



NECHAKO
WATERSHED
ROUNDTABLE

STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2026



November 2021



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Aita Bezzola, University of Northern BC
Norm Bilodeau, NWR Core Committee; Resident
Barry Booth, University of Northern BC
Lori Borth, Provincial Government staff
Katie Cornish, University of Northern BC
Jordan Cranmer, NWR Youth Engagement Coordinator, University of Northern BC
Brian Frenkel, District of Vanderhoof
Alex Lane, University of Northern BC
Gina Layte Liston, NWR Core Committee; Resident
Sandra Martin Harris, Laksilyu Clan, Wet'suwet'en Nation
Diana Kutzner, University of Northern BC
Clint Lambert, NWR Core Committee; Regional District of Bulkley Nechako
Kim Menounos, NWR Core Committee and NWR Secretariat; Fraser Basin Council
Kevin Moutray, Co-Chair, NWR Core Committee; District of Vanderhoof
Ella Parker, Water Program Advisor, Yukon Government; University of Northern BC
Margot Parkes, Co-Chair, NWR Core Committee; University of Northern BC
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Wayne Salewski, NWR Core Committee; Nechako Environment and Watershed Stewardship Society (NEWSS)
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City of Prince George	District of Vanderhoof
Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako	Regional District of Fraser-Fort George



This document presents the strategic plan for the Nechako Watershed Roundtable for 2022 to 2026. The Nechako River is one of British Columbia's largest rivers originating in the northwest region of the province. The Nechako watershed encompasses all land drained by the Nechako and the Stuart river systems, is home to many Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, and is supported by a rich diversity of ecosystems. The watershed overlaps with the traditional territories of 15 First Nations, and seven local governments including five municipalities and parts of two regional districts.

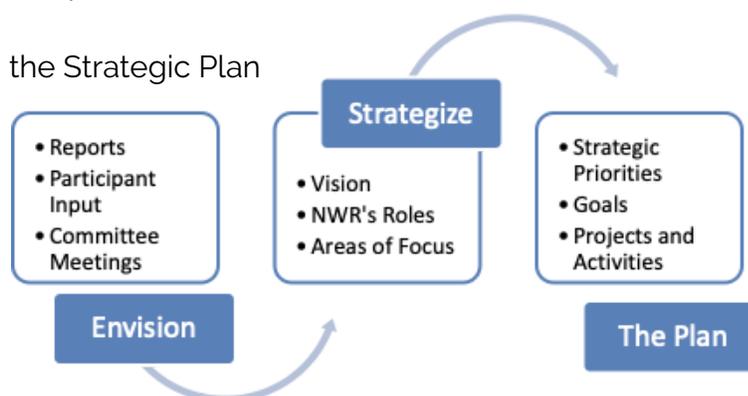
Over the past several decades ecosystems and communities in the Nechako watershed have experienced numerous severe impacts including the mountain pine beetle epidemic, major wildfires, declining White Sturgeon populations and salmon stocks, along with climate change. During this time, there have been (and continue to be) many important initiatives aimed at addressing the resulting effects at the local and regional level. The need to coordinate these efforts has also become more apparent. The Nechako Watershed Roundtable (NWR) was created in 2015 to address the need for collaboration and to advance the vision of a healthy Nechako watershed.

The purpose of this strategic plan is to guide the NWR's activities over the next five years. Recognizing that the NWR has no formal jurisdictional authority, our 2022-2026 strategic plan provides an overview of NWR's strategic priorities, goals and key projects.

The NWR's primary role is to serve as a collaborative body that convenes and connects related efforts across the Nechako watershed. This role includes a strategic priority to advance reconciliation in collaboration with Indigenous Nations and Peoples to uphold the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the potential implications of the BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA). The plan is intended to guide how the NWR works with others to benefit ecosystems, communities, and the vision of a healthy watershed for future generations.

The strategic planning process reconfirmed the vision, the NWR's roles, and important areas of focus, which in turn led to identifying strategic priorities, goals and projects. Figure 1 below shows how the plan was developed.

Figure 1. Developing the Strategic Plan





All plans need to identify a desired outcome or destination, often referred to as a vision. This strategic plan builds on the original vision: 'For the Nechako watershed to be healthy for generations to come' (Fraser Basin Council 2016). The NWR continues to be committed to achieving this vision, described by participants in this strategic planning process as a watershed which:

- has resilient and diverse aquatic and forest (terrestrial) ecosystems;
- supports people, communities, and human activities;
- has water ways (lakes, rivers, streams) with natural seasonal variations; and
- is sustainable and will support future generations.

The NWR's overall role is to convene those interested in the Nechako Watershed; help connect related programs and activities; and support collaborative efforts. More specifically in pursuing the vision described above, the NWR's roles are to:

- identify common priorities and actions to address them;
- advocate for the watershed with all orders of government;
- bring together diverse people and perspectives to work on common goals; and
- advance reconciliation with First Nations in NWR activities and collaborations.

Along with the vision and roles, a number of topics or themes were identified as areas on which the NWR would focus its efforts. These areas of focus include:

- water management and governance, with flow regimes providing multiple benefits
- fish management and habitat restoration, with an emphasis on salmon and sturgeon
- wildlife habitat and collaboration on research and management
- public education and engagement
- climate change including mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.

The strategic plan is based on the vision, the NWR's roles and the areas of focus (see Table 1). The NWR's Core Committee would oversee the implementation of the strategic plan, with the support of a securely funded Secretariat. Implementation includes keeping track of and reporting on progress in pursuing the strategic priorities, goals, and the various projects and activities, as well as generating and overseeing the financial and human resources required to implement the plan. Ultimately, the NWR's purpose - bringing people together to further the well-being of the Nechako watershed and its inhabitants - is also the most useful way to measure its success. By continuing to do what it does best - convening, connecting, and collaborating - and holding itself accountable to fulfilling these roles, the NWR will be successful in carrying out its strategic plan.



Table 1. Summary of the NWR's Strategic Plan for 2022-2026

Strategic Priorities	Goals	Projects	Years
Convene partners including all four orders of government, and support collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring together diverse people and perspectives to work on common goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Meetings and Spring Technical Meetings Working Groups (Youth Engagement, Lakes Monitoring) Online library of information and resources (digital portal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All ongoing 2022-2026 Ongoing Expand 2022 or 2023
Support efforts to restore watershed health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify common priorities and actions to address them Support efforts that restore health of lands, waters, and ecosystems in the Nechako Support sharing of and access to information and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lakes Monitoring Working Group A sub-watershed restoration pilot project with First Nations Best practices for managing riparian areas Online library of information and resources (digital portal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing Scoping underway, Initiate 2022 Initiate 2022 or 2023 Expand 2022 or 2023
Advocate for the watershed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for the watershed with all orders of government, and diverse groups benefitting from land and water resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provincial land use and resource management planning processes Responsive engagement to emerging watershed issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2022 (TBD by province) Ongoing
Advance reconciliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advance reconciliation with First Nations in NWR activities and collaborations Collaborate with Indigenous Nations and Peoples to uphold the UNDRIP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A sub-watershed restoration pilot project with First Nations Online library of information and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scoping underway, Initiate 2022 Expand 2022 or 2023
Ensure a resilient organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider governance options to support NWR goals Maintain a strong and diverse organization with sufficient funding and resources Implement the strategic plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance options under the Water Sustainability Act and/or the BC Societies Act Core Committee activities: Annual Meetings, Spring Technical meetings, securing human and financial resources Core Committee - monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate 2022 or 2023 Ongoing Ongoing



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Nechako River is one of British Columbia's largest rivers originating in the northwest region of the province, on the east slopes of the Coast Mountains. The Nechako watershed is part of the Fraser River basin and combines areas drained by the Nechako River main stem and the Takla Lake-Stuart Lake/River drainage (see Map 1). The Nechako flows through parts of BC's northwest and northern interior regions, joining the Fraser River at Prince George. At the confluence of the Fraser and Nechako Rivers, the upstream catchment area of the Nechako River basin encompasses 47,200 km², which is over 1.5 times the area of Vancouver Island. It is larger than the drainage area of the upper Fraser which is 32,400 km². The Nechako watershed comprises about 20% of the total area of the Fraser River basin and about 5% of the total area of British Columbia (Figure 1).

The watershed is home to many Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, supported by a rich diversity of ecosystems. It overlaps with the traditional territories of 15 First Nations, and seven local governments which include five municipalities and parts of two regional districts (see inset). There are numerous First Nations connections throughout the watershed, led by individuals, families, First Nation communities, and organizations such as the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council and the Office of Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs.

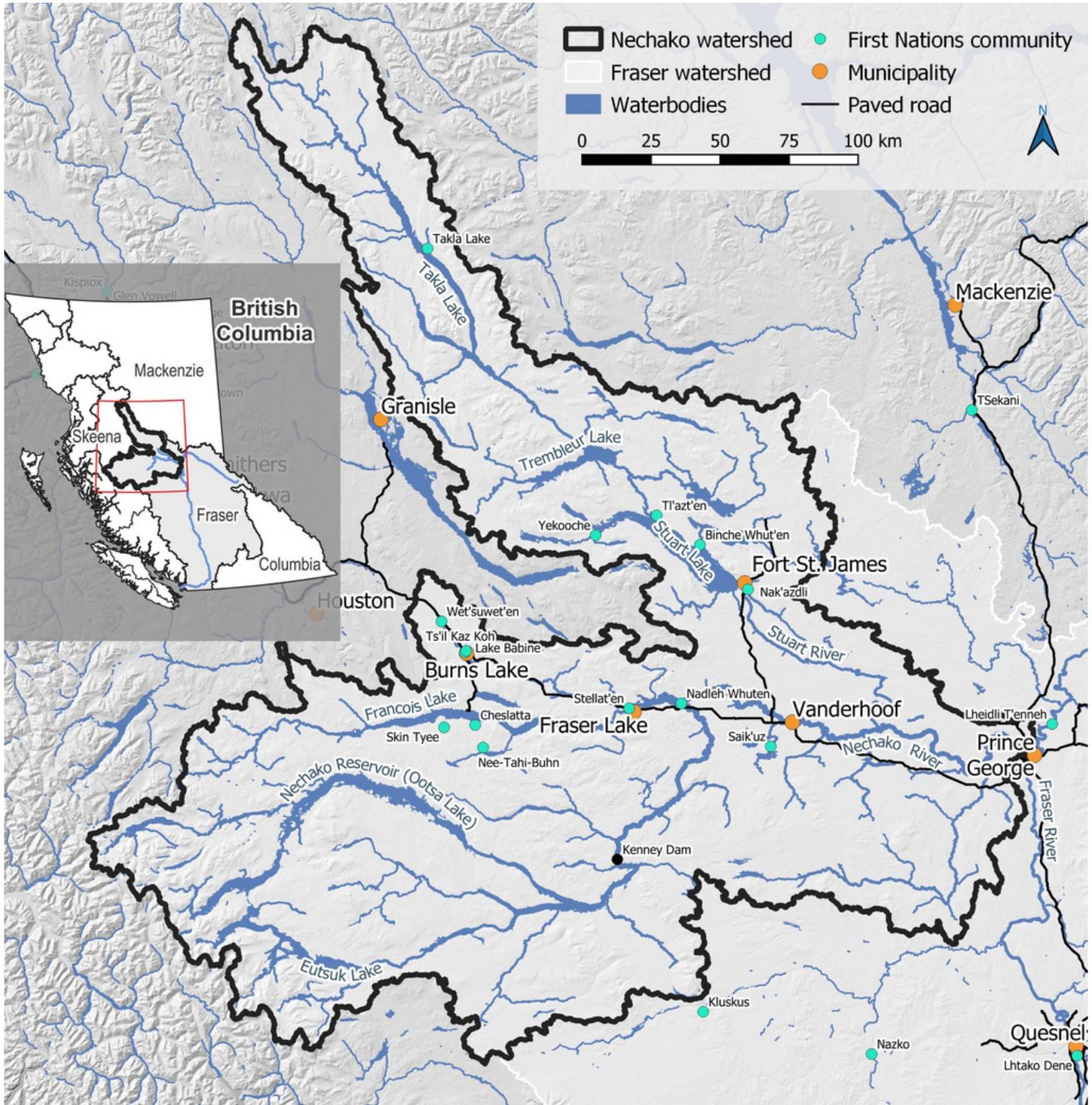
As well, some of the First Nations' territories and the regional districts' boundaries overlap with adjacent territories and watersheds, such as the Bulkley and Babine drainages.

FIRST NATIONS, REGIONAL DISTRICTS, & MUNICIPALITIES IN THE NECHAKO WATERSHED

- Binche Whut'en
- Cheslatta Carrier Nation
- Lake Babine Nation
- Lheidli T'enneh First Nation
- Nadleh Whut'en First Nation
- Nak'azdli First Nation
- Nee Tahi Buhn Band
- Saik'uz First Nation
- Skin Tye Nation
- Stellat'en First Nation
- Takla Lake First Nation
- Tl'azt'en Nation
- Ts'il Kaz Koh First Nation
- Wet'suwet'en First Nation
- Yekooche First Nation
- Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako
- Regional District of Fraser-Fort George
- Prince George
- Vanderhoof
- Fraser Lake
- Fort St. James
- Burns Lake (NWR 2021c).

The regions' economy include forest products, agriculture, mining, and tourism; and the Nechako's water resources support hydro-electricity generation and aluminum production on BC's northwest coast. Over the past several decades the watershed's ecosystems and communities have been impacted by the mountain pine beetle epidemic, major wildfires, declining White Sturgeon populations, and declining salmon stocks, along with the effects of climate change.

During the past decades, there have been (and continue to be) many initiatives to address the resulting local and regional impacts. In recent years, the need to coordinate these many efforts has also become more apparent:



Map 1: The Nechako Watershed



The Nechako Watershed Roundtable (NWR) was established in 2015 to address this need for collaboration and to develop a strategy to further advance the vision of a healthy Nechako ... Building on past collaboration in the region, the NWR is a group of representatives from a diversity of organizations, local governments, First Nations, private sector and federal and provincial agencies with a shared concern and commitment to protect and improve the health of the Nechako watershed (Fraser Basin Council 2016; p.4).

Since its inception in 2015, the Roundtable has included all four orders of government (federal, Indigenous, provincial, and local), volunteer organizations, the private sector, residents and researchers. The NWR has no formal jurisdictional authority, although it includes representatives of several orders of government that have jurisdictional authority and responsibilities. The NWR as a whole identifies the broad directions it wishes to take in pursuing the watershed's well-being, while the Core Committee oversees the implementation of these broad directions.

The NWR Core Committee consists of nine to 12 representatives from local and First Nations government (three seats each), and from not-for-profit organizations and/or individuals (also known as civil society; three to six seats).

The Committee oversees administrative items such as funding applications, staffing (through participating organizations), organizing events, issuing letters and/or press releases. For the Roundtable itself, there is no formal membership that requires for example submitting a membership application and

paying an annual fee. Individuals and organizations can become involved by attending NWR meetings, participating in activities, and/or visiting the website and indicating that they wish to be added to the email list. More information about the NWR structure, Core Committee, and Terms of Reference are available on the Nechako Watershed Roundtable website: https://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/About_the_NWR.html. (Also see: NWR 2016, NWR 2019a, NWR 2021c).

1.2 Purpose of Strategic Plan

After the Roundtable was founded in 2015, it commissioned a watershed strategy which was completed the following year (Fraser Basin Council 2016). The first strategy was comprehensive, identifying topics of concern from across the watershed, and the roles that the NWR could play in helping to address the concerns. Given the strategy's broad nature, it did not go into specific detail as to how or who would carry out the various initiatives.

With its fifth anniversary in 2020, the Roundtable decided to pursue the 'next generation' strategic plan. Building on the foundation provided by the initial strategy from 2016, the purpose of this strategic plan is to guide the NWR's activities over the next five years, and add some level of detail. The NWR's primary role is to act as a collaborative body that convenes and connects related efforts across the watershed. The plan is intended to guide how the NWR works with others to benefit ecosystems, communities, and the vision of a healthy watershed for future generations.



1.3 Overview of Planning Process

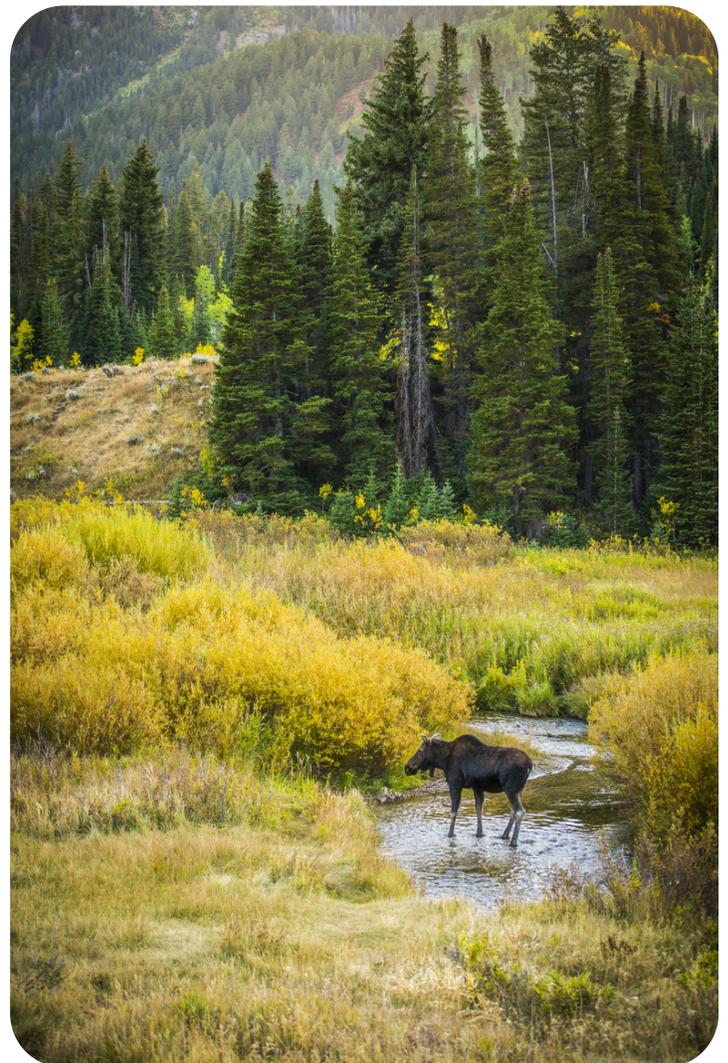
In the Fall of 2020, the NWR's Core Committee hosted a meeting to discuss the need for a strategic plan, what it might contain, and how the planning process might unfold. The following steps were identified, which became the main phases of the strategic planning process (NWR 2020b, NWR 2020d):

- Step 1. Organize – getting ready, budget, time line, participants
- Step 2. Imagine – initiate planning process, review relevant reports, seek input from NWR members (online sessions, survey)
- Step 3. Envision – develop and/or confirm NWR's purpose, vision and priorities
- Step 4. Launch – write, review and finalize strategic plan; implement and monitor progress.

The strategic planning process began in late 2020 with a newsletter announcing the project, its purpose, and forthcoming opportunities for Roundtable members to participate (NWR 2020b). Sections 3 and 4 of this Strategic Plan present the methods used to seek input, and summarize the findings. As the reader will see in the subsequent sections, participant input was a major component in developing the strategic plan. Other components important in developing the plan were the NWR Core Committee's knowledge and advice, the contributions of the Strategic Plan Secretariat, and information contained in various documents (see 'References').

1.4 Overview of Planning Document

This planning document takes a different approach than most typical plans. It presents 'the plan – what we're going to do' in an early section, followed by the sections which describe 'how we arrived at the plan'. Thus Section 2.0 presents the plan itself, followed by Section 3.0 Participation Methods and Section 4.0 Findings from Participant Input.





2.0 The Plan

2.1 Introduction to the Strategic Plan

This strategic plan is meant to guide the NWR's activities over the next five years 2022 to 2026; to help focus its efforts; and to make effective use of human and financial resources, in pursuing its goals. The plan is built upon the feedback and information provided by participants through several methods; the knowledge and advice from the Core Committee; and information derived from a range of NWR and related documents. The original vision for the watershed was confirmed through the planning process, along with the watershed's values and benefits. The process also reconfirmed topics and issues identified over the years, which continue to be important, along with ongoing or potential actions to address them.

The plan is also based on the NWR's roles, the most important and unique being as a convener for the watershed; a body which invites all four orders of government, community organizations, business, researchers, and individual residents to be involved collaboratively in pursuing the long-term well-being of the watershed and those who live in it.

To date, this collaborative effort has relied on funding from various government programs and foundations, as well as in-kind contributions of staff expertise and time, meeting venues, and equipment (eg. water sampling, Zoom software account). Implementing the plan will require a similar approach with financial and in-kind contributions from various funding programs,

participating agencies and organizations, especially for supporting NWR's convening role.

Also related to implementing this strategic plan is the time frame - the next five years. Pursuing the number of possible projects suggested below may appear to be ambitious. Some of them are already underway, while others are new. The NWR will need to take a practical approach in gauging its capacity from year to year, as financial and human resources fluctuate over time, whether increasing or decreasing.

Lastly, all plans need to integrate two important functions: providing clear direction for achieving the stated vision, over the short and long term, and providing flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. A plan is not useful if it is too general and broad in tone, and thus lacks direction. Similarly, a plan is not useful if it is 'set in stone', and is inflexible. A realistic, useful plan describes the desired destination and strategic priorities while acknowledging that specific activities might need to be adjusted along the way.

In integrating firm direction and flexibility in this strategic plan, it is intended that the vision, strategic priorities and goals 'stand the test of time' and serve the NWR over the long term, for example the next 10 to 20 years. The individual projects and activities are better considered in a shorter time frame, for example five years. In looking at both the short and long terms, this plan should be considered a 'living document', allowing the NWR to be practical and responsive to changing circumstances and thus updating the plan as needed.



2.2 The Vision

The NWR continues to be committed to achieving the vision of "a healthy watershed for generations to come", described as a watershed which:

- has resilient and diverse aquatic and forest (terrestrial) ecosystems;
- supports people, communities, and human activities;
- has water ways (lakes, rivers, streams) with natural seasonal variations;
- is sustainable and will support future generations.

2.3 Better Together by Working Together

To achieve the above vision, the NWR focuses on its unique roles and the 'value added' it brings by creating opportunities to be 'better together'; by making connections across the range of activities, projects and initiatives being carried out by all orders of government, community organizations, the private sector, and/or researchers. Through broad strategies and/or specific activities, the NWR reaffirms its

commitment to working together in ways that:

- identify common priorities and actions to address them;
- advocate for the watershed with all orders of government;
- bring together diverse people and perspectives to work on common goals; and
- advance reconciliation with First Nations in all its activities.

Regarding truth and reconciliation with First Nations, the NWR initially proposes a role that encourages conversations, learning, and profiling Indigenous perspectives across all activities (see Section 3.3).

2.4 Strategic Priorities

The planning process has provided the NWR with options for its direction for the next five years. This section outlines the NWR's strategic plan for 2022 to 2026. It presents strategic priorities, the goals for those priorities, and more specific actions including both current and proposed projects. The NWR is committed to the strategic priorities, goals and individual projects described below and summarized in Table 2.

The priorities and goals will continue to be guided by the Roundtable through Annual Meetings, Spring Technical Meetings and Core Committee input.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY:

- Support efforts to restore watershed health.

GOAL: - Support efforts that restore health of lands, waters and ecosystems

PROJECT: Lakes Monitoring Project

Initiated in 2019, this project is a partnership





between the province, Takla First Nation, and NEWSS. It involves sampling lake bottom sediments in two large lakes, to help determine historic and more recent nutrient loading. With funding received in 2021, the Working Group will be able to expand the number of lakes being studied. It has hired a researcher from UNBC to study five large lakes in the coming years.

TIMEFRAME: Ongoing, 2022-2026.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY:

- Convene partners including all four orders of government and support collaboration

GOAL: - Bring together diverse people and perspectives to work on common goals.

PROJECT: Expand youth voice, engagement and activities across the watershed

This project builds from the Youth Engagement Working Groups since 2019. Youth Info sessions held in October 2021 identified an expanded group of youth who are motivated to identify and implement projects of interest to them. Youth are interested in learning about the watershed and want to be part of choosing hands-on projects. The project will expand the activities in the Youth Engagement Working Groups, and may explore options for expanded youth engagement in NWR governance processes.

TIMEFRAME: Ongoing, 2022-2026.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY:

- Advance reconciliation

GOALS: - Advance reconciliation with First Nations in all NWR activities.

-Collaborate with Indigenous Nations and Peoples to uphold the UNDRIP

- Support efforts that restore health of lands, waters and ecosystems

PROJECT: A proposed sub-watershed restoration pilot project with First Nations

As described in Section 3.3, discussions with First Nations are ongoing regarding the strategic plan and how it might reflect their priorities and participation in the NWR. One idea currently being discussed is targeted collaborations to support restoration in a specific sub-watershed. Several potential areas have been suggested, with a project with Carrier Sekani Tribal Council and Saik'uz First Nation in active development, focused on Tachick Lake, Nulki Lake, and Corkscrew Creek. The establishment of any such pilot projects will depend on respect for, relationships with and relevance to the First Nations in whose territory these projects are based. These processes will ultimately determine what type of collaborative project might proceed.

TIMEFRAME: Initial pilot project being scoped in 2021, for initiation in 2022.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY:

- Convene partners including all four orders of government; and support collaboration.
- Support efforts to restore watershed health

GOALS: - Bring together diverse people and perspectives to work on common goals.

- Support sharing of and access to information and resources.

PROJECT: The development of a digital watershed portal

The Integrated Watershed Research Group (IWRG) at UNBC has a Nechako River Basin Research Project (IWRG, 2018). One of the research themes has been working with several watershed partners, to develop a web-based tool that provides a geospatial archive of information and resources for the Nechako Watershed (IWRG 2020). Other versions of this same geospatial portal tool are also being



developed by Lands Management offices in First Nations within the watershed. By strengthening existing partnerships, NWR has a role to play in creating connections between different users of this portal tool. By expanding the potential of a watershed portal, it can provide a central point of access where users can share and find data, reports, maps, and community projects throughout the watershed. Using this portal tool to increase access to and sharing of information has the potential to support community engagement, discussions, and decision making.

TIMEFRAME: A new phase of an established project, for expansion in 2022 or 2023.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY:

- Support efforts to restore watershed health.

GOALS: - Identify common priorities and actions to address them.

- Support efforts that restore health of lands, waters and ecosystems in the Nechako

PROJECT: Best Practices for Managing Riparian Areas

There are innumerable riparian areas and waterways within the watershed, which support a diversity of aquatic life. These water bodies occur in and/or flow through public, Indigenous, and private land, and fall within the jurisdiction of one or more of the four orders of government. The waterbodies sometimes also fall within the responsibility of several agencies or ministries within one or two orders of government. The NWR would organize and host an interjurisdictional, multi-sector, multi-interest event as a first step. The purpose is to share information regarding the various approaches and standards, and to identify opportunities for implementing best practices

across the watershed by all jurisdictions, sectors, and land owners.

TIMEFRAME: A new project to initiate in 2022 or 2023.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY:

- Advocate for the watershed.
- Support collaboration.

GOALS: - Advocate for the watershed with all orders of government, and diverse groups benefitting from land and water resources.

- Bring together diverse people and perspectives to work on common goals.

PROJECT: Provincial land use and resource management planning processes

In the near future, it is anticipated that the provincial government will embark on land use and/or resource management planning processes for all or parts of the watershed. The NWR can explore how it might be involved. For example, it could strengthen and broaden its networks and collaborations with various watershed stakeholders to provide targeted engagement opportunities. These efforts would help position the NWR to support the province's planning processes in the Nechako watershed. As well, the NWR will support and encourage collaborative approaches to emerging watershed issues.

TIMEFRAME: A new project to initiate in 2022, in conjunction with provincial planning processes

STRATEGIC PRIORITY:

- Ensure a resilient organization.

GOAL: - Consider governance options to support NWR goals.

PROJECT: Governance options under the 'Water Sustainability Act' and/or the 'BC Societies Act'. During its second five years, the NWR is



committed to maturing as a resilient, and well-funded organization that is well-informed by options for watershed and organizational governance in BC and beyond. This project will have an initial focus on options related to two pieces of BC legislation. The NWR needs to examine the overall advantages and disadvantages of each legislation; whether one is better suited to pursuing this goal and the NWR's overall purpose; or whether pursuing both options is the best path forward.

The 'Water Sustainability Act' has several provisions that provide options for managing water resources that could inform future NWR activities, including:

- Establish water objectives (e.g., water quality or quantity) for specified watersheds.
- Develop Water Sustainability Plans to address, for example, water use conflicts, or risks to aquatic ecosystem health
- Provide specified powers or duties to an entity or person(s).
- Participate in Minister directed watershed advisory boards.

The objective is for the NWR to further understanding of these options so that local governments, Indigenous nations, and decision makers are best positioned to apply appropriate options based on specific watershed concerns.

Another option for the NWR is to revisit governance options under the 'BC Societies Act', which allows groups to incorporate as a not-for-profit organization or Society, according to the provisions in the Act. The NWR could assess the implications for such things as organizational development, funding, and staffing; and the

potential advantages and disadvantages over the long term for pursuing its purposes. Concurrently, the NWR will continue ongoing efforts to secure financial and human resources to ensure a resilient organization (see Section 1.1 and 2.5).

TIMEFRAME: A new phase of an established project for focused attention in 2022 or 2023.

2.5 Implementing the Plan and Measuring Success

The NWR's Core Committee would oversee implementation of the strategic plan, with the support of a securely funded Secretariat. Implementation includes keeping track of progress in pursuing the goals and the various projects, as well as generating and overseeing the financial and human resources required to enact the plan. Working in a supportive role with each project, the Core Committee and Secretariat for example could help with keeping a project on track, particularly if it looks like it might need additional resources.

As noted in Section 1.1, there have been and continue to be many initiatives within the watershed. The NWR needs to be responsive to emerging projects and initiatives, and planning processes in the watershed as a whole. However, the NWR is dependent on funding through successful grant applications and occasional supporting organization funding. This five-year plan reflects current funding and the associated organizational capacity that funding supports. Nonetheless, one purpose of NWR meetings, such as the annual meetings and technical



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Strategic Priorities	Goals	Projects	Years
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meetings, is to convey members' priorities; the NWR is committed to using that input to adjust its strategic plan activities and priorities as appropriate.

Reporting on plan implementation and individual projects can occur at Annual Meetings and Spring Technical Meetings. As well, the NWR will need to report and be accountable to the organizations that provide funding and/or in-kind contributions. The NWR's newsletters and websites provide other means of reporting on overall plan and project implementation.

One important aspect of implementation is

measuring success. There are two elements:

- How will the NWR know that it is successful in implementing the plan; and
- How will the NWR know that the plan itself is successful in furthering the vision and goals for the watershed?

Ultimately, the NWR's purpose - bringing people together to further the well-being of the Nechako watershed and its inhabitants - is also the most useful way to measure its success. By continuing to do what it does best - convening, connecting, and collaborating - and holding itself accountable to fulfilling these roles, the NWR will be successful in carrying out its strategic plan.





3.0 PARTICIPATION METHODS

A number of methods were used to seek input from Roundtable members and others interested in the Nechako Watershed, during the winter and spring of 2021. All together, approximately 93 people participated. The different methods enabled a variety of different groups to be engaged as follows:

- 'In-person' activities were conducted using Zoom software. (In-person workshops and interviews were not allowed given the BC Provincial Health Officer's restrictions in 2020 and 2021, due to the Covid 19 pandemic.)
- An online questionnaire survey was launched in May, using Survey Monkey, in partnership with members of the NWR Secretariat, and researchers at University of Northern British Columbia (Integrated Watershed Research Group and ECHO Network).
- First Nations were invited to open-house discussions, also using Zoom software.
- Telephone interviews were conducted with several individuals who served as advisors for the planning process.
- Youth were involved in several in-person activities in conjunction with the NWR Youth Engagement Working group.

The results from each of these methods have been summarized and presented at NWR Core Committee meetings through 2021, and reports have been shared on the website for public access (NWR 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d).

3.1 In-Person Activities

Following the launch of the strategic planning

process in October 2020 (NWR 2020b), the first 'in-person' activities were part of the Annual Meeting held online February 24, 2021. While NWR Annual Meetings are normally held in the fall, this meeting was postponed from October 2020, due to the Provincial election and rescheduled to the start of 2021 in an online format, due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Of the 63 people attending the February 2021 Annual meeting, a total of 24 individuals participated in two exercises that were integrated into the Annual Meeting design. The exercises were conducted using the Zoom whiteboard and break-out room features. In the first exercise, participants were asked to describe what a healthy watershed means to them without using the word 'healthy'. The second exercise asked them to identify what the NWR can do better as a group working together, compared to government agencies, community groups, individuals and/or the private sector working alone. These exercises were also shared as part of the Annual Meeting report (NWR 2021a).

The second 'in-person' activities were part of the Spring Technical Meeting held May 26, 2021. Similar to the Annual Meeting, the Zoom break-out room and whiteboard features were used. Of the 35 people registered for the meeting, approximately 6 or 7 people participated in the break-out session on the strategic plan (meeting attendees had the option to attend either of two break-out sessions offered concurrently). The strategic planning exercise asked participants to identify particular subjects or issues of concern to them, and what goals or outcomes they would like to



see. While suggestions were being made on the white board, there was discussion as to the NWR's overall role and avoiding goals that are more appropriately the jurisdiction of government agencies or research groups. Key findings from these break-out discussions were also shared with the larger group after break-out rooms reconvened (NWR 2021b).

3.2 Online Survey Questionnaire

The online survey questionnaire was developed during March and April 2021, with the early stages focusing on the type of information being sought, followed by drafting the various questions. The survey was developed in partnership with members of the NWR Secretariat, and researchers at University of Northern British Columbia (Integrated Watershed Research Group and ECHO Network). NWR and UNBC team members worked together on designing and refining the Survey Monkey questions, and the survey received UNBC Research Ethics Approval (REB Certificate E2021.0401.012.00). The final draft of the survey was piloted by three individuals, with subsequent revisions completed before launching the survey in May 2021. The invitation to participate in the survey was sent by email to NWR members, as well as posted on the NWR's website. Forty-two individuals participated in the survey (all responses were anonymous); 76% of respondents indicated they have been involved with the NWR, while 21% hoped to do so in the future.

3.3 First Nations Engagement

First Nations have contributed to the development of the NWR since its inception, having participated

in the discussions regarding the proposed roundtable and its establishment in 2015. Over the past five years, the NWR has become more aware of the need to incorporate efforts toward truth and reconciliation, as others are doing elsewhere in BC and Canada. It acknowledges that more learning, listening, sharing history, and continuing to build relationships with First Nations will be especially important. As it explores with the watershed's First Nations what type of initiatives and/or supporting roles may be appropriate regarding truth and reconciliation, the NWR remains committed to its current partnerships and initiatives, as described below, as well as those that may be developed in the coming years.

In keeping with the NWR's Terms of Reference (NWR 2019c), the Core Committee is structured to include at least three members from First Nations, along with members from local government and civil society. Although several members of the Core Committee have brought perspectives from First Nations since 2015, succession and new recruitment has proven challenging, leaving vacancies on the Core Committee. The need for better processes to engage and recruit First Nations in the NWR has been highlighted throughout the strategic planning process. First Nations have also been actively involved in the Lakes Monitoring Working Group and Youth Engagement Working Group (see Section 3).

Beyond Core Committee and Working Groups involvement, the NWR Annual and Spring Technical Meetings have created opportunities to profile important First Nations initiatives,



such as the 'Yinka Dene 'Uza'hné Surface Water Management Policy' and accompanying guide (Nadleh Whut'en and Stelat'en First Nations 2016a, 2016b). The NWR also partnered with Nadleh Whut'en in 2018 and Nak'azdli Whut'en in 2019 to host the Annual Meetings (NWR 2018b and 2019b). The postponed 2020 Annual Meeting, held online in February 2021, included a panel profiling new partnerships, governance and management scenarios emerging between First Nations and the province (NWR 2021a). The presentation also provided useful information for the planning process.

In addition, for this strategic planning process, all 15 First Nations in the Nechako Watershed (see Section 1.1, inset p.1) were sent an update on the strategic planning process. They were invited to attend any of a series of online open-house meetings (using Zoom software) or direct interactions as the strategic plan was developed. One open house discussion was held in mid-July and included an overview of the planning process, what an engagement process might look like for this particular First Nation, the results of the online survey, a possible joint project, and the opportunity to review and have input on the draft plan.

Other opportunities are also emerging that expand options for the NWR and its members to work with First Nations in the watershed. In late September 2021, the Regional District of Bulkley Nechako and the Saik'uz, Stelat'en and Nadleh Whut'en First Nations signed a Memoranda of Understanding committing the signatories to work together to restore the health of the Nechako River, its tributaries and

fish populations (Nechako First Nations and Regional District Bulkley Nechako, 2021). While not part of the strategic planning process, this MOU is one important example of the many ways that First Nations are working with other orders of government in the watershed in ways that are complementary to the NWR's goals.

At the time of drafting this document, the NWR Core Committee Co-Chairs and members are discussing ways in which to adapt a proposed tour of the watershed in the Fall of 2021, to meet with First Nations to discuss the draft strategic plan. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation, these plans are being adapted to explore another round of online discussions. It is anticipated that the strategic plan would be revised as needed to reflect these discussions.

3.4 Telephone Interviews

One of the participation methods involved a small number of advisors, including past Core Committee members, local government, and provincial agency staff. These individuals participated in telephone interviews conducted in March 2021. They were asked for their advice on three aspects: the overall planning process, contents of the plan, and questions for the online survey.

3.5 Youth Engagement

The NWR established a Youth Engagement Working Group in 2019, enabling youth participation in the Annual and Spring Technical Meetings, including February and May 2021 (NWR 2019b, NWR 2021a, NWR 2021b). Before joining the 2020 Annual Meeting, students held



their own discussions about the watershed, and focused on how they would like to be involved with the NWR over the long term. Youth identified that they want to become knowledgeable about the watershed; have opportunities to learn more; and be able to choose projects meaningful to them. They described useful engagement for youth as: 'Long term, influential engagement, with set goals (ie. something to be accomplished)' (Cranmer 2021).

For the exercises during the Annual Meeting, approximately 15 students in grades nine to 12, from two high schools in Nechako Lakes School District (SD 91), participated through a Zoom link to the classrooms. One person entered answers on the Zoom white board on behalf of the group. The students also participated in the meeting's closing discussion, and received many expressions of support and encouragement from the adults.

The NWR has also been collaborating with other initiatives in the watershed which involve youth. In October 2020, the NWR initiated an Indigenous youth video project which got underway in that same month. As well, it has been collaborating with the School District 91-UNBC project titled 'Koh -Learning in Our Watersheds: Transforming Education by connecting students, communities and waterways'. Both projects were featured at the 2021 Spring Technical Meeting (NWR 2021b).

3.6 Core Committee and Secretariat Meetings

Throughout the planning process, the Core Committee and the Strategic Planning Committee met regularly with the consultant to

discuss progress and provide overall advice and guidance. Much useful information and feedback was also provided during these committee meetings, and became part of the overall participant input as well.

All members of the NWR Core Committee have also maintained lines of communication with the organizations they represent, which has created further pathways of feedback and input. The Core Committee is supported by the NWR Secretariat through a partnership between the Fraser Basin Council and University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). The UNBC involvement has drawn on support from different groups at UNBC including the Health Research Institute, the Integrated Watershed Research Group, and the Koh -Learning in Our Watersheds team.





4.0 FINDINGS FROM PARTICIPANT INPUT

This Section summarizes the key points from all of the participation methods described above. In this Section, the word 'participants' refers to all the individuals who provided input through any of the methods described in Section 3. The methods chosen to guide the plan were selected to provide a rich range of perspectives, insights and input from those engaged with the NWR and were not intended to generate statistically significant sample sizes or results.

The variety of approaches used to seek input, enabled different methods to explore the same overall questions using different formats, phrasing, and emphasis. This approach also created some overlap, for example between the questions posed in the Annual Meeting activities and in the online survey. These questions involved: 1) the vision and describing what a healthy watershed is; and 2) what the NWR can do better as a group working together (compared to agencies, volunteer groups, residents and/or business working alone). To estimate possible overlap, survey respondents were asked if they had participated in the Annual Meeting.

Of those who participated in both activities 91% had no further suggestions regarding the vision, and 93% had no further suggestions regarding the NWR and working together. This suggests minimal overlap or risk of 'double counting' the feedback for these two particular aspects. In addition, the online survey asked more questions on a larger variety of topics, than those used at the 2021 Annual Meeting and Spring Technical Meeting, and through the other methods.

Therefore, for some themes, the survey is the sole source of feedback, which is noted in the following summary where appropriate.

Taken together, the feedback obtained by all methods revealed commonly held observations and themes; some of which reconfirm discussions from previous years, while others confirm some which may be considered more recent. These commonly held observations and themes are used in developing the strategic plan.

4.1 The Vision

All plans need to identify a desired outcome or destination, often referred to as a vision. The NWR's vision was originally stated as:

'For the Nechako watershed to be healthy for generations to come' (Fraser Basin Council 2016; p12).'

The vision is also stated in the NWR's Terms of Reference (NWR 2019a).

This overall vision for the NWR was reconfirmed, but also renewed and expanded for the present with more description. Four main themes emerged from participants' definitions of what a healthy watershed means to them:

- has resilient and diverse aquatic and forest (terrestrial) ecosystems
- supports people, communities, and human activities
- has water ways with natural seasonal variations; and
- is sustainable and will support future generations.



This last point also reconfirms the NWR's Terms of Reference (NWR, 2019a) which includes advancing stewardship with consideration for existing and future generations, thus creating an accountability to future generations.

4.2 The Importance of the Nechako Watershed

The importance of the Nechako watershed for ecosystems, people and communities became evident through a number of activities, including those at the 2021 Annual and Spring Technical Meetings. The survey included two particular questions on this topic, with survey responses aligning with other sources of feedback as to what participants value most about the watershed. When asked what the watershed's land, water and living systems are most important for or to, the following were the five top responses in the survey:

- habitat for birds, fish and animals
- health and well-being
- lifestyle and way of life
- cultural and spiritual practices; and
- livelihoods, jobs and economic prosperity.

Although both ecological and economic values in the Nechako watershed have long been recognized, the above responses reflect an expanded and growing acknowledgement of the watershed's importance to human well-being in the broader context. These themes were reinforced by survey responses that identified the following as being most important reasons to take care of the watershed:

- other species (animals, plants, fish) that live in the watershed
- children and future generations; and

- all people in the watershed.

Overall, findings from the survey, annual and technical meetings all emphasized the importance of the human element in the watershed alongside the ongoing importance of environmental aspects. The findings highlighted an expanded recognition of the watershed's importance to human well-being, along with other species.

4.3 The Roundtable's Roles

As noted in Section 1.1 and in previous reports (Fraser Basin Council 2015, 2016), there have been numerous activities, programs and research conducted in the watershed for many decades, from natural resource development regulated by various government agencies to traditional uses by First Nations since time immemorial. What was lacking is a means to coordinate the various activities and programs, for the overall well-being of the watershed. The purpose of the NWR is to provide a collaborative approach to addressing common concerns about the watershed. It is not a jurisdictional authority, nor does it have any legislated or delegated decision-making responsibilities.

In preparing for the planning process, the goal of the NWR was described as:

To help individuals, agencies, organizations, and communities to integrate watershed stewardship considerations into their plans and decisions by promoting communication, collaboration, cooperation, and understanding of key issues in the Nechako watershed (NWR 2020c).



In pursuing this goal, the Core Committee oversees the NWR's activities and provides organizational management for the group, helping with project management and support as needed (also see section 1.1, and NWR 2019a).

Given this history, one purpose of this strategic planning process was to gather input from those engaged with the NWR to clarify and confirm what it is that the Roundtable uniquely contributes. Participants were clear in their responses. The things that the NWR can do better working together as a group, compared to organizations, agencies, residents and/or the private sector working alone, are:

- bringing people together
- communicating with the public
- collaborating on projects, research, planning and management; and
- being a 'keeper' of information.

NWR STATEMENT OF CONCERN OCTOBER 2018

In the fall of 2018, the NWR issued a 'Statement of Concern' regarding the eight major wildfires that summer, affecting almost 11.5% of the Nechako watershed, in part stating:

We strongly urge all levels of government to enter into dialogue that will examine current and past land and water management practices and legislative policies that may be impacting and exacerbating these issues. We call for urgent consideration of proactive measures that minimize the long-term adverse impacts of disaster response activities such as fireguards, and also optimise concerted, coordinated efforts to reduce future fire and flood risks (NWR 2018a).

LAKES MONITORING WORKING GROUP AND PROJECTS

Over the past decade, there have been growing concerns about nutrient accumulation in the watershed's large lakes, affecting the aquatic food web, algal blooms, and possible collapse of fish populations. Initiated in 2019, the Lakes Monitoring Project and Working Group was proposed as a joint project between the Nechako Environment and Watershed Stewardship Society (NEWSS) and the province, to research the health of large lakes. The project includes training volunteers to help conduct the monitoring. In 2021, Takla First Nation joined the project. The lakes included to date are Takla and Trembleur, with other large lakes identified for future years (NWR 2020a, 2021a).

Participants' input confirmed that this first role listed – being a convening entity, and literally hosting the table around which many diverse perspectives and interests can gather concerning the entire watershed – that is particularly unique in the Nechako watershed. It is a role that needs to be prioritized as the NWR continues to develop and mature.

In looking at participation in the NWR, feedback from several methods identified perspectives and/or sectors that were missing, and should be invited to participate. Industry and the economic sector overall were identified as perspectives that would enhance NWR activities, with forestry and agriculture sectors specifically identified as important.



Participants were also asked to provide more detail as to the NWR's roles through several methods. The common themes that were identified include:

- identifying common priorities and actions to address them
- advocating for the watershed with all orders of government
- bringing together diverse people and perspectives to work on common goals
- advancing reconciliation with First Nations in NWR activities

Specific examples of the NWR's roles in the past are provided in the text boxes.

INDIGENOUS PANEL - 2019 ANNUAL MEETING

The 2019 Annual Meeting hosted at Nak'azdli Whut'en featured an Indigenous Salmon Stewardship Panel. The panelists profiled three speakers from two First Nations and a tribal council, who work in the Nechako watershed. The panel provided a conversational and interactive format to profile stories, leadership experiences and reflections from the panelists about their community's efforts regarding salmon stewardship; the connections and priorities most important to them in their work; and how the NWR could help support their priorities. For many of the Annual Meeting participants, ranging from community members, through to local, provincial, federal agencies, the panel was a rare opportunity to learn firsthand about Indigenous leadership in this regard. The panel's contributions generated lively breakout group discussions later in the meeting (NWR 2019b).

YOUTH VIDEO PROJECT

In the fall of 2020, Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth from the watershed attended a workshop with an Indigenous film producer, who is also from the watershed. They developed a story board for a short video that will highlight three communities. The filming took place in the spring and summer of 2021. The first showing is slated for the late fall of 2021 (NWR 2021a)

In summary, the feedback described above reconfirmed several of the roles that the NWR had taken on and developed in its first five years (NWR 2020c). Identifying what the NWR does best and its most important roles helps to determine the most effective use of its resources and capacity.

4.4 Initiatives in the Watershed

The strategic planning process has underscored the diversity of initiatives, projects and activities already underway in the watershed. It was, therefore, important to ask participants through several methods which projects and/or initiatives should be included in the strategic plan. Participants identified the following current and potential initiatives as being especially important to include in the strategic plan:

- participating in provincial land use and resource management planning processes
- encouraging engagement with youth and projects by youth throughout the watershed
- exploring governance options under the Water Sustainability Act
- projects by the Lakes Monitoring Group.



4.5 Areas of Focus

Participant feedback from the Annual and Spring Technical Meetings, Core Committee work in previous years, and the online survey, was consistent regarding topic areas identified for the NWR's activities. The planning process therefore confirmed a set of topics and sub-themes that are important to NWR participants and reflect their concerns for the watershed. These are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Areas of Focus - Topics and sub-themes Identified as Priorities
<p>Water management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance and management • Flow regimes for multiple benefits • Natural flow regimes <p>Fish</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat restoration, especially spawning • Overall management practices • Particular focus on salmon and sturgeon <p>Wildlife</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting and enhancing diverse habitat • Collaborating on and advocating for research and management <p>Public Education and Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall education and awareness regarding the watershed • Building public support for the watershed <p>Climate Change (mitigation, adaptation, resilience)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projections and actions for the watershed • Management and decision making based on the projections • Communication and education

The online survey provided an opportunity to ask for participants' views on topics and priorities in more detail. In one question, a list of 15 topics (plus 'other') was developed based on feedback from other methods and previous reports. The survey respondents were asked to choose the five most important to them and/or their organization, from among the 15 options. The most frequently chosen topics were:

- climate change (mitigation, adaptation, and resilience)
- water management
- fish
- wildlife
- public education and engagement.

The survey responses helped to identify new and existing priorities for the NWR to consider, and also reinforced themes that had arisen from other participation methods, including the interaction among topics or themes. For example, the identification of climate change as the most frequently selected topic from the list in the survey question, underscored the need for climate change and its effects on the watershed to be a priority consideration in the NWR's future work, especially due to its impact on most (if not all) other topics.

While the five topics above were most frequently selected, all of the watershed topics listed in this survey question proved to be issues of importance to some survey respondents. More details about the survey responses are available in the full survey summary report (2021d).



The strategic planning process has helped the NWR reconfirm several broad topics and sub-themes as important to its future work (Table 2, p.20). It is notable that these themes were also identified during the participation sessions and discussions which led to the founding of the NWR, in the watershed assessment (Fraser Basin Council, 2015) and the initial proposed strategy (Fraser Basin Council, 2016).

For example, the initial strategy identified water quantity, water quality, fish and wildlife as the top issues.

The feedback sought during this strategic planning process has reiterated the importance of these and other issues, as well as helping to reinforce priorities for future work as outlined in the Strategic Plan, and presented in Section 2.





(Throughout: NWR = Nechako Watershed Roundtable)

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Photo 1 Front Cover, Source: Adobe Stock Photo

Photo 2 Page 4, Source: Adobe Stock Photo

Photo 3 Page 6, Source: Image by Pok Rie via Pexels, Aerial Photo of Truck Carrying Timber, 2019

Photo 4 Page 11, Source: Image by Ella Parker, River Clinic for Empowered Youth, Upper Nechako, Hosted by Rivershed Society of BC and Endorsed by the NWR, 2019

Photo 5 Page 15, Source: Image by Jordan Cranmer, Hay Bails at Sunset in Vanderhoof, 2021

Photo 6 Page 21, Source: Image by Alex Lane, Northwest Territories Wildland Firefighter at Cheslatta Falls, 2018.

Photo 7 Page 24, Source: Koh-learning in our Watersheds Program, 2020

Photo 8 Back Cover, Source: Photo by Jordan Cranmer, Confluence of Stuart and Fraser River, 2021





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Contact

Nechako Watershed Roundtable

1511 3rd Ave, Prince George, BC, V2L 3G3

nwrcoordinator@gmail.com

https://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/Nechako_Watershed_Roundtable.html

