



BC
WATERSHED
SECURITY
COALITION

March 15, 2022

Att: Water Protection and Sustainability Branch, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy

Submission from the BC Watershed Security Coalition on the BC Government's Watershed Security Strategy and Fund Discussion Paper

The BC Watershed Security Coalition is a non-partisan, diverse coalition of 44 organizations representing 255,000 British Columbians from all walks of life. This Coalition has come together out of the recognition that, in every region of British Columbia, healthy watersheds are fundamental to human health, security, prosperity and reconciliation.

The BC Watershed Security Coalition is focusing this submission specifically on the Watershed Security Fund (the "Fund"). If the Strategy is how the provincial government organizes its own house to establish priorities and ensure effective coordination across government, the Watershed Security Fund is the key to unleashing the incredible knowledge, skills and capacity of local leaders in our watersheds - in Indigenous Nations, local governments, the private sector and community organizations.

As Minister Heyman writes in his introduction to the government's Discussion Paper:

To strengthen the security of our watersheds, we all need to work together. Increasing the role of Indigenous peoples, local governments and communities in watershed governance can help us mitigate the risks to our watersheds.

It is important to recognize that collaboration and partnerships are only possible if the resourcing and human capacity exists to engage in partnership. Without funding, increasing the role of these partners will be an exercise in provincial downloading and weaken rather than strengthen community resilience. This is why Indigenous Nations, local governments, and community organizations have been calling for dedicated provincial funding for watershed security for a number of years.

Our comments pertain to three aspects connected to the Fund: 1) the priority and timing of the Fund; 2) the focus and design of the Fund; and 3) the need to invest in skills development and training.

1) PRIORITY & TIMING OF THE FUND

The Coalition was disappointed to see the Fund listed last on the list of outcomes in the Discussion Paper with only a few lines of description. Funding should not be an afterthought or a nice-to-have. Many of our members have been impacted by last year's droughts, fires and floods and many are also involved in

recovery efforts. There is an urgent need for investments in communities to strengthen watershed resilience in the face of a rapidly changing climate.

Recommendation 1: The Fund should be a stand-alone priority that is developed in parallel with the Strategy on an accelerated timeline to ensure it meets the timing constraints of the Budget 2023 process.

2) THE FOCUS & DESIGN OF THE FUND

The Coalition's recommendations for Fund design have been informed by the Sustainable Funding Working Group's proposed directions that were outlined in their December report, [BC Watershed Security Fund: A Collaborative Vision](#).

a. Focus Areas

Based on the expertise of our membership, the Coalition has identified three key areas of investment that would put BC on the pathway to watershed security:

1. **Rebuilding Natural Defences:** our forests, wetlands, stream banks are all a critical first line of defence against the climate crisis—absorbing and releasing water more slowly lessening floods and preventing landslides, purifying water by filtering runoff, providing shade to rivers supporting salmon survival, storing carbon, and ensuring we have healthy and secure communities
2. **Strengthening Watershed Governance:** Governance is organizing the way we work together to make responsible decisions. It is about taking action based on effective collaborative planning. It requires investments in relationship-building and new partnerships: between the Crown and Indigenous Nations, between governments and communities, and between the various interests that have a stake in the health of our watersheds. Watershed governance is about making decisions at the right scale, according to the priorities set by the people that live in those watersheds and know them the best. To do this effectively takes sustained resources over time.
3. **Bolstering Collaborative Monitoring:** You can't effectively manage what you don't measure. We need good data and information to make the best decisions possible. Throughout the province, we lack a comprehensive understanding of the state of our watersheds. Collaborative watershed monitoring grounded in both Indigenous knowledge and western science is essential. It is the only way to ensure we are making the right decisions, at the right time, taking the right actions, and investing where we need it the most.

Recommendation 2: Establish clear priority focus areas for the Fund that include: Rebuilding Natural Defences; Strengthening Watershed Governance; and Bolstering Collaborative Monitoring.

b. Scale of Funding

Based on community surveys and the experience of programs like the Healthy Watersheds Initiative, the Coalition has identified a need of over \$200 million annually for watershed investment. The Coalition proposes that an investment of \$75 million annually is required to make a material impact on the ground. Funding at this scale would help leverage additional funds from multiple sources. A ratio that has been identified in numerous local watershed projects is that for every dollar invested by the provincial government, another four dollars is leveraged.

Recommendation 3: Establish the Fund to provide consistent, sustainable funding in the range of \$75 million annually over the long-term.

c. Sustainability

Just as important as scale is the need for the funding to be sustainable over time. A government fund that ends after 2 to 3 years of support will achieve limited long-term impact. The areas that need support - rebuilding natural defences, strengthening watershed governance and partnerships, and bolstering collaborative monitoring - all require long-term investment to be effective. Advancing provincial commitments to UNDRIP also requires long-term, predictable funding for Indigenous Nations so that Nations can invest in their own watershed management capacity.

Recommendation 4: Make a one-time allocation of \$600 million to establish the Fund and create a permanent legacy endowment. And, engage in direct dialogue with First Nations governments about revenue sharing options that could be available for the Fund.

d. Indigenous Governance

Several provisions in the province's Draft Action Plan for implementing the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples speak to creating a new fiscal relationship with Indigenous Nations. The Watershed Security Fund provides an important opportunity to demonstrate a different fiscal relationship with Indigenous Nations.

There are several ways the Fund can align with the provincial government's commitments to UNDRIP and reconciliation:

- i) the provincial government should co-create the Fund with First Nations;
- ii) First Nations should have explicit roles in the governance and leadership structure of the Fund;
- iii) Indigenous rights and authority should be explicitly recognized in the Fund's founding and guiding documents; and
- iv) Principles of Indigenous governance should be reflected in the funding approach.

Recommendation 5: Co-create Fund governance with Indigenous peoples, ensuring explicit roles for First Nations in the governance and leadership structure, recognition of Indigenous rights and authority, and incorporating principles of Indigenous governance.

e. Independent

To advance DRIPA and avoid perpetuating Crown-controlled funding approaches, the Fund structure should be independent of the provincial government but with clear accountabilities to provincial and Indigenous governments.

Recommendation 6: The Fund should be independent of government with clear accountability mechanisms to provincial and Indigenous governments.

f. Flexible to regional needs & priorities

Since every region in BC has different watershed conditions and needs, the Fund should be structured to respond to the priorities of different regions and watersheds. These priorities could be defined by existing collaborative hubs or new watershed based trusts or boards.

Recommendation 7: Develop a Fund governance structure that includes both a central (province-wide) structure and regional hubs that work together to develop the Fund's strategic priorities and make ongoing funding decisions.

3) SUPPORT FOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING

British Columbia has a significant opportunity to grow its watershed sector, particularly in rural and Indigenous communities. The [Working for Watersheds](#) report has demonstrated the diversity of jobs and professional positions in the watershed sector from planners, to heavy machinery operators, from Indigenous guardians to industry technologists, from ecologists to software developers. This field is growing, and a Watershed Security Fund can support training opportunities to ensure workers have the skills to fill these roles.

The Healthy Watersheds Initiative has demonstrated the opportunity for rewarding employment in this sector, creating 750 jobs with good wages and in meaningful work. A skills and training program for the watershed sector would align with BC's new Economic Plan and would help support youth employment and just transition for under-employed resource workers, in sectors such as forestry.

Recommendation 8: Create and fund a BC Centre for Watershed Security in partnership with BC technology institutes, colleges and applied university programs, to provide a dedicated focus on supporting skills development and training for the watershed sector.