

NECHAKO
WATERSHED
ROUNDTABLE

2025 ANNUAL MEETING SUMMARY

October 14, 2025





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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.



A collaborative initiative to protect and improve the health of the Nechako Watershed for future generations.



Gina Layte Liston, NWR Chair

The 2025 Annual Meeting of the Nechako Watershed Roundtable, entitled "Roots of Resilience: Forests and Water for a Sustainable Future" took place on October 14th from 9:00am to 12:30pm. The meeting was held online.

The Nechako Watershed Roundtable (NWR) recognizes the 15 First Nations for which the Nechako Watershed 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, Nechako Watershed Roundtable Core Committee Chair, chaired the meeting and provided opening remarks and reflected on the 10-year anniversary of the Nechako Watershed Roundtable.

Thank you to the following individuals for their contributions to this year's annual meeting: Wayne Salewski, Dan Selbie, Siobhan Klassen, Dr. Stephen Déry, Kim Menounos, Dan George, Kevin Moutray, Chris David, Julie Castonguay, Megan D'Arcy, Jason Fisher and Tannis Reynolds.

Funding to support the NWR in 2025 is provided by Canada Water Agency, Ministry of Forests, University of Northern BC, Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, Regional District of Bulkley Nechako, the District of Vanderhoof, the District of Fort St. James, and the Real Estate Foundation of BC.

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 at nechakowatershed.ca/news-events/previous-meetings-meeting-summaries.

Welcome to new Core Committee Members: Dominic Frederick, Eduardo Martins, Tannis Reynolds, and Jonothan Doyon.



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ROOTS OF RESILIENCE: FORESTS & WATER FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

- Forests sit at the heart of the Nechako watershed's environmental health, shaping the resilience of its land, water, and communities. A healthy environment supports both a strong economy and vibrant communities, and the forests of the region play an essential role in sustaining that balance.
- As we transition resource governance to a shared model, we aim to support mutual understanding of needs and interests. We support collaborative governance across the watershed to advance stewardship for a healthy watershed. Recent resolutions at UBCM support these efforts.
- NWR has made significant advancements this year in understanding the nutrient history and current dynamics of several lakes in the watershed. NWR primarily gathers partners while First Nations, aquatic scientists, and field teams carry out the research. Results are communal to maximize the benefits of shared knowledge.
- We are in a time of climate crisis. Most impacts were predicted, but we are also seeing increases in wildfires, landslides, and floods. Our response now will determine future preparedness, resilience, and collective action.





ACTION IN THE NECHAKO:

PROGRESS AND POTENTIAL ACROSS THE WATERSHED' IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NAK'AZDLI WHUT'EN IN FORT ST. JAMES

The Spring Technical meeting was held in Nak'azdli Whut'en/Fort St. James with over 50 participants attending. These included NGOs, government, academics, and community members from not only across the province. Day 1 included a tour on Stuart Lake where participants were shown and discussed cultural pictographs. Participants also had an opportunity to witness the incredible work being done at the Nak'azdli Hatchery. That evening, a networking dinner was held at Stuart Lake Golf Course where Dr. Stephen Déry presented "Climate Change Trends Within the Watershed". The Day 2 presentations included François Lake Foreshore Assessment, Beaver Dam Analogs, Nchako River Geomorphology, Nchako Water Engagement Initiative, Dakelh Legal Orders, and more.



Full details of NWRS 2025 Spring Technical can be found in the report: [2025-Spring-Technical-Meeting](#)





Wayne Salewski, Lake Monitoring Working Group Lead

Wayne provided an overview of work that is being done through the Lakes Monitoring Working Group which included:

- Monthly meetings to connect and collaborate with local, provincial and federal fisheries and natural resources staff, NGO's, First Nations, academia and others
- Large Lakes Monitoring Strategy (LLMS) 2023 phased implementation as funding realized
- Monitoring strategy & equipment partnership with Takla Nation & Nakaz'dli Whut'en
- NSERC Alliance Grant submitted July 2025 for paleoenvironmental research on lakes; Stuart, Takla, Trembleur
- Field season completed: sediment cores from seven lakes collected
- Training opportunities in 2026/27 with Living Lakes Canada

Dan Selbie, Department of Fisheries

Dan provided an overview of a collaborative research initiative focused on understanding environmental change in the Upper Fraser River watershed and its impacts on salmon health, particularly the declining Fraser Sockeye population. Research by Dr. Jules M. Blais and Dr. John P. Smol, provides key data to the project using paleolimnology, analyzing sediment cores up to 3,500 years old, to reconstruct the physical, chemical, and biological history of key lakes such as Stuart, Takla, Trembleur, and Bowron. This work aims to develop tools like a "paleo thermometer" to assess historical temperature ranges and salmon calorie intake, offering insight into past and future ecosystem conditions. The effort is supported through partnerships among DFO, Queen's University, the University of Ottawa, the Nechako Watershed Roundtable, and several First Nations, including Cheslatta, Nadleh, Saik'uz, and Stellat'en. With core funding from partners and an NSERC Alliance Grant decision expected by July 2025, the project is currently in its pre-fieldwork phase which includes building partnerships, mapping priorities, and planning for the creation of an inclusive stewardship committee to guide future fieldwork and research.



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



Dr. Stephen Déry, IWRG/ UNBC

Dr. Déry provided an overview of the research being led in understanding climate crisis impacts and strengthening preparedness for integrative responses within the region. His presentation discussed four key themes of current research:

Theme 1: Network of experimental watersheds for integrated research (NEWIR) with research-grade weather stations

- Monitoring water temperature across the watershed and put this information in the Nechako Watershed portal
- Simulations of the Nautley river basin impacts of forest cover change
- Tracking atmospheric river activity

Theme 2: Effects of landscape disturbances on sediment and contaminant fluxes

- Looking at run-off and erosion in areas impacted by wildfires and atmospheric rivers

Theme 3: Fish responses to environmental changes

- Short- and long-term responses of fish to environmental changes

Theme 4: Amplifying co-benefits for climate, catchments, and communities

- Identify and amplifying opportunities for co-benefits to contribute to a healthy, just and sustainable future in the Nechako

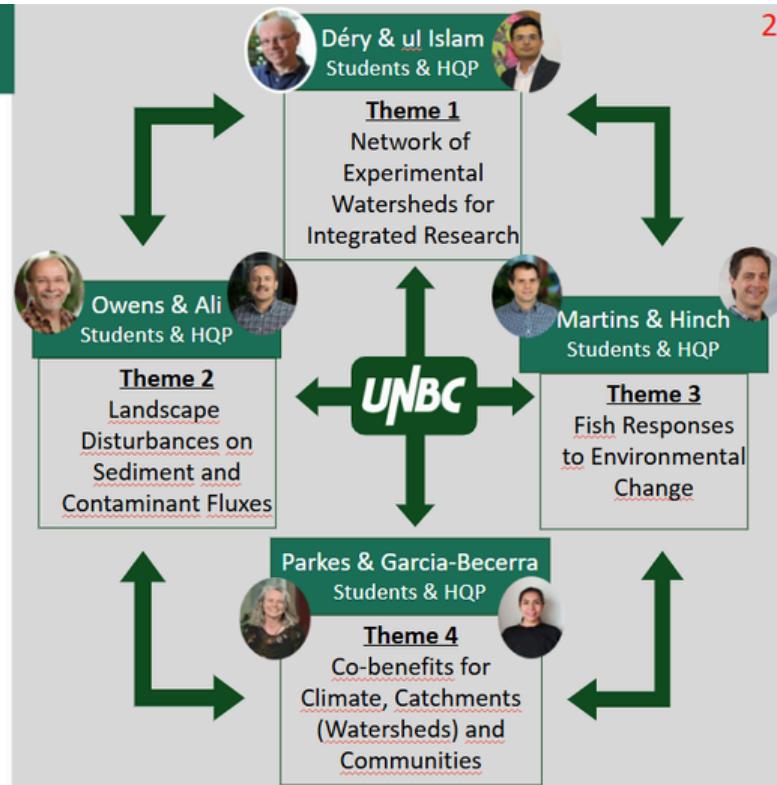
 More information about the IWRG can be found at: <https://www2.unbc.ca/integrated-watershed-research-group/research/nechako-river-basin>.

Phase 3 team & themes

Overarching Goal and Theme: The climate crisis as a cross-cutting driver of watershed change in the Nechako: Strengthening preparedness for integrative responses to climate, water and community connections in the Nechako Watershed.

Timeline: 1 July 2023 to 31 August 2025 with final report submitted to NEEFS at end of September 2025.

Budget: Total value of the project was \$0.8M, with the total award from NEEFS being \$0.4M and ECCC / CWA providing half of the required matching funds.





Siobhan Klassen, YEC Member

The Youth Engagement Committee formed in the Summer of 2025 under the leadership of NWR Youth Representative Jonothan Doyon. The YEC looks forward to engaging directly with high school students across the watershed. Siobhan provided a brief overview of past engagement work and events and what the committee hopes to accomplish in the new year.

- Spring 2025: High school visits and 'Watershed Connections' youth event at UNBC
 - Jonothan Doyon visited schools in SD 91 and shared information about NWR, on April 26th a "Watershed Connections" event was held with 14 participants
- Summer 2025: Formation of Youth Engagement Committee
 - Siobhan Lassen and Kiara Mills joined the Youth Engagement committee and started planning for Rivers Day 2025
- Fall 2025: Co-hosted BC Rivers Day event at Riverside Park in Vanderhoof, BC
 - Community engagement event with youth focused activities, a BBQ lunch and water safety demonstrations. An MOU between Saik'uz First Nation & Nechako Valley Cattleman's Association was signed.
- Winter 2025/26: Plans for school visits in SD 91 and SD 57 to educate students on watershed research
 - Schedule of visits to be released early January 2026



For more information about the Youth Engagement Committee visit:

<https://www.nechakowatershed.ca/whats-happening/youth-engagement-committee>





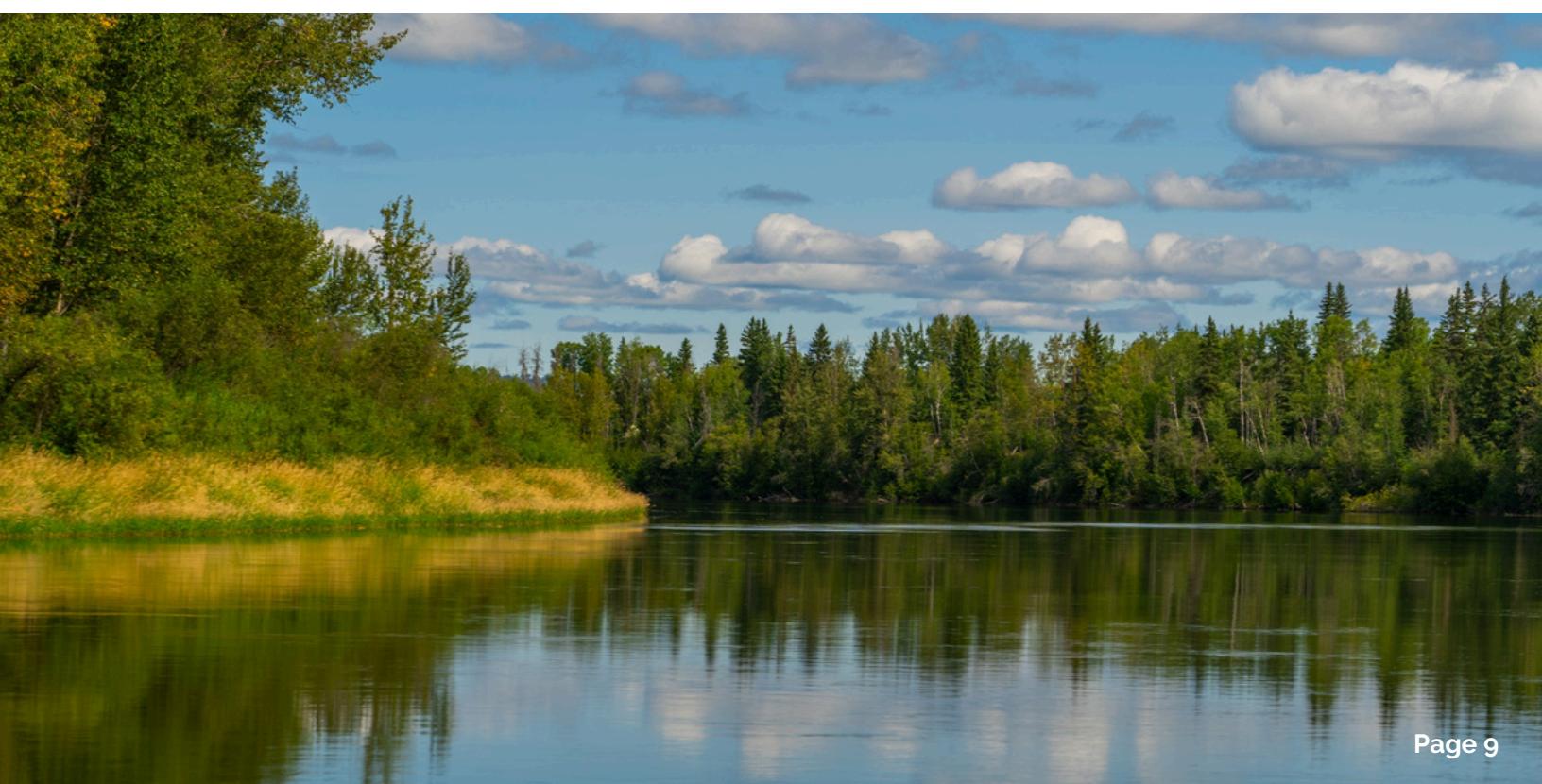
Kim Menounos, Climate Change Adaptation & Resilience Lead

Kim shared the work that NWR does to continue to advance coordinated climate change adaptation and resilience planning across the region. Over the past year, this initiative has brought together regional leaders to identify shared priorities and collective actions that strengthen community and ecosystem resilience. Last November, members from across the watershed, including First Nations, municipalities, regional districts, UNBC, and local organizations came together for a workshop focused on regional climate impacts and collective action. Despite snowy weather, participation was outstanding, showing the strong commitment of our communities to our watershed. Key discussions addressed climate trends, forest sector transitions, health service delivery, and the economic sustainability of northern communities.

The recommendations from that session that were captured in the *post-event report* will help guide the next steps and connect science, policy, and community action more effectively across the watershed.



For more information about the Climate Change, Adaptation and Resilience Working Group, visit:
<https://www.nechakowatershed.ca/news/27/151/Climate-Change-Adaptation-and-Resilience-in-the-Nechako-Watershed-Workshop>





Dan George, Four Directions Management Inc.

The Climate Change Adaptation & Resilience (CCAAR) workshop in November 2025 brought together watershed leaders to identify regional climate impacts and develop collective strategies for action. A central theme of the discussion was the importance of relationships—between people, communities, and the land—as foundational to effective climate adaptation and sustainable resource management.

Key recommendations include:

Strengthen Governance Collaboration and Stewardship

- Recognize that effective watershed management depends not only on policy but also on the quality of relationships among stakeholders.
- Foster shared governance approaches that integrate Indigenous knowledge and Western science to ensure decisions are inclusive, culturally grounded, and future-focused.
- Approach reconciliation as an ongoing practice of trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility, rather than a one-time goal.

Integrate Indigenous and Western Knowledge (Two-Eyed Seeing)

- "Two-Eyed Seeing" combines the strengths of Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) with Western scientific approaches, ensuring balanced and informed decision-making.
- Support continued dialogue, knowledge sharing, and co-development of strategies that respect both knowledge systems.

Promote Climate Preparedness and Resilience

- Prioritize immediate and long-term actions to mitigate the increasing frequency and severity of climate-related impacts, including wildfires, floods, and landslides.
- Empower local communities to participate in climate adaptation initiatives, recognizing that resilience grows from within and is strengthened by local leadership and stewardship.





Dan George, Four Directions Management Inc.

Key recommendations continued:

Foster Community Engagement and Shared Success

- Ensure all stakeholders, including First Nations, local governments, licensees, and community members, are actively engaged in planning and decision-making processes.
- Recognize that collective action is essential: "No one can do this work alone. None of us is as smart as all of us, and there's not enough of us to throw anyone away. We are all needed in this effort to ensure the Nechako watershed thrives."

Embed Reconciliation and Trust in Practice

- Approach reconciliation as a shared journey: "Reconciliation is not about perfection, it's about showing up, even when it's uncomfortable."
- Build relationships based on trust and respect, understanding that the health of the watershed reflects the strength of the connections among its stewards.
- Commit to humility, continuous learning, and collaboration across diverse perspectives:

"Decolonization begins with trust, reconciliation deepens through relationship, and together, they open the path to healing and shared leadership."

Summary:

The CCAAR recommendations emphasize that the path toward climate adaptation, watershed health, and resilient communities is inherently collaborative. By centering trust, relationships, and the integration of Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, stakeholders can work together to build a sustainable future for the Nechako watershed. The collective commitment to shared responsibility, respect, and active engagement provides the foundation for long-term success.



FOUR DIRECTIONS
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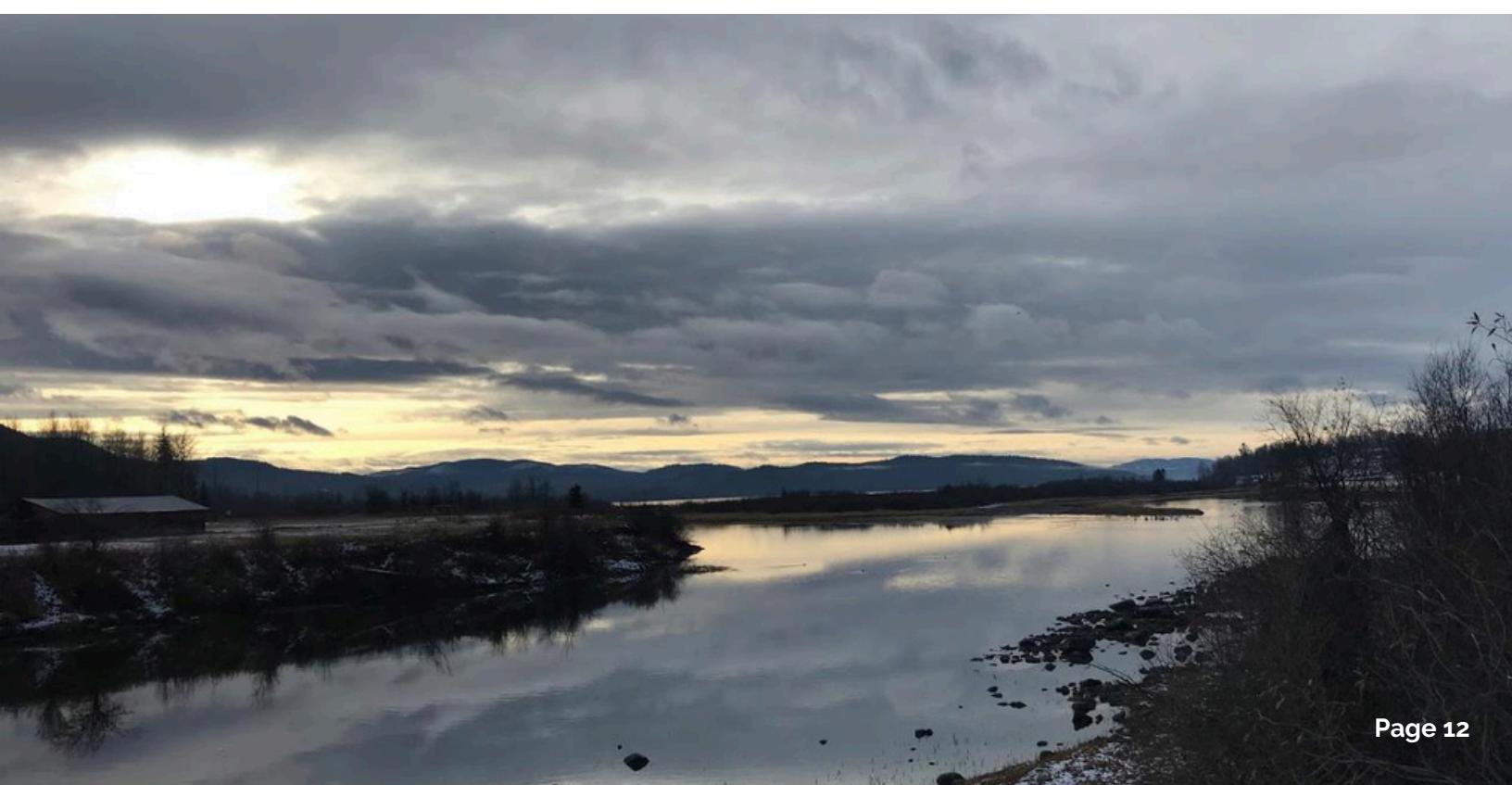
Kevin Moutray, Mayor, District of Vanderhoof

Mayor Moutray spoke about the value and purpose of community forests, which provide local communities with tenure over forested lands to reflect community priorities and values in management. Community forests are Crown land managed by a municipal government or First Nation which puts community resources in community control. The District of Vanderhoof's 23,000-hectare community forest was first established in March 2016 and they are currently seeking to expand it. Kevin explained that the expansion proposal, shared with Fraser Lake and Fort St. James, will also focus on commercial thinning of 30–40-year-old stands to promote forest health and economic sustainability. The fiber harvested from thinning could be processed locally. This approach supports local industry, responsible resource use, and community-based stewardship of the land.

- Commercial thinning operations on the existing 30-40 year stands
 - Will create fire mitigation and herbaceous layer growth post-thinning
 - Support for local jobs and economic value for community



Learn more about the [District of Vanderhoof Community Forest Expansion](#).





**Julie Castonguay, Forest Landscape Planning, Ministry of Forests
Chris David, Director, Strategic Initiatives, Omineca Region**

Forest landscape planning was introduced in 2021, and is being developed in collaboration with First Nations. Goals include reconciliation, transparency, and engagement. Opportunities for discussion and planning include:

- Increased riparian retention to improve water quality
- Review of silviculture practices to address drought
- Review of road management practices focusing on stream crossings
- Engagement with licensees and First Nations through government-to-government tables
- Comprehensive engagement plan includes open houses, surveys, websites, technical working groups, and guest speakers

Integrated Planning Across Jurisdictions

- Forest landscape plans are developed collaboratively between the Province, First Nations, and licensees, shifting from prior models where Indigenous participation was minimal.
- Government-to-government tables support negotiations and shared decision-making, ensuring local values, traditional knowledge, and cultural priorities are incorporated.
- Focus Areas in Mackenzie and Lakes Projects
- Increased riparian retention to protect water quality and aquatic habitat.
- Review of silviculture practices to address drought resilience and climate change impacts.
- Consideration of assisted migration and approved species selection to strengthen forest sustainability.
- Road and stream crossing management to minimize sedimentation impacts on fish habitat and water quality.

Participation and Engagement

- Stakeholder engagement includes open houses, surveys, websites, technical working groups, and invitations to comment on draft plans.
- Engagement emphasizes local empowerment, with opportunities for First Nations and communities to actively shape forest management practices in their territories.

Long-Term Vision

- Forest landscape planning provides a framework for sustainable forest management, community participation, and reconciliation through shared governance.
- The approach aims to balance ecological, social, and economic objectives while preparing forests and communities for climate change impacts.



For more information: [British Columbia Forest Landscape Planning](#)



Participants were distributed amongst several online breakout rooms to network and discuss the following two questions:

What are your (or your community/organization) forest management priorities?

What role should the NWR play in supporting forest management planning?

Through discussion and topics raised during breakouts, there was a clear focus on climate change's impacts on forests and healthy watersheds. Participants provided thoughts on conservation tools and discussed the merits and faults of Forest Landscape Plans. Discussions touched upon what to plant and where, with emphasis on native species and ecological sustainability. It became clear that participants felt that the Nechako Watershed Roundtable plays a central role as convener, bringing diverse voices together in spaces meant to elicit conversation, planning, and building solutions together.

Key take aways from group work discussions:

- Climate change and impacts on future forests. Healthy forests and importance of the watershed, flooding concerns, intact forests and salmon, conservation tools and landscape plans.
 - NWR as a central role into bringing people together.
- What to plant and where to plant? Native species and not just forest harvest replant, ecological sustainability, native plant nurseries, how to propagate and continue in a respectful way.
 - NWR role is to be a common place for different voices.
- Forestry landscapes and difficulties that arise when bringing people together and seeing the value of NWR in these processes. Restoration of habitat areas that improve watershed health.
 - Partnerships with the health sector.
 - Wildfire and the impacts on forestry, communities, health and watershed impacts.
 - Mountain pine beetle and ways to grow forests where we can keep those impacts limited.
 - NWR as the Networker.
- Community empowerment, importance of the smaller rural communities and FN communities in being in decision process in the planning, recognizing agriculture and forestry and health of water
 - NWR brings forward discussions and informing, educating the public and government, lobbying power? youth engagement.
 - Certainty for licensees, FNs, communities and ministry.
 - Water quantity and challenges in the upstream work and impact downstream: What does water use and storage look like over the landscape, and into the future?
- NWR has representation at the planning table when Forest Landscape Planning is initiated.
 - Partnerships with health sector, wildfire mitigation, mountain pine beetle impacts, and community engagement
 - Youth engagement and public education to inform government and stakeholders



Jason Fisher, Executive Director, Forest Enhancement Society of BC

Jason provided an introduction to the changing landscape in forestry practices and how the Forest Enhancement Society of BC (FESBC) has been supporting this movement. Forest Enhancement Society of BC, a non-profit organization founded in 2016, invests public funds into forest management initiatives across the province. Supported by government funding of \$20 million annually, FESBC focuses on wildfire risk reduction and fiber utilization, helping ensure that residual forest materials are used productively rather than burned. Jason highlighted the Society's reach—426 funded projects, including 144 led by Indigenous organizations—and its role as a funder rather than direct implementer. He emphasized partnerships such as those with the 'Namgis First Nation and N PAC Forestry Group, which recover and utilize fiber that would otherwise go to waste, thereby supporting local economies, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and promoting sustainable forest management.

- Purpose of the FESBC is to invest public dollars in public forest for all BC residents
- The organization receives \$20 million annually from the provincial government to fund projects.
- Primary focus areas are wildfire risk reduction and fiber utilization from managed forests.
- Of 426 funded projects, 144 have been led by Indigenous organizations.
- Supporting First Nation forestry councils and local employment through projects. Some examples include:
 - Westbank First Nations: Wildfire risk reduction work being done in the West Kelowna area.
 - Lower Nicola Indian Band: Wildfire risk reduction treatments near Merritt to enhance community safety and forest resilience.
 - Atlee First Nation: A tipping yard on Vancouver Island utilizes fiber that would otherwise be burned, creating economic opportunities and reducing emissions.

The goal is to achieve multiple benefits from each project, connecting the economy, ecological resilience, and community safety.

"Better management practices come from the people on the land, rather than management of land from afar."



If you would like more information: [FESBC Special Report](#)



Tannis Reynolds, Stellat'en First Nation

Tannis shared the BC First Nations Climate Action Strategy and Action Plan, focusing on its guiding principles of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), self-determination, and meaningful collaboration between First Nations, government, and industry. She emphasized that the vision centers on system health, sustainability for future generations, and respect for inherent Indigenous rights and title. The strategy integrates cultural relevance, stewardship, and guardianship to strengthen climate preparedness and leadership. Tannis also highlighted the interconnectedness of forest health, species protection, and cultural practices and stressed that sustainable management is essential for both ecological and cultural survival. Her reflections underscored a call for relationship-building, shared decision-making, and respect for Indigenous knowledge as essential components of a sustainable future.

Guiding principles for climate action strategies:

Four Pathways for Climate Action

- Inherent Title and Rights
- Capacity and Leadership
- Land and Water Protection
- Climate Response and Preparedness.



Additionally, each pathway has a set of objectives, themes, actions, strategies, and recommendations.

- Focus on health and sustainability for future generations, self-determination and governance, sustainable natural resource use
- Supports building understanding and relationships with First Nation communities

Principles for Engaging with First Nations

- Engagement should be guided by Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).
- This means meaningful, no-cost consultation with First Nations before a project begins, allowing them to be part of the planning.
- Respect for First Nations' sovereignty and self-determination is essential, in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.
- Cultural relevance is key, including the integration of traditional knowledge about medicines, plants, and harvesting.
- Access to old-growth trees is crucial for cultural practices like making baskets and medicines.



If you would like more information: [BC First Nations Climate Strategy](#)

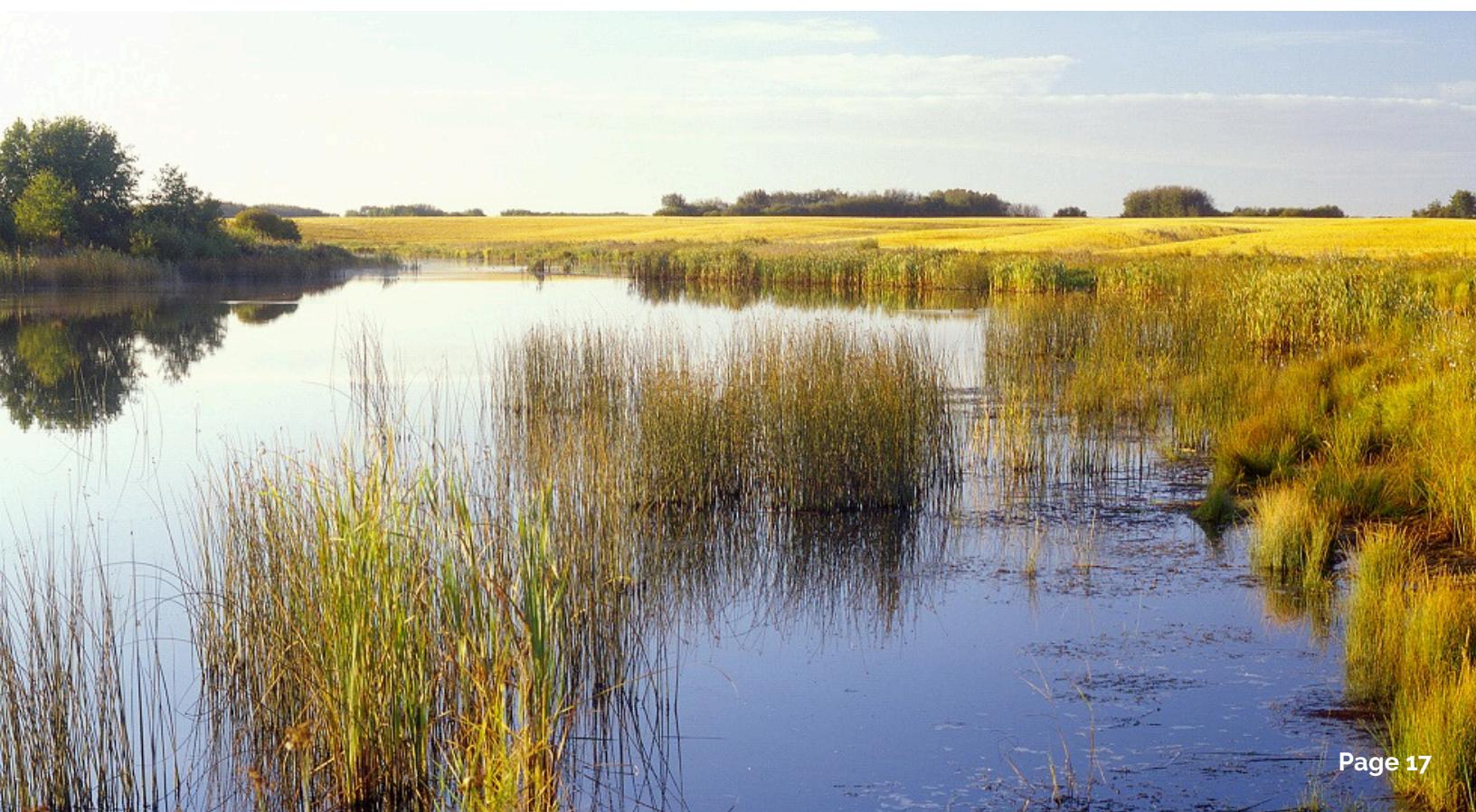


Megan D'Arcy, Regional Agriculture Coordinator, RDBN

Megan outlined projects under the RDBN's Food and Agriculture Plan, focusing on climate resilience and sustainable agricultural practices. She described two key initiatives: a community irrigation feasibility project in Vanderhoof and a livestock services project covering the wider district, including much of the Nechako Watershed. The irrigation project investigates the potential for shared water systems to enhance forage and horticultural productivity, involving local producers, First Nations, and industry partners. There is a draft report under review and completion expected by December. This project aims to create a transferable model for other regions. Megan emphasized that irrigation and other sustainable practices, such as soil health and riparian management, are vital for adapting to climate variability and supporting long-term agricultural stability.

- Draft report completion set for December 2025, with toolkit for regional use
- Management of forest-agriculture interfaces, shelter belts, hedgerows, and connected habitats for pollinators

 If you would like more information: [Pollinator Assessment and Agricultural Crop/ Climate Analysis](#)





Dan George, Four Directions Management Services

The NWR Annual Meeting highlighted the central importance of relationships, both with the land and water and among the people who care for the watershed. Discussions emphasized that the health of the Nechako Watershed reflects the health of our relationships and the strength of trust and collaboration within the community.

Key themes from the meeting included:

Trust and Relationships:

- Trust is foundational for progress. As Dan George noted, "If one part of the circle is hurting, everything is affected." Strong relationships enable collaboration; without trust, even the best strategies stall.
- Reconciliation is a process of showing up consistently and engaging in meaningful action, not achieving perfection.

Local Empowerment and Shared Leadership:

- Resilience begins in the community. Local knowledge, particularly from First Nations whose territories span the watershed, is critical for place-based, culturally grounded decision-making.
- Community stewardship grows within; it cannot be imposed externally.

Collaboration Across Knowledge Systems:

- We need to reinforce the value of Two-Eyed Seeing: integrating Indigenous knowledge with Western science to create a holistic understanding of environmental and social systems.
- "Two-Eyed Seeing... allows us to see with one eye the strengths of Indigenous knowledge, and with the other eye, the strengths of Western science."

Climate Adaptation and Long-Term Planning:

- Immediate action is necessary to respond to climate-related challenges such as wildfires, floods, and landslides, while also considering generational impacts.
- Decisions should answer the question: Will this help future generations thrive?

Shared Success Through Collective Action:

- Protecting and restoring the watershed requires collaboration across First Nations, governments, researchers, and communities.
- Participation and engagement are essential. Mistakes are part of the process: "When we are afraid to make mistakes, we risk doing nothing and doing nothing serves no one."

Reconciliation in Practice:

- "Decolonization begins with trust, reconciliation deepens through relationship, and together, they open the path to healing and shared leadership."
- The process emphasizes humility, open-hearted learning, and shared responsibility for the land, water, and all living things.



Dan George, Four Directions Management Services

Overarching Themes and Future Direction of Nechako Watershed Roundtable:

Progress in watershed management depends on trust, collaboration, and respect for all ways of knowing. Collective action, guided by shared responsibility and long-term vision, ensures the Nechako Watershed and its communities can thrive together.

- The core theme is relationships: with land, water, and each other. The health of the watershed reflects the health of these relationships.
- A key opportunity lies in weaving together Indigenous knowledge and Western science, described as "seeing with both eyes open." This approach is presented as decolonization in practice.
- Understanding that capacity strengthening is a critical need for First Nations communities, which often have few people managing numerous complex issues.
- Sustained, long-term funding and a series of connected projects are needed to build lasting capacity to work towards common goals.

Nechako Watershed Roundtables' progress and future direction lie in identifying its central role in bringing diverse stakeholders to the table.

Suggestions for advancing the NWR's goals included:

- Fostering networking and sharing expertise among members.
- Empowering local and rural communities.
- Strengthening partnerships with sectors like public health to connect environmental and human well-being.
- Continuing and expanding youth engagement programs.
- Lobbying government and the public for initiatives that have seen success in the Nechako Watershed.





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