



Natural Resource Permitting Improvements

What We Heard from

Public Engagement

Fall 2025

Image taken at Stuart Lake,
near Fort St James, BC

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Purpose

The purpose of this What We Heard Report is to summarize the feedback and perspectives shared during the Natural Resource Permitting Improvements Fall 2025 public engagement campaign. It reflects what was heard from participants regarding proposed statutory changes, including key themes, priorities, and considerations that will inform next steps in policy development and decision-making. This report is intended to provide transparency, acknowledge contributions, and ensure that voices from diverse sectors, interested parties, and the public are recognized for shaping future actions.

Executive Summary

Natural resource permitting plays a critical role in supporting environmental stewardship, reconciliation with First Nations, and the delivery of infrastructure, housing, clean energy, restoration and economic development across British Columbia. In recent years, First Nations, local governments, industry, professionals and the public have consistently identified challenges with the current permitting framework, including complexity, duplication, inconsistent processes, and lengthy timelines. In response, the Province initiated the Natural Resource Permitting Improvements initiative to explore targeted statutory and regulatory updates aimed at improving clarity, efficiency and predictability while maintaining strong environmental protections and upholding commitments under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act).

Between September and December 2025, the Province sought feedback on 16 proposed permitting improvement topics spanning the Water Sustainability Act (WSA) and Regulation (WSR), the Riparian Areas Protection Act (RAPA) and Regulation (RAPR), and the Forest Act. Input was gathered through large virtual sessions, smaller focused meetings, written submissions and topic specific online surveys hosted on the Province's public engagement platforms. In total, engagement activities included 48 meetings with close to 1,000 participants, more than 130 written submissions, and 1,526 completed surveys.

This What We Heard Report summarizes feedback received through those engagement activities. It reflects the perspectives shared by participants but does not represent government decisions or commitments. There was broad support for the proposed changes. Across all topics, participants emphasized the importance of maintaining or strengthening environmental protections while improving permitting efficiency for lower risk and routine activities. There was broad interest in risk-based approaches that clearly distinguish between activities requiring full authorization and those that could proceed through streamlined, notification based, or exemption pathways, provided safeguards, monitoring, and accountability are in place.

Alongside this support, participants raised some cautions. Key concerns related to watershed and groundwater sustainability, wetland protection, professional capacity and enforcement limitations. Feedback underscored that efficiency gains must be accompanied by strong safeguards, clear roles and responsibilities, and

transparent decision-making to ensure environmental, cultural and community values are protected over time.

Indigenous rights, interests, and knowledge were also central themes throughout engagement. First Nations emphasized the importance of early and ongoing engagement, alignment with the Declaration Act, and the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into regulatory design, implementation, and monitoring. Concerns were raised about cumulative impacts, data gaps, and the potential for streamlined approaches to reduce visibility or engagement if not carefully designed.

The feedback summarized in this report will be used to help inform the refinement, prioritization and implementation of potential statutory and regulatory changes, as well as the development of guidance, tools, and supporting measures. The Province thanks all participants who contributed their time, expertise, and perspectives to this engagement process and acknowledges the importance of continued dialogue as work to modernize natural resource permitting in British Columbia progresses.

Introduction

Natural resource permitting plays a significant role in the government's strategy to strengthen and diversify British Columbia's economy. Ministries and agencies are working across the natural resource sector to streamline permitting, remove barriers and delays, eliminate duplication, simplify processes and transform natural resource permitting while maintaining high environmental standards and our commitments under the Declaration Act. Unnecessary delays and hurdles can slow economic growth and impact stewardship of natural resources.

As part of the work to improve permitting, the regulatory framework was reviewed for alignment with public expectations and government strategic priorities. The need to update the laws that guide permitting was considered, with the aim of reducing unnecessary steps and making the system work better—while maintaining policy objectives, ensuring positive environmental outcomes supporting reconciliation. Opportunities for updates across many statutes were identified.

Rather than consulting and amending legislation on a one-by-one basis, several potential changes are being developed concurrently as part of an integrated approach. This approach allows related legislative changes to be considered together, improving alignment, and reducing the need for multiple, separate engagement processes.

The Province's initial focus is on the following 16 opportunities across the Water Sustainability Act and Regulation, the Riparian Areas Protection Act and Regulation, and the Forest Act:

1. Exemption for construction dewatering

Exploring a three-tiered, risk-based framework that exempts low-risk projects from authorization requirements and exempts mid-risk projects with conditions.

2. Expanding eligibility for stream restoration activities

Exploring opportunities for qualified proponents to carry out stream channel or fish habitat restoration and maintenance projects.

3. Exemption for constructing ice roads to access restoration sites

Exploring the removal of short-term water use approvals for the construction of ice roads to support the restoration of inactive oil and gas sites over the winter months.

4. Riparian Areas Protection Enhancements

Exploring possible exemptions from riparian area protection requirements for certain low-risk activities, introducing flexibility for some low-risk activities and addressing unclear or missing definitions.

5. Administrative penalties timelines

Exploring ways to better align the timelines and processes for administering penalties under the WSA with the administrative penalty frameworks under other natural resource sector statutes.

6. Low volume water use without an authorization

Exploring allowing low volume groundwater use up to two cubic metres (2,000 litres) per day without an authorization in areas with available groundwater.

7. Expediting existing use groundwater applications

Exploring streamlining the application review and decision process for existing use groundwater applications.

8. Streamlining routine permitting for changes in and about a stream

Exploring allowing applicants to submit one application that may include items such as best management practices, project design, appropriate mitigation measures and environmental monitoring strategies for a single project that can be followed routinely for a set amount of time or that encompasses multiple smaller works across several locations.

9. Low volume water use streamlined authorization process

Exploring the development of a new streamlined review process for small quantities of water on streams and aquifers where the withdrawal is not expected to have an impact on other authorized water users, on land or other property, and where there are no other significant environmental or cultural concerns.

10. Best management practice for changes in and about a stream (non-regulatory)

Updating existing guidance to address gaps in the changes in and about a stream application process.

11. Managing all wetland classes

Considering whether the management of all wetland classes, including bogs and shallow open waters, should be included in the WSA to ensure consistent management and stewardship.

12. Strategic use of offset payments to support wetland conservation

Exploring options to apply compensation measures through the strategic use of offset payments to support wetland restoration activities.

13. British Columbia Wetland identification and delineation manual (non-regulatory)

Developing a clear, science-based manual for professionals, applicants, and decision-makers to determine when a wetland is present (identification) and to identify its boundaries (delineation).

14. Wetland professional accountability

Exploring definitions for qualified professionals and assurance statement requirements in applications for work in and around wetlands.

15. Applying the mitigation hierarchy for wetland activities

Exploring how to better apply the mitigation hierarchy of ‘avoid, minimize, restore on-site, and offset’ for activities that may impact wetlands.

16. Streamlining Forest Act permitting on provincial public highway lands

Exploring streamlining the permitting of linear utility projects (such as pipelines and transmission lines) that cross both Crown land and provincial public highway lands which are owned by the BC Transportation Financing Authority (BCTFA).

Proposed changes in these areas have been identified by the Province as important steps toward strengthening economic resilience and improving how natural resource permits are processed. These updates aim to bring greater clarity, enhance efficiency and create more streamlined processes that lead to better outcomes for applicants, partners and communities.

Engagement Approach and Analysis

The engagement process was designed to gather meaningful, representative input from a wide range of interested parties including First Nations. Three engagement streams guided the work: consultation and cooperation with First Nations, public and stakeholder engagement, and discussions with provincial staff (the latter informing—but not included in—this report). The approach emphasized transparency, accessibility, and inclusivity, offering multiple pathways for participation to ensure diverse perspectives were captured.

Information about proposed changes was shared through the GovTogetherBC platform, the Water Sustainability Act (WSA) engagement site. Feedback was collected through online surveys, virtual information and discussion sessions, focused meetings, and written submissions. All requests for additional meetings during the 12-week engagement period were accommodated, ensuring participants had opportunities to provide detailed input across topics. Additional details on the engagement principles, methods and approach are available in **Appendix A**.

Analysis of the feedback drew on both quantitative and qualitative methods. Survey data was reviewed for trends, while comments from virtual sessions and written submissions were analyzed to identify recurring themes, areas of alignment, and divergent viewpoints. All feedback streams were consolidated into a comprehensive thematic review to inform refinement of proposed regulatory, legislative, and non-regulatory changes.

The analysis acknowledged several limitations, including repeated comments across channels, overlapping participation, and differing engagement timelines. Overall, the findings represent the perspectives of those who voluntarily contributed during the engagement period. Additional information on the analysis methodology is provided in **Appendix B**.

Participation

This section provides an overview of who participated in the province's engagement on proposed statutory changes to natural resource permitting improvements in British Columbia. It summarizes participation levels across all engagement activities—including surveys, written submissions, webinars, focused meetings, and government-to-government (G2G) discussions with First Nations. Input was received from a broad range of groups, including First Nations, local governments, industry, professional associations, regulatory bodies, Qualified Professionals, academic institutions, federal agencies, not-for-profit organizations, and members of the public. Together, these contributions provide a comprehensive picture of the perspectives, challenges, and opportunities identified by those most involved in, or most affected by, permitting processes in British Columbia.

First Nations and First Nation Organizations

All 204 First Nations in the province were invited to take part, along with the Alliance of BC Modern Treaty Nations and the First Nations Leadership Council. The First Nations that participated came from across the province and represented a wide range of community sizes and governance structures.

- 42 First Nations participated in virtual sessions
- 64 surveys were completed by First Nations and First Nations organizations
- 6 G2G meetings were held
- 44 written submissions were received

While the First Nations Leadership Council was informed about the engagement, it did not provide consultative feedback on the proposed changes.

A list of the First Nations who participated is provided in **Appendix C**. This list does not include any additional Nations who may have chosen to provide feedback through anonymous survey submission.

Local Governments

All local governments across the province were invited to participate in the engagement process. Participation included a strong cross-section of communities, with representation from cities, towns, townships, regional districts, the Islands Trust, and other local authorities. Both urban and rural perspectives were reflected, offering a wide range of geographic viewpoints.

- 49 local governments participated in the engagement
- 197 online surveys were completed
- 10 written submissions were received
- 5 meetings were hosted specifically for local government participants, with an estimated 280 attendees in total

These contributions reflected diverse regional experiences and operational contexts, providing insights into local government perspectives across British Columbia.

A list of the local governments who participated is provided in **Appendix D**. This list does not include any additional local governments who may have chosen to provide feedback through anonymous survey submission.

Regulatory Agencies

The regulatory bodies governing natural resource sector professionals in the province were highly engaged throughout the process. Their participation included contributions to the online surveys, submission of written feedback, and active involvement in meetings.

The regulatory bodies that participated were:

- College of Applied Biologists (CAB)
- Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of British Columbia (ASTTBC)
- British Columbia Institute of Agrologists (BCIA)
- Forest Professionals British Columbia (FPBC)
- Engineers and Geoscientists British Columbia (EGBC)

Their involvement provided cross-sector technical and regulatory perspectives, reflecting the breadth of professional practice areas affected by the proposed statutory reforms.

Qualified Professionals

While all registrants under the Professional Governance Act were welcome to participate, targeted invitations were provided only to those known to frequently work within the scope of RAPR and wetland-related activities. This approach ensured strong representation from practitioners with direct operational experience in the areas where changes were being proposed.

Engagement from qualified professionals was substantial:

- 367 online surveys were completed by respondents who identified as qualified professionals
- 14 written submissions were received

- 4 dedicated webinars were held for qualified professionals, with more than 500 combined attendees recorded

This high level of participation reflects significant interest from the professional community and provided a wide range of technical insights, field-based perspectives, and recommendations relevant to statutory reform.

Academic Institutions

Academic institutions were invited to participate in the engagement process. Most participation from this sector was through the online surveys, with additional input provided through written submissions. To support direct dialogue, one dedicated webinar was held as requested by an institution.

Their contributions added research-informed and field-based perspectives to the engagement, complementing feedback received from local governments, professional regulators, and qualified professionals.

Federal Government

Federal government agencies contributed to the engagement through several channels. A total of 19 online surveys were completed by federal representatives, and 5 written submissions were provided. In addition, 4 meetings were held with federal agencies, with a combined total of 17 attendees.

These contributions offered federal perspectives related to environmental management, regulatory responsibilities, and coordination across jurisdictions.

Private Industry

Industry participation was strong across all engagement channels. A total of 213 online surveys were completed by industry representatives, and 9 written submissions were received. Industry participants also took part in 9 virtual meetings, providing detailed operational perspectives and sector-specific insights that supported a comprehensive understanding of industry priorities and concerns.

Not for Profit Organizations

Not-for-profit organizations were active contributors to the engagement process. A total of 250 online survey respondents self-identified as representing not-for-profit organizations, and 10 written submissions were received from this sector.

Representatives from not-for-profit organizations also attended engagement webinars, providing a range of community-based, environmental, and advocacy perspectives that enriched the overall feedback.

'Other' Category

The general public had the opportunity to participate through online surveys and are captured in the "other" category where they did not self-identify with another group.

A list of the 123 organizations that took part in the natural resource permitting improvements engagement process is provided in **Appendix E**.



Engagement Results



Image taken at Mt. Newton Valley,
Central Saanich, Vancouver Island

Engagement Results by Topic

The following section provides a high-level summary of feedback received across the 16 engagement topics. It does not capture every comment or perspective shared during the engagement; rather, it reflects the most prevalent themes expressed by participants. Each topic summarizes the commonly cited reasons participants supported the proposed change, the most frequently raised concerns, and suggestions that were repeatedly identified as relevant to the proposal. In addition, notable observations and context-setting feedback that did not directly relate to a specific concern or suggestion are included where they help illustrate broader perspectives shared during engagement.

Topic descriptions reflect the original proposals as presented during the engagement period. Final proposals that advance for government decision may be different, in part, due to consideration of feedback received.

1. Exemption for Construction Dewatering

What's Being Proposed?

B.C. is considering changes to authorization requirements for construction dewatering activities that would allow low-risk projects to proceed without an authorization. The Province is contemplating options for exempting mid-risk construction activities while maintaining moderate oversight, for instance by relying on a notification framework. High-risk construction dewatering activities would likely still need to apply for and obtain authorization. The Province is also exploring how to define and communicate risk thresholds in a way that is clear, accessible, and representative of actual risk.

Impacted Statute(s): Water Sustainability Regulation

Data Reviewed

Total: 156 Surveys: 112 Letters/emails: 14 Opinions from meetings: 30

Overall Opinion on Proposed Change

- Support for the proposed change was mixed, with strong support from industry and registered professionals and concerns predominantly raised by First Nations, environmental organizations, academics, and members of the public.

Support for Proposal

- Many participants supported efforts to streamline permitting for low-risk activities, provided that environmental protection, monitoring, and accountability are maintained.
- Several participants expressed support for the proposal, citing expectations of improved efficiency, reduced delays, and lower administrative burden for both applicants and government.
- Participants believed streamlining approvals for low-risk activities would reduce costs and timelines and better support delivery of housing, electrification goals, infrastructure projects, and public utilities.
- Low risk, short duration activities were frequently identified by participants as appropriate candidates for streamlined or expedited processes
- Participants emphasized the importance of relying on qualified professionals, noting confidence in professional expertise to assess risk, recommend mitigation measures, and support compliance.
- Local government participants were generally supportive of tiered permitting and notification approaches for moderate risk activities and emphasized the need for clear guidance and integration with municipal processes.

Concerns Raised

- Concerns were raised about potential impacts to fish-bearing streams, groundwater quality, and aquatic ecosystems. Respondents cited contamination risks such as metals and sediments, noting that harm could occur even from activities considered low risk.
- Participants expressed concern that exemptions could reduce monitoring and accountability.
- Limited enforcement capacity and existing non-compliance with construction dewatering requirements were identified as key risks.
- Concerns were also raised that multiple small projects could collectively result in significant impacts (cumulative effects), particularly in urban areas or sensitive watersheds. Participants noted uncertainty in predicting groundwater volumes and conditions prior to construction.

- First Nations emphasized that construction dewatering can affect culturally significant waters, fish habitat, and treaty or Aboriginal rights. Several respondents noted risk definitions may not align with First Nation perspectives and that streamlined approaches could reduce opportunities for consultation.
- Members of the public and non-government organizations questioned whether exemptions would prioritize economic efficiency over environmental protection. Calls were made for public access to information, clear reporting requirements, and transparent decision-making.
- Participants raised concerns about the proposed notification process being unpractical and questioned the efficiencies and time-savings this would achieve.

Suggestions Received and Other Feedback

- Participants emphasized the need for clear definitions, transparent processes, and strong safeguards, regardless of whether activities proceed under an exemption, notification, or authorization.
- Many participants supported a tiered, risk-based framework (e.g., exemption, notification, authorization), with risk determined by factors such as volume, duration, proximity to sensitive areas, and site conditions.
- Participants requested clear, simple thresholds and practical guidance to support consistent application of the framework.
- Participants suggested implementation supports such as decision trees, online tools, self-declaration mechanisms, and plain language guidance materials.

2. Expanding Eligibility for Stream Restoration Activities

What's Being Proposed?

B.C. is exploring ways to streamline the process for qualified proponents doing stream restoration. Instead of focusing on *who* can do the work, the regulation could set clear terms and conditions for *how* the work can be carried out.

Impacted Statute(s): Water Sustainability Regulation

Data Reviewed

Total: 103 Surveys: 79 Letters/emails: 13 Opinions from meetings: 11

Overall Opinion on Proposed Change

- Participants generally supported improving and simplifying permitting for stream restoration and maintenance, expressing strong agreement that current processes hinder timely and effective work
- Participants viewed change as necessary to achieve ecological restoration, climate adaptation, and cultural objectives, while emphasizing the need for clarity and safeguards.

Support for Proposal

- Participants strongly agreed that the permitting process for stream restoration and maintenance needs improvement. Many practitioners expressed frustration with unnecessary delays and complex rules, saying these issues make it difficult to complete work in a timely and effective way.
- Expanding eligibility was seen as a way to empower First Nations-led initiatives, integrate traditional ecological knowledge, and address capacity challenges.
- Participants said that a simpler permitting process would make it easier to restore streams and support cultural and ecological values, especially for First Nations communities.
- Many participants prefer nature-based restoration approaches over hard-engineered solutions.

- Participants viewed tools like e-licensing and shared data systems as positive steps that build trust, improve transparency, and make permitting more efficient.

Concerns Raised

- There was strong support for making sure projects protect the ecological integrity of existing habitat and that work should not occur unless there is a clear need based on the health of the whole watershed.
- Concerns raised largely focused on restoration work in general, rather than the proposed change to expand eligibility, such as risks of poorly designed restoration techniques harming ecosystems, the need for planning to be specific to each site to avoid unintended damage, impacts when long-term maintenance is not appropriately planned and funded, and recommendations to avoid or limit activities involving changes to stream channels or fish habitats.

Suggestions Received

- Participants emphasized the importance of distinguishing restoration from maintenance to ensure regulatory clarity and support risk-based permitting.
- Participants supported a professional reliance approach to reduce regulatory burden while still ensuring accountability and safe practices.
- There was strong support for involving qualified professionals and interdisciplinary teams in complex projects to ensure technical rigour and accountability.
- Many participants favored a tiered approach, such as notifications for low-risk activities and formal approvals for higher-impact works.
- There was strong support for combining Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge with Western science to achieve better restoration results.
- Participants suggested creating notification options for low-risk restoration activities, noting this would allow community groups and stewardship organizations to participate more easily.
- Some participants suggested that complex restoration projects should require sign-off from a qualified professional.

Other Feedback

- Timely permitting was viewed as critical to achieving climate adaptation and ecological restoration goals.
- Current processes were described as siloed, inconsistent, and overly bureaucratic, leading to delays and discouraging participation.
- Participants said that overlapping laws, multiple permits, and unclear processes slow projects down, making it difficult to understand what is required and trust the process.

3. Exemption for Constructing Ice Roads to Access Restoration Sites

What's Being Proposed?

BC Energy Regulator and the Province are exploring exempting ice road construction for restoration purposes from requiring a short-term water use approval.

Impacted Statute(s): Water Sustainability Regulation

Data Reviewed

Total: 25 Surveys: 14 Letters/emails: 7 Opinions from meetings: 4

Overall Opinion on Proposed Change

- Participants generally supported making changes to improve permitting efficiency for ice road construction to better enable timely access to restoration sites, while stressing that safeguards must remain in place.

Support for Proposal

- Many participants agreed that changes are needed to make permitting for ice road construction more efficient so that restoration sites can be accessed more easily.
- Many industry participants said the exemption is important because it would help reduce delays and allow restoration work to happen more quickly. They noted that the exemption would make it easier to take advantage of winter work windows, would make it easier to plan and schedule projects, reduce administrative steps that slow projects down, and reduce costs.
- Participants noted that ice roads are temporary and cause less disturbance to the environment than traditional road construction.
- They felt that risks can be managed by placing conditions on water withdrawals, restricting diversion from sensitive sources, and implementing measures to prevent the spread of invasive species.

Concerns Raised

- Participants emphasized that environmental protections must still be in place, suggesting limits on the amount of work allowed, site-specific reviews, and monitoring.
- First Nations participants raised concerns about potential impacts to culturally important places and wildlife, including impacts on trapping seasons. They also said the approach must align with the Declaration Act and honour Indigenous rights.
- Areas noted as needing more detail and consideration were who would oversee the exemption, how rules would be enforced, and how proponents exercising the exemption would be held accountable.
- Participants expressed concern that the exemption could be misused for activities that are not related to restoration, especially if there is limited oversight or monitoring.
- Ecological risks were noted, including taking too much water from sensitive areas, disturbing wildlife, and increasing the chance of spreading invasive species.

Suggestions Received and Other Feedback

- Several participants supported using qualified professionals and maintaining clear, transparent records to help ensure responsible and consistent decision-making.
- Clear definitions of what counts as restoration work were recommended, along with measures that limit the possible misuse of the exemption and clear enforcement processes.
- There was a call for independent monitoring and for professional sign-off to help ensure accountability and build trust in the system.

4. Riparian Areas Protection Enhancements

What's Being Proposed?

B.C. is exploring amendments to expand exemptions for low-risk activities in riparian areas, introduce flexibility for low-risk activities and address unclear or missing definitions, while maintaining strong environmental standards.

Impacted Statute(s): Riparian Areas Protection Act and Riparian Areas Protection Regulation

Data Reviewed

Total: 444 Surveys: 320 Letters: 20 Opinions from meetings: 91

Overall Opinion on Proposed Change

- Participants generally supported the proposed changes, particularly efforts to improve clarity, consistency, and efficiency, while stressing the need for safeguards, effective oversight, and alignment across regulatory systems.
- Participants generally agreed that clearer and more consistent definitions are needed. They noted that different laws and bylaws use terms differently, which creates confusion.
- There was broad support for allowing low-risk developments such as ecological restoration, removing invasive species, removing danger trees, and rebuilding after wildfires. Participants commonly recommended conditions for low-risk developments, including involvement of a qualified professional, proper erosion control, and revegetation.

Support for Proposals

- Participants said that RAPR should be aligned with the Water Sustainability Act, the Fisheries Act, and local bylaws so that definitions and exemptions match across the different systems. This would help reduce duplication and make rules easier to understand. Participants also suggested exploring ways to align RAPR with FireSmart practices so wildfire-related work can happen while still protecting riparian areas.

- Many supported allowing specific low-risk activities as long as clear conditions are in place. They recommended developing Codes of Practice or standardized conditions, similar to the approach used by Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Participants also suggested allowing more flexibility for rebuilding after disasters and for restoration projects, provided there are strong accountability measures.
- Participants generally agreed that improving definitions in the regulation would bring greater clarity, improve consistency in decision-making, and reduce disagreements. They recommended updating the regulation and technical manual to clearly define terms like ditch, surface flow, riparian restoration, minor repairs, and institutional development.
- Participants emphasized the importance of ongoing engagement with First Nations, local governments, and industry to help shape conditions and support implementation. They also said it is important to address concerns about cumulative impacts and ensure appropriate notification for activities in sensitive areas.

Concerns Raised

- Participants raised concerns about the cumulative effects of multiple low-risk developments in riparian areas, including erosion issues, habitat loss, and reduced oversight. They encouraged the use of science-based thresholds, mitigation measures, and monitoring to help manage these risks.
- Participants noted that the lack of provincial enforcement authority makes it difficult to ensure compliance. They suggested adding enforcement tools, monitoring requirements, and funding for local governments so they can properly oversee activities.

Suggestions Received

- There was strong interest in updated technical manuals, guidance documents, and training opportunities for both qualified professionals and local governments. Some suggested certification or refresher training to help ensure consistent and high-quality reviews.

- There were strong calls to expand the scope of exceptions and flexibility for low-risk development beyond what the Province was considering, with many specific suggestions and examples provided.

Other Feedback

Significant feedback was provided on the current permitting experience during engagement on proposed changes:

- Qualified professionals and local governments asked for updated technical guidance and consistent interpretation across regulations.
- Participants highlighted gaps in compliance and enforcement. They noted that RAPR does not currently include provincial enforcement authority, which leaves local governments responsible. Many said this creates challenges because local governments may not have the resources or authority needed. Participants asked for stronger compliance tools, more monitoring, and better provincial support.
- There was widespread frustration with long review timelines, inconsistent feedback, and unclear provincial processes. Participants said they want approvals to be more efficient, communication to be clearer, and for greater reliance on the professional judgment of qualified professionals. Suggestions included offering pre-submission consultations and creating a triage system to help manage complex files.
- Participants asked for digital improvements to make processes more transparent and efficient. Suggestions included real-time status tracking, clearer reviewer comments and options for qualified professionals to speak with reviewers before submitting applications to reduce back-and-forth delays.
- Participants also said communication during application reviews is often unclear, and expectations are not always well explained. They recommended improving feedback loops, publishing more guidance, and providing timelines so people know what to expect.

5. Administrative Penalties Timelines

What's Being Proposed?

B.C. is exploring ways to better align the timelines and processes for administrative penalties under the WSA with the administrative penalty frameworks under other natural resource sector statutes like the Forest and Range Practices Act and the Wildfire Act.

Impacted Statute(s): Water Sustainability Act

Data Reviewed

Total: 31 Surveys: 23 Letters/emails: 7 Opinions from meetings: 1

Overall Opinion on Proposed Change

- Participants generally supported aligning enforcement timelines under the Water Sustainability Act with other legislation.
- Participants expressed conditional support for extended or flexible timelines, emphasizing that changes should strengthen both fairness and environmental protection without weakening enforcement credibility.

Support for Proposal

- Many participants supported aligning timelines under the Water Sustainability Act with those in other legislation, often suggesting three years as a reasonable and consistent approach.
- Some participants noted that longer timelines could improve due process and help manage workloads but could also reduce the deterrent effect if consequences are delayed.

Concerns Raised

- First Nations emphasized the importance of free, prior, and informed consent, stronger shared stewardship through working groups, and better enforcement against illegal water use.
- There were concerns about fairness, especially for small landowners or people who inherit violations they did not cause. Many called for clear distinctions between intentional and unintentional non-compliance.

- Participants said consultation materials need to be clearer and more detailed, including a stronger explanation of why timelines may be extended and what outcomes are expected.
- Participants emphasized the need to balance deterrence with fairness. They cautioned that timelines should not be so long that they reduce the credibility of enforcement and suggested considering whether older violations should be grandfathered.
- There were concerns about equity, with calls for guidance that distinguishes between intentional and unintentional violations and that scales penalties according to the level of harm. Many said it is important to avoid placing undue burden on small landowners.
- Participants also noted that permitting and enforcement teams both need enough resources to function effectively, and that system changes should not create new bottlenecks.

Suggestions Received

- Participants shared a wide range of opinions about appropriate timeframes. Some recommended 60-to-90-day timeframe so enforcement can happen quickly, while others suggested timeframes of 10 years or more for serious, long-term violations.
- Participants recommended creating Joint Water Stewardship Working Groups with First Nations to support shared decision-making and better assessment of cumulative effects.
- They suggested a more flexible enforcement system with different timelines depending on the severity of the issue—for example, 60–90 days for minor violations, up to three years for more complex cases, and ten or more years for harm that has been hidden or difficult to detect.
- Participants said communication needs to be clearer and more accessible. They asked for engagement materials that explain the purpose of timeline changes, the benefits, and what the changes would mean in practice.
- Several participants said the approach should align with broader provincial strategies, including B.C.'s Flood Strategy, Marine Strategy, and Watershed Security Strategy, to support more coordinated water management.

- There was support for using digital tools to improve monitoring, track compliance, and better understanding cumulative impacts across a watershed.
- Participants also highlighted the need for training and resources for both enforcement officers and regulated parties so they can understand and meet new expectations on time.
- Participants supported mandatory follow-up after penalties to make sure corrective actions are completed and problems do not recur.

Other Feedback

- Participants stressed that penalties should reflect the level of ecological harm and the intent behind the action. They also emphasized the need to monitor cumulative impacts.

6. Low Volume Water Use Without Authorization

What's Being Proposed?

The Province is exploring whether, when, or where to allow non-domestic groundwater uses under two cubic metres per day (2 m³/day) without requiring an authorization. This could cover many small groundwater users, like home-based businesses, small commercial operations, camps, public facilities, and small livestock operations. The intention would be to only allow this diversion and use without an authorization within aquifers where water is available.

Impacted Statute(s): Water Sustainability Act and/or Water Sustainability Regulation

Data Reviewed

Total: 132 Surveys: 102 Letters/emails: 17 Opinions from meetings: 13

Overall Opinion on Proposed Change

- Participants generally supported the proposed change provided appropriate safeguards are in place.
- Support was strongest among industry, small-scale agriculture, and local governments.

Support for Proposal

- Participants said that reducing permitting delays would support small businesses, farms, and housing projects by lowering costs and improving project timelines.
- Several supporters said this change would reduce administrative work and help improve food security.

Concerns Raised

- Concerns were raised mainly by First Nations, environmental groups, and qualified professionals. They highlighted risks related to cumulative impacts, enforcement capacity, First Nations rights and increasing pressures from climate change.

- Environmental safeguards were a common concern, with calls for stronger measures to manage drought, protect riparian areas, and support watershed restoration.
- There were also concerns that, without strong safeguards, exemptions could be misused, leading to overuse and ecological harm.
- Many First Nations emphasized the need for meaningful consultation, consent, and recognition of First Nations water laws. They warned that failing to uphold these requirements could conflict with the Declaration Act and constitutional obligations.
- Participants said there isn't enough information about groundwater in many areas. They noted that monitoring is limited and there isn't a complete picture of how much water is available in each watershed. Without this information, it is difficult to know whether exemptions are appropriate or sustainable.
- Participants said that current monitoring and enforcement capacity is not sufficient. Without metering and regular reporting, small withdrawals could go untracked and add up to significant cumulative impacts.
- Several participants asked for clearer information about who would qualify for exemptions. They said clear maps, criteria, and communication are needed so people understand where exemptions apply and what conditions must be met.

Suggestions Received and Other Feedback

- Participants suggested several safeguards. These included mandatory registration with public access to water-use data, metering and regular reporting, and restricting the exemption in areas where water is scarce or sensitive.
- Participants generally supported a tiered approach—such as an exemption for very low-risk use, a simplified authorization for moderate use, and a full authorization for higher-risk use—to balance efficiency with proper oversight.
- Participants emphasized the value of better data. They said notification systems and tools for tracking cumulative impacts would improve transparency and help guide adaptive management.

- There was also interest in education and outreach to help small-scale users understand stewardship responsibilities and adopt sustainable water-use practices.
- Participants also recommended automatic suspension of use during drought or low-flow periods and ensuring First Nations engagement and consent before exemptions are applied.
- Some participants said rules for groundwater should be aligned with surface water regulations so that similar activities are treated consistently.

7. Expediting Existing Use Groundwater Applications

What's Being Proposed?

The Province is considering streamlining the existing use groundwater application review and decision process to clear the application backlog and support business certainty. Specific solutions were not defined. Instead early input was invited to inform direction.

Impacted Statute(s): Water Sustainability Act and/or Water Sustainability Regulation

Data Reviewed

Total: 99 Surveys: 72 Letters/emails: 14 Opinions from meetings: 13

Overall Opinion on Proposed Change

- Participants generally supported efforts to streamline and improve the groundwater application process, provided environmental protections and data quality are not weakened.
- Participants expressed mixed views on the pace of change, with support for faster decisions balanced by caution about risks to groundwater sustainability.

Support for Proposal

- Several respondents said they support improving the efficiency of the process because long delays create uncertainty for households, farms, businesses, and local governments.
- Many respondents agreed that small domestic users and low-risk agricultural users should be able to receive decisions more quickly.

Concerns Raised

- Feedback reflected expectations for a more transparent process, concerns about groundwater sustainability, and differing opinions on how quickly applications should be reviewed.
- Many respondents stated that groundwater supplies are already stressed, and shared concerns about wells and streams drying during summer months.

- Respondents emphasized that better information is needed about aquifers, including improved mapping, monitoring, and reporting on groundwater use.
- Several participants said there is not enough groundwater data or clarity about aquifer capacity or details of the proposed changes. This uncertainty created concerns that streamlining approvals could weaken environmental protections.
- Some respondents raised concerns that expediting applications without adequate review could lead to licences being issued that harm aquifers, surface water, fish habitat, or neighbouring wells.
- Others participants shared that household drinking water should take priority over commercial or industrial uses, especially during drought conditions.
- Some participants called for public hearings or community input before licences are approved, particularly when proposed use could affect local water security.
- The need to incorporate First Nations rights, interests, and knowledge into groundwater decision-making was also raised.

Suggestions Received and Other Feedback

- Several suggestions were offered to help expedite existing use groundwater applications including the use of a risk-based approach that allows low-volume and long-standing uses to be approved more quickly while applying greater scrutiny to large commercial users.
- Participants suggested using batching or contracting out work to help clear the backlog. They said broad, program-wide consultation could help speed up decisions while still making sure all required information is collected.
- Participants recommended mapping and tracking where applications are concentrated so withdrawals can be better managed and decisions can be made more efficiently at a larger scale.
- Some suggested a two-step approach: first, a streamlined intake process to bring all users into the system, followed by regional, batched reviews in water-stressed areas that include engagement with First Nations.
- Many respondents expressed frustration with long delays in processing existing-use applications, including wait times of several years.

8. Streamlining Routine Permitting Requirements for Changes in and about a Stream

What's Being Proposed?

The Province is considering how to move forward with a new approach and support proponents in routine maintenance projects throughout the Province while upholding strong protections for aquatic habitats, public safety, and the surrounding environment.

Impacted Statute(s): Water Sustainability Act

Data Reviewed

Total: 118 Surveys: 86 Letters/emails: 14 Opinions from meetings: 18

Overall Opinion on Proposed Change

- Participants generally supported streamlining, provided it does not weaken protections for water quality, fish habitat, or aquatic ecosystem health.

Support for Proposal

- Many participants said that faster permitting would allow projects to move ahead more quickly, reducing delays that currently last months or even years. They noted this would help meet short seasonal work windows, especially for restoration and flood-mitigation projects.
- Participants expressed that long delays and heavy documentation requirements increase costs for consultants, applicants, and municipalities. Streamlining the process would lower these costs, make small projects more viable, and support investment in infrastructure and restoration work.
- Participants noted that routine maintenance often goes through the same lengthy process as complex projects. They said simplifying permits for low-risk, repetitive tasks would save time and resources for everyone involved.
- Participants also highlighted environmental benefits. They said that faster approvals would help more restoration projects move forward, improving stream and riparian health. Delays can cause organizations to miss seasonal work windows or lose funding, which limits habitat restoration efforts.

- Many said streamlined permitting would also support broader community and economic development, including infrastructure upgrades, housing projects, and flood-risk reduction.

Concerns Raised

- Participants emphasized that efficiency gains are acceptable only if environmental standards are maintained or strengthened.

Suggestions Received and Other Feedback

- Participants supported greater use of qualified professionals to oversee routine work and ensure best management practices are followed consistently. Participants said this approach could maintain environmental standards while reducing delays in the permitting process.
- Some participants recommended a risk-based approach that treats low-risk and high-risk activities differently, allowing simpler steps for routine work and more detailed review for complex projects.
- Several respondents supported expanding eligibility for notification-based processes to include activities like culvert maintenance, small-scale restoration, and emergency works.
- They recommended a risk-based system where the level of oversight depends on the project's size, complexity, and environmental impact. Simple criteria or checklists could help determine whether a project qualifies for a streamlined review.
- Some participants suggested allowing similar or related projects to be grouped under one application to simplify the process and improve efficiency.
- There was broad support for requiring reporting after work is completed so compliance can be confirmed and impacts can be tracked over time.

Other Feedback

- Some respondents encouraged better coordination between provincial, federal, and First Nations processes to reduce duplication. Many suggested that restoration-focused projects should be eligible for faster review.
- Participants said permitting would be more predictable if clear timelines were set for reviews, often suggesting 30 to 90 days. They also asked for

better communication, so applicants know when the review has started and what stage their application is in.

- Some participants said there is confusion about what counts as water use, especially when it comes to temporary diversions, dewatering, or discharges during construction. They asked for clearer definitions to avoid misunderstandings.

9. Low Volume Water Use – Streamlined Authorization Process

What's Being Proposed?

BC. is exploring the development of a streamlined review process for low volume water licence applications so that decisions can be made faster. The proposed process would likely only be for applications for small quantities of water on streams and aquifers where the withdrawal is not expected to have an impact on other authorized water users, on land or other property, and where there are no other significant environmental or cultural concerns. The intent is that only applications on streams or aquifers with enough water supply might be eligible for the streamlined review process.

Impacted Statute(s): Water Sustainability Act

Data Reviewed

Total: 171 Surveys: 153 Letters/emails: 9 Opinions from meetings: 9

Overall Opinion on the Proposed Change

- Participants generally supported the direction of the proposed change, agreeing that permitting processes should be streamlined; however, support was conditional on maintaining strong environmental protections, fairness, and respect for First Nations rights.
- Most participants viewed the proposal as necessary but requiring careful design, particularly to avoid unintended cumulative or regional impacts.

Support for Proposal

- Participants indicated that a streamlined process would provide faster and clearer decision-making, reduce long queues, and ease administrative requirements for small, low-risk uses. Many noted that the current system can involve multi-year waits and considerable uncertainty, and they felt that streamlining would allow efforts to be focused on higher-risk applications.
- Participants noted that urgent, low-risk environmental restoration activities would be well suited to a streamlined pathway. Others highlighted that low-volume needs for bridge and culvert work, dust control, and temporary

construction activities could also be handled more efficiently through streamlining.

- Participants felt that streamlining could help level the playing field for small farms and small businesses, especially where groundwater users currently face more onerous assessment requirements than comparable surface-water users.
- Some participants felt that a more efficient process would encourage compliance among small users who may otherwise abandon applications.

Concerns Raised

- Participants warned that even small water withdrawals can accumulate to create significant impacts, especially in stressed watersheds, if monitoring, aquifer mapping, and cumulative accounting are insufficient.
- Participants raised concerns that even small groundwater withdrawals may reduce stream baseflow during low-flow periods, potentially harming fish and aquatic ecosystems.
- Some participants expressed concern that, without metering or reporting, applicants could exceed low-volume thresholds or attempt to divide a larger use into multiple small authorizations.
- Some licensed water users worried that exemptions or streamlined approvals could undermine their seniority, reduce certainty, or place them at a disadvantage during curtailments.
- Forestry and other sectors cautioned that streamlining should not introduce additional steps or duplicate requirements where existing regulatory frameworks already address water use.

Suggestions Received

- Many participants recommended a risk-based approach, with streamlined processes limited to low-risk areas and flexibility to apply stricter rules in sensitive watersheds.
- Some participants recommended that drought-stressed or highly sensitive watersheds be excluded from streamlined review.

- Participants suggested that approvals should consider seasonal timing, particularly differences between freshet and late-summer low-flow conditions.
- Some participants stated that streamlined authorization should only proceed on an opt-in basis following discussion and agreement with each affected Nation and should not be applied province-wide by default.

Other Feedback

- Participants emphasized climate adaptation, noting that decisions should reflect changing hydrologic conditions and cumulative pressures.
- Many participants stressed the importance of evidence-based decision-making, supported by best available science and the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge.
- Participants highlighted the need for ongoing monitoring and enforcement, noting that efficiencies in permitting must be matched by capacity to safeguard water resources over time.

10. Best Management Practices for Changes in and about a Stream

What's Being Proposed?

In 2022 the Province released updated BMPs for projects involving work in and around streams. Further updates are being considered to address new information and gaps in the application process.

Impacted Statute(s): None

Data Reviewed

Total: 97 Surveys: 74 Letters/emails: 16 Opinions from meetings: 7

Overall Opinion on the Proposed Change

- Participants generally supported the development of new and updated Best Management Practices (BMPs).
- There was broad agreement that existing BMPs are widely used but require updating, clarification, and stronger implementation support.

Support for Proposal

- Participants expressed strong support for developing new BMPs and updating existing ones to reflect current science, innovation, and watershed-based, risk-based approaches.
- Many participants supported updates in principle and noted that greater transparency on the timing and process for releasing updates would increase confidence and uptake.
- Participants identified several existing BMPs they find particularly helpful, including environmental monitoring, reduced-risk timing windows, deleterious substances and spill management, riparian vegetation protection, erosion and sediment control, site restoration and maintenance, general BMPs for changes in and about a stream, temporary works, stream crossing installation and maintenance, bank stabilization techniques, fish and wildlife salvage, and in-stream habitat restoration and vehicle crossing removals and replacements.

Concerns Raised

- Some participants felt existing BMPs are too general, overly flexible, or inconsistently enforced, creating uncertainty about government expectations. Clearer, more prescriptive and region-specific standards were encouraged.
- Gaps were identified in existing BMPs for rare or sensitive features, including ephemeral wetlands, seeps, groundwater-fed streams, and non-fish-bearing waterways.
- The need for Indigenous knowledge and local hydrology to inform BMP updates was noted.

Suggestions Received

- Participants suggested making BMPs more prescriptive and region-specific, supported by clear mandatory standards rather than broad province-wide guidance.
- Clearer definitions of key terms, such as “about a stream,” were requested, along with field-ready guidance and training to reduce ambiguity while maintaining flexibility.
- Additional training opportunities for qualified professionals and practitioners was suggested to clarify roles, responsibilities, and regulatory requirements under the WSA.
- Several participants proposed adding more low-risk activities to Water Sustainability Regulation (WSR) Section 39 to help reduce approval timelines.
- Participants recommended identifying a single, clearly designated regional government contact to provide consistent guidance on BMP interpretation.
- Suggestions were received to develop plain-language materials clarifying which activities fall under the WSA versus RAPR and to remove duplication where possible.
- Some respondents expressed that current work windows and water quality guidelines may not sufficiently accommodate changing weather conditions or safety considerations, recommending greater flexibility in this area and reliance on the guidance of a qualified professional.

- Some participants also encouraged incorporating Indigenous stewardship objectives and improving clarity on what is required versus recommended.
- Additional suggestions included expanding BMP guidance for forestry and private managed forest land contexts, developing BMPs for low-risk and low-complexity works, and creating or updating BMPs related to invasive species management, emergency works, bio-engineered restoration methods, and post-disaster cleanup.

Other Feedback

- Participants emphasized that streamlining processes is important to improve compliance and ensure timely processing and approvals.
- Some respondents indicated that the WSA section 11 notification process is working well, citing responsive staff and realistic conditions.
- Some participants raised concerns about limited monitoring and enforcement, suggesting stronger enforcement mechanisms, greater public transparency, and independent monitoring so requirements apply equally to all proponents.
- Participants expressed confusion related to overlapping requirements under the WSA and the RAPR, including duplication for stream crossings.
- Respondents also suggested greater alignment with DFO standards and codes of practice, improving clarity and protections for riparian buffer areas, and ensuring BMP updates strengthen environmental protection rather than reduce oversight.

11. Managing All Wetland Classes

What's Being Proposed?

The Province is exploring whether to expand the definition of wetlands to include all classes of wetlands (including bogs and shallow-open water wetlands) or designate certain prescribed features.

Impacted Statute(s): Water Sustainability Act

Data Reviewed

Total: 153 Surveys: 112 Letters/emails: 12 Opinions from meetings: 29

Overall Opinion on the Proposed Change

- Participants generally support the proposed change to include bogs and shallow open waters under the definition of wetlands.
- Most participants view the change as positive, necessary, and aligned with ecological priorities, while noting the importance of managing implementation impacts.

Support for Proposal

- Participants consistently stated that including bogs, shallow open waters, and other currently unregulated wetland types would improve consistency, clarity, and fairness in wetland regulation.
- Many participants emphasized that broader inclusion would strengthen protection of ecosystem services such as drinking water, biodiversity, flood mitigation, and habitat for species at risk, including protection of high value seasonal and precipitation fed wetlands.
- Participants noted that regulating all wetland classes in the same way would improve environmental outcomes and make permitting requirements easier to understand and apply.
- Participants expressed strong support for province led training, webinars, and standardized tools to help qualified professionals and landowners apply the requirements consistently and efficiently.

Concerns Raised

- Some participants, particularly from industry, raised concerns that expanding regulated wetland classes could increase permitting requirements, reduce developable land, lengthen approval timelines, and increase project costs.
- Participants stressed that clear transition measures and certainty in implementation will be critical to minimizing disruption.
- Some participants noted the need to clarify how estuarine and tidal wetlands would be treated to avoid gaps or inconsistencies in protection.

Suggestions Received

- Participants recommended developing clear, comprehensive wetland definitions and classification guidance to reduce uncertainty, improve transparency, and support consistent decision making.
- Several participants supported development of a dedicated provincial wetland policy, similar to approaches used in other provinces, including standardized mapping, classification, and functional assessment tools.
- Some participants suggested integrating Indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge into wetland management to support more holistic and culturally informed stewardship.
- Several participants highlighted the importance of public education, noting that increased outreach to landowners, developers, and communities would improve awareness of wetland values and encourage voluntary compliance.
- A shift over time toward value based permitting, focused on wetland function (e.g., hydrology, connectivity, nutrient filtration, cultural values), was suggested as a way to improve outcomes and simplify regulatory understanding.

Other Feedback

- Participants emphasized that clear communication, guidance materials, and early engagement with affected sectors will be essential to building confidence in the new approach and ensuring successful implementation.

12. Strategic Use of Offset Payments to Support Wetland Conservation

What's Being Proposed?

The Province is exploring the use of offset payments for wetlands to support a more consistent and strategic approach to compensation when impacts on wetlands are unavoidable.

Impacted Statute(s): Water Sustainability Act

Data Reviewed

Total: 156 Surveys: 65 Letters/emails: 17 Opinions from meetings: 74

Overall Opinion on Proposed Change

- Participants generally supported the intent of the proposed change, particularly efforts to improve consistency, accountability, and ecological outcomes.
- Support was conditional on strong safeguards, with many participants cautioning that offsetting should remain a last resort and not weaken avoidance and mitigation requirements as part of the mitigation hierarchy.
- Some participants remained skeptical, citing past failures and questioning whether offsetting can reliably deliver net ecological gains.

Support for Proposal

- Participants supported prioritizing avoidance and minimization, with offsetting used only in limited, well-defined circumstances.
- Participants supported like-for-like replacement of wetlands and rejected stormwater ponds as substitutes.
- Participants supported regional offset banks and in lieu payments to improve efficiency and direct funding to higher value restoration, if well governed.
- Participants supported stronger long-term monitoring, clear success criteria, and enforceable accountability mechanisms.

- Participants supported meaningful First Nations involvement across planning, implementation, and monitoring.
- Participants also supported local or regional offsetting approaches to maintain watershed function and enable First Nation and community-led stewardship.

Concerns Raised

- Participants raised concerns that offsetting could result in net loss, fail to replicate ecological function, and repeat failures seen in other jurisdictions.
- Participants expressed concern about inconsistent standards for offset ratios, restoration quality, monitoring, and enforcement.
- Participants identified risks related to pooled funds, weak oversight, unclear responsibility for failed offsets, and low enforcement capacity.
- Participants warned that offsets and in lieu payments could normalize avoidable impacts if not tightly constrained.
- Participants noted limited restoration capacity, lack of shovel ready sites in high-pressure regions, and complex permitting processes.
- Participants emphasized risks to First Nations rights if offsets proceed without consent or affect culturally significant wetlands.
- Participants questioned the reliability of wetland creation and called for more evidence based, ecologically credible restoration approaches.
- Participants also noted uncertainty around eligibility for in-lieu payments, administrative burden, and the need for improved guidance on liability, risk, and performance thresholds.
- Some participants said that offsetting may not be suitable for sensitive, rare, or culturally significant wetlands

Suggestions Received

- Participants suggested focusing offsets at local or regional scales to maintain watershed function.

- Participants recommended targeting degraded wetlands, flood-risk areas, aquifer-stressed regions, and headwaters to deliver climate and resilience benefits.
- Participants suggested a dedicated authority or Crown-led entity to manage funds, ensure expertise, and support long-term stewardship.
- Participants recommended updated guidance, training, and province-wide standards to improve consistency and restoration outcomes.
- Participants suggested improved coordination across ministries, federal agencies, local governments, and land-use planning tools.
- Participants suggested that offset costs and ratios should reflect long-term ecological, climate, and management realities.
- Additional suggestions included strengthening transparency tools, protecting sensitive ecological and cultural information, improving restoration capacity, and integrating offset policy with broader climate resilience and watershed-scale planning.

Other Feedback

- Participants emphasized the need for transparency and public reporting, while protecting sensitive ecological and cultural information.
- Participants highlighted opportunities for local and First Nation-led stewardship.
- Participants also noted potential benefits of long-term funding mechanisms, regional banking, and improved cross-agency coordination to support consistent program delivery.

13. B.C. Wetland Identification and Delineation Manual

What's Being Proposed?

The Province has developed a Wetland Identification and Delineation Manual that aims to 1) standardize wetland delineation practices across B.C.; 2) improve permitting efficiency and consistency; and 3) support better environmental outcomes. The manual is available for review and comment on the Resource Information Standards Committee website, with updates planned for mid-2026.

Impacted Statute(s): None

Data Reviewed

Total: 170 Surveys: 103 Letters/emails: 19 Opinions from meetings: 48

Overall Opinion on Proposed Change

- Overall, participants who provided feedback generally supported the proposed change, particularly the introduction of a standardized wetland identification and delineation approach. Support was strongest where implementation is phased, supported by training, and aligned with existing regulatory frameworks.
- Participants also emphasized that alignment with RAPR, forestry, agriculture, and urban development contexts will be important to ensure consistent expectations and outcomes.

Support for Proposal

- Participants supported adopting a standardized wetland methodology, noting it would improve consistency, clarity, and confidence in decision making across sectors.
- Participants supported a phased rollout, with mandatory use once training, guidance, and capacity are established.
- Participants supported requiring standardized submission of wetland and stream data to improve provincial mapping, planning, and transparency; 59% of survey respondents supported mandatory data submission.

- Participants accepted potential short term increases in time and effort, citing improved quality of information and outcomes as a worthwhile tradeoff.
- There was strong support for accompanying tools such as field templates, digital mapping aids, and a regionally calibrated wetland function assessment tool to support mitigation and offsetting.

Concerns Raised

- Participants raised concerns about practitioner capacity, particularly qualified professional expertise in soils and vegetation.
- Participants expressed concerns about alignment with existing regulations, especially RAPR, and requested clarity to avoid inconsistent expectations and outcomes.
- Participants identified potential equity impacts, including barriers for Indigenous governments, small communities, non-profits, and smaller projects with limited technical or financial resources.
- Participants from forestry and agriculture raised concerns about regulatory uncertainty, unintended burdens, and impacts on land use and food production.
- Some participants preferred retaining the Manual as a best management practice, citing concerns about cost, flexibility, and implementation burden under a mandatory approach.
- Participants also noted uncertainty about how the Manual should apply in areas of disturbance or unique ecosystems, and requested clearer definitions for streams, ephemeral or seasonal features, and wetland functional assessment criteria.

Suggestions Received and Other Feedback

- Participants recommended developing comprehensive training, field tools, templates, and digital mapping supports to accompany implementation.
- Participants suggested developing a transparent, science based, regionally calibrated wetland function assessment tool to support mitigation, restoration, and offsetting.

- Participants requested clearer definitions and sector specific guidance, including for urban and disturbed areas, compliance expectations, and how seasonal or ephemeral features should be addressed.
- Additional suggestions included clarifying how the Manual will interface with *Forest and Range Practices Act* and Agricultural Land Reserve contexts, ensuring wetlands in agricultural areas are assessed appropriately, improving compliance mechanisms (including seasonal timing), and providing additional guidance for coastal, modified, or relic wetlands.
- Some respondents requested stronger alignment with scientific rationale underlying the method and clarity around classification systems referenced in the Manual.

14. Wetland Professional Accountability

What's Being Proposed?

The Province is considering whether to better define the term “qualified professionals” as they relate to wetlands to clarify who should provide professional advice and services related to wetlands and Change Approval applications.

In addition, the Province is considering whether qualified professionals should include an assurance statement in their wetlands’ environmental assessments as a minimum application requirement.

Impacted Statute(s): Water Sustainability Act and Water Sustainability Regulation

Data Reviewed

Total: 147 Surveys: 77 Letters/emails: 14 Opinions from meetings: 56

Overall Opinion on Proposed Change

- Overall, participants who provided feedback generally supported the proposed changes to introduce clearer qualified professional (QP) accountabilities and assurance mechanisms for wetland works.
- Support was conditional, with many participants emphasizing that any new requirements must be practical, risk based and aligned with existing professional governance to avoid unintended impacts on capacity, cost, and equity.

Support for Proposal

- Many participants supported establishing a clear, standardized definition of a wetland qualified professional, noting it would improve clarity, consistency, and confidence for proponents, professionals, and regulators.
- Participants broadly agreed that wetland work should be undertaken by professionals with appropriate wetland specific training and expertise.
- Most participants supported the use of assurance statements, particularly for complex or higher risk projects, as a way to strengthen accountability, transparency, and decision making confidence.

- Participants indicated that pairing a qualified professional definition with assurance statement requirements would strengthen oversight of wetland works.

Concerns Raised

- Some participants, particularly professional regulators, raised concerns that a wetland qualified professional definition could duplicate or overlap existing professional governance under the Professional Governance Act.
- A smaller subset of participants raised liability and legal concerns, including potential unintended consequences for signing qualified professionals and uncertainty around enforcement.
- Participants cautioned that increased administrative requirements could reduce the pool of available qualified professionals, increase costs for proponents, and disproportionately affect rural areas and smaller projects.
- Several participants questioned whether the proposed requirements alone would meaningfully improve accountability without additional compliance and enforcement measures.

Suggestions Received

- Participants recommended a risk-based approach that scales requirements to project complexity and potential impacts, to avoid unnecessary burden for low risk activities.
- Many suggested standardized templates and clear guidance for assurance statements, including direction on appropriate signatories.
- Participants emphasized the need for government supported or low-cost training and certification to address current gaps in wetland specific expertise.
- Phased implementation and transition periods were recommended to allow time for capacity building and adjustment by professionals and proponents.

Other Feedback

- Capacity and equity considerations were a recurring theme, with participants highlighting limited availability of wetland specialists, especially in rural and remote regions.
- Participants noted that clearer accountability frameworks should be supported by auditing, compliance, and enforcement mechanisms, including consequences for working out of scope or providing inaccurate information.

15. Applying the Mitigation Hierarchy for Wetland Activities

What's Being Proposed?

The Province is considering introducing a requirement to demonstrate that all steps of the mitigation hierarchy (avoid, minimize, restore on-site, and offset) are applied and considered for changes in and about wetlands under the WSA. The goal is that applications would describe which reasonable measures were explored to avoid and minimize impacts, before the consideration of restoration on-site. Consideration of offsetting any remaining impacts would be the last step.

Impacted Statute(s): Water Sustainability Act

Data Reviewed

Total: 96 Surveys: 68 Letters/emails: 12 Opinions from meetings: 16

Overall Opinion on Proposed Change

- Participants generally supported the proposed change to require use of the environmental mitigation hierarchy for wetland impacts.
- Most participants viewed the change as consistent with best practices and the existing Environmental Mitigation Policy for B.C., particularly where avoidance and minimization are clearly prioritized.
- While support was strong in principle, participants emphasized that implementation details would determine whether the change improves outcomes without adding unnecessary burden.

Support for Proposal

- Participants broadly supported embedding the mitigation hierarchy into Water Sustainability Act permitting requirements.
- Respondents supported applying the hierarchy to all development affecting wetlands and other natural ecosystems, with avoidance identified as the highest priority.
- Participants noted that the proposal would encourage earlier consideration of impacts, including at the watershed and cumulative effects level, supporting long-term wetland protection.

- Some participants emphasized the importance of integrating Indigenous knowledge, including early engagement and co-development of guidance with First Nations.

Concerns Raised

- Participants stressed that avoidance must remain the priority, noting that compensation wetlands often do not fully replace lost ecological functions.
- Respondents raised concerns that offsets could become a default or “pay to impact” option without strong thresholds, ratios, and safeguards.
- Views were mixed on whether the change would improve permitting efficiency, with some participants concerned it could increase timelines, costs, and administrative burden.
- Concerns were also raised about inconsistent application without clear minimum standards, qualified professional involvement, and training.

Suggestions Received and Other Feedback

- Strong support was expressed for clear, wetland specific guidance and standardized tools to support consistent application of the mitigation hierarchy by proponents and regulators.
- Participants suggested tiered or risk-based approaches to reduce impacts on low-risk projects
- Some suggested that certain high-value or sensitive wetlands should be protected from development entirely.
- Strong recommendations were made for mandatory qualified professional involvement, minimum reporting standards, and province led training for both practitioners and regulators.
- Suggested offset safeguards included high offset ratios, clear eligibility thresholds, advance construction or verification, and alignment with watershed scale planning.
- Participants encouraged linking the mitigation hierarchy with improved wetland mapping, data sharing, and cumulative effects assessment.

16. Streamlining Permitting on Provincial Public Highway Lands

What's Being Proposed?

The Province is exploring opportunities to remove duplicative permitting currently required for linear utility projects crossing Crown land and provincial highway lands owned by the BC Transportation Financing Authority (BCTFA).

Impacted Statute(s): Forest Act

Data Reviewed

Total: 45 Surveys: 42 Letters/emails: 3 Opinions from meetings: N/A - no meetings held for this topic

Overall Opinion on the Proposed Change

- Overall, feedback indicates broad but conditional support for the proposed change.
- Most participants supported streamlining and removing duplication - particularly the idea of "one application and one process"- but emphasized that this support depends on maintaining strong environmental protections, meaningful First Nations consultation, and clear accountability.

Support for Proposal

- Streamlining was seen as a way to reduce delays and costs, especially for routine timber removal and linear projects where regulatory requirements are often repetitive.
- There was strong support for clearer, more predictable timelines and straightforward guidance to make the permitting process easier to navigate.
- Participants supported greater and more consistent reliance on qualified professionals, noting that acceptance of qualified professional reports could significantly improve efficiency.
- Some respondents linked their support to ensuring that local contractors and communities benefit from timber handling and related work associated with projects.

Concerns Raised

- Some participants worried that faster permitting could weaken environmental oversight and increase risks to fish habitat, riparian areas, watershed health, and hydrological function.
- First Nations participants expressed concern that streamlining could undermine First Nations rights, reduce meaningful consultation, and limit opportunities for shared or joint decision-making.
- Some participants feared a loss of accountability, suggesting that a strong focus on efficiency could result in poor contractor practices, greater ecological harm, and reduced transparency in decision-making.
- A number of respondents opposed changes they perceived as deregulation, emphasizing that environmental protection and the public interest must not be compromised by industry pressures.

Suggestions Received

- Many supported removing duplication by creating a single, coordinated or “single-window” process.
- Participants suggested clearer definition and communication on which agency is responsible for which decisions, with predictable roles, timelines, and transparent approval steps across Crown land, private land, and regulatory bodies.
- Some participants recommended increased use of qualified professionals while strengthening professional standards, oversight, and accountability mechanisms.
- Ensuring streamlined processes include early, meaningful, and ongoing First Nations engagement was also suggested.

Other feedback

- Some participants expressed frustration that permitting is often the slowest and most difficult part of project delivery and stated that improvements are urgently needed.
- Some emphasized that efficiency gains should be viewed as a way to improve outcomes for communities and regulators alike, not solely to accelerate development.

Discussion and Conclusion

The public engagement undertaken for the Natural Resource Permitting Improvements initiative provided insights into how B.C.'s permitting framework is experienced by First Nations, interested parties, and the public. Across all engagement streams and topics, participants consistently emphasized the importance of maintaining strong environmental protections while improving the clarity, efficiency, and predictability of permitting processes.

Feedback reflected broad support for the 16 proposed changes. Participants encouraged streamlining of low-impact permitting, strengthened professional accountability, improved guidance and consistency across statutes, and better use of digital tools and data. At the same time, engagement highlighted concerns related to cumulative effects, compliance and enforcement capacity, data gaps, and the need for transparent thresholds and safeguards to ensure environmental and cultural values are protected.

First Nations rights, interests, and knowledge were central considerations throughout the engagement. Participants repeatedly underscored the importance of early and ongoing engagement with First Nations, alignment with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, and the integration of Indigenous knowledge into policy design, decision-making, and monitoring.

This What We Heard Report is not a record of decisions or commitments. Rather, it documents the perspectives shared during engagement and identifies common themes, areas of alignment, and differing viewpoints across the proposed statutory and regulatory changes. The feedback summarized in this report will inform the development, refinement, and sequencing of potential legislative and regulatory updates, as well as implementation considerations such as guidance, training, compliance, and digital services.

The Province is grateful to all participants who contributed their time, expertise, and lived experience. Ongoing dialogue and collaboration will continue as work advances to modernize natural resource permitting in B.C.; supporting environmental stewardship, reconciliation, and economic resilience while building a system that is clear, transparent, and responsive to the needs of communities, rights holders, and practitioners across the province.



Image taken at Chase Creek Falls

Appendix A: Engagement Approach

Engagement on the proposed changes to improve natural resource permitting was carried out through three streams:

1. Consultation and cooperation with First Nations
2. Engagement with the public and interested parties
3. Engagement with provincial government staff

This report summarizes the feedback received from First Nations, the public and a broad range of interested parties, including not-for-profit organizations, industry representatives, developers, local governments, professional regulatory bodies, qualified environmental professionals, environmental conservation groups and academic institutions. Feedback from provincial government staff is not included in the report but is being considered as proposed changes are refined.

Engagement was designed to gather meaningful input on the benefits, opportunities, risks and potential impacts of the non-regulatory, regulatory and legislative changes under consideration. The approach aimed to ensure broad representation from groups and organizations that may be affected by the proposed changes.

The process was guided by principles of transparency, accessibility and inclusivity. A range of engagement options was offered, so all partners had opportunities to participate and share their perspectives.

Feedback gathered through this process was analyzed to identify key themes and considerations. This input will help refine the proposed changes, shape implementation strategies, and inform future regulatory and legislative proposals.

Methods of Engagement

Information about the proposed Natural Resource Permitting Improvements was shared on the Province's [public engagement platform](#) as well as on the [Water Sustainability Act engagement site](#).

Engagement activities included:

1. Large virtual information and discussion sessions,
2. Small, focused virtual meetings, and
3. Email and written correspondence.

Feedback was gathered through:

1. Online surveys (sample provided in **Appendix F**)
2. Comments, questions, and discussions during virtual engagement sessions (captured through transcripts, recordings, and chat tools), and
3. Written submissions.

All requests for additional engagement meetings received during the 12-week engagement period were accommodated.

The following sections describe each engagement method in more detail, including how information was shared and how feedback was collected across all participation pathways.

Online Information and Surveys

To initiate the engagement process, the GovTogetherBC website was updated to share project information and invite written feedback. Updates were also made to the WSA Engagement site to support engagement on proposed WSA changes and to connect with individuals interested in water policy, including subscribers from previous WSA initiatives. In addition, a dedicated public engagement website supporting the Natural Resource Permitting Improvements was launched through the broader GovTogetherBC platform.

This webpage provided an overview of the potential improvements to Natural Resource Permitting along with more detailed information on each of the proposed policy items and included individual survey links to collect detailed feedback on each of the proposed policy items. The surveys were developed by the policy teams and hosted on Microsoft Forms. A link to the survey was included in the invitation to the virtual sessions, and participants were provided with the survey link during the virtual sessions.

Feedback surveys for six of the topics closed on October 17, 2025. Surveys for the remaining topics closed on December 12, 2025. The two timelines were to accommodate the different government processes required for regulatory and legislative changes.

Virtual Engagement Sessions

The Province hosted several virtual information sessions to support open discussion and gather live feedback on the proposed policy changes. Sessions were organized to ensure participation from the sectors most directly affected by each topic.

Each virtual session covered one or more policy opportunities. When additional discussion was needed, the Province scheduled follow-up sessions, including one-on-one meetings between interested parties and policy staff. These conversations helped create space for more detailed, informed dialogue.

Written Submissions

Written feedback was accepted through an email portal, providing an opportunity for interested parties and groups to submit comments beyond the scope of the online surveys. This approach allowed respondents to offer comprehensive input on multiple topics simultaneously.

Appendix B: Analysis Methodology

Input from all engagement pathways was gathered and analyzed together to identify key themes, areas of alignment, and differing perspectives.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used. Survey results were reviewed to identify trends and response patterns, while written and verbal feedback provided deeper insight into participant views.

Online Information and Written Surveys

Responses submitted through online information materials and written surveys were compiled and analyzed. Numerical survey data was assessed for common trends, while open-ended comments were reviewed to identify recurring themes and observations.

Virtual Information Sessions

Feedback from all virtual sessions was documented and analyzed. Questions, comments, and discussion points raised during these sessions were reviewed qualitatively to identify key issues and shared perspectives as well as tracked quantitatively to understand the frequency with which similar suggestions or concerns were raised.

Written Submissions

All written submissions received during the engagement period were reviewed in full. These were analyzed qualitatively and considered alongside survey responses and feedback from virtual sessions to ensure all viewpoints were captured.

Consolidation and Theme Development

Feedback from all engagement methods was brought together for a comprehensive review. Through a combination of manual analysis and thematic review, common themes, areas of agreement, and differing viewpoints were identified. These findings were summarized to reflect the full range of input received across all engagement pathways.

Constraints regarding Analysis Methods

- It was noted that some comments raised through the online surveys were also asked and answered during the webinars, which occasionally led to repetition across the engagement channels.
- There was some duplication of participation with surveys, written responses and webinars,
- Acknowledging variability in engagement timelines, noting that the time available to contribute differed across topics and engagement streams.

Limitations and Clarifying Scope

This report reflects the feedback shared during the engagement period. As participation was voluntary and varied across groups, the findings represent the perspectives of those who chose to take part.

Appendix C: First Nation Participation

Alliance of BC Modern Treaty Nations	Saulteau First Nations
BC Assembly of First Nations	Skowkale First Nation
Blueberry First Nation	Seabird Island
Cheam First Nation	Shíshálh Nation
Citxw Nlaka'pamux Assembly	Shuswap Band
Cowichan Tribes	Stz'uminus First Nation
Gitga'at First Nation	Stswecem'c Xget'tem First Nation
Halat First Nation	Taku River Tlingit First Nation
Kwikwetlem First Nation	Tsay Keh Dene Nation
Kitasoo Xai'xais	Tla'amin Nation
Kitsumkalum First Nation	Tsawout First Nation
K'omoks First Nation	Tsawwassen First Nation
Lower Nicola Indian Band	Tsilhqot'in National Government
Lower Similkameen Indian Band	Ts'kw'aylaxw First Nation
Maa-nulth Treaty Society	Tsleil-Waututh Nation
Malahat Nation	Tsq`escen First Nation (formerly Canim Lake Band)
Metlakatla First Nation	Uchucklesaht Tribe
Musqueam Indian Band	West Moberly First Nations
Namgis First Nation	Williams Lake First Nation
N'Quatqua First Nation	W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council
Prophet River First Nation	Xatsull First Nation

Appendix D: Local Government Participation

Bowen Island Municipality	Metro Vancouver
Capital Regional District	Regional District - Alberni-Clayoquot
City of Abbotsford	Regional District - Bulkley-Nechako
City of Burnaby	Regional District - Central Okanagan
City of Chilliwack	Regional District - Columbia-Shuswap
City of Coquitlam	Regional District - Comox Valley
City of Kelowna	Regional District - Cowichan Valley
City of Langford	Regional District - Mount Waddington
City of Merritt	Regional District - Nanaimo
City of Mission	Regional District - Okanagan-Similkameen
City of Nanaimo	Regional District - Strathcona
City of Port Moody	Resort Municipality of Whistler
City of Richmond	Squamish-Lillooet Regional District
City of Salmon Arm	The Corporation of Delta
City of Surrey	The Corporation of the City of Courtenay
City of Grand Forks	The Corporation of the City of New Westminster
District of Highlands	The Corporation of the City of North Vancouver
District of Hope	The Corporation of the City of Penticton
District of Lake Country	The Corporation of the District of Pitt Meadows
District of Sicamous	The Corporation of the District of Powell River
District of Sooke	The Corporation of the Township of Langley
District of Squamish	The Corporation of the Village of Cumberland
Islands Trust South	Thompson-Nicola Regional District
Islands Trust North	Village of Anmore

Appendix E: Engaged Parties

Type of organization	Participating Organization
Federal Government	Fisheries and Oceans Canada
	Environment and Climate Change Canada
	Canadian Wildlife Service
Local Governments	Union of BC Municipalities
	10 Regional Districts and 38 Local Governments
Industry Associations	BC Hydro
	Greater Vancouver Board of Trade
	Surrey Board of Trade
	BC Council of Forest Industries
	Forest Practices Board
	BC Business Council
	BC Agriculture Council
	BC Cattlemen's Association
	Premier's task force on agriculture and food economy
	BC Groundwater Association
	Mining Association of BC
	Association for Mineral Exploration of BC
	Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers
	Tourism Industry Association of BC
	Outdoor Recreation Council of BC
	Commercial Bear Viewing Association of BC.
	Canadian Home Builders' Association
	Guide Outfitters Association of BC
	BC Builds
	Urban Development Institute
Private Industry	Conwest Developments
	Lorval Developments
	Third Space Properties
	Beedie Industrial
	Cedar Coast
	Hungerford Properties
	Orion Construction
	ConocoPhillips Canada
	Newmont Corporation
	Woodside Energy
	Rubellite Energy
	Ovintiv Canada

	Paramount Resources
	BC Groundwater Consulting Services Ltd.
	Oceanside Engineering Ltd.
	Strathcona Resources Ltd
	ARC Resources Ltd
	Canadian Natural Resources Limited
	CNOOC Petroleum North America
	Maskwa Environmental Consulting
	Owen's Drilling Ltd.
	Shell Canada
	Petronas
	Cenovus
	JRTW Planning Services
	Lacey Construction
	Carrier Lumber Ltd
	Diamond Head Consulting Ltd
	Bluelines Environmental Ltd
	EDI Environmental Dynamics Inc
	AECOM Canada Ltd.
	Qortado Environmental Consulting Inc.
	Aqua-Tex
	Mosaic Forest Management
	Western Forest Products
	Imperial Oil
	Tourmaline Oil Corp
Environmental Non-Government Organizations (ENGOs)	BC Wildlife Federation
	Ducks Unlimited Canada
	Living Lakes Canada
	Coast to Cascades Grizzly Bear Initiative
	Nature Trust of BC
	Veins of Life Watershed Society
Regulatory Agencies and Commissions	Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC
	Association of BC. Forest Professionals
	Engineers and Geoscientists BC
	BC. Institute of Agrologists
	College of Applied Biologists
Academia	UVic (and POLIS Water Sustainability Project)
	Vancouver Island University

Appendix F: Survey Example

Expanding Eligibility for Stream Restoration Activities Survey

1. Which of the following best matches your role or affiliation
 - a. Academia
 - b. Federal government
 - c. First Nation
 - d. First Nation organization
 - e. Industry
 - f. Local government
 - g. Not-for-profit
 - h. Professional regulatory bodies
 - i. Registered professional under the Professional Governance Act
 - j. Regulatory agencies and commissions
 - k. None/other

2. From your perspective, how could expanding eligibility for certain stream restoration activities support Indigenous-led initiatives and stewardship?

3. What qualifications, experience or local knowledge should be required for those designing, implementing or carrying out stream restoration activities?

4. Do you agree that changes are needed to improve permitting for stream restoration and maintenance?
 - a. I agree
 - b. I disagree
 - c. I am undecided

5. Are there specific stream channel, fish habitat restoration, or maintenance activities you believe should be avoided or limited?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know

6. If you answered yes to the question above, please identify the specific stream channel, fish habitat restoration or maintenance activities you believe should be avoided or limited.

7. Please share your perspective on why some stream channel, fish habitat restoration or maintenance activities should be avoided or limited.
8. What, in your mind, is a good way to distinguish between stream restoration and stream maintenance?
9. How might the distinction between stream restoration and stream maintenance affect how activities are planned or regulated?
10. Please use this space to provide your comments, feedback, questions or concerns on expanding eligibility for stream restoration.
11. How did you hear about this survey?
 - a. From an association, organization or community I belong to
 - b. From a friend, colleague or co-worker
 - c. From a government employee
 - d. From the government engagement site
 - e. Other: _____