



BRITISH COLUMBIA  
ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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# Newsletter

BC Assembly of First Nations

Winter/Spring 2024



BCAFN Regional Chief Terry Teegee with Justice Leonard Marchand (Sylx/Okanagan Indian Band) newly appointed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as the Chief Justice of British Columbia.

## Message from Regional Chief Terry Teegee

Chiefs, Leaders, Knowledge Keepers, Elders, Youth, & Community Members,

Hadih! As I begin my third term as the Regional Chief, BCAFN continues its momentum, advancing work on priorities and urgent issues. I travelled to Ottawa last fall in November 2023 to attend the Assembly of First Nations' (AFN) Executive Council meeting where we met with several federal ministers including the Honourable Gary Anandasangaree (Crown-Indigenous Relations), the Honourable Arif Virani (Justice, Attorney General of Canada) and the honourable Patty Hajdu (Indigenous Services).

While I was in Ottawa I also attended the AFN's Chiefs Committee on Economic Development convened with Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) to deliberate on NRCan's National Benefits Sharing Framework, a crucial step towards implementing AFN Resolution 72/2023: *First Nations-Led Procurement Organization and the National Benefits-Sharing Framework*.



In early December 2023, I spent time in Ottawa in preparation for and to participate in the AFN's Special Chiefs Assembly and National Chief Election. I warmly congratulate Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak as she assumes her new role as the National Chief for the Assembly of First Nations. I also want to pay tribute to the other candidates who conducted themselves with integrity and honour throughout the election. I look forward to working with these strong leaders and a united AFN as we progress on vital issues and concerns that First Nations Chiefs have brought forward.

Collaborative efforts between the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC), Premier Eby, and Ministers early this year focused on key areas such as MTA reform, aligning legislation with DRIPA, developing new fiscal models, enhancing emergency management, and addressing the climate crisis.

Additionally, I attended the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs meeting in Treaty One territory, Winnipeg, Manitoba, early in February to strategize on safeguarding First Nations' Rights and provide updates on my AFN portfolios. Later that same week I also participated in the First Nations

Fisheries Council meeting at Harrison Hot Springs, where I met Stu Barnes, the new Executive Director.

I witnessed a significant moment on February 9th with the appointment of Justice Leonard Marchand (Syilx/Okanagan Indian Band) as the Chief Justice of British Columbia by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, marking him as the first Indigenous person to hold this position in BC. On the same day, I updated the United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on the progress of implementing UNDRIP as provincial and federal law at the University of British Columbia.

I was honoured to speak at the AFN & First Peoples Wellness Circle: National Gathering for Indian Residential School Survivors event held in Vancouver last month.

I also joined leaders and change-makers at the Globe Forum 24 in Vancouver, discussing the changing climate to accelerate solutions for a regenerative, resilient, net-zero economy.

I am deeply disappointed by the BC government's postponement of the introduction of amendments to the *Land Act*. This is work that would contribute to commitments made five years ago to align provincial legislation to the minimum human rights standards set out in the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous*



*Peoples Act*. There is a significant lack of understanding among the public, including many local government, industry, and non-governmental organization leaders, regarding Indigenous human rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Declaration Act. BC First Nations have persistently advocated for acknowledging their fundamental human rights. It is unjust that they are burdened with the responsibility of educating every British Columbian and individual traversing their territories about these rights and decisions, such as the agreement to shared decision-making, which have already been established and unanimously supported by all members of the Legislative Assembly. It is high time that the ignorance of others does not supersede our rights.

Check out further updates and highlights of recent work advanced on priority areas and issues by BCAFN in this newsletter. Mussi cho!



## Economic Development

The BCAFN was honoured to hold the annual Economic Development Forum in the shared territories of the Squamish and Lil'Wat Nations in Whistler, BC. Held from October 16th to 18th, 2023, the Forum brought together First Nations, Government, and Industry in the Squamish Lil'Wat Cultural Centre to celebrate best practices and share innovative ideas. The event served as the official launch of the BC First Nations Centre of Excellence.

Over the last two years, the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN) worked to execute Resolution 31/2021: A BC First Nations Centre Of Excellence For Economic Development. The BCAFN secured funding for the Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Q4 of FY 22/23 from the Ministry of Jobs, Economic Diversification, and Innovation, with a total allocation of \$3.097 million. The funding is provided over three fiscal years as start-up capital to develop the CoE as a dedicated First Nations organization solely focusing on economic development. The CoE will have strong ties to the BCAFN through governance and relationships and report to the Chiefs in the Assembly Bi-Annually at the Special Chiefs Assembly and the Annual General Assembly. The BCAFN is proud to welcome Harlan Schilling (CEO), Gordon Campbell (CFO), and Katie Robertson (EA) as the CoE team.

The BCAFN economic development team continues to implement economic initiatives as directed by the Chiefs in the Assembly, our Board of Directors and from feedback from First Nations citizens. Vital work areas include trade, provincial procurement, food sovereignty and security, sustainable development, and the gamut of sectors found in BC. The BCAFN continues to advocate for policy changes and solutions-based action to address the gaps in the economic well-being of First Nations.

On the invitation of Forest Innovation Investment and Minister Ralston (Minister of Forests), the BCAFN sent a delegation on the Canada Wood Trade Mission to Japan from December 10th to 14th, 2023. Four delegates were in attendance, led by Chief Lynda Price on behalf of Regional Chief Teegee, the BCAFN, and Harlan Schilling from the CoE. The mission provided the opportunity to connect with Canadian and Japanese companies, governments, and other First Nations delegates. After the mission program, the delegates travelled to Hokkaido to tour the Upopoy National Ainu Museum and meet with the Shiraoi Ainu Association. It was a historic first step in creating a relationship with the Indigenous peoples of Japan.



BCAFN Board Member Chief Lynda Price accepts a gift from hosts during the Canada Wood Trade Mission in December 2023.

## BC First Nations Centre of Excellence in Economic Development



# FIRST NATIONS Centre of Excellence

We are thrilled to share the latest developments from the First Nations Centre of Excellence (FNCOE). Here's what's been happening:

Since its launch in October 2023, the FNCOE team has expanded, now boasting a team of three full-time staff members. Led by Harlan Schilling as CEO, and supported by Katie Robertson as Executive Assistant; we are excited to introduce our newest team member, Gordon Campbell, who joins us as CFO. We anticipate further growth as we aim to add a policy analyst to our team in the coming months.

Recently, the FNCOE team participated in the Canada Wood Provincial Forestry trade mission to Japan, where we had the opportunity to bridge connections with both industry and government officials. This experience allowed us to explore potential partnerships and opportunities for collaboration, laying the groundwork for future initiatives. The FNCOE team has also had the opportunity to attend the BCAFN Housing Forum, the AME Round-up and the Globe Forum in Vancouver, where our CEO, Harlan Schilling, spoke as part of a panel on Lands and Water stewardship.

The FNCOE has also embarked on the initial phases of our strategic planning process, defining five key areas

of focus for the FNCOE over the next five years. These areas include:

1. First Nations International Trade Relations: Enhancing global trade opportunities for First Nations through missions, negotiations, and market representation.
2. Knowledge Sharing and Best Practices: Fostering learning and innovation through forums, speaker series, and conferences.
3. Communications and Promotions: Increasing awareness and support for First Nations economic initiatives through strategic communication and promotion.
4. Service Delivery to First Nations Companies: Providing essential support and resources for First Nations businesses to thrive, partner, and brand effectively.
5. Exploring the feasibility of a First Nations Sovereign Wealth Fund: Establishing a Sovereign Wealth Fund to secure financial stability and long-term prosperity for First Nations communities.

Additionally, the FNCOE has established a brand identity and is gearing up to launch a new website next month. We invite you to stay tuned for updates and announcements as we continue to make strides in advancing economic development initiatives for First Nations communities.



## Non-medical Cannabis Legalization and Regulation

Over the past year, the BCAFN has continued to advance BC First Nations title and rights in regard to cannabis, consistently emphasizing colonial governments' obligations to respect jurisdiction and joint decision-making process. The BCAFN continues to work as part of the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) and FNLC Joint Cannabis Working Group to advance collaborative discussions between First Nations and the provincial and federal governments on jurisdiction.

The FNLC has been engaged with the BC Cannabis Secretariat (BCCS) in a step-by-step process towards advancing Declaration Act Action Plan action 4.47 and co-developing the key pieces necessary for legislative reforms, including a Request for Decision (RFD). The initial goal for submission of the RFD to Cabinet was for November 2023, and while we have worked in good faith to advance the process, the challenges for development have resulted in a reset of the process as of September 2023. We requested this reset to allow us to complete the foundational elements that are required to set us on a good path and meet the standards set under the Interim Approach.

While we were optimistic that this reset would allow us to co-develop the process more effectively, the window for submission of the RFD closed due to our inability to move the province in an expeditious way. Furthermore, both the ADM and the Director of Indigenous Government Relations for the BC Cannabis Secretariat left their positions in December of 2023. We were informed of the Director's replacement on February 7th, 2024, and understand that the new Director will take some time to be up on the file.

Once the Reset has begun, the FNLC Cannabis Working Group and Technical Staff will continue to advance the key areas of the BC First Nations Cannabis Strategy Framework, which First Nation Chiefs and Leaders in BC provided in-principal support for through Resolution 09/2022. The 6 priority areas identified in the framework are:

1. The recognition of inherent jurisdiction over cannabis;
2. Cannabis taxation and revenue sharing jurisdiction;

3. Support First Nations cannabis businesses and entrepreneurs;
4. Prioritize community safety;
5. Strengthen health and wellness advocacy work through First Nations institutions and,
6. The necessary infrastructure, institutions and other supportive resources are required to be successful in the Cannabis market.

The final Strategy Report has just been completed, January 2024, and exists as a resource for First Nations and to strengthen the FNLC's advocacy. The Action Items and Priorities for advancing the Strategy are in progress. It is anticipated that this final draft Strategy will be brought to the Chiefs in Assembly for consideration in early 2024.

In January 2024, the final meeting with the Expert Panel, tasked with engaging First Nations in the review of the Cannabis Act, occurred virtually and was attended by the AFN Chiefs Committee on Cannabis. However, Regional Chief Teegee no longer holds the Cannabis Portfolio for the AFN and is, therefore, no longer the Co-Chair of the AFN Chiefs Committee on Cannabis. Before this change was made, the Regional Chief and the Committee met with the Expert Panel after reviewing the release of their initial report. BC First Nations voices were captured throughout this process with a focus on jurisdiction, economic participation, taxation, safety, traditional use and health. The Panel has now taken all the information and will be tabling a final report with recommendations to Health Canada sometime on or before March 31st, 2024. Regional Chief Teegee has been very supportive of this portfolio and the objectives that have been identified by the BC First Nation Leadership. His official absence of the file will be noted, but we expect his continued support of our efforts to align laws, advance jurisdiction, and promote economic opportunities for BC First Nations.

In fall 2022, the FNS, BCAFN, the province of BC, and the federal government launched the BC Indigenous Cannabis Business Fund, which will deliver \$9.75 million for First Nations cannabis-related activities over 3 years – 2023 to 2025. This fund is administered by the New Relationship Trust in partnership with three Aboriginal

Financial Institutions. Funds continue to be available for community engagement, the development of business plans, as well as capital grants of up to \$250,000. Path-finding supports are also available through the New Relationship Trust.

Fourteen months into the process, the uptake has been slow as the funding requirements are similar to institutional lending criteria. As such, FNLC Cannabis Policy Analyst Marc Storms has been working directly with the NRT to bridge this gap by providing direct navigational services to applicants, as well as working with the Aboriginal Financial institutions to review the criteria for lending.

As of now, 8 projects have been approved for funding, and five more are “in progress” for expected approval,

amounting to \$2,394,000 in grant commitments. In most of those cases, the AFI is waiting for documentation from the applicant to move ahead with the file. The funding from the Province, including a top-up addition received in April 2023, in addition to Canada’s portion that has been received thus far, is being carried forward to this fiscal year. A total of 91 applications have been received since the fund was launched in December 2022.

This Fund is an example of positive, tangible collaboration to support challenges in accessing capital; however, there remains much more substantive work to be done on a wide range of First Nations’ interests, including jurisdiction, health, safety, traditional use, taxation, and economic development.



## Women’s Representative Update

Louisa Housty Jones  
Heiltsuk Nation

Greetings Chiefs and Councillors! My name is Louisa Housty-Jones. I come from the Heiltsuk Nation, where I also serve on the Council. I am passionate about the wellness and leadership of women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, and I am honoured to continue working for safety, justice, and equity for First Nations women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

Earlier this year, I was grateful to attend the BCAFN Women Chiefs and Leaders Caucus Meeting. At this event, I spoke about the importance of bringing together Indigenous women from all over BC to discuss their experiences as leaders and priorities within their communities and how it is significant to recognize that Indigenous women face many barriers in order to reach leadership positions. At gatherings like this, I continue to learn more about these barriers in order to help address and create the change needed to increase the

number of leaders who are women and support future leaders. As the BCAFN Women’s Representative, my passion is to uplift the voices of women who overcome all odds and dedicate their time to their communities.

I regularly participate in the AFN Women’s Council and meetings on issues related to the province’s implementation of the Calls for Justice and Policing. AFN Women’s Council meetings include advocating for their identified priorities and strategizing how to mobilize action on the Calls for Justice. I continue to look forward to bringing our regional priorities forward in these discussions. You can find more in-depth updates on all of the activities within my portfolio under specific sections in this newsletter. As always, please feel free to connect with me at any time. I believe we are stronger when we work together. The support of our political leadership is so important to bringing about transformative change.



## 2SLGBTQQIA+ Representative Update

Orene Askew  
Squamish Nation

Hello! I am a proud Afro-Indigenous and 2-Spirit person who also brings my experiences as a previous Councillor for the Squamish Nation and my current role as a DJ and motivational speaker. As the BCAFN 2SLGBTQQIA+ Representative, I continue to advocate for the creation of safe spaces for 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples in First Nation communities.

In August of 2023, I presented the second draft of the BCAFN Women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Strategic Action Plan during BCAFN virtual engagement sessions on the plan. This allowed me to report to former contributors on how we implemented their feedback from the 2022 and 2023 Women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Dialogue Sessions. As the BCAFN 2SLGBTQQIA+ Representative, this feedback is important as it helps guide advocacy mechanisms and pathways to create safe spaces for all Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples. In October, I was appreciative to attend a meeting with the AFN 2SLGBTQQIA+ Council and the RCMP on the National Pathway for Reconciliation. This meeting was an important step in fostering a relationship between the two entities. Although this meeting was in the right direction, the RCMP needs to do more regarding policing reform and protecting all Indigenous peoples across the country by rebuilding their integrity and trust within communities.

I additionally attend the AFN joint 2SLGBTQQIA+ and Women's Council meeting in Winnipeg, Manitoba, from the 25th to the 26th of October. The first day proceeded with adopting the council's newly drafted Terms of Reference, current events, and the BCAFN Resolution to work alongside the side of TransCare BC in their initiative, as noted in the 2023 BCAFN AMG in September. On the final day of the joint AFN Council meeting, AFN Staff provided updates on GBA+ work, the next steps for connecting with RCMP, CIRNA Roundtable and Red Dress Alert, Calls for

Justice Working Group, and finally the Ministerial Special Representative Interim Report.

Most recently, I was grateful to attend the BCAFN Women Chiefs and Leaders Caucus Meeting. This meeting was a space for women and gender-diverse people in leadership roles to learn from the experiences of others and share best practices. I attend to speak on behalf of leaders who belong to the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community and their leadership roles in the community and to advocate for First Nation women also to include 2SLGBTQQIA+ mandates within their programs and the good they continue to do.

This past month, I was honoured to attend the I attend the National Indigenous-Federal-Provincial-Territorial Roundtable on MMIWG and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Peoples from February 7-8th, 2024. Various federal ministers across Canada attended this meeting, and I was also able to advocate for the Red Dress Alert and the implementation and accountability related to the Calls for Justice. Specifically, I noted the government of BC's presentation on the Path Forward and the Path Forward Community Fund. I also mentioned an appreciation that BC's Path Forward prioritized the recommendations coming from families, survivors, and advocates engaged in 2019. I felt that this point was important to make as the Federal Government has yet to provide survivors and families with an updated progress report regarding their role in implementing the Calls for Justice.

Finally, as we close this fiscal year, I was privileged to attend the National Wellness Gathering for Indian Residential School Survivors hosted by the Assembly of First Nations and First Peoples Wellness Circle. During this time, it was also important to me that I attend the 33rd Annual February 14th Women's Memorial March. This march is a form of awareness for missing and murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+



peoples as it not only gives space for remember lost loved ones but to start further conversations on what work is being done and where we need to address gaps.

Overall, it has been an eventful time advocating for and alongside First Nation 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples in BC. I'm grateful for the opportunity to showcase the good work that is happening and to attend events hosted by other Indigenous and 2SLGBTQQIA+ societies and organizations to advocate, build connections, and learn. During each of the events I have learned something new and gained further understanding and insight into the collective, yet diverse priorities of First Nations 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. I look forward to strengthening these relationships and integrating these priorities into BCAFN's advocacy moving forward.



## Women/Gender-Diverse/2SLGBTQQIA+ Initiatives

BCAFN hosted the 2024 Women Chiefs and Leaders Caucus Meeting, on January 19th, 2024, on the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) territories. We were grateful to be welcomed to the territories by Musqueam Councillor Allyson Fraser and Squamish elder Carla George, both of whom share beautiful words. The purpose of this meeting was to learn from the shared experiences of First Nations women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ leaders. We were also guided throughout the day by Co-Chairs, Chief Lynda Price and Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir. They not only kept

the event on schedule but were excellent at creating a safe and inclusive environment with their words, actions, the importance of confidentiality, and recognizing that we all have a sacred role.

This meeting had a full schedule, we began the day with opening remarks from Louisa Housty-Jones, BCAFN Women Representative, Orene Askew, BCAFN 2SLGBTQQIA+ Representative, and Crystal Lewis, the BCAN Female Youth Representative. Each spoke to the purpose of the day and the role of women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ leaders within First Nation Communities.



The meeting included two keynote addresses, the first from Elaine Alec, who shared how the Cultivating Safe Spaces Framework has become one of the most sought-after trainings for companies, communities, and governments to support the well-being, inclusion, freedom, and validation of their staff, community members, clients, and leadership and how she utilized the framework as the map for leadership and business growth and decision-making. The second keynote address was from Yakawilas Coreen Child who shared her experience in leadership and the role of culture and language in the reclamation of women's roles within First Nations communities. Both Keynotes helped set the day's tone by recognizing the diverse pathways Indigenous women leaders have traveled and how to overcome challenges. The second draft of the BCAFN strategic action plan was also shared during the meeting. In the afternoon, leaders were given space during roundtable discussions to network and share with each other about the challenges, experiences, expectations, priorities, and vision related to their roles. This section was again guided by Co-Chairs who facilitated discussions and a section for smaller groups to report back on their discussions.

The feedback and comments will be used to help further BCAFN Advocacy regarding how to support and increase the number of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ leaders. The final dialogue of the day was the Panel on First Nation Women leading UNDRIP Implementation, which was led by Cheryl Casimer, Political Executive, First Nations Summit who is a citizen of the Ktunaxa Nation and lives in her community of Aqam and Chief Marilyn Slett who is a citizen of Heiltsuk Nation and the elected Chief Councillor of the Heiltsuk Tribal Council. Both leaders shared information that help equip Chiefs and leaders for this work and help First Nations collectively shape UNDRIP implementation processes to ensure the rights and well-being of First Nations women are advanced through this work.

BCAFN would like to extend a thank you to IRSSS Elder Cultural Support Worker, Gertrude Pierre, Musqueam Councillor Allyson Fraser and Squamish elder Carla George, Co-Chairs Chief Lynda Price and Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir, keynote speakers Elaine Alec and Yakawilas Coreen Child for contributing to the day. Finally, a thank you to all the leaders who attended and actively participated in this meeting your voices will carry forward BCAFN's advocacy.



## First Nations Approaches to Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)

BCAFN continues to implement Resolution 01/2022 Intersectional Advocacy and Capacity Building Grounded in First Nations Knowledges that was passed by Chiefs-in-Assembly on March 9-10th 2022. BCAFN is diligently working with facilitators Chastity Davis Alphonse and Dr. Natalie Clark, to pilot the draft toolkit. The pilot project with the T̓silhqot̓in Women's Council started in July 2024 and will be complete by March 31, 2024. The T̓silhqot̓in Women's Council work is informing the development of a toolkit that centres on First Nations approaches to justice, equity, inclusion, and intersectionality. The toolkit also speaks to the importance of bringing back our traditional First Nation ways of being and knowing about inclusion in our community structures. That everyone had a role, responsibility, and accountability to the community. The final toolkit and learnings from the pilot will be shared via a webinar in March 2024.

## Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2-Spirit +

BCAFN staff also continue to meet regularly with provincial officials responsible for coordinating the province's response to the Calls for Justice. The BCAFN 2SLGBTQQIA+ representative, along with BCAFN Staff, attend the FPTI Roundtable on MMIWG2S+ from February 7-8, 2024, via Zoom. During this meeting, we heard opening remarks from Minister Gary Anandasangaree, Minister Nahanni Fontaine, and Hilda Anderson-Pyrz. All attendees listened to the report back on the Red Dress Alert by Sandra DeLaronde, and Hilda Anderson-Pyrz, along with the support of MP Gazan and MP Damoff. Once their presentation was completed, break out the session began on the Red Dress Alert. During the breakout session, Indigenous organizations and others provided recommendations. BCAFN shared many recommendations, but the following are two examples supported by First Nations in BC. The first recommendation by BCAFN was that the alert system should be in place for all Indigenous people, not exclusively women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. The second recommendation, is that the public alert should be implemented through a multipronged approach using intrusive broadcast alerts, non-intrusive alerts, as well as a form of a mass notification system or application-based system. Although time was limited, BCAFN spoke from a regional perspective and acknowledged that there are further discussions to be had on the Red Dress Alert. To conclude, it was clear that a Red Dress Alert is supported

by those who attended the meeting but that a pilot must be done before the Alert becomes public. Therefore, BCAFN will continue to be a part of the discussion on the Red Dress Alert and the proposed Pilot.

The Second day was regarding implementation and accountability related to the Calls for Justice. During this time BCAFN 2SLGBTQQIA+ Representative spoke the appreciation that BC's Path Forward prioritized the recommendations coming from families, survivors, and advocates engaged in 2019. As well as establishment of the Path Forward Community Fund, that is based on supporting communities self-determined community safety priorities, which is an important aspect of preventing harm and restoring wellbeing. At the same time, BCAFN also recognize the need for an action plan with more systemic, specific concrete actions, goals, timeframes, and measurement indicators that will help evaluate progress. To wrap up day two, Ministers' and Indigenous leadership shared their views and thoughts on what was learned as well as best practices within their jurisdiction. Ministers and Indigenous leadership were also invited to share their initial reactions. Where some elaborated on how they are advancing efforts on their respective plans noting any new or emerging priorities or areas of focus.



Sempulyan, BCAFN 2SLGBTQQIA+ Knowledge Keeper rep and Regional Chief Terry Teegee at the Vancouver Women's Memorial March 14th event.



Chief Priscilla Mueller, Saikuz First Nation, speaks at the Prince George Court House at the Women's Memorial March event.



Crystal Starr-Lewis  
Squamish Nation-Swxwú7mesh Úxwumixw

Kyle Alec  
Syilx (Okanagan) Nation

## Youth Representative Update

BCAFN welcomes two newly appointed Youth Representatives - Kyle Alec and Crystal Lewis - both of whom will be serve their first terms. BCAFN sends gratitude to the outgoing BCAFN Youth Representative, Taylor Behn-Tsakoza for her strong leadership and voice on behalf of First Nations youth over her past three-year term.

Kyle is from the Syilx (Okanagan) Nation and Secwepemc (Shuswap) Nation and is a member of the Penticton Indian Band in Southern British Columbia. Kyle also served for a short time on council for the Penticton Indian Band, Kyle grew up in the Indigenous planning world and specializes in facilitating enowkinwixw process for decision-making and planning. He has experience working through strategy sessions in governance and community planning, facilitation and co-facilitation of workshops dealing with multigenerational trauma, healing, goal-setting and visioning, and event coordination.

Crystal comes from the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) and lives on the ancestral lands of the Kwikwetlem First Nations. Crystal's passion is centred in advocacy on climate action and climate justice, social justice, cultural revitalization, reconcili-action, and youth in care.

In acclimating to their new roles, Kyle and Crystal both attended the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly in Ottawa in December, representing BCAFN at the National Youth Council. In recent months, Kyle and Crystal have been working with BCAFN staff to organize and lead the 2024 BCAFN Youth Forum which will be held on March 25 - 26, 2024 at the Westin Wall Centre, Richmond on Musqueam territories. Crystal and Kyle look forward to engaging with their fellow youth from across BC. For more information please [visit](#)

## Children and Families

Recently, there have been some significant shifts and successes related to the resumption of First Nations jurisdiction over our children and families. On Feb. 9, 2024 the Supreme Court of Canada issued a long-awaited decision upholding the *Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families*. The decision upholds the constitutionality of the entirety of the Act including: the national minimum standards, Parliament's affirmation that the inherent right to self-government includes jurisdiction over Indigenous children and families and the framework designed to facilitate the ability of First Nations to exercise that right. The Act is intended to address the harmful impacts of the child welfare system on First Nation families. The FNLC intervened in this case and argued that the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* affirms the right to self-determination and that the *Declaration* represents binding international law. As a result, section 35 of the Constitution should be interpreted broadly as including the right to self-determination, which the Court upheld.

With respect to child welfare reform and compensation related to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) which found that Canada was discriminating against First Nations children and families under the FNCFS program and its application of Jordan's principle there continues to be ongoing negotiations and engagements related to distribution of the \$23.24 billion. With the establishment of the Settlement Implementation Committee, there continues to be discussions related to the protocol which would govern the distribution process of the settlement monies.

We continue to advocate for BC First Nations in interests and priorities at the Tripartite Working Group table, including supporting First Nations that are working with governments to develop and implement coordination agreements to deliver models that are specific for the Indigenous Governing Body. The TWG is also working towards long term reform funding models through the fiscal framework development team and the installation of an Indigenous Child Welfare Director that will provide

guidance in Indigenous child welfare matters and to ensure delivery of services between Indigenous and provincial laws.

We look forward to an All Chiefs Meeting in the near future to discuss this and all matters related to child welfare legislation and policies that are impacting First Nations in BC. Stay tuned for dates.



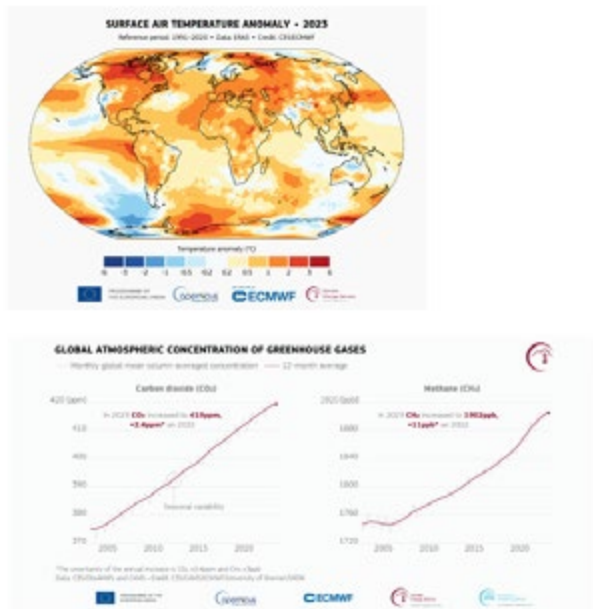
## Climate Emergency

We welcomed 2024 with more weather anomalies for British Columbia due to climate change. This winter has been unusually dry and warm. The provincial snowpack was very low, averaging 39% below normal across BC, and the Fraser River was 38% below its normal capacity for February. This situation, combined with seasonal runoff and warm weather forecasts, creates a significant drought scenario for this upcoming spring and summer, exacerbating wildfire hazards.

The impacts of climate change will persist and intensify as the global mean temperature escalates, propelled by the steady rise in the global atmospheric concentration of greenhouse (GHG) gases. Current and future efforts to adapt to climate change will be insufficient if climate action does not address the root causes of this crisis.



For the last twelve months (Feb 2023 – Jan 2024), the global mean temperature was the highest on record, at 1.52°C above the pre-industrial average (1850-1900). Greenhouse gas concentrations in 2023 reached the highest levels ever recorded in the atmosphere.



### Spiritual Knowledge Keepers Gathering on Climate Change

To discuss the causes of the climate crisis, BCAFN and Chief Darrell Bob (Xaxli'p First Nation) hosted a Spiritual Knowledge Keeper Gathering on Climate Change on Tsleil-Waututh territory in November 2023. Over the course of two days, Spiritual Knowledge Keepers from what is known as British Columbia came together in Ceremony to share stories, songs, visions and discuss the underlying causes of climate change and its profound impacts on the Land and all living beings. Over 80 Observers from Provincial and Federal governments, First Nations, organizations, academia, and interested parties were invited to witness the ceremony.

For the Knowledge Keepers, climate change, as we know it today, is a symptom of a larger problem that is deeply rooted in the disconnection between people and nature. The problem is human greed and to have placed ourselves above other beings in a hierarchy of existence. This disconnection has resulted in ecological imbalances and destruction, perpetuating ongoing injustices. Understanding and recognizing the causes of climate

change would result in real solutions to tackle the crisis.

“As the world keeps edging into the path of destruction, it has become clearer to me that Indigenous knowledge must now be a part of the equation in mitigating irreversible destruction.... Modern science cannot do it alone because it has no conscience and is indeed the origin of unimaginable force and power that reaps the whirlwind when not managed properly. Solving this crisis doesn't start in science, it starts in our hearts”  
- Dr. Robert Joseph, BCAFN Knowledge Keeper

“Our teachings focus on relationships. Relationships between people, but also relationships between ourselves and the whole of creation...The government is divided into siloes, and we need to break down those divisions and re-establish relationships. Mother Earth is not divided – she connects us all; what we do to one, we do to all; what impacts one impacts all. To address climate change, we need to come together, intertwined.” Chief Darrell Bob, Xaxli'p First Nation.

The Knowledge Keepers shared that when each of us heals, everything heals, too; if we heal, the Earth heals. The gathering was a means for Knowledge Keepers and Observers to heal and be inspired with motivation and determination to take responsibility and care for the lands and waters for future generations. The gathering left powerful teachings with observers to move forward with the next steps in their workspaces and personal lives.



BCAFN worked with Naqsmist to produce a [What We Heard Report](#), and a documentary-style video that will be released in the coming weeks. The report presents the Knowledge Keepers's mandate distributed into fourteen actions to guide our policy work. BCAFN is advocating and working towards facilitating more Spiritual Knowledge Keepers gatherings across BC to bring **culture, language, ceremony and natural laws** into climate action.



### First Nations Forest Carbon Toolkit

To support reducing GHG emissions in a way that aligns with First Nations conservation and economic priorities, BCAFN and Ecotrust Canada developed the [First Nations Forest Carbon Toolkit](#). The toolkit aims to enrich First Nations' capacity to engage in forest carbon projects by providing capacity tools tailored to First Nations in BC. The toolkit features five learning modules and Project Idea Note Builder, designed to facilitate the practical application of the toolkit's information in planning on-the-ground carbon projects. To learn about the toolkit, visit the [toolkit website](#).

# International Women's Day

March 8, 2024



BRITISH COLUMBIA  
ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS



Participating in break-out dialogue groups at the Women Chiefs & Leaders Caucus Meeting held in October 2023.



## Water

### Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act Repeal and Replacement

Bill C-61 (First Nations Clean Water Act) was introduced into parliament on December 11, 2023, and is currently in Second Reading in the House of Commons. BCAFN shared a preliminary legal analysis of the draft legislation which can be viewed [here](#).

A first draft of the proposed legislation was released in mid-February 2023 for feedback from Rights and Titleholders. BCAFN hosted a hybrid Engagement Session on February 27, 2023, to discuss ISC's draft proposed legislation and developed a [What We Heard Report, including a legal analysis and formal submission to Indigenous Services Canada](#) in March 2023.

BCAFN has been mandated to support the next steps of the implementation of the Act through [Resolution 27/2023](#), which states, "The BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly call on Indigenous Services Canada to work in full co-development with BCAFN on the implementation of the Act, if successful, including, at a minimum, the creation of the First Nations Water Commission, the development of a funding framework and the development of drinking water and wastewater quality standards." Pursuant to this mandate, BCAFN submitted and successfully received funding from ISC to promote and accelerate First Nations' participation in the critical next steps of the Act and facilitate, where possible, avenues to enhance free, prior and informed consent through information sharing, establishing mechanisms for co-development frameworks for First Nations throughout the implementation of the Act.

Further engagement will be planned with Chiefs and technicians in Spring 2024 to discuss the draft legislation, next steps in addition to resources and information BCAFN seeks to develop for rights holders with respect to the next steps of the Act implementation. Further information will soon be available at [events.bcafn.ca](#).

### Safe Drinking Water Class Action Settlement

For those who were impacted by a long-term drinking water advisory, the claim period has been extended to **March 7, 2024**. Based on feedback from rights holders, BCAFN will be introducing a resolution at the Special

Chiefs Assembly requesting an additional six-month extension to support First Nations with additional time to gain clarification on eligibility and submit a claim. BCAFN will keep leadership apprised of the status resolution including any follow-up in communications with the Class Action Settlement administrators.

For more information on the settlement, please go to [firstnationsdrinkingwater.ca/](#)

### Canada Water Agency and Canada Water Act Modernisation

BCAFN continues to engage with Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Canada Water Agency representatives. BCAFN is undertaking a legal analysis of the Canada Water Act to support rights holders with their discussions with the Federal Government. This document will be shared with Chiefs and technicians in late March 2024.

### BCAFN Climate and Water Newsletter

The BCAFN Environmental portfolios have teamed up to distribute a monthly BCAFN Climate Change and Water Newsletter. This newsletter will feature updates, community-led projects, and share funding opportunities for environmental community-based initiatives. If you would like to subscribe to this newsletter or have a community environmental initiative you would like featured in the newsletter, please email [sophia.iliopulos@bcafn.ca](mailto:sophia.iliopulos@bcafn.ca) or [patricia.rojas@bcafn.ca](mailto:patricia.rojas@bcafn.ca) for more information.



[Assembly of First Nations and Canada chart new joint path for new and updated priorities on climate action.](#)  
News release - June 2023

The Assembly of First Nations and the Government of Canada released the fifth annual report of the joint Committee on Climate Action (JCCA). This report is a response to the increasing effects of climate change seen across Canada. Through the JCCA, both the AFN and Canada demonstrate their continued commitment to partnership-driven climate solutions, where First Nations are recognized and empowered as leaders of climate action.

## Emergency Management

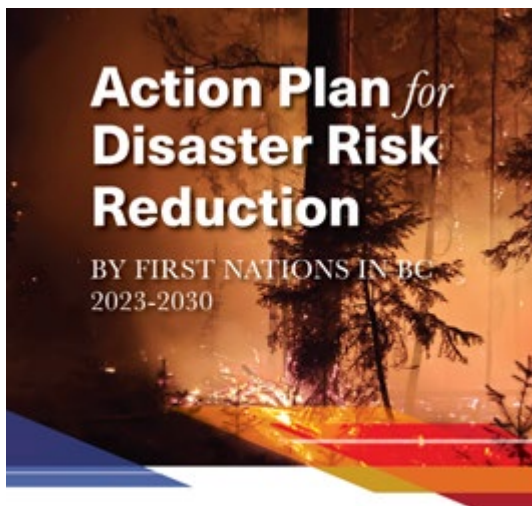
The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is assisting First Nations in B.C. by offering negotiation models for engagement with Canada and British Columbia on a new trilateral agreement. They are working towards a multilateral agreement and have started developing a framework since November 2023. An All Chiefs Meeting hosted by FNLC on January 31, 2024, focused on First Nations' participation in negotiations for emergency management, discussing a three-phased approach and collaborative models for consideration. A discussion paper, *Collaboration Model: Towards a New Multilateral Emergency Management Agreement in British Columbia* can be found on the [BCAFN website](#). You can also view BCAFN draft resolution 14/2024 *Model for Multilateral Emergency Management Services Funding Negotiations* for more details [here](#).

Wildfires in BC, from April 1, 2021 to March 28, 2022 numbered over 1,642, burning 869 million hectares, with 181 evacuation orders, 304 evacuation alerts, a 56-day provincial state of emergency, and costs of \$565 million and estimated insurance damages of \$102 million, causing catastrophic loss to lands and critical infrastructure. Additionally, flooding in BC reached unprecedented levels in 2021, causing at least \$450 million in damage, impacting 42 First Nations communities, and resulting in mudslides, landslides, and infrastructure damage. Despite significant resource allocation, they remain insufficient and/or poorly managed to address First Nations' needs, challenges, and priorities.

### Emergency Management Forum

This event will be held on March 28, 2024 online via Zoom. It aims to facilitate information sharing on pressing issues affecting First Nations and to explore strategies for supporting their communities during emergencies. It provides a platform for First Nations to voice their experiences during recent emergencies, allowing for tailored support to address any outstanding needs effectively. Additionally, discussions will revolve around the implementation of the First Nations of BC Regional Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction, emphasizing proactive measures to enhance disaster resilience.

The session seeks to keep First Nations leadership informed with updates on emergency management legislation, policy developments at the Provincial and Federal levels, and updates on the ongoing negotiation process for the multi-lateral emergency services agreement. You can register and find more information on the BCAFN events website [here](#)



DEVELOPED BY  
First Nations Leadership Council  
British Columbia Assembly of First Nations  
First Nations Summit  
Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs  
First Nations Emergency Services Society  
First Nations Emergency Services Society Ltd.



## Fisheries

Regional Chief is Co-Chair of the AFN National Fisheries Committee (AFN-NFC) for the West Coast; Regional Chief Joanna Bernard is Co-Chair for the East Coast. At the national level the AFN-NFC has been focused on three priorities:

### 1. **Draft federal Aquaculture Act and Transition from Open-Net Pen Fish Farms in BC by 2025.**

The AFN Chief-in-Special Assembly passed resolution 26/2023: Transition from Open Net-Pen Fish Farming, which directs the AFN to fully support a rapid transition away from open net-pen aquaculture and to call on DFO to ensure Indigenous rights are foundational to federal aquaculture legislation and to co-develop legislation with Indigenous title and rights holders. The UNDA Action Plan itself instructs DFO, under measure 44, to pursue “the development of a national aquaculture legislation that will support self-determination and the meaningful implementation of Aboriginal and treaty rights”.

2. **Support implementation of Marshall Decision and Peace on the Water Senate Report.** The Sipekne’katik First Nation, among many others, continues to face harassment despite the 1999 Marshall decision and the Peace on the Water’s strong recommendations. This harassment includes obstruction on the water and seizure of traps and equipment. The UNDA Action Plan, pursuant to section 43, instructs DFO to establish “effective mechanisms and processes to address systemic racism in the enforcement of fisheries laws and regulations.” We are monitoring the east coast fishery as several First Nations will continue to rightfully implement their rights to their fishery resources this spring

3. **UNDA Action Plan implementation of fisheries related measures.** The AFN Fisheries Sector, through the Joint Planning Table with DFO, regularly discusses updates and progress made by DFO toward the implementation of the UNDA

Action Plan. AFN is seeking funding to enable the National Fisheries Committee to be part of the development of the implementation work plans and prioritization process required for each of the 11 Action Plan measures. This will require a funding commitment by DFO and is a key part of the agenda for our next AFN NFC meeting, scheduled for March 26-28, 2024.

In BC, we are increasingly concerned about the impacts of climate change to fish and fish habitat; this is a major issue for food security and long-term ecosystem health. Drought conditions persist throughout BC, and forecasts for this spring and summer season are hot and dry. BCAFN will continue to press DFO and the Crown to be prepared to support First Nations throughout BC that our food security is in jeopardy, and we need to invest in food storage facilities throughout BC as an immediate measure. BCAFN will be hosting a food security forum in 2024 to discuss the state of the food system and developing First Nations strategies to address such concerns.

Since the appointment of the new DFO Minister, Honorable Diane Lebourhillier, I have had 2 meetings, most recently late February. While we appreciate her efforts to build a relationship, we see a record of Ministers being moved from this important file – Ministers have been changing every 2 years under Trudeau government: Tootoo (2015-16), LeBlanc (2016-2018), Wilkinson (2018-2019), Jordan (2019-21), Murray (2021-23). Minister Lebourhillier is willing to meet with the Chiefs and BC to discuss fisheries issues, and I suggest we are making a request for such a meeting in April or May.

## UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Canada)

### Background

On June 21, 2021, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (UNDA) came into force. This Act requires the Government of Canada, in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples, to:

- Take all measures necessary to ensure that federal laws are consistent with the *Declaration* (Section 5);
- Prepare and implement an action plan to achieve the objectives of the *Declaration* (Section 6); and
- Develop annual reports on progress and submit them to Parliament (Section 7).

On December 10, 2021, Canada launched its consultation, cooperation and engagement process. The Minister of Justice has been identified as the designated minister for purposes of the Act, with the obligation to take measures to ensure consistency of federal laws and to develop an action plan for the implementation of the Act. Other federal Ministers are implicated as needed.

On June 20th, 2023, the Department of Justice tabled in Parliament the UNDA National Action Plan (NAP), as mandated by Section 6 of the *UNDA*.

The NAP is organized into five chapters, of particular interest to First Nations are Chapters: 1) Shared priorities, which sets out commitments to implement measures required by the *UN Declaration Act* as well as measures that address cross-cutting Indigenous priorities, and respond to priorities put forward by Indigenous Peoples; 2) First Nations Priorities, which sets out commitments to implement measures that respond to submissions put forward by First Nations representative organizations, historic and number Treaty partners, and First Nations governments; and 5) Indigenous Modern Treaty Partner Priorities, which sets out commitments to implement measures that respond to submissions put forward by Modern Treaty Partners across Canada.

Work is already underway by Federal Departments on implementing many of the NAP Action Plan measures (APMs). The FNLC technical team is aware of the following initiatives:

1. SP-APM #2: Minister Virani, in his Oct 25 submission to the Senate's Study on Bill S-13, *An Act to amend the Interpretation Act*, noted that the passage of the bill would be a successful completion of one of the

UNDA APMs.

2. SP-APM #9: Federal Pathway to address the root causes of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people underway.
3. SP-APM #10: Development of a National Gender-Based Violence Action Plan.
4. SP-APM #13: Bill S-250 at consideration in committee of the Senate.
5. SP-APM #28 Canada and Indigenous-led engagements re. Finalizing the Indigenous Justice Strategy is underway.
6. SP-APM #46. Canada is coordinating the development of the Indigenous Climate Leadership Agenda.
7. SP-APM #52: Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and the Canada Border Services Agency have begun engaging with Indigenous peoples on UNDA NAP APM SP #52 regarding federal legislative changes to the right to enter and remain in Canada.
8. SP-APM #68: CIRNAC is leading engagement with Indigenous groups on the renewal of the consultation and accommodation guidelines, with a forum scheduled for March 21st, in Vancouver.
9. FN-APM #7: Bill C-38, which seeks to address discrimination in the registration and membership provisions of the *Indian Act* is currently in Second Reading.
10. FN-APM #8: ISC is establishing an Indigenous Advisory Process to guide First Nations engagement on reforms relating to registration and band membership issues.
11. FN-APM #11: ISC has begun engaging with rights holders in the scope of the FNHC authority.
12. FN-APM #17: *An Act Respecting First Nations Water and Wastewater Act*, is being proposed.
13. Multiple APMs: The Department of Justice has launched its consultations, consistent with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, on possible reforms to the *Security of Information Act*, *Criminal Code* and *Canada Evidence Act*.

### FNLC Involvement

On Feb 16th, 2023, Minister Lametti issued a Letter of Understanding (LOU) to the FNLC, which outlines Canada's commitment to a BC-specific bilateral process

with the FNLC to identify priorities and actions for UNDA implementation consistent with the direction of First Nations in BC.

On May 4th, 2023, the FNLC submitted the FNLC Priorities Paper to Minister Lametti, articulating the priorities of First Nations in BC for inclusion into the NAP. This Priorities Paper was developed by the FNLC with feedback from BC First Nations.

In partial fulfilment of the guiding principles of the UNDA NAP, the FNLC and the Department of Justice have entered a funding agreement to formalize and implement the FNLC-DoJ LOU over the next two calendar years.

To assist in formalizing the terms of the LOU, the FNLC met with Minister Virani, the new Attorney General and Minister of Justice, to prepare draft Terms of Reference to guide the political and technical tables under the LOU. The intention of these tables is to facilitate the inclusion of the priorities and interests of First Nations in BC in the implementation of the UNDA Section 5, 6 and 7 provisions. The draft TORs have not yet been finalized, but once an agreement between the Department of Justice and the FNLC is reached, the TORs will be shared with members.

#### **AFN Chiefs Committee on the UN Declaration Act**

Through executive motion at the AFN Executive Committee, the AFN established an Ad-Hoc Chiefs' Committee on the UN Declaration to ensure that First Nation priorities were being advocated for during the development of the UNDA Action Plan. The Ad-Hoc Committee's mandate expired after the July 2023 AFN Annual General Assembly.

On December 5th, 2023, the First Nations-in-Assembly passed resolution no. 78/2023 to 1) transition the Ad-

Hoc Chiefs' Committee to become a standing Chiefs' Committee on the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, and 2) direct the AFN Executive Committee to appoint, and in some cases reappoint, existing members as needed, to the Chiefs' Committee on the UNDA, in accordance with Article 7 (3) of the AFN Charter, to provide advice and direction on matters relating to the implementation of the *UN Declaration*.

BCAFN Regional Chief Terry Teegee holds the portfolio lead for the UNDA file. Letters from Regional Chief Teegee to fellow Regional Chiefs have gone out seeking regional appointments to the committee.

#### **Funding for First Nations**

Justice Canada launched their Indigenous Partnership Fund Call for Proposals to support consultation and cooperation between the Government of Canada and Indigenous partners on:

- Measures to ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- Implementation of the UN Declaration Act Action Plan to achieve the objectives of the UN Declaration;
- The development of annual reports on progress.

The deadline to submit applications passed on January 30, 2024, but the FNLC is continuing to advocate for additional funds to support First Nation's capacity to participate in the implementation of the UNDA.

*United Nations Declaration  
on the Rights of  
Indigenous Peoples Act*  
Action Plan **2023-2028**

**CANADA.CA/DECLARATION**



## Implementation of Concrete Actions (2018) and the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (2019)

Reconciliation and transformative change will occur through tangible and measurable actions and structural changes to laws, processes, and institutions to uphold title and rights, and inclusion of rights-holders in policy and legislative development. Such actions and structural changes are enabled by key aspects of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*:

- Section 3 obligates the Province to take all measures necessary to ensure its laws are consistent with the UN Declaration, in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples. Consultation and cooperation is informed by the Interim Approach to Implementing the Requirements of the Section 3 of the *Declaration Act*, which creates space for First Nations governments to be involved in legislative development in accordance with their needs and priorities.
- Section 4 requires the Province to develop and implement an action plan, in consultation and cooperation with rights holders, to meet the objectives of the UN Declaration. The five-year *Declaration Act Action Plan* released in 2022 sets out 89 actions in four key theme areas.
- Section 5 requires annual reports by June 30 of each year on progress on the alignment of laws and implementation of the action plan.
- Sections 6 and 7 enable the Province to enter into decision-making and consent-based agreements with Indigenous governing bodies.

There has been some significant progress made. This includes critical changes to legislation including that related to children and families, education, emergency and disaster management, and health professions. Many of the *Declaration Act* action plan items are well underway or complete, including development of a provincial policy to guide their distinctions-based approach, interim improvements to forestry revenue-sharing, new civil litigation directives, a new tripartite Nature Agreement, and announcement of new fiscal tools related to equity financing, loan guarantees, and associated capacity development. We are also

anticipating some important measures in the coming months related to anti-racism, housing, and power projects.

While these are important gains, many of the more substantive shifts have yet to occur. Some of these substantive shifts represent complex changes that take time to work through – such as in developing new fiscal relationships, and in replacing outdated laws such as the *Heritage Conservation Act* and the *Mineral Tenure Act* – all of which are major priorities over the next 18 months. However, and troublingly, we are also seeing that efforts to make these substantive shifts are met with racism and resistance, as seen in the recent public backlash to proposed modest amendments to the *Land Act*. In this climate leading into the provincial election, First Nations title and rights and the *Declaration Act* are under attack, and the core tools of transformation in consent-based and shared decision-making agreements continue to be delayed. It is imperative that this work be accelerated while not stirring up harms and racism against our governments and communities.

Another key issue is the incredible volume of requests for First Nations governments to participate in consultation and cooperation. An initial *Declaration Act* Engagement Fund was established to provide some capacity support for this work, but more systemic solutions are required to ensure resourcing and process support for First Nations to participate effectively.

This year's *Declaration Act* Annual Report, to be released in June, will include detailed reporting on all *Declaration Act* commitments and provide full transparency to leadership on areas of progress and where issues need to be addressed.

## Hunting and Wildlife

The dual climate and biodiversity crises are severely impacting our land, wildlife, waters, communities and ways of life. In 2022, Chiefs in Assembly mandated ([Resolution 11/2022](#)) BCAFN to continue to advocate and advance the recognition of First Nations rights, title, treaty rights and ancient respected protocols related to hunting and wildlife management. BCAFN staff are monitoring ongoing work by the Province, including [amendments to the Wildlife Act](#), implementation of the [Together for Wildlife Strategy](#), the Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council and the [First Nations–B.C. Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Forum](#). In 2022, BC initiated a [review of the Wildlife Act](#), in accordance with the commitment made in Action 12 of the [Together for Wildlife Strategy](#) priorities and implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Targeted engagement with rights and title holders, advisory bodies, and B.C. Government Ministries commenced in the fall of 2023 with the advancement of legislative recommendations estimated to take place in the spring of 2026.

Regional Chief Terry Teegee continues to advocate and bring attention to hunting, wildlife, biodiversity, and conservation issues, ensuring First Nations' culture, food security, jurisdiction, self-determination and rights and title are safeguarded. Free, prior, and informed consent must be emphasized in wildlife and habitat management in BC.

### Chronic Wasting Disease

Traditional food has significant nutritional, social, cultural and spiritual value, and is an important part of food security for Indigenous peoples. It is important to know about chronic wasting disease if you hunt, handle, or eat traditional foods like deer, elk, caribou, or moose. In 2024, Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) was confirmed in two deer samples in the Kootenay Region. (CWD) is a fatal disease of the brain and nervous system that affects species in the deer family (cervids), such as mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, moose and caribou. CWD has no cure, is caused by prions transmitted through various means, and infected animals may be contagious for months before showing symptoms. Hunters are advised to be vigilant, avoiding animals that appear sick

or behave abnormally to reduce the risk of transmission. Before going out to hunt, check with the [BC Wildlife Management](#) office where you live or hunt to identify areas where CWD is known to occur.

### Species at Risk Act and Spotted Owl

Wildlife species are central to the health of ecosystems and First Nations' inherent rights, culture, food security, well-being and health. We are seeing the dramatic loss of wildlife species and habitat across BC, which is strongly linked to the health of Mother Earth. As mandated by [Resolution 04/2020](#), BCAFN staff are monitoring ongoing work on Species at Risk, in particular the Spotted Owl *caurina* subspecies that was originally published on the Species at Risk Public Registry in 2006. In 2023, the Governor in Council's decision not to pursue an Emergency Protection Order for the Spotted Owl is an urgent concern. Logging, clear-cutting and other industrial activities, particularly the harvesting of old-growth forests, have significantly impacted the Spotted Owl's habitat and population. Sadly, the population in BC has dwindled to just one remaining wild Spotted Owl in Spuzzum First Nation's traditional territory. The Spotted Owl represents a deep connection to the spirit world within many First Nations in BC. Urgent action is needed to ensure the Spotted Owl's protection of critical habitat, survival, and recovery must be led in collaboration with First Nations to hold government and industry accountable.

[Knowledge Keepers](#) call on all people and levels of government to make decisions with the Seven Generations in mind and create a paradigm shift that re-establishes ecosystems' inherent value, not their value as resources. Chief James Hobart, Spuzzum First Nation mentioned that "our fight for the Spotted Owl rests on our fight to protect their habitat. We can't bring our owls back unless we rebuild their habitats."



AFN Special Chiefs Assembly in Ottawa, 2023.



2022-2032 | INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF  
**Indigenous Languages**

## First Nations Languages

The Government of Canada allocated approximately \$52 million for First Nations languages in 2024-2025, falling short of the commitment under the Indigenous Languages Act. During the AFN Annual General Assembly in July 2023, a resolution for Equitable Funding for Languages Revitalization was not passed. This resolution aimed to establish a new funding formula proposed by the AFN Chiefs Committee on Languages, which faced concerns from BC Chiefs regarding its impact on funding allocation leading to a call for more consensus-based work.

The proposed CCOL Regional Allocation Formula could reduce BC's funding by about 10%, compared to the current formula. The Regional Allocation Formula considers factors like population, language vitality, number of languages, First Nations, and regional remoteness but lacks base cost considerations for language revitalization. BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly rejected the Equally Weighted Regional Allocation Formula and urged for an evidence-based, consented formula that prioritizes the number of languages, endangerment levels, and undergoes annual review for up-to-date data. Further details can be found in BCAFN draft resolution 06/2024 addressing underfunding of BC First Nations languages.



## Justice and Policing Reform

Last and beginning into the new year, the landscape of justice and policing for First Nations continued to shift and evolve. First Nations continue to advance work that will support the establishment and maintenance of their own justice systems and reduce the negative effects of the colonial justice system. BCAFN continues to uphold the importance of culture and the recognition of First Nations jurisdiction as a foundational element of this work. As Co-chair to the AFN Policing Taskforce alongside Regional Chief Gislain Picard we continue to advocate strongly for the advancement of First Nations jurisdiction and control over community safety.

The AFN Policing Taskforce is composed of experts in First Nations Policing, regional representatives, and executive members of the First Nations Chiefs of Police Association from across Canada. From BC, this work is supported by Chief Jerry Jack and Chief Dean Nelson. The mandate of the Taskforce is to provide support and guidance for the co-development of First Nations Policing Essential Services legislation. Recently, we have encountered a number of challenges with the Department of Public Safety with respect to the co-development of the First Nations Policing Essential Services Legislation. Minister Dominic LeBlanc has reopened the door for negotiations related to the legislation, however has reinforced the idea of provincial responsibility and jurisdiction which unfortunately is completely misaligned with the Federal Government's

commitment to align all Federal legislation with the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

Regional Chief Picard and I attended the FPTI Meeting on October 11, where we discussed the Indigenous Justice Strategy. We expressed that co-development is our preferred model of working together to develop laws and policies impacting First Nations. Most importantly, the final framework that is developed must be consistent with the minimum standards set out in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (UNDA).

There continues to be advancement of the National Indigenous Justice Strategy, wherein the BC First Nations Justice Council and the First Nations Leadership Council held engagement sessions with communities and experts in Fall 2023 soliciting feedback and input into the strategy. Recently, Minister Virani committed to extending the timeline to complete the strategy to Fall 2024.

Provincially, we continue to work with our partners the BC First Nations Justice Council to advance BC Policing and Public Safety Modernization, which includes the reformation of the *BC Police Act*. There are a number of discussion papers associated with this work that technical staff continue to review and once analysis is complete we will reengage with the working group to ensure First Nations in BC positions are advanced at this table.



AFN Executive Council meeting with Minister Arif Virani, Justice and Attorney General of Canada, in Ottawa in October 2023.

## Housing and Homelessness

BC Budget 2024 - Housing and Homelessness Priorities  
BC's Budget 2024 has committed to \$116 million in funding for the construction of new homes across the province and the launch of BC Builds with a commitment to projects in partnership with nonprofits and First Nations in which 20 percent of units will rent at 20 percent below market rate. Additionally, 1200 new supportive housing units including \$151 million to develop 248 units of Indigenous focused social housing and community services in Vancouver were announced. Notably, investments in a human rights approach to the homelessness crisis as well as First Nations-specific housing funding are absent in Budget 2024.

The investments outlined in Budget 2024 fall short of addressing the housing needs of First Nations in BC. To address the infrastructure gap between First Nations communities and the rest of Canada by 2030, the Assembly of First Nations estimates that BC requires \$18.9 billion in funding for new housing and an additional \$2.1 billion in funding for the operation and maintenance of existing housing stock. A holistic approach is necessary to effectively address the shortage of safe and supportive housing, homelessness, low physical and mental health outcomes as well as ongoing climate emergencies disproportionately impacting First Nations communities.

### BCAFN Housing Forum

BCAFN hosted a two-day Housing Forum on October 23 & 24, 2023 to facilitate engagement and dialogue with Chiefs, leadership, technicians and First Nations community members. Critical issues on housing and homelessness including a First Nations-led Housing and Infrastructure service and program delivery framework for BC were highlighted. The forum was widely attended. 185 delegates participated in-person and 175 delegates joined online. BCAFN also successfully hired a Housing Policy Analyst in November 2023.

BCAFN produced a [What We Heard Report](#) summarizing key recommendations and calls to actions generated by participants at the Housing Forum. The report underscores the importance of recognizing housing as a fundamental human right enshrined in the *UN Declaration* and outlines recommendations to guide BCAFN's continued advocacy, including support for FNHIC's housing and infrastructure related program and

service delivery in BC. The report calls on all levels of government to: close the infrastructure gap and ensure that housing initiatives for First Nations in BC, both on and off reserve, are sufficient, culturally appropriate, and resilient to the impacts of climate change; undertake a holistic and unified approach to addressing the housing and homelessness crisis grounded in free, prior, and informed consent; and support and finance the transfer of service and program delivery to the First Nations Housing and Infrastructure Council (FNHIC), where First Nations rights and title holders consent to the transfer of such responsibility.



### Homelessness

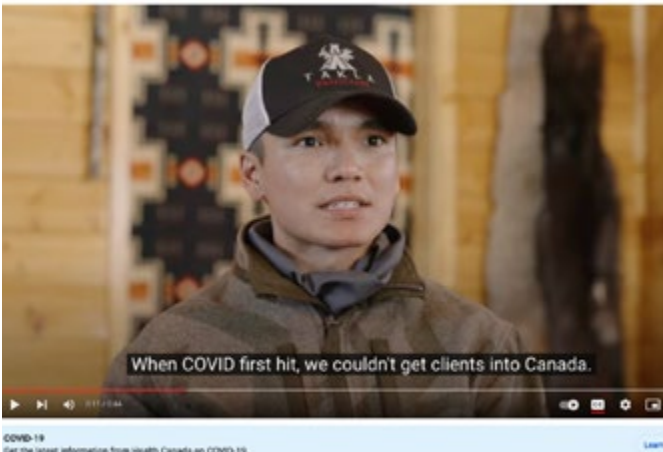
In February 2024, the Federal Housing Advocate (FHA) released a conclusive [report](#) on its review of homeless encampments across Canada. The report exposes a two-fold human rights crisis and reveals a larger, systemic failure to uphold the right of all people to adequate housing. Indigenous peoples across Canada are disproportionately over-represented within those experiencing homelessness and living in encampments. Regional Chief Teegee agrees with the FHA's report findings including the call for establishment of a National Encampments Response plan by August 31, 2024; development and implementation of encampment response measures in consultation and cooperation with First Nations and their representative organizations; and a strong human-rights and distinctions-based approach to homelessness, including culturally safe housing and First Nations-specific funding.

Regional Chief Teegee, alongside the First Nations Leadership Council Executives, continue to regularly

engage with the Province of BC on aligning its housing policy and legislative initiatives with the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UN Declaration) and the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (UN Declaration Act). They have provided input and submissions on various programs and initiatives including Inclusionary Zoning, Local Government Density Initiatives, BC Builds Program, Short Term Rentals Accommodation, Shelter Provisions, and Bad Faith Evictions.

BCAFN staff are working on securing funds for a 2024 Housing Forum to continue critical discussions on housing and homelessness issues for First Nations in BC. BCAFN will keep Chiefs and leadership apprised of the developments of these initiatives over the coming months.

Check out BCAFN's public service announcements on COVID-19 vaccines on our [Youtube Channel](#)



Jaden's Story - COVID-19 Booster



Cayden's Story - COVID-19 Booster

## BCAFN Board of Directors

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Dr. Gwendolyn Point  
Sto:Lo Nation  
**Women's Representative**  
Louisa Housty Jones  
Heiltsuk Nation  
**2SLGBTQIA+ Representative**  
Orene Askew  
Squamish Nation  
**Youth Female Representative**  
Crystal Starr-Lewis  
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## BCAFN Events

**BCAFN Youth Forum**  
March 25 (evening reception & entertainment) & March 26, 2024  
Westin Wall Centre, Richmond, BC  
[REGISTER](#)

**BC First Nations Climate Leadership  
Agenda Engagement Sessions 2024**  
Save the Date!  
Terrace - April 11  
Campbell River - April 23  
Chilliwack - April 25  
Prince George - April 30  
Fort St. John - May 2  
Kamloops - May 7  
Cranbrook - May 9  
Haida Gwaii - May 22  
*More details to follow, including  
the travel policy, hotel blocks and  
registration links.*

**First Nations of BC Emergency  
Management Forum**  
March 28, 2024  
Online via Zoom  
[REGISTER](#)

Information and registration for all BCAFN events can be found on the website

## Other Events

**First Nations Women in Leadership:  
Virtual Speaker Series**  
February 21 - March 19, 2024  
Online via Zoom  
[REGISTER](#)

**AFN Virtual Chiefs Update on Housing  
and Homelessness**  
March 11, 2024  
Online via Zoom  
[REGISTER](#)

**7th Annual Water Symposium and Trade  
Show: Bridging the Gap: First Nations  
Water and Wastewater Equity**  
April 15 - 18, 2024  
Hilton Lac-Leamy, Gatineau, QC  
[REGISTER](#)

**Our Gathering**  
SAVE the Date!  
April 22 - 24, 2024  
JW Marriott Park, Vancouver

**Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Annual  
General Assembly**  
Save the Date!  
July 9 - 11, 2024  
Montreal, QC

## Check out our websites!

[bcagn.ca](http://bcagn.ca)  
[youth.bcagn.ca](http://youth.bcagn.ca)  
[events.bcagn.ca](http://events.bcagn.ca)

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