



Photo by Marika Ai-Li

Funding the Future: Conservation Finance for Private Landowners



**Action for
Adaptation**

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Executive Summary

The Action for Adaptation Project held a workshop on the 27 February 2025 titled *Funding our Future: Conservation Finance for Private Lands*. This brought together local and provincial governments and First Nations elected officials and staff, non-profit organisations, funding and financial advisors. The purpose was to talk about how sustainable funding for biodiversity and stewardship could be achieved in the capital region, specifically acknowledging that 57% of the land is in private ownership.

The objectives for the workshop were to:

- To reflect on what we value about the natural environment.
- To share information on new ways to finance biodiversity and stewardship.
- To meet others who are involved in stewardship.
- Look for collaborative opportunities to increase finance for stewardship.

Information was shared with participants of the workshop through presentations from five knowledge holders, printed resources in the room and during small breakout groups (<10 people).

One of the first speakers of the day was STHENEP (Adam Olsen) who reminded the workshop attendees that colonisation has disrupted Indigenous Peoples connection to the land and that this has had a lasting impact on indigenous communities and ecosystems. We now need to explore how balance can be restored through Indigenous-led stewardship and governance leading to a just and sustainable future. The other speakers included:

- Cassandra Cummings – Diamond Head Consulting – who spoke about the work that the District of Saanich has completed to establish a baseline of biodiversity; to develop a Biodiversity Conservation Strategy; and subsequently consider how to finance conservation action on private lands.
- Juliet Craig – Kootenay Conservation Program – shared information about Local Conservation Funds, first established in the Kootenay region in 2008, including how they formed; how they are managed; their benefits to the wider community; and the projects they have successfully supported in their service areas.
- Brodie Guy – Island Coastal Economic Trust – explained how sustainable financing can be formed when you take into consideration social, economic, cultural and environmental conditions. The best return is seen when funds are pooled by all parties and all types of funding streams are considered.
- Josh O’Neill – Mustel Group – presented the results of a survey undertaken in the Capital Regional District, which included sample of residents (1056) that enabled statistical comparison between four core areas. The survey explored what people value, what threats they are concerned about, if people would be willing to pay a tax to protect the natural environment and how much they would be willing to pay.

A key part of the workshop was for attendees to participate in breakout groups to work through the steps relating to how to establish sustainable funding in the Capital Region for land stewardship.

The steps followed align with those within the [Local Conservation Fund Guide for Local Governments](#).

1. Build a leadership team and support network
2. Determine community priorities
 - Public polls and focus groups
3. Make the case for a Conservation Fund
 - Outreach, frequently asked questions.
4. Design the Conservation Fund
 - Priorities, type and scope of funding, Terms of Reference.
5. Determine financing options
6. Understand how to establish the fund
 - Governance, technical support and administration.
7. Gain approval to establish a fund, if tax based
 - Alternative approvals, referendum etc.

The information collected during the discussions was used to determine next steps. A draft vision was proposed:

'Development of a Biodiversity and Land Stewardship Fund that is co-governed by First Nations and local governments'.

In addition, the following recommendations were put forward:

Build the Supporting Network and Leadership Team

1. The Action for Adaptation team (CDFCP / UBC Botanical Gardens) will review completed workshop feedback forms to identify individuals and organisations that indicated that they would be interested in supporting the next steps of forming a fund (support network and leadership team).
2. The Action for Adaptation team will look to pull together interested parties to identify what support they would be willing to provide.

Communication and Outreach Strategy

3. Identify a person / organisation in the support network (built from workshop attendees) that can help draft an initial Communications Strategy. This can then be developed with time but helps provide a framework in the short term.
4. The workshop attendees have indicated that there should be co-governance of the Fund by First Nations and local governments and for all parties to have equal representation. Therefore, sharing information collected during the workshop and the community survey will be a short-term priority for the Action for Adaptation team (CDFCP / UBC Botanical Gardens) to these audiences. The approach may include:
 - Presentations to the Capital Regional District Environmental Services Sub-Committee or Board.
 - Presentations to Municipal and First Nations Councils.
 - One on one conversations with First Nations and local government staff.

Regional Biodiversity and Land Stewardship Strategy

5. The Action for Adaptation team will consult with the CRD's team leading on the development of the Biodiversity and Environmental Stewardship Services and the Parks Department to understand their aspirations for the service and what they consider to be the most relevant plans and strategies for guiding a fund.
6. The Action for Adaptation team will work with the support network and leadership team to develop a regional strategy that would guide the implementation of a fund and would help support funding. This is likely to need capacity funding.

Business Strategy

7. The support network and leadership team (formed from workshop attendees and beyond) will identify funding that would provide capacity to produce the Business Strategy.