



CAPITAL REGIONAL DISTRICT

REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY STRATEGIC PLAN

FIRST NATIONS ENGAGEMENT - WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Capital Regional District (CRD) began engagement with First Nations on its Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan in March 2025. CRD's intent is to update the 2017 strategic plan to reflect regional changes and commitments to reconciliation.

From March to November 2025, CRD's regional water supply management team reached out to 15 First Nations whose traditional territories overlap CRD's regional water supply area to receive feedback and input on a draft Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan.

This report summarizes the input received from First Nations during the engagement period and is reflective of key interests expressed by First Nations who were available to participate. The CRD asked Jemma Scoble & Associates Consulting to review the feedback from First Nations and prepare this report.

Eight First Nations responded, with seven providing input on the draft strategic plan. This input is not reflective of the interests and concerns of all First Nations. The report includes key themes that emerged from the feedback received through meetings, written correspondence, and during a site visit to the Sooke Lake Reservoir on September 12, 2025.

Key themes heard during the engagement period included reconciliation, governance and representation, watershed access, the desire for greater collaboration on watershed stewardship and protection, cultural and spiritual connection to water, and cumulative impacts on water resources.

The final plan, incorporating input from First Nations, will be presented to the Regional Water Supply Commission in late 2025.

## 1. Introduction

The Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan outlines the CRD's commitments and priorities over a 10-year horizon to ensure sustainable management and maintenance of the region's water infrastructure and supply system.

In 2024, CRD staff began a two-step process to update the 2017 Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan to reflect changes in the region such as the need for climate change response, and key priorities of the CRD such as reconciliation with First Nations.

In 2025, CRD staff engaged with 15 First Nations with traditional territories within the regional water supply area on a draft water supply strategic plan, sharing the document for input and discussing individual Nation interests in water supply management across the region.

### *1.1 Context for the report*

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This report summarizes the feedback received from First Nations regarding the Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan. Jemma Scoble & Associates Consulting (JSco) were retained to review the feedback provided by First Nations in written submissions and meeting notes and to identify key themes for consideration by the CRD in a "what we heard" summary document. JSco were not involved in the planning or implementation of consultation with First Nations.

The next steps are to bring the report and updated Strategic Plan to the Commission in late 2025. The updated strategic plan incorporates the input from First Nations, and these adjustments have been shared with each Nation individually for their information. Following approval, the CRD will move forward with the plan, prioritizing the action related to watershed access which was raised as a top priority by many First Nations.

## 2. First Nations Consultation

### *2.1 Engagement Approach*

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The CRD is committed to engage First Nations communities respectfully and appropriately in the development of regional plans and strategies, and to support decision making around shared interests.

The following First Nations with territory within the Regional Water Supply Area were invited to engage on the Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan:

- BOŶÉĆEN (Pauquachin) First Nation
- Cowichan Tribes
- Halalt First Nation
- Lyackson First Nation
- MÁLEXEL (Malahat) Nation
- P'a:chi:da?ahť (Pacheedaht) First Nation
- Sc'ianew (Beecher Bay) First Nation
- Spune'luxutth (Penelakut) Tribe
- SŶÁUTŶ (Tsawout) First Nation

- T'Sou-ke Nation
- W̱SÍKEM (Tseycum) First Nation & W̱JOŁEŁP (Tsartlip) First Nation through the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council
- x̱w̱sepsəm (Kosapsum) Nation
- Tsu'uubaa'asatx First Nation

## *2.2 Engagement Methods & Activities*

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The following describes the engagement methods used during engagement on the Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan:

- Initial Letters
  - All identified First Nations were sent a letter from the CRD in March 2025 regarding the Regional Water Supply Master Plan.
  - All identified First Nations were sent a copy of the draft Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan for review and invited to meet to discuss.
- Emails
  - All identified First Nations were contacted by email with follow-up information, meeting requests, and other details as requested.
- Meetings and Follow-ups
  - Meetings took place with First Nations, in-person or virtually, as requested.
  - Follow up occurred, as needed, to ensure the feedback provided was properly captured and additional thoughts could be shared, as appropriate.
- Feedback
  - Feedback was provided through meetings, phone calls, emails, and written submissions, according to the preferences of each First Nation.

Seven First Nations provided feedback on the draft strategy either through in-person meetings or written comments. One First Nation deferred the project to the other local First Nations.

## **3. Key themes**

First Nations expressed appreciation for the opportunity to review the Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan, and to engage in a discussion with CRD regarding the approach to water supply management in the region.

The following themes were present in most of the discussions with First Nations and in written feedback received during the engagement period.

### *3.1 Reconciliation as a Guiding Principle*

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First Nations recommended the inclusion of CRD's commitment to reconciliation as a guiding principle, in addition to the importance of healthy ecosystems for watershed health, and shared stewardship. This feedback included aligning the strategic plan with the CRD's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) noting that the RAP should provide guidance to the strategic plan, and related CRD plans. Several First Nations noted the need to incorporate their rights and interests into future water planning, noting the importance of drinking water safety, fishing, and Douglas Treaty rights.

First Nations emphasized the need to acknowledge their Nations as rights holders, and to focus collectively on the shared goal of protecting water supplies, managing lands sustainably, and partnerships to protect water resources considering climate change impacts.

### *3.2 Governance and Representation*

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First Nations seek formal roles in the governance and decision-making around water as there is currently no mechanism for their direct representation on the Regional Water Supply Commission. As the *Capital Region Water Supply and Sooke Hills Protection Act*, its regulation, and the *Local Government Act* currently only permit local governments to participate on the Regional Water Supply Commission, some First Nations suggested joint advocacy to the provincial government for by-law amendments that would allow for direct representation. First Nations also suggested that the governance framework for decision-making on water should consider the province's commitment to align legislation with the *Declaration Act*. One First Nation suggested the creation of a governance table for structured feedback on water-related decisions and initiatives.

Many First Nations emphasized the importance of Nation-to-Nation decision-making protocols when it comes to water supply, and others requested more clarity on CRD's approach to water services, storage, distribution, and treatment, and how these align with reconciliation and water security.

Some First Nations spoke strongly about their responsibility to care for the lands and waters within their territory, and as such to be involved in decision-making about the watershed.

### *3.3 Watershed Access*

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First Nations raised strong concerns regarding the lack of access to watershed lands for hunting, harvesting and cultural use in alignment with their Douglas Treaty rights. One First Nation expressed interest in understanding the historic decision to close access to the Sooke Lake Water Supply Area, while others queried closure of Goldstream Watershed access, noting that this is an area of shared territory and a place used for traditional purposes. First Nations expressed interest in guardian or access agreements to support First Nations involvement in responsible watershed management.

### *3.4 Desire for Greater Collaboration on Watershed Stewardship and Protection*

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First Nations emphasized the need for watershed protection, and the importance of the ecosystem, and indicated strong interest in greater collaboration, and a greater role for their communities, in watershed stewardship planning and implementation.

Some areas identified for greater collaboration include stream restoration and cumulative impact assessment; fire management, prescribed burns, and forest fuel reduction; environmental monitoring; employment and training programs; data collection programs including wildlife, and support for First Nations Guardian programs focused on watershed protection.

Several First Nations noted the importance of First Nations involvement in the implementation of strategic plan actions related to watershed protection and monitoring and asked if capacity considerations and/or funding had been considered. One First Nation raised concerns regarding the transparency of current research and creek sampling activities of several government agencies and expressed interest in greater involvement in reservoir activities and water sampling.



Some Nations noted the need for early consultation on water infrastructure projects and proposed land acquisitions, noting the need to obtain Free, Prior and Informed Consent from First Nations.

### *3.5 Cultural and Spiritual Connection to Water*

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First Nations emphasized the importance of their cultural and spiritual connection to water, noting that it is a fundamental Aboriginal right and core interest for First Nations. They also noted that the plan omits cultural use, harvesting and spiritual relationships as priorities for First Nations.

First Nations highlighted the distinction between stewardship of the land and cultural use, indicating that in addition to expanding opportunities for First Nations' involvement in stewardship of watershed lands, the strategic plan should include the elements of cultural and ceremonial use, food, and medicine harvesting. Some First Nations noted the importance of the integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge, cultural use, harvesting, and spiritual relationships into watershed planning and management. Others suggested the elements of cultural and ceremonial use, food and medicine harvesting be included as a medium-term action.

### *3.6 Cumulative Impacts on Water Resources*

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First Nations emphasized the need for watershed protection, and the importance of the ecosystem, waterflow, species and access to resources. Cumulative impacts on species and ecosystems that depend on water was a strong theme, with some feedback focusing on the lack of recognition of historical, ongoing cumulative impacts from water management resulting from colonization and development. Some First Nations requested CRD undertake collaborative assessments of the environment with First Nations and co-develop strategies to mitigate past harm. Some Nations questioned whether CRD would limit development due to water resource constraints. Some First Nations suggested including language in the plan to reflect the CRD's responsibility to protect fish and wildlife.