

Sustaining Local Watersheds:

Building Community Prosperity through
Collaboration and Reconciliation

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Panel #1

A New Reality for Watershed Management in B.C.

- **Coree Tull** – Chair, BC Watershed Security Coalition
- **Hon. Randene Neill** – Minister for Water, Lands and Resource Stewardship
- **Tricia Brett** – Councillor, District of Lake Country
- **Lydia Hwitsum** – First Nations Water Caucus and Watershed Security Fund



Okanagan Lake from the Naramata Bench. Photo Credit Becks





Ginty's Restored Pond. Photo credit Al Peatt, Southern Interior Land Trust Society





Wildfire. Photo Credit Province of British



Fishing on the Goat River. Photo credit Cheryl Jagers



Argenta Fire Brigade, Photo Credit Louis Bockner
(Using Water mapping Data)



Skeena River. Phot Credit Sam Beebe





Gint'y Pond. Photo credit Southern Interior Land Trust



Naramata Bench Winery Vineyard, Penticton, Okanagan Valley



ReddFish Restoration, Brushing Crew. Photo credit Graeme Owsianski



Goat River Watershed Canyon. Photo Credit Amy Allcock



Similkameen River, Aug 2026 Flowing at 15% of normal in the last 10 years. Photo Credit Hanneke Brooymans

WATER RESTRICTIONS

Skana

NO RESTRICTIONS	STAGE 1 MODERATE	STAGE 2 HIGH	STAGE 3 EXTREME	STAGE 4 CRITICAL
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Please conserve water every day!

← Scan to learn more about your water system

CRD



Goat River Watershed Wetland. Photo Credit Amy Allcock



Goat River Watershed Wetland Hwy 21 Bridge. Photo Credit Amy Allcock



Drought in the North Arm of the Cowichan River, Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable
Photo Credit Parker Jefferson



Flooding in Abbotsford, 2023. Photo Credit Province of British Columbia

WATER RESTRICTIONS

Stage 1

NORMAL

Stage 2

MODERATE

Stage 3

ACUTE



Stage 4

SEVERE

Please
Conserve water every day.

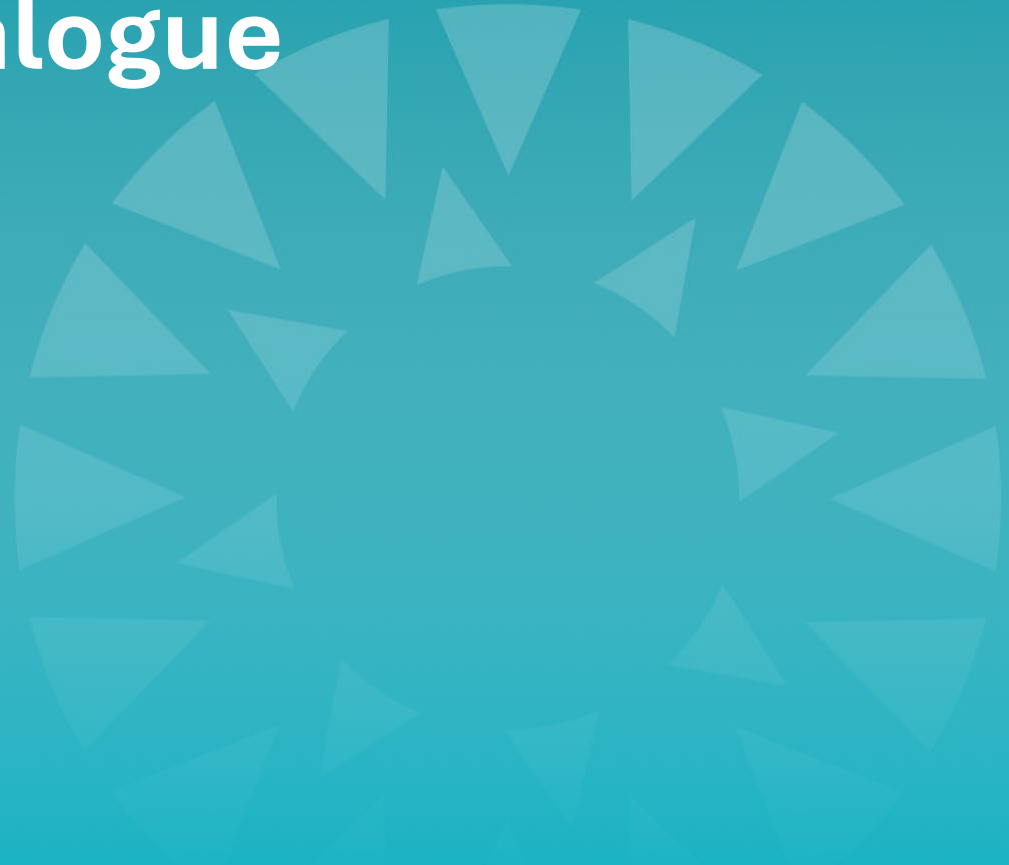
www.scrd.ca





Salmon fry release with Cheam First Nations. Photo Credit Alieska Robles, Watershed Security Fund

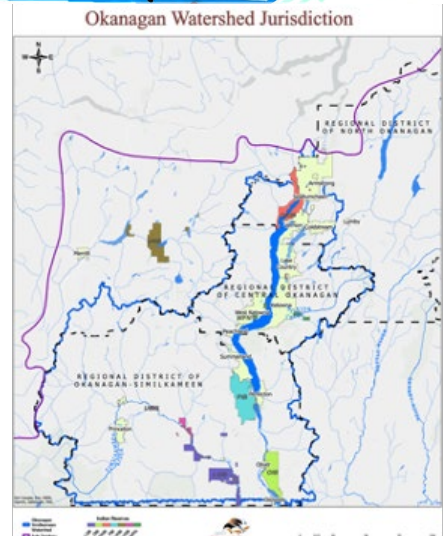
Participant Dialogue



Panel #2

Local Watershed Governance: Enablers, Tools and Ideas for Action

- **Tricia Brett** – Okanagan-Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table
- **Lydia Hwitsum** – Cowichan Watershed Board
- **Paris Marshall Smith** – Goat River: Working Together on Water Sustainability for yaqan nuʔkiy ʔamakʔis - Creston Valley
- **Hon. Randene Neill** – Provincial Perspectives on Watershed Governance





BUILDING OUR RELATIONSHIP FOR WORKING TOGETHER ON WATER SUSTAINABILITY



YAQAN NUKIY
LOWER KOOTENAY BAND

GOAT RIVER WATERSHED SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

yaqan nu?kiy amakis - Creston Valley

The RDCK in collaboration with yaqan nu?kiy, is doing water sustainability planning to respond to growing concerns about water availability in the Goat River Watershed. This effort aims to protect the quantity, health, and resilience of the local watershed that supports communities, ecosystems, and economies. **It starts with engagement.**



YAQAN NUKIY
LOWER KOOTENAY BAND

THE CHALLENGE

The Goat River's low-flows are changing and no longer follow past patterns

- Real, felt pressures, not abstract risk: dry wells, crop loss, flooding, allocations near capacity in low-flow periods
- Two provincially recognized at-risk aquifers, hydrologically connected to community and agricultural supply
- The gap was as much relational and governance as it was technical
- Also high level of governance complexity - 9 improvement districts and abundant agricultural community of diverse crops with minimal level of sectoral organisation.



YAQAN NUKIY
LOWER KOOTENAY BAND

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Low flows on the Goat River matter

- Low-flows reveal watershed health by how well the land stores and releases water
- Declining late-summer flows signal lost resilience, affecting farms, fish and community supply
- Managing low-flows is key to water security, linking land use, forests, and groundwater
- Water sustainability planning on the Goat River Watershed is needed to protect economic, ecological and cultural flows for the future



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ON PARTNERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Government to Government collaboration

- **2018**, the RDCK launched the Watershed Governance Initiative to build relationships, share data, and increase community understanding
- **2024**, the RDCK Board & yaqan nuʔkiy Chief and Council requested that the Province order a Water Sustainability Plan be developed in the Creston Valley
- **2024**, the Province responded with a list of how to prepare - engage, build relationship & seek funding
- **2025**, launched joint engagement with grant from Watershed Security Fund
- **2026**, Water Lands Resource Stewardship invited the RDCK and yaqan nuʔkiy to one table with multiple provincial ministries, with RDCK Directors and community close by



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ON APPROACH AND PROCESS DESIGN

Trying to listen first



- **Listen first, deciding later:** survey, open houses, kitchen table conversations, direct producer visits before any tool discussion
- Sequenced conversations so trust & access could build ahead of hard questions
- Holding two worldviews as distinct rather than rushing to merge them
- A data gap is not the same as a knowing gap, both kinds of knowledge counted

ON RESULTS AND WHAT SHIFTED

What has changed is the foundation

- We are still actively in process, we are not anywhere yet
- No recommendations are finalized, no decisions are made
- From scattered concern to a shared, documented understanding of the watershed
- A working three-government relationship that did not exist in this form before
- Clearer map of where knowledge lives and where genuine gaps remain
- Community can see itself in the work; celebrating together on Rivers Day



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THE MAGIC SAUCE

what is currently working...

- We are engaging alot
- We are treating local knowing and instrument data as different things, both valuable, so a data gap is not mistaken for a knowing gap
- We gave the work its own identity, on neutral ground, so no one had to see it as belonging to someone else
- And underneath all of it, we are trying to make room for two worldviews to stay distinct
- Don't rush



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Audience Q&A



Thank you

Building Community Prosperity through Collaboration and Reconciliation



COMMON
GOOD UBCM
2026



The Rural Coordination Centre of BC

In appreciation of our speakers today and with thanks for your contribution, UBCM has made a donation to the Rural Coordination Centre of BC. Since their inception in 2007, RCCBC has grown into a network of hundreds of people - rural physicians and other healthcare providers, healthcare administrators, community members, policymakers, educators, researchers, and non-profit and business leaders – guided by the principles of cultural safety and humility.