



# Flood Recovery, Resilience and Reconciliation in the Lower Fraser

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: BUILD BACK BETTER, TOGETHER – JULY 14 2022 FORUM

The November 2021 flooding events brought home hard realities in the Lower Fraser floodplain. As water spread across the landscape, forcing evacuations, closing highways for days, stranding salmon, inundating fields and causing hundreds of millions of dollars of damage, it became obvious that **the 'system' we have to manage our relationships with water in the Lower Fraser is broken**. Siloed decisionmaking, short-term priorities, red tape, inequities in capacity, disregard for salmon and other species, and the persistent, harmful legacies of colonialism—all the flaws were plain to see.

Communities are now under pressure to rapidly develop recovery plans and compete for federal and provincial funding, but they are stuck with outdated funding policies, varying levels of capacity and resources, and little to no opportunity for collaboration with neighbours, much less across the region. **Before we further entrench existing problems, we need to reset and move forward in a better way** that builds respectful relationships, long term resilience for communities and other species, like salmon, and **advances reconciliation**.

Responding to this need, the Emergency Planning Secretariat, with technical support from the Build Back Better Together Collaborative, secured direction from federal and provincial ministers to **host a regional forum to find common ground to inform a strategic approach** to flood recovery and long-term resilience in the Lower Fraser. Leadership and staff from **16 First Nations and 14 local governments** in the region gathered territories in Abbotsford, BC on Coast Salish territories, on July 14, 2022, along with **BC Minister of Public Safety, Mike Farnworth, and Secretary-Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, Kukpi7 Judy Wilson**, plus senior staff from a dozen federal and provincial agencies. 108 people were in the room, and 50 people attended online.

The Forum guests supported five principles as a foundation for flood recovery and resilience in the Lower Fraser, to “Build Back Better, Together” and provided valuable insights for further development of the approach:

1. **Understanding and reducing risk** and adapting to climate change in accordance with the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction;
2. **Advancing reconciliation**, with particular attention to Articles 18, 19, 29, 32 of UNDRIP;
3. Ensuring that **salmon and the coastal and freshwater ecosystems they depend on are thriving**;
4. **Everyone is part of the solution** – there are many siloes in planning, decision-making and actions on the ground in the lower Fraser, and a more holistic and collaborative approach to managing flood risks is needed;
5. **Sustainable economies and resilient communities for the long term** – we need a shared vision for the future and a plan to measure progress and ensure accountability.

Specific objectives identified by participants at the July 14 Forum include:

- **Proactive planning and risk reduction** – Responding to emergencies is not sufficient to meet the needs of the Lower Fraser region and protect our communities and ecosystems. *“We need timelines and milestones, without this there is no progress – we need a roadmap of where we are going.”*
- **Collaboration and regional-scale approaches** – Local leaders are prepared to invest not only in their communities, but in relationships with their neighbours and across the region. *“Water doesn’t respect municipal boundaries. All must work together so that all can flourish together.”*
- **Modernized funding mechanisms and programs to support resilience and reconciliation on the ground** – First Nations need to be involved in decisionmaking at the earliest stages. Resilience through multi-benefit and nature-based solutions must be supported. Funding needs to address legacy problems, not perpetuate them.

The Build Back Better, Together Collaborative committed to prepare this report documenting the vision and advice of Forum participants, along with a briefing note directed to provincial and federal government ministries, recommending actions, and **to convene the next forum in Fall 2022 to continue advancing this work together.**

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*The Build Back Better, Together Collaborative is a group of BC-based organizations and experts with the shared goal of helping BC’s upcoming flood recovery and management efforts achieve the best possible outcomes. Includes: Emergency Planning Secretariat (Indigenous-led); UBC Coastal Adaptation Lab, School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture; West Coast Environmental Law; Ebbwater Consulting; Sto:lo Tribal Council; Watershed Watch Salmon Society; Resilient Waters Project; Farmland Advantage; and Kerr Wood Leidal.*

Scan / read the full report at [resilientwaters.ca/floodrecovery](https://resilientwaters.ca/floodrecovery):

