

# A Shared Vision

Ross McMillan, President and CEO, Tides Canada



“I see a real sense of ownership and pride in the people responsible for the creation of Coast Opportunity Funds,” says Ross McMillan. “There were so many people coming at the task from a whole range of different perspectives—the First Nations communities and regional groups, environmental

groups, industry, governments. But everyone really did share the vision, and once that was understood it was remarkable how everyone got to work and how quickly a viable system to implement the vision was developed.”

McMillan represented various philanthropic organizations in the discussion on how to finance conservation and sustainable economic development as a viable package, and helped design the system that ultimately became Coast Funds in 2007.

The shared vision, says McMillan, was that conservation activities and economic activity were two essential parts of a whole. “Even though two separate funds were created, one

for conservation management funded by the philanthropic organizations and one for economic development funded by governments, that separation was just because of regulatory restrictions on philanthropic funding. All the investors were always committed to the notion that it is the combination of both funds that is fundamental for success. It was Coast Funds as a whole that we all focused on.”

Ensuring that they were not simply creating an inflexible bureaucracy was very important, says McMillan. “We really wanted to create a partner for the First Nations communities who would work with them to support their initiatives and be accountable to them as recipients of the funding, as well as to the investors in the funds.”

Those investors also saw the creation of an organization like Coast Funds as a real opportunity to showcase a working model of the successful marriage of conservation activity with economic wellbeing in other parts of the world where environmental values and community self-sufficiency are threatened by unsustainable resource extraction and development. “If these other communities can see successful outcomes in the Great Bear Rainforest,” says McMillan, “it will be very encouraging. That was always the vision. That’s happening. I think we can all be proud of that.”