

NECHAKO
WATERSHED
ROUNDTABLE

2024 ANNUAL MEETING SUMMARY

September 25, 2024





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The Nechako Watershed Roundtable (NWR) was established in 2015 to address the need for collaboration and to develop a strategy to further advance the vision of a healthy Nechako. Building on past collaboration in the region, the NWR is a group of representatives from a diversity of organizations, local governments, First Nations, private sector and federal and provincial agencies with a shared concern and commitment to protect and improve the health of the Nechako watershed.





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WELCOME & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 2024 Annual Meeting of the Nechako Watershed Roundtable, entitled "**British Columbia Watershed Governance: Celebrations, Considerations and the Path Forward**" took place on September 25th from 9:00am to 12:30pm. The meeting was held online.

The Nechako Watershed Roundtable (NWR) is grateful to the 15 First Nations for which the Nechako overlaps with their Traditional Territory: Binche First Nation, Cheslatta Carrier Nation, Lake Babine First Nation, Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, Nadleh Whut'en First Nation, Nak'azdli First Nation, Nee Tahi Buhn First Nation, Saik'uz First Nation, Skin Tyee Nation First Nation, Stellat'en First Nation, Takla First Nation, Tl'azt'en Nation, Ts'il Kaz Koh First Nation, Wet'suwet'en First Nation, Yekooche First Nation.

Gina Layte Liston and Kim Menounos, Nechako Watershed Roundtable Core Committee Co-chairs, chaired the meeting and provided opening remarks.

Thank you to the following individuals for their contributions to this years annual meeting: Wayne Salewski, Dr. Stephen Dery, Lucas Macedo Moura, Ian Rogalski, Zita Botelho, Coree Tull, Rhona Martin, Paula Siwik, Brian Frenkel, Tasha Peterson and Lindsay Sackett.

Funding to support the NWR in 2024 is provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada, Ministry of Forests, Lands & Natural Resource Operations, UNBC, Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, and the District of Vanderhoof.

The purpose of this document is to summarize the key learnings from the annual meeting. The meeting package including the agenda and a complete recording of the meeting are available to members at nechakowatershed.ca/news-events/previous-meetings-meeting-summaries.



Environment and
Climate Change Canada



Ministry of Forests,
Lands & Natural
Resource Operations



REGIONAL DISTRICT
of Fraser-Fort George



DISTRICT OF
Vanderhoof



UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN BRITISH CO.



Presented by: Gina Layte Liston, NWR Co-chairs

The NWR continues to make progress toward implementation of its strategic priorities as laid out in the 2022 -2026 Strategic Plan, to convene partners, support efforts to restore watershed health, advocate for the watershed, ensure a resilient organization and advance reconciliation.

NWR 2024 projects include:

- Lakes Monitoring Working Group: Working to implement the Large Lakes Monitoring Strategy
- Youth Engagement Working Group: Seeking funding and developing partnerships for youth engagement.
- Nechako Portal: Working with UNBC to upload and organize Nechako Watershed related resources.
- Watershed Security Strategy: Engaging in discussions and development.
- Resilience Framework: Workshop and framework discussion November 29th in Prince George.

The NWR welcomes new Core Committee member Stephen Dery, and would like to thank outgoing member Margot Parkes for her dedication to the Roundtable and participation on the Core Committee from 2015- 2024.

The NWR Core Committee members as of September 2024 are:

- Gina Layte Liston, Member-at-Large & NWR Co-chair
- Kim Menounos, Fraser Basin Council & NWR Co-chair
- Brian Frenkel, District of Vanderhoof
- Lara Beckett, Regional District of Fraser Fort-George
- Mike Robertson, Cheslatta Carrier Nation
- Ray Kingspohn, Nulki-Tachick Lakes Stewardship Society
- Shirley Moon, Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako
- Stephen Dery, University of Northern British Columbia
- Wayne Salewski, NEWSS

**The NWR is looking for First Nation members to join the Core Committee.
For more information, please contact nwrcoordinator@gmail.com.**



Lakes Monitoring Working Group

Presented by: Wayne Salewski, NWR Working Group Chair

- Large lakes provide critical habitat for the health and recovery of the salmon population
- Been working on the Large Lakes Monitoring Strategy (LLMS) implementation for three years
- Thanks to Fraser Basin Council and Takla Nation, some projects have been implemented in select lakes
- Several funding applications have been submitted for strategy implementation
- Lakes Monitoring Working Group meeting being held on October 21st at the Spruce City Wildlife Association in Prince George
- Huge thank you to Environment and Climate Change Canada/ Canada Water Agency who has provided funds for partial implementation of the LLMS in 2024 through the 'Fraser River Basin Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative'



For more information about the Lakes Monitoring Group or view the Large Lakes Monitoring Strategy, visit: <https://nechakowatershed.ca/projects/lakes-monitoring-working-group>

Nechako Portal

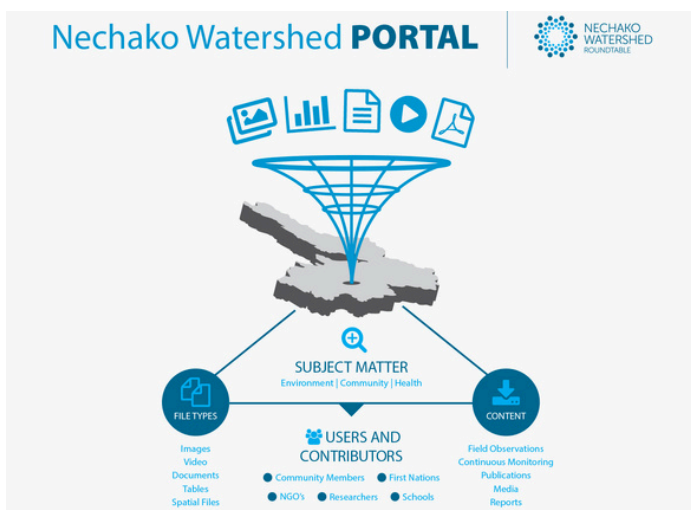
Presented by: Lucas Macedo Moura, UNBC

The Nechako Portal Working Group is an exciting partnership development between UNBC and the NWR with the purpose of creating a digital storage and sharing tool with everyone working in the Nechako.

Lucas gave an overview and demonstration of how the portal has been and continues to develop, and shared a video demonstrating the portal's new project function.



The portal team is open to discussing new portal projects with partners and encourages conversation on how individuals would like to engage with the tool.



For more information on accessing the portal, or if you are interested in uploading your own data, please visit <https://nechakowatershed.ca/projects/nechako-portal> or connect with Lucas at Lucas.MacedoMoura@unbc.ca.



Update from UNBC's Integrated Watershed Research Group (IWRG)

Presented by: Dr. Stephen D  ry, IWRG/ UNBC

UNBC houses the IWRG, a collaborative research group with the goal to strengthen community connections and preparedness for integrative responses to climate variability affecting the Nechako Watershed. The project is now in phase three, with a completion date of June 2025. Phase four focuses on four themes:

- The IWRG has received about 3 million in research funding since 2014
- Phase three funding from the Nechako Environment Enhancement Fund; recently received support from ECCC/Canada Water Agency
- Recently published a synthesis paper, "Towards an integrative understanding of British Columbia's Nechako Watershed: Connecting knowledge systems to strengthen understanding of climate change, watershed security, health and well-being", by Margot Parkes, Stephen D  ry, Phillip Owens, Ellen Petticrew and Barry Booth in PLOS Water
 - Covers the major findings and lessons learned from Phases one and two
 - Open access article, and be viewed here: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pwat.0000263>



More information about the IWRG can be found at: <https://www2.unbc.ca/integrated-watershed-research-group/research/nechako-river-basin>.





An Overview of the Canada Water Agency and the Fraser River Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative

Presenter: Ian Rogalski, Senior Analyst, Canada Water Agency

Ian Rogalski is a Senior Analyst with the new Canada Water Agency (CWA), currently a Branch within Environment and Climate Change Canada. He's leading the development and implementation of a new program - the Fraser River Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative - that aims to address water quality issues and promote the health of the Fraser River basin through improved partnership with Indigenous Peoples, provinces, territories, and stakeholders.

- 2023 CWA budget includes \$85.1M over 5 years and \$21M ongoing to support the creation of the Agency, \$650M over 10 years to support monitoring, assessment, and restoration work in select lakes and rivers, and \$22.6M over 3 years to support better coordination efforts.
- Currently CWA is a branch within ECCC - news coming soon on becoming stand alone agency
- Agency will be regionally-responsive with regional offices across Canada
- National initiatives include: establishing a Federal Freshwater Committee (permanent committee involving 24 depts./agencies with freshwater activities), Federal Freshwater Hub (a hub that co-locates employees from various depts./agencies with freshwater activities with 2-3 year assignments), Water One Window (centralized web presence), National Freshwater Data Strategy and Freshwater Science Agenda
- Looking to review the Canada Water Act (1970) to address shortcomings (e.g. ability to enter into agreement with First Nations). Engagement will begin in 2025.
- Regional initiatives: funding spread across 8 freshwater ecosystem initiatives, including Mackenzie River and Fraser River in BC; Priorities include action to restore and protect water quality, advance science monitoring and the use of Indigenous Knowledge, enhance governance to support improved collaboration, mobilize knowledge and reporting to measure progress and improve climate change resiliency
- ECCC will remain the national backbone, keeping water quantity/quality monitoring, science and research and forecasting/modelling
- Freshwater Ecosystem Initiatives - focused on priorities for restoration and protection, tailored to the needs of the waterbodies
- Fraser River Basin Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative:
 - Fraser has water quality (algal blooms, contaminants) and ecosystem health threats (mountain pine beetle, wildfires, dams, industry)
 - Key strategies: engagement, information sharing and coordination, and develop knowledge and restoration priorities
 - Nechako funded projects: NWR strategic plan implementation (\$282,700), UNBC IWRG and Nechako Portal (\$100,800), UFFCA water monitoring program led by Saik'uz and Nadleh Whuten First Nations (\$150,000)
 - Call for applications planned in late 2024 for projects April 2025 and beyond





Indigenous Watersheds Initiative - Learnings in advancing indigenous led watershed security

Presented by: Zita Botelho, Director, Watersheds BC

Zita Botelho is the Director of Watersheds BC and previously served as Co-Director of the Healthy Watersheds Initiative (2020-2022). In 2022, she led Watersheds BC's partnership with MakeWay to launch the Indigenous Watersheds Initiative. Under her leadership, Watersheds BC has supported the distribution of \$42 million in provincial funding to 110 watershed security projects.

- Indigenous Watersheds Initiative (IWI) is a 3-year initiative (2022-2025), which builds on the success of the Healthy Watersheds Initiative (HWI), with \$15m in provincial funding
- Purpose of work is watershed security rooted in resilience, local values, and indigenous stewardship
- IWI funded 49 projects across the province (round one 21 projects/ round two 28 projects)
- Project themes: Watershed restoration and protection, fisheries and food sovereignty, Indigenous knowledges and land-based-learning, watershed monitoring and assessment, watershed planning and governance. Indigenous sovereignty is at the centre of all the work
- 80% of projects include some restoration work (58 site). Types of restoration work: Aquatic and wetland restoration, invasives management, replanting traditional medicines/species, debris removal, fish passage, habitat reconstruction, and road deactivation
- Over half of projects include monitoring activities: Quality and quantity (water flows, temperature, pH, turbidity), fish and wildlife (migration, size, etc.), creating databases and training staff, and identifying culturally significant areas. Activities are informing planning and management
- Economic outcomes and benefits - community engagement and jobs held by community members
- Peer-to-peer learning opportunities via in-person gatherings and webinars
- Project challenges: rising costs, staffing and human resources, permits and regulatory environment, impacts of climate change, and access to remote watersheds
- "Healthy Watersheds Initiative Evaluation Framework & Report" by Tara Marsden, highlights how HWI is supporting UNDRIP
- Perspectives that inform IWI approach:
 - The "how" is as important as the "what"
 - Recognizing that communities see watersheds through an integral lens
 - Geography matters
 - Capacity is a serious challenge
 - Holistic - for ecological, cultural, human and economic health
 - Strengthening communities from within to heal the relationships with the land and water
- Funding reflections/needs: Multi-year funding, holistic funding streams, core supports for operations, capital and equipment, regional funding equity, accessible funding designs, Indigenous decision-making spaces for Indigenous-focused funds, and growing the Watershed Security Fund





British Columbia Watersheds

Moderator: Coree Tull, Chair, BC Watershed Security Coalition

Panel: Rhona Martin, Chair, Shuswap Watershed Council/ Paula Siwik, Executive Director, Mackenzie River Basin Board/ Kim Menounos, Co-Chair, Nechako Watershed Roundtable

Coree Tull, BC Watershed Security Coalition

- Inception in 2020 - constructive solutions and focused dialogue with all levels of government to drive solutions forward
- Key pathways in work: Strengthen watershed governance, rebuild natural defences, and bolster collaborative monitoring and long-term sustainable funding
- Challenges are growing and costs are rising (to do the work needed); BC is in constant state of responding - need to get ahead of crisis and move into proactive planning and action
- Watershed Security Priorities:
 - Investing in watershed security (\$1 billion Watershed Security Fund/ Increase water royalties)
 - Accelerate watershed governance, planning and tools (establish province-wide system of Watershed Boards/ Deploy WSA legislative tools in partnership with First Nations)
- Provincial Watershed Security Pledge launched by the Coalition - call for all BC election 2024 candidates to commit to healthy watersheds and watershed security (WatershedSecurity.ca/Pledge)



Learn more about the BC Watershed Security Coalition at watershedsecurity.ca





British Columbia Watersheds Cont.

Rona Martin, Chair, Shuswap Watershed Council

- Started with Shuswap Lake Integrative Planning Process - lesson in what not to do. Issues being identified were the responsibility of senior members of government. Group folded and Shuswap Watershed Council was formed
- From the beginning had great collaboration across districts and First Nations; Council is diverse with many representatives including elected officials, regional districts, provincial and community representatives who have all brought incredible knowledge to the council
- Council has done the work to identify key challenges in the watershed; Number of projects continues to increase
- Council had received \$10/year parcel tax which recently went to referendum and was not supported
 - Believe that misinformation played a role in loss of core funding
 - Some members will not be able to be part of council anymore
- Incredibly important to make sure you have good/clear communication going out to the public - it's the public that decides whether to support the work or not
- Need to get out of silos/have someone on the ground listening to what the community is saying/talking about so that you can identify and rectify misinformation
- Groups should be actively engaging with the community
- Getting community members involved in projects helps build support for the work



Learn more about the Shuswap Watershed Council at www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/Shuswap_Water.html





British Columbia Watersheds Cont.

Paula Siwik, Executive Director, Mackenzie River Basin Board

- Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement was signed by the Government of Canada, provincial governments of British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan, and territorial governments of the Yukon and Northwest in 1997; Agreement sits under the Water Act Agreement
- The purpose of the agreement is to establish common principals for the cooperative management of the aquatic ecosystem, establish a board and make provisions for Bilateral Water Management Agreements
- Board is currently focused on strategic planning which is focusing on: reconciliation, climate change, social health and wellbeing, communication, education, outreach, and strategic investments and partnerships
- Bilateral Water Management Agreements - mechanism for more local and place based conversations. Commonalities of agreements signed to date (4) include a risk informed approach to prioritizing work and Bilateral Management Committees that provide advice and guidance
- 2021 State of the Aquatic Ecosystem Report:
 - Focuses on four indicators: water quantity, water quality, health and wellbeing, and species and habitat
 - based on the idea of a three-strand braid that includes Indigenous Knowledge, scientific observations and the co-created story about the basin brought together without the comparison or integration of one knowledge system into the other
 - Most significant emerging trend is more widespread/stronger evidence of climate change impacts



For more information on the MRBB visit [MRBB.ca](https://mrbb.ca), or the 2021 State of the Ecosystems Report, visit [SOAER.ca](https://soaer.ca)





British Columbia Watersheds Cont.

Kim Menounos, Co-chair, Nechako Watershed Roundtable

- The Nechako Watershed is home to 15 First Nations, 5 municipalities and 2 regional districts
- Group is not an incorporated society but guided by a Core Committee
- NWR's role is to bring people together to work on common goals, identify priorities and actions to address them, advocate for the watershed and advance reconciliation with First Nations
- NWR concerns include impacts from inadequate and restricted timing of water flows, loss of forest cover, declining and endangered Nechako White Sturgeon and salmon stocks, climate change and lack of knowledge or monitoring in watershed lakes
- NWR challenges include the large geographic area with many interests, lack of delegated authority for stewardship, funding hurdles and climate change impacts outpacing action
- Success include popular youth paddling events, development of the Large Lakes Monitoring Strategy, successfully convening/setting the table for sharing knowledge and working together, and widespread collaboration/partnerships



Learn more about the Nechako Watershed Roundtable at nechakowatershed.ca



For more information on the individual presentations or to view the panel discussion, additional resources can be found at <https://nechakowatershed.ca/news-events/previous-meetings-meeting-summaries>





Regional Climate Resilience Strategy & Workshop

Presented by: Brian Frenkel, District of Vanderhoof/NWR Core Committee

Severe drought, catastrophic wildfires, mass flooding, and landslide events across British Columbia signify that climate change response requires focusing on water and strengthening the natural defences that can only be provided by healthy watersheds.

Because the adverse impacts of climate change are manifested largely at the local level, the NWR will be hosting a **“Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience in the Nechako Watershed” workshop** on November 29th in Prince George. to identify priorities for action in the Nechako Watershed. The workshop planning is being spearheaded by a steering committee made up of participants from Community Energy Association, Fraser Basin Council, NWR, Northern Health and the University of Northern BC.

Workshop Goals and Outcomes include:

- Understanding the current condition of the Nechako River
- Identifying priorities for climate change adaptation and resilience
- Create a strong and consistent message for advocacy of priorities



If you would like more information on the event, please contact nwrcoordinator@gmail.com.





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Contact

Nechako Watershed Roundtable

Suite 507, 1488 4th Avenue
Prince George, BC, V2L 4Y2
nwrcoordinator@gmail.com
www.nechakowatershed.ca

