

# FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

## Press Release

August 2, 2023

### The FNLC Calls for Water Rental Rate Reform and Watershed Investments in the Wake of Unprecedented Drought Conditions in BC

(xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətał (Tseil Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) As forest fires continue to rage across British Columbia due to climate change, a paralleling crisis is occurring within our watersheds as aquifers are drying up, glaciers are retreating, and groundwater is depleting at unprecedented rates. With decimated snowpack levels, and over two-thirds of BC's watersheds in Category 4 and 5 drought conditions, negative compounding impacts will continue throughout the summer and into the fall. These conditions adversely impact stream flows and high river temperatures for fish and aquatic habitats, increase food insecurity, and cause widespread damage to BC's ecosystems while threatening First Nations' cultures, traditions and practices.

Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) President, Grand Chief Stewart Phillip stated, "The heavy burden of devastating consequence falls disproportionately on First Nations as we continue to see inaction from the Crown. Governments continue to cite 'unprecedented' environmental conditions as an excuse for decades of negligence. What should be unprecedented is the prioritization and investment in watershed stewardship by the Federal and Provincial governments. Many First Nations are leading this stewardship in their own communities. The time is now to resource them adequately and sustainably." In 2023, the Province of BC committed \$100 million towards a Watershed Security Fund. Many advocates, including the First Nations Leadership Council, have celebrated this initial contribution while calling for increased investments by BC and Canada to ensure the Fund's sustainability. Phillip concluded, "Governments must prioritize protecting our watersheds beyond media cycles, budget cycles, and political cycles. We need a paradigm shift in the way we respect and value water - a view that has been effectively practiced by our ancestors for millennia."

In 2022, the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS) and UBCIC assemblies [passed mirrored resolutions](#) calling for water rental rates to be reviewed and increased by the BC government in partnership with First Nations to reflect the administrative, ecological and restorative costs associated with water users. Despite the BC government's introduction of new rates in 2015, the province still has among the lowest water rental rates in Canada, which exacerbates water use, particularly from industry in BC. "The First Nations Leadership Council is seeking to collaborate with the Province on water revenue sharing with First Nations and water rental rate reform. BC's current rates fail to cover the basic administrative costs of managing water licenses. Without increasing rates, watershed restoration projects will continue to be under-resourced as it has been since colonization. While we have yet to get the province to the table, we are confident that we will see progress because there is no other option - BC's current water management systems and regulations have failed not just First Nations but all British Columbians," stated BCAFN Regional Chief Terry Teegee.



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FNS Political Executive, Hugh Braker stated, "The health of our waters is unequivocally the central indicator of the health of our ecosystems and communities at large. To that end, water must be central in the application and implementation of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We cannot afford to push this subject to the end of our agendas, priorities, and actions. Water represents our ancestors, our relatives, our children, and our future generations. We must all collectively advocate for change, we must call on all governments to yield to that change, and we, as Indigenous peoples, have the traditional and ancestral knowledge to lead that change. However, First Nations must have sustainable and adequate resources to undertake this work as the inherent rightsholders of the lands and waters we now call British Columbia. We continue to call on the Province of BC and the Federal Government to prioritize this critical work ahead in partnership with BC First Nations."

**Helpful Links:**

[BC Drought Information Portal](#)

[First Nations Leadership Council's Intentions Paper: Towards Water Revenue Sharing in BC](#)

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*The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).*

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