



Nechako Watershed Roundtable Spring Technical Meeting Report

Date: April 22nd, 2020

Location: Virtual

Prepared by the Nechako Watershed Roundtable Secretariat



Acknowledgements

The Nechako Watershed Roundtable (NWR) is grateful to the Lheidli T'enneh First Nations for the opportunity to virtually host the Spring Technical Meeting on their traditional territory in Prince George BC. We would like to thank Mike Robertson (Cheslatta Carrier Nation) and Lori Borth (BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development) for their participation on the panel entitled 'Updates on Watershed Partnerships and Governance in the Nechako'. We would also like to thank Chelton Van Geloven, Ella Parker, Jordan Cranmer, Dr. Stephen Déry, and Wayne Salewski for their updates and contributions.

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Introduction

The Spring Technical Meeting of the Nechako Watershed Roundtable took place virtually on April 22nd, 2020 with attendees and speakers joining from Vanderhoof, Smithers, Burns Lake, Maple Ridge, and Prince George. Specific topic areas for the meeting included:

- The New Day Agreement between the Cheslatta Carrier Nation and Rio Tinto Alcan
- The Cheslatta Nation Settlement Agreement
- The Pathways 2.0 Agreement
- Youth Engagement Research and Updates
- Flood Response and Restoration Partnerships
- Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative during COVID-19
- Nechako Watershed Research- Industrial Research Chair

Dr. Margot Parkes and Councillor Kevin Moutray, Nechako Watershed Roundtable Core Committee Co-Chairs, chaired the meeting. The objectives of the meeting were to:

- Provide an update on activities of the Nechako Watershed Roundtable membership;
- Provide opportunities for knowledge sharing and discussion;
- Facilitate opportunities for networking and collaboration.

A total of 34 people attended, including representatives from First Nations, local government, provincial ministries, civil society, the private sector, the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), and community members. See Appendix A for the list of attendees.

Roundtable Update & Overview of Roundtable Operations

Co-chairs Dr. Margot Parkes and Councillor Kevin Moutray provided an introduction to the meeting as well as an overview of NWR operations. The presentation began with a brief introduction to the Nechako watershed and an overview of the NWR and Core Committee structure and purpose. The NWR Core Committee is made up of members from local government, First Nations, and NGOs/civil society. The mandate of the NWR is to add value and connect initiatives that are already happening in the watershed by convening watershed leaders and practitioners.

Core operations of the NWR include:

- Annual Meetings
- Spring Technical Meetings
- Core Committee Meetings (quarterly)
- Fostering diverse multi-stakeholder exchange
- Initiatives of the NWR working groups

The NWR continues to seek funding for core operational costs. The NWR Secretariat is staffed through a half time position and is actively seeking to match existing funding from the Real Estate Foundation of BC.



Panel: Updates on Watershed Partnerships and Governance in the Nechako

Speaker 1 [Mike Robertson, Senior Policy Advisor, Cheslatta Carrier Nation.](#)

Mike provided updates on the [New Day Agreement with Rio Tinto Alcan](#) and the Cheslatta Carrier Nation Settlement Agreement with BC.

The New Day Agreement was signed in February 2020 by the Cheslatta Carrier Nation and Rio Tinto and represents a long-term partnership between them. The agreement was the culmination of a 20-year process and accomplishes many things including business partnerships and return of some land through government land grants. It includes a financial component, a training center to provide a wide range of training opportunities for Cheslatta people, a matching scholarship fund, and a 30-year reservoir stewardship program related to impacts of the flooding and operations of Rio Tinto. The agreement does not include the Kenney Dam cold water release facility. The agreement will help to build Cheslatta's economic presence in the watershed with contracting and business. Cheslatta will be taking over dam maintenance and special projects including the operation of the Skins lake spillway.

The agreement runs parallel to the day-to-day operations of the Cheslatta, and the final settlement agreement that was signed with the Province. This agreement includes restoration and rehabilitation, collaborative resource management, caribou rehabilitation in Tweedsmuir Park and the guardian program.

There will be a lot of inventory work to be done and the agreements set out a pretty comprehensive work plan. Overall the agreements establish a long-term sustainability presence for Cheslatta as a steward of the watershed. Everything filters downstream, and so this will have positive impacts down in the mainstem of the Nechako and beyond.

Questions for Mike Robertson

Question: Will the agreement address the Skins Lake spillway and damage of the siltation into Cheslatta and Murray Lake?

Answer: This is not part of the agreement, investigations into the impacts of the spillway into Cheslatta and Murray lake and water flows were not part of the new day agreement. We are still impacted by the flooding and siltation. This wasn't on the table, but hopefully the Kenney Dam project (which is a completely separate project) will address this.



Speaker 2 Lori Borth, Director of Strategic Initiatives, North Area, Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, member of the Provincial team for negotiation and implementation of Pathways.

Lori provided an update on the [Pathways 2.0 Agreement](#).

The Pathways 2.0 Agreement is a reconciliation agreement with the Carrier Sekani Nations (it is not a treaty). The goal is to close socioeconomic gaps and address concerns about the environment and the economy. To have a healthy economy, we need a healthy environment. It is a collaborative partnership deal that focuses on the key topics of forestry, land, carbon, environmental stewardship. The agreement builds on the Pathways 1, which has expired. Work that was done on the environmental stewardship component was largely focused around assessing the state of the land base. A big concern of First Nations is what can be done to improve the state of the environment. Work is being done with major forestry licensees, and they have agreed to change some practices. This is happening in concert with other province initiatives, such as amendments to the Forest Range and Practices Act. Some of the next steps in the Pathways agreement are to work on an implementation plan which will also include plans for further engaging with the public.

Questions for Lori Borth

Question: What can we expect to see happening with this in the near future?

Answer: Well we are working on an implementation plan, we will have more that we could report out on in the fall. We are trying to figure out when to provide an opportunity for the public to give feedback, it will help to understand the questions/concerns that the public might have. Also, the stewardship has been focused on forests, but it is also about other industries as well and one of the focuses is water.

Question: What are the lessons learned between PA1 and PA2?

Answer: We didn't get everything settled and solved with Pathways 1 or Pathways 2, we learned that the more collaboration that is possible the better, public engagement is very important, we all live in these communities and want to work together to improve them. For example, it would be an important step to engage with the Roundtable to further explain the agreement and understand if the NWR could be a place for engagement in the future.

Question: Is there an explicit water management component to the agreement?

Answer: We are setting up other tables to discuss different components of the agreement and there is a plan to have a water table sometime in the future.

Question: Is there room for other entities to be involved in developing the agreement?

Answer: When it was announced, Carrier Sekani Nations received request from other nations to become involved and they are in conversation about that right now.

Question: Has Covid-19 hindered the agreement moving forward such as field work?

Answer: There is still some work happening on the ground, but foundational work moving forward (paperwork) is still going ahead over the phone and on zoom conferences. We are



figuring out best management practices for field work. We are not sure how the monitoring could go on (but some nations are still doing it) and we might end up developing further rules about what we can do.

Question: Can you expand on the changes in the Environmental Stewardship Initiative?

Answer: It is being addressed through the stewardship component, with a focus on fish, moose, and forest biodiversity, so that licensees are better accommodating. This includes:

- Building larger riparian buffers than required by licensees, especially on small (s4, s6) streams
- Wetlands protection
- Changes to the configuration of block layouts to be friendlier for moose; sight lines, minimizing distances, and road deactivation, limiting access by wolves
- Vegetation management along block edge to facilitate better browse species
- Increasing the level of retention in cut blocks

Question: Will the economic component be to help watersheds or environments or just businesses?

Answer: The funding will be provided based on proposals that come forward. An advisory board will be making decisions on projects that can be funded and advanced. It could be used for projects that could help the watersheds as well. It is in the early stages of setting things up, the funds haven't been advanced yet.

Other Updates & Discussion

Updates on other initiatives and work happening in the watershed were provided by NWR members attending the meeting:

Chelton Van Geloven, Source Water Protection Hydrologist for FLNRORD, provided an update on his current work. Summary of the update:

- Major areas of work consist of the Omineca and Cariboo regions, efforts are currently being focused on flood response.
- Have partnered with NEWSS and UFFCA to secure a \$470,000 Nature Legacy grant, to be used over 4 years for rehabilitation of areas that we have completely lost, including the riparian areas.
- Next steps include assessing how this work will be monitored, how to assess whether or not it is successful, and how to learn from it if it's not.

Ella Parker, Masters Student at UNBC, provided an update on her graduate research focusing on school-based water monitoring and decision-making in the Nechako watershed. Summary of the update:

- The Koh-Learning in our Watersheds program is a UNBC-School District 91 (SD91) education program with the goal of fostering aboriginal education as well as hands-on waterways learning
- Ella's research will be focusing on the Koh-Learning project and School District 91 (SD91) to better understand how high school water monitoring could inform decision making in the watershed.



- The research will happen through group interviews with SD91 teachers, students, and Nechako Watershed partners, and will involve some stream monitoring trials with the students.

Jordan Cranmer, Intern, Tour Guide and Outreach Lead at the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative Hatchery, provided an update on the current status of activities at the facility. Summary of the update:

- The hatchery is currently closed to the public due to the pandemic.
- Working actively to develop monthly media releases in order to maintain community engagement and keep folks updated on events, programs, and how things have changed
- Planning to host virtual tours of the facility and sturgeon release.
- A series of educational videos has been released on their [YouTube channel](#) and website which could be useful for those working through an education program at home.

Dr. Stephen Déry, Researcher at UNBC with the Integrated Water Research Group, provided an update on a fairly new project he has been working on. Summary of the update:

- New project in the Nechako was started in July 2019, and the official announcement was made in November.
- It is a five-year program of research looking at climate change and water security.
- The three themes are:
 - Improving monitoring of hydrometeorology,
 - Atmospheric rivers and their terrestrial impacts (ex: floods)
 - Modelling exercises around a combination of water management and temperature
- The research is funded jointly by NSERC and Rio Tinto, but the research is done independently from Rio Tinto, the money all goes toward supporting students and staff at UNBC.
- For more information check out this [link](#)

Wayne Salewski, chair of the Nechako Water and Environment Stewardship Society, provided an update on the Lakes Monitoring Working Group. The Lakes Monitoring Working Group is focused on the health of large lakes and will be working with the Province on the volunteer lakes monitoring program. Many of the lakes have groups that are concerned about the changes they see in water quality. Summary of the update:

- Have been working on getting funding for the lakes monitoring training.
- Would be working with First Nations, looking at all big lakes from Takla to West Lake.
- A Plan B and Plan C are needed for acquiring funding for the Working Group.
- Additional funding would increase the frequency of monitoring on the lakes – there is lots of community buy in for this to happen, and the necessary equipment is ready, money is the last thing needed to get it going.



Conclusions and Next Steps

Co-Chairs Margot Parkes and Kevin Moutray concluded the meeting with some closing remarks.

Christina Ciesielski, Fishers Manager for the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, who has been a part of the NWR since its beginnings, will be stepping down from her role with the NWR this summer. The NWR will continue to look for connections with First Nations groups.

A lack of funding currently threatens the NWR's ability to continue operating. It is asked of all members to forward any suggestions related to funding to the Co-Chairs Core Committee.

The NWR will continue with ongoing outreach and engagement, and encourage continued participation in the Water Engagement Initiative.

The Fall 2020 Meeting will ideally be an in-person event, but a location has not yet been determined.

Appendix A: Participant List

Participant Name	Affiliation/Organization
Andrea Erwin	College of New Caledonia
Barry Booth	University of Northern BC
Bhavana Jawhare	Cheslatta Carrier Nation
Brian Frenkel	District of Vanderhoof
Chelton VanGeloven	BC Ministry of FLNRORD
Christiana Onabola	University of Northern BC
Clint Lambert	Regional District Bulkey Nechako
Danielle Dekay	Rio Tinto Alcan
Diana Kutzner	University of Northern BC
Dolores Funk	Mayor of Burns Lake
Ella Parker	University of Northern BC
Garth Frizzell	City of Prince George
Gerry Thiessen	Mayor of Vanderhoof
Guy Scarf	Department of Fisheries and Oceans
Hannah DeBoer-Smith	University of Northern BC
Ian Rogalski	Environment Canada
John DeGagne	BC Ministry of FLNRORD
Jordan Cranmer	Nechako White Sturgeon Hatchery
Jorja Cranmer	School District 91
Keith West	Takla Lake First Nation
Kevin Kriese	BC Ministry of FLNRORD
Kevin Moutray	District of Vanderhoof
Kim Menounos	Fraser Basin Council
Lindsay Sackett	Fraser Basin Council
Lori Borth	BC Ministry of FLNRORD
Margot Parkes	University of Northern BC
Meg Labron	University of Northern BC
Megan Usipuik	University of Northern BC
Mia Moutray	School District 91
Mike Robertson	Cheslatta Carrier Nation
Nan Kendy	University of Northern BC
Norm Bilodeau	NWR Core Committee
Stephen Dery	University of Northern BC
Sydney Raison	City of Prince George
Wayne Salewski	Nechako Environment and Watershed Stewardship Society