



FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL CLIMATE EMERGENCY SURVEY

FINDINGS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

May 2020

The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) Climate Emergency Survey offers insights regarding the perspectives of First Nations on the climate emergency and related impacts, concerns, barriers and priorities. The data gained from this survey will be used to inform the development of a draft First Nations Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

The findings may also be useful for those who are developing provincial and federal plans and policy related to climate change adaptation and mitigation, and any other organizations that work in this space in BC and wish to respect and work with the Indigenous population. However, this survey does not replace the need for First Nations to be full participants in the development of plans and policies and should be used to inform, not to replace meaningful participation by First Nations in BC in all current and future processes.

The survey was hosted online from August to September 2019, and the target audience was all First Nation communities and Tribal Councils in British Columbia, including the Chiefs, Elders, Youth, Women, staff and community members. The responses came from 139 First Nations and Tribal Councils across all eight regions of British Columbia. A total of 244 people began the questionnaire of which 221 completed it, including 54 Chiefs and Councillors, 9 technicians, 10 elders, 108 members and 40 responses from staff members working for First Nations.

This summary provides an overview of the data collection and major findings of the FNLC Climate Change Survey. The complete findings of the survey can be found in the main body of this report.

Major Findings:

1. Perspectives on severe weather events

The vast majority of the survey respondents believe that severe and unusual weather events are caused by human activities (83%), a small number of respondents disagree (6%), and about 11% are not sure. Respondents in agreement based their opinions on the fact that there is clear scientific evidence that greenhouse gas emissions have been increasing exponentially in recent decades and believe it is due to the excessive use of fossil fuel, livestock pollution and over population.

One of the most visible consequences of a warming world is an increase in the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, and associated events. The main weather events identified by respondents depended largely on the region. Warmer winters, heat waves, wildfire, warming rivers or lakes (and ocean), and flooding were the top five events described overall.

2. Impacts to territories, cultures and health

Respondents identified impacts to First Nations from severe weather events and climate change; nearly 50% of participants identified impacts to sacred and cultural sites due to either disappearance, damage or loss of access. The events causing these impacts included wind events, fires, floods, erosion, landslides and degradation of ecosystems.

Respondents identified plants and animals which have decreased as a result of climate change, with salmon, medicinal plants, land-based plants, and moose being the top four responses. Respondents found that there was an increase in non-traditional plants, animals and insects. Lastly, respondents cited that there is an “ecosystem shift” creating anomalies in animals and plants, including migration routes and the loss of certain species.

Water quality and quantity impacts were noted: both a decrease in water quality and generally lower levels of water, although extreme weather events also cause drastic changes in water levels at certain times (e.g. flooding).

Participants were asked to identify health problems possibly associated with climate change; responses included stress/anxiety and respiratory disease. Stress and anxiety, according to the comments, could be linked to the loss of traditional foods and extreme weather events, and respiratory disease could be related to effects from wildfires and extreme heat events. Health Canada has identified seven categories of climate-related impacts, and the potential effects these can have on health and well-being. These include weather-related natural hazards (including population displacement) and air quality (including respiratory disease, heart attacks, stroke and cancer).

3. Main Priorities for First Nations

The responses from First Nations identified five top priorities for climate change response, in order of importance:

- i. Integration of traditional knowledge into strategies
- ii. Developing action plans
- iii. Carbon reduction
- iv. Strengthening community capacity to work on climate actions, and
- v. Education programs

4. Barriers and Concerns in First Nations' communities

The largest barrier identified is the lack of sufficient funding or resources to undertake climate actions. Respondents also cited a lack of capacity to deal with climate change in concurrence with addressing other, more immediate issues in communities that need to take priority. A lack of consultation with First Nations by government in regard to developing climate policies and laws, and weak government-to-government relationships were also identified as obstacles to implementing climate action in communities.

The main concerns identified included loss of wildlife, loss of traditional food, berries and medicines, and declining salmon and other fish, among other issues. Respondents also mentioned the loss of First Nations ways of life and the lack of support from all levels of government to collaborate with First Nations communities.

5. Energy Sources in First Nations' communities

A range of energy sources were identified, with a majority relying upon hydroelectric/run-of-river power sources, followed by natural gas and then a range of other sources such as diesel, biomass, geothermal, solar, wind and coal. Communities were most interested in developing solar, wind and run-of-river energy generation to increase their access to renewable energy.

6. Climate Actions

The majority of respondents noted that their community either does not have a climate action plan, or they were unaware of such a plan. They noted that their community lacks the funds to develop an action plan and many are searching for funds. A small number of communities now have a climate change coordinator, which is in marked contrast to communities who do not have staff working on climate

change, and who noted the lack of capacity to develop plans. A very small number of communities have a renewable energy plan which highlights the need for major investments to support the transition to renewable energy in First Nations' communities.

Respondents were asked about what climate change mitigation and adaptation actions have been undertaken in their community. Education and awareness-raising was the most common mitigation action, followed by consuming less and producing less garbage. With respect to adaptation actions, respondents identified emergency management or response programs, cultural revival of traditional practices, and environmental monitoring programs as the most common, followed by agriculture, food security and community gardens.

7. First Nations Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan

Respondents identified a number of priorities and keywords for the vision statement in the First Nations Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. The comments reinforced the priorities identified, and in particular noted that safeguarding Rights and Title were always important, and salmon and food security were critical. The top priorities identified in order of importance were:

- I. Protection of land, water and cultural identity
- II. Traditional knowledge
- III. Rights and Title
- IV. Clean energy

Goals for the First Nations Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan were also identified and prioritized. The top priorities in order of importance were:

- I. Inherent Aboriginal Title, Rights and Treaty Rights are recognized, respected and affirmed
- II. Traditional knowledge informs adaptation planning
- III. Sufficient resources are in place to adapt to climate change impacts
- IV. Renewable energy as a main source of electricity
- V. Communities are enabled to be leaders in the transition to a green economy
- VI. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are reduced

8. Participation in Federal or Provincial Initiatives

Only 10% of respondents believed that their community had been consulted by the Federal or Provincial Governments on climate change initiatives (with about 20% noting that they had not been *meaningfully* consulted and a large proportion unsure). Respondents also noted that the lack of tangible results from engagement (in addition with the deficiency of funding) means "it isn't worth it".

These results point to a systemic problem with the governments' forms and depth of engagement (and capacity from communities to engage) to date, and provide further rationale for why a First Nations Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan are needed at this time to inform provincial and federal decision makers, planners, and others about First Nations perspectives, priorities and concerns in BC.