



Shuswap Watershed Council Response to Recent Social Media Posts

January 22nd, 2024

The Shuswap Watershed Council (SWC) is aware of certain claims and criticisms posted recently on social media and opinion letters that call for a response and correction. These claims are summarized below, with our response.

Claim: The SWC is a non-regulatory group which means that responsibility for the functions of the SWC are the responsibility of other government agencies. We are being asked to continue to pay double taxes for a service that we are already taxed for.

Response: It is true that the SWC does not have regulatory authority. The work carried out by the SWC is not regulatory and doesn't claim to be regulatory. The SWC's work focuses on education, collaboration, advocacy, incentives, and contributing to water monitoring and research. The SWC takes great care not to duplicate the work done by its member organizations.

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**Claim:** The SWC 2023 budget lists approximately \$40,000 under 'Administration', but this is stated as related to meeting costs. It does not include the \$120,000 that will be paid to the Fraser Basin Council. Why aren't the true administration costs clearly reflected in the SWC annual report?

**Response:** The SWC budget for 2023-24 includes \$40,100 for administration. Of that, \$2,600 is for meeting expenses (4 meetings per year, approximately \$650 for each meeting). The remainder is for other administrative items such as annual work planning and budgeting; regular correspondence and updates between staff and the Chair and Vice Chair; member recruitment, training, and learning opportunities; financial tracking and administration; and fund development and reporting. The \$120,000 referenced is for program management fees paid to the Fraser Basin Council (FBC) for the work their staff carry out on behalf of the SWC. There are two staff in FBC's Kamloops office that lead all the SWC's programs and initiatives. The SWC's work plan and budget for 2023-24 summarizes all these expenses including program management fees and disbursements, and can be viewed on its website (link: [https://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/swc\\_resources.html](https://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/swc_resources.html)).

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Claim: CSRD taxpayers have been funding the SWC since 2015. It has been communicated this represents less than \$10/year. Although technically correct, this certainly doesn't reflect the \$180,000/year proposed in the [Columbia Shuswap Regional District] by-law. Total cost so far is \$180,000/year x 7 years = \$1,260,000?



Response: The SWC has received funds from the following four organizations since 2016: Columbia Shuswap Regional District (CSRD), Thompson-Nicola Regional District (TNRD), City of Salmon Arm, and Adams Lake Indian Band (since 2017). The CSRD has contributed \$160,000 per year except for in 2016 (\$108,900), 2017 (\$155,000) and 2021 (\$97,200). For more information on the CSRD by-law and the cost to tax-payers, see this page on the CSRD website: <https://www.csr.bc.ca/543/Shuswap-Watershed-Council-Referendum>.

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**Claim:** For this huge investment taxpayers have received limited, if any, value and no measurable water quality improvement.

**Response:** We offer the following for residents to consider:

1. Water quality is a shared responsibility, and a multitude of factors impact water quality. As such, no single agency or organization can take credit for water quality improvement (nor be accused for lack thereof).
2. The SWC is a convenor. The management and governance of water is complex, and many different agencies and organizations have roles and responsibilities related to water. The SWC brings many of these organizations together to facilitate information sharing and water quality planning for the long term. The need for collaboration is one of the primary reasons the SWC was established.
3. The SWC has implemented extensive educational campaigns in the Shuswap to residents and tourists about preventing the spread of invasive mussels. The reach of our campaigns since 2018 is estimated at 7.75 million views. We believe education in the Shuswap is critical to ensuring the region remains free of invasive mussels and other invasive aquatic species.
4. The SWC has contributed to water monitoring and research. We initiated a scientific, peer-reviewed research program that was carried out by UBC Okanagan. It has shown that one of the biggest threats to water quality is the movement of phosphorus from land to water, which is contributing to algal blooms. We have developed a Phosphorus Action Plan ([https://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/Library/TR\\_SWC\\_2/SWC\\_PhosphorusActionPlan.pdf](https://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/Library/TR_SWC_2/SWC_PhosphorusActionPlan.pdf)) to help everyone in the region take positive steps on the issue.
5. The SWC provides funding through its water quality grant program for watershed restoration projects. These funds are dedicated to addressing the biggest threat to our water quality, as mentioned above in #4. Funding is supporting water quality improvement projects and sustainable agriculture practices in our region. To date, the SWC has advanced \$178,000 in grant funding for 13 projects, which has leveraged \$287,000 for a total investment of \$465,000 in the Shuswap watershed since 2020.

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Claim: The SWC has budgeted more than \$40,000 for meetings in 2023. This is concerning as the SWC meets quarterly and many attend by Zoom.

Response: The SWC has budgeted \$40,100 for several administrative tasks in 2023, including coordinating four meetings per year. More details are in response #2, above.

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**Claim:** In 2022, the SWC wrote and widely distributed on social media, a letter to the Minister of Environment demanding action on the Sunnybrae algal bloom. The SWC letter was returned, advising them the Ministry of Forests and Lands were responsible for algal blooms. After six years and approximately \$1.2 million dollars, how does the SWC not know what regulatory body is responsible for algal blooms?

**Response:** No such response was received by the SWC. The SWC wrote a letter to Minister of Environment George Heyman in October 2022 to express its concern about deteriorating water quality in the Salmon Arm of Shuswap Lake and to ask for the Ministry's leadership in restoring and protecting water quality and specifically cited the *Agricultural Environmental Management Code of Practice*, which the Ministry of Environment is responsible for implementing under the *Environmental Management Act*. The Minister replied on March 2, 2023. The reply does not mention the Ministry of Forests and Lands. The Minister stated, "I appreciate the leadership that the Shuswap Watershed Council plays in promoting water quality improvement and the Ministry will continue to work in partnership with the Council..." and further stated "I appreciate the work the Shuswap Watershed Council has done to educate citizens in the watershed about the protection of water quality in Shuswap Lake, including best practices in your recent Phosphorus Action Plan." This correspondence is posted on the SWC website (link: [https://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/SWC\\_Advocacy.html](https://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/SWC_Advocacy.html)).

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Claim: The SWC regurgitates the same [invasive] mussel and water safety advertisements the federal and provincial governments already broadcast.

Response: The federal and provincial governments do not implement educational campaigns in the Shuswap watershed. The SWC's campaigns for the prevention of invasive mussels and for safe boating and recreation are targeted to residents and visitors in the Shuswap through placement in local media, social media, travel literature and signage.

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**Claim:** The lake's health is monitored both federally and provincially; water quality is the responsibility of BC's Interior Health, while water safety is a federal responsibility.

**Response:** Water quality is a shared responsibility. The BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy is the lead, long-term monitoring agency for many lakes in the Province, including Shuswap and Mara Lakes. It currently monitors two sites on Shuswap Lake and two sites on Mara Lake, twice per year. Municipalities and regional districts also do water quality monitoring for their own purposes. The SWC plays a unique and much-needed role of compiling water quality data from monitors and producing annual Shuswap watershed water quality reports for the public (reports can be found here: [https://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/Water\\_Quality\\_Reports.html](https://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/Water_Quality_Reports.html)).

The SWC also provides funding for early-detection monitoring of invasive mussels at several sites throughout the Shuswap watershed (a program that is carried out by the Columbia Shuswap Invasive



Species Society, more information can be found here:  
[https://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/Invasive\\_Mussels.html#monitoring](https://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/Invasive_Mussels.html#monitoring)).

The federal government does not operate any long-term water quality monitoring programs in the Shuswap. Some federal departments are involved in special research projects related to water quality (e.g., Department of Fisheries and Oceans). Environment and Climate Change Canada is involved in hydrometric monitoring.

Water safety is a shared responsibility. Transport Canada regulates boating and the RCMP do safety patrols. The SWC educates residents and visitors about water and boating safety. The SWC's water safety campaigns are covered by 75% percent funding from Transport Canada.

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Claim: The Province has not taken an interest the Shuswap Watershed Council.

Response: The Province has been involved with the Shuswap Watershed Council since its inception in 2014. The engagement of the Province has expanded over the years, and there are now three representatives from the Province participating in the SWC: one each from the Ministry of Environment & Climate Change Strategy, the Ministry of Forests, and the Ministry of Agriculture & Food. (The SWC membership list can be viewed here: https://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/About_SWC.html). Staff from provincial agencies also participate in two technical committees of the SWC. Additionally, correspondence from Provincial Ministers has consistently stated their appreciation of the Shuswap Watershed Council.

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**Claim:** This will result in household water metering and/or water and well licensing.

**Response:** The Shuswap Watershed Council does not have any involvement in metering or licencing. Water metering, where in place, is the responsibility of water suppliers or local/regional governments. Water licensing is the responsibility of the Provincial government.