



COAST
FUNDS

GREAT BEAR RAINFOREST ECONOMIC SUMMIT:

Activating the Next 15 Years

EVENT PROGRAM



OCTOBER 2, 2025



COAST COAL HARBOUR VANCOUVER HOTEL
xʷm kw m, Skwxwú7mesh, and s lilw tał territory

FROM THE CEO



WELCOME TO THE GREAT BEAR RAINFOREST ECONOMIC SUMMIT

We’ve come a long way together. In the 2000s, when the Great Bear Rainforest agreements were being created, First Nations came together with partners to chart a new path for the region that protects sensitive rainforest ecosystems, while also creating opportunities for First Nations people to thrive in their homelands.

In the years that followed, First Nations worked with Coast Funds to invest over \$61 million in businesses, infrastructure, training, and regional economic development. These investments shaped the foundation for a conservation economy on the coast, supported more than 1,000 new jobs, and attracted over \$207 million of additional investment to the region.

This morning, we’ll hear from First Nations leaders and analysts about the community and regional impacts of Nation-led projects financed through the Economic Development Fund (2008-2024). We’ll also hear from economists about

the trends and forces that have shaped the Canadian and British Columbian economies, creating new opportunities and challenges for First Nations.

In the afternoon, we’ll turn our focus forward to consider how First Nations (and Coast Funds) can build on this foundation and strengthen coastal economies for future generations. We have many knowledge holders and leaders in the room with us today – I’m looking forward to hearing your visions for the decades to come.

In partnership,



Eddy Adra
CEO, Coast Funds

AGENDA: ECONOMIC SUMMIT

7:30 AM	Registration and Breakfast
8:30 AM	Territorial Welcome and Dancers - Alec Guerin - Language Learner and Councillor, Musqueam Indian Band - Spakwus Slolem <i>Eagle Song Dancers</i>
8:45 AM	Opening Remarks and Land Acknowledgement Eddy Adra - CEO, Coast Funds
9:00 AM	Presentation: Great Bear Rainforest Economic Impact An overview of the overall impact of First Nations’ projects supported through the \$60-million Economic Development Fund at Coast Funds. Hannes Edinger - Founder and Managing Director, Big River Analytics
9:30 AM	Panel Presentation: Community Perspectives Insights from community representatives from the North Coast and Haida Gwaii, the Central Coast, and Northern Vancouver Island on the local impacts of Economic Development Fund-supported projects. - Sonia Rice - Director of Executive & Community Relations, HaiCo - Bruce Cullen - Director of Business Development and Strategic Partnerships, Gitga’at Economic Corporation - Cyrus Singh - Chief Executive Officer, K’awat’si Economic Development
10:30 AM	Morning Coffee and Connecting
11:00 AM	Panel Presentation: Economic Outlook Perspectives on the Canadian and British Columbia economies, and the trends shaping the wider business environment and First Nations economies. - Jack Blackwell - Economist, CPABC - Dr. Tara Atleo - Stewardship Economist, UBC
11:30 AM	Lunch and Connecting
1:00 PM	Workshop and Discussion Interactive small group conversation and facilitated discussion on opportunities and challenges for strengthening existing economic foundations and considerations for the next 15 years of the conservation economy.
2:30 PM	Afternoon Coffee Break
2:45 PM	Panel Presentation: Future Opportunities A forward-looking discussion on the enabling aspects of economic development that will support the continued diversification and strengthening of coastal economies for the next 15 years and beyond. - Michael Bonshor - Managing Director, First Nations Business Development Association - Donna St. Louis - National Lead for Indigenous Business, EDC - Vickie Whitehead - VLW Financial Management Ltd.
3:45 PM	Closing Keynote Speaker Sxwpilemaát Siyám <i>Chief Leanne Joe</i>
4:15 PM	Closing Remarks

AGENDA: CELEBRATION DINNER

5:30 PM	Cocktail Reception
6:30 PM	Welcome and Land Acknowledgement - Michael Vegh - Heiltsuk Tribal Council - Elder Shane Pointe - Musqueam First Nation - Git Hayetsk Dancers
6:50 PM	Opening Remarks and Land Acknowledgement Eddy Adra - CEO, Coast Funds
7:05 PM	Fireside Chat with Hereditary Chiefs Moderator: Dallas Smith, Coast Funds – Board Chair - Chief Darren Blaney - Homalco First Nation - Nees Ma’Outa <i>Clifford White</i> - Gitxaʼla Nation
7:30 PM	Dinner Blessing by Elder Shane Pointe - Musqueam First Nation
8:25 PM	Reflections Dr. Jody Holmes - Rainforest Solutions Project
8:35 PM	Funding Partner Recognition Province of British Columbia, Government of Canada Garth Davis - Board Member, Coast Funds
8:45 PM	Special Recognition of Participating First Nations
9:00 PM	Cultural Performance Git Hayetsk Dancers



Photo: Charge Solar / Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation

SPEAKERS



Hannes Edinger

Hannes Edinger is an award-winning economist, a member of the Métis Nation, and the Managing Director of Big River Analytics. Hannes founded Big River Analytics Ltd. in 2011 with the mission of providing statistical and analytical capacity to benefit Indigenous governments across Canada. In addition to his work at Big River, he serves on the Board of the Pacific Institute of Mathematical Sciences and as a member of the National Stakeholder Advisory Panel for the Labour Market Information Council. He holds a Masters in Economics from Queen’s University. When he’s out of the office, Hannes is off chasing steelhead and salmon somewhere in the Pacific Northwest.

Sonia Rice



Jáas K’iyygaanga hánuu díi kyá’aang. Díi uu Yahgujáanas gáagang. Sandy Adams díi ‘aw uu íijan. Isabella Edenshaw díi nán nán uu íijan. Charles Edenshaw díi nán chán uu íijan. Díi gidaláng hlGúnalgang. Skil Jáada, SGáan Gid, isgyáan Waatsasdiyyee hánuu ‘Il kyá’aa’waang. Yáahl Gadaás hánuu Skil Jáada gid íihlangaa kyá’aang. Gaw Tlagée, Xaadáa Gwáay aa.uu Hl na’aanggang.

Jaas K’iyygaanga *Sonia Rice* has dedicated the past three decades to working for the Haida Nation (HaiCo, Council of the Haida Nation, and Old Massett Village Council). Since joining Haida Enterprise Corporation (HaiCo) in March 2016, Jaas K’iyygaanga is an integral part of the HaiCo management team, where she actively supports various strategic initiatives and projects. In addition to her leadership in executive support and board relations, she plays a key role in developing strategic and operational documentation and governance materials.



Bruce Cullen

Bruce Cullen is a Director of the Gitga’at Development Corporation (GDC), where he leads the Strategic Partnership and Business Development team. The GDC has emerged as a prominent economic leader on the north coast of British Columbia, currently collaborating with 15 Joint Venture partners on major projects such as LNG Canada and Cedar LNG. His association with the Gitga’at spans two decades, commencing with a leadership position at Pulse Energy, a Vancouver software company. Mr. Cullen co-developed an innovative Micro Smart Grid in Hartley Bay, in partnership with the Gitga’at First Nation. This successful technological initiative not only provided substantial energy and financial savings to the Gitga’at First Nation, and several other First Nations in BC, but also significantly contributed to the community’s objective of becoming the greenest First Nation in Canada.

Cyrus Singh



Cyrus Singh is the CEO of KEDC (Kawatsi Economic Development Corporation), the economic arm of the Gwa’sala Nakwaxda’xw Nations. Under his leadership the Nation has made significant strides toward achieving its economic vision. KEDC is the largest employer located in Northern Vancouver Island with over 275 employees comprised of 40% Indigenous employment. With over 20 years of experience in business development and analytics, his leadership blends traditional values with modern strategies to drive sustainable economic in Indigenous communities. He holds a Master’s Public Administration from Dalhousie University and Bachelor of Commerce from the University of Victoria.

SPEAKERS



Jack Blackwell

As the Chartered Professional Accountants of British Columbia's in house economist, Jack Blackwell contributes to the organization's thought leadership on the BC economy through the BC Check-Up series and other publications. He holds an MA in Economics from Simon Fraser University and a BSc from Brock University. Prior to joining CPABC in 2023, Jack worked as an analyst at Statistics Canada, specializing in labour economics.

Dr. Tara Atleo

Dr. Tara Atleo, haḥuula, is a stewardship economics researcher and sustainable development practitioner from the Ahousaht First Nation, house of ḥaqiṣpiit. Tara is passionately committed to the principles of stewardship, dedicating her work to exploring innovative approaches to upholding and empowering Indigenous law and governance through the creation of opportunities that advance efforts towards intergenerational equity, interconnectivity, and balance between life and land within Indigenous territories. She is currently an assistant professor within the Faculty of Forestry at the University of British Columbia.



Michael Bonshor

Michael Bonshor is a member of the Dzawada'enuxw First Nation of Kingcome Inlet, BC. Michael has over 20 years of experience working with First Nation across Canada in key areas of governance, business and economic development, and First Nations investment. Michael has extensive experience working within the public and private sector, bridging Indigenous rights and title to opportunities and respectful relationship development with government and industry. He is President and CEO of Visions First Nations Financial Services and Managing Director of the First Nations Business Development Association. In 2024 Michael was appointed Chair of the Board of Directors for BCIT and also sits on the National Indigenous Economic Development Board.

Donna St. Louis

Donna St. Louis is from the Nlaka'pamux Nation in British Columbia and has dedicated her career to supporting Indigenous economic development. In her role at EDC, she strives to increase opportunities for Canadian Indigenous companies that export or are interested in growing their business through exporting. Her professional experience includes working with the First Nations Finance Authority (FNFA), where she helped First Nation governments access capital. Prior to the FNFA, she assisted Indigenous entrepreneurs in obtaining financing and funding with Tale'awtxw Aboriginal Capital Corporation (TACC).



SPEAKERS



Vickie Whitehead

Vickie Whitehead is a CPA, CGA, with her ICD.D designation. She is the Administrative Trustee and trusted advisor to First Nations across Canada. Vickie is Cree Métis, is a citizen of the Métis Nation of B.C., and is driven by her traditional values of cultural integrity and respect for each community's self-determination goals. With over 22 years of experience working in industry and in the Government of Canada, she is a respected speaker and expert in her field. Vickie specializes in working with First Nation clients to help them achieve success in the areas of First Nation Trust creation and management, board governance, and financial management. Vickie is the recipient of the 2018 CPABC Distinguished Services Award for her volunteer work with Indigenous organizations and currently sits on the Vancouver Aboriginal Health Society board and on a Southern BC First Nation's Finance and Audit Committee.

Chief Leanne Joe

Sxwpilemaāt Siyám, also known as Chief Leanne Joe is one of sixteen Hereditary Chiefs of the Squamish Nation and the first female Chief of her Lackett Joe Family. She shares her traditional name with her late father, Sxwpilem Siyám, Chief Philip Joe. Sxwpilemaāt Siyám is also a descendent of the Kwakwaka'wakw speaking people and carries the traditional name of Q-Gee-Sea Loud, and the Thomas family of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation. Sxwpilemaāt Siyám was born and raised on the beautiful shores of North Vancouver while having close relations to her roots on the east coast shores of Vancouver Island. Her family lives in her husband's ancestral territory of the Sylix and Nlaka'pam speaking people, aka Merritt, BC.



Coast Funds is grateful for the support of our investment partners, who have sponsored the Summit and travel costs.

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