

# WATERSHED SECURITY AGENDA FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

*A proposal to prioritize watershed security to support economic recovery, advance reconciliation, and build local resilience*

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## Summary

Nothing is more fundamental to British Columbians’ security and well-being than fresh water. Clean, abundant water and healthy, functioning watersheds are the fundamental basis of thriving and prosperous communities today and into the future. This vital resource, however, is under growing pressure. As uncertainty and instability mount, communities are bearing the costs and conflicts caused by increasing droughts, floods, fires, and watershed degradation.

The provincial government plays a fundamental role in advancing watershed security. Fall 2020 platform commitments to safeguard clean water, develop a watershed security strategy and fund, and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and the B.C. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) reflect a strong commitment and foundation for action.

This Agenda provides practical direction and focus for the next mandate of government to fulfill its promises and ensure a prosperous and resilient future for communities. It outlines **actions and a pathway to success on critical platform commitments**, including five immediate actions for the provincial government to initiate in its first 100 days:

- 1. Advance reconciliation and implement UNDRIP by explicitly integrating water into land use planning and watershed pilot initiatives;** enabling better local watershed decisions; and immediately applying an UNDRIP lens to watershed decision-making and Water Sustainability Act (WSA) implementation including groundwater licensing and an environmental flow regulation.
- 2. Protect drinking water sources** by implementing existing recommendations from the recent Auditor General of British Columbia and Hullcar aquifer review, including providing clear direction that the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy is to lead source water protection with support and oversight by a new **Provincial Water Security Officer**.
- 3. Create a Watershed Security Fund to ensure independent, dedicated funding** to build on the initial stimulus investments for long-term watershed and community security.
- 4. Invest in climate adaptation and resilience** to floods and droughts, including updating the British Columbia Drought Response Plan and accelerating groundwater licensing in hotspot regions.
- 5. Appoint a Provincial Water Security Officer** accountable for planning, implementing, and overseeing a watershed security regime, and empowered to unite and coordinate provincial action.



Beyond immediate actions, this Agenda outlines four longer-term priorities to strengthen the foundation for watershed security. These actions are oriented around completing essential policy, governance, and law reform work that government already has underway, including fully implementing the Water Sustainability Act and enhancing capacity and partnerships.

By turning the actions outlined in this Watershed Security Agenda into reality on the ground, B.C. will create a lasting legacy of watershed security for all British Columbians, with clean and abundant water, economic resilience that benefits communities, meaningful UNDRIP implementation, thriving salmon, less conflict, strengthened accountability and transparency, and improved policy and legal coherence.