OVERVIEW:
A WATERSHED SECURITY FUND
FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

Building Resilience & Advancing Reconciliation

OCTOBER 2019
WATERSHED SECURITY UNDER THREAT

Freshwater security is an increasing concern for British Columbians, especially in a changing climate. Severe droughts, floods and forest fires are undermining economic activity, livelihoods, and salmon survival. Communities, particularly Indigenous and rural, are facing long-term boil water advisories and unmanaged cumulative impacts on their lands and waters.

In the context of these challenges, First Nations, local governments, unions and a diverse range of local organizations are calling on the Province to establish a dedicated Watershed Security Fund to invest in community resilience and reconciliation in action.¹

The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services’ Budget 2020 Consultation Report formally recommends that the provincial government:

“Advance water sustainability in British Columbia by providing a dedicated, sustainable, annual funding source for First Nations, local government, local watershed protections agencies and community partnerships.”

OPPORTUNITY FOR AN ENDURING LEGACY FOR B.C.

B.C. currently faces a fork in the river. On the one hand, business-as-usual will see the health of our watersheds further degrade—in some cases reaching tipping points with irreparable impacts. On the other hand, the Province has a tremendous opportunity to choose a different way forward—a path that gets ahead of watershed threats and creates a powerful and enduring legacy for communities across B.C. This legacy looks like:

1. **Reconciliation in Action.** A Watershed Security Fund enables Indigenous communities to build the capacity necessary to implement Indigenous policies, laws and governance structures, while working with the Province and non-Indigenous communities to undertake collaborative land and water stewardship.

2. **Healthy & Resilient Communities.** Through investments in watershed planning and climate adaptation, a Watershed Security Fund greatly improves the ability of rural communities to secure their drinking water sources and build climate resilience.

3. **Robust Local Economies.** Rural economies historically dependent on resource extraction are suffering from industry downsizing or closures. A Watershed Security Fund catalyzes local economic development: from new jobs and training programs in restoration and monitoring; to leveraging private sector investment in innovative water technologies; to supporting farmers and sustainable agriculture.

4. **Freshwater Habitat for Fish and Wildlife.** Through investments in restoration, conservation, and environmental flow protection, a Watershed Security Fund ensures critical habitat is safeguarded for salmon survival and other fish and wildlife.

¹ These groups include: Indigenous leaders and the First Nations Fisheries Council; wildlife and recreation organizations; B.C. water leaders - over 20 groups representing policy experts, salmon and wildlife organizations, and environmental NGOs; local governments; unions; local watershed and community organizations.
FUND INVESTMENTS & BENEFITS

A Watershed Security Fund is an investment in the security and well-being of all British Columbians. Returns on this investment would be broad-based benefits to our communities, local economies, and home watersheds. The Fund would invest in three primary areas:

1. **Partnerships**

   Support Indigenous nations to lead and partner on watershed initiatives, including developing Indigenous water laws and policy, strengthening staff capacity and governance, and engaging in government to government partnerships. Invest in partnerships with local governments and community organizations to leverage existing momentum and capacity on watershed initiatives.

2. **Places**

   Support watershed-scale planning, monitoring, and natural asset management in key regions of the province that connect land and water and build community, economic, and watershed resilience.

3. **People**

   Prioritize the creation of good local jobs, support farmers to produce sustainable local food, and strengthen community connection with watersheds.

DELIVERING ON—AND INTEGRATING—PROVINCIAL PRIORITIES

Watershed security is linked to a suite of Provincial mandates and priorities related to land, economy, and reconciliation. Currently, government initiatives on land-use planning, water sustainability and management, forestry, climate adaptation, and reconciliation, are being pursued separately by different branches within multiple ministries. This creates several challenges, including First Nations engagement fatigue, and inefficiency in program delivery. A Watershed Security Fund offers an opportunity for government to deliver effectively on multiple commitments and provides a mechanism to integrate policy priorities at a landscape level.
RECOMMENDED FUND SCOPE & STRUCTURE

The key elements for the creation of such a Fund are:

• **Independent**—by creating an external, independent fund, government can ensure its sustainability, build a governance structure to reflect its reconciliation commitments, and more easily support a broad range of innovative partnerships and programs.

• **Sustainable**—funding availability should be sustainable and ongoing. It is suggested that the Province create an endowment fund and that annual returns be supplemented by an ongoing contribution from resource revenues, such as water rental fees.

• **Co-Governance Structure**—the Fund should be structured to model a co-governance approach, with governance representation from Indigenous and non-Indigenous watershed experts and knowledge holders.

• **Target**—to ensure a meaningful, province-wide impact, the target for annual expenditures for the Fund should be $40 million per year. The Fund could be scaled up to this amount over three years while organizational infrastructure is developed and early investments tested.

THE POWER OF LEVERAGE

A B.C. government investment in a Watershed Security Fund would unleash a much larger total province-wide investment by leveraging contributions to projects and initiatives from a wide range of other sources. These sources would include local government and Indigenous capacity and resources, funding from philanthropic organizations, and leveraging the market through private sector investment in watershed solutions. This does not include the in-kind dollar contributions from the thousands of energized and knowledgeable volunteers that engage in watershed work.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

This document provides an overview of a Position Paper that outlines in more detail the benefits, as well as examples and precedents for the creation of a **Watershed Security Fund**. For more information or to request a copy of the Position Paper: A Watershed Security Fund for British Columbia (October 2019), please contact:

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