



**British Columbia**  
**Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship**

**Agency Report to the  
Mackenzie River Basin Board**

**Meeting 78 of the  
Mackenzie River Basin Board  
December 5, 2023**

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## 1. Bilateral Water Management Agreements

The *Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement* provides for neighbouring jurisdictions to negotiate Bilateral Water Management Agreements (BWMA) to address shared surface water quantity, quality and groundwater. Under the Master Agreement, British Columbia (B.C.) is required to negotiate three such agreements with the governments of the Northwest Territories (NWT), Yukon and Alberta.



Figure 1: Three transboundary water management agreements in British Columbia.

### British Columbia – Northwest Territories

B.C. and the NWT [signed their BWMA](#) in October 2015. The British Columbia – Northwest Territories BWMA applies to all transboundary waters shared between B.C. and the NWT in the Mackenzie River Basin, primarily the Liard River basin. On August 31, 2017, the B.C. government approved implementation of the British Columbia – Northwest Territories BWMA through an Order in Council.

### British Columbia – Yukon

B.C. and the Yukon [signed their BWMA](#) on March 30, 2017. On August 31, 2017, the B.C. government approved implementation of the British Columbia – Yukon BWMA through an Order in Council. This BWMA applies to all transboundary waters shared between B.C. and Yukon in the Mackenzie River Basin, primarily the Liard River basin. Transboundary waters shared between the jurisdictions outside the Mackenzie River Basin, such as the headwaters of the Yukon River, are not included in the BWMA.

B.C., NWT and Yukon are currently collaborating to produce a joint annual BWMA implementation report that will cover the period from January 2022 through May 2023.

## **A Learning Plan for the Liard River Basin**

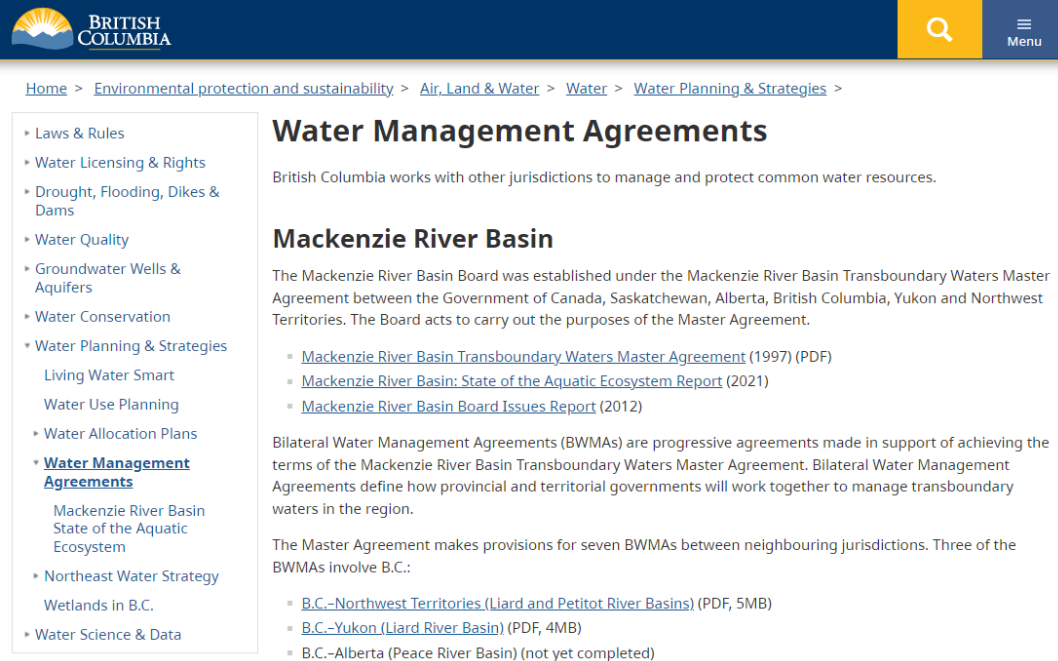
Both BWMA's are guided by a Risk Informed Management Approach in which water bodies are classified based on risk. The classification of the entire Liard River as Class 2 for water quality in 2021 means that this transboundary watercourse may be at risk of adverse changes and, therefore, requires a Learning Plan. These plans are intended to better understand the historical, current, and potential future of water quality, quantity, and health of the overall aquatic ecosystem, and the values of the waters long held by Indigenous peoples and local communities in the Liard basin.

In 2023, both the B.C. – NWT and the B.C. – Yukon Bilateral Management Committees continued to focus efforts on collaborative development of a Learning Plan for the Liard River Basin. The most significant work has been the completion of an Elders Circle workshop that brought together Indigenous Elders from 11 First Nations across the basin to share their Indigenous knowledge to inform development of the Learning Plan. Next steps will include finalization of the Elders Circle What We Heard report and planning for collaborative workshops for the B.C.-NWT and B.C – Yukon Bilateral Management Committees, including Indigenous members, to develop the Learning Plan itself.

## **British Columbia – Alberta**

B.C. remains committed to collaborating with Alberta on water matters of joint interest. Development of a B.C. – Alberta BWMA has been put on hold pending the outcome of negotiations with Blueberry River First Nation and completion of the B.C. Watershed Security Strategy. A BWMA would apply to all transboundary waters shared between B.C. and Alberta in the Mackenzie River Basin, with a significant focus on the Peace River. Engagement between B.C. and Alberta on shared water concerns remains positive and valuable. Regular information exchanges and updates have been held in virtual meeting format since February 2021, and the two jurisdictions remain in contact about transboundary water priorities.

Updates on the on the implementation of agreements to are available on the B.C. [Water Management Agreements](#) webpages.



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## Water Management Agreements

British Columbia works with other jurisdictions to manage and protect common water resources.

### Mackenzie River Basin

The Mackenzie River Basin Board was established under the Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement between the Government of Canada, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon and Northwest Territories. The Board acts to carry out the purposes of the Master Agreement.

- [Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement](#) (1997) (PDF)
- [Mackenzie River Basin: State of the Aquatic Ecosystem Report](#) (2021)
- [Mackenzie River Basin Board Issues Report](#) (2012)

Bilateral Water Management Agreements (BWMA) are progressive agreements made in support of achieving the terms of the Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement. Bilateral Water Management Agreements define how provincial and territorial governments will work together to manage transboundary waters in the region.

The Master Agreement makes provisions for seven BWMA between neighbouring jurisdictions. Three of the BWMA involve B.C.:

- [B.C.–Northwest Territories \(Liard and Petitot River Basins\)](#) (PDF, 5MB)
- [B.C.–Yukon \(Liard River Basin\)](#) (PDF, 4MB)
- B.C.–Alberta (Peace River Basin) (not yet completed)

Figure 2: Landing page for the water management agreements in British Columbia.

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## 2. Water-Related Legislation / Policy / Regulations / Planning

### The Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

In December 2022, Honourable Nathan Cullen was appointed as the Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (WLRS). Key [mandate letter](#) commitments include leading cross-government work to protect water, watersheds and the coast, improving permitting processes to enable sustainable economic development while maintaining high levels of environmental protection, and continuing to work with First Nations to transform the stewardship and management of our waters, lands and resources.

Lasting and meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is an ongoing process and a shared responsibility that is central to WLRS's mandate. Government looks forward to advancing government-to-government (G2G) relationships with First Nations and working together to develop a path forward to build a co-managed land and resource management regime that will ensure natural resources are managed effectively now and in the future.

WLRS will also continue providing provincial leadership on water policy, science, and strategies. This includes co-developing the Watershed Security Strategy with First Nations, ensuring clean, safe, and reliable drinking water for all British Columbians, and implementing *Water Sustainability Act* tools such as Water Objectives and Water Sustainability Plans.

In October 2023, the government announced a further reorganization of its natural resource ministries to align water functions under WLRS. This reorganization shifted roles such as water licensing and allocation from the Ministry of Forests to WLRS.

### *Water Sustainability Act* Implementation Continues

The Province is committed to the successful implementation of the 2016 [Water Sustainability Act](#) (WSA) which remains a key legislative driver for continuous improvement in water stewardship in B.C.

Several operational policy and guidance documents were completed in 2023, including new Comptroller's guidance for implementing an interim Environmental Flow Needs approach for the Blueberry River, Upper Beatton River and Lower Sikanni Chief watershed management basins; and guidance on the WSA requirements for constructing, operating and decommissioning dewatering and drainage wells in B.C. WSA priorities for 2023 will continue to focus on supporting decision makers to implement the legislation and developing policy and guidance related to WSA provisions including higher level enabling provisions requiring more detailed policy and process to implement (e.g. WSA Objectives, water sustainability plans and governance).

Perhaps most pertinent to the Mackenzie River Basin Board, B.C.'s North area water staff supported the provincial groundwater licensing outreach program and directly mailed or phoned agricultural, industrial and commercial businesses believed to require a licence. These efforts

resulted in many additional applications, which staff are currently assessing. Efforts are also underway to notify any existing groundwater users who may not have applied for a licence by the deadline.

In the Fort Nelson region, water staff sampled available private groundwater wells and surface waters. Combined with the [Provincial Groundwater Observation Well Network](#) results, the data will enhance our understanding of the local aquifers.

Several reports have been received of wells in the north area being drilled without required oversight and of well construction not meeting regulated standards. Well inspections have been completed across the north to assess whether well construction is meeting Groundwater Protection Regulation construction standards. Provincial staff also followed up with drillers and professionals to inform them of their construction, supervision, and documentation obligations. In several cases, enforcement has been escalated, with one well ordered closed and several tickets issued by Natural Resource Officers. This year, the Province also published a flowing well advisory for Fort St. James area.

For more information about the WSA, its regulations, and water policy and guidance visit the [Water Sustainability Act](#), the [WSA public engagement and blog](#) and [Water Licensing and Rights](#) webpages.

#### *Koksilah Water Sustainability Plan*

This year, a major milestone was reached in the Xwulqw'selu (Koksilah) Watershed planning process. A G2G Agreement between the province of B.C. and Cowichan Tribes was formally endorsed by both parties on May 12, 2023. This agreement includes the development of the first Water Sustainability Plan (WSP) in the province. This plan will address the holistic needs and existing pressures in the watershed while incorporating Indigenous values, processes, laws, and knowledge - alongside western science - in a lasting and respectful co-governance relationship.

Other significant achievements in the WSP process this year include the establishment of the Collaborative Community Advisory Table, the G2G Table's approval of the Terms of Reference for the plan, and the formation of the workstreams necessary to move the plan forward towards its completion in 2026.

#### *Interim WSA Objectives Policy*

Fall of 2023 marked the completion of the WSA Objectives Interim Policy and WSA Objectives Technical Guidance document. The completed interim policy outlines the Province's approach to developing WSA Objectives under *Water Sustainability Act* section 43 and provides guidance on what WSA Objectives are, how they may be developed, including roles and responsibilities, and how they may be adapted for different governance models. The policy is intended for provincial, First Nations, federal and local governments, and non-government organizations in B.C. who may be partners in initiating, developing, or implementing WSA Objectives under WSA s.43. The guide outlines actions to be consistent with the United Nations Declaration on

the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) during development and implementation of WSA Objectives. The interim policy will be updated periodically based on learnings from the completion of WSA Objectives development and implementation projects. The WSA Objectives Interim Policy and WSA Objectives Technical Guidance documents will be released internally and externally in late 2023.

### **Watershed Security Strategy and Fund**

Developing a [Watershed Security Strategy](#) and associated Fund (Strategy and Fund) is a mandate letter commitment for the Minister of WLRS with support from the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy. Reconciliation and collaboration with Indigenous peoples is central to this work. Government is working with Indigenous partners to jointly build the enduring engagement and collaboration processes needed to co-develop the Strategy and Fund. This includes the formation of the B.C. – First Nations Water Table (the Water Table), which is a shared space for dialogue and solutions.

In March 2023, the Province and the Water Table announced an unprecedented \$100 million investment in healthy watersheds. Funding has been transferred to the Real Estate Foundation of B.C. (REFBC). REFBC will work with the Water Caucus, First Nations delegates to the Water Table, to co-develop the long-term operation of the Watershed Security Fund. Also in March 2023, the formation of the Water Table was publicly announced and an [Intentions Paper](#) was released for the next period of engagement. The Intentions Paper was co-developed with the Water Table. The final Strategy is anticipated in 2024 and will be informed by feedback heard through both engagement on the [Discussion Paper](#) and the Intentions Paper.

### **Watershed Security Funding**

Through Budget 2022, the Province invested \$30M to continue safeguarding B.C.'s watersheds and help mitigate the impacts of a changing climate on community health, and support water security and the economy.

The Province granted \$15 million to Watersheds BC to fund Indigenous-led and co-led watershed security projects through the [Indigenous Watersheds Initiative](#). The remaining \$15 million was granted to BC Wildlife Federation, Ducks Unlimited, Living Lakes Canada, Redd Fish Restoration, Investment Agriculture Foundation/Farmland Advantage, and Rivershed Society.

These organizations have continued to build on the good work they started under the Healthy Watersheds Initiative and have funding agreements in place until March 2025.

### **2023 Drought Response**

In 2023, B.C. experienced severe drought levels and unprecedented conditions around the province. Though B.C. is prone to experiencing drought conditions, 2023 brought extreme drought conditions for some basins in the province beginning mid-July and extending into

November. The lingering effects of late fall 2022 drought, particularly in the northeast, and unusually dry and warm conditions in the spring, led to an overall streamflow and soil moisture deficit. Early and rapid freshet meant that the high elevation snowpack typically relied on for water storage heading into the drought season was not available to recharge streams and aquifers. Limited precipitation fell during the summer months, and temperatures were above normal. By mid-August 85% of basins in the province reached [drought level 4 or 5](#). Many streams fell to record low levels.

In May, Regional Drought Response Teams began implementing regional drought response plans including water conservation communications to water licensees and the public; requesting voluntary reductions; enforcing terms and conditions of water authorizations; addressing unauthorized use; and developing Temporary Protections Orders under Section 88 of the WSA to curtail authorized use (Fish Population Protection Orders) in the Interior and Vancouver Island regions. The BC Energy Regulator also utilized regulatory authority under the *Oil and Gas Activities Act* (OGAA) to limit water use for the oil and gas sector in the northeast.

October brought rainfall and cooler temperatures to many parts of the province which helped reduce precipitation deficits and lowered drought levels throughout much of the province. However, drought levels remain high in the Fort Nelson, East Peace, North Peace, and South Peace basins; all four basins were at level 5 drought as of November 23, 2023.

### **B.C. Flood Strategy**

A comprehensive B.C. Flood Strategy and Flood Resilience (implementation) Plan (the Flood Strategy) will help to reduce flood risks while enhancing our resilience to more frequent extreme flood events in the future. The Flood Strategy, informed by the UN Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, will provide a foundation and roadmap for implementing significant improvements to integrated flood hazard management over time. The Flood Strategy is based on four pathways which include understanding flood risk, strengthening flood risk governance, enhancing flood preparedness, response, and recovery, and investing in flood resilience.

The Flood Strategy seeks meaningful and collaborative input from Indigenous communities, particularly recognizing the role of First Nations Rights and Title holders, drawing direction from articles in the UNDRIP and the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (DRIPA).

Over the past year, the Province met with First Nations and local governments and business, industry, non-governmental associations, academia, professional associations, and the public through various in-person and virtual workshops. To draft the Flood Strategy, First Nations and technical experts previously engaged were invited to participate in a “Sharing the Pen” process in consideration of B.C.’s nine major watersheds.

The draft Flood Strategy emphasizes the importance of understanding flood risk, then investing in a wide range of approaches across society to reduce the likelihood and impacts of flooding.



This includes opportunities to work together across jurisdictions and watersheds, toward ecosystem restoration, food security and reconciliation with First Nations. A revised governance approach would also see the Province provide more tools and support to local governments, including more accessible guidance and information, and greater strategic oversight of flood management, with regional or watershed-scale collaboration encouraged.

The Province has expressed an intent to release the Flood Strategy in 2023, but the timing may be determined in association with other related government priorities. Staff are currently working to further review the draft with First Nations and key stakeholders, to be in a good position to transition to implementation planning once the strategy is released.

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### 3. Science, Monitoring and Information

#### Groundwater Science Program

B.C.'s Groundwater Science Program continuously improves the level of scientific knowledge on provincial groundwater, aquifers and the interactions between surface water and groundwater to support the sustainable management of our shared water resources and water-related values. Science and research are often conducted collaboratively with leading experts, stakeholders, and, increasingly in partnership with local communities and Indigenous groups, which facilitates a more transparent and inclusive growth in our knowledge of water. These activities support the implementation of the WSA and Groundwater Protection Regulation, as well as provide critical information related to a range of current and emerging issues and opportunities, including drought prediction and response, source drinking water risk assessment, and potential analyses for identifying demand-supply constraints and opportunities related to major housing development objectives.

The following key projects represent some of the groundwater science work currently underway in 2023/24:

1. Chilliwack – Preliminary Assessment of Hydraulic Connection
2. An Integrated Model to Support Conjunctive Management of Groundwater and Surface Water within the Shawnigan Creek Watershed on Vancouver Island, BC
3. Rithet's Bog Experimental Site
4. SGWELLS/Aquifer Factsheets, New Functionalities and Enhancements
5. South Coast Aquifer Mapping

Multi-year groundwater projects initiated in previous years that are also funded in 2023/24:

1. Surface Water Exchange Dynamics in Low-Gradient and Tidally Influenced Streams in the Lower Fraser Valley
2. Assessment of Groundwater-Surface Water Interactions on the Vaseux Creek Alluvial Fan, Oliver, BC
3. Impact of Cumulative Groundwater Withdrawal on Surface Water and Groundwater Interaction in Stoney Creek Watershed
4. South Area Aquifer Mapping
5. North Area Aquifer Mapping

#### Water Quality Guidelines and Objectives

Pursuant to the *Environmental Management Act*, B.C.'s [water quality guidelines \(WQGs\)](#) provide provincial benchmarks for fresh and marine water quality, which are used to assess and manage the health and sustainability of B.C.'s aquatic resources. WQGs are established for the protection of aquatic life, wildlife, agriculture, drinking water sources, and recreation.

WQGs currently under development in B.C. include Nickel, Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons, Conductivity, Arsenic, and 6PPD-Quinone.

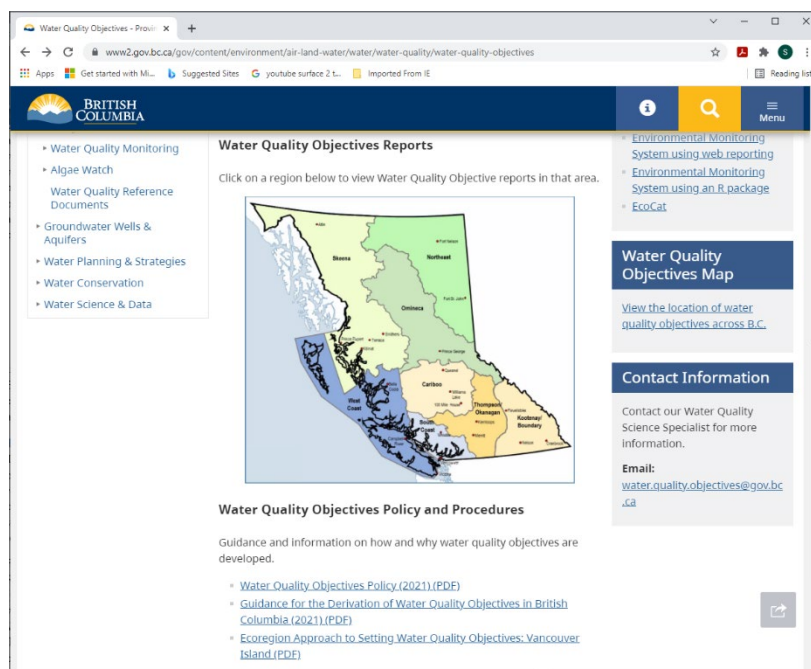


Figure 3. Webpage for the Water Quality Objectives Reports.

Also pursuant to the *Environmental Management Act*, [Water Quality Objectives \(WQOs\)](#) provide approved policy direction to guide the balance between human use, values and healthy aquatic environments by guiding statutory decisions that may impact the quality of a specific waterbody. WQOs are established on a priority basis for freshwater, estuarine and marine waterbodies of regional, provincial, inter-provincial, and international significance. They are used to inform resource management decisions, identify which values should be addressed based on local concerns, promote water stewardship, and support long-term planning in communities across B.C. WQOs are numbers or statements representing low-risk conditions to provide protection for a specific waterbody and its associated water values and uses. These include:

- Drinking water sources;
- Aquatic life and its habitat;
- Wildlife and its habitat;
- Agriculture (livestock watering and irrigation);
- Recreational use and aesthetics; and
- Traditional, cultural, and social uses.

In northeast B.C., the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy and WLRS continue to work collaboratively with Treaty 8 First Nations (West Moberly First Nation, Saulteau First Nation, and McLeod Lake Indian Band) to develop WQOs for the Murray River

watershed in response to the cumulative contributions of impacts on water quality and Indigenous water values. All existing WQO reports (and WQGs) are available on B.C.’s [Water Quality](#) website.

### Tracking Algae Blooms in B.C. Lakes: “Algae Watch”

In 2021, the Province launched [Algae Watch](#) website to track harmful algae bloom information throughout the province. Public can access the website to learn about harmful and non-harmful algae blooms and use the online submission form to share photos and information on the location and extent of algae blooms in their communities. This citizen science program will help the Province track and understand these events throughout B.C. All submitted information is reviewed and shared with the public through an online map which was released at the end of 2021.

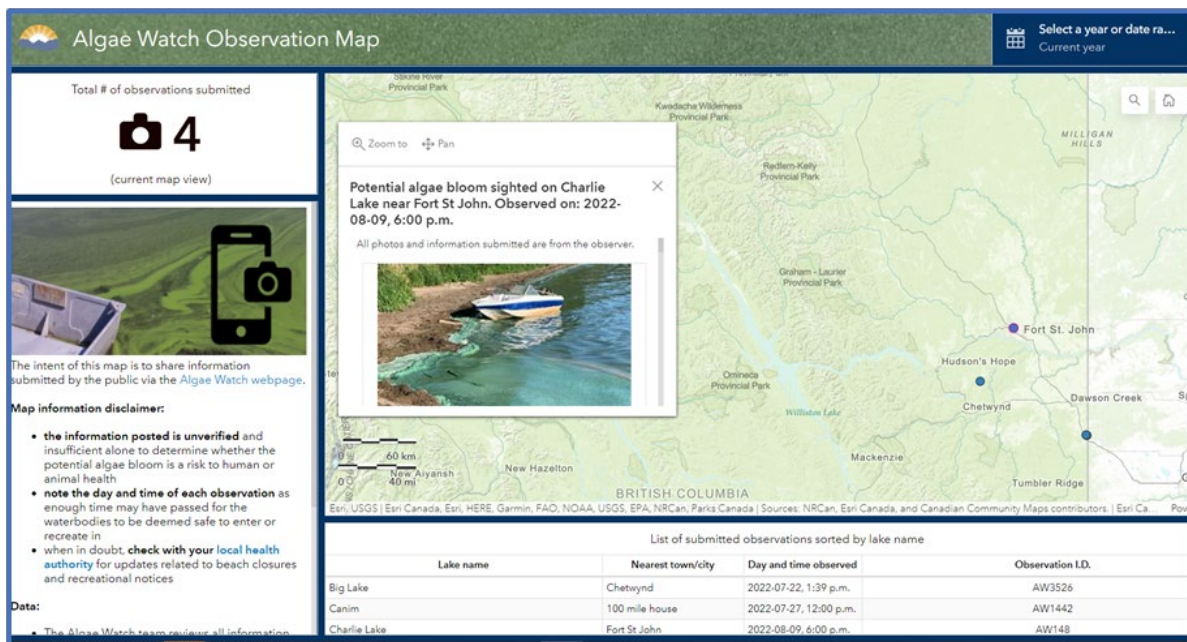


Figure 4: An Algae Watch observation map and Charlie Lake submission from 2022.

### Canada-B.C. Water Quality Monitoring Program

The [Canada-B.C. Water Quality Monitoring Program](#) was established under an agreement in 1985 as a partnership between the Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and the B.C. Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy. The goal of the program is to provide inter-jurisdictional coordination and integration of water quality monitoring on over 49 river and stream sites across B.C. in a cost-shared manner, including three stations in the Mackenzie River basin. Interested members of the public can click on individual stations to download data and to review water quality status and trends.

In 2023, the Canada-B.C. Water Quality Monitoring Program added a station at the Muskwa River near Fort Nelson in collaboration with the Fort Nelson First Nation. Data collected at this

station can be accessed from the Program website or from the Environment and Climate Change Canada [Data Catalogue](#).

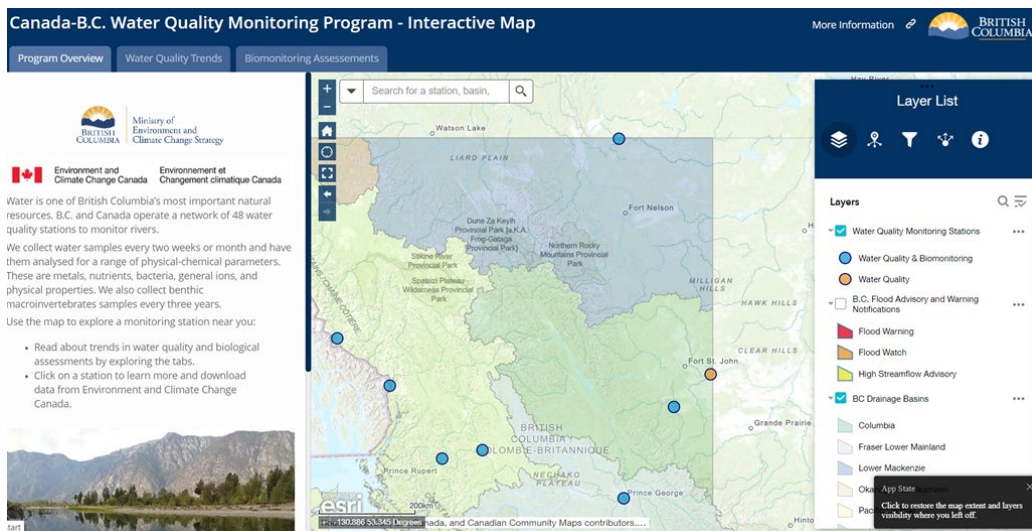


Figure 5: Canada-B.C. Water Quality Monitoring Program Interactive Map.

## B.C. Lake Monitoring Network

The [B.C. Lake Monitoring Network](#) monitors 57 key lakes across B.C. and was formally established in 2018 when it became managed at a provincial scale by dedicated program staff. The transition from regional to provincial scale management has allowed for standardization of monitoring and reporting approach and associated improvement to data quality. Lakes are sampled by Ministry staff bi-annually (spring and late-summer) to assess status and trends and evaluate lake water quality data in relation to ecosystem change including watershed stressors and climate change.

## Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network in B.C.

The Province continues to work closely with Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) to promote the nationally standardized Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network (CABIN) program across B.C. CABIN uses benthic macroinvertebrates as indicators of aquatic ecosystem health. CABIN uses data from a wide range of reference sites (i.e., minimally affected by human activities) to build predictive models that can be used to evaluate the condition of test sites (i.e., where there are concerns about the aquatic ecosystem). The differences between the macroinvertebrate communities at the test site and the “healthy” reference sites provides an indication of the extent of effects to aquatic biota.

There are two CABIN models available to monitor and assess aquatic ecosystem health within the B.C. portion of the Mackenzie River Basin (i.e., Liard and Peace Basins). In 2022, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy partnered with three different Indigenous



groups to collect reference site data to maintain these models, including the Fort Nelson First Nation, Kaska Dena, and Tahltan Nation.

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## 4. Major Projects

In B.C., major projects are assessed for potential environmental, social, economic, health and cultural effects by the Environmental Assessment Office (EAO). In 2018, the system the B.C. Environmental Assessment Office uses to report on and provide information on major projects was updated: the [EPIC Portal](#) provides searchable information on Environmental Assessment projects, an overview of the environmental assessment process, and an interactive map that displays the geographic locations of projects.



Figure 6: The EPIC Portal landing page.

The following tables summarize the major projects in EPIC that fall under the Project Types of Energy-Petroleum and Natural Gas, Energy-Electricity, Industrial, Mines, Water Management, and Waste Disposal, that are in the *Pre-Environmental Assessment Act*, Pre-Application, and Application Review phases. There is one project in the *Pre-Environmental Assessment Act* category. There are 10 projects in the Pre-Application phase, and there are no major projects currently under the Evaluation phase.

### Pre-Environmental Assessment Act

Title	Category and Location	Phase	Comments
Stronsay Lead/Zinc	Mines; Mineral Mines Northeast of Fort Ware	Pre-EA Act Approval; June 1995	An open-pit mine operation.

### Pre-Application and Early Engagement

Title	Category and Location	Phase	Comments
Pacific Northern Gas Looping Project	Energy-Petroleum and Natural Gas; Transmission Lines Summit Lake to Kitimat	Pre-Application; Scoping	The Pacific Northern Gas Looping Project would supply natural gas, via a 525 km long pipeline, from Summit Lake to proposed liquefied natural gas (LNG) export facilities in Kitimat, BC. It would have an initial capacity of 600 million standard cubic feet per day.
Kutcho	Mines; Mineral Mines	Pre-Application;	An underground copper-zinc mine with a production capacity of approximately 3,500 tonnes of ore per day,

	100 km East of Dease Lake, B.C.	Process Planning	yielding an annual average of 33 million pounds of copper and 46 million pounds of zinc over a mine life of up to 14 years.
Aley Mine	Mines; Mineral Mines 140 km N of Mackenzie, B.C.	Pre-Application; Scoping	Proposed 10,000 tonne per day open pit niobium mine with a 25-year mine life.
Carbon Creek Coal Mine Project	Mine; Coal Mines Approximately 40 km west of Hudson's Hope, B.C.	Pre-Application; Scoping	Cardero Coal Ltd. proposes to develop a new open-pit surface and underground metallurgical coal mine with an average annual production rate of 2.9 million metric tonnes of clean coal.
Gething Coal	Mines; Coal Mines 25 km Northwest of Hudson's Hope, B.C.	Pre-Application; Scoping	Proposed new underground coal mine with an onsite coal preparation plant. The production rate is 2 million tonnes per year with a mine life estimated at 40 years.
Frontier Project	Energy-Petroleum and Natural Gas; Natural Gas Processing Plants South to Southwest of Fort St. John, B.C.	Early Engagement	Enbridge proposes to construct a natural gas liquids straddle plant, 130-170 kilometre (km) pipeline, and associated infrastructure in northeastern B.C. The straddle plant and initiating pump station are located approximately 36 km west of Chetwynd, and the pipeline is proposed to span from the straddle plant to Taylor.
Wonowon Landfill	Waste Disposal; Hazardous Waste Management 9 km southeast of Wonowon, B.C.	Other	Secure Energy services Inc. proposes to construct and operate the Wonowon Landfill Project, which is anticipated to handle approximately 200,000 tonnes of waste annually over a 25-75 year lifespan, dependent on disposal services demand.
Taylor Wind	Energy-Electricity; Power Plants	Pre-Application; Process Planning	Taylor Wind Project would be located on private land in the Peace River Region approximately 10 km south of the District of Taylor. The proposed project would have a nominal power production capacity of up to 400MW.
Red Willow Wind	Energy-Electricity; Power Plants	Pre-Application; Process Planning	Red Willow Wind Limited Partnership is proposing to construct and operate a 200 MW wind energy facility in the Peace River Region of B.C. The project is located southeast of the District of Tumbler Ridge and within the traditional territory of Treaty 8 First Nations.
Sundance Wind	Energy-Electricity; Power Plants	Pre-Application; Process Planning	The Sundance Wind Project would be located in the Peace River Region approximately 20 km north of Tumbler Ridge and would have a nominal power production capacity of up to 250 MW.

There are 50 projects in the Post-Decision phases of Pre-Construction, Construction, Operation, Care and Maintenance, Complete, and Substantial Start phases. These projects include the Kemess Underground project and the Site C Clean Energy electricity power plant which are in the construction phase (more information below); the Mt. Milligan Copper-Gold Mine which is in operation; and the Roman Coal Mine, which is currently in care and maintenance. One project, the Kemess South Mine, is in decommissioning.

#### **Important Related Links:**

- [B.C. Environmental Assessment Office](#)
- [Frequently asked questions](#)

## B.C. Hydro Site “C” Clean Energy Project

Work has continued on construction on B.C.’s third dam and hydroelectric generating station on the Peace River in the northeast of the province. Construction started on July 27, 2015 and the dam is anticipated to achieve first power in 2024, with all generating units in service by 2025. A major project milestone was accomplished in July 2023 with the completion of the earthfill dam. This follows earlier work that saw the completion of two 500 kilovolt, 75 kilometer transmission lines to connect the new Site C substation to the BC Hydro grid. Once the Site C project begins to generate electricity, these transmission lines will help deliver clean energy to the rest of the province. In September 2023, the Mackenzie River Basin Board met in Fort St. John and members toured the Site C and the W. A. C. Bennett dam on the Peace River.

In May 2023, BC Hydro partnered with Treaty 8 First Nations and the B.C. Conservation Officer Service to create a new conservation officer role based at the Site C dam. The new role will provide protection to land and wildlife within the dam and reservoir areas. Through education and enforcement, the new role will focus on compliance, natural resource protection and improved public safety. Indigenous traditional laws and customs will be taken into consideration through this new position.



Figure 7: View of the earthfill dam at Site C, July 2023.

More information about the Site C project is available on the [project page](#).



Major Projects Contact:

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## 5. Events, Conferences and Seminars

Two events from 2023 are highlighted below.

### 2nd Annual Groundwater Science Symposium

On November 2, 2023, the Province of British Columbia's 2nd Annual Groundwater Science Symposium highlighted projects undertaken last year by BC government staff in partnership with a variety of external organizations. There were 288 unique attendees throughout the day, represented by 32 organizations from BC First Nations, universities, municipalities, health authorities, and consultants. Notably, 15% of attendees were from other provinces and territories across Canada. In sum, the event was a success by all measures.

The symposium presentations focused on the projects outlined in the annual Compendium of Provincial Groundwater Science and Monitoring Projects: 2022-23 available on the online [Ecological Reports Catalogue](#).

### 2023 B.C. Groundwater Association Convention (BCGWA)

On April 13 and 14, 2023, the BCGWA held its annual convention. The BCGWA's mission is to provide professional and technical leadership in the advancement of the groundwater industry and in the protection, promotion, and responsible development of groundwater resources. Hosting the convention aligns with their mission to foster and promote education, standards, research and techniques that improve methods of well construction, materials and services.

On Day 1, talks included technical presentations on several different topics, such as the groundwater project, Living Lakes Groundwater Monitoring Program, GWELLS updates and delivery of driller's and pump installer's courses. Day 2 of the convention was focused on flow testing for domestic wells, introduction to drilling muds and a discussion on Groundwater Protection Compliance: Initiatives and Enforcement. Nine staff from two ministries of the B.C. provincial government took part in the convention, including hosting a booth to enable industry and other participants to have discussions about groundwater initiatives and resources.

### Mackenzie River Basin Board Water Quality Task Team

Directly related to the work of the Mackenzie River Basin Board, B.C. continues to participate actively in the SOAER committee work (all continuing to take place virtually) and on the Water Quality Task Team (WQTT). In the past year, the WQTT met face-to-face to discuss priority activities of the group. The WQTT reached consensus on a basin-wide approach for water quality trend analysis (draft report in progress), drafted a framework for establishing water quality triggers, and revisited the WQTT terms of references. The WQTT continues to meet monthly.

## 6. Other

### Treaty 8 Nations and B.C. Move Forward on Cumulative Impacts

In June 2021, the B.C. Supreme Court ruled that the Province, through authorizing or otherwise allowing activities in Blueberry River First Nations' Claim Area, has led to a breach of the treaty commitment and infringement of Blueberry River's treaty rights. The Province and Blueberry River First Nation have been in negotiations since summer 2021 in efforts to respond to the fourth declaration issued by the court, to negotiate timely, enforceable mechanisms that address the impact of the cumulative effects of development and protect Blueberry River's treaty rights.

Water is a value component defined as part of the Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment work progressed between the Province and seven Treaty 8 Nations, which included Blueberry River First Nation. Water management and use, as it relates to treaty rights, is a topic of negotiation between the Province and Blueberry River. Should an agreement be reached between the Province and Blueberry River, a component on water management is anticipated and can be reported on further in next year's report.

### Legislation Recognizes Indigenous Rights in B.C.

Continuing the Province's commitments to advance reconciliation and adopt and implement UNDRIP, B.C. passed new legislation (DRIPA) to recognize Indigenous human rights on November 26, 2019. DRIPA is the foundational framework for reconciliation in B.C.. It sets out a process to align B.C.'s laws with UNDRIP and requires the development of an action plan to achieve the alignment of provincial laws with UNDRIP, providing transparency and accountability to the process. Regular reporting to the Legislature is required to monitor progress. The new legislation also provides a framework for decision-making between Indigenous governments and the Province on matters that affect their citizens. Notably, the Province established the Declaration Act Secretariat as a dedicated organization to progress initiatives under DRIPA. The goal is to have filled the Secretariat roles with an exclusively Indigenous staff by 2024. More information on DRIPA and the 2022-2023 Annual report is available on the new Declaration Act [Annual Reporting webpage](#). The current annual report is the first provided in the new format and highlights progress made between April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023 on 32 of the 89 actions outlined in the DRIPA Action Plan.

#### Other Initiatives Contact:

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