

**Remarks by ELC Executive Director
Professor Chris Tollefson
At the public announcement of 2.75 million grant from
Tula Foundation to support ELC
February 17, 2011**

Today is a day to celebrate the exciting new capacity and prospects that this remarkable investment by the Tula Foundation will bring... for UVic Law, for the ELC, and for environmental sustainability and protection across this remarkable province.

When Eric Peterson and Christina Munck first approached us in 2006, the ELC was just embarking on its teenage years. During that first decade or so, we had done a few things right, but still had some growing up to do. On the positive side of the ledger, we managed to recruit to our clinic program some of Canada's best and brightest young law students; assemble a highly experienced and committed board of directors; secure a diverse and worthy client base; and, perhaps most importantly, hone a distinct organizational vision:

To inspire and train the next generation of Canada's public interest environmental lawyers by giving them the opportunity to advocate for the environment as a core part of their law school experience.

What the Tula Foundation did in 2006 was to make that vision a reality by putting our core operation on a sound financial footing for five full years, allowing us to focus on delivering our program.

Over those next five years, we had the honour of getting to know our Tula friends even better. Through that process we realized just how closely our values aligned: among them, the importance of teaching and mentoring, of public service, and of thorough, credible public interest advocacy on issues of environmental sustainability.

The last five years have also demonstrated the benefits of the ELC and Tula working together. Thanks to Tula's support, during this period over 150 UVic law students had the chance to be part of our innovative clinic program; many of whom, as lawyers and grads, continue to work to promote and advance our mission.

We have also—we like to think—made a big difference for our many clients. All across this province, from Bella Bella to Kitimat, from Fort Nelson to Penticton, from Sechelt to Jordan River, the ELC has provided its clients with students ready, willing and able to weigh in with legal resources on a range of issues:

- from climate change to species protection;

- from contaminated sites to sustainable regional planning;
- from access to justice to mining practices.

In many cases, our work has allowed citizen concerns to be heard and understood, often for the first time. And, on occasion, it has been a game-changer.

Currently, our legal team takes on about 60 new cases a year. It is fair to say that where there is a legally or ecologically significant environmental issue in British Columbia, chances are that we are working on it.

Last June, the ELC team was invited up to the Hakai Beach Institute. In our discussions, it became clear that Eric and Christina saw the potential of the ELC to deliver even more in terms of inspiration, education and on-the-ground results. In subsequent discussions that summer between Dean Greschner and Eric and Christina, the groundwork for today's announcement was laid.

While today's announcement may be seen by some as a vote of confidence in the course we have steered, more importantly, it challenges us individually and collectively to take our work to a new level.

That being case, what will the next five years look like?

Most of the key features of the ELC model and approach will remain the same. Thanks to this new funding, the ELC team that has achieved so much (Calvin Sandborn as Legal Director; Deborah Curran, Project Director; and Holly Pattison as Program Administrator) will stay together. As well, we will continue to have the benefit of a Tula-sponsored articling position and the ongoing support and advice of our dedicated ELC board and province-wide network of ELC Associates and Fellows.

We will also maintain our grassroots, student-focused approach to governance; and our commitment to mentoring, strategic lawyering and organizational agility.

However, the new funding arrangement will bring about some important new innovations.

For one, it will allow us to become more of a full-service law firm for the environment. This will provide us with the capacity, where necessary, to go court, easing the access to justice burdens faced by many of our clients when things turn litigious.

It will also allow us to bring more scientific expertise into ELC operations. This will occur in various ways, including the hiring of a new ELC staff lawyer/clinic instructor. This new hire will be responsible for developing an innovative new course on environmental law and science. We will be hiring for this position in the next several months. We will also be bringing scientific perspectives into the law school curriculum through a variety of new interdisciplinary environmental law courses that are still in the planning stages, including some that will be delivered on-site at the Hakai Beach Institute.

This new funding arrangement will also provide resources to support collaborations and with other Tula-funded colleagues and initiatives at other BC universities: once again making use of the Hakai Beach Institute as a venue for interdisciplinary research and teaching.

A key new priority of this funding will be to support closer ties and long-term collaborations with coastal First Nations on issues of sustainability. This new “coastal priority” recognizes that our coastal location and faculty expertise in both aboriginal and environmental law vests us a special responsibility and opportunity to augment our work in this area. To this end, we look forward to building on existing relationships with coastal First Nation clients and developing new ones.

Finally, this new funding will support delivery of Canada’s first-ever *environmental law and sustainability* concentration. This new concentration, approved by UVic Law Faculty Council last month, will feature some of the most innovative environmental law and policy-related courses ever offered at a Canadian law school. Its launch will ensure UVic law remains at the forefront of Canadian environmental legal education; and a destination of choice for law students from across the country.

The next five years are rich with promise and expectations. We thank the Tula Foundation for its belief in what we do, and its confidence in our ability to do even more in the years ahead.