

Inspiring the Next Generation

Evaluating TNC's Indigenous Youth Stewardship Program

Since 2005, TNC has partnered with First Nations to help achieve conservation results across Canada, because we believe that healthy communities are the foundation of lasting conservation.

Our First Nations partners identified a critical need to support the next generation of conservation leaders, so together we developed the SEAS program: Supporting Emerging Aboriginal Stewards.

SEAS is designed to engage, develop, and prepare Indigenous youth to become leaders in their communities, and stewards of their territories. It's an innovative educational program that connects Indigenous youth of all ages to the natural world outside.

And it's working.

SEAS uses classroom and hands-on learning—developed by and tailored to each community—to strengthen connections to culture and territory. SEAS supports educational and career goals with nature-based curriculum and paid internships.

To measure its impact, we worked with communities to conduct an in-depth evaluation; interviewing elders, educators, and students in three communities with SEAS programs. We confirmed that the program not only benefits students, but entire communities.

Learn more about how this approach to conservation is inspiring the next generation.

We support community-led conservation by Indigenous stewards, for lasting results through deep connections to their territories



of stewardship students experience a transformative impact on their lives



more Indigenous youth have spent time visiting their territories



450+
Students connect with lands and culture each year

"SEAS is the single most successful program we have in this community... In five to ten years, these guys are going to be the ones sitting at the government tables, the ones becoming hereditary chiefs and chief councillors."

- Doug Neasloss, Elected Chief Councillor, Kitsoo/Xai'xais Nation and TNC Canada Director



SEAS benefits start with individuals...

The evaluation showed that youth benefit significantly in six key areas:



Connection to Territory and Culture

Students are connected to their Nation's places and ways, becoming closer to culture, stories, laws, and values. They are passionate about caring for lands and waters and feel more secure in their Indigenous identities.



Health and Wellness

Students report feeling more resilient and capable, supported by strong social networks and a connection to nature. Research indicates that relationships to land, culture, and community are critical in helping overcome pressures of intergenerational trauma, cultural dislocation, and socioeconomics.



School Performance

Students are more enthusiastic about learning and achieving, and attendance improves. They also retain information better. SEAS supports a variety of learning styles and development stages.



Character Development

Students are more respectful of others and of nature. They are more confident and open to new challenges, taking initiative and applying critical thinking skills.



Opportunity

SEAS imparts transferable career skills, and provides connections to job opportunities. Students are more comfortable with new people and ideas, and show increased interest in post-secondary learning.



Leadership

- 100% of students demonstrated concern about others' wellbeing
- 91% are likely to inspire others
- 87% are able to manage, motivate, and organize others
- 80% are able to communicate effectively

"SEAS absolutely helps with mental health and addictions. Students have a better sense of their mental health through their connection to the outdoors." - Educator

Right: A SEAS student on a cultural field trip warms up her drum by rubbing its skin. ©Jason Houston



"They learn to help each other and share. They encourage each other, and cheer each other on, watching over each other." - Educator

Right: SEAS students practice sockeye fishing with gill nets. ©Jason Houston



...and ripple throughout communities

The evaluation revealed positive impacts across the community:



Community Wellbeing

SEAS strengthens community networks, fosters intergenerational relationships, and supports the re-emergence of cultural values.



Cultural Resurgence

SEAS promotes community-wide engagement in cultural events, such as potlatches and ceremonies, and increases activity on territorial lands and waters.

SEAS also helps bridge the gap between elders and youth, revitalizing traditional ways of learning, while ensuring that local knowledge, language, and culture is shared and active; not lost.



Economic Opportunities

SEAS supports local economies through direct employment, contracting, and paid internships.

Youth acquire skills needed to find jobs, which can help communities shift economies over time. Youth also gain exposure to job opportunities in their Nation's stewardship offices and in conservation tourism, making SEAS training both meaningful and practical.



Community Capacity

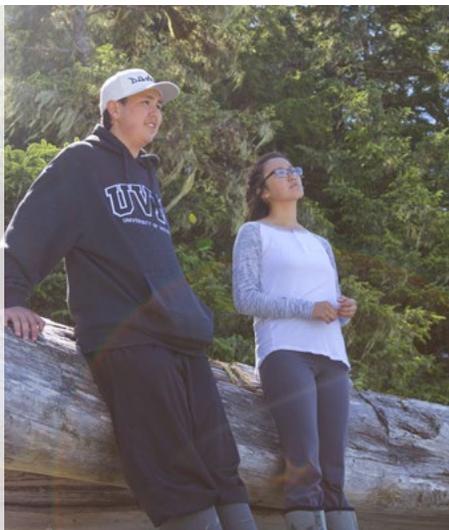
SEAS prepares stewards to fill community roles. As school performance and community engagement increases, the stewardship knowledge base grows.

One community reported an increase in stewardship office staff from four to 29—many being SEAS alumni.

"For those who aren't strong academically, participation rates go up, confidence goes up, and that usually translates into improved marks..."

- Educator

Right: SEAS students retell a traditional story.
©Michael Pietrocarlo



"I see the benefits to the community with local knowledge; they get to come in and show their skills"

- Educator

Right: SEAS educator teaches medicinal plant harvesting.
©Jason Houston



The Power of Youth

Supporting the next generation of conservation leaders

SEAS is successfully engaging and preparing Indigenous youth to become conservation and community leaders. We documented increased numbers of youth who:

- Pursue education in conservation fields
- Take up community stewardship causes
- Work in their Nations' land management offices

The Strength of Community

SEAS is flexible and responsive to each Nation's priorities

Curriculum is tailored to specific needs, such as science, leadership, language, or culture. Activities have included:

- Land-based ecology teachings
- Field trips to culturally significant sites
- Lessons from elders and visiting scientists
- Paid summer internships
- Community events, celebrations, and ceremonies
- Harvesting and preparing traditional plants, food, materials, and medicines

The Support of TNC Canada

Working toward a future where people and nature thrive

SEAS is part of reimagining conservation, as we help address the world's greatest conservation challenges through an approach driven by human wellbeing and sustainable economic development.

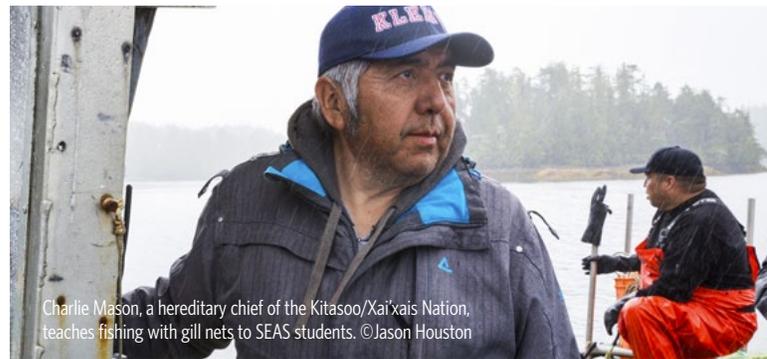
We are an affiliate of The Nature Conservancy: the world's largest conservation organization, working in 72 countries with the support of over 3,700 staff and 600 scientists.

"This is life-changing! I want to move into marine biology...SEAS has given me the opportunity to explore [and] the confidence to pursue what I want to do"
- Student



A SEAS student teaches bear safety to hikers. © Michael Pietrocarlo

"We're missing as a community...our sense of identity, and it's the knowledge we get from getting out on the land, learning traditional practices, that will help."
- Program Coordinator



Charlie Mason, a hereditary chief of the Kitasoo/Xai'xais Nation, teaches fishing with gill nets to SEAS students. © Jason Houston

"I think that we're moving towards a conservation-based economy. And some of the work in the stewardship area is providing opportunities..."
- Community Leader



Doug Neasloss leads a SEAS field trip to a sacred cultural site. © Jason Houston



Get in touch today to learn more:

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See SEAS in action at tnc.ca/SEAS