

## Coastal First Nations, Nanwakolas Council and Coast Funds welcome B.C. investment in Great Bear Sea

VANCOUVER, BC, Dec. 5, 2023 /CNW/ - Coastal First Nations, Nanwakolas Council and Coast Funds are welcoming the provincial government's announcement of a \$60 million investment in support of Indigenous-led marine conservation, stewardship, and sustainable economic development in the Northern Shelf Bioregion, also known as the Great Bear Sea. BC's investment forms part of a broader initiative that will bring hundreds of millions of dollars in new investment for economic development, community prosperity, and the protection of coastal ecosystems and wildlife across the north and central coast and Haida Gwaii.



*Coastal First Nations, Nanwakolas Council and Coast Funds are welcoming B.C.'s investment in the Great Bear Sea. (Josh Neufeld photo)*

The Great Bear Sea extends from the top of Vancouver Island to the Canada-Alaska border. One of the richest and most productive cold-water marine ecosystems on Earth, it is home to a rich diversity of marine life that has sustained our communities for countless generations. Stewarded and cared for by our Nations for more than 14,000 years, the Great Bear Sea is the source of sustenance, culture, and livelihoods for our own communities and for all British Columbians.

For over a decade, our Nations have worked with Canada and BC, and with stakeholders from commercial fishing, tourism, energy, and other sectors, to develop multi-use marine plans and a network of marine protected areas. These plans are informed by Indigenous knowledge, Western science, and collaboration between governments, citizens, and stakeholders. By putting these plans into practice, we can help ensure a healthy future for fisheries, marine wildlife, communities, and cultures across the region.

"By protecting *whole* ecosystems that include people and communities in co-existence with nature, Indigenous-led stewardship provides a blueprint for conservation and sustainable resource management worldwide," says K'áwáził Marilyn Stett, Chief Councillor of the Heiltsuk Nation and President of Coastal First Nations-Great Bear Initiative. "This funding provides vital long-term support for stewardship initiatives that maintain ecosystem health and biodiversity, while creating new jobs and improving social and economic well-being throughout coastal communities."

Coast Funds, the world's first Indigenous-led conservation finance organization, will manage these funds on behalf of participating First Nations. Through Coast Funds, First Nations have established a strong track record of success: the innovative conservation finance model developed in the Great Bear Rainforest in 2007 has supported more than 1,250 new jobs and 120 businesses, along with broader economic development and diversification.

"In the Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii, First Nations have demonstrated how investments in stewardship and coastal communities create jobs and opportunities, while protecting the ecosystems we all rely on," said Eddy Adra, CEO of Coast Funds. "We're pleased to see the Province of B.C. renew its support as First Nations work with Crown governments and partners to extend protections and conservation financing to their marine territories."

This investment contributes to the ongoing development of the Great Bear Sea Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) initiative, one of four Indigenous-led PFPs in development across Canada. PFPs are a proven tool for conservation finance that blends public and private investment to deliver long-term conservation and economic benefits. In December 2022, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced his government's commitment of [\\$800 million for the four PFPs initiatives](#).

The Great Bear Sea PFP will provide durable, long-term funding for the implementation of the Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Action Plan for the Great Bear Sea. Announced last February, the [MPA Network Action Plan](#) is the result of a collaborative partnership between First Nations, the Province of British Columbia, and the Government of Canada with input from industry and community stakeholders. When completed, the MPA Network will support healthy fisheries, protect and conserve ecosystems, enable sustainable marine economies, improve food security, and increase coastal resilience to climate change.

The provincial investment will also support the ongoing implementation of the [Marine Planning Partnership \(MaPP\)](#), a joint initiative of the Province and First Nations to develop and implement multi-use marine plans that combine sustainable economic development with environmental stewardship in the Great Bear Sea.

"Indigenous-led stewardship, coupled with effective long-term conservation investments, has proven to be a powerful model for delivering enduring ecosystem protection while creating jobs and building sustainable economies," said Dallas Smith, President, Nanwakolas Council. "We welcome BC's commitment to work collaboratively with our Nations to deliver on our existing marine planning partnerships -- and to join our Nations and Canada at the PFP table. Together we will get these benefits flowing for nature and for people."

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