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FROM VISION TO ACTION

Advancing the BC First Nations
Climate Leadership Agenda

Draft Final Report



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Foreword

The climate crisis is a symptom of a broader problem rooted in the disconnection of people and nature, resulting in ecological imbalance, destruction, and ongoing injustice. British Columbia Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN) Regional Chief Terry Teegee, and Dr. Robert Joseph, BCAFN Knowledge Keeper, highlight the shortcomings of modern, western approaches to addressing climate change:

“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. Relationship building and taking responsibility are needed. Our ancestors knew how to be in a relationship with Mother Earth. They had their ways of doing that, and we must bring that forward.”

Dr. Robert Joseph, BCAFN Knowledge Keeper and Hereditary Chief of the Gwawaenuk Tribe

“The solutions to the climate crisis are held by our Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and the existential threats we are facing from climate change is part of the sickness of our societies; as our Indigenous cultures heal from the trauma of colonialism and capitalism, we will show each other and our neighbours how to heal, to stand together, lift each other up, be hopeful and bring balance back to our lands and communities.”

Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations

Urgent action is needed to address the dual climate and biodiversity emergencies through restoring balance and reciprocal relationships between all people and Mother Earth. Transformational change in the current flawed system is urgently needed, where Canada and countries around the world continue to fail to meet climate targets and commitments. Canadian greenhouse emissions continue to increase, and Canadian climate and environmental policies are deeply disconnected from First Nations’ worldviews and ways of knowing and being.

The Canadian government must listen to First Nations and fully acknowledge the essential role First Nations play in climate action and environmental protection. Addressing the climate emergency must be intertwined with Canada's reconciliation efforts to fully implement the United Nations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Declaration Act. To advance the BC First Nations Climate Leadership (FNCL) Agenda, Crown governments must provide the resources and uphold, respect, and recognize First Nations' self-determination and Knowledge systems while fully returning the governance and jurisdiction over their territories.

Acknowledgements

We want to acknowledge the Knowledge Keepers, Matriarchs, Elders, Leaders, 2SLGBTQQIA+, Youth, First Nations community members, technicians, regional leads, and First Nation-led organizations that participated in and provided valuable feedback to inform the BC FNCL Agenda. Your perspectives, knowledge, and lived experience enriched this report, and we hope you feel your voices are present in it.

We also acknowledge the support of Temixw Planning and Tiskwat Consulting for costing the high-level recommendations, and Four Directions Management Services and Naqsmist for planning and facilitating the various BC FNCL Agenda engagement sessions and helping shape the recommendations. Their efforts ensured that sessions were inclusive, conducted in safe spaces, and that all voices were heard.

Thanks to so many of our partners and First Nations-led organizations and Nations that are leading the way in climate action:

- First Nations Leadership Council (Union of BC Indian Chiefs and First Nations Summit)
- Coastal First Nations-Great Bear Initiative
- First Nations Energy and Mining Council
- Peer Reviewers

In particular, we would like to thank the BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda Steering Committee¹ for their constant guidance, wisdom and support:

- Harvey McLeod, Upper Nicola Band
- Janna Wale, Gitxsan from Gitanmaax First Nation
- Katisha Paul, xwíl̓qəxw sténi? (woman of this land) from the W̱ JOŁŁP
- Terry Webber, Nuxalk Nation
- Sophie Collins, Te Esk'etemc re st'7é7kwen
- Kyle Alec, Syilx (Okanagan) Nation and Secwepemc (Shuswap) Nation
- Beverly Lambert, Saulteau First Nation

Preface

Throughout the report, First Nations (status and non-status) may also be referred to as First Nations community members or a First Nations community. This should not be confused with a non-Indigenous local community, city or municipality but refers to a First Nation or Band under the Indian Act, Historic Treaty, Modern Treaty Nation or a Self-Governing Nation. We recognize that the unique relationship between Canada and Modern Treaty and Self-Governing First Nations in BC must be honoured throughout the BC FNCL Agenda, including in decision-

¹ BC FNCL Agenda Steering Committee Member bios can be found here: <https://www.bcafn.ca/priority-areas/environment/climate-emergency/bc-fncl-agenda>

making, financing, and capacity. Any reference to Indigenous Peoples in this document refers to First Nations to BC. When we refer to First Nations in BC, we recognize that some Nations have land bases that extend beyond provincial borders.

Crown governments must acknowledge that what is known as British Columbia (BC) is located on unceded lands with 204 First Nations with distinct cultures, languages, laws, traditions and identities. It is important to acknowledge the unique history and lived realities of First Nations in BC, including treaty, modern treaty, self-governing, urban, rural, status and non-status.

VISION

We, the first peoples of the lands, assert our inherent Title, Rights, and jurisdiction to lead the response to the climate crisis. We exercise our knowledge, laws, and processes in our self-determined ways to care for the Earth and ensure health and stability for generations to come.

Executive Summary

The Government of Canada committed to co-developing a distinction-based Indigenous Climate Leadership Agenda (ICLA) that would build regional and national capacity and progressively place authority and resources for climate action in the hands of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and representative organizations (Priority 46 under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan).²

BCAFN received the mandate from Chiefs in Assembly via Resolution 03/2023 to facilitate the development of the regional First Nations Climate Leadership (FNCL) Agenda process in British Columbia (BC) and ensure the recommendations and policy directions are fully considered in the Canada-wide FNCL Agenda, ultimately shaping the ICLA.

The BC First Nations Climate Leadership agenda (BC FNCL Agenda) recommendations are built upon the BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan (BC FN Climate Strategy) and engagement throughout BC between 2023 and 2024, including a Spiritual Knowledge Keepers Gathering on Climate Change. The BC FNCL Agenda development process was guided by a BC FNCL Agenda Steering Committee and informed by the FNCL Agenda National Steering Committee, which included representation from FNCL Agenda regional leads throughout Canada, and national technical and leadership meetings.

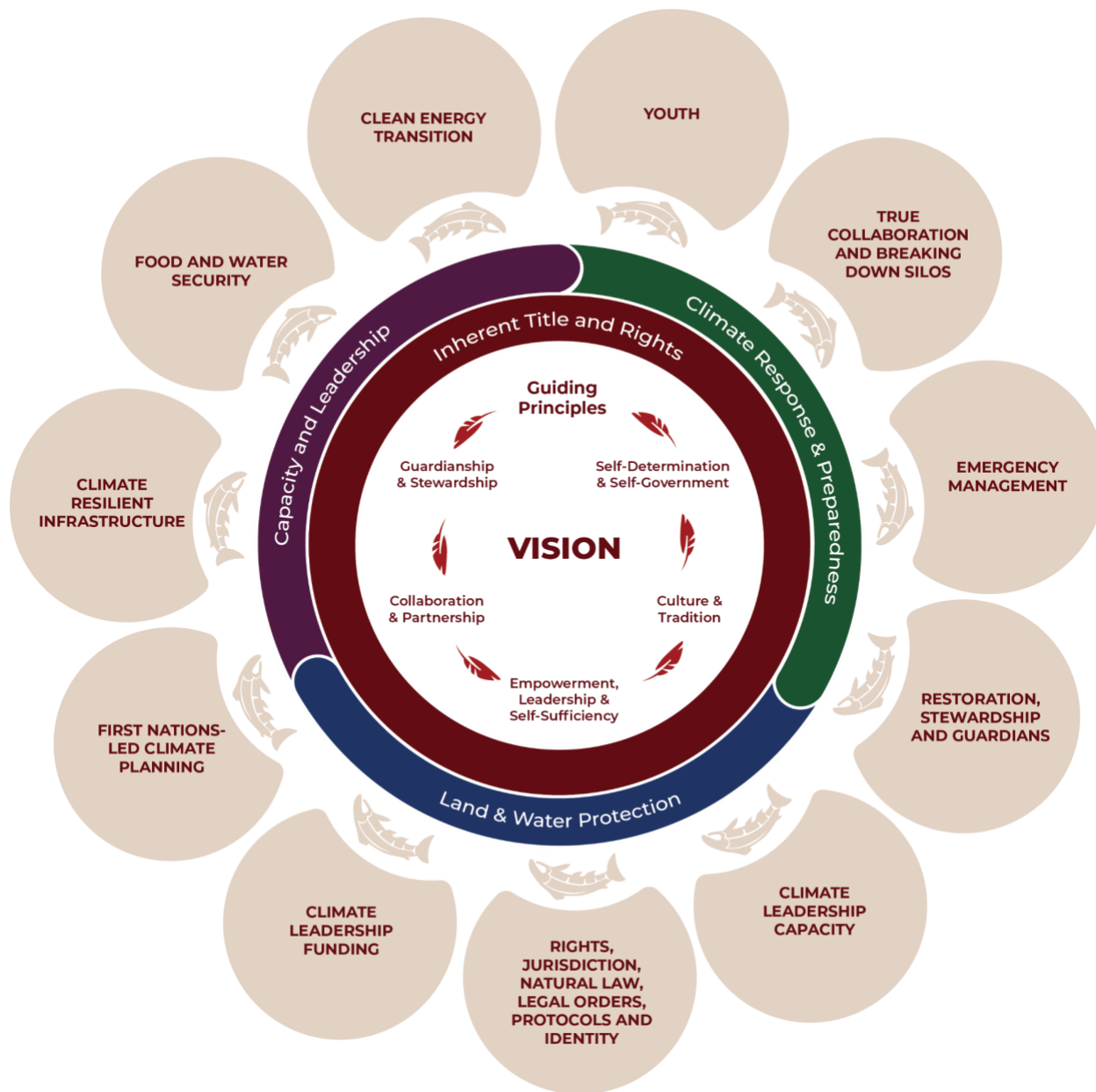
Based on these various climate-related engagements and previous work, eleven (11) high-level themes with 24 recommendations were identified. These themes are represented in **Graphic 1** below surrounding BC FN Climate Strategy's 'Four Pathways for Climate Action' to symbolize their interconnectedness. These interrelated recommendations complement the BC FN Climate Strategy and seek to enable the transformational change required to address the climate and environmental crisis, achieve Canada's climate goals, support and uplift First Nations-led climate leadership and action and protect Mother Earth.

In our travels throughout BC, we repeatedly heard from First Nations that *"we are tired of having the same conversations, we need urgent action now"*. Implementing the recommendations as presented in the BC FNCL Agenda requires strong federal commitment, accountability mechanisms and enforcement to set the foundation for true collaboration, partnership, co-jurisdiction, self-determined climate action and leadership through creating the conditions that break down silos, create long-term agreements, support tripartite or multi-party relationships, overhaul program and funding frameworks, and build climate capacity within First Nations in BC.

The draft high-level recommendations were submitted to the Federal government in September 2024 to inform the Canada-wide ICLA Memorandum to Cabinet (MC) and eventual Treasury Board submission to enable implementation. The MC was developed in the fall of 2024; however, progress has been stalled due to Ottawa's ongoing political and economic uncertainty.

² Government of Canada (2023, November 14). [Government of Canada launches the Indigenous Leadership Fund to support First Nations, Inuit, and Métis climate action.](#)

Despite this uncertainty, it is essential that the federal government remains steadfast in its obligations under the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* and other climate commitments and legislation. BCAFN will continue collaborating with the First Nations Leadership Council climate staff on the implementation of the BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan and advocate for the full implementation of the BC FNCL Agenda recommendations. These efforts must be driven by the priorities and realities of First Nations rights and title holders.



Graphic 1. BC FN Climate Strategy and the BC FNCL Agenda: The centre and the concentric circles of the graphic represent the BC FN Climate Strategy’s ‘Vision, Principles and the Four Pathways for Climate Action’. The circles surrounding this graphic are the 11 key themes identified in the BC FNCL Agenda. This visually presents the interconnectedness of the BC FNCL Agenda with the Strategy.

Background

The Government of Canada committed to co-developing a distinction-based Indigenous Climate Leadership Agenda (ICLA) that would build regional and national capacity and progressively place authority and resources for climate action in the hands of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and representative organizations (Priority 46 under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan).³ The ICLA was created to recognize that, while Indigenous peoples are climate leaders with immense potential, they face significant barriers to taking climate action in self-determined ways.⁴ The ICLA resulted from years of advocacy by First Nations right-holders and First Nations organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations and regional offices throughout the Joint Committee and Climate Action (**JCCA**).

BCAFN received the mandate from the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly (Resolution 03/2023) to facilitate the co-development of the BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda (BC FNCL Agenda) with Title and Rights-holders and First Nations organizations across the Province and ensure that their recommendations and policy directions are fully considered in the Canada-wide First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda (FNCL Agenda), ultimately shaping the Indigenous Climate Leadership Agenda (ICLA).

The BC FNCL Agenda must reflect and respond to First Nations in BC realities, needs, priorities and interests while providing a roadmap consisting of recommendations and policy directions to ensure that federal climate policy and legislation.⁵



The FNCL Agenda presents a unique opportunity to create transformational change in the federal government system to fully support First Nations' climate goals, uplift First Nations-led climate action and leadership in BC and achieve federal climate goals and national and international commitments. With the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) legislation adopted at a federal and provincial level, BC and Canada have a critical moment to strategically and cooperatively work with First Nations right-holders on climate and environmental policy and legislative development and reform.

³ Government of Canada (2023, November 14). [Government of Canada launches the Indigenous Leadership Fund to support First Nations, Inuit, and Métis climate action.](#)

⁴ Sahtú Renewable Resources Board (2024, February 20-22). [Indigenous Climate Leadership Agenda.](#)

⁵BCAFN. (March 2023 9-10). [Resolution 03/2023.](#)

Draft BC FNCL Agenda high-level recommendations were developed by building on the BC FN Climate Strategy and engagement throughout the province. The draft high-level recommendations were submitted to the Federal government in September 2024 to inform the Canada-wide ICLA Memorandum to Cabinet (MC) and an eventual Treasury Board submission to enable implementation. An MC was developed in the fall of 2024; however, progress has been stalled due to the ongoing political uncertainty in Ottawa.

The BC FNCL Agenda recommendations identify the systemic changes needed to ensure First Nations in BC have shared decision-making, access to long-term, stable funding to enhance climate capacity and self-determined climate action. Any new authority that arises between electoral cycles must respect, recognize and uphold the commitments made through the FNCL Agenda.

This BC FNCL Agenda Report builds on these high-level recommendations to provide more context while ensuring the voices and recommendations heard from engagement sessions throughout the province are reflected in this report.

BC FIRST NATIONS CLIMATE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

It is essential to acknowledge that the BC FNCL Agenda Report was not developed in isolation. The BC FNCL Agenda draws on long-standing First Nation-led climate action experience, contributions and work. The BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan (BC FN Climate Strategy) and the ongoing implementation efforts are the foundation for the BC FNCL Agenda.

In 2019 and 2021, Chiefs-in-Assembly passed *UBCIC Resolution No. 2019-02*, *BCAFN Resolution No. 04/2019*, and *FNS Resolution No. 0221.15* mandating the First Nations Leadership Council (**FNLC**) to develop the BC FN Climate Strategy in collaboration with First Nations in BC. The purpose of the BC FN Climate Strategy is to advocate for the following priorities:

- First Nations' Title, Rights, and Treaty Rights are asserted and protected in addressing climate change.
- First Nations' knowledge, laws, legal processes, and worldviews are recognized and implemented in climate planning and response.
- Effective and immediate responses to the climate emergency are identified to reduce impacts and vulnerability within and across First Nations in BC.

The work on the BC FN Climate Strategy commenced in 2019, and it was launched and endorsed by Chiefs-in-Assembly in April 2022. In acknowledgement of the BC FN Climate Strategy as a living document, the work of the BC FNCL Agenda serves as a continuity by building deeper understandings of the context, realities of First Nations, shared needs and experiences, and further advocating for the systematic implementation of the Climate Strategy. Furthermore, the BC FNCL Agenda Report is grounded in the same pathways, vision, and guiding principles as the Climate Strategy.

It must be acknowledged that colonialism and capitalism are fundamental drivers of climate change, systematically undermining First Nations Knowledge, infringing on First Nations' inherent, constitutionally protected rights and Treaty rights, and exacerbating racial and gender-based inequalities. Climate policies and environmental stewardship continue to be rooted in a colonial framework that disregards Indigenous knowledge, often prioritizing industrial interests

over the protection of First Nations lands, rights, and sovereignty. This approach perpetuates systemic injustice and fails to recognize the rights, responsibility, and vital role First Nations must play in climate change and environmental stewardship. In alignment with the AFN First Nations Climate Lens, this report challenges the conventional conceptualizations of First Nations as vulnerable people and passive recipients of climate impacts. Instead, the Climate Lens emphasizes the distinct cultures, unique connections, and inherent responsibilities that First Nations have to the land, water, air, and non-human beings/relatives that sustain our people.

The eleven (11) themes and twenty-four (24) recommendations outlined in this report are essential to enable transformational change within the federal system. While many BC FNCL Agenda recommendations are reflected in the broader BC FN Climate Strategy, they reflect the most urgent actions needed to enable transformational change in the federal system to support First Nation-led climate leadership.

KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS MANDATE

In light of the escalating and devastating consequences of the climate and nature crises, BCAFN recognized that the response, including policy development and reform, must be guided by First Nations values, teachings, ceremonies, laws and traditional ways of knowing. Colonial climate policy is not sufficiently addressing the climate crisis as it is profoundly disconnected from First Nations worldviews and approaches and continues to reinforce the patterns of inequality, exploitation, discrimination, environmental degradation and top-down, market-based, and siloed approaches.

To start the development of the BC FNCL Agenda in a good way, it was essential to seek a mandate and guidance from Knowledge Keepers to ground our climate work in our spirituality, ceremony, teachings and governance systems. In this regard, BCAFN, with the guidance and leadership of Chief Darrel Bob, Xaxli'p First Nation, hosted a [Spiritual Knowledge Keepers on Climate Change Gathering](#) From November 17-19, 2023.

23 Spiritual Knowledge Keepers from across British Columbia came together in Ceremony on Tsleil-Waututh Territory to collectively heal and share stories, songs, and teaching around the current climate crisis, its underlying causes, our roles and responsibilities and its profound impacts on the Land and all living beings. For the first time in a ceremonial space, over 80 observers from First Nations Leadership, youth, NGOs, academics and crown governments were invited to listen with discipline and take back the teachings to their lives and workplace. The Spiritual Knowledge Keepers called for restoring First Nations' responsibility for the land through self-determination, jurisdiction and self-governance. At the core, our worldview has a common thread: an understanding that "*we are the land, and the land is us,*" representing a sacred and personal responsibility and relationship with all of creation. Approaching climate action from the heart and traditional teachings is critical to standing up for our lands, culture, way of life and future survival.

“We need to remember this teaching to remember who we are. We as humans should not want to disrespect each other. So why would we want to harm the rock, the cedar tree? We have no right to disrespect, because that is who we are. When we harm the earth, we are harming ourselves. It has to stop. Please. As a younger generation, I am asking: please find your ways, go back to the roots of who we are, and be true to ourselves.”

Katisha Paul, WJOLĒLP and St’át’imc First Nations, and youth representative of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC)

“We have to be humble! We don’t own the Earth; we take care of it. This doesn’t belong to me. It belongs to the people, to Creation. As a leader you no longer belong to yourself; you belong to the people. Be humble, take care of the people. When they ask for help, you go. Today, they teach the opposite.”

Robert Nahanee, Squamish Nation Elder

“I recently had a vision – as I was speaking to some young people. I realized: Our rivers were never meant to be alone. The people that had been there forever needed to be there. The people that were born into those rivers, places, belong to those places through millennia. Everything in my vision told me that the environment—trees, rivers—wanted to renew our relationship so we could be custodians and restore sanctity to this great and wonderful planet of ours. So, it is going to be spiritual work as well, not just scientific. Somehow elevating your psyche to the idea that we have responsibility, all of us have the responsibility to be involved.”

Dr. Robert Joseph, BCAFN Knowledge Keeper and Hereditary Chief of the Gwawaenuk Tribe

Despite the advocacy and reconciliation work and the UN Declaration, Canadian climate plans and climate action consistently fail to uphold Indigenous rights to self-determination, Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, or true Nation-to-Nation relationships. There is a large gap between colonial policy, legislation, and First Nations’ worldviews and governance, but we must find a way forward together.

Grounding climate action in First Nations governance and Natural Law is essential to address the root causes of climate change. To continue the healing journey and guide our collective climate work. The Knowledge Keepers provided a mandate (14 items) to guide the development of the BC FNCL Agenda and the implementation of the BC FN Climate Strategy.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS WITH PREVIOUS AND ONGOING WORK

Beyond the BC FN Climate Strategy, the BC FNCL Agenda has been informed by an extensive body of climate-related engagements and foundational work, including:

- Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction by First Nations in BC (2023-2030)

In collaboration with the First Nations Leadership Council and other organizations, this plan provides a roadmap for building community resilience and preparedness, strengthening infrastructure and building standards, and enhancing emergency response and recovery capacities for First Nations in BC.⁶ It aims to reduce disaster risk and build First Nations communities' safer, more sustainable future.

- Joint Committee on Climate Action (JCCA) (2017-Current)

Established in 2017, the JCCA is a forum where First Nations advocates, and federal officials come together to discuss the inclusion of First Nations in federal climate policy and programming. In 2020, the JCCA prepared the *Best Practices for Federal Departments Working with First Nations on Climate Change* to provide guidelines and recommendations for federal departments to effectively engage and collaborate with First Nations on climate change initiatives.⁷

- Indigenous Climate Action Network (ICAN) (2011)

ICAN provides funds to remote Indigenous communities to hire full-time Climate Action Coordinators and peer and individual networking support, mentoring, and training for that person. Climate action coordinators plan and carry out energy efficiency, renewable energy generation, and climate change adaptation projects for their communities.

- Resilience Climate Action Network (RCAN) (2023)

Co-led by Coastal First Nations-Great Bear Initiative and the First Nations Emergency Services Society (FNESS), the RCAN aims to support Indigenous capacity to protect their communities', territories', culture, health and wellbeing from the impacts of climate change, elevating Indigenous knowledge and First Nations sovereignty. Action taken by RCAN includes supporting the development of regional climate resilience coordinators, creating resources and training opportunities and building a province-wide resilience network.

- First Nations Leadership Council Capacity and Needs Assessment Project (2024-2025)

The FNLC is currently working with the Great Bear Initiative and the First Nations Emergency Services Society to develop a province-wide Climate Change Capacity Assessment Report. Key objectives include assessing disparities among communities in their capacity to respond to the climate crisis and identifying needs, barriers, and challenges that limit the implementation of self-determined climate action and participation in provincial climate change decision-making. While the report is being developed, FNLC focuses on advocacy and building connections, relationships and areas for collaboration to address climate capacity challenges in First Nations communities.

- BC Flood Strategy (2024)

Focuses on building flood resilience through collaboration with governments and First Nations as climate change increases flood risks. Guided by the UN Sendai Framework,

⁶First Nations Leadership Council. (2023). [Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction by First Nations in BC](#)

⁷Joint Committee on Climate Action. (JCCA) [2020 Annual Report. Annex 2](#)

it prioritizes understanding flood risks and improving governance. It addresses funding, coordination, and communication challenges while aligning with other provincial initiatives to protect communities and ecosystems by 2035.

- First Nations Carbon Tool Kit (2022)

BCAFN partnered with Ecotrust Canada to create an online First Nations Carbon Toolkit focused on First Nations-led forest carbon projects in British Columbia. This toolkit aims to inform First Nations interested in learning more about forest carbon offset projects, particularly ones based on protecting intact forests and restoring forests degraded by logging.

BC FNCL AGENDA DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The BC FNCL Agenda was developed through a process centered on engagement and collaboration with First Nations right-holders, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, youth, leaders, and First Nations organizations to identify priorities and strategic actions and define the actionable high-level recommendations to enable transformational change in the federal system.

A Steering Committee was established to provide strategic direction, make key decisions, ensure the development process upholds the FNCL Agenda guiding principles and validate findings and recommendations at every stage of the development process (Appendix A). The Steering Committee ensured accountability, recognizing the importance of being informed by First Nations' priorities, rights, and knowledge. It must be noted that the Steering Committee was not a consultative body, as consultation and accommodation must be achieved directly with Rights and Title holders.

Climate staff from the other two FNLC organizations, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the First Nations Summit, who work in collaboration with BCAFN to implement the BC FN Climate Strategy, have played an important role throughout the engagement and development process by guiding to ensure the FNCL Agenda uses and complements both the BC FN Climate Strategy and its respective implementation activities. Government representatives from the Ministries of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) participated in engagement sessions and presented Canada's commitments and actions to support the development of the FNCL Agenda across Canada.

The BC FNCL Agenda development process involved several key steps:

Initial Assessment

- Reviewed the BC FN Climate Strategy and other foundational documents.
- Developed an Engagement Plan to ensure meaningful engagement with First Nations right-holders.
- Conducted meetings with First Nation leaders, organizations, and government officials.

Engagement

- Conducted comprehensive virtual and in-person engagement with the support of Naqsmist and Four Directions Management Services from October 2023 to October 2024 to gather data on priorities, challenges, and solutions.
- Hosted a Spiritual Knowledge Keepers Gathering on Climate Change in November 2023 to discuss the roots of the climate crisis and provide direction on climate solutions.
- Hosted a Co-development Kick-off Session on December 1, 2023, to explore the meaning of 'co-development.'
- Completed eight in-person regional engagement sessions from April to July 2024 in various locations across BC. A summary of each session can be found [here](#).
- Conducted virtual youth and general surveys to complement in-person engagement activities.
- Met with various First Nations organizations and First Nations leaders to seek feedback and input.

Participation in National FNCL Agenda Meetings

- BCAFN and representatives of the BC FNCL Steering Committee attended three in-person First Nations National Technical Steering Committee Meetings in Vancouver (May 2023), Ottawa (Feb 2024) and Halifax (August 2024).
- Ongoing participation in the First Nations National Caucus Meetings, facilitated by the AFN.
- Regional Chief Teegee and Katisha Paul, Union of BC Indian Chiefs Youth Rep, FNCL Agenda Steering Committee Member and BCAFN technical staff participated in the First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda – Leaders' Meeting in Ottawa on June 19, 2024.

Analysis of Data, Drafting Recommendations and Preparing a Costing Report

- Based on information gathered from the initial assessment, research and engagement sessions, the BCAFN climate staff prepared a draft BC FNCL Agenda High-Level Recommendations, identifying eleven (11) key themes and twenty-four (24) recommendations.
- Temixw Planning, in collaboration with Tiskwat Consulting, estimated the cost of the recommendations to guide the expected investment the federal government needs, supporting a \$1.5 billion Climate Fund strategy with \$150 million in annual investments over 10 years.

Feedback and Peer Review

- Hosted a virtual verification session in September 2024 to present themes and recommendations for feedback.
- Held a virtual All Chiefs and Leadership Meeting in October 2024 to discuss and provide feedback on the engagement process outcomes.
- Conducted a peer review of the recommendations with key First Nation leadership.

Approval and Endorsement

- Seeking formal endorsement of the BC FNCL Agenda final recommendations and report at the BCAFN Special Chiefs Assembly from February 26-27, 2025.

A detailed description of the steps in the development process is presented in Appendix A.

KEY CHALLENGES

The government of Canada committed to “co-develop” the FNCL Agenda with First Nations across Canada. However, numerous systemic barriers and challenges emerged, hindering a truly meaningful co-development process.

Co-development can be defined as a collaborative process between First Nations and the Crown aimed at advancing shared objectives, such as jointly creating or modifying policies and laws in planning, development and implementation. However, for many First Nations, the term ‘co-development’ has been cautiously approached due to the unequal conditions and unbalanced power that First Nations have when working with the government. Moreover, the existing colonial policies and legislation create obstacles for true co-development to occur, including Crown interpretations of parliamentary privilege, cabinet confidentiality and the Treasury Board approval process, which create barriers to the success of meaningful co-development.

According to the “*A Vision for Co-Development of the First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda*” Report, based on discussions from a BC FNCL Agenda engagement session on December 1, 2023, a co-development process or initiatives must uphold the following essential principles, acknowledging the interconnectedness of all things and prioritizing the Land and Traditional Knowledge.⁸

- Respect First Nations' inherent Rights and Title, self-determination, jurisdiction, free, prior, and informed consent, and governance
- True partnerships mean transparent, timely, and accessible decision-making and equitable solutions
- Government approaches must be rooted in the spirit of reconciliation and decolonization.

The following systemic barriers and challenges prevented the BC FNCL Agenda from being recognized as a true co-development process:

Inherent Rights and Title, Self-Determination, Jurisdiction, and Governance

The FNCL Agenda development process, both as a national process and a BC process, faced inherent challenges due to the ongoing insufficient action to decolonize the federal system, ministries and Crown laws and policies to fully uphold the Rights, Title and Treaty rights of First Nations and recognize First Nations authority, self-determination, jurisdiction and knowledge systems.

- During engagement sessions, participants emphasized that the BC FNCL Agenda remained heavily influenced by a power imbalance, with Canada ultimately holding decision-making authority. This imbalance was evident in the lack of transparency, lack of political will for reform, and the fact that First Nations and regional leads were not

⁸ BCAFN. (2023). [A Vision for Co-Development of the First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda](#)

involved in drafting the Memorandum to Cabinet (MC) or provided any subsequent updates on the MC or if it was presented to cabinet.⁹

- Community-driven approaches are fundamental for co-development initiatives with rightsholders. However, Canada failed to engage directly with rights holders to support the development of their own Nation-driven agendas, which should have informed the BC and Canada FNCL Agendas.

True Partnership

- True partnership means transparent, timely, accessible decision-making and relationships, and equitable solutions. The BC FNCL Agenda faced challenges in maintaining transparency during the drafting of the MC and cabinet discussions. The federal government was unable to take a more flexible approach to addressing concerns around privilege and cabinet confidence to ensure First Nations' direct involvement. As a result, the MC was drafted in secrecy and isolation, with any discussions—if they occurred at all—taking place entirely without First Nations' participation. Reconciliation and true partnerships effectively end at the highest political levels, where the most critical discussions and decisions are made.
- The government's strict timeline of less than 18 months for developing the FNCL Agenda significantly impacted the process in BC. Despite these constraints, BCAFN made every effort to engage all 204 First Nations by offering various engagement opportunities, including eight in-person sessions. However, the tight timeline limited additional engagement activities that were initially planned.
- Participants also expressed concerns that a single-day session was insufficient to meaningfully discuss priorities and solutions on such a complex and urgent issue as climate change from a First Nations perspective.
- Engagement fatigue was another key challenge in the process. First Nations staff expressed exhaustion from frequent government demands to participate in sessions, often without receiving tangible, adequate and sustainable support for addressing their climate priorities. In this context, the implementation phase of the BC FNCL Agenda is crucial, not only to demonstrate that First Nations priorities were heard but also to recognize the efforts to participate in the engagement process.

Strong First Nations Governance

- A fundamental principle for co-development grounded in the spirit of reconciliation and decolonization is the support for Nation-Building. The federal government failed to uphold this principle when allocating limited resources and setting short timelines for co-developing the FNCL Agenda across Canada. The process was not designed to follow a bottom-up approach that empowers Nation-driven climate agendas and supports Nation-building priorities. BCAFN and other AFN regions strongly advocated for a different approach. However, political pressures and the electoral context created a sense of urgency, increasing the risk of inaction.

BCAFN played a fundamental role in ensuring a steering committee was in place to guide the process and maximize engagement with First Nations rights holders within the government's imposed timelines. Although the BC FNCL Agenda Recommendations resulted from an extensive engagement process with rightsholders, the opportunity for a true government-to-

⁹ A MC is developed when a Minister is seeking a Cabinet decision on a policy proposal. MCs are brought forward by individual ministers or by several ministers working together.

government approach—where Nation-driven climate agendas could shape the BC FNCL Agenda and set the basis for true collaboration between First Nations and the government — was significantly restricted.

Climate Impacts and Context

Climate change is a symptom of the ongoing imbalance and disconnection in the world. The land, waters, First Nations culture, language and ways of life are deeply intertwined and connected with Mother Earth. Climate change impacts and Western development are eroding First Nations culture, spiritual connections and responsibility to the land, water and air. It is important to note that climate impacts are interdependent and cannot be separated from First Nations' worldviews or the impacts stemming from colonial policies or an extractive economic model.

Climate change disasters are increasingly displacing First Nations from their territories, severing their connection to the land cultural practices and limiting access to traditional foods. The destruction of critical habitats, such as the habitat of spotted owl's old-growth forest in Spuzzum First Nation territory in the Fraser Canyon, underscores the irreparable loss of biodiversity that First Nations rely on for both sustenance and spiritually. The loss of an animal or a non-human relative is a loss of a relative.

“Fire, water, air, and land are life. Take one away, and we have nothing. We have to bring these things into balance.”

Wenecwtsin (Wayne Christian), Former Kukpi7 of Splatsin First Nation, Knowledge Keepers Gathering 2023

Beyond the impacts on the land, water and non-human relatives, climate change impacts First Nations culture, health, wellbeing, spirituality, rights, connection, mobility, safety and security, etc. These multiple, intersecting impacts of climate change and environmental harm are often called 'cumulative effects': the collective impacts of past, present, and anticipated future activities and natural processes. These effects infringe on First Nations inherent Title, Rights, and Treaty Rights, including hunting, harvesting traditional foods, and practicing cultural ceremonies.¹⁰

BC warmed an average of 1.4°C per century from 1900 to 2013, with more significant warming in the north.¹¹ These rising temperatures are causing a slow-onset of devastating impacts, including sea level rise, ocean acidification and biodiversity loss.¹² Both Western science and First Nations knowledge/science have confirmed that the escalating climate impacts—that disproportionately affect First Nations—are a result of human-caused climate change.

¹⁰ Government of Canada. (2024). [About cumulative effects.](#)

¹¹ BC gov. (2015). [Long-term Change in Air Temperature in B.C. \(1900-2013\).](#)

¹² Government of Canada. (n.d.). [Canada in a Changing Climate: British Columbia Regional Perspectives Report.](#)

Although First Nations have been resilient to extreme changes in climate for millennia and possess valuable knowledge to adapt and mitigate climate impacts, their ability to address the current climate crisis has been severely impacted by discriminatory policies, lack of funding and the highly unequal relationship with the Crown.¹³ Continued underfunding of basic infrastructure such as clean drinking water, roads, and housing only exacerbates these issues.

The impacts of climate change are not just environmental, they are existential. Communities like the Shackan Indian Band and Kitselas First Nation face profound disruptions to their food security, traditional harvesting practices, and even their physical homes and loss of land. In many watersheds throughout BC, fish stocks are declining, and wildlife, such as moose populations, are declining and becoming more challenging to hunt. Wildfires, floods, and droughts—linked to climate change—pose constant threats to critical infrastructure, health, and the well-being of First Nations people. As climate emergencies worsen, these communities face the heartbreaking reality of witnessing their homes and ancestral lands change beyond recognition, calling for immediate action to protect the land, water, and culture that are the foundation of survival.

The increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather-related events in BC have resulted in unpredictable and record-setting summer and winter temperatures, droughts, wildfires, heat waves, damaging storms, floods, landslides and additional slow onset and cultural impacts. For example, in 2023, more than 2.84 million hectares of forest and land burned, making it the most destructive wildfire season in BC's recorded history.¹⁴ This released 1.6 times more than the province's total emissions in 2021.¹⁵

The complex web of climate impacts intersects with the ongoing deforestation, unsustainable logging, and industrial and urban development harming ecosystems, non-human relatives, inherent rights, and cultural connection to land and water. For example, in Haida Gwaii, logging has destroyed ancient forests, dried the land, and disrupted traditional hunting and medicine practices, forcing the Haida to rely on store-bought fish rather than what they once harvested from their rivers.

Refer to Appendix B for a more detailed description of the climate impacts experienced in BC. It includes lived experiences from various First Nations, illustrating the real-world effects of these climate changes on their communities, culture, and livelihoods.

Recommendations For Transformational Change

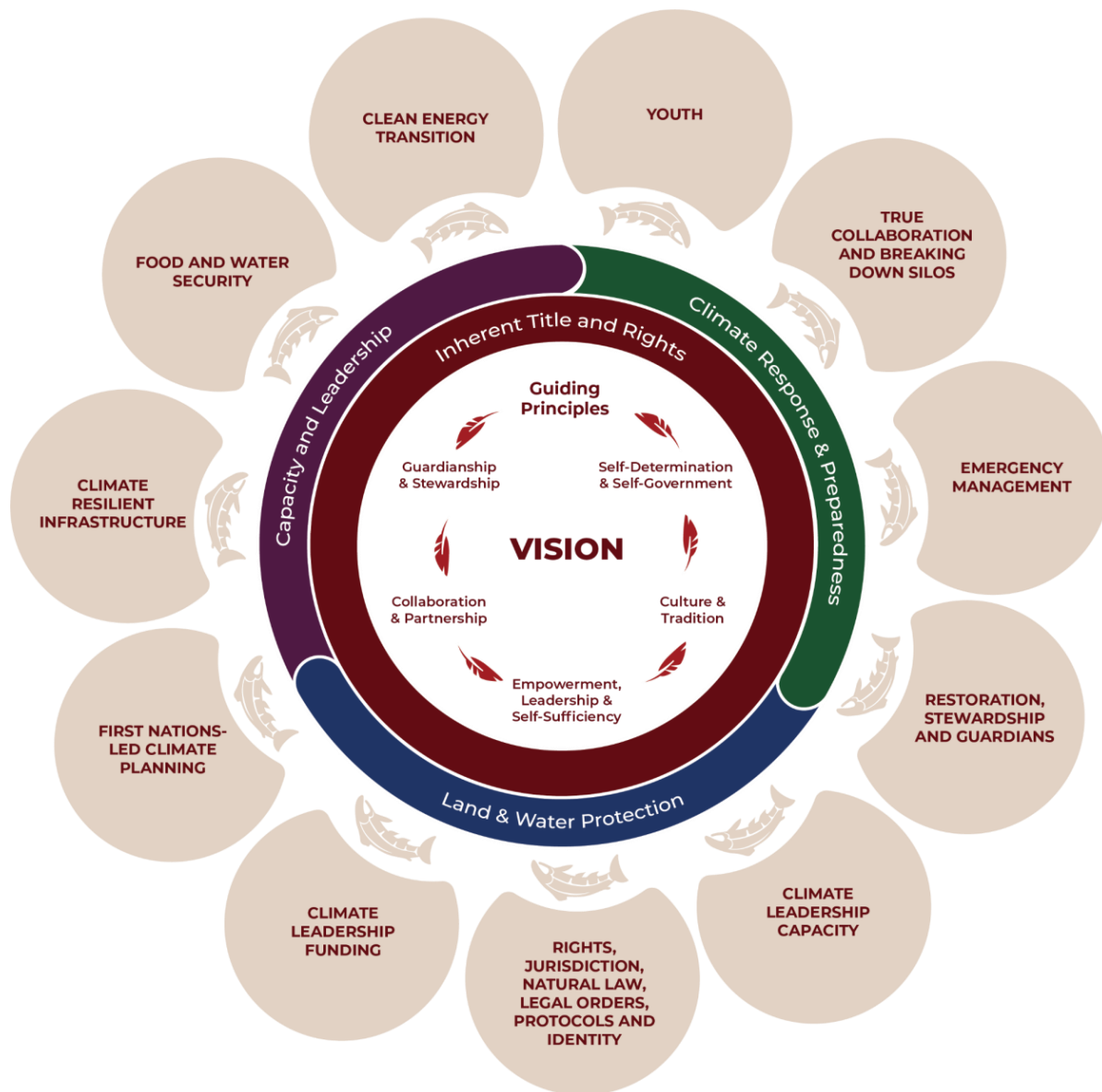
The following high-level recommendations are not presented in a hierarchy of priority but rather as a web of interconnected recommendations that will enable the transformational change needed to address the climate and environmental crisis, achieve Canada's climate goals, support and uplift First Nations-led climate leadership and protect Mother Earth. The solutions and response to address the climate crisis must be holistic, multidimensional, interrelated, and

¹³ Government of Canada. (n.d.). [Canada in a Changing Climate: British Columbia Regional Perspectives Report](#).

¹⁴ Government of British Columbia. (2023, December 7). [Wildfire Season Summary - Province of British Columbia](#). Gov.bc.ca.

¹⁵ Victoria News. (2024, January 18). [2023 B.C. wildfires pumped 102 megatonnes of carbon into atmosphere: EU](#). Victoria News.

grounded in First Nations self-determination, jurisdiction, laws, traditions, culture, knowledge systems, language, and governance.



Graphic 1. BC FN Climate Strategy and the BC FNCL Agenda: The centre and the concentric circles of the graphic represent the BC FN Climate Strategy's 'Vision, Principles and the Four Pathways for Climate Action'. The circles surrounding this graphic are the 11 key themes identified in the BC FNCL Agenda. This visually presents the interconnectedness of the BC FNCL Agenda with the Strategy.

1. FIRST NATIONS RIGHTS, JURISDICTION, NATURAL LAW, LEGAL ORDERS, PROTOCOLS AND IDENTITY

The land is law. First Nations' languages, songs, dances, and stories are derived from the land and the various infringements on First Nations' inherent right to protect the land continue to have a detrimental effect on the health of past, present, and future generations. The continued

enforcement and use of colonial legislation and policy, including the *Indian Act*, have undermined First Nations' jurisdiction and authority over traditional lands, resources, knowledge and data and disregarded the legitimacy of First Nations laws and legal orders. Colonialism, consumerism and capitalism are the root causes of climate change and have contributed to devaluing First Nations Knowledge, infringing Title, Rights, and Treaty Rights, and intensifying racial and gender-based inequality. First Nations are well positioned to take care of the land, water, oceans and air for future generations, and as many Elders say, "*the health of the land is a reflection of the health of our people.*"

First Nations in BC are disproportionately affected by climate change, and traditional lands, sacred resources and cultural identity are at risk of degradation and destruction due to the escalating climate emergency and cumulative impacts. First Nations have inherent rights and jurisdiction over our lands and territories and our right to self-determination and self-government. Despite the inherent jurisdiction First Nations possess, we are often plagued with layers of colonial bureaucracy and a lack of meaningful action.

First Nations must have the resources and mechanisms to develop, maintain, and implement our own institutions, governing bodies, and political, economic, and social structures. First Nations must also have ownership, control, access and possession over our climate data, including information protocols that adequately protect sensitive information and traditional knowledge and allow integration with data sets to help inform climate action.¹⁶

In November 2023, Spiritual Knowledge Keepers across BC called for restoring First Nations' responsibility for the Land through self-determination, jurisdiction and self-governance. At the core, the First Nations Worldview has a common thread: an understanding that "*we are the land, and the land is us,*" representing a sacred and personal responsibility and relationship with all of creation.

Language, traditions, culture, and Ceremony are the core of First Nations' identity. First Nations' cultures, laws, languages and knowledge systems are built from thousands of years on the land passed down from generation to generation and form the basis of an innate understanding of both the connection between the land, water, animals and all life forms of the physical and spiritual world and the mindset of respect, responsibility and stewardship for the Earth.

Climate adaptation and mitigation efforts have a higher likelihood of success when co-created with First Nations Peoples in ways that protect and strengthen the Title, Rights, and Treaty Rights and jurisdiction and when knowledge systems, culture and the unique connections First Nations have with our territories are respectfully honored and thoroughly incorporated in all aspects of climate change-related planning and action.¹⁷

¹⁶ First Nations Information Governance Centre (n.d.). [The First Nations Principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession \(OCAP\)](#).

¹⁷ Government of Canada (2020-22). [Canada in a Changing Climate: Advancing our Knowledge for Action, BC Regional Perspectives Report](#).

“[We need to make] sure First Nations are leading their own research, OCAP principles, data management/data sovereignty.”

Ktunaxa Language Group (Cranbrook) Regional Engagement Session

“We need to do a lot of healing in our community. There is currently no funding for culture, ceremony and healing and there is an issue with getting small grants that are not sufficient.”

“It comes down to the recognition of land and title. We need the government to understand that we are the Rights holders of this land – there is no Treaty in this area.”

Algonquian Language Group (Fort St. John) Regional Engagement Session

“On this path, there are many obstacles. There is trauma and there is work to do. When you pick up a rock, treat it well, for that rock has a spirit. Trauma has a spirit, just like love does. We must tap into this awareness and see the relationships between things as the priority, not the things themselves. This means breaking down silos in government and ways of thinking. It also means revitalizing culture, language, and Ceremony and restoring First Nations’ responsibility for the Land through self-determination, jurisdiction, and self-governance. It means practicing Traditional Knowledge, Sacred and Natural Law, balance, respect, care for one another and the Land, education, cycle breaking, seven generations principles, and taking responsibility to stand with Mother Earth. Ceremony can be many things, but above all, it is a way of life.”

Recommendation 1.1: First Nation Jurisdiction, Laws and Legal Orders

BC FN Climate Strategy: Theme 1.3

- Recognize and uphold First Nations’ knowledge systems, laws, legal orders, and worldviews in federal climate policies, legislation, planning and response using a whole-of-government approach. Federal climate policy and legislation must reflect the fact that the inherent Title, Rights, and Treaty Rights of First Nations Peoples include the inherent responsibility to our ancestral lands and cultural identity and that in the face of a climate emergency, upholding First Nations inherent and constitutional protected Title, Rights, and Treaty Rights depends on immediate and bold climate action grounded in the recognition of our self-determination, authority and jurisdiction and the revitalization of natural and sacred laws, protocols and identity.
- Fund the revitalization, development and/or implementation/enforcement of First Nations laws, legal orders and protocols related to land and resources/environmental governance and management rooted in each Nation’s distinct legal tradition. This involves the federal government recognizing First Nations authority, governments, laws and legal orders and our collective ability to uphold our responsibilities to the land, waters, and environment.

Recommendation 1.2: Language and Cultural Revitalization

BC FN Climate Strategy: Theme 1.3

- Provide \$2 billion CAD in annual funding required to fully support language revitalization programs as costed by the AFN.¹⁸ This figure includes upholding laws, legal orders and traditions that would strengthen Nation-led climate action and adaptation.
- Fund and support First Nations-led climate discussion circles, ceremonies and land-based learning initiatives to strengthen identity, language, culture, governance and intergenerational knowledge transfer while fostering the whole exercise of the right to self-determination and jurisdiction.

Recommendation 1.3: First Nations Data Sovereignty

- Recognize, respect and uphold First Nations data sovereignty through implementing the First Nations Data Governance Strategy.¹⁹
- Fund a legislative co-development process with First Nations to address barriers in Canadian legislation to First Nations data sovereignty and achieve consistency with the UN Declaration, as per the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.²⁰
- Provide funding and support for the continued development and implementation of the BC Regional Information Governance Centre, including the continued development of digital infrastructure and systems to enable First Nations and intergovernmental partners to exchange and act upon climate-related data and information more freely.

2. FIRST NATIONS CLIMATE LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

First Nations in BC are climate leaders; however, with additional capacity, tools, skill development and Nation-building opportunities and appropriate policies and financial resources, First Nations would be equipped and empowered to effectively adapt, build resilience and lead the response to the climate crisis both now and in the future.

Data and research show that communities with strong identity, capacity, and governance systems are better positioned to adapt and overcome the increasing climate emergency. Given the harmful and unjust colonial policies imposed by the Crown, the federal government has the historic responsibility to provide resources and mechanisms that empower First Nations to build strong, resilient Nations with the capacity for self-determined climate action.

The BC FNCL Agenda represents actions that can be broadly taken to support all First Nations in enhancing this necessary holistic capacity to face the climate crisis, in part by drawing on our ancestral teachings, knowledge, and legal orders. This illuminates comprehensive opportunities for climate-related training and skills development, braiding both Indigenous Knowledge and

¹⁸ AFN (2022). [Revitalizing First Nations Languages: A Costing Analysis](#).

¹⁹ First Nations Information Governance Centre (2020, March 31). [A First Nations Data Governance Strategy](#).

²⁰ First Nations Information Governance Centre (2022, August). [An Exploration of the Impact of Canada's Information Management Regime on First Nations Data Sovereignty](#).

science and Western science to prepare future generations through advocacy, training, and intergenerational knowledge sharing.

To improve First Nations' holistic capacity, funding must be allocated to support the creation of climate positions in First Nations in BC. These positions will be the first step in empowering and supporting First Nations in setting up self-determined climate departments, encouraging collaboration and collective knowledge sharing and learning between Nations. Climate staff could serve as a bridge between First Nations leadership and Nation members and Crown governments to support goals for consultation and meaningful engagement, in addition to coordinating First Nation-led mitigation and adaptation action.

“We need climate departments. We want the government to provide the funding, but let us design what we need. Don't come with your agenda.”

Algonquian Language Group (Fort St. John) Regional Engagement Session

“[We are] constantly [having] other people doing work for us – how can we build our own capacity if we're not doing the work ourselves?”

Ktunaxa Language Group (Cranbrook) Regional Engagement Session

To achieve Free, Prior, and Informed Consent and move beyond the “duty to consult” paradigm, the federal government must acknowledge the importance of continuous and meaningful engagement and co-development approaches directly with inherent rights title holders in BC. Despite the Joint Committee on Climate Action (JCCA) Best Practices Guide on meaningful engagement being co-developed by AFN regional advocates with the federal government, it has been largely ineffective due to the lack of clear mandates, protocols and procedures to support their use. The absence of accountability mechanisms within the federal government to measure progress and make necessary adjustments during engagement processes also contributed to the failure of this effort.²¹ The use of proper Crown government-to-Nation government relationship approaches could improve inter-ministerial and provincial government collaboration and coordination of climate engagement processes while supporting First Nations in building meaningful capacity to effectively participate in negotiations, consultations, and discussions rather than responding to fragmented federal and provincial government invitations to engage in isolated climate policy initiatives.

Recommendation 2.1: Support the Development and Implementation of a BC First Nations Climate Action Secretariat

BC FN Climate Strategy: 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action #3 and Theme 2.1 c.

- Support the creation of a BC First Nations Climate Action Secretariat to coordinate climate action efforts, provide technical guidance, and manage emergency responses.

²¹ JCCA (2022). [Joint Committee on Climate Action Annual Report to the National Chief and the Prime Minister - 2022](#).

- Direct long-term and multi-year funding to support the BC Climate Action Secretariat in developing robust governance frameworks, including constitutions, regulations, accountability mechanisms, and administrative procedures.

Recommendation 2.2: Fund and Support the Creation of Climate Positions and a Provincial First Nations-led Climate Network

BC FN Climate Strategy: 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action #5, #8, Theme 2.2, Theme 2.3 e

- Provide funding for climate-related positions (i.e. climate change coordinators or climate adaptation and mitigation specialists) in each First Nation in BC for a minimum of five years with competitive wages and benefits. These climate-related positions would work collaboratively with the emergency management positions outlined in Recommendation 8.2.
- Fund and support the establishment of a BC First Nations-led Climate Network (FNCN) composed of regional hubs of climate staff or coordinators. The FNCN Network may be hosted by the BC First Nations Climate Action Secretariat as outlined in Recommendation 2.1. The peer network would provide space for mutual support, learning, knowledge exchange, collaboration and relationship building between First Nations and foster the development of regional and provincial climate reciprocal partnerships or alliances with First Nations and non-First Nations.

INDIGENOUS CLIMATE ACTION NETWORK (ICAN)

The Indigenous Climate Action Network (ICAN), hosted by Coastal First Nations - Great Bear Initiative (CFN-GBI), works in partnership with First Nations in BC and supports First Nations-led climate action and leadership across British Columbia. The program provides funding for remote First Nation communities to hire full-time Climate Action Coordinators who focus on implementing energy efficiency, renewable energy, and climate change adaptation projects. Since 2011, CFN-GBI has assisted eight coastal First Nations communities in preparing for climate change and reducing reliance on fossil fuels by developing local capacity. In 2019, the program expanded to train Climate Action Coordinators in each community, and by 2022, ICAN extended its network to include all remote First Nations in BC dependent on diesel power, aiming to grow to 25 participants by 2025. The network fosters collaboration and peer support, allowing leaders to share knowledge and expertise.

- Provide funding and support for the FNCN and regional hubs to host gatherings and meetings such as one province-wide annual gathering and regular regional meetings, ideally at least twice a year. The gathering host would rotate across the different territories and language groups in BC.
- Fund and offer specialized climate-related training and skills development targeted to First Nation climate and emergency management positions. Training and skills development should include building capacity in developing, managing, and delivering

climate-related policies and projects, preparing funding applications, project proposals, and data assessment.

- Fund and support the creation of an online platform or knowledge hub to support the BC First Nations Climate Network and share climate information and research, such as First Nations-led climate initiatives and other information relevant to First Nations climate action and leadership. This platform could extend to other regions in Canada and showcase First Nations-led climate action and leadership to support and build collaboration across Nations and provincial and territorial boundaries.
- Ensure Recommendation 3.1 is implemented to create core funding for Network staff, First Nation staff and regional positions. Climate positions require long-term, stable funding sources to ensure that projects continue and that capacity remains in First Nations. Federal ministries, such as ISC and CIRNAC, should work collaboratively with the BC government to secure core funding and look for endowments to support the FNCN's sustainability and climate positions.

Recommendation 2.3: Coordinated and Meaningful Engagement and Co-development Approaches

BC FN Climate Strategy: 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action #2, #6, #10, Theme 1.2 b, Theme 1.4

- Ensure federal ministries support and collaborate with First Nations in BC and relevant provincial ministries to streamline and strategically align consultation and cooperation in policy and legislative development. This may include the creation of a whole-of-government engagement framework that contains procedures, protocols, tools and accountability mechanisms to ensure that cross-ministerial climate-related legislation, policies, and programs are meaningfully co-developed in partnership with First Nations in BC. A revised engagement approach must:
 - Be aligned with the UN Declaration, the UN Declaration Act and the Declaration Act Action Plan to streamline consultation and cooperation in policy and legislative development.
 - Protect and uphold the unceded Aboriginal Rights, Title and Treaty Rights of First Nations, as affirmed in the *Tsilhqot'in v. B.C.* (2014) with respect to Aboriginal Title and in the *Yahey v. BC* decision (2021) with respect to cumulative effects from industrial development and the Crown's failure to honour and protect Treaty Rights.
 - Enforce the use of the Joint Committee on Climate Action (JCCA) Best Practices Guide for Federal Departments Working with First Nations on Climate Change, which focuses on outlining what meaningful engagement with First Nations in federal climate policy looks like.²²
 - Reduce engagement fatigue through a coordinated and whole of government approach.

²² JCCA (2020). [*Joint Committee on Climate Action Annual Report to the National Chief and Prime Minister.*](#)

- Uphold the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) principles.
 - Ensure inclusive participation and empowerment for First Nations youth, women, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ (Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and others) peoples in climate action, decision-making and engagement processes.
 - Meaningfully engage Elders, youth and/or Knowledge Holders to ensure First Nations Knowledge is incorporated in all federal-led policy and legislative reform and climate-related response initiatives.
 - Create built-in accountability mechanisms to enforce and hold the federal government accountable for inaction.
- Ensure that the federal government continues to engage with First Nations in BC to discuss the implementation of the BC FNCL Agenda and the BC FN Climate Strategy. This includes creating mechanisms and allocating adequate financial resources to First Nations right-holders and First Nations organizations to meaningfully engage in the BC FNCL Agenda implementation process at the local and national levels.

3. CLIMATE LEADERSHIP FUNDING REFORM

First Nations have a deep understanding of our needs but lack the long-term, flexible funding to fully implement self-determined climate mitigation and adaptation actions, projects and initiatives. With complex and competitive application processes and stringent administrative reporting requirements, federal climate funding programs are difficult to access. This situation results in only those with the resources and capacity being able to secure financial support, creating division and inequity between First Nations in BC. The JCCA echoes these sentiments, identifying several key barriers, including inflexible program mandates and narrow investment categories, rigid funding allocations, short application deadlines, and unmalleable program parameters.²³

“Reporting requirements on grant funding is too difficult – First Nation’s need to be at the table when creating these programs in the first place.”

Algonquian Language Group (Fort St. John) Regional Engagement Session

“It is sad when the Federal Government puts money on the table, and we have to fight over it. This creates division.”

First Nations require the political support and core legislated funds to establish a BC First Nations Climate Fund to remove barriers and let First Nations do the urgent work needed in our territories to address and adapt to the climate emergency.

²³ JCCA (2020). [Joint Committee on Climate Action Annual Report to the National Chief and Prime Minister.](#)

On November 3, 2023, the Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the First Nations Leadership Council, the Province of BC, and the Federal Government. This agreement commits over \$1 billion to nature conservation initiatives in British Columbia through March 2030. While this historic agreement is a step towards reconciliation and First Nations-led conservation efforts in BC, the funds are still controlled by and administered through the Crown. Similarly, the release of Canada's National Adaptation Strategy (NAS) included \$1.6 billion in new federal funding commitments to help protect communities across the country. While the NAS recognizes Indigenous Peoples and governing bodies as key partners in adaptation action and acknowledges Indigenous rights to lands and territories with self-determined or self-governed actions, the announced budget did not include funding specifically targeted for Indigenous Peoples and First Nations despite the high level of vulnerability First Nations face from climate change and our crucial role in addressing the climate crisis. These two examples demonstrate that, while both represent progress in climate and biodiversity action, flaws in resource delivery may undermine First Nations' engagement and self-determine climate actions.

Funding reform is critical to building resilience and advancing First Nations-led conservation and climate action in BC. It is essential to simplify, streamline, and consolidate federal climate funding programs, and reduce reporting requirements, to better reflect First Nations' realities, priorities, and needs and support self-determined First Nations climate action and leadership. Furthermore, the federal government must collaborate cross-ministerially with the provincial government and crown corporations to address the complexities and barriers to accessing federal funding and improve both provincial and federal funding frameworks and programs.

Recommendation 3.1: Establish a BC First Nations Climate Fund

BC FN Climate Strategy: 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action #4 and Theme 2.3.

- Provide political support and core legislated funds for a minimum of 10 years to create a long-term, multiyear, flexible and sustainable BC First Nations Climate Fund. The fund will aim to foster public-private partnerships to leverage additional funding and resources, ensuring the long-term sustainability of climate action programs. The fund could be managed by the First Nations Climate Action Secretariat or by a board comprised of First Nations representatives and financial experts with strict transparency and accountability mechanisms, including regular audits and public reporting.
- The First Nations Climate Fund must secure sustainable financial resources for climate positions (presented in Recommendation 2.2) with the long-term goal of establishing permanent climate departments.
- The First Nations Climate Fund would provide low-barrier project funding to First Nations. The funded climate positions (Recommendation 2.2) would benefit from access to low-barrier project funding.

Recommendation 3.2: Create a Whole of Government Framework for Program Delivery

- Create a comprehensive, new whole-government framework for program delivery to improve, streamline, simplify and reduce the number of federal climate funding programs, eliminate the bureaucratic processes for funding application and ensure adequate government support is provided when applying for funding. The federal government must establish a task force composed of First Nations representatives and federal ministries, and if possible, the provincial government and crown corporations, to engage with Rights and Title holders to develop and implement the new whole-government framework for program delivery.
- The federal government must collaborate cross-ministerially with the provincial governments and crown corporations to address the complexity and barriers to accessing federal funding and improve both provincial and federal funding frameworks and programs to reflect First Nations' priorities on climate change.

4. FIRST NATIONS-LED CLIMATE PLANNING

Nation re-building and planning are crucial to adapting, building resilience, and effectively responding to the climate emergency. First Nations-led planning grounded in each Nation's culture, knowledge systems, laws, legal orders, and realities allows for tailored solutions. It also supports First Nations in cultivating a sense of ownership and responsibility, encouraging Nation members to collectively support Nation-driven climate initiatives and practical solutions.

"Our people know our communities best."

Tsimshianic Language Group (Terrace) Regional Engagement Session

"We need to tap into the community's abilities and knowledge. The community has answers, abilities and skills that we need and are often underappreciated or underutilized. We need real engagement with the people so that they feel their knowledge and abilities are important and valued."

Xaayda Kil Language Group (Haida Gwaii) Regional Engagement Session

Crown governments and ministries must acknowledge the importance of including First Nations' cultural and ecological knowledge in climate planning to combat climate change. First Nations' Knowledge systems and science must be recognized and implemented alongside Western scientific understandings in developing climate strategies and actions.

When Nation members plan together, they build resilience by strengthening community relations and networks of support and incorporating First Nations Knowledge, culture and identity in the planning process, which are essential to adapting and responding to the climate emergency.

Recommendation 4.1: Localized Climate and Emergency Strategies and Action Plans

BC FN Climate Strategy: 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action #17 and Theme 4.5 and 4.6.

- Fund the development of First Nation-specific climate-related strategies and action plans based on self-determined needs, priorities and processes. These may include energy efficiency strategies, risk assessments, cumulative impact assessments, GHG emission reduction plans, heritage protection plans, and/or monitoring and data collection or governance frameworks.
- Fund and support First Nations communities in developing self-determined emergency management strategies, plans, and systems. These plans should help First Nations establish and maintain clear, well-planned evacuation routes and procedures to enhance First Nations resilience.

5. FIRST NATION YOUTH

First Nations youth must be honored and acknowledged as true catalysts of change, innovators and climate leaders. 58% of First Nations youth in British Columbia are very concerned about the future impacts of climate change-related disasters.²⁴ Although we see the youth standing tall and strong as climate action leaders in their Nations, they are not fully acknowledged or involved in federal government policy or legislation decision-making.

First Nations youth in BC must have a strong voice and representation in Canada-led climate engagements and co-development processes and be invited to hold positions of power and seats at the climate and environment decision-making tables that impact their future. To support future young leaders, we must continue to empower and prepare them for the current and projected climate impacts through training, mentorship, advocacy, meaningful engagement, land-based learning and intergenerational knowledge exchange opportunities. In addition, they need to be connected with Elders.

“Youth are the future, and they must be involved in all of the conversations. We need a youth climate committee, and they must attend these meetings and engagements to advocate for First Nations climate action.”

Algonquian Language Group (Fort St. John Regional Engagement Session)

“We need more intergenerational knowledge transfer.”

Interior Salishan Language Group (Kamloops) Regional Engagement Session

Recommendation 5.1: Commit to Supporting Youth Climate Action and Leadership

BC FN Climate Strategy: 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action #6, #7 and Theme 2.6

- Establish dedicated long-term and stable funding to support education, training, skill development and mentorship programs for First Nations youth in topics such as wildfire conservation, water protection, Nation resilience building, cultural sustainability, renewable energy projects, forest restoration and others that might be identified by First

²⁴ First Nations Leadership Council (2023). [Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction by First Nations in BC](#)

Nations youth. This can be administered via the Climate Fund as outlined in Recommendation 3.1.

- Increase representation of First Nations youth and 2SLGBTQQIA+ youth in government climate decision-making at the local, regional, national and international levels by:
 - Enhancing or creating youth councils at the Nation level.
 - Funding a BCAFN Youth Council to support climate and environmental advocacy at the provincial, national and international levels (see Resolution 33/2023).
 - Hosting a First Nations youth forum annually.
 - Funding and supporting First Nation youth-led climate adaptation initiatives, programs, businesses, and organizations.
- Expand accessible opportunities for First Nations youth to engage in local, regional, national, and international climate advocacy and leadership roles by increasing funding for youth climate internships by at least 25% within the federal government and First Nation governments by 2026. Designate select opportunities for climate-related positions presented in recommendation 3.1 for First Nations youth.
- Fund and support the creation of intergenerational knowledge-sharing spaces and land-based learning opportunities targeted specifically for First Nations youth and Elders and Knowledge Keepers within each Nation in BC and between Nations.

6. RESTORATION, STEWARDSHIP AND GUARDIANS

First Nations have a deep spiritual and physical connection to our territories and non-human relatives where values such as reciprocity guide our actions and ensure the health of individuals, the collective and the ecosystem for generations to come. Unsustainable resource extraction practices (such as clear-cutting), industrial activities and uncontrolled development continue to destroy nature, disrupt First Nations' connection with the natural world, diminish economic opportunities and contribute to climate change.

As recognized by Article 35 of the Constitution, reaffirmed with the Tsilhqot'in court decision and the UN Declaration, First Nations in BC have inherent jurisdiction to access, use, and manage our traditional lands, waters, medicines, and resources in our self-determined ways. Federal policies require a paradigm shift that re-establishes ecosystems' inherent value, not their value as resources or commodities, and a shift in decision-making procedures towards consent-based approaches in line with the minimum standard of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. The federal government must recognize, respect, and support First Nations in developing and maintaining our systems, laws, policies, and guidelines for land, water, air, and resource management to use within and between our ancestral territories.

First Nations are the people of this land; our knowledge lies on the land, so fostering robust conservation initiatives that also generate sustainable revenues is a paramount goal for many First Nations in BC. This can be achieved by creating conditions to support conservation models that respect First Nations' jurisdiction and self-determination, as outlined in Recommendation

1.1. Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) represent a long-term commitment to conservation grounded in First Nations values, stewardship and culture. As referenced by the group Indigenous Resistance Against Carbon, in partnership with Oil Change International, in 2021 alone, Indigenous land and water defense “stopped greenhouse gas pollution equivalent to nearly one quarter (24 percent) of annual total US and Canadian emissions.” In this context, IPCAs have the potential to elevate both First Nations rights and responsibilities to the land.

First Nations must hold the pen when lines are drawn on the map, sit at the table when decisions are made, and continue to be on the ground caring and monitoring for lands and waters through First Nations Guardians programs in BC. Guardian programs are essential for Nations to assert and enforce our laws and make decisions in our territories. These programs are often underfunded or unable to secure long-term, stable funding.

“Our people have been environmentalists. We have the right to be Guardians and to continue what we did before.”

Athabaskan-eyak-tingit/ na-dene Language Group (Prince George) Regional Engagement Session

“Guardians are burned out. Stewardship program needs authority, with protocols, to do their job. There are no consequences, protocols, or procedures to support the Guardians' program.”

Wakashan Language Group (Campbell River) Regional Engagement Session

Ensuring recognition and implementation of the "economic component" of First Nations title is essential for achieving First Nations well-being. The ongoing imposed government land dispossession and colonial policies must be alleviated by supporting First Nation-led sustainable and low-carbon economic development initiatives. Despite challenges, First Nations in BC are leading conservation and economic development efforts. For example, Coastal First Nations manage and operate the Great Bear Rainforest within a framework that upholds ecological harmony and Nation well-being.

Recommendation 6.1: Creation of and Jurisdiction over Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs)

BC FN Climate Strategy: 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action #9 and Theme 3.5 d.

- Allocate dedicated, long-term, multi-year funding for the establishment, management, and expansion of IPCAs and marine IPCAs in BC, covering the initial setup and ongoing operational costs to ensure Canada’s target of conserving 30 percent of Canada’s land and water by 2030 is achieved.

- Provide technical support to First Nations for creating and managing IPCAs and marine IPCAs. This includes ecological assessments, biodiversity monitoring, and climate resilience planning.
- Support and fund climate resilience projects within IPCAs and marine IPCAs, such as nature-based solutions, habitat restoration, native species reintroduction, and fire management. In addition, provide incentives and financing for carbon sequestration projects led by First Nations and develop mechanisms for quantifying and verifying carbon sequestration benefits. These initiatives should not only contribute to broader climate adaptation and mitigation efforts but also align with and enhance First Nations' economic development goals. This can be achieved by asserting carbon rights, fostering conservation economies, and ensuring ecological integrity and biodiversity within IPCAs
- Legally recognize the jurisdiction and authority of First Nations over IPCAs and marine IPCAs and carbon rights through federal legislation and policies. Ensure that First Nations' laws, governance structures, and policies governing IPCAs and marine IPCAs are respected and enforced at all levels (see Recommendation 1.1).

Recommendation 6.2: Long-Term Commitment to Guardian Programs

BC FN Climate Strategy: 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action #5, Theme 3.5.

- Provide full funding for First Nations Guardians Programs to manage IPCAs. Guardians should be empowered and resourced to monitor ecological health, enforce regulations, and engage in restoration activities.^{25,26}
- Secure multi-year funding commitments to ensure the sustainability of First Nation Guardians programs, including investments in long-term capacity-building initiatives to strengthen the expertise and knowledge of First Nations Guardians. As mentioned in Recommendation 2.1, short-term funding can create uncertainty and limit the effectiveness of these programs.
- Uphold, respect, and support First Nations Guardians' compliance and enforcement that align with respective Nations' laws, legal orders, policies, plans, and guidelines.

Recommendation 6.3: First Nations-led Watershed Protection and Restoration

BC FN Climate Strategy: Theme 3.1 and 3.2

- Federal and provincial matched contributions to the BC Watershed Security Fund amounted to a total of \$1 billion, including at least 50% of funding directed toward First Nations-led watershed protection, restoration and conservation projects.²⁷

²⁵ Indigenous Leadership Initiative (2022, January). [Good for the People, Good for the Economy: A Call to Action to Recognize, Support and Implement Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas and Indigenous Guardians in British Columbia.](#)

²⁶ Four Directions (2022, June). [What We Know Summary Report Guardians.](#)

²⁷ The Watershed Security Fund is an identified fund under the Tripartite Nature Framework Agreement with the First Nations Leadership Council, BC and Canada signed on November 3, 2023.

- Full alignment of the *First Nations Clean Water Act* (C-61), the modernization of the *Canada Water Act*, and standing up the Canada Water Agency with the UN Declaration, including upholding and affirming First Nations' inherent, constitutionally protected and Treaty Rights to water on and off reserve. This must include sustainable, long-term funding for source water and watershed protection, stewardship and governance, as affirmed by the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly in Resolution 27/2023.

Recommendation 6.4: First Nations-led Conservation Economies and Stewardship

BC FN Climate Strategy: 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action #9, #10, #11, Theme 3.5 and Theme 4.10.

- Work with and support the provincial government and First Nations in BC to align tenure and licensing systems for logging, mining, water, carbon, and other related to resource extraction with the principles of FPIC (an example to follow is the Mineral Tenure Act Reform process).
- The federal government must obtain FPIC from each distinct First Nation in climate response and planning and ensure that any resource development project proponents uphold FPIC within First Nation ancestral territories.
- Review, reform and implement policies and mechanisms to support the protection of critical habitats and old-growth forests and other practices that align with conservation goals, such as First Nations-led silviculture.
- In partnership with First Nations in BC, conduct a study to identify areas and critical wildlife habitats for Species at Risk that require immediate restoration and protection due to current and projected resource extraction (logging, fracking, LNG, mining, etc.), agriculture, other urban/industrial development, and climate change.
- Create mechanisms and work collaboratively with First Nations in BC to explore opportunities to grant rights to non-human relatives such as animals, rivers and lakes.

7. CLIMATE RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE

On-reserve, infrastructure has historically been underfunded in BC and across Canada. The lack of access to critical infrastructure, such as housing, education, healthcare, connectivity, drinking water, and other essential services, has perpetuated deep-rooted inequality across First Nations and elevated vulnerability in the context of the climate crisis.

A report co-developed between the Assembly of First Nations and Indigenous Services Canada quantified the capital and operating costs to “Close the Infrastructure Gap by 2030” (CTIG 2030) across Canada.²⁸ The estimated on-reserve investment needed in BC to Close the Infrastructure Gap is \$70.7 billion, more than 20% of the total estimated for Canada. This gap is

²⁸ AFN & ISC (2023). [Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030. A Collaborative and Comprehensive Cost Estimate Identifying the Infrastructure Needs of First Nations in Canada.](#)

a result of decades of underfunding, failed fiduciary duties, and unfair distribution of Canada's and BC's wealth.²⁹

According to the Independent Auditor General Report (2024), First Nation on-reserve infrastructure is insufficient and aging relative to surrounding municipalities and lagging far behind when it comes to the critical investments for safety, livability, health and wellness in the context of the climate crisis.³⁰ In addition, according to Canada's 2021 Census, people in First Nations communities are four times more likely than the non-Indigenous population to live in crowded housing, where the dwelling does not have enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the household. People in First Nations reserves are also six times more likely to live in housing in need of major repairs.

Assessing, identifying, and meeting critical infrastructure needs and asset management in First Nations reserves is imperative to protecting the Nation's and ecosystem health, building climate resilience, responding to emergencies, and reducing GHG emissions and reliance on fossil fuels.

"The shoreline is deteriorating, and we are losing our land and roads."

Xaayda Kil Language Group (Haida Gwaii) Regional Engagement Session

Recommendation 7.1: BC First Nations Critical Infrastructure Needs Assessment and Implementation Plan

BC FN Climate Strategy: 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action #12, and Theme 4.1 a and 4.9 c.

- Fund and support developing and implementing a province-wide assessment of critical infrastructure and asset management on First Nations reserves to protect the Nation's health and wellness, including during climate-related events, and prioritize long-term investments to close the infrastructure gap as outlined in the [AFN-ISC Infrastructure Gap Report](#). The assessments should be First Nation-led, incorporating First Nation knowledge and priorities to accurately identify and address specific needs and gaps.
- The federal government, in partnership with the provincial government, must prioritize repairing and upgrading roads and highways on and off-reserve to ensure infrastructure is designed to handle increased water flows and other climate-related impacts and

²⁹ AFN & ISC (2023). [Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030. A Collaborative and Comprehensive Cost Estimate Identifying the Infrastructure Needs of First Nations in Canada.](#)

³⁰ Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2024). [Housing in First Nations Communities, Independent Auditor General Report.](#)

disasters. This will also ensure that First Nations in BC have full access to evaluation routes to prevent isolation during natural disasters.

- Uplift and support First Nations-specific technical organizations such as the First Nations Housing & Infrastructure Council to work with rights and title-holders to address their housing and infrastructure needs and priorities as outlined in BCAFN Resolution 08/2024.

8. EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Natural disasters in BC are being exacerbated by climate change and are increasing in frequency and intensity. In 2021, unprecedented floods in BC led to over thirty First Nations being directly impacted, causing displacement of community members and the loss of reserve lands and homes. The total economic costs associated with the 2021 floods, heat dome, wildfires and landslides were estimated between \$10.6 billion and \$17.1 billion.³¹ In 2023 wildfire season was the most destructive in BC's recorded history with more than 2.84 million hectares of forest and land burned, putting in danger and isolating many First Nations communities.

According to the 2022 Auditor General of Canada's report, First Nations communities are at higher risk from these disasters due to their increased remoteness stemming from forced relocation under the *Indian Act* and socioeconomic challenges.³² First Nations communities are also more likely to be evacuated than non-Indigenous communities. Despite being most at-risk and vulnerable to natural disasters due to decades of chronic underfunding, First Nations are expected to prepare and respond to these events without the training, resources or capacity comparable to that of provincial, federal or municipal governments. This limits First Nations' ability to keep our communities safe and has devastating consequences on our lands, livelihoods, and cultural heritage.

The 2022 Auditor General of Canada Report also found that Indigenous Services Canada's (ISC) approach towards emergency management has been more reactive than preventative and continues to have a backlog of underfunded and eligible First Nations infrastructure projects to mitigate emergencies, particularly in BC.³³ Despite the evidence that for every one dollar spent on preparedness and mitigation, six dollars can be saved in emergency response, ISC spent 3.5 times more on emergency response and recovery than on prevention and preparedness.

The 2022 audit also found that the highest-risk First Nation communities are not identified or prioritized for resources, reducing the effectiveness of funding allocation towards preparedness and mitigation projects and, therefore, leaving more at-risk First Nations vulnerable. Furthermore, when funding is provided, it is not flexible enough to meet the needs of First

³¹ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2022, November 30). [A Climate Reckoning: The economic costs of BC's extreme weather in 2021](#)

³² Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2022). [Report 9 - Emergency Management in First Nations Communities - Indigenous Services Canada](#)

³³ Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2022). [Report 9 - Emergency Management in First Nations Communities - Indigenous Services Canada](#)

Nations. The current funding from Indigenous Services Canada does not permit, for example, the acquisition of emergency response vehicles or trailers, and direct funding should instead be provided.

In addition, First Nations have historically not been included or consulted in emergency management decision-making, violating our constitutionally protected rights and making emergency preparedness and response delayed, ineffective and not culturally safe. This lack of inclusion has also contributed to poor communication of the roles and responsibilities across emergency management agencies, making it difficult for First Nations to know who to reach out to find support and how to access them.³⁴ As a result of the lack of effective communication and a transparent decision-making framework, First Nations have had sacred and ceremonial sites destroyed or bulldozed in an uninformed effort to help. First Nations also may not even understand their own vulnerabilities because of this lack of inclusion.

“We need emergency kits for everyone in the community, including cultural items, plants and masks for smoke.”

Algonquian Language Group (Fort St. John) Regional Engagement Session

“In the event of an emergency, a database would be helpful, so we know who and what equipment is available in real time – we could have clusters of First Nations who can work together to support each other.”

Athabaskan-eyak-tlingit/ na-dene Language Group (Prince George) Regional Engagement Session

“Why are we going to UBCM to get funding? Our communities have been engaged so heavily but are not able to access the funding directly.”

Athabaskan-eyak-tlingit/ na-dene Language Group (Prince George) Regional Engagement Session

Consistently, First Nations are prevented from using our own Indigenous Knowledge to protect our communities. Cultural burning, an effective method of fuel reduction with proven benefits, has “too much government red tape” and was mentioned in every engagement session as a key priority. In addition, communities are often vilified for trying to protect themselves in an emergency.

³⁴ BC Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (2022). Summary Report: 2022 First Nations Emergency Management Partnership Tables

“Our voices are not heard. We are underrepresented at government tables, this is a huge vulnerability for our Nations.”

Salishan-Squamish Language Group (Chilliwack) Regional Engagement Session

“We’ve done controlled burns through millennia and we should have the right to be able to be guardians, be environmentalists on our own territories, but the government is implementing these laws and these regulations that are limiting us.”

Athabaskan-eyak-tlingit/ na-dene Language Group (Prince George) Regional Engagement Session

“The communities are there to help, and they can respond to natural disasters. But if you get out to, for example, put down fires, you will be put in jail. We need to use common sense and the skills of communities. Often, you need tickets or certifications, but in an emergency, there is no time.”

First Nations must be fully included in the co-creation of mechanisms to streamline the addition of reserve lands affected by climate change-related loss and damage or areas identified as prone to climate impacts. In collaboration with the provincial government, the federal government must ensure that emergency management legislation, policies, and programs respond with urgency to the current climate emergency and are aligned with the UN Declaration and the Declaration Acts.

Additionally, Natural Climate Solutions or Nature-Based Solutions can play a significant role in preventing and mitigating climate change-related disasters by leveraging ecosystems and our natural processes to address environmental and climate challenges. First Nations, with our deep-rooted role in stewarding our lands, water and resources, are ideally positioned to lead the deployment of these solutions within our ancestral territories. Projects related to flood and fire management, coastal protection, erosion control, water and watershed management, biodiversity enhancement, carbon sequestration, etc., should be fully supported and prioritized.

“We need land back and better policies around addition to reserve land. The federal government needs to create loss and damage policies for First Nations within Canada and move beyond their international commitments.”

Interior Salishan Language Group (Kamloops) Regional Engagement Session

Finally, there needs to be a streamlined ‘additions to reserves’ mechanism. The climate emergency is reducing the size of many First Nations reserves, particularly coastal communities affected by sea level rise.

Recommendation 8.1: Co-developed Emergency Management Decision-Making

BC FN Climate Strategy: 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action #16, Theme 4.5

The Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction by First Nations in BC: 30 Calls to Action #1, #4, #7, #13, #27

- Support the creation of formalized respectful partnerships within and between First Nations, local, provincial and federal governments to build climate resilience and ensure well-coordinated and culturally centered emergency preparedness and responses. The Multi-Agency Support Team (MAST) made up of First Nations support organizations, ISC and the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and offering timely face-to-face support to First Nations in the response and recovery stages could be a key model to follow.
- Ensure each First Nation in BC has the funding and capacity to co-develop risk assessments and emergency management plans with local governments, which incorporate Indigenous knowledge and promote cultural safety as per the new *Emergency and Disaster Management Act*. This information should be shared with Indigenous Services Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada to allow the departments to target their preparedness and mitigation funds to the Nations with the greatest need.

Recommendation 8.2: Fund Emergency Management Positions

BC FN Climate Strategy: 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action #16, Theme 4.5

The Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction by First Nations in BC: 30 Calls To Action #19

- Fund emergency management positions in each First Nation in BC that could work in partnership with climate staff to develop and maintain emergency management plans, manage and coordinate emergency management training, provide support in response and recovery after an event, and maintain relationships with First Nations, tribal councils, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations.
- Provide long-term funding to hire, train and secure First Nations firefighters to protect critical infrastructure and support cultural burning practices and wildfire mitigation within their respective traditional territories.
- This recommendation can be effectively implemented by allocating long-term funding and strengthening capacity as outlined in Recommendations 3.1 and 2.2

Recommendation 8.3: First Nation Emergency Management Training and Equipment Provision

BC FN Climate Strategy: 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action #16, Theme 4.5

The Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction by First Nations in BC: 30 Calls To Action #2, #6, #9, #17

- Co-develop, fund and implement comprehensive training programs for First Nations community members, leadership, emergency responders and other stakeholders on fire and flood prevention, response, and recovery. Ensure these programs are tailored to their specific hazards, continuously offered, and cumulative. Training provided to First Nations communities through qualified trainers, or service organizations (like the First Nation Emergency Service Society (FNESS) should be vetted and recognized equally to Justice Institute British Columbia (JIBC) training. The training programs must be culturally appropriate, and accessible and include First Nations traditional knowledge. Additional training should also be developed for hereditary and elected leaders to fully understand their roles during emergencies and effectively respond.
- Provide each First Nation in BC with the necessary equipment to respond to climate-related emergencies to enhance capacity. This includes firefighting gear, flood control tools and emergency response kits. In particular, investments are needed for communities to have emergency response vehicles (e.g., fire trucks, marine vessels, and equipment such as generators) along with resources to ensure they have the qualified personnel to operate them and construct/acquire storage facilities to ensure proper asset maintenance.

Recommendation 8.4: Loss and Damage Mechanisms for First Nations

- Co-develop and establish mechanisms with First Nations in BC, including funds, to acquire and make additions to reserves lands affected by climate change-related loss and damage, or areas identified as prone to climate impacts.
- Ensure the mechanisms and process of additions to reserve lands are streamlined to replace lands lost to climate-related disasters or areas identified as prone to climate impacts. The addition of lands should align with each Nation's culture, traditional uses and priorities.

Recommendation 8.5: Natural Climate Solutions Initiatives

- Integrate First Nations-led natural climate solutions into disaster risk reduction strategies to prevent disasters, build Nation resilience to climate change and reduce our vulnerability to climate events. This includes providing the appropriate funding to First Nations governments to design, plan and implement natural climate solutions.

9. FOOD AND WATER SECURITY

Food, water, and drinking water are fundamental to all aspects of First Nations culture, including ways of life and well-being. Global warming and extractive and unsustainable land use impacts are having devastating effects on food and water security. Many First Nations in BC are trying to re-establish sovereignty over their food systems despite the disruptions experienced due to the adoption of capitalist and colonial food systems.

Intensive and industrial agricultural systems are more vulnerable to climate change and contribute to deforestation, soil degradation, biodiversity loss, carbon pollution, pesticide exposure and water scarcity and pollution in BC. Excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides has significant impacts on both water and soil, with grave consequences for ecosystems, health and agriculture.

Water extraction and pollution continue to influence water quality and quantity, affecting fish populations such as salmon, which not only provide food security to many First Nations in BC but are part of our cultural identity and way of life.³⁵ Extreme weather-related events such as floods and droughts are becoming more frequent, putting further stress on First Nations. Without long-term and reliable access to safe and clean food and water sources, First Nations will not be sufficiently prepared to respond and adapt to the ongoing climate crisis. The federal government must invest in infrastructure to ensure all First Nations have long-term, reliable access to safe and clean water. First Nations, in our engagement sessions, continued to cite poor water security.

The federal government must recognize and support First Nations authority and rights to define, use, and manage our food systems, including market management, local gardens, harvesting, gathering, and trapping. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring that First Nations are self-sufficient in the face of climate emergencies. This is particularly important considering the cost-of-living crisis.

“Every house has an issue with water, and the water is all contaminated. Housing drinking water are terrible on reserve.”

“We need to get back to the land and have the government funding to support the green economy.”

Algonquian Language Group (Fort St. John) Regional Engagement Session

Recommendation 9.1: Local Food Sovereignty and Access to Traditional Foods

BC FN Climate Strategy: Theme 4.4

- Fund programs that support traditional hunting, fishing, and harvesting practices. Ensure these practices are integrated into broader food security strategies and support intergenerational knowledge transfer and land-based learning. Prioritize First Nations in colder climates with short outdoor growing seasons and those most vulnerable to climate-related impacts and emergency-related disasters.³⁶
- Provide education and training on sustainable agricultural practices, traditional food systems, and food preservation techniques. Offer workshops on canning, drying, and

³⁵ FNLC (2022). [First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan](#).

³⁶ FNLC (2022). [First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan](#).

other preservation methods to enhance self-reliance during climate-induced disruptions and emergencies.

- The Department of Fisheries and Oceans must meaningfully work with First Nations in BC to support the recovery and restoration of wild salmon stocks to secure First Nations' cultural connection and access to traditional food sources for current and future generations.

Recommendation 9.2: Long-Term Access to Safe and Clean Food and Water Sources

- Invest in infrastructure to ensure all First Nations have long-term, reliable access to safe and clean water. This includes building and upgrading water treatment facilities and distribution systems in remote and underserved areas.
- Establish First Nation-led soil and water quality and quantity monitoring programs, providing training and resources to local personnel to ensure continuous monitoring and rapid response to contamination issues, soil degradation and changes in water availability.
- Create or strengthen First Nation-led systems for monitoring the levels of pesticides and fertilizers in water bodies, soil, and air in their traditional territories. This includes requiring farmers and agribusinesses to publicly report the quantities and types of fertilizers and pesticides they use and their potential environmental impact.
- Implement Recommendation 6.3 to ensure First Nations, both on and off-reserve, have long-term access to safe, clean water in alignment with the UN Declaration.

10. TRUE COLLABORATION AND BREAKING DOWN SILOS

Climate change is an urgent global threat that transcends borders and jurisdictional boundaries, making collaboration and partnership essential. The BC FN Climate Strategy emphasizes the guiding principle of collaboration and partnership, underscoring the importance of developing genuine partnerships between First Nations, Crown governments, the private sector, organizations and society as a whole, both in Canada and in international spaces. All forms of collaboration must be rooted in the recognition of First Nations rights, self-determination, jurisdiction, and authority. In addition, the past and present harms of colonization and ongoing racism and discrimination that exist in Canada must be acknowledged and addressed as an essential component of developing positive relationships and shared accountability for climate action.

“Silos have made the government so complicated. The departments need to work together to avoid the overlap.”

“All of the Steering Committees working on Climate Change should get together and get organized. We need to all be on the same page and working together. Great coordination of Climate Change groups and committees is needed. We need to stop the silos. How can we work together to be united? Once a year all Steering Committees related to Climate Change should get together.”

Xaayda Kil Language Group (Haida Gwaii) Regional Engagement Session

Creating spaces such as tripartite tables between First Nations, the provincial, and the federal government can support streamlined and collaborative decision-making and shared accountability. It is essential to develop collaborative partnerships and strengthen information sharing within and between First Nations, as well as with all levels of government, organizations both in Canada, BC and internationally and society at large, to collectively care for Mother Earth. Further dialogue and the continuation of building meaningful partnerships are required to thoroughly implement the BC FNCL Agenda.

Recommendation 10.1: Breaking Down-Silos

BC FN Climate Strategy: Theme 1.2

- Commit to breaking down the silos within and between federal ministries and departments by creating policies and mechanisms to support implementation, progress tracking, and continuous improvement.
- Strengthen Crown-led resource management, environment and climate engagement, decision-making, processes, and communications between the provincial and federal governments and First Nations.
- Fund and establish a collective process to create partnerships and shared accountability via long-term agreements and tripartite mechanisms between First Nations, and the provincial and federal governments to enhance coordinated and effective First Nations climate action and leadership.

11. CLEAN ENERGY TRANSITION

The human-caused climate emergency is threatening the survival of all living beings and demands urgent action to globally reduce GHG emissions, transition away from fossil fuels and achieve global net zero. However, for First Nations, decarbonization cannot be seen as separate from decolonization. The legacy of colonization is evident in the ongoing barriers to energy sovereignty and the disproportionate energy poverty being experienced by First Nations in BC.

Remote and off-grid First Nation reserves are often forced to sacrifice a significant amount of time, money, staff capacity and effort to fulfil the Nation's basic energy needs. These First Nations also have limited control over, or access to, clean energy options and often rely on diesel, which is neither affordable, reliable, nor a sustainable source of electricity³⁷. As First Nations seek to reduce diesel dependency and realize energy sovereignty, they continue to face persistent economic, regulatory, and political barriers.³⁸

According to the provincial government, BC will experience a clean energy deficit by 2028. While new opportunities for First Nations to participate in the clean generation and transmission and distribution are emerging, significant barriers prevent our full integration and ability to benefit from clean and renewable opportunities. These barriers include, but are not limited to: issues of affordability, limited capacity, minimal contract opportunities for partnership and equity-sharing and lack of financing and stable funding. In addition, bureaucratic obstacles that fail to recognize First Nations Rights and Title prevent interested First Nations from benefiting from clean energy developments on their traditional territories. As a result, First Nations are frequently excluded from the economic opportunities in this growing sector, despite their desire to participate.

"We want to generate our own energy systems and electricity."

Interior Salishan Language Group (Kamloops) Regional Engagement Session

The transition to a clean energy future, including new investments in renewable energy, must be inclusive, just, and avoid reproducing colonialism. The BC electricity matrix is predominantly powered by hydroelectric systems, coming from large hydroelectric dams and run-of-river systems. Hydroelectric megaprojects have had significant and lasting impacts on First Nations communities, including land and biodiversity loss due to flooding of large sections of traditional territory. It has cut off First Nations communities from their ancestral lands, disrupted traditional hunting and fishing areas, eroded cultural and heritage sites, and infringed upon Treaty and Inherent Rights.³⁹

³⁷ Indigenous Clean Energy (2023, December). [Enabling Efficiency: Pathways and recommendations based on the perceptions, barriers, and needs of Indigenous people, communities, and organizations.](#)

³⁸ Pembina Institute (2023, May 31). [Government action on UNDRIP and the clean energy transition.](#)

³⁹ Exploring the Impacts of Hydroelectric Megaprojects on Indigenous Lands (2023). <https://www.sej.org/publications/features/exploring-impacts-hydroelectric-megaprojects-indigenous-lands>

“Programs and communications need to be simplified to support community members in accessing rebates for cleaner energy and transportation, such as E-bikes or solar panels. This transition must be equitable.”

Ktunaxa Language Group (Cranbook) Regional Engagement Session

“We are trying really hard to get solar panels and we are having issues with BC Hydro. We run on diesel, so running our heat pumps is expensive. Haida Gwaii uses approximately 10 million liters of diesel a year to run our generators.”

Xaayda Kil Language Group (Haida Gwaii) Regional Engagement Session

Furthermore, despite being impacted by hydroelectric projects, some First Nations communities still face issues with the reliability and affordability of electricity services. Decarbonizing Canada’s economy must uphold and adhere to First Nations inherent Rights, Title, and Treaty Rights, as well as the norms of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent and the UN Declaration. First Nations must have access to technical education and capacity-building opportunities to support clean energy leadership and action for a just transition.

First Nations must have the jurisdiction and decision-making authority over our territorial lands and resources that can be utilized to generate any form of clean or renewable energy. First Nations must also have the ability to sign revenue-sharing agreements to benefit from clean energy projects. The federal government must work to transition to clean electricity systems that build on ownership, revenue sharing, local employment, and business development benefits for First Nations in new clean energy infrastructure, power generation, and sales.

Recommendation 11.1. First Nations-led Transition to Reliable and Affordable Renewable, Non-Combustible, and/or Low-Carbon Energy Sources.

BC FN Climate Strategy: 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action #18, Theme 4.8

- Ensure all future federal net zero-targets and federal clean energy policies and legislation are fully co-developed in partnership with First Nations in alignment with the UN Declaration.
- Fund technical education and training to create job opportunities in the clean energy transition, particularly for youth. As stated in recommendation 3.1, a BC First Nations Climate Fund could support this.

- The federal government must work in partnership with the provincial government, Crown Corporations, First Nation Governments and First Nations organizations such as the First Nations Energy and Mining Council and the Indigenous Clean Energy Opportunities to finance, develop and support self-determined, reliable and affordable clean energy alternatives that incorporate ownership, revenue sharing, local employment and business development opportunities and benefits.
- Increase long-term funding to support First Nations' energy sovereignty and First Nations-led clean energy initiatives through the First Nations Climate Fund presented in Recommendation 3.1.
- Provide support to Indigenous Clean Energy Opportunities and BC Indigenous Clean Energy Initiative (BCICEI) to continue supporting First Nations self-determined clean energy goals, engaging First Nations and advocating for First Nations inclusion in the transition to net-zero and to a clean energy future.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Co-development should be seen as part of the long-term goal of shared jurisdiction, involving true partnerships to manage lands and shared decision-making processes led by First Nations and supported by the federal government. This approach is essential for moving beyond consultation and toward true governance, where First Nations can fully implement their authority and capacity to make decisions about their lands and resources. All federal climate legislation, policies, and regulations must be developed in partnership with First Nations and the federal government must honour 'Nation-to-Nation' decision making, self-determination, uphold Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, and advance reconciliation.

Over decades, First Nations have identified that Canada's colonial policies, which prioritize extraction and disconnection, are at the root of environmental imbalances. To address this, a fundamental shift in worldview is needed—one that is rooted in reciprocity, respect, relationships and co-existence. Climate change cannot be tackled through policy changes alone; it requires a collective transformation in how we relate to the natural world. To address the climate crisis, First Nations' perspectives, knowledge systems and worldviews should not only be included in Canada's climate plans, policies and legislation but rather form its' foundation.

After two years of extensive engagement throughout BC, First Nations have articulated clear priorities: the need for self-determination, jurisdiction, capacity building, meaningful involvement in climate governance and decision-making, and flexible long-term funding. The voices of Youth and the Knowledge Keepers Mandate will guide BCAFN climate work and ensure that the BC FNCL Agenda implementation does not lose sight of the importance of Natural Law, ceremony and healing.

As we move forward, it is also crucial that the FNCL Agenda and its associated discussions continue to evolve under the guidance of First Nations leadership at the local and regional

levels. The extensive engagement, relationship building and research conducted over the past two years have laid a strong foundation for transformational change and future implementation of the FNCL Agenda and the BC FN Climate Strategy, but the work is far from complete. First Nations leadership in BC must remain at the forefront of these conversations, ensuring First Nations not only have a seat at decision-making tables, but are able to influence and shape climate policy, programs, and legislation.

The ongoing political uncertainty, economic challenges and the imposition of tariffs by our closest trading partner and ally have presented significant obstacles to the full realization of the FNCL Agenda. Despite this uncertainty in Canada, the work to achieve transformational change and implementation of the BC FNCL Agenda recommendations and the UN Declaration Action Plan must continue. As we approach a new political era, it is essential that the federal government remains steadfast in its obligations under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act and other climate commitments and related legislation. These frameworks are the foundation of a truly collaborative and inclusive approach to climate change, and they must be upheld with unwavering commitment. Any political party in power must recognize that disregarding BC First Nations' recommendations endangers Canada's reconciliation efforts and undermines federal climate commitments.

Despite the challenges ahead, the full implementation of the FNCL Agenda must be driven by the leadership and resilience of First Nations across British Columbia and Canada. Together with the First Nations Leadership Council, the work and advocacy will continue to implement both the BC FNCL Agenda and the BC FN Climate Strategy.

Appendices

APPENDIX A - BC FNCL AGENDA DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

- Conducted a deep review of the First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan, and other foundational key documents such as those described in section B of the Background.
- Developed an Engagement Plan to ensure First Nations right-holders are meaningfully engaged to the best of our ability.
- Conducted several meetings with First Nation leaders, First Nations organizations and provincial and federal government officials.

ENGAGEMENT

Informed by the Initial research and engagement, a comprehensive engagement was completed between October 2023 and October 2024 to collect data on key priorities, challenges and solutions. Engagement included the following activities:

- **SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS GATHERING ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

The Spiritual Knowledge Keeper Gathering on Climate Change, November 17-19, 2023, opened the FNCL Agenda co-development process. At the gathering, Knowledge Keepers from across BC discussed the climate crisis, its underlying causes and its profound impacts on the Land and all living beings. Over the course of the Gathering, Knowledge Keepers shared personal experiences, stories, prophecies, songs and teachings to support healing and guide our collective work on climate change. The Knowledge Keepers provided direction on climate solutions while outlining roles and responsibilities for First Nations, communities, governments, and society at large for the future of Lands and Waters and the children of our children. The What We Heard Report includes a Knowledge Keepers Mandate with 14 actions, which will guide our collective climate change work and inform the implementation of the BC FN Climate Strategy and the BC FNCL Agenda.

- **CO-DEVELOPMENT KICK-OFF SESSION**

On December 1st, 2023, BCAFN hosted "A Vision for Co-development: The BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda" to kick off the development of the BC FNCL Agenda, culminating in the publication of a report. Participants from Nations across BC focused on exploring the question: "*What does 'co-development' with Canada mean to you?*" We heard from participants that 'co-development' processes must:

1. Respect First Nations' inherent Rights and Title, self-determination, jurisdiction and governance;
2. Provide transparent, timely, and accessible decision-making and equitable solutions; and
3. Be rooted in the spirit of reconciliation and decolonization

- **IN-PERSON REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS**

Eight in-person regional engagement sessions were completed in Prince George, Fort St John, Kamloops, Cranbrook, Haida Gwaii, Terrace, Chilliwack and Campbell River from April 30 to

July 3, 2024. Summaries from each engagement session can be found [here](#). Based on guidance from the Spiritual Knowledge Keepers Gathering on Climate Change and the Co-development Session, participants were asked to identify priority actions, policy directions, next steps, and concrete recommendations to the federal government for implementing and advancing the BC FNCL Agenda. These sessions were co-designed, facilitated and organized by Four Directions Management Services and BCAFN.

- SURVEYS

BCAFN conducted a virtual youth and general survey to complement the in-person regional and virtual engagement activities and to inform the recommendations of the BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda. This complemented the regional in-person engagement, and it was another opportunity to give feedback in another format.

ANALYSIS OF DATA, PREPARING A COSTING REPORT AND DRAFTING THE FNCL AGENDA

The 11 key themes and 24 recommendations emerged through a review of ongoing and previous climate work, including the BC FN Climate Strategy, as well as identifying commonalities and priorities heard at the in-person engagement sessions and one-on-one meetings. The recommendations were costed by a consultant to provide guidance for the Memorandum to Cabinet of the expected investment needed by the federal government to begin their practical implementation. The costing supports the creation of a \$1.5 billion Climate Fund strategy, with \$150 million in annual investments over 10 years.

FEEDBACK AND PEER REVIEW

- VIRTUAL FEEDBACK VERIFICATION SESSION

On September 11th, 2024, BCAFN hosted a virtual engagement session for First Nations and First Nation-led organizations participating in the FNCL Agenda's regional in-person sessions. During the virtual meeting, themes and high-level recommendations from the engagement sessions held between April and July 2024 were presented for feedback, along with a discussion on the next steps to advance the BC FNCL Agenda.

- VIRTUAL ALL CHIEFS AND LEADERSHIP MEETING

On October 21st, 2024, BCAFN hosted a virtual Chiefs and Leadership Meeting to discuss and provide feedback on the themes and high-level recommendations that emerged from the BC FNCL Agenda engagement process.

APPROVAL AND ENDORSEMENT

The FNCL Agenda recommendations and final report will be presented to First Nations Chiefs at the BCAFN Special Chiefs Assembly (February 26-27, 2025) to seek formal endorsement and support for their implementation.

APPENDIX B – CLIMATE IMPACTS AND CONTEXT

OVERVIEW

British Columbia (BC) is experiencing a climate emergency with increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather-related disasters, including record-setting summer and winter temperatures, droughts, sudden and unprecedented wildfires, damaging storms, floods, and landslides. In 2023, more than 2.84 million hectares of forest and land burned, making it the most destructive wildfire season in BC's recorded history.⁴⁰ This released 102 megatonnes of carbon into the atmosphere, 1.6 times more than the province's total emissions in 2021.⁴¹ Climate change is not just news-worthy extreme weather events. British Columbia has warmed an average of 1.4°C per century from 1900 to 2013, with greater warming in the north.⁴² These rising temperatures are causing a slow-onset of devastating impacts, including sea level rise, ocean acidification and biodiversity loss.⁴³

Both extreme weather events and slow-onset impacts are disproportionately affecting First Nations in BC. Although First Nations peoples have been resilient to extreme changes in climate for millennia and possess valuable First Nations Knowledge systems, their ability to address the current climate crisis has been severely impacted by their extremely unequal relationship with the Crown.⁴⁴ Policies of colonization, including the forced relocation of First Nations away from their traditional territories to smaller, isolated and poorly serviced reserves deemed 'unprofitable' to the Government, have made First Nations less able to adapt or plan to climate change.⁴⁵ Continued underfunding of basic infrastructure such as clean drinking water, roads, and housing only exacerbates these issues.

These multiple, intersecting impacts of climate change are often referred to as 'cumulative effects': the collective impacts of past, present, and anticipated future activities and natural processes. These effects can influence inherent, Aboriginal and Treaty Rights, including First Nations' broader interests such as hunting, harvesting traditional foods, and practicing cultural ceremonies.⁴⁶ Historic and present-day colonial practices not only have contributed to the climate crisis but exacerbated the resulting negative impacts on First Nations. Consider the logging industry in BC, which all engagement sessions raised as a key issue. This industry over-extracts natural resources for profit, a colonial concept which not only reduces carbon storage and increases CO₂ in the atmosphere, but dries the soil, increasing the chances of flooding and wildfires whilst reducing biodiversity. This means that we cannot think of climate change as isolated from colonization or separate from other colonial activities. Therefore, we have included 'exacerbating impacts' sections for each major climate impact.

CLIMATE IMPACTS

Below is not an exhaustive list of some of the climate impacts First Nations face in BC. These impacts are interdependent and cannot be separated from First Nations' worldview, which states that everything is interrelated and interconnected. They also have and continue to have immediate secondary and cumulative effects on First Nations culture, health, wellbeing, rights

⁴⁰Government of British Columbia. (2023, December 7). [Wildfire Season Summary - Province of British Columbia](#).

⁴¹Victoria News. (2024, January 18). [2023 B.C. wildfires pumped 102 megatonnes of carbon into atmosphere: EU](#).

⁴²Government of British Columbia. (2015). [Long-term Change in Air Temperature in B.C. \(1900-2013\)](#).

⁴³Government of Canada. (n.d.). [Canada in a Changing Climate: British Columbia Regional Perspectives Report](#).

⁴⁴Government of Canada. (n.d.). [Canada in a Changing Climate: British Columbia Regional Perspectives Report](#).

⁴⁵Government of Canada. (n.d.). [Canada in a Changing Climate: British Columbia Regional Perspectives Report](#).

⁴⁶Government of Canada. (2024). [About cumulative effects](#).

etc. As heard in the 2023 Knowledge Keepers Gathering on Climate Change in BC, climate change is a symptom of imbalance in the world.

“Fire, water, air, and Land are life. Take one away, and we have nothing. We have to bring these things into balance.” - **Wenecwtsin (Wayne Christian), Former Kukpi7 of Splatsin First Nation, Knowledge Keepers Gathering 2023**

BC has distinct characteristics and challenges related to the climate crisis that set it apart from other regions in Canada. BC has an extraordinarily diverse geography that encompasses coastal rainforests, mountain ranges, dry plateaus, and fertile valleys. This diversity leads to a different mix of climate-related impacts across the province, leading to First Nations facing different challenges. For example, coastal Nations are most at risk from rising sea levels, whereas Interior Nations face increased aridity and wildfire risks. In addition, all First Nations have unique cultures and lived experiences, making them experience the impacts of climate change differently.

INTENSIFYING DROUGHT RISK AND FRESHWATER STRESS

Although BC has numerous glaciers, rivers, and lakes that have supported First Nations since time immemorial, it is a myth that BC has limitless water. Due to climate change, glaciers are retreating at an alarming rate due to increased temperatures, snowpacks are melting earlier, and precipitation patterns are changing. This impacts freshwater availability and increases the likelihood of drought, affecting fish populations, biodiversity and agricultural practices. In April 2024, the average snowpack was at a 50-year low, contributing to 84% of BC being classified as Abnormally Dry or in Moderate to Extreme Drought by the end of July 2024.^{47 48} Drought continues to threaten ecosystems while posing additional threats to First Nations’ access to safe drinking water, exacerbated by systemic issues like federal inaction on boil water advisories.

Exacerbating impacts: Engagement participants noted that *“water laws in BC are really relaxed, and lots of people from the industry are drilling into the aquifers.”* The Auditor General of BC noted the mismanagement of groundwater resources in 2010, which found that the “Ministry’s information about groundwater is insufficient to enable it to ensure the sustainability of the resource.”⁴⁹ This situation has not improved significantly with the current mapping and monitoring infrastructure.⁵⁰ In addition, industry can affect the quality of water sources. An engagement participant mentioned that algae blooms are becoming a particular issue in lakes caused by heavy farming, forestry, and fertilizer applications.

Lived Experiences: Threatened salmon

In the Cowichan Region, severe recurring seasonal drought is threatening to reduce river flow to the extent that salmon runs will not be able to take place unless adaptive actions are taken. This is a significant change to the way that things used to be for First Nations: *“The elders talk about salmon runs being so numerous that there were runs all year round and you could fish all year round”* (Tim Kulchyski, Cowichan Tribes Fisheries Consultant).⁵¹ Terrace has similar concerns with streams running dry.

⁴⁷ BC Gov News. (2024, April 10). [Minister’s statement on drought preparedness](#)

⁴⁸ Government of Canada. (2024). [Current drought conditions](#).

⁴⁹ The Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2010, December). [An Audit of the management of groundwater resources in British Columbia](#).

⁵⁰ CBC News. (2024, April 14). [Experts warn B.C. needs to better track water use amid drought](#).

⁵¹ Government of Canada. (n.d.). [Canada in a Changing Climate: British Columbia Regional Perspectives Report](#).

INCREASED AND MORE INTENSE FLOODING

BC's unique topography, with its numerous river systems, makes it particularly susceptible to flooding, especially during the spring melt and in the event of intense rainstorms. Climate change exacerbates these risks by altering precipitation patterns and increasing the frequency of extreme weather events, impacting many First Nations who live near water bodies. Coastal flooding is also a growing concern for coastal First Nations due to rising sea levels and storm surges.

Exacerbating impacts: An engagement participant in Prince George shared that the logging industry is contributing to flooding in their territory: “Clear-cutting has to stop in our territories [as there is] lots of flooding going on [and] 1 tree holds 40 tonnes of water.” Research from UBC supports the link between clearcutting and more frequent and extreme flooding in BC, noting that replanted forests are not able to mitigate flood risk in the same way as the previous trees for decades.⁵² Irresponsible logging activities can also lead to more extreme wildfires, as described below.

Lived Experiences: 2021 flooding in the Fraser Valley

In October 2021, BC saw record-breaking rainfall, which led to a number of “atmospheric rivers” in BC. The resulting floods and landslides killed at least six people, ripped apart buildings and infrastructure and closed most roads leading out of Vancouver. Much of the damage was in Abbotsford, where Sumas Lake used to exist. A case of land theft, Sumas Lake was drained in 1924, destroying the ecosystem that provided a thriving and varied Indigenous food system and replacing it with a settler food system.⁵³ In 2021, part of the lake-bed reflooded again during heavy rainfall, causing millions in damages. A study found that maintaining flood protection systems rather than restoring the lake will become more expensive as climate change increases the frequency and severity of storms and floods.⁵⁴ ⁵⁵ According to an Elder from the Sumas First Nation, the current reserve was built above the badly flooded section of the Fraser Valley, and the Semá:th People knew constructing the reserve in the current location would keep them safe from rising waters if a drained lake reappeared.

GREATER INTENSITY AND SCALE OF WILDFIRES

BC has experienced some of the most severe wildfire seasons in Canada, a trend that is intensifying with climate change. The province's vast forested areas are increasingly vulnerable to larger, more intense, and more frequent wildfires due to warmer temperatures, earlier snowmelt, changes to wind patterns, and an increase in pests such as the Mountain Pine Beetle.⁵⁶ This affects air quality with Elders and children particularly at greater risk, destroys ecosystem habitats, and can lead to loss of cultural sites, access to traditional foods and medicines, and even displacement from their traditional territories.

⁵² UBC News. (2023, August 2). [Clearcut logging leads to more frequent flooding, including extreme floods.](#)

⁵³ Bosshart, L. (2024, Jun 3). [Researchers call for return of Sumas Lake following devastating 2021 floods - UBC News. UBC News.](#)

⁵⁴ Bosshart, L. (2024, Jun 3). [Researchers call for return of Sumas Lake following devastating 2021 floods - UBC News. UBC News.](#)

⁵⁵ Steph Kwetásel'wet Wood. (2024, June 4). [After disaster strikes, how much is it worth to rebuild? The Narwhal](#)

⁵⁶ Government of Canada. (n.d.). [Canada in a Changing Climate: British Columbia Regional Perspectives Report.](#)

Exacerbating impacts: Both regulated and regulated logging practices contribute to out-of-control wildfires by leaving ‘fuel’ on the forest bed.⁵⁷ Many engagement participants noted that cultural burning is beneficial to reducing fuel in the forest but there is “Too much government red tape on cultural burning and environmental management,” preventing such activities from taking place.

Lived Experiences: Donnie Creek, the largest recorded wildfire

In June 2023, the Donnie Creek wildfire in northeastern BC became the largest wildfire on record in B.C. at 5,745 sq. km. The Donnie Creek wildfire was situated in the traditional territories of the Prophet River First Nation, Doig River First Nation and Blueberry River First Nations. The impacts of the fire extend beyond physical infrastructure to culture and traditions, including the loss of destroyed trappers' cabins, trap lines, hunting and fishing grounds, burial grounds, archaeological sites, traditional trails and rare diamond willow used for ceremonial smudging. According to Timber Bigfoot from Prophet River First Nation, “*berry stocks and countless animals — including beaver, wolves, moose and elk — were also lost to the flames.*”

OCEAN WARMING, ACIDIFICATION, AND SEA LEVEL RISE

Situated in the Pacific Northwest, BC is especially vulnerable to the effects of ocean warming, acidification, and sea-level rise. Without significant changes to the current rate of carbon emissions and the long period required to slow down human-caused climate change and observe a plateau in warming, BC is being advised to prepare for half a meter of sea-level rise by 2050 and a meter by 2100.⁵⁸ As ocean water warms and expands, it feeds stronger and deadlier hurricanes and flooding events that encroach on First Nations homes, imposing the costly and cultural threat of permanent inundation, relocation, and rebuilding. This will impact many coastal First Nations territories who may lose part of their traditional territories.⁵⁹ First Nations are also seeing and experiencing the changes to marine life first-hand. Marine ecosystems are changing and degrading in quality, causing the decline of many marine species—a grave barrier to First Nations food sovereignty and security.

Exacerbating impacts: Ocean degradation is not just a product of climate change—it is the direct outcome of poor waste management practices that produce marine debris such as microplastics from single-use plastics, ghost gear, and polystyrene foam⁶⁰; industrial trawling in BC that perpetuates overfishing, bycatch, and habitat destruction⁶¹; contaminants released from urban developments to nearby streams and eventually the ocean; and the continued emissions of carbon that enter ocean carbon sinks and cause lower ocean pH levels.

Lived Experiences: The loss of food sovereignty in coastal First Nations

The Haida First Nation in Haida Gwaii and their culture, livelihood, and food systems are inextricably linked to the coastal ecosystem. They describe the growing difficulty in securing food as the decline of their traditional food in quantity and quality. This perpetuates dependence on costly, imported foods despite their ecosystems and food systems' historical richness. The Haida Nation notes that the waters in the spring season are 2 degrees Celsius warmer than recorded temperatures, causing kelp decline by the time when herrings spawn. According to the

⁵⁷ David Suzuki Foundation (2024, August 14). [Will logging in more healthy forests reduce wildfire risk?](#)

⁵⁸ City of Vancouver. (2019). [Adapting to sea level rise.](#)

⁵⁹ National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health. (2022). [Overview of Canadian communities exposed to sea level rise.](#)

⁶⁰ BC gov. (n.d.) [What We Heard on Marine Debris in B.C.](#)

⁶¹ Pacific Wild. (2024, January 31). [End Industrial Trawling In B.C.](#)

Haida Nation, “*Our land is sinking, and the water is coming closer to our homes. Erosion is a huge problem, and we are losing land.*”

LOSS OF TRADITIONAL PLANTS AND NON-HUMAN RELATIVES

Containing 14 different biogeoclimatic zones, BC is considered the most biodiverse province in Canada.⁶² The land provides all that Nations need to be self-sufficient through farming, hunting, gathering medicines, and traditional foods. Many food sources, such as salmon, are important nutritional sources and play a significant part in cultural identity and social cohesion for many First Nations.⁶³ The cumulative impacts of climate change, including heat waves, droughts, flooding, forest fires, and storms, have altered animal food sources and habitat ranges, leading to species decline, including salmon. This has increased the food insecurity of many Nations.⁶⁴

Exacerbating impacts: Predominant industries in BC, including the logging and fishing industry, are causing species decline through ecosystem destruction and overharvest. For example, BC’s open-net fish farms often create disease-ridden conditions for farmed salmon that spread to wild salmon.⁶⁵ In addition, uncontrolled tourism can also bring many problems, including the introduction of invasive species to the tourist area, reducing the chances of native species survival and success, and excessive harvest of First Nations medicines and traditional foods that leave little to none for First Nations.⁶⁶

Lived Experiences: The changing taste of berries

Salmonberry is a native plant in BC that is a traditional staple for many First Nations in BC. Salmonberries are also an important guide for First Nations like the Haíłzaqv (Heiltsuk), where the abundance of the salmonberry crop can indicate the abundance of salmon, informing the Nation how they need to prepare for the winter months.⁶⁷ However, many First Nations note the disrupted cycle of the salmonberry, where the plant now grows at unprecedented times in the season and produces berries with a different taste. A participant in the BCAFN Regional Engagement Session hosted in Haida Gwaii states, “*Berries are not coming out on a fixed border or within the normal seasons. The seasons have changed, and the winds have also shifted, which impacts weather and ecosystems. Berries also taste different due to these changes.*”. Climate change is not only about food productivity but also food quality, as environmental stressors alter plant properties.

EXTREME HEAT

Extreme heat and heat waves are becoming more frequent due to climate change. One of the most devastating extreme heat events was the 2021 heat dome, which led to 526 heat-related deaths.⁶⁸ For First Nations, extreme heat events are a particular concern for Elders’ and children’s health and wellbeing but they can also put stress on marine and land ecosystems.⁶⁹ A participant in the BCAFN Regional Engagement Session hosted in Kamloops stated, “*The*

⁶² UBC Centre for Forest Conservation Genetics. (n.d.). [About BEC and BGC units. CFCG.](#)

⁶³ Government of Canada. (n.d.). [Canada in a Changing Climate: British Columbia Regional Perspectives Report.](#)

⁶⁴ Climate Action Secretariat. (2022). [Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Food Security in a Changing Climate.](#)

⁶⁵ BCAFN. (n.d.) [B.C. First Nations leaders want immediate end to open-net salmon farms.](#)

⁶⁶ BCAFN Regional Engagement Session in Haida Gwaii

⁶⁷ The Narwhal. (2021, May 30). [Gifts from the salmonberries: how one plant connects salmon, nature and the Heiltsuk people](#)

⁶⁸ Government of Canada. (n.d.). [Canada in a Changing Climate: British Columbia Regional Perspectives Report.](#)

⁶⁹ City of Vancouver. (n.d.). [Adapting to Extreme Heat](#)

constant smoke, poor air quality, and heat waves are becoming unbearable for Elders and Community members.”. Another participant in a Regional Engagement Session in Chilliwack stated that “Pavements are not heat friendly. Providing green solutions is urgently needed.”.

Exacerbating impacts: Housing infrastructure is an important determinant in one’s capacity to withstand and survive extreme heat temperatures, and many First Nations in BC are subject to substandard housing that maximizes their vulnerability. Traditional First Nations homes are designed and built harmoniously with the local environment. However, the imposition of the Indian Act removed First Nations’ rights to make decisions about their own homes and enforced housing standards that are not culturally appropriate.⁷⁰ Today, there remains a prevalent housing gap for First Nations where many do not have access to a home or a clean and safe home.⁷¹ Additionally, poor land-use planning design contributes to the problem. In addition, in urban areas with low concentrations of vegetation and high concentrations of buildings, roads, and developments whose materials retain rather than reflect sunlight occurs the ‘urban heat island effect’. This is where the area traps higher temperatures than surrounding rural areas, causing homes to feel the greater intensity of extreme weather events.⁷²

Lived Experiences: The cascading effects of extreme heat on the Kanaka Bar Indian Band

The Kanaka Bar Indian Band or the T'eqt'aqtn'mux" are a First Nations community 14 km south of Lytton, British Columbia. In June of 2021, following the record-setting high temperatures in BC of 49 to 50 degrees C, a wildfire burned down most of the village of Lytton. Aside from the wildfire, extreme heat temperatures devastate Lytton culture and livelihoods in numerous ways. The previous chief, Chief Patrick Michell, notes that surrounding lakes, rivers, and creeks would be a place of respite for his community once the hot summer temperature arrives. However, they are either dried out, or the water is warm and can no longer cool.

⁷⁰ Canadian Climate Institute (2023). [Community is the solution The 2021 extreme heat emergency experience in urban, rural, and remote British Columbia First Nations.](#)

⁷¹ AFN. (2024, April 5). [The Housing Gap - Assembly of First Nations.](#)

⁷² Climate Atlas of Canada (n.d.) [Urban Heat Island Effect.](#)