



BRITISH COLUMBIA ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

March 22, 2024

BC Assembly of First Nations Calls for Continued Investments in Watershed Protection on World Water Day

Lheidli T'enneh Territory, Prince George – Each year, on March 22nd, World Water Day is celebrated across the globe to raise awareness on water issues and promote sustainable management of freshwater resources. Roughly half of the world's population experiences significant water scarcity each year and over two billion people live without safe drinking water, including many First Nations in British Columbia and across Canada. This year, the United Nations designated *Water for Peace* as the theme of World Water Day to promote shared cooperation of transboundary waters across the globe.

"The Crown has unlawfully asserted colonial jurisdiction over First Nations' waters in British Columbia since settlements were established in our territories," stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee. "The Crown has effectively established all freshwater in BC as transboundary waters and must prioritize transboundary cooperation with First Nations in BC to establish true shared decision-making with rights holders and uphold our constitutionally protected rights and the UN Declaration. Most importantly, this recognition must be matched with sustainable resourcing to be fully implemented," Teegee continued.

In 2023, the Province of BC invested \$100 million into a Watershed Security Fund to be co-led by First Nations in BC. The fund was a historic investment to support building resilient and healthy watersheds across the province, signalling an important shift in recognizing First Nations' decision-making role as a vital path forward for water stewardship.

Regional Chief Teegee remarked, "the initial investment in the Watershed Security Fund was an important step forward, but this will not sustain our communities to lead the paradigm shift needed to protect our watersheds in light of the climate crisis. Healthy watersheds are nature's most effective protection against wildfires, drought, and flooding and can create long-term jobs for communities across the province. The floods in 2021 cost BC more than \$17 billion in recovery efforts. We cannot afford to continue to react to climate emergencies and Indigenous and Western science is clear: investing in healthy watersheds is critical for our future generations. We call on BC and Canada to invest in a sustainable, long-term \$1 billion fund that enables meaningful impact for First Nations to lead the charge towards healthy watersheds in BC."

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