



Lower Fraser Floodplains Forum 2023 Dialogue on Regional Action Executive Summary

HOSTED AT: THE'Í:TSELÍYA - S.A.Y. HEALTH & COMMUNITY CENTRE • JUNE 9, 2023





Executive Summary

At the S.A.Y. Health and Community Centre on the traditional land of the Sq'ewqeyl people, the Lower Fraser Floodplains Coalition reconvened key actors in the region for dialogue about actions to reduce risk and build resilience in the floodplain.

In attendance were representatives from 14 First Nations, 20 local governments, 2 regional governments, senior staff from 10 provincial and federal agencies, including Minister Bowinn Ma from the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR) as well as Robert Phillips from the First Nations Summit, and 5 agricultural associations (including the BC Agricultural Council).

The purpose of the Forum was to identify priorities for a region-wide approach to implement the 5 Principles for community and floodplain resilience. This followed the July 2022 Build Back Better Forum, Informed by the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction and UNDRIP.

Since July 2022, the Province has created EMCR, begun a provincial risk assessment, advanced the BC Flood Strategy and tabled emergency management legislation. The federal government released a National Climate Adaptation Strategy, reviewed its disaster financial assistance funding program, and is rolling out new funding programs. Many Lower Fraser communities continued recovery from November 2021, but are also committed to long term resilience. There is collective momentum for developing a regional action plan and getting it funded.

SETTING THE TABLE FOR DIALOGUE

The Forum began with an opening from Darcy Paul, Sq'ewqeyl First Nation, who welcomed guests to the Sq'ewqeyl Territory.

Sq'ewqeyl Elder, Th'et-simiya Wendy Ritchie, shared her people's creation story. In this story, the rooted, the 4-legged, the finned, and the above-ground plants each offered themselves to the 2-legged humans for food, clothing, medicine, shelter, and utensils, while only asking for respect in return. This story reminded those in the room that all other creatures can survive without us, but we cannot survive without them. Elder Ritchie shared her hopes that the work happening at forums such as this one can change our future to be resilient and safe for ourselves and future generations.

Minister Bowinn Ma provided an overview of Provincial initiatives, and emphasized her support for collaborative, nature-based approaches to resilience in the region.

Tribal Chief McNeil and **Gillian Fuss, Program Manager for the Emergency Planning Secretariat**, spoke about Hilekw Sq'eq'ó ("getting ready together" in Halq'eméylem) the draft Regional Coast Salish Action Plan for Disaster Resilience that is being developed for all 31 Mainland Coast Salish Communities, from Yale to Semiahmoo to Squamish. The plan weaves First Nation knowledge with global best practices and is grounded in the Sendai Framework.

Jason Lum, Chilliwack Councillor and FVRD Board Chair, noted it is important to ensure that those who lack technical capacity are not left behind. Regarding recovery efforts in Chilliwack, he said that it may seem slow, but taking the time to work collaboratively and in accordance with the 5 Principles is a pathway to durable progress.

On good practices for floodplain management, **Patrick Lilley of Kerr Wood Leidal** explained how working together at regional and sub-regional scales opens up pathways to resilience for shared critical infrastructure and multi-benefit projects that protect habitat. **Robert Carey, Nature Conservancy, State of Washington**, shared successful outcomes from collaborative work supported through the **Floodplains by Design** program.

DIALOGUES FOR ACTION

At tables based on the proposed 'Regional Hubs' model for Hílekw Sq'eq'ó (Up-river, Mid-river, River-tidal and Coastal), Forum guests identified five areas of focus for regional action and related objectives:

1. Understanding risk and risk management options;
2. Critical infrastructure and essential services;
3. River and waterways restoration, recovery and resilience;
4. Food security; and
5. Regional planning and decision making.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

Based on the Forum dialogue, LFFC has developed proposed actions for the next 2-3 years:

1. Build the knowledge foundation needed for regional planning and investment in flood risk management in the Lower Fraser, including a regional flood risk assessment and a suite of specific mitigation options;
2. Build a framework for regional planning and investment in flood risk reduction, guided by the 5 principles by convening an interim Regional Advisory Committee; and
3. Unlock a steady flow of flood and ecosystem resilience projects in the sub-regions of the Lower Fraser through relationship building, capacity funding and technical support.

LFFC committed to prepare this Forum report, and will continue its work convening for collaboration, catalyzing nature-based projects and advocating for supportive policy and funding, as well as organizing the next forum in 2024.

A resilient BC is when...we build to accept and work with nature. – Minister Bowinn Ma, EMCR

Lower Fraser Floodplains Coalition

We are a collaborative 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. We offer support from a diverse range of interests, experience and networks, including Indigenous groups, conservationists, farmers, environmental legal specialists, researchers and natural resource professionals. We hope to see BC move towards a more holistic, collaborative approach to flood management that benefits people and other species, like salmon.

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; and Kerr Wood Leidal.

LFFC SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES:

