

# Youth employment programs to build a more equitable and inclusive future for conservation

As communities, businesses, and industry seek to work in a more integrated way with nature and seek natural solutions to global challenges like climate change, severe weather and biodiversity loss, conservation experience will be an increasingly important asset for youth seeking to enter the workforce. Historically in Canada, workers in conservation have not come from diverse backgrounds. This is changing. Now more than ever before Indigenous people, racialized youth, youth with disabilities and youth facing barriers to employment are seeking and finding opportunities for jobs and careers in conservation.

The integrated outcomes that can result from funding youth employment programs include local community and economic benefits, ecosystem wellbeing, the development of youth career paths, mental and physical health benefits, and growing a sense of inclusion and belonging.

The Green Budget Coalition appreciated the \$802 million announced in the 2022 Fall Economic Statement for the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS), Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ), and the Income Assistance-First Nations Youth Employment Strategy Pilot through 2024-25. However, these programs' effectiveness and benefits for employees and employers continues to be limited by the program requirements (number of youth hired per funding amount), which prevent full-time terms beyond 4 months.

The Green Budget Coalition recommends that the government continue and improve its support for conservation and other organizations in developing the workforce of the future.

## Recommended Investments and Improvements: [ESDC with PC and ECCC]

- For the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy, Canada Summer Jobs, Indigenous youth employment programs, and the Green Jobs initiative led by Parks Canada:
  - Amend the program funding rules to allow all work terms to be at least six months long, full-time, at geographically-appropriate wage levels;
  - **\$80 million in 2024-25** to provide the ability for 20% of such work terms to be double-length, roughly 6-8 months, while facilitating the same number of young people to be hired;
  - **\$500 million per year, ongoing, starting in 2025-2026**, to create permanent funding including the ability for 25% of young people hired to be employed for roughly 6-8 months;
- Work with the environmental NGO and funding communities to develop increased match funding to further expand these programs' reach and benefits for youth employment in the environmental sector.

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