

# BACKGROUND: BC WATER LEADERS STRATEGY

## Context

- The BC Water Leaders is an informal group of 15-20 NGO and provincial policy organizations that meets regularly to share information, learn about and give feedback on government priorities, and identify collective freshwater priorities and strategies.
- Water Leaders' efforts initiated around Living Water Smart & *Water Act* modernization in 2008.
- The Water Leaders group has operated at both an informal and opportunistic level and at times quite strategically, such as the development of collective statements articulating to the BC government expectations for water law and policy.
- The Water Leaders group has evolved and changed significantly over the years as provincial water issues and priorities shift. This includes:
  - Recent changes in who is involved and how they participate.
  - A shift in focus from the narrow target of getting the WSA passed to a broader and more diverse scope of work related to freshwater management and governance. (e.g., water monitoring, local capacity-building, Indigenous-led initiatives).

## The Opportunity

The benefits and impacts of Water Leaders' aligned efforts to-date have been clear. For example: regular shared Statements of Expectation have demonstrated a coherent set of priorities, helped drive the WSA, and kept government accountable to the water file. Emerging efforts around a Water Sustainability Fund are linking policy and GR expertise to the groups doing public engagement to mobilize constituencies and ensure consistent asks during Budget 2020 consultations.

Given the breadth and depth of expertise and capacity within the Water Leaders group and its members' networks, and the growing degree of collaboration, Water Leaders have a significant opportunity to provide ongoing leadership in freshwater sustainability. However, there is also a risk that as priorities continue to expand the Water Leaders group could lose cohesion and miss opportunities to align efforts.

It was for this reason that a core group of the Water Leaders met throughout 2018-19 to develop a shared strategy as a natural evolution for the group. This strategy is a tool to support active collaboration and to assess progress on our collective efforts on freshwater in B.C.

**Strategy Purpose:** The strategy capitalizes on the growing collaboration already happening and offers guideposts for what we can achieve together. It identifies common goals/outcomes and provides a way of tracking our progress. It will help us continue to support alignment between groups, ensure we are moving in a similar direction, and highlight gaps/priorities across areas of work.

What the strategy does:

- Identifies goals (outcomes) across areas of work to support strategic alignment
- Provides a way to track collective progress
- Provides a way to reveal gaps and priority needs – where we need to build capacity or focus
- Ties the various areas of work together under a common framework (helps orient new folks coming in)

The strategy is NOT intended to:

- Prescribe any one organization's programs/actions
- Be "final" or locked in forever – it will evolve and change
- Create an unmanageable data collection burden to "evaluate progress"

# BC WATER LEADERS STRATEGY

## DRAFT OCTOBER 2019

The strategy is organized around the “4Ps” (Policy, Place-Based Governance, Pooling Water Knowledge, and People/Public Engagement)—the themes around which recent water leaders and funders efforts are focussed. There is overlap and linkages between each of these areas of work; and many water leaders work on multiple themes.

The strategy includes both shared outcomes and “impact measures” (markers against which to assess progress towards outcomes). It incorporates the elements & recommendations outlined in recent (2017 and 2018) Water Leaders statements to government. The strategy is intended for a 10-year arc in recognition of the fact that many of the changes, such as law and governance reform, take time—but the outcomes are oriented around what we think can be achieved in a shorter timeframe (the next 3-5 years).

The strategy is based on a common impact statement<sup>1</sup> that represents the WL members’ diverse mandates:

**COMMON IMPACT STATEMENT: By 2030, all waters in B.C. are in good health and resilient<sup>2</sup> in the face of growing pressures, achieved through active community leadership, strong institutions and capacity, and effective laws and policies.**

**Water leaders advance different aspects of the strategy via shared/coordinated efforts and through aspects of individual organizations and programs, e.g.:**

- Keeping gov’t accountable to its commitments and breaking down inter-ministry silos through Statements of Expectation, annual or biannual meetings with gov’t, progress tracking on priority policy areas, strategic briefings, etc)
- Catalyzing/supporting public engagement and campaign efforts that align with policy asks
- Supporting watershed governance initiatives in-region (e.g. via Indigenous laws work; environmental flows research, sustainable funding, data hubs)
- providing leading research and thinking on innovative approaches to law/governance and pushing the envelope

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<sup>1</sup> This statement draws on and aligns with the federal Our Living Waters network common impact statement.

<sup>2</sup> “Good Health” per OLW: Water is safe for drinking, swimming and fishing; fish are flourishing and healthy to eat; the flow of water supports life, recreation and ecosystems; aquatic bugs that form the base of the food chain are thriving. Tracking via WWF Freshwater Reports with 6 Indicators.

# #1. POLICY/GOVERNMENT<sup>3</sup>

**Robust implementation of Crown legislation for water sustainability with Indigenous co-leadership; supporting revitalization of Indigenous water governance and laws.**

## **1. Priority *Water Sustainability Act* regulations<sup>4</sup> are being implemented with Indigenous co-leadership, and are providing firm legal protections for ecosystems<sup>5</sup>**

- % regulations being implemented
- # infractions (investigations, court cases, fines)
- % of recommendations implemented from First Nations WSA engagement framework (July 2019)
- Resources earmarked for WSA implementation and for First Nations engagement

## **2. Explicit space exists (e.g. in laws, governance institutions, watershed plans) for dual Crown and Indigenous authority, and expression of Indigenous laws**

- # of agreements and institutions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments (e.g. Environmental Stewardship Initiatives/Collaborative Stewardship Framework forums) that:
  - a) include or explicitly focus on water; and
  - b) have evidence of shared authority (e.g.: co-chair model; draw on both Indigenous and Crown laws)

## **3. Government has secured the resources to implement the WSA and support watershed partnerships.**

- Budget allocation to implement WSA
- Creation of explicit Water Sustainability Fund
- Amount charged as water rentals

## **4. Related government policy & law reform initiatives explicitly include a consistent water focus.**

- Presence/absence of water focus within other areas of government interest, e.g.:
  - Environmental Stewardship Initiatives
  - Wild Salmon Strategy
  - Forest and Range Practices Act
  - Climate Adaptation Strategy

## **5. Drinking water safeguards are implemented to protect public health, including a coordinated net of legislation/regulations and actions for source water.**

- % of recommendations implemented from Hullcar Review (2017)
- #recommendations implemented from Auditor General Drinking Water Audit (2019)

## **6. \*CROSS-CUTTING ACROSS ALL AREAS: Provincial staff have the capacity to innovate and engage effectively with Indigenous partners and communities/stakeholders, and understand the potential of the WSA to generate support for change.**

**— \*\*NEED MEASURES HERE**

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<sup>3</sup> Progress tracking ideas– “taking the pulse” updates to track policy progress; do an annual update to WL SoE tracking progress key gov’t commitments.

<sup>4</sup> Key regulations: environmental flows, water sustainability plans, measuring & reporting, water objectives

<sup>5</sup> The content/quality of these regulations can be tracked against recommendations made by the water leaders to-date (e.g. does the measuring & reporting reg. include mandatory water use reporting by major users?)

## #2. PLACE-BASED GOVERNANCE

Advancing innovative approaches to collaborative watershed governance and building capacity within the Province, Indigenous nations, and communities to do so.

**1. Multiple watershed governance initiatives exist in different regions as part of a province-wide program. These entities/initiatives establish government-to-government arrangements with First Nations, and have broad-based support from local communities and stakeholders.**

- # and type of watershed governance and planning pilots/initiatives
- Evidence of shared decision-making
- Provincial support for watershed governance projects
- Positive endorsements/evidence of outreach and relationships with local governments/stakeholders/communities

**2. Indigenous communities have the capacity and resources to lead watershed governance and management initiatives**

- Provincial funding/support for WSA engagement framework
- # of Indigenous staff allocated to water governance and management in the province
- Amount of Indigenous funding allocated to water governance and management
- # Indigenous-led water policies, plans, declarations, etc.

**3. A growing number of watershed planning and governance initiatives have dedicated capacity for watershed governance (including sustainable multi-year core staffing)**

- # of watershed governance initiatives that have sustainable funding mechanisms
- # of communities that have received training/coaching
- # of FTE's involved in watershed governance (e.g. coordinator positions, community engagement officer)

## **#3. POOLING WATER KNOWLEDGE: water monitoring & reporting**

Improving understanding of watershed health and dynamics, and ensuring data from community-based monitoring efforts is actively informing decisions

### **1. Comprehensive State of the Watershed reports are available and accessible, informed by Indigenous knowledge, western science, and community-based monitoring.**

- # of state of the watershed reports implemented across B.C.
- # of data sharing protocols with Indigenous nations

### **2. Collaborative water monitoring initiatives are informing decision-making and watershed governance.**

- Concrete examples of decisions informed by collaborative water monitoring
- % coverage of Province with accessible data portals
- # of collaborative monitoring initiatives that create space for Indigenous knowledge

### **3. British Columbians are engaged and connected in strong regional community-based monitoring networks, building the knowledge base**

- % of watersheds with an active community-based monitoring initiative

## #4. PEOPLE: Public engagement

Increasing broad public awareness and meaningful and sustained engagement to keep water on the agenda.

### 1. British Columbians are aware of freshwater issues

- Percent change in traditional media stories on priority water impacts (year over year) (ie. drought, governance)
- Percent of people who have an accurate sense (awareness) of the health of and threats to freshwater - measure by building on 2018 polling questions re: knowledge, attitudes, awareness of water issues, threats
- Number of residents who have engaged on River IQ

### 2. British Columbians are actively engaged, both as individuals and as community members, in freshwater health

- Increase in supporter base who acted for freshwater health – growth in Our Water BC Base<sup>6</sup>
- Code Blue digital engagement
- Evidence that behaviours/norms are changing (e.g. water conservation)

### 3. British Columbians are engaging with political representatives to advocate for Water protection, conservation, and restoration becoming a long-term provincial mandate

- # of meetings with MLAs, Ministers and government staff.
- # of presentations and/or submissions to government? ie. budget consultation success - great example of collective engagement
- # of supporting resolutions - First Nations, UBCM, other

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<sup>6</sup> Also for progress tracking - Rivershed Society has #s of people engaging in watershed challenges and other activities