



FIRST NATIONS YOUTH CLIMATE PRIORITIES AND CALLS FOR ACTION

Purpose

This document shares the climate priorities of First Nations youth in British Columbia¹ who are involved in climate work, and communicates what youth are asking of leadership to meaningfully involve, support, and uplift youth climate leadership and advocacy.

Acknowledgements

B.C. is located on First Nations lands, and we acknowledge with deep gratitude all First Nations communities who continue to care for their territories in the face of climate change. We are especially grateful to the Musqueam people, on whose land the Uplifting Youth Climate Leaders gathering took place.

This document was created by and with youth over three online sessions and one in-person gathering. We honour the youth contributors listed below as co-authors of this work:

- Kwaya'tsiq'Kwe Bluesky - Sandy Lake First Nation
- Evelyn Charleson - Tseshaht/hesquiaht
- Illy Christian - Secwepemc Nation/Splatsin
- Drew Harris - Wet'suwet'en and Gitxsan Nations
- Amy Jeffrey-Uehara - Lax Kw'alaams
- Neknekulewet, Leandra Johnson - shíshálh Nation
- Cassidy Keutzer - Aniyvwiya?i & Chahta Nations
- Desiree Mannila - Da'naxda'xw First Nation
- Tiyanetkw Manuel-Herd - Okanagan Nation/Upper Nicola Band
- Nicole North Peigan - Piikani Nation and Wikwemikong
- Chelsey Perry - Nisga'a First Nation
- Nunitsta (Rainwater) Pootlass - Nuxalk Nation
- Wittig Manuel - Heiltsuk Nation

¹ Two of the youth participants are not members of First Nations in B.C., but are Indigenous and now have their home in B.C. These youth

contributed their voices to the B.C. First Nations-centred conversation and dialogue.

We are thankful for the guidance of Elders and Knowledge Holders and mentors who supported this work through teachings and care.

- Skw'akw'as Dunstan-Moore - Nlaka'pamux Nation
- Crystal Lewis - Squamish Nation - Swxwú7mesh Úxwumixw
- Ray Harris - Chemainus First Nation
- Chief Harvey McLeod - Upper Nicola Band
- spe'ʔeci' Amelia Washington - Nlaka'pamux Nation
- Peyal Laceese - Tl'esqox First Nation

We also recognize the support of the FNLC climate staff and FNLC leadership, as well as the many years of climate work led by First Nations communities and organizations across B.C., and see this work as building on that foundation.

Background

The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is a political collaborative working relationship between the British Columbia Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), the First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs (UBCIC). Mandated by First Nations in B.C., the FNLC engages in advocacy and develops strategies and actions to bring about significant and meaningful change for all First Nations in British Columbia.

The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) launched the [B.C. First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan](#) (the Strategy) in April 2022. Within the Capacity and Leadership pathway of the Strategy, Theme 2.6 focuses on a Commitment to Youth. The objectives of this commitment are to 1) Increase opportunities for First Nations youth to take on climate advocacy and leadership positions both within and outside of their communities, and 2) create inclusive and culturally appropriate spaces for First Nations youth, including 2SLGBQQIA+ youth, to participate in climate discussions and respond to and support the implementation of any outcomes.

The First Nations Youth Climate Leaders Project

The Uplifting Youth Climate Leaders Project was created to support First Nations youth in B.C. to come together, learn from each other and from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, engage in land-based learning, and share how they want to be involved in climate action and leadership. Through online and in-person discussions, the youth:

- Identified shared climate priorities grounded in their Nations, lands, and waters.
- Spoke directly about how they want to be involved, empowered, and supported.
- Developed messages and outputs to bring forward to leadership.

Key Priorities and Calls to Action

These priorities are based on what youth are seeing and experiencing in their own communities and what they are seeing on the land, with the water, and in their everyday lives. Each priority includes hopes, concerns, and examples of how youth want to be involved.



WATER SECURITY AND WATERSHED PROTECTION

"Water is life, we must care for it."

Youth shared concern for the health and safety of water across B.C., based on what they are seeing in their Nations and communities, including flooding, drought, water shortages, extreme weather events, and rising sea levels. Water protection was described as cultural and tied to responsibility for future generations and all creations. Youth emphasized responsibility to care for water and faith in the land's ability to heal when given the chance.

Calls for Action

- Protect watersheds and source waters.
- Collaborative watershed protection — unity up and down the waterways.

- Tighter environmental regulations on stream crossings.

INVOLVING FIRST NATIONS YOUTH

- Youth involved directly in protecting and monitoring water systems.
- Youth participating in watershed planning and advocacy.

CARING FOR LANDS AND FORESTS (WILDFIRE AND DEVELOPMENT)

"Sustaining life systems that support all relations."

Youth identified increasing wildfire risk, forest degradation, habitat loss, and ecosystem disruption as urgent concerns based on what they are seeing in their communities. Protecting old growth and caring for land in ways that support biodiversity, cultural practices, and long-term ecosystem health were emphasized. Youth shared hope for land-care practices rooted in traditional knowledge, proactive stewardship for forests that support biodiversity, cultural practices, and overall community wellbeing.

Calls for Action

- Protect forests and old growth.
- Support traditional land care practices that reduce wildfire risk.
- Consider long-term and cumulative ecological impacts.

INVOLVING FIRST NATIONS YOUTH

- Youth participation in environmental assessments and land monitoring.
- Hands-on, land-based learning in home territories.
- Involvement in stewardship, fire management, and environmental response.

SALMON AND AQUATIC ECOSYSTEM PROTECTION AND RESTORATION

"Hope for salmon returning."

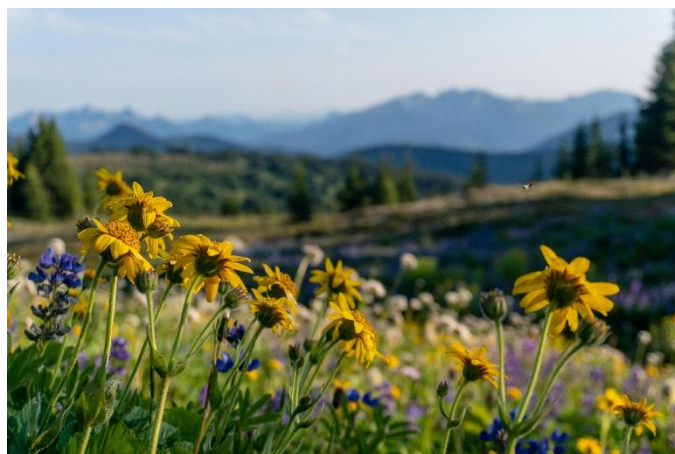
Youth identified salmon and aquatic life as culturally and ecologically important, and shared concern about declining salmon populations based on what they are seeing in B.C. waterways. Climate change, warming waters, development, mining, and sea-level rise were identified as threats to salmon and the waterways they depend on. At the same time, youth expressed hope for salmon returning and for communities restoring aquatic ecosystems through long-term stewardship.

Calls for Action

- Protect salmon and aquatic ecosystems.
- Address cumulative impacts across watersheds and territories.
- Responsive fisheries response (4-year species rotation).

INVOLVING FIRST NATIONS YOUTH

- Youth involvement in salmon restoration and monitoring.
- Having youth at more management tables and discussions.



CONSENT-BASED DECISION-MAKING FOR DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCE EXTRACTION WITH SUSTAINABILITY AT THE CORE

"Supporting First Nations self-determination and sovereignty."

Youth described ongoing pressures from resource extraction, mining, and development in their communities and across B.C., and raised concern about projects moving forward without First Nations' consent. Youth emphasized the need for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and for Nations to have real decision-making authority over projects that impact their lands and waters, and expressed hope for governance systems where Indigenous laws, responsibilities to land and future generations help guide decisions.

Calls for Action

- Stop projects that proceed without First Nation consent.
- Continued push for consent-based decision-making.

INVOLVING FIRST NATIONS YOUTH

- Youth involved at all levels: community, Nation, provincial, federal, and international (e.g., UN).
- Youth having seats at decision-making tables (not token roles).

- Youth learning laws, protocols, and governance responsibilities.
- Youth networking with other Indigenous youth and in Indigenous advocacy spaces.

Language, Traditional Knowledge, and Climate Education

Youth identified Indigenous language and traditional knowledge as central to climate education and action. Concerns were raised about the loss of traditional practices and knowledge, alongside impacts from colonial systems that devalue land-based and oral ways of learning. Youth shared hope for climate education and action rooted in Indigenous languages, storytelling, and learning directly from Elders and Knowledge Holders through land-based, intergenerational approaches.

Calls for Action

- Support local capacity in grassroots fire learning and place-based knowledge.
- The integration of language and culture into climate and land work.
- Invest in land-based and intergenerational learning.

INVOLVING FIRST NATIONS YOUTH

- Youth learning traditional and scientific approaches together.
- Language learning integrated into climate and land work.
- Hands-on, land-based learning on home territories.
- Community involvement alongside youth.



SUPPORTING FIRST NATIONS YOUTH LEADERSHIP, WELLBEING, AND INTERGENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE SHARING

"Youth-led movements are growing stronger each year."

The youth described the desire and necessity of youth in meaningful roles in climate solutions but recognized that the weight can also be discouraging and difficult to bear alone. They emphasized the need for long-term involvement of First Nations youth across British Columbia, rooted in local values, relationships to land and water, and shared responsibilities to each other and future generations. Youth highlighted the importance of safe spaces, mental wellness support, strong connections with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and land-based learning that supports healing and leadership.

Calls for Action

- Support youth wellbeing by creating spaces where youth feel able to speak and are shielded from lateral violence.
- Support youth leadership as ongoing, not one-time.
- Youth leadership mentorship programs.

- Youth space/youth breakout session at the next BC First Nations Climate Gathering, or similar gathering hosted by an FNLC partner.

First Nations Youth Involvement in Climate Action

Support, Involve, Empower

SUPPORTED

When youth talk about being supported, they are describing the conditions that allow them to show up, speak honestly, and stay involved over time. Support means safe spaces where youth are heard, encouraged, and protected from lateral violence. It also means care for mental wellness and relationships that are consistent and ongoing, not one-off. Youth also mentioned that connection to practical support, such as space, time, and sustained resources, makes participation possible and shows that their involvement is valued.

INVOLVED

Youth described involvement as participating in structured spaces and processes where their perspectives are included and reflected. This includes engagement through youth councils and youth committees, as well as hands-on, land-based involvement where youth are actively working with water, salmon, land stewardship, and wildfire response. Involvement means youth are present, engaged, and contributing within established decision-making processes.

EMPOWERED

Youth described empowerment as being part of decisions from the very beginning, rather than being brought in after choices are already made. Empowerment means having real decision-making power, including the ability to say “no,” and having influence over priorities, funding, and laws related to land, water, salmon, health, and development. Youth emphasized being recognized as leaders now, not simply prepared for future roles, and linked empowerment to decolonizing governance structures by centring language, culture, and

governance knowledge in leadership, as well as youth teaching youth and creating solutions within their own communities.

- Youth stewardship and internship programs.
- Language learning integrated into climate and land work.
- Youth engagement embedded in the education system.
- Family and community involvement alongside youth.

Overarching Calls to Action

Overall, the group emphasized that youth leadership must be taken seriously, that youth are inheriting the world being shaped today, and that they deserve meaningful leadership roles both now and in the future. They called for more proactive rather than reactive approaches to climate and called for rights-based decision-making that upholds the Doctrine of Priority (R v. Sparrow) and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).

“Don’t lose hope... because we aren’t.”

