



## Watershed Security Fund

### Watershed Security Fund Grant Recipients: Empowering Communities for Climate Resilience and Ecological Restoration in BC

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 24, 2024 (Vancouver, BC/ x̱m̱əθkw̱əy̱əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətəl (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations) – The First Nations Water Caucus – with the [First Nations Fisheries Council of British Columbia \(FNFC\)](#) – and the [Real Estate Foundation of BC \(REFBC\)](#) proudly announce the inaugural recipients of the [Watershed Security Fund](#) grants. **Almost \$5 million will be distributed to 26 projects spanning seven watershed basins.** These grants aim to bolster and rehabilitate communities' resilience to climate change, support jobs, enhance regional food security, and safeguard fish, wildlife, and flora habitats.

The **Watershed Security Fund** was [established](#) by the Province of BC on March 6, 2023, through an initial contribution of \$100 million, made available as an endowment to support watershed projects through interest earned on the Fund. The Fund and the long-term entity that will hold it are being co-developed and co-governed with First Nations to create a growing, permanent revenue stream to provide long-term support for watershed projects and initiatives across British Columbia.

In the first year of the grants program, \$7 – \$10 million will be awarded across two grant intakes. These funds are a combination of the interest made on the initial endowment and an additional investment made by the Real Estate Foundation of BC. Watershed Security Fund stewards received many more requests than current available funds can support, making evident the critical need to take better care of watersheds in a time of continuing climate change. The Fund is vital to supporting watershed work in the province.

*“This milestone of the Watershed Security Fund marks an enduring opportunity to build relationships and support shared priorities of climate resilience, reconciliation, and community and economic well-being for all of British Columbia. These awarded grants highlight incredible community-led projects that bring together diverse perspectives to advance watershed security. We also acknowledge the many outstanding projects we were unable to fund, that highlight a great need for more funding to support this critical work around the province. As climate pressures continue to impact communities throughout the province, the need to work together in a good way to protect and restore our waters is increasingly clear.”* – Hugh Braker, FNFC President and Co-Commissioner of the First Nations Water Caucus.

The Watershed Security Fund grants program aims to support work that nourishes waterways, upholds the strength of Indigenous voices and ways of being in relation to the land and water, and weaves together enduring relationships and partnerships that flow throughout and across watersheds.



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*"The Water Caucus, FNFC, and REFBC have worked closely to put the relationships, systems and structures in place to steward this interim fund and support the communities working to protect our waters. Through this first grants intake, we recognize a huge demand for watershed funding, particularly from work being done by First Nations. I want to commend The Real Estate Foundation of BC's leadership for adding supplementary funding that will allow us a second grant intake this year. We are dedicated to supporting the good work to protect our watersheds."* – Stu Barnes, First Nations Fisheries Council Executive Director.

The many watershed projects applying for support reveal the significance of collaboration and reconciliation, restoring ecosystems, creating sustainable economies, and protecting the long-term health of our water systems.

*"Watershed Security Fund grants will create local watershed jobs and unite communities through land and water-based stewardship, learning and knowledge sharing. As exciting as it is to announce funding for these 26 outstanding projects, 131 compelling applications were received, totalling \$33 million. The first intake demonstrated the urgent need for increased watershed funding."* – Mark Gifford, Real Estate Foundation of BC Chief Executive Officer.

### **Some examples of funding include the following projects:**

A \$150,000 grant will go to the Yaqan Nuʔkiy and the Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) who are funding partners on the project Working Together on Water Sustainability for yaqan nuʔkiy ʔamakʔis — Creston Valley. Together, Yaqan Nuʔkiy and RDCK aim to protect the watersheds through regional collaborative decision-making, particularly on issues, such as, consumptive water sources and fish habitats which are at risk.

*"All lives connected to the Goat River are increasingly vulnerable to the cascading and compounding effects of the climate crisis, natural disasters, and the pressures agriculture, forestry, industrial activity, development, and recreational use have on our watersheds. Our hope is that together, through regional collaborative decision-making, we can reduce the effects on fisheries, livelihoods and culture and prioritize actions that reflect the diverse experience and knowledge of the lands and waters in yaqan nuʔkiy ʔamakʔis – Creston Valley."* – Isaac Dekker, Watershed Stewardship Coordinator, Yaqan Nuʔkiy

A \$150,000 grant will support rehabilitating the primary water source for the Lytton First Nation's traditional lands, which was devastated by wildfire in 2021. The grant will support strategies to restore the Alkali water source's function, which the community's ancestors originally developed to provide water for irrigation, fire protection, and, in some instances, drinking.

A \$400,000 grant for the Reeve Slough Salmon Habitat Reconnection Project will enable collaboration and planning through watershed and ecosystem restoration. kʷikʷəłəm First Nation, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the City of Coquitlam are partnering to reconnect 31,800 square meters of habitat to the Coquitlam River and create 600 square meters each of new spawning and rearing habitat. The Watershed Security Fund will support ten engineering, environmental,



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archaeology, and project management positions and eight construction and ecological monitoring positions.

*"We are proud to take part in the Reeve Slough Salmon Habitat Reconnection Project. Restoring vital salmon habitats like this is not only about supporting biodiversity but also about strengthening our cultural and environmental connection to the land and waters. This project will ensure that future generations can continue to benefit from the natural resources that have sustained our communities for centuries."* –  
Councillor George Chaffee, k'wik'wəłəm First Nation

The complete list of 26 grant recipients from the first grant intake in June 2024 is available [online](#).

As British Columbians adapt to drought, water scarcity, flooding, and wildfires, it is heartening to see so many communities working together to support watersheds. We hope to grow support for the Watershed Security Fund to ensure our watersheds remain healthy and vibrant for generations to come.

The next intake of grant applications to the Watershed Security Fund will be accepted from **November 12, 2024, to December 11, 2024.**

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### **About the Watershed Security Fund**

The [Watershed Security Fund](#) was established by the Province of BC on March 6, 2023, through an initial contribution of \$100 million to seed a permanent endowment fund. In the early years, the initial contribution will generate a \$3–5 million annual baseline budget for grants and programs. The long-term goal is to create an enduring entity that will be co-developed and co-governed with First Nations and to increase the fund to provide a long-term permanent revenue stream that meets the demand for funding support from across the province.

### **About the stewards of the Watershed Security Fund**





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The Water Caucus has a key role in providing oversight and direction for planning and implementing the Watershed Security Fund co-development process. The First Nations Water Caucus is comprised of First Nation regional and technical 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 (Water Table). The Water Table addresses water and watershed security issues of concern between First Nations in BC and the Province through co-development and consensus. The Water Caucus was first convened by FNFC in June 2022, and it has worked with the province at the Water Table over the past two years to co-develop a prospective Watershed Security Strategy for BC.

The [First Nations Fisheries Council of British Columbia](#) is a non-profit society that works to develop a cohesive and united voice among First Nations in B.C. FNFC's approach is to convene First Nations, listen to their priorities and perspectives, and help clearly articulate their shared messaging to decision-makers regarding the integrated planning and management of Pacific fisheries, aquatic resources and habitat at the province-wide level. FNFC, as the secretariat to the Water Caucus, implements the goals and priorities of the Water Caucus and carries out the substantive operational work. They are partnering with REFBC as interim stewards of the Fund and supporting the co-development process.

The [Real Estate Foundation of BC](#) is a philanthropic organization working to advance sustainable, equitable, and socially just land use across what is known as B.C. REFBC funds projects, builds relationships, and shares knowledge among Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to advance a healthy environment that supports thriving, resilient, livable communities from one generation to the next. For many years, REFBC has been proud to work with First Nations, local governments, the Province and a broad network of partners to advance watershed security through its grants, research and convening, and as host of the Healthy Watersheds Initiative.

