

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Press Release

October 6, 2022

In the Wake of Unprecedented Drought, FNLC Calls on BC and Canada to Provide Immediate Sustainable Funding

(xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətał (Tsleil Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) The First Nations Leadership Council is calling on the provincial and federal governments to prioritize and sustainably resource watershed restoration and protection including the immediate establishment of a Watershed Security Fund by 2023 as part of a response to the unprecedented drought.

Five major river basins in BC remain in Level 4 category drought as the province endures continued record-breaking weather patterns. These watersheds, including West and East Vancouver Island, Lower Mainland, Sunshine Coast, and Fort Nelson basin are home to over 85 First Nations and nearly 80% of BC's population. Imminent investments in watershed resiliency are required to mitigate the impacts of global warming.

"In the wake of the climate emergency, and nearly a year after BC experienced a historic atmospheric river event, drought continues to threaten the ecosystems' natural capacity to mitigate risks while posing additional threats to our communities' access to safe drinking water. Premier Horgan recently committed \$30 million towards watershed protection in BC, including a minimum \$15 million allocation towards Indigenous-led and co-led projects. We welcome this commitment, however; a further commitment for long-term sustainable funding is necessary to ensure the protection of our valuable watersheds. BC must fulfil its mandate commitment to establishing a permanent Watershed Security Fund that is co-developed and co-led with First Nations Rights and Title holders in BC," stated BC Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief Terry Teegee.

Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, UBCIC Secretary-Treasurer, stated "We simply cannot continue with business as usual while surpassing climate records. A paradigm shift is needed, and First Nations' values, traditional knowledge, laws, and stewardship play a critical role in the work ahead. The BC Government must uphold the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* and commit to true shared decision-making on water with First Nations. First Nations have been the original stewards and caretakers of our watersheds for millennia, and it is time for BC to honour its legal obligations and uphold First Nations' water jurisdiction and governance on our traditional territories."

"Our inherent and constitutionally protected rights and treaty rights are at imminent risk while inaction continues to occur. Yesterday, Heiltsuk Nation uncovered thousands of dead salmon due to drought in the Neekas River. We cannot accept this as the new normal. We must act now, and the provincial and federal governments must work alongside Rights and Titleholders with a common goal towards protecting our most valued resource", stated Hugh Braker, First Nations Summit Political Executive.



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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

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