

Annual Report 2025-26



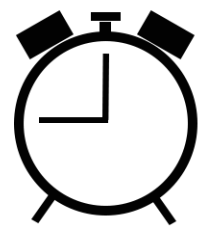


2025-26 OVERVIEW

As we enter our 30th year as an organization, the ELC stands as a remarkable example of resilience and renewal. These qualities are reflected in our logo – a fern—chosen for its ability to regenerate, adapt and endure. Over three decades, the ELC community has grown well beyond the clinic, with our alumni thriving as lawyers and leaders in diverse settings. At the same time, our approaches to teaching the clinic, problem solving, and environmental justice continue to evolve. This ongoing renewal is made possible by our generous community of supporters and the steady influx of dedicated students who continue to share with us their fresh perspectives and inspiration.

The **ELC Clinic Program** has the twofold purpose of providing legal aid, legal research, law reform, and legal education services to Indigenous organizations, community members, and conservation organizations in British Columbia while also delivering hands-on legal skills training and education for law and articling students. Over the past year, we offered three sessions of the ELC Clinic and mentored 31 Clinic students, who provided over 3,175 hours of direct legal services. In total, through new and ongoing Clinic work, ELC staff, articling students, research students and Clinic students provided more than **7,570 hours of legal services** to over 60 client groups to help them understand and resolve public interest environmental law issues.

7,570
HOURS
OF LEGAL SERVICES



40
PEOPLE



Through the ELC Clinic Program, we delivered in-person legal information, training and strategic advice on many matters, including working with Indigenous Nations and organizations on assessing legal tools for collaborative marine stewardship governance, examining how Indigenous law principles could be incorporated into co-governance agreements, and developing bylaw reforms to protect biodiversity, sensitive ecosystems and natural assets. We also continued to prioritize our work in supporting Indigenous organizations and individuals to uphold and assert their own laws.



Over the past year, we advanced initiatives aimed at building capacity and collaboration across the province, particularly through our other core program, the **ELC Associates Program**, which offers training for lawyers who practice or are interested in public interest environmental law. In April 2025, we organized a learning session in Vancouver, and in February 2026, we co-hosted a public interest environmental law conference with the Environmental Law Club, which was open to the public. Both gatherings provided dedicated time and space for professional legal education, knowledge sharing, skill building, and collective learning.

We held the conference in the newly opened Indigenous laws wing of the Fraser Building, which also includes purpose-built space that became our permanent home when we moved in early September 2025. This new space enhances collaboration, ensures client confidentiality, and improves our capacity to support students and community partners through integrated legal work.

For the 9th year in a row, we co-organized a Research-a-thon event with Club members. This year's theme explored how jurisdictions around the world regulate commercial composting to protect environmental and community health. We also continued to mentor students interested in governance roles within the ELC Society, supporting their growth in public interest environmental law and non-profit leadership.

Our work continues to evolve in a rapidly shifting policy and regulatory environment. In response, we are prioritizing working closely with communities to support changes within their own territories and neighbourhoods. At the same time, we continue to offer strategic guidance, legal tools and law reform recommendations that strengthen the ability of organizations to engage effectively with governments and others. This combined approach—community empowerment paired with systemic advocacy—supports the creation and enforcement of strong laws and regulations that advance healthy ecosystems and meaningful reconciliation.

All this work is possible because of the consistent financial commitments we receive from foundations and others. We are grateful for this support, which allows us to develop legal resources and tools to help communities, build new client relationships, and strengthen existing ones.

This 2025-26 Annual Report shares some of the highlights and impact of our activities. We are honoured to work with

ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTRE



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Student Researchers:

- Isabelle McIntyre
- Meagan Siemaszkiewicz
- Curtis Bergen
- Keegan Neary



Indigenous organizations in upholding their authority and relationships with the environment in old and new ways, to empower communities with legal knowledge, and to respond to growing concerns over environmental issues with practical and accessible resources and tools.

These activities reflect the ELC's continued commitment to delivering high-impact legal education, research, and services that empower communities, support Indigenous leadership, and advance environmental law across BC.



2025-26 HIGHLIGHTS

Clockwise from top left: (1) Sylix Water Forum (L-R) Tessa Terbasket (Okanagan Nation Alliance), Deborah Curran (Environmental Law Centre), Scott Boswell (Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Partnership). (2) Articled student Kevin Berk at Bowker Creek Headwaters. (3) (L-R) Holly Pattison and Shannon Otruba (Environmental Law Centre) prepare for a pre-move tour of the new Indigenous Laws wing. (4) (L-R) Gracie Chiu and Patricia Weber (Environmental Law Centre) in conference planning mode. (5) (L-R) Deborah Curran and Holly Pattison at UVic Law's 50th Anniversary. (6) ELC staff meeting (L to R) Shannon Otruba, Deborah Curran, Patricia Weber, Ashley Wehrhahn, Gracie Chiu.

SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP IN PROTECTION OF TERRITORY AND LEGAL ADVOCACY

Stairway to the new ELC offices in the Indigenous Laws wing of the Fraser Building.

This year, we continued to support Indigenous Nations in advancing their laws, governance structures, and stewardship responsibilities. Some of this work included helping Nations develop water laws and policies grounded in their own legal orders, creating protocols for data governance and permitting, and examining co-governance pathways that recognize Indigenous decision-making authority.

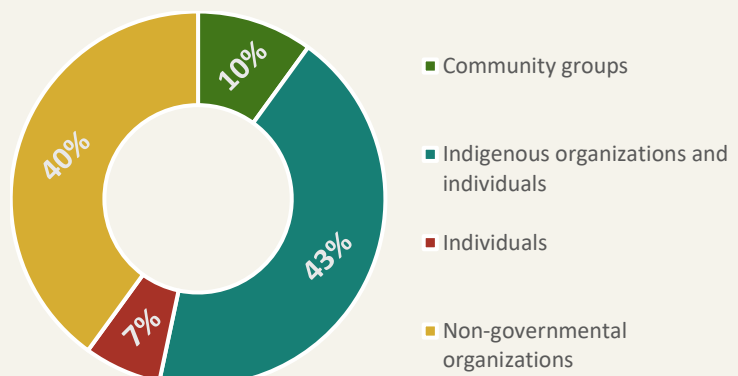
Through legal research, memos and community-specific tools, we helped strengthen the foundation for Indigenous governments to assert jurisdiction, express their ecological relationships and obligations, and shape land and water governance in their territories.

A specific example of this work is the set of 12 plain-language fact sheets we developed on injunctions to support Indigenous community members engaged in land defence, offering accessible legal information to help them understand the personal implications of land defence activities as individuals and communities respond to additional state-approved industrial development in their territories. By simplifying complex legal concepts, the fact sheets aim to strengthen the capacity of land defenders to make informed decisions about land defence strategies and advocate for their rights. Also, in collaboration with a hereditary chief, we produced a report examining government-to-government arrangements between British Columbia and Indigenous Nations. We analyzed how the Province of BC has amended its laws and processes in response to Indigenous laws expressed through land use plans. The project is intended to support community understanding of how BC can better uphold Indigenous laws and stewardship responsibilities using land use plans as a starting point.

Indigenous Nations, individuals, or organizations now represent approximately 40% of our clients, reflecting the depth and continuity of our work in supporting Indigenous leadership in territorial protection, governance and legal advocacy.

COMMUNITIES SERVED

Through our work on new and ongoing Clinic files, this year we supported 26 Indigenous organizations or individuals, 23 non-government organizations, six community groups, four individuals and one public interest environmental law non-governmental organization.



EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES WITH LEGAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Shared boardroom in the Indigenous Laws wing of the Fraser Building.

The Clinic offers us many opportunities to provide communities with clear, practical legal tools to understand environmental risks and advocate for stronger protections.

One of the public resources we released this year was a legal briefing on the risks of the land application of biosolids. The report examined gaps in federal and BC law, contamination concerns—particularly from PFAS “forever chemicals”—and legal precedents from other jurisdictions. Building on earlier ELC work, the resource informed renewed public debate as the Capital Regional District reconsidered its longstanding ban and was selling biosolids to a company creating soil amendments for the gardening industry. Encouragingly, the local government has now committed to thermally converting biosolids into biochar, marking a Canadian first and a significant step toward safer waste management.

More recently, we published a report exploring how remining could help BC clean up legacy mine sites while supplying critical minerals for the province’s clean-energy transition. The report outlines both the promise and the risks of remining, finding that BC currently lacks clear rules to ensure these projects protect the environment and uphold Indigenous rights. It highlights key gaps in existing laws and recommends the safeguards needed for responsible, transparent remining that supports a circular economy rather than repeating past harms.

By translating complex legal frameworks into accessible resources, we help communities make informed decisions and pursue long-term strategies to better protect local ecosystems and public health. Being invited to share our collaborative work directly with communities – to listen, respond, and support local efforts to protect land and water – remains one of the most significant highlights of our work.



REGIONS SERVED

Over the past year, most of our client files (40%) dealt with province-wide issues, followed by Vancouver Island and Coastal regional issues, with remaining files distributed across other areas of BC and beyond.



CULTIVATING LEGAL COLLABORATION AND MENTORSHIP



Law Rooted in Land and Relationships Conference (L-R) (1 & 2) Environmental Law Club students greet conference attendees and run tech behind the scenes. (3) Afternoon audience listening to guest speakers with an overlay of the Club's conference graphic.

One of our core values is to continue to develop a collaborative public interest legal community of lawyers who can rely on one another. In April 2025, we hosted an in-person education session for past and present ELC Associates working with law firms throughout BC and lawyers from West Coast Environmental Law and Ecojustice. The intent was to foster dialogue on new developments in environmental and Indigenous laws and strengthen connections among these legal practitioners. Discussions ranged from addressing government initiatives to fast-track industrial projects to supporting Indigenous-led solutions. We heard about critical minerals, the circular economy, prioritizing ecosystem health, legal strategies in the Gitxaala Nation's landmark case, and big-picture, creative thinking on establishing and maintaining marine protected areas. This session demonstrated legal mentorship in action, with former students—now junior lawyers—actively contributing and mentoring, showcasing the strength of knowledge mobilization and career progression within the environmental law community.

Another highlight this year was the February 2026 public interest environmental law conference we co-hosted with students in the Environmental Law Club, held at the University of Victoria.

Attended by law students, lawyers, students at UVic and the public, speakers at the *Law Rooted in Land and Relationships Conference* examined how Indigenous legal orders are reshaping environmental governance and statutory interpretation in BC. Panels highlighted Indigenous-led watershed and fire stewardship initiatives as assertions of jurisdiction that address cumulative impacts and challenge provincial regulatory constraints, including barriers to cultural burning under wildfire legislation. The keynote analyzed the significance of the *Gitxaala* BC Court of Appeal decision, which confirmed the justiciability of assessing provincial laws for consistency with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and signaled major implications for the implementation of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* and potential Supreme Court of Canada review. Additional sessions emphasized the responsibilities of lawyers working in intercultural contexts and explored the recent BC Supreme Court decision in favour of Aboriginal title for Cowichan Tribes, which recognized Aboriginal title to village and submerged lands and clarified Crown obligations in reconciling Indigenous land rights with provincial land systems.





(Clockwise L-R) (1) PANEL 1: WATERSHED AND PLACE-BASED GOVERNANCE: INDIGENOUS AUTHORITY AND COLLABORATIVE WATER MANAGEMENT. Tessa Terbasket (Okanagan Nation Alliance) (onscreen) and Deborah Curran (ELC) with Moderator Eric Higgins (Environmental Studies). (2) PANEL 2: LAW, FIRE, AND RENEWAL: RETHINKING LAW THROUGH INDIGENOUS FIRE STEWARDSHIP. Russell Myers Ross (Gathering Voices Society) and Jocelyn Stacey (Peter A. Allard School of Law, UBC) with Moderator Eric Higgins. (3) KEYNOTE: UNDRIP, DRIPA, AND THE GITXAAŁA DECISION: INTERPRETING BC LAWS IN A TRANSFORMING LEGAL LANDSCAPE. Ruben Tillman (Ng Ariss Fong and former ELC student, articulated student and ELC Associate) and Lisa Fong, KC (Ng Ariss Fong and former ELC Board member and ELC Associate) (4) PANEL 3: LAWYERING IN INTERCULTURAL CONTEXTS: INDIGENOUS-SETTLER LAWYER-CLIENT APPROACHES. Karennia Williams (Huberman Law Group and ELC Board member and ELC Associate) (onscreen) and Lisa Fong, KC with Deborah Curran. (4 & 5) PANEL 4: REFLECTIONS ON THE COWICHAN DECISION: LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS OF A LANDMARK ABORIGINAL TITLE RULING. Robert Morales (Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group) (onscreen), Ava Murphy (Woodward & Company LLP) and Julian Riddell (Woodward & Company LLP and ELC Associate), with moderator Patricia Weber (ELC).

By creating opportunities for mentorship and collaborative learning, we help strengthen a network of legal practitioners dedicated to advancing environmental justice across the province.



RESEARCH-A-THON 2026: COMMERCIAL COMPOST CONTROL



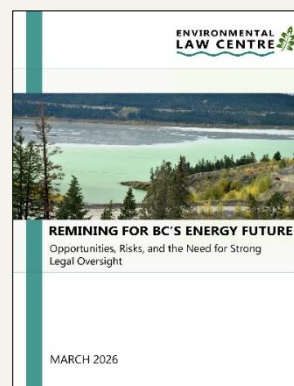
Research-a-thon 2026 (L-R) (1&3) Students study in the Dispute Resolution Room participating (2) Event poster.

The annual ELC Research-a-thon is a one-day event where students gather to focus on a single issue and generate research to support public interest environmental law in BC. Organized by the Environmental Law Club with support from the Environmental Law Centre and UVic Libraries, the theme for the 9th annual Research-a-thon, was *Commercial Compost Control: Decoding International Best Practices*. In response to significant regulatory gaps in BC's regulation of commercial composting brought forward by ELC clients, students researched how jurisdictions around the world regulate commercial composting to protect environmental and community health. Students explored approaches to leachate control, setbacks, volume limits, storage requirements, and end-product testing, comparing differences and documented effective practices across jurisdictions in the United States and European Union. The goal was to highlight strengths and trends in commercial composting to deepen understanding of how well-designed compost regulations can support environmental protection in BC.

PUBLICATIONS

2025-26 Clinic activities included legal aid, legal research, law reform, and legal education activities. Reports and submissions we publicly released included:

1. [Land Application of Biosolids in British Columbia](#)
2. [Environmental Petition to Prevent the Spread of Invasive Mussels](#)
3. [Remining for BC's Energy Future: Opportunities, Risks, and the Need for Strong Legal Oversight](#)



Check out more resources on our webpage: <https://envirolawcentre.ca/resources/>



2025-26 ACTIVE FILE SUMMARY

The ELC receives many more requests for assistance each term than we can address. Thankfully, we are guided by a board-driven case selection policy and process. In addition to requiring that each case result in a solid educational component for students, our policy guides us to take on cases with the potential to make a significant contribution to the development of environmental law.

Our core work produces resources to support healthy lands, waters, and governance through our five main focus areas: Healthy Watersheds, Sustainable Communities, Resilient Coast, Climate and Energy Equity, and Environmental Justice.

HEALTHY WATERSHEDS

GOAL: Protect and restore natural resources and freshwater systems through strong water governance, supporting Indigenous-led water laws, and legal accountability.

Key Activities:

- Supported Indigenous Nations in developing and implementing **Indigenous water laws, policies, and permitting systems** rooted in Indigenous legal orders.
- Identified and analyzed **legal tools for watershed and wetland protection**, including agricultural runoff mitigation and local government authorities.
- Addressed regulatory risks to water quality, including **log handling practices, pesticide and herbicide use, invasive species, and water monitoring failures**.
- Advanced environmental protection through **legal opinions, environmental petitions, and strategic research** to strengthen freshwater oversight and compliance.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

GOAL: Strengthen community resilience and encourage better planning through developing best practices legal reforms that reduce environmental risk and support sustainable land and waste management.

Key Activities:

- Advanced **local government law reform** to prevent urban flooding and protect urban creeks, sensitive ecosystems, and natural assets.
- Strengthened legal frameworks for **waste reduction and circular economy solutions**, including extended producer responsibility, composting regulations, waste-to-energy oversight, and food labelling reform.
- Provided **legal analysis and recommendations** to help communities better manage growth while reducing pollution and environmental harm.

RESILIENT COAST

GOAL: Support coastal and marine ecosystems through supporting Indigenous-led marine stewardship, assessing and improving enforcement regimes, developing stronger legal protections, and ensuring industrial activities remain accountable to the public and the environment.

Key Activities:

- Assisted Indigenous Nations in assessing **marine governance authorities** and opportunities for Indigenous-led and co-governance planning.
- Analyzed **cumulative effects and jurisdictional gaps** affecting coastal and marine decision making.
- Examined legal tools to strengthen oversight of **industrial marine activities and dangerous cargo shipping**, drawing on best practices from other jurisdictions.
- Supported protection of **culturally and ecologically significant coastal species and ecosystems**.

CLIMATE AND ENERGY EQUITY

GOAL: Address climate-related harms and inequities arising from industrial pollution, extractive industries, and energy systems through providing legal capacity and tools for communities to respond.

Key Activities:

- Analyzed and challenged legal frameworks governing **mining, tailings ponds, industrial emissions, oil sands effluent, mine bonding, and waste-to-energy practices**.
- Examined how regulatory failures shift the **economic and environmental costs of pollution** onto communities, including climate-driven insurance impacts.
- Identified legal pathways to improve accountability and ensure that climate and energy transitions are **fair, transparent, and protect communities**.

Active files reflect the Clinic's strategic priorities and offer students hands-on experience applying public interest environmental law to real community needs.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

GOAL: Centre the rights of Indigenous and other underrepresented communities on the development and the enforcement of environmental laws, ensuring ecological integrity, community health and meaningful participation in environmental decision making.

Key Activities:

- Supported the integration of **Indigenous legal orders** into environmental governance, enforcement, and land- and water-use decision making.
- Prepared legal analyses on **injunctions, cumulative effects, access to lands and waters, and conflicts between Indigenous and state legal systems**.
- Advanced legal protections for **biodiversity, species at risk, and culturally significant wildlife**, by drafting emergency and preventative legal tools.
- Addressed contamination and pollution risks affecting communities, with a focus on **long-term ecological and human health impacts**.



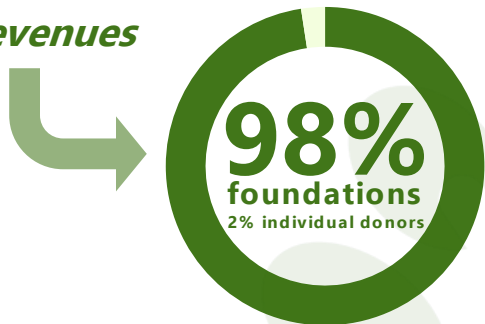
MANY THANKS FOR YOUR PARTNERSHIP!

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the many partners who sustain our work. It is a privilege to collaborate and work in partnership with our students, clients, the Law Faculty, Board members, lawyers, charitable foundations, and individual donors.

Support from the Faculty of Law University of Victoria, Law Foundation of British Columbia, North Family Foundation, Sitka Foundation, Wilburforce Foundation, the *Janet Person Environmental Law Centre Endowment Fund* and individual donors allow us to continue training students and assisting communities.

We are deeply grateful for your continued trust and commitment, and we look forward to another year of shared renewal and inspiration.

Revenues



Expenditures

Your support helps us deliver high-impact legal education, research, and services that empower communities, support Indigenous leadership, and advance environmental law across BC.

