



BC
WATERSHED
SECURITY
COALITION

PATHWAY TO WATERSHED SECURITY: STATEMENT OF EXPECTATIONS

June 24, 2021

The BC Watershed Security Coalition is encouraged by the provincial government's commitments to create a BC Watershed Security Strategy and Fund, and the opportunity this provides for a defining public legacy that can be celebrated by all British Columbians.

The BC Watershed Security Coalition is a diverse, non-partisan and multi-sectoral coalition of organizations representing people from every region of B.C. The Coalition represents over 250,000 British Columbians.

OPPORTUNITY FOR A DEFINING PUBLIC LEGACY

A Spring 2021 public opinion poll found that a wide majority of British Columbians (69%) believe that BC needs to make major investments in watershed security and take strong action to protect fresh water in all of BC. By investing in watershed security today, the BC government can create a popular legacy that will support human health, security, prosperity and reconciliation far into the future.

CENTRAL TO BC'S RECOVERY

Watershed security should be recognized as integral to successful recovery as BC emerges from the COVID-19 crisis and builds back better. Healthy watersheds underpin healthy communities and the natural systems that support our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. A recent economic study indicates that the watershed sector currently supports 48,000 jobs across the province and a further 30,000 jobs could be added in the next decade.

THE URGENCY FOR ACTION

Communities and ecosystems across the province are experiencing serious negative impacts - economic uncertainty, social tensions, and habitat destruction - as a result of poor watershed management. Local watershed crises will continue to mount without bold provincial action. While we recognize the impacts of COVID-19 and commend provincial response efforts - including stimulus investments for watershed projects - our members are concerned by the limited evidence of action on the watershed security mandate commitments issued on November 26, 2020.

The undersigned organizations urge the BC provincial government to honour its commitments to watershed security by taking the following actions in the next 8 months.

ACTIONS TO ADVANCE WATERSHED SECURITY

(NEXT 8 MONTHS)

The Watershed Security Coalition has identified three key outcomes of watershed security (see Box II). To demonstrate positive movement towards these outcomes, the actions outlined below should be undertaken immediately and achieved over the next 8 months. In February 2022, the Coalition will assess progress on the watershed security commitments based on the implementation of these highly achievable actions.

1 Create the Watershed Security Fund

In the next provincial budget (Budget 2022), commit to a dedicated and ongoing **\$75 Million Annual Investment** in BC's watershed security. 5 Key principles should guide the development of the Fund (see Box I).

Box I: 5 KEY PRINCIPLES FOR THE BC WATERSHED SECURITY FUND

1. **Permanent & Sustainable** - dedicated, long-term funding that is sustainable over time.
2. **The Right Scale** - funds of sufficient scale to have ecosystem/watershed level effects.
3. **Advance Reconciliation** - should be co-governed and funds used to advance Indigenous rights
4. **Independent** - a true co-governance structure will need an independent home outside of government.
5. **Partnership-Driven** - the Fund should foster and support partnerships with and between Indigenous Nations, the Federal government, local governments and civil society at large.

2 Implement Existing Laws & Tools

Since the provincial government has a number of existing tools and prior commitments on the books, there is no need to wait for the completion of the Watershed Security Strategy to take action. Working with Indigenous Nations and BC communities, the BC government should take immediate action in the following areas:

- Implement Water Sustainability Act tools, starting with completion of groundwater licensing
- Fulfil source protection recommendations from the Auditor General and Hullcar Review
- Provide full support to watershed and land use planning pilots to demonstrate co-governance models
- Complete state of watershed reporting that draws on collaborative monitoring with Indigenous nations
- New Ministry of Land and Natural Resource Operations created with a focus on watershed security

3 Co-develop the Watershed Security Strategy with Indigenous Nations

To demonstrate the Province's commitment to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, **IMMEDIATELY** begin the process of co-developing the Watershed Security Strategy with Indigenous Nations, and ensure all British Columbians are effectively engaged in its creation.

Box II: KEY OUTCOMES OF WATERSHED SECURITY

1. Strong & Sustainable Communities

Workers of all skills and demographics are employed in the watershed sector; traditional and new businesses have been spurred; regional colleges are preparing BC's youth for the watershed economy. All communities have become stronger, more livable, healthy and are climate ready. In spite of growing threats from a changing climate, the costs to these resilient communities have gone down and risks to drinking water have decreased.

2. Reconciliation in Action

The Province of BC and Indigenous governments are jointly implementing watershed plans that drive economic development, ecological resilience, and advance reconciliation. Collaborative watershed stewardship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities has become a model for the rest of Canada, demonstrating real progress on implementing the rights of Indigenous peoples.

3. Thriving Wild Salmon, Fish & Wildlife Populations

Fish, wetland and riparian habitats have been restored and are flourishing. Environmental flows for fish and nature are implemented and groundwater continues to recharge streams, rivers and lakes during dry summers. Wild salmon have been given a fighting chance with barriers to their ability to swim upstream removed and critical spawning habitats restored.