

Watershed Security Strategy Intentions Paper - Summary

Government is taking action to protect and sustain water and watersheds in B.C. Healthy watersheds are central to the wellbeing of all living and non-living things. They provide clean, safe, and abundant water for drinking. They contribute to the bounty of wild and farmed food. Healthy watersheds also provide habitat for keystone species, like wild salmon, and are of great cultural and spiritual importance to Indigenous Peoples. Finally, they provide greater safety for communities against climate change.

Without efforts to improve watershed security, our watersheds are at risk from drought, flood, climate change and urban development. The Watershed Security Strategy is responsive to these pressures and will shape the future of watersheds and watershed management in B.C. over the next twenty years. The purpose of the Strategy is to lead the changes needed to create a future where our watersheds are better cared for and stewarded together.

We are now at the mid-way point of developing the Watershed Security Strategy and have developed an Intentions Paper that builds on input from 2022 about watershed security. The Intentions Paper shows where the development of the Strategy is heading. It was written in close collaboration with the B.C.-First Nations Water Table as part of advancing the Province's commitment under the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* Action Plan to co-develop the Watershed Security Strategy.

The Paper reflects the feedback we have heard to date and is organized around five key policy intentions. Each policy intention expresses the outcomes the Province intends to achieve through the final Watershed Security Strategy. Each policy intention is supported by a series of strategic themes and key actions that are being considered for the final Watershed Security Strategy. Please see the Policy Intentions-at-a-glance below.

The Intentions Paper describes how the Strategy may take shape. Each strategic theme is supported by a list of example actions to provide an idea of what outcomes might look like. To see the example actions, please refer to the full Intentions Paper at www.gov.bc.ca/water.

We welcome your feedback on the policy intentions. Any feedback you provide by April 17, 2023 will be included in a What We Heard Report, but we will gladly receive feedback after that date. Thank you for contributing to a better outcome for water and watersheds in B.C.

Policy intentions at a glance

Policy Intention 1: Enable new approaches to watershed governance through inclusion, capacity building and collaboration.

- Enhance local watershed governance
- Support the development of governance structures founded upon principles of mutual recognition, respect, sharing, flexibility, accountability and responsibility with Indigenous Peoples
- Enhance coordination, leadership, and accountability across different levels of government to align decision-making for watersheds

Policy Intention 2: Pursue legislative change, policy development and alignment of laws and policy to be consistent with the UN Declaration.

- Align the *Water Sustainability Act* and new and related policies with the UN Declaration
- Identify opportunities to collaborate with Indigenous Peoples and co-develop policies and procedures about the use of Indigenous knowledge
- Consider legislative change and policy development to improve outcomes for watersheds

Policy Intention 3: Build a strong foundation of watershed science and knowledge that is accessible for use by Indigenous Peoples, local governments and communities.

- Strengthen existing water data and information tools and address gaps in current systems
- Improve understanding of water and watershed use, ecosystem needs and related cumulative effects
- Enhance monitoring and assessment of watershed health to support watershed governance arrangements

Policy Intention 4: Apply holistic approaches to watershed management and ecosystem protection.

- Increase the leadership role of Indigenous Peoples in watershed stewardship and restoration
- Strengthen regulations, standards and policy to protect and prioritize water values in decision-making
- Enhance communication, education and outreach to cultivate a shared understanding of the values and issues that exist within watersheds
- Adopt wild salmon recovery as a key value in watershed planning

Policy Intention 5: Balance water supply and demand (quality and quantity) at the watershed scale to address the needs of people, the environment and the economy.

- Proactively consider and address existing and/or emerging regional pressures and risks
- Develop policy and guidance to promote incentives for water conservation and reallocation
- Develop approaches to meet existing and future demands for humans and requirements for ecosystem health