



What We Heard – First Nations Workshop Summary Report

Project: North Cowichan Climate Change Adaptation Strategy

Date: September 25, 2023

Background

The Municipality of North Cowichan is developing a Climate Change Adaptation Strategy to help prepare our community for the effects of climate change. The project will create actions designed to make municipal infrastructure, operations, facilities, and services more resilient to climate hazards in our region. As part of this project, staff connected with the public, community partners, and First Nations to better understand local concerns around climate hazards, climate-sensitive areas, and climate-related challenges.

How we connected

North Cowichan staff reached out through the referrals process to Cowichan Tribes, Halalt First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Penelakut Tribe, Stz'uminus First Nation and Snuneymuxw First Nation in July 2023. A letter outlining the project objectives was provided, with a query to each Nation on how they would like to be involved in the project.

Who we heard from

Staff from Cowichan Tribes, Halalt First Nation Lyackson First Nation, and Stz'uminus First Nation expressed interest in attending a multi-Nation workshop, which was scheduled for September 25, 2023. Cowichan Tribes hosted the workshop and staff from Cowichan Tribes, Halalt Nation and Lyackson Nation participated in the workshop.

What we heard

The discussion highlighted the challenges and efforts of Indigenous communities in addressing climate change impacts and emphasizes the need for collaboration, funding, and capacity building. These communities have experienced significant impacts from climate change including flooding, erosion, and drought and disruptions to cultural practices. They are actively working on mitigation and restoration efforts and emphasized the need for increased support, collaboration, and funding to address these challenges effectively. Watershed health remains a crucial priority in their efforts. Specific thoughts raised by each Nation during the workshop are

captured below and the discussion resulted in general agreement on items raised between Nations.

1. Halalt Nation:

- Community is located in the Chemainus floodplain and experiences flooding which impacts infrastructure and traditional practices.
- The Chief has prioritized collaboration around flooding issues (collaborative work is underway with Cowichan Valley Regional District, Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, Municipality of North Cowichan).
- North Cowichan can support messaging to higher levels of government.
- Efforts to elevate housing and adapt to increased flooding risks.
- Erosion is causing loss of reserve land. Desire to move to higher ground.
- Drought affecting water resources and cultural practices.
- Private forestry practices impacting the river, resulting in siltation and habitat loss.
- Concerns about private moorages and docks affecting fishing rights.
- Lack of industry accountability for environmental costs.
- The Municipal Forest Reserve is part of their Traditional Territory. Halalt views watershed stewardship as inclusive from the top of the mountain to the ocean.

2. Cowichan Tribes:

- Forestry companies have to be more involved in watershed protection.
- Agriculture having a big impact on watersheds and water quality (e.g. Quamichan Lake)
- Decreasing fish stocks and dangerous environments for traditional harvesting.
- Challenges with food security and mental health.
- Addressing social issues exacerbated by climate change.
- Challenges balancing environmental, economic, and social priorities.

3. Lyackson Nation:

- Focus on erosion mitigation along shorelines and sea-level rise challenges.
- Monitoring and enforcement issues related to vessel traffic and pollution.
- Clam bed restoration efforts and lack of enforcement against trespassers.
- Impacts on wildlife populations, including deer and elk.
- Challenges with hunting regulations and traditional hunting rights.
- Need to integrate the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) framework into this project.

Collaborative Efforts:

- Baseline data should be prior to colonization and incorporate indigenous knowledge.
- Need for collaboration and support from higher levels of government.
- Emphasis on watershed health as a significant concern, as climate impacts do not have jurisdictional boundaries.
- Advocacy for involving youth in driving positive change.
- Calls for funding and capacity-building for environmental initiatives.

Next steps

Engagement activities during Phase 1 will inform the comprehensive 'risk and vulnerability assessment' that will be developed for the Municipality. Local concerns and hazards identified during the engagement phase will be used to determine areas of vulnerability in North Cowichan's services, infrastructure, and operations. This will form the basis of the Climate Adaptation Strategy that will be developed in Phase 3 of this project.

An additional round of community engagement will occur in Phase 3, to share findings and receive input on a draft Climate Adaptation Strategy.

Following review by workshop participants, this report will be presented to North Cowichan Council and posted to the engagement project page and people who asked to stay informed on the project will be notified.