, and to collective restoration. I am advocating for myself and for so many others like me: racialized youth, migrant workers, refugees—communities with deep wisdom and lived experience, yet largely excluded from the legal and environmental conversations that shape their lives.

Through my work with the Tanah Air Project, I facilitate workshops at universities across BC that explore Indigenous-newcomer solidarity, land responsibility, and what it means to build kinship on stolen land. I believe law must learn to feel—to hold emotion, memory, and story alongside logic. Storytelling creates openings: for healing, understanding, and building new relationships to land and place. I envision future environmental laws shaped not just in boardrooms, but around kitchen tables, in ceremony, and in community—laws that ask not only “what is allowed,” but “what is right?”

My vision is one of interconnected legal futures—where Indigenous sovereignty is respected, where newcomers are welcomed into responsibility rather than exclusion, and where Canada’s laws become capable of holding the full complexity of climate justice. I am not just imagining this future—I am building it.

ARYAN SHARIFI • Over the next 50 years, British Columbia possesses the potential to foster profound ecological and community resilience. Achieving this, however, necessitates a fundamental shift in how we conceptualize and implement both Canadian and Indigenous laws. My vision, shaped by direct experiences in community engagement, environmental stewardship, and social justice advocacy, centres on moving away from reactive, often siloed legal frameworks towards integrated systems. These systems must be grounded in Indigenous partnership, prioritize environmental justice, and recognize the inherent relationality between human communities and the natural world.

My understanding has been forged through practical engagement. My time working directly on ecological restoration with Still Moon Arts Society, assessing the health of Still Creek, vividly illustrated the interconnectedness of ecosystems and the fragmentation of our current legal approaches to their protection. Simultaneously, my involvement with the Environmental Youth Alliance, through the Cultivate Program and Youth Advisory Circle, has deeply impressed upon me the necessity of embedding an environmental justice lens into all actions. Witnessing how the Environmental Youth Alliance centres youth from equity-denied communities underscores the inseparable nature of ecological health and social equity, highlighting the unjust distribution of environmental burdens and benefits. Experiences advocating for Wet'suwet'en land defenders with the Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group and proposing housing solutions focused on youth affordability as a Youth Councillor at the Burnaby North—Seymour Constituency Office further revealed the crucial intersections of Indigenous rights, social equity, and environmental governance.

Therefore, my vision for the next half-century hinges on key legal transformations. Foremost is the need to move beyond performative acknowledgments to fully enact the principles of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and British Columbia's *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, upholding Indigenous law and establishing true co-governance. This involves creating robust frameworks for shared decision-making and recognizing the inherent jurisdiction of Indigenous Nations, allowing their legal traditions of long-term stewardship and relational responsibility to work in concert with Canadian law. Future laws must also proactively centre environmental justice, addressing the disproportionate harms faced by marginalized communities. This requires ensuring equitable access to decision-making, fair distribution of environmental benefits like clean resources and healthy food access as emphasized in my food rescue work with Embark Sustainability Society, and targeted measures to mitigate localized pollution and climate impacts through explicit equity mandates in legislation.

Finally, Canadian law must evolve from a primarily anthropocentric view towards one recognizing the inherent value and interconnectedness of all beings and ecosystems, embracing relationality. This entails prioritizing long-term ecological health and community well-being, legally supporting community-based stewardship efforts like the citizen science work at Still Creek, and valuing diverse knowledge systems. Such an approach protects biodiversity not just as a resource, but as fundamental to the health of relationships between people, land, water, and the more-than-human world.

Ultimately, personal experiences, from restoring a creek to advocating on policy, have solidified my conviction that resilience is built through integration, not fragmentation. Weaving Indigenous law with reformed Canadian law, guided by principles of environmental justice and relational accountability, offers British Columbia the strongest pathway towards a future where diverse human communities and the ecosystems we are part of can truly thrive together.

CHANVRE OLEMAN • My name is Chanvre Oleman. I am from the community of Tsal'alh from St'át'imc Nation and grew up in Ts'kw'aylaxw and Tsal'alh areas. I had three summer work terms as a Junior Wildlife Technician with the Environment Department at St'át'imc Government Services (SGS), where I learned how to grow as a young professional in different fields of biology, environment, and natural resources. My professional and personal experiences have shaped the vision of Indigenous laws that could potentially shape ecological and community resilience in BC over the next 50 years. The following experiences that I have informed are important environmental policies for St'át'imc Nation, and I know I can be successful in applying my past experiences and skills to other environmental and social justice issues in BC:

- St'át'imc has a Settlement Agreement with BC Hydro and the Province of BC that was created in 2011, and one of the commitments of this Agreement was to develop the Bridge-Seton Watershed Strategic Plan (BSWSP). The purpose of this Plan was to ensure that St'át'imc determines the vision for the watershed's future. This important project also advanced reconciliation efforts for my community as BC Hydro is improving their relationships with the First Nations by capturing community voices to ensure fairness and social equity in future engagement. As part of my role in this project, I assisted the SGS Environment Team with organizing community records dating back +40 years, translating traditional language and place names that are used in Nation-led land use plans, and reviewing Phase 1 of the Strategic Plan. My contributions to the BSWSP also has important linkages to the St'át'imc RELAW (Revitalizing Indigenous Law for Land, Air and Water) Project as I learned teachings from my Elders and Knowledge Keepers on St'át'imc Ways including how everything in the environment is connected and how all of the stories are connecting “the wolf/(s)q.áwam, to the fish/sts.úqwaz., to the bear/st.alhálam, to the frog/p.epg. íg.lha, and they are all connected to the waters/qu7 and the forest/npátqets. Finally, in each story there is an animal/pépla7 and a plant/pál7alhaz. because you cannot live with the other.”
- I also assisted my team with water collection, filtering, and data entry for a White Sturgeon/xu7t. project at Seton and Anderson Lakes to figure out if these fish still occur in lakes and are separated from the Fraser River by a dam. This project has important environmental policy for St'át'imc Nation as White Sturgeon are a Species at Risk in the Middle Fraser River that are not being considered in the government's recovery planning. Another fish project that I worked on that has policy implications is the Portage Creek Chinook/Skwáxem Salmon Recovery Program. During the field season I helped identify the juvenile chinook by going out night snorkeling. The data collected from this project will be used to figure out the timing of when fish leave and return to the Portage Creek to eventually inform if habitat or management activities are needed to preserve this fish population.
- Lastly, I was awarded the Embracing Your Roots Award by my education sponsor, BC First Nations Forestry Council in June 2023. The award is significant because in our First Nations' cultures Eagles are among the most sacred of creatures. They represent attributes we aspire to in our communities including: wisdom, strength, courage, dignity, and excellence. When an Eagle Feather is presented it is with great honour as it is felt the recipient embodies these qualities. I received this award for assisting in translation of common names to the St'át'imc names for important natural resources and receiving an acknowledgment for my contributions in the BSWSP by the SGS Environment Team and Two Worlds Consulting. As mentioned previously, I learned so much from the Elders and Knowledge Keepers that were interviewed for their

local knowledge of the St'át'imc Territory. As discussed in the RELAW Project, the St'át'imc have a responsibility to honour the seven generations before, and the seven generations after; I learned how to take care and steward our resources from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, as well as share what the land and water can provide for my loved ones and other people I have met. This important teaching I have learned from St'át'imc communities is a value that I can contribute to ecological and community resilience in BC over the next 50 years.

The contributions that I envision assisting with in relation to Indigenous laws in the next 50 years include water rights in Indigenous communities, decision-making and youth participation, and protecting old-growth forests and other high-biodiverse forests.

My current work at Innovatree Carbon Group focuses on climate-based solutions for First Nations communities. I assisted the Innovatree team by developing and implementing sustainable forestry and environmental practices in the area, including soil carbon sampling and forest carbon sequestration monitoring, to create a continuous revenue stream from carbon credits for First Nation communities. This would build a restoration economy and replace/supplement the current extraction economy.



*This is when I attended and participated in a ceremony for a grizzly bear project. I was preparing and serving the traditional food that grizzly bears eat to everyone who attended the ceremony.
(Photo from work at St'át'imc Government Services)*

CHRISTIE MCLEOD • Canada has been setting—and repeatedly failing to meet—emissions reduction targets since I wore diapers. While calling for such reductions, Canada has simultaneously enabled the expansion of the fossil fuel industry: from 1990 to 2021, emissions from the oil and gas sector rose by 88%. Despite knowing the localized impacts of climate change and the severe effects experienced globally, both Canada and British Columbia (BC) have continued to support this industry.

I long for us to shift from being a climate laggard to a genuine climate leader. As David Wallace-Wells articulates in *The Uninhabitable Earth*, humans have “engineered as much ruin knowingly as we ever managed in ignorance.” By lowering our emissions, Canada and BC can help build a more ecologically resilient planet—and earn the credibility needed to call on others to do the same.

First, federal and provincial governments must end fossil fuel subsidies. In 2023, Canada released a policy to eliminate inefficient subsidies; however, this policy exempts subsidies supporting carbon capture, utilization, and storage (“CCUS”). Companies that continue to produce oil and gas while relying on CCUS to offset emissions should bear the full cost of those decisions, especially given the immense profits derived from production and the resulting environmental harms. Subsidies that prop up the primary driver of the climate crisis cannot be considered “efficient”—unless the objective is to worsen that crisis.

Second, while the 2021 passage of the *Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act* was a promising first step, this statute should be amended to require baseline domestic emissions reductions. Without this, Canada risks relying too heavily on offsets while allowing for continued—or even increased—oil and gas production under the guise of progress. The Act also ignores Scope 3 emissions. We must account for and reduce emissions from exported fossil fuels, overseas operations of Canadian companies, and emissions embedded in imported goods.

Third, project approvals must receive more scrutiny. The recent enactment of legislation implementing the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, both in BC and federally, offers hope that Indigenous Peoples will have a more meaningful say in project assessment—including the right to grant or withhold free, prior, and informed consent to a proposed project. I was encouraged by BC’s 2018 passage of the new *Environmental Assessment Act*, which enables Indigenous-led assessments of proposed projects, and I hope to see this legislative tool used more often. While working with Indigenous clients on an Indigenous-led assessment of a proposed mine expansion in BC, I witnessed how their approach enabled a more holistic review of the project, with broader temporal and geographic considerations.

This work has taken on new meaning since I gave birth to my daughter four months ago. I hope for a world—and a province—that is safe for her. Climate impacts are already clear in BC, where we’ve recently seen heat domes, wildfires, and atmospheric rivers. “One-in-1,000-year” weather events are occurring with alarming frequency. The Earth is signaling that it can only absorb so much warming above pre-industrial levels. The question is: when will we finally listen?

CLEO NICKELS • *Environmental Awareness from the Outside*—This fall, walking through the forest I spotted a brilliant orange cap on the forest floor. To my delight, I recognized it as a Chanterelle mushroom, the first I have seen on my family farm on Salt Spring Island. In that moment I became aware that my plant identification skills were blooming, which I can credit to the time spent volunteering with the local Climate Adaptation Research Lab building a native plant database.

In working to restore the Mt. Maxwell watershed with this organization, my role is to select specific plants that will supply food and larval support for local pollinators. In choosing plants, I critically analyze the watershed's environment, considering the sun, soil and water requirements for each plant, as well as their flowering seasons, and the active pollinators present. It is amazing to discover all the flowering plants that grow in our local forests.

I recognize the importance of ecological wisdom and am so grateful to have grown up in a community teeming with environmental stewards, activists, experts and knowledge keepers. I have gained such valuable knowledge throughout my life, living on my family's Eco-forestry and Permaculture farm. I actively practice environmental conservation, learn first-hand the practical science my dad uses to harvest and design our forest to be climate resilient and experiment alongside him. We grow unique tree species, such as *Sequoia sempervirens* (California redwoods), which are native to the warmer temperatures and drier soils of California, and are now thriving in the Northwest Coast's warming climate.

I understand sustainability as appreciating the resources we have and using them mindfully, preserving the environment for the future. My family not only actively implements sustainability but goes the extra length of living and working in a regenerative manner. I watch my dad use regenerative forestry techniques, ensuring every dead or dying tree taken down to make valuable products is replenished by ten new ones.

On a more personal level, I decided at the age of 13 to become vegan, after learning about the ecological impacts of food consumption. Being part of a community organic food program, I eat fresh food in season that supports local farms, sustainable farming practices and my well-being. I also join my family every spring to plant a garden full of fruits and vegetables to be enjoyed, fresh, frozen and preserved throughout the year.

I love thrifting clothes, as another effort to practice the values of a circular economy. This fall with the grad dress shopping season looming, I was determined to find a vintage dress with character to wear. I was so excited about this plan that I shared it widely and was gifted a beautiful violet colored dress from Paris bought in the 1960s!

As part of the school Earth Club, I initiated the holiday gift swap this year, providing the school community with an opportunity to find reused Christmas gifts for their family. I felt fulfilled in observing my peers, enthusiastically discovering the perfect present from other classmates' donated belongings.

In the end, ecological wisdom and sustainability are key practices in my family, community and personal life. Through volunteer activities, community involvement and day-to-day actions, I have demonstrated these values with purpose and intention.

EVJE KNUTSON • I believe that strong community laws can help to create ecological justice for everyone as it means that apathy will no longer be an option, from both the government and communities.

Since January of 2024 I have been working alongside the City of Salmon Arm as a community ambassador. In this role, I helped to run community engagement events. These events were diverse in nature, but primarily I helped community residents understand what an Official Community Plan (OCP) is and helped to get feedback from my community about what the updated OCP should look like. The community ambassadors worked with various community stakeholders to ensure that the bylaws in place would reflect diverse perspectives. Furthermore, this process introduced me to community and city laws, how the community will shape them, and environmental laws. It taught me to how to take action to ensure that environmental law happens in our community plans!

For the past three years, I have worked alongside senior leadership in the Environmental Advisory Working Group with my school district (K'w'saltktnéws ne Secwepemcúl'ecw – School District No. 83). For the past year, this group has dedicated its time to the creation of an Environmental Stewardship Action Plan. Together with our new environmental stewardship policy, this plan will guide staff and trustees in their planning and decision making. On behalf of the working group, I recently presented the draft plan to the Board of Education, and we received their full support. The draft will be ready to be accepted by them in June. After it is implemented, it would create a path for clearer, and more guided action from the school district and would implement environmental and sustainability strategies across our school district.

I was recently appointed to the Climate Resiliency Plan – Steering Committee with the City of Salmon Arm. I was recommended to apply for this committee by the City Planners that I worked with on the OCP, and it is an extension of the work that I did on the OCP. This group will work together to create an Action Plan that will support climate change mitigation and adaptation. In my community this is crucial as we have many environmentally sensitive, and culturally significant areas, such as our lake (Shuswap Lake) and our forests. This opportunity will allow me to be a part of creating and guiding environmental bylaws in my local community, giving me an opportunity to protect these significant areas. This group is full of community leaders in Salmon Arm. Having the opportunity to be a part of this group allows me to give the youth a voice in sustainability in my community. Although climate change affects everyone, youth and their voices are crucially important as the state of this world will greatly impact their future.

These unique experiences have shaped my abilities to create positive community-based changes, and I believe that creating these changes in my community will create a ripple effect for the rest of British Columbia!

JESSICA KAI PAISLEY • Over the next 50 years, British Columbia has the opportunity to lead the world by weaving Indigenous legal traditions and Canadian law into a framework of ecological and community resilience. I envision a future where Indigenous sovereignty is recognized as central to environmental governance, and where legal tools are actively used to support healing between people, land, and more-than-human beings.

We must expand support for Indigenous law revitalization and embed Indigenous legal orders into climate adaptation strategies, particularly in coastal and small island communities. Legal frameworks must reflect the spiritual and ecological relationships that sustain life on these lands. My legal education in both Canadian and international law has affirmed that climate justice is inseparable from Indigenous justice.

I also believe that Canadian environmental law must evolve to reflect the urgency of the climate crisis. We need enforceable environmental rights, accessible mechanisms for holding governments and corporations accountable, and climate policy rooted in equity. My experience in legal research and frontline advocacy—whether supporting disability justice or advancing global gender equity—has shown me how systemic change happens from both the top down and the grassroots up.

I am currently pursuing an LL.M. at the University of Hawai‘i, focusing on Ocean Law & Policy, Climate Change Law, and Pacific Island Legal Systems. This is a deliberate step to deepen my understanding of sea-level rise, migration, and legal resilience. I plan to return to BC and apply this knowledge to advocate for climate-displaced persons and support communities most impacted by ecological disruption. My goal is to serve as a legal advocate and consultant, working with local and international bodies to advance community-led, rights-based solutions.

In this future, law is not merely reactive but generative. It helps reimagine systems, redistribute power, and protect future generations. This is the vision I am committed to realizing.

JOCELYN THORNE MCMILLAN • As a Haisla youth and participant in the Environmental Youth Alliance’s Earth Allies program, I’ve come to understand how deeply connected Indigenous peoples are to the land—not just physically, but spiritually and culturally. Our laws are rooted in respect, balance, and responsibility, and I believe that strong Indigenous and Canadian environmental laws can work together to restore and protect the relationships between people, animals, plants, and the natural world over the next 50 years.

Growing up, I’ve always heard from my elders and family members about how the Haisla Nation has lived in harmony with the land and waters for thousands of years. We fish, hunt, gather medicines, and protect these resources—not just for ourselves, but for the generations to come. That’s what stewardship means to us. In the Earth Allies program, I was able to practice this through hands-on learning. From digging up invasive plants in Trillium Park and Renfrew Ravine, to potting new Indigenous medicinal plants, I saw firsthand how the environment needs constant care. These moments reminded me that laws need to do more than just punish harm—they need to teach responsibility, build connections, and protect sacred relationships.

One of the most meaningful experiences was making tea and salve from Indigenous plants. These are our medicines. We also made cedar bracelets and tobacco ties, which are part of our ceremonies and healing. These practices reflect our worldview—everything is connected. In contrast, Western laws often focus only on economic value or science. While those have their place, they don’t always respect the spiritual and cultural importance of the land. That’s why I believe Indigenous laws need to be at the centre of environmental decision-making.

Imagine a BC where Indigenous legal systems are recognized and upheld alongside Canadian laws. Where youth like me can lead programs that teach others about medicine plants, traditional harvesting, and environmental justice. Where every policy made about the land includes the voices of those who have lived in balance with it for generations. That’s the future I want to help build.

Over the next 50 years, strong Indigenous and Canadian laws can work together to restore what’s been lost—both ecologically and socially. They can protect biodiversity, uphold Indigenous rights, and create resilient communities. But it has to start with respect. Respect for Indigenous knowledge, our governance systems, and our relationship with the more-than-human world. Programs like Earth Allies show how education can support this shift. I’ve become more aware of my role as a caretaker of the land. I’ve learned how invasive species threaten native plants that our communities rely on. And I’ve seen how community care—whether through making salves or stewarding ravines—can be powerful healing.

My vision is one where law isn’t just written in books, but practiced in gardens, taught through ceremony, and passed down through generations. One where the land is not owned, but honoured. One where future Haisla children, and all children, can thrive in a world that remembers how to listen to the Earth.

JORDANA PANGBURN • Over the next 50 years, I imagine a British Columbia where strong Canadian and Indigenous laws work together to create ecological and community resilience—by stopping the destruction at its root, supporting restoration, and centring justice. To me, this means holding fossil fuel companies accountable, ending extractive projects, and restoring Indigenous jurisdiction as foundational to climate solutions.

My vision comes from years of youth climate organizing. In high school, I started my school's environmental club and led campaigns to build environmental engagement and take action locally. Since then, I've participated in bigger campaigns—organizing with Save Old Growth, where I helped mobilize public support to protect BC's ancient forests. These experiences taught me that without strong legal protections, ecosystems and communities are left vulnerable to powerful corporate interests.

As part of the Sue Big Oil campaign, I've spoken in classrooms, lobbied city councils, helped run social media, and acted as a youth consultant. I believe polluters should be legally responsible for the harm they've caused. Laws that force fossil fuel companies to pay their fair share can help fund the rebuilding of climate-resilient infrastructure and shift the burden off everyday people. At the same time, I've worked on climate solutions—as a summer student through 350 Canada's Heat Pumps for All campaign, I lobbied federal representatives to ensure everyone can access clean, safe, and affordable energy.

These efforts show me how much laws shape what's possible—and how essential it is that they reflect justice, equity, and long-term thinking. That's also why I've been involved in divestment campaigns at UVic, organizing with other students to pressure our university to divest from fossil fuels, war, and colonization, and to invest in solutions that serve people and the planet.

Indigenous law is not something I have studied. But what I do know is that Indigenous peoples have been the caretakers of these lands and waters since time immemorial, and they've consistently been the fiercest defenders of ecosystems and communities in my communities. I look up to Indigenous land and water protectors, and I believe their laws, governance systems, and leadership should be at the centre of climate policy. It's not my voice that should lead, but theirs—and strong Canadian law should step up to support and centre that leadership, not override it.

As a 21-year-old student, I'm part of the generation that will live with the outcomes of today's legal decisions. My vision is of a future where the law protects life, not profit; where Indigenous knowledge and authority guide environmental decisions; and where youth are heard, not sidelined. That's the future I organize for—and strong, justice-based laws are the tools we need to get there.

KWAYA'TSIIQ'KWE BLUESKY • I love my Indigenous culture and teachings. I value learning about the Land and the animals within because it encompasses ecosystems, culture, law, and spirituality. The Land sustains every aspect of our lives, which is why I graduated from an International Baccalaureate program called the Climate Action Leadership Diploma (CALD). At Pearson College, CALD is a specialised diploma program focusing on leading climate actions and creating solutions for change.

While undertaking the two-year program, I joined Kule, a non-profit organisation. We worked to fundraise to help communities in Kenya and Uganda. One summer, I was given a bursary and placement to volunteer with the Kule Foundation International in Nairobi, Kenya. In my second year, I was promoted from a jewellery maker to a KULE leader. I had a beautiful experience in Kenya for 22 days. I was able to construct a school from an ongoing project of five years. I was able to help finally complete one of the school's buildings in person. I am forever grateful for this opportunity to meet people who are so connected to their land and culture. I reflected on my experience by relating our Seven Grandparent Teachings to my time in Kenya.

My culture has powerful deep connections to Mother Earth. We are responsible for taking care of her sacred places. My Nuu-chah-nulth language will go to sleep if we do not begin learning and teaching the next generations. I hope to be able to speak my Nuu-chah-nulth language with my dad and revitalize our language.

Being Indigenous comes with advocating for our inherent rights, and consistently trying to preserve our culture and the sacred teachings. My art reflects cultural and historical forms through storytelling using visual arts. These are deep-rooted practices that I have practiced in other forms over the past year. I am exploring using cedar because this reflects the connection and uses of the Land without harming nature. When I engage with these types of traditional art forms, I communicate traditional narratives and historical events.

In Visual Arts at UBC, I intend to raise awareness about different Indigenous teachings, such as the importance of connection to the Land, the concept of interconnectedness, and the respect we have for Elders and Ancestors. I am committed to community and wellbeing, balance and harmony, equity and inclusivity. In my daily life, I work to uphold sustainability and land stewardship, ceremonial practices and teachings.

MANVI BHALLA • My vision for the next 50 years centres on transformative legal frameworks—both Canadian and Indigenous—that prioritize environmental justice, anti-coloniality, intersectionality and bridge-building to enhance community resilience across British Columbia. My lived experiences as a racialized youth navigating academia, intersectional community organizing, and non-partisan policy advocacy guide my work in this space. In particular, I see immense potential in the evolution and implementation of the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* (CEPA), especially as it begins to incorporate environmental justice principles. With the recent recognition of the right to a healthy environment, CEPA could become a more powerful tool in addressing environmental racism and injustice, health inequities, and uneven infrastructure development that have long disproportionately impacted Indigenous, racially, ethnically and gender-minoritized and low-income communities.

I have witnessed how structurally excluded communities are too often left out of environmental decision-making, despite being on the frontlines of climate and health crises. My work—across research, nonprofit leadership, and coalition building—seeks to shift this dynamic by democratizing access to policymaking and amplifying the voices of those too often ignored. As part of my PhD at the University of British Columbia, I am conducting a procedural justice analysis of CEPA's modernization from the tabling of Bill S-5, hosting community-based participatory action research workshops with racialized immigrants to capture their environmental health needs and priorities and using arts-based story writing methods to capture BC racialized youth's visions of just, equitable, sustainable futures. This research will help me to generate robust policy recommendations for the forthcoming national EJ strategy that is being developed currently by the federal government.

A belief that has guided much of my advocacy work is that strong legal systems must not only advance protections for ecosystems and future generations but must also meaningfully engage communities in shaping those laws. Recently, I helped to organize a series of community consultations across the country to inform the federal government's development of the implementation framework for the right to a healthy environment, under CEPA. Leading my team of skilled young volunteers and staff at our national climate justice nonprofit, Shake Up The Establishment, over the span of one month, we ended up directly engaging over 150 youth from 8 of 13 of Canada's provinces and territories, of which over 65% identified as belonging to racially-minoritized backgrounds. To hone in on my home province specifically, our Vancouver-based event convened youth under the age of 35 from Vancouver, North Vancouver, Richmond, Surrey, Victoria, Burnaby, Squamish Valley, and Tsawwassen. Many of these participants had never been invited into federal policy conversations before yet left with a renewed sense of agency and a desire to engage again. These dialogues did more than surface critical environmental health concerns—they also planted seeds of civic participation among youth who will be instrumental in shaping the next half-century of environmental governance.

My work has deepened my commitment to fostering legal systems that are not only reactive but visionary—ones that are rooted in intersectionality, uphold Indigenous jurisdiction, and recognize the interconnectedness of all living beings. I believe that the future of environmental law in BC must be co-created with Indigenous Nations, ensuring that their laws and governance structures are upheld alongside, or instead of, colonial frameworks. Indigenous legal traditions hold the knowledge and practices necessary to restore balance between people, lands, waters, and more-than-human kin. Informed by this, in the next 50 years, I hope to see a BC where environmental laws are living documents—responsive to community needs, grounded in Indigenous sovereignty, and upheld by a deeply engaged public.

RUBEN TILLMAN • Over the next 50 years, the world will continue see the effects of climate change and declining biodiversity, effects which will be more and more severe. In BC, wildfires will rage and rivers will flood. Meanwhile, in the worst but increasingly likely case, governments will double-down on resource-extraction and unsustainable community growth.

I don't know that my vision involves somehow avoiding all this, but I am hopeful for the future, and that hope comes in large part from the possibilities that Indigenous laws represent. A few years ago now, I articulated at the Environmental Law Centre at the University of Victoria. I worked on report about Indigenous Guardian programs. These programs create jobs, apply Indigenous laws, and, for every dollar put in, generate far more in health, social, and environmental benefits.

I also get hope from BC and Canada's commitments to implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), including by reforming existing laws. UNDRIP law reform must include creating space for Indigenous laws to take full force and effect.

There are hundreds of First Nations in BC and Canada, each with distinct legal and cultural traditions and ways of seeing the world and humanity's place in it. As individual communities implement their own laws over their own territories, others can learn from those models to better apply their own respective laws. There's a huge opportunity for creativity in the face of climate change's existential threat. It's an opportunity for our entire society to move away from the individualistic, extractive consumer capitalism that got us in this pickle in the first place.

Years ago now, I went to law school with a vague idea that I wanted to do something "good" afterwards. During law school I was exposed, for the first time in a significant way, to Indigenous culture, laws, and ceremonies. At the time what struck me most was the sense of community and belonging I observed—something I felt more or less entirely lacking from my own, European-infused upbringing in Vancouver. For our communities to be resilient, and meet the threats that are already here and only going to get worse, Canadians as a whole will need to find some sense of community. We currently see the opposite happening in the United States, where not for the first time in a so-called liberal capitalist democracy, fascists have taken advantage of an atomized, nihilistic, and ignorant population for hateful destructive ends.

So, in short, the vision of hope I have is of people coming together and supporting each other, promoting Indigenous laws and communities and learning from them, "decolonizing" our worldviews and European legal traditions, and building something that allows our society to exist sustainably and peacefully in the world.

SUMMER TYANCE • *“Walking in Two Worlds: Miskwaadesii Law, Vision, & Medicine”*—Anishinaabe scholar and visionary, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson says, “Once one has received an important dream, he or she has responsibility to act on that vision.”

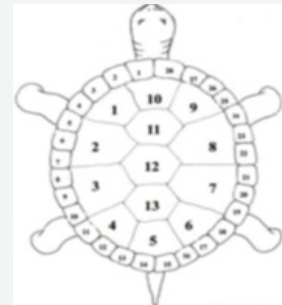
Boozhoo, Anongkwe niindizhinikaaz. Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek. Migizi miiniwaa Auwuse doo-demag. Miigwech gitchi manitou, miskwaadesii manitou, nibi, aki, nookomis, mishoomis, niimama, miniwaa niipapa. Thank you for your continued guidance, teachings, and support on both of my legal journeys of walking in both worlds—as I have always done. To introduce myself is to breathe life into Indigenous law. I will always thank my ancestors, guides, community, and family who support me as without them I am nothing. It is the people before me who have paved pathways so that I can continue on this legal journey. Indigenous law holds many answers for climate solutions here in Canada. Canada must always listen and respect Indigenous laws which embed ancestral practices that have helped to look after and steward Mother Earth since time immemorial. One of my life long passions is to help revitalize Indigenous laws for the land, air, and water. For our human and non-human kin.

After one visit, listening, and learning, with Anishinaabe legal scholar Dr. John Borrows at The University of Victoria; where I am going into my third year of the Joint Degree Program in Canadian Common Law and Indigenous Legal Orders (JD/JID), there was a ripple of his story that in turn impacted my own. There is a rhythmic shaking of a rattle which he imitated with his voice that plays on loop in memory. It shook and rang true of responsibility, reciprocity, and revelation. Revelation of a gift I had yet to birth spirit into, “Shhshk, shhshk, shhkhk...”, this was a miskwaadesii (painted turtle) shell I was gifted. The turtle is a physical conduit and spiritual being within Anishinaabe law, and it is one of Anishinabeg responsibilities to continue to practice and care for the turtle spirit and its laws.

With hereditary ancestry of relatives who practice ceremonies such as shaking tent, sacred fire ceremonies, and guiding visions or dreams, it has always been my own personal familial responsibility to care for, and revitalize Anishinaabe traditional healing and legal lodges. The creation of the healing rattle goes beyond the scope of just a course, and law school in general. This journey is personal, and intimate, but so often is Indigenous law personal, and embedded with raw debwewin (truth). Law takes time, and that is one similarity between Indigenous law and Canadian law. Climate activism, ecological restoration, and Indigenous law revitalization results do not occur overnight. This rattle was a sacred seven years in the making. From first receiving the gift of the shell in August 2019, to gathering knowledge and protocols around the turtle rattle, to acquiring materials, and much time and patience. The amount of preparation is similar to drafting of written laws and constitutions, you cannot go into either process blind, homework was required, along with research of all varieties. Above all, this shell holds immense responsibility and I’ve asked myself, am I ready for this? How do I know? When do I know? You get called on by others who believe and trust in you. Sometimes there isn’t a choice, but to take responsibility, action, and agency for the healing of yourself and communities. I currently speak my truth on two environmental boards, research and learn Indigenous legal orders in my law courses, field schools on the land, and work at the Indigenous Law Research Unit supporting their initiatives. I’ve spread awareness about Indigenous law in action through communications with RELAW (Revitalizing Indigenous Law for Land, Air and Water) shared teachings and stories orally through podcast work, and continue to show up in community to aid where I can and be a good relation.

The turtle represents, and is one of the leaders and caretakers of the Anishinaabeg principle debwewin (truth). To speak your truth from the heart and honour it always. This is represented in the seven grandfather/grandmother sacred teachings that are also legal principles. Turtle is also a communicator and translator between worlds, the spirit world, water worlds, and land worlds. Turtle spirit is adaptable and my interpretation of them having no set gender is connected to perhaps turtle also being a Two Spirit (Niizh Manitoowaag) being like me. Two-spirit Anishinaabeg have very important roles in our communities, like miiskwaadesi who also plays a key role in Anishinaabeg origin stories. It was them who offered their back as a spot to place the mud, that muskrat was able to swim deep and bring up in their paw to create new earth in time of a great flood. The intersections are also between my doodemaag, eagle and catfish. Clans entail fulfilling responsibility and having a purpose and place in community and Anishinaabe law. Fish clans are intellectuals, and meditators, they watch over the sun, moon, and stars from the water. Fish doodem and the Turtle doodem, both are the philosophers of our nation, which are teachings my family has shared with myself along with the law of Migizi (eagle), who flies closest to the creator and delivers our prayers to gitichi manitou (great spirit). Eagle clan are spiritual leaders and hold gifts of knowledge and higher learning. We are responsible for passing on our oral history, traditional stories, and providing counsel and guidance to community leaders. Being who I am and from these two clans, and being on this legal journey is no coincidence.

The rattle was created on Songhees territory during Frog moon on March 20th, 2025. This day also happened to be Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ awareness day, along with the marking of the spring equinox. Turtle carries 13 scutes on its back, representing the Anishinaabe months of the year, honoring cycles, water, transformation, and rebirth. There are also 28 smaller scutes on the outer edge of the shell, signaling women's moon/menstrual cycle. Turtle embodies many powerful teachings, energies, and Anishinaabe law.



My journey in this life has always been destined. To continue to be that mediator, philosopher, healer, and leader that my clans and ancestors envisioned me to be. I will continue to swim, walk, and fly and do all it takes to continue to revitalize Indigenous and Anishinaabe laws, medicines, songs, and help others see the power of spirit. Before I return home, there is still personal responsibility to uphold and reciprocate here on the West Coast, to give back to the nations and communities who have greatly hosted, and shared knowledge with me during my time as a guest on these beautiful territories. West Coast First Nations are spearheading legal change and activism in and out of Canadian courts. Their self-determination, resistance, and resilience is inspirational with regard to impacts on biodiversity, sustainability, water law, and ecological change and goals. I can only hope to be a part of this monumental change and movement. Chi Miigwech.

VALENCIA OWINO • Over the next 50 years, I envision a British Columbia where strong, living laws—rooted in Indigenous legal traditions and strengthened by principled Canadian governance—form the backbone of ecological and community resilience. This future is not only possible; it is necessary. The climate crisis, biodiversity collapse, and deepening social inequities demand a bold legal framework that centres justice, reciprocity, and long-term care for both people and the more-than-human world.

My perspective is shaped by my upbringing in Kibera, Nairobi, one of the world’s largest informal settlements. Orphaned at 14, I grew up surrounded by the choking smoke of charcoal fires, where energy poverty and environmental degradation went hand in hand. I witnessed firsthand how toxic fuels silently erode health, opportunity, and dignity. That experience didn’t break me—it built my resolve.

Now, as the founder of Wings of Care, I lead a social enterprise that turns waste into solutions. We manufacture clean, affordable cookstoves using recycled metal and distribute them through a network of women entrepreneurs. Our work reduces emissions, empowers women, and creates circular economies. But real transformation cannot rely on innovation alone—it requires strong laws that protect what matters most.

In the BC context, my vision calls for:

- The full legal recognition of Indigenous laws and governance systems, not as symbolic acknowledgements but as foundational to land, water, and species protection. Indigenous Nations have managed ecosystems sustainably for millennia. Their laws carry the wisdom and legitimacy needed to restore right relationships with the Earth.
- Constitutional protection of environmental rights, enshrining access to clean air, water, and a safe climate as fundamental rights for all—especially for those in historically marginalized and under-resourced communities.
- Legal mechanisms that shift from extractive to regenerative economies, incentivizing circularity, clean technology, and community-led climate solutions that build both ecological health and economic justice.
- A redefinition of legal standing to include more-than-human beings, ensuring forests, rivers, and other living systems can be represented and protected in courts of law.
- Community co-governance of resources, backed by legislation that returns decision-making power to those who are most affected by environmental harms—particularly Indigenous, immigrant, and frontline communities.

My journey—from a charcoal-filled childhood to designing clean energy solutions in BC—has shown me that the law can either entrench injustice or ignite resilience. I believe in a future where law is not wielded from above but grown from the ground up, informed by lived experience and cultural wisdom. If we want resilience to last 50 years and beyond, we must design legal systems that listen to Elders, empower youth, and protect the rights of species we’ll never meet. This is not about managing decline—it’s about legislating life.

With courage, humility, and collaboration, British Columbia can lead the world in building a just legal architecture for a livable planet. I am committed to being part of that future.



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