

MEETING SUMMARY

Columbia Basin Regional Advisory Committee

Ecosystem Function Webinar

Sept. 29, 2020, 12pm – 1:30pm Pacific Time

The Columbia Basin Regional Advisory Committee met on Sept. 29, 2020 by webinar for a special presentation on the ecosystem function work being led by Canadian Columbia Basin Indigenous Nations that is helping inform Canadian negotiating positions on modernizing the Columbia River Treaty.

The session included a review of information presented to CBRAC at its October 2019 meeting, and an update on progress made since. There was time given for questions and answers.

[View the presentation here.](#)

This summary is based on notes taken during the meeting and is meant to give greater context to the slides in the presentation.

Welcome/Canada-U.S. Columbia River Treaty Negotiations and B.C. Provincial Election

Brooke McMurchy, B.C. Columbia River Treaty Team.

Brooke McMurchy welcomed attendees and began the webinar with an acknowledgement of the traditional Indigenous territories that all participants, spread throughout the Canadian Columbia Basin and Victoria, were joining the webinar from.

Brooke then provided the following updates on CBRAC actions, Treaty negotiations and how the B.C. snap election would affect the Province's work on the Treaty:

- She reminded CBRAC that, following Jody Lownds' departure, a new CBRAC citizen member was being sought for Revelstoke, and a decision was expected to be made by the end of October.
- Brooke conveyed that there were no new updates regarding Canada-U.S. negotiations on the Treaty and that the next round has not yet been scheduled.
- Brooke explained that, during the B.C. provincial election, the government is in caretaker mode and that no public engagement will take place until after a new Cabinet is sworn in. Brooke noted that the B.C. Treaty Team will remain in touch with CBRAC members and is hopeful that another webinar will be possible for late November, as planned.

Towards Integrating Ecosystem Function in the Columbia River Treaty – REVIEW

Mark Thomas, Shuswap Indian Band/Shuswap Nation Tribal Council; Nathalie Allard, Ktunaxa Nation Council; Bill Green, Ktunaxa Nation Council; David de Rosa, Okanagan Nation Alliance; Cindy Pearce, Mountain Labyrinths Inc.

Indigenous Cultural Values

- Mark Thomas began by talking about Secwepemc Nation values as they relate to ecosystems, and the impact the Columbia River Treaty has had on Secwepemc traditional lands.
- Mark explained that the priority for the ecosystem function work is to improve ecosystem health for all who live in the Basin. He stressed the importance of considering the whole Basin, and of sustaining healthy fish, wildlife and plant populations.
- Nathalie Allard described the link between cultural and ecosystem connections from the Ktunaxa Nation’s perspective. She described the Ktunaxa peoples’ relationship with the land, noting “What we do to the Earth, we do to ourselves.”
- Nathalie emphasized that Indigenous peoples’ health aligns with healthy ecosystems.
- Mark explained the importance of cultural values work in the process, and pointed out that each Basin Indigenous Nation has a Cultural Values Team that is collecting traditional ecological knowledge information to add to the ecosystem studies, and broader information to develop cultural values performance measures. This information is being collected through document review, interviews with elders and others and community workshops.
- Mark acknowledged that doing this work is challenging in the COVID era and that this has slowed the pace.

Ecosystem Function Review

- Cindy Pearce introduced the next part of the presentation by explaining that one of the reasons this webinar is being held is because, when the ecosystem function draft goals and objectives were shared with CBRAC at its October 2019 meeting, members asked for more time to reflect on the work and the ability to ask questions at a later date. This webinar combines a quick refresher of the October 2019 presentation, an update on work that has been completed since then and the opportunity to ask questions about both.
- Leading the review portion of the webinar, Bill Green spoke next about domestic flexibility. He explained that, under the Treaty, once the water crosses the border, the U.S. can shape its flows as they want; however, Canada/B.C. doesn’t have that flexibility.

- Bill said that seeking more flexibility in a modernized Treaty is a key aim for the Canadian negotiating delegation (Canada, B.C. and Indigenous Nations), so that operations can be developed to better meet B.C.'s objectives.
- Bill clarified that the purpose of the ecosystem function work is to inform the domestic flexibility being negotiated within the Treaty. It is not to define one specific operating scenario to include in the Treaty.
- Bill spoke about the structure in which the Indigenous Nations' Cultural Values Teams give advice to the Ecosystem Function Subcommittee (EF Subcommittee). The EF Subcommittee then provides advice to the Negotiation Advisory Team (includes representatives of Canada, B.C. and Indigenous Nations), which in turn advises the Canadian Negotiating Team.
- Bill shifted to explaining what ecosystems are, and what ecosystem function is. Ecosystems are all the living things in an area, plus the non-living things they depend on. There is a reciprocal relationship between people and the land. He said that ecosystem function improvements support Indigenous values as well as Basin community values.
- Bill said that increasing flexibility in the Treaty for B.C. would allow for the use of active adaptive management to achieve ecosystem goals.
- Mark Thomas spoke next about how people view ecosystems in relation to themselves.
- Indigenous Nations see themselves as part of and dependent on ecosystems, with water at the centre of the ecosystem, to be respected in all its forms. Mark said that a typical western view is to consider water and other ecosystem aspects as commodities.
- Mark reviewed the draft ecosystem function goals that were shared with CBRAC in Oct. 2019. He explained that the draft goals and objectives were developed by synthesizing available information, and were reviewed by provincial, academic and other specialists.
- In addition to sharing these draft goals and objectives with CBRAC last year, they were also shared broadly during the [Province's Treaty community meetings](#) in October and November 2019. Feedback received during these sessions are helping to refine the synthesis of information, and will be used to refine the goals and objectives. The goals and objectives guide where the EF Subcommittee focuses its efforts, and which studies it undertakes, particularly to fill information gaps.

Towards Integrating Ecosystem Function in the Columbia River Treaty – UPDATE

Mark Thomas, Shuswap Indian Band/Shuswap Nation Tribal Council; David de Rosa, Okanagan Nation Alliance; Greg Utzig, Friends of Kootenay Lake and Kutenai Nature Investigations Ltd.; Cindy Pearce, Mountain Labyrinths Inc.

- This portion of the webinar provided an update on how the ecosystem function work has progressed since October 2019.

- Greg Utzig shared a summary of the feedback received at the 2019 meetings, highlighting that most people felt the work was going in the right direction and supported Indigenous leadership.
- The EF Subcommittee has since initiated a number of studies to further explore how to achieve some of the goals and objectives to enhance ecosystem function.
- Greg said the Negotiation Advisory Team has selected a model called OASIS, which will be used to model different dam operation scenarios along the Columbia River to explore how each scenario could enhance or negatively impact riverine and reservoir ecosystems, as well as other interests including power generation, flood risk management and socio-economic objectives. OASIS has been used across North America to model large river systems to support management decision processes. It is being customized for the Columbia River under the guidance of the Model Tech Group, which includes Indigenous Nations, the Province and BC Hydro, and reports to the Negotiations Advisory Team.
- The EF Subcommittee studies will identify performance measures that will be built into this model.
- Greg described three general studies underway by the EF Subcommittee:
 - **Ecosystem Function Traditional Knowledge Collection** is being done by the Cultural Values Teams from each Indigenous Nation through literature review, interviews and community workshops (which have been challenging during COVID times.) The ecosystem studies will incorporate the related traditional ecological knowledge from each Nation when it is available.
 - **Climate Change Info and Guidance** involved four climate science experts who provided a list of key references and two webinars to the study teams. The experts are standing by to answer questions from the teams. The info provided to the study teams will be shared with CBRAC in a webinar planned for January 2021.
 - **Reports and Data Compilation** have almost been completed. Reports related to the studies have been compiled into a searchable database and geospatial data, water survey information and other data has been compiled and made available to all the teams. The database and the non-confidential data will be available to the public through a public data portal hosted at the Selkirk College Geospatial Research Centre.
- Greg then explained that there are nine performance measure studies underway for specific ecosystem elements. He said each study will document how river flows and reservoir levels impact specific ecosystem elements and will recommend performance measures and ideal scenarios to benefit each element. As mentioned above, these performance measures will be input into the OASIS model.

- The studies underway focus on ecosystem productivity, floodplain/riparian/wetlands, riverine and reservoir ecosystems, anadromous species, and overall scenario modelling.
- Dave DeRosa expanded on some of the river and reservoir ecosystems studies – the functional flow study compares the regulated flow from dam operations to pre-dam flows. The other three studies explore the impacts of different river flows and reservoir levels on habitats, spawning tributary access and stranding mortality impacts on fish species.
- Cindy Pearce said that a big part of the work is to develop scenarios with differing flows and reservoir levels that reflect the ecosystems goals, as well as looking at scenarios that would achieve better ecosystem function while supporting Indigenous cultural values. She said the scenario development study is being finalized now that the model is in place.
- Cindy wrapped up the presentation by saying the scenario development work will continue well into 2021.
- The scenarios that enhance ecosystem function and support Indigenous cultural values will be sent to the Negotiation Advisory Team who will use this information to explore scenarios across all goals, including flood risk, power and socio-economic interests.

Closing

Brooke McMurchy, B.C. Columbia River Treaty Team.

- Brooke McMurchy thanked the presenters and all those who asked questions.
- She said summary notes from the webinar would be sent out soon, and that any additional questions could be sent to Anna Kim of the B.C. Treaty Team.
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