

For Immediate Release

## Initiative to improve watershed resilience launches

**May 9, 2024 | xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səlilwətał territories, Vancouver:** The B.C. Watershed Security Fund (the Fund) is launching its first phase of support for watershed projects and initiatives to help communities respond to urgent and long-term watershed needs. The Fund's first grant program application intake opens June 3, 2024 until June 26, 2024. A larger intake and funding stream is planned to open in late 2024/early 2025.

The Real Estate Foundation of BC (REFBC) and the First Nations Water Caucus (Water Caucus) - with the First Nations Fisheries Council (FNFC) – are excited to announce this important early step in flowing critical resources to communities. The group is collaborating as partners to provide interim Fund stewardship, and to support co-development of a permanent, co-governed entity that will oversee and manage the Fund over the longer term.

The Fund was established in 2023 through a historic contribution by the Province of B.C. of \$100 million to kick start the creation of the Fund.

In this first year, the Fund's Grants Program will start flowing commitments of \$7-\$10 million to communities, spread across two grant intakes in 2024/25, to address urgent and long-term watershed security needs. Together with a Grants Working Group, the partners endeavor to build a foundation of work, systems, and approaches that transfer over and evolve into the long-term multi-year grants program offered through the Watershed Security Fund. Funded projects and initiatives will support:

- Reconciliation and advancing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Restoring and maintaining ecosystem services and watershed health
- Climate resiliency
- Local watershed governance, planning & monitoring initiatives
- Job creation and economic stimulus
- Learning and relationship-building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities

Funding will meet water stewards and water champions where they are at, building partnerships and collaboration amongst First Nations, local governments, NGOs, community groups, and scientific communities.

The current Grants budget for 2024/25 is a combination of interest earned on the initial \$100 million Provincial investment and a contribution from the Real Estate Foundation of B.C.

Water is life, and remains the most important, environmental, cultural, economic, and spiritual well-spring we share. In an era of record-breaking droughts and wildfires, stressed salmon stocks, and struggling crops, the brutal impacts of climate change have only amplified the need to prioritize the defense and resilience of our watersheds in ways that support the ongoing work of communities and organizations and uphold UNDRIP commitments.

By investing in projects and initiatives that prioritize reconciliation, ecosystem restoration, and climate resilience, the Fund will help ensure watersheds are healthy and vibrant for generations to come.

For more information about the Watershed Security Fund's Grants Program, eligibility, funding streams & priorities, and ways to apply you can visit [www.watershedsecurityfund.ca/grants/](http://www.watershedsecurityfund.ca/grants/)

### **Quotes from Leadership**

“We aim to collaboratively develop a foundation and structure for a long-lasting watershed fund that upholds reconciliation, collaborative stewardship, and healthy relationships. Our approach will be holistic and whole-of-watershed, acknowledging water as a sacred and vital source fundamental to healthy communities, environments, and economies. As such, our watershed investments will reflect their value to all living things.” – Lydia Hwitsum, Co-Commissioner, First Nations Water Caucus, and member of the Watershed Security Fund Joint Executive

“Water is so important to us as Indigenous People and all people – it is healing, energy, cleansing. We envision a future where the flourishing of watersheds and the unimpeded flow of water are of utmost importance and where water is highly valued and nourished as the sacred source of life. Together, we will work towards supporting and strengthening watersheds for generations to come.” – Leslie Dickie, Governor, Real Estate Foundation of BC Board, and member of the Watershed Security Fund Joint Executive

“Watersheds are critical to our very way of life, our economy, environment, and culture. We established the \$100 million Watershed Security Fund in 2023, specifically to help communities strengthen the freshwater sources they rely on. I'm very excited that the Fund will soon be accepting applications for new projects. This important work will increase the resilience of watersheds throughout B.C. We thank REFBC, FNFC and the FN Water Caucus for their continuing leadership in developing the Fund.” – Hon. Nathan Cullen, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

“The co-development of the Watershed Security Fund is one aspect of a broader strategic approach to water management in BC, it is a foundational piece to develop the appropriate resources to create transformational change in stewarding healthy watersheds for the future. The Fund ensures First Nation voices are at the table in a meaningful way and brings the 7 generations values that we are caring for future generations in British Columbia. The First Nations Water Caucus and the FNFC are excited to get financial grants into the First Nation communities who have the capacity and expertise to do the good work for our watersheds.” – Jordan Point, Executive Director, First Nations Fisheries Council

“The work to co-develop the Fund is new and innovative. We are moving ahead in good ways,

learning as we go and taking the time to build the relationships, systems, and structures required for the long haul. The launch of our initial grants program aims to get funds flowing into communities while we continue to develop a larger intake and funding stream that will open later in the year.” – Mark Gifford, Chief Executive Officer, Real Estate Foundation of BC

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**About the Watershed Security Fund:** The Watershed Security Fund aims to create a sustainable funding source to support watershed projects and initiatives across the province known as British Columbia, fostering collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. The initial \$100 million provincial investment will seed a permanent endowment fund, generating earnings and dividends that provide a dependable flow of annual funding for grants, programs, and operational investments. In the early years, the initial contribution from the Province of B.C. of \$100 million will generate a \$3-5 million annual baseline budget for grants and programs. Partners will seek additional provincial, federal, industry and philanthropic contributions to help grow the Fund, with a long-term goal of creating a \$1 Billion Fund.

**About the First Nations Water Caucus (Water Caucus):** The Water Caucus is comprised of the First Nation delegates from major watersheds across BC, convened by the First Nations Fisheries Council, to discuss and identify shared strategic priorities and interests related to fresh water. Water Caucus delegates participate at the joint B.C.-First Nations Water Table

**About the Real Estate Foundation of BC (REFBC):** The REFBC is a philanthropic organization dedicated to advancing sustainable, equitable, and socially just land use across British Columbia. Through grants, research, and convening, REFBC has been a proud partner in advancing watershed security initiatives, including as hosts of the Healthy Watersheds Initiative.

**About the First Nations Fisheries Council (FNFC):** FNFC is a non-profit society working to develop a cohesive and united voice among First Nations in B.C. As the secretariat to the Water Caucus, FNFC implements the goals and priorities of the Water Caucus, supporting the co-development process of the Watershed Security Fund.