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Minister's Message



HONOURABLE
DOUG DONALDSON,
Minister of Forests, Lands,
Natural Resource Operations
and Rural Development

As Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, and as a resident of Hazelton, a small town in the northwest, I know firsthand the resilience, determination and independence of those living in rural communities.

Across rural British Columbia, residents strive to see local potential and opportunities fully realized in ways that incorporate the wealth of knowledge and talented people in rural communities, as well as the natural resources that surround them. Rural residents recognize the pressures and uncertainties our communities face, including through softwood lumber tariffs, industry downturns, wildlife management, floods and unprecedented wildfires. Through this consultation process, we heard that rural residents want to see their commitment and expertise reflected in addressing those challenges and in building future success – for themselves and their children and grandchildren, but also for every British Columbian.

As the voice of rural development in Cabinet, this is a view that I share. Part of my job is to ensure that rural issues and needs remain at the forefront of Cabinet discussions and decisions. My colleagues and I are committed to rural development, and to ensuring that Indigenous and rural British Columbians play an integral role in building strong local economies that will support families and businesses into the future.

In late 2017 and early 2018, we asked rural British Columbians for input on the priorities and actions that would unlock opportunities and address some of the issues facing rural communities. We held face-to-face community engagement sessions around the province and online discussions. This report presents the findings of that consultation.

Across all regions, some consistent themes emerged as being vital supports for effective rural development. These include:

- Transportation, medical and recreational infrastructure.
- Natural resource stewardship and management.
- Access to venture capital and services for small business.
- Reconciliation with Indigenous communities.
- Community-level services across age groups, including economic opportunities for youth.
- Local educational programming from early childhood to post-secondary programming.
- Technology particularly broadband internet.

While I am proud to be your government's voice for rural development – and an advocate of the Community Economic Development model – it is clear that every member of Cabinet has an important role to play in advancing the future of rural B.C. The diverse priorities that emerged during consultation illustrate that rural development requires an all-of-government approach. In their own way and with their own programming, all of my Cabinet colleagues are rural ministers too.

To all of you who took time to participate in the process – thank you. Your contributions shine a light on the opportunities and issues facing rural communities. Your responses will inform conversations at Cabinet and with all rural British Columbians as government continues to develop and implement priority policies, programs and services with rural communities. We want to ensure that those living in rural parts of our province can share in economic gains, shape their own economies and plan and develop projects that sustain their communities and families. I believe this work is a valuable contribution to achieving those outcomes.

Introduction

The Government of British Columbia is committed to rural development, including developing and implementing policies, programs and services that will work for all rural British Columbians and support rural and Indigenous communities in building their own resilient, sustainable futures.

To inform this work, face-to-face sessions and interviews were held across the province between December 2017 and March 2018. The sessions were led by local organizations, in partnership with the Province, to gain a deeper understanding of the needs and priorities of rural communities.

Participants represented a broad range of experience, from individual citizens and community leaders, to First Nations, industry, academia, youth, community service organizations, and provincial associations with rural mandates.

Indigenous and youth sessions informed both the provincial and regional opportunities discussed.



28 Online Submissions





16 Community Engagement Sessions

22 Key Advisor Interviews (42 Key Advisors)

Participants were asked:

- What do we need to do now to take action on rural community issues for the long term?
- What are the key priorities to focus on for a rural development strategy?
- How would you like to see government continuing a dialogue about rural development?

In addition, rural British Columbians were invited to share their thoughts and provide input, through an online forum, on a diverse range of topics including: youth opportunities, Indigenous partnerships, services and technology, access to capital, and natural resources. The Rural Development engagement website

(https://engage.gov.bc.ca/ruraldevelopment) was open from January 29, 2018 to March 7, 2018.

This engagement provided opportunities for citizens from around the province to share their knowledge, expertise and experience living in rural communities.

What We Heard summarizes the engagement into 10 common themes that emerged across rural B.C. and provides an overview of the top themes within each region.

What We Heard Across Rural B.C.

All of the feedback collected online and in-person was reviewed, analyzed and categorized into 10 themes. These themes represent areas of common interest from participants around the province, and are listed in order of priority as expressed by participants.



Local services such as transportation, water, social services, healthcare and recreation.

Respondents indicated that essential services, such as clean drinking water, specialized health services and roads are required to ensure public safety, growth and development.



Resource development and supporting activities, such as permitting and licensing, for industries including agriculture, forestry, mining and fishing.

More local stewardship and processing of forest or agricultural resources, and reducing the export of natural resource processing, would help keep well-paid, high-skill jobs in rural areas. Respondents commented on the value of community forests and their connection to the local economy.

Respondents also emphasized the importance of a long-term vision and strategy for sustainable resource extraction and management. Value-added manufacturing for wood products, access to external markets and improving wood fibre supply were identified as possible solutions to retaining well-paid jobs.



Capital, including venture capital and credit, to fund rural businesses and community development.

Community leaders and participants emphasized that access to community-directed funding is an investment that will result in growth for B.C. Submissions suggested that adopting long-term strategies, reducing barriers to small business and using funding structures that encourage community cooperation could benefit both rural communities and the Province.

Suggestions included adding a Rural Dividend Program category for very small communities, having consistent intakes each year for the program and allowing more Rural Dividend funds to be used for infrastructure.





Demographic-specific issues such as senior care, community services, youth retention and economic opportunities for youth.

Cultivating opportunities for youth in rural communities will help support the needs of an aging population and the broader community.

Feedback highlighted the importance of preparing youth for labour market changes through skills training, mentorship and creating cultures of entrepreneurship. Respondents also mentioned the importance of succession planning and youth retention. Most comments encouraged improving affordability to address disparities and challenges, from childcare and education at one end of the demographic, to seniors' housing at the other.



Effectiveness of municipal, regional, and provincial governance structures, including procurement and economic development activities.

Communities expressed a desire for self-governance, meaningful engagement and consultation on decisions that affect them.

Respondents consistently stated the importance of involving rural communities in decisions that affect them and the value of consulting rural experts on challenges and opportunities. Submissions also highlighted the importance of long-term, sustainable and environmentally conscious strategies as communities continue to grow.



Skills training, kindergarten to Grade 12 education, and post-secondary education.

Skills training was identified as the most consistent priority for the economic growth of each region.





Advancing the Province's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Participants stressed the need for individual engagement, consultation with and representation from each First Nation to identify their unique development opportunities and needs.

Many local governments expressed an interest in working in partnership with First Nations on reconciliation.



Availability, affordability and suitability of housing.

Participants highlighted that both jobs and affordable housing are required for a community to retain and grow its population.



Technologies such as broadband internet, telecommunications, renewable energy and innovation.

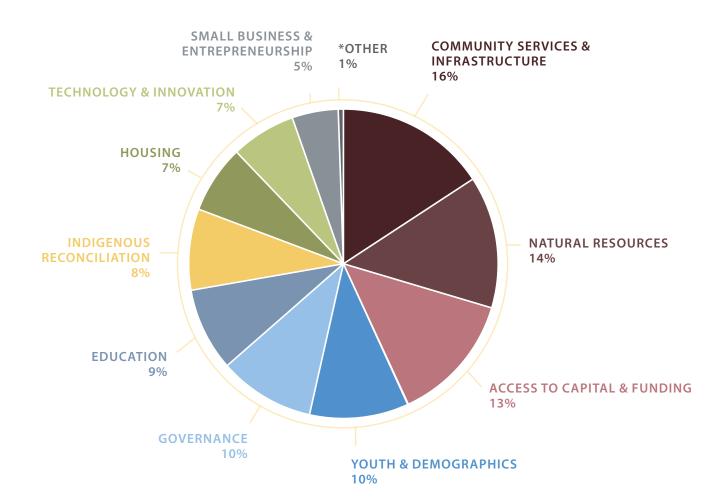
Respondents stated that establishing internet and cell service are priorities for providing access to emergency services, improving education, and diversifying the rural economy.



Support for small businesses and entrepreneurs in rural communities.

Respondents identified an opportunity for B.C. to become a leader in cultural, technological and agricultural innovation.

The following illustration shows, in percentage, how often each theme was discussed by participants throughout the engagement.



^{*} Regional food security, environmental protection, arts, culture, tourism, recreation, research and best practices.

Across Regions

The feedback from online submissions, comments, community engagement sessions and key advisor interviews was reviewed, analyzed and categorized by the eight development regions. The following common themes emerged and are listed in order of importance to the participants in each region.



Cariboo

Feedback from the Cariboo region focused on building a diverse economy with a healthy environment for youth, business and culture. The following themes were identified as priorities for the Cariboo:



TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Access to broadband internet and cell-phone reception create opportunities to improve economic growth and youth retention.



COMMUNITY SERVICES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Improving roadways and accessibility are an important step in growing the region's economy.



GOVERNANCE

Investing in industries, other than resource extraction, and focusing on long-term sustainability to support economic development.

Collaboration between communities, and with provincial and federal governments, is an important component of improving housing, education, infrastructure and health care services.



YOUTH & DEMOGRAPHICS

Some respondents drew attention to the region's affordability and positive quality of life and expressed that this could be better communicated to urban residents. Attract youth to rural communities by improving access to internet services, education and skills training.



NATURAL RESOURCES

Stewardship and management of forests could be enhanced by expanding community forests or woodlot licences. Participants indicated fire resilience is a priority in communities impacted by pine beetle, wildfire or climate change.

Collaboration and partnerships between First Nations, local governments and industry is important to develop value-added economic opportunities that keep well-paid, high-skill jobs in rural areas.

Kootenay

Feedback from the Kootenay region focused on growing the regional economy through improved internet access, and developing a long-term view for economic planning. The following themes were identified as priorities:



TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Construction of a broadband internet network is a priority. However, rural communities do not have the resources to achieve this without assistance.



ACCESS TO CAPITAL & FUNDING

Invest in new areas such as large-scale renewable energy, biofuel and tourism, and follow-up by measuring and quantifying the resulting economic improvement.

Smaller communities and businesses need more assistance and fewer barriers when seeking funding and access to capital. A long-term funding strategy is necessary to make an impact in rural development.



GOVERNANCE

Collaboration and engagement between local government associations and rural governments, particularly for regional information technology strategies, is necessary.



YOUTH & DEMOGRAPHICS

Building technology-based industries in rural communities would attract youth. Participants recommended an advertising campaign, directed at urban residents, to demonstrate the benefits and advantages of rural living.



NATURAL RESOURCES

Respondents encouraged government to promote the purchase of locally-produced agricultural products over those sourced internationally but discouraged the creation of projects like dams and housing on prime farmland.

Expand local land stewardship through community forests and cooperative development to diversify rural economies. Value-added production in forestry and agriculture is crucial to long-term job creation.



HOUSING

Affordable rental housing and transportation are growing rural challenges.

Mainland / Southwest

Responses from the Mainland/Southwest region focused on increasing internet access, expanding into knowledge-based economies, and promoting entrepreneurial development initiatives. The following themes were identified as priorities for the Mainland/Southwest:



EDUCATION

Prepare residents for a move to knowledge-based economies and foster entrepreneurial opportunities and expertise in communities.



TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Create strong internet connections and cell coverage to attract new businesses, residents and entrepreneurs to rural communities.



GOVERNANCE

Encourage communities to work together to develop economic development initiatives to drive innovation and a diverse economy.



COMMUNITY SERVICES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Provide tools to communities to strengthen ties between Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments, businesses and community members.



HOUSING

Recognize that people can start new enterprises only when their basic needs are met, and that a lack of affordability in the region creates barriers to innovation.

Nechako

Responses from the Nechako region centered on fostering understanding between communities, while improving living conditions and access to health care services. Feedback also highlighted the importance of environmental responsibility and First Nations consultation. The following themes were identified as priorities for the Nechako region:



GOVERNANCE

Reduce the disparity in living conditions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Participants stressed the importance of building dialogue with all community members.



COMMUNITY SERVICES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Improving infrastructure, including internet access, public transit and airports, would promote growth in the region.

Building housing for the elderly and providing specialized health care services, especially for children, would help retain the population of rural communities.



NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural resource development strategies need to consider the cultural, social and ecological values of Indigenous and rural communities.



HOUSING

A regional housing strategy would promote healthy urban densification while addressing affordability challenges.



YOUTH & DEMOGRAPHICS

Creating rental housing and community buildings, as well as lowering daycare costs, would attract more youth to the region.

North Coast / Northwest

Responses from the North Coast/Northwest region focused on sustainable economic growth through strategic funding and regional collaboration. Respondents also recognized the importance of Indigenous rights and consultation going forward. The following themes were identified as priorities for the North Coast/Northwest:



ACCESS TO CAPITAL & FUNDING

Trust-fund models have been successful in the region, and respondents suggested that further use of these models could promote strategic community investment. Funding structures that do not compete with neighbouring communities were also proposed.

Respondents suggested that a small number of successful projects can greatly improve a local economy, and that altering securities legislation around crowd-funding could lead to a stronger regional economy.



YOUTH & DEMOGRAPHICS

An important step in youth retention is to increase the supply of stable, middle-class jobs. Other recommendations included: funding youth programs, building a voice for youth in communities, and advertising the affordability and quality of life in rural areas.



COMMUNITY SERVICES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Improved internet enables access to services, such as online education. The importance of improving roads, sewer systems, water systems, and recreational facilities was also emphasized.

Increasing the availability of doctors and nurses, and improving seniors' care are important for the region. Digital health care services, associated with improved internet connection, could help in retaining the region's population.



NATURAL RESOURCES

Develop a long-term vision for the natural resource sector to move towards a value-added, diversified economy that supports jobs in rural communities.

Northeast

Feedback from the Northeast region focused on increasing health care service funding, cell network coverage and access to safe drinking water. The region faces complications due to their shared border with Alberta, especially in areas such as water, provincial sales tax and policing. The following themes were identified as priorities for the Northeast:



EDUCATION

Providing practical training allowances and distinguishing between skills training and academic training are important for education development in the region.



COMMUNITY SERVICES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Funding for health care services and supports for children with medical and psychological disabilities is needed to help keep the region healthy and maintain its population.

Safe drinking water and improved connectivity to cell networks, including 911 services and internet service are a priority. Other suggestions included creating road maintenance programs and making improvements to community buildings.



GOVERNANCE

There is an opportunity for increased regional autonomy and cultivating regional collaboration. Many respondents recommended developing resilient, long-term governance structures and greater rural representation in decision making.



ACCESS TO CAPITAL & FUNDING

Create a long-term investment strategy for the region, change regulations to favour local business and make economic development programs more accessible for small businesses.



YOUTH & DEMOGRAPHICS

Communicating the potential for accelerated career growth and career flexibility could attract and retain youth. Some respondents also suggested providing grants to first-time homeowners.

Thompson-Okanagan

The Thompson-Okanagan region focused on preparing their communities for new and changing industries by prioritizing training and education, attracting youth, and creating strong partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. The following themes were identified as priorities for the Thompson-Okanagan:



EDUCATION

Access to K-12 education and early childhood education in the area is needed. Some advised that the job market affects education because job losses can result in school closures.

Provide access to local training, long-term mentorship, peer mentorship, technical expertise and online post-secondary education. Ideas included providing businesses incentives for hiring and training young entrepreneurs.



YOUTH & DEMOGRAPHICS

Affordable housing and job creation are priorities for youth retention. Suggestions included offering programs that encourage urban youth to seek opportunities in rural communities. Cultivating diverse and progressive communities with adequate childcare, internet and food supply access were also discussed.



ACCESS TO CAPITAL & FUNDING

Respondents expressed a desire for rural areas to receive more of the revenue that they generate for B.C. Removing barriers to small businesses, particularly in procurement, exploring new tools and investment structures for rural communities, and collaborating with groups willing to invest in the community were also suggested.

Protect small businesses from being priced out by large businesses and tie economic development to future trends.



NATURAL RESOURCES

Train local youth to help them access well-paid jobs in the natural resource sector.

Promote value-added local food production and modern agricultural strategies. Additional and larger community forests would better support rural communities.

Vancouver Island / Coast

Responses from the Vancouver Island/Coast region focused on the potential economic growth provided by improved internet connectivity and cell phone reception. The following themes were identified as priorities for the region:



EDUCATION

Leadership development and investment in technology-related education for the region is needed.



TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Improved internet access is an important part of the economy that requires significant funding to achieve. This access is critical for diversifying rural economies and supporting technological ecosystems. Some expressed concern that local retailers may collapse under online retail trends.



ACCESS TO CAPITAL & FUNDING

Improve access to low-interest capital, create predictable long-term funding and amend current policies to make investing in rural communities more attractive. Some respondents recommended building co-ops in rural communities.



HOUSING

Jobs and affordable housing are required for a community to retain and grow its population.



COMMUNITY SERVICES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Road safety was emphasized, and any future road development should consider non-motorized transportation options. The economic benefit of improved road infrastructure was also considered important.



NATURAL RESOURCES

Transition from a resource-based economy is a challenge that can be mitigated by sustainable, local economic development that integrates other sectors such as tourism or technology.

Improve access to wood fibre, including residual fibre, as well as local processing to ensure the benefits of resource extraction goes to rural communities. Greater control of forestry and wood lot management by the local community was also discussed.

