



Collaboration key to future flood management

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Recent flooding in BC is a compelling reminder of why all governments need to work together on a long-term, collaborative flood plan for BC, says Fraser Basin Council Chair Charles Jago following BC's first-ever flood forum. The forum, held January 18, drew over 130 elected officials and key staff with roles on flood hazard management.

"Flood is an ongoing concern, and we've seen examples in northern communities, including ice jam flooding on the Nechako this winter and the potential for flood on the Lower Fraser last spring," says Jago. "The time was right for everyone to take stock of what is known about flood risks, how best to manage those risks and how to ensure effective emergency response." The BC flood forum, organized by the Fraser Basin Council, with support from the Province of BC and Public Safety Canada, attracted a diverse mix of representatives from local, regional, First Nations, provincial and federal governments, and utility companies.

"Multiple governments and agencies have flood-related responsibilities – and they carry those out admirably – but it's clear that nobody can go it alone. Floods don't respect jurisdictional boundaries, or follow convenient timetables," Jago says. "We in BC are fortunate to enjoy all the benefits of natural river systems. Managing the risks of rivers for both public safety and environmental health calls for long-term financial commitments, inter-governmental cooperation, planning and action."

BC Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General John Les, BC Minister of Environment Barry Penner and Abbotsford MP Ed Fast spoke at the forum about their commitments. Minister Les and senior staff gave an overview of the new BC Flood Protection Program, a recent announcement from the Province of BC to invest \$100 million over 10 years for flood protection. The Province has invited federal cost-sharing in that program. Participants also learned about BC's experience in flood forecasting, community preparedness and emergency response, including the work of local government and First Nations in handling recent flood and near-flood events.

Flexibility is key to flood prevention, and so is an integrated approach. "No single solution can adequately protect communities," says Steve Litke, manager of the Fraser Basin Council's flood hazard management program, which offers support to government flood authorities. "Diking and drainage systems are critical in many areas, for example, but land use decisions at the local level are also important to limit the risk in flood-prone areas."

"The forum emphasized the importance of good science as a foundation for all flood strategies," says Litke, noting that flood information has improved, and more work is needed to assess the risk, impacts and priority actions. "A broad network of water monitoring stations, flood computer models, floodplain maps, and assessments of community risk and vulnerability, are all needed to make good plans, sound decisions

and wise investments,” he says. Most of all, people at the forum appreciated the opportunity to share experiences and they flagged the need for collaboration, he said.

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The Fraser Basin Council

The Fraser Basin Council is a non-profit society dedicated to sustainability. Established in 1997, the FBC brings people together to find solutions to longstanding issues and conflicts, and take advantage of opportunities to advance sustainability in the Fraser River Basin, the geographical area drained by the Fraser River and its 13 main watersheds. The FBC works to ensure that the decisions British Columbians make about the Basin today will advance the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability into the future.