



Blueprint for restoring ecological governance to the Lower Fraser River



LOWER FRASER
FISHERIES
ALLIANCE



THE UNIVERSITY
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



WEST COAST
Environmental Law



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Cover photo of Elder T'it'elem Spath, Eddie Gardner, a member of
Skwah First Nation. Photo taken at a 2016 Wild Salmon Caravan
event at Cheam Nation's Longhouse. Image by Michael O. Snyder on
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Blueprint for restoring ecological governance to the Lower Fraser River

The Lower Fraser River and its estuary host a remarkable diversity of species within a globally important ecosystem, including its role as one of the greatest salmon bearing rivers in the world. As of 2018¹, more than one third of the unique populations of Fraser River salmon and steelhead are considered at risk of extinction². Additionally, there are more than 100 other species of conservation concern just within the Fraser estuary.

To help address these issues the Lower Fraser Fisheries Alliance, Raincoast Conservation Foundation, Martin Conservation Decisions Lab at the University of British Columbia and West Coast Environmental Law, have established a Lower Fraser Working Group. This group aims to propose options for Indigenous-led and community-driven governance arrangements that fosters long-term ecological resilience, through ecosystem-based management, of the Lower Fraser River and estuary and the species and people that rely on it.

Industrial, urban and residential development are creating unprecedented pressures in this complex social-ecological system. Currently, land use decisions and governance arrangements lack a mandate that prioritizes long-term ecosystem resilience, upholds Aboriginal rights and title, and recognizes the federal and provincial commitments to work with Indigenous governments to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples³. First Nations have inherent Indigenous rights, title and responsibilities to manage resources and habitat in their respective territories, including stewardship and restoration activities. Identifying new governance arrangements and sustainable funding mechanisms will provide the means to collectively work towards the ecological sustainability of the Lower Fraser River.

Foundational species, such as salmon and the ecological processes they rely on, present a focus for collaboration between First Nations and other governments, communities, conservation organizations and public interests to streamline our work and centre Indigenous voices and knowledge.

1 Refers to the 24 Fraser River salmon populations listed as threatened or endangered under COSEWIC as of 2019, including 11 Chinook Conservation Units, 10 sockeye Conservation Units, 2 steelhead Designated Units and the Interior Fraser coho Designated Unit.

2 Based on COSEWIC listings.

3 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, available online at: www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html





This *Blueprint for restoring ecological governance to the Lower Fraser River* is guided by five key principles:

- 1. A commitment to sustainability that spans seven generations.**
- 2. Governance that honours Aboriginal rights and title, inherent Indigenous jurisdiction and law, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.**
- 3. Clear enforcement mechanisms to ensure ecological resilience.**
- 4. Sustainable funding for governance and ecosystem based management.**
- 5. Respect for the opinion, voices, experiences and culture of others.**





Next steps

Through 2020, working group members will continue to research, communicate and have dialogues to facilitate a coordinated and strategic approach to restoration efforts in the Lower Fraser. This includes identifying possible options for new, sustainable governance arrangements and funding mechanisms consistent with the Blueprint for restoring ecological governance to the Lower Fraser River, and the First Nations Fish Habitat Restoration Strategy.

REPRESENTATIVES AND SOURCES OF EXPERTISE

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Now, as the ecological crisis for salmon and other species is clear, it is time for thoughtful and coordinated action that ensures functioning coastal, freshwater and terrestrial habitats that underpin biodiversity. With no overarching coordination to consider ecological sustainability, and a lack of federal or provincial government leadership and urgency, fragmented and uncoordinated land use prevails. This also hampers progressive planning and stifles ambitious innovation. Without immediate action and the establishment of a long term plan that addresses the mismatch between decisions that affect salmon habitat and the social and economic consequences of those decisions, the irreversible loss of vital habitat and populations will continue.

To this end, LFFA is developing a regional First Nations Fish Habitat Restoration Strategy, grounded in Indigenous law and knowledge and drawing on the best available scientific and technical analyses to guide restoration efforts in the region. The Lower Fraser Working Group seeks to facilitate collaborations and dialogue that will align the efforts of others, such as environmental NGOs and researchers in the Lower Fraser, with the First Nations Fish Habitat Restoration Strategy.





Profile of project partners

WWW.LFFA.CA

LOWER FRASER FISHERIES ALLIANCE

The LFFA is working towards a Vision of an ideal future, in which the LFFA is a voice for the First Nations of the Lower Fraser River. We work collaboratively and holistically to manage our fishery and to support our cultural and spiritual traditions for future generations.

The Mission of the LFFA is to promote and support the management of a robust and expanding fishery for the First Nations of the Lower Fraser River. The work of the LFFA is guided by the following Shared Values:

- A.** Respect for the opinion, voices, experiences and culture of others;
- B.** Our inherent rights to harvest fish and manage the fishery;
- C.** Trust, Honesty, Openness and Reciprocity;
- D.** Commitment to the sustainability of our fishery for seven generations;
- E.** Recognition of the connectivity of the ecosystem; and
- F.** Sq`eptset Syoyes Sth`o`th`equwi: collaboration of "Fishers working together".

In 2014, the LFFA established and implemented a Governance Protocol that 23 of 30 Lower Fraser First Nations executed. Subsequently, the LFFA Society was ratified. Lower Fraser First

Nations have inherent rights, aboriginal title, aboriginal rights, and/or treaty rights and have common management concerns, interests and responsibilities to the Lower Fraser Fisheries which benefit from collaborative approaches and processes.

There are a broad range of topics, concerns and issues that fall within the management of the Lower Fraser Fisheries. Lower Fraser First Nations agree on the need for a respectful and ongoing relationship and dialogue on common issues arising from the management of fish and fish habitat in the Lower Fraser River while respecting bilateral arrangements of the First Nations with other governments.

Lower Fraser First Nations who are signatories to the Governance Protocol are committed to working with each other in a government to government relationship to develop and implement processes to more effectively and efficiently participate in the management of fish and fisheries, including aquatic resources, in the lower Fraser River and its tributaries from the mouth of the Fraser River to the Fraser Canyon.



BLUEPRINT FOR RESTORING ECOLOGICAL
GOVERNANCE TO THE LOWER FRASER RIVER





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RAINCOAST CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

Raincoast’s Lower Fraser Salmon Conservation Program was initiated to address the degradation of salmon habitat and the intensity of development pressures in the Lower River and estuary. The project includes a multi-year study of juvenile salmon use throughout the estuary, and physical restoration efforts to remove migration barriers. In 2017, we began restoring salmon access to Sturgeon Bank from the Fraser River’s main arm by creating openings in the eight km long Steveston Jetty built in the early 20th century to ‘control the river’ and facilitate its use for industry. In tandem with the research and restoration, Raincoast initiated a process to develop a Vision for Salmon habitat in the Lower Fraser that identifies and articulates the aspirations of a range of interests, including local and regional First Nations.



WWW.TARAMARTIN.ORG

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Dr. Tara Martin (UBC) heads the Conservation Decisions Lab within the Department of Forest and Conservation Sciences at the University of British Columbia.



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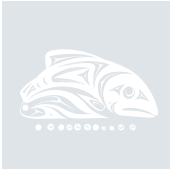
WWW.WCEL.ORG

WEST COAST ENVIRONMENTAL LAW

West Coast Environmental Law (WCEL) is a non-profit group of environmental lawyers and strategists dedicated to safeguarding the environment through law. WCEL transforms the legal landscape through law reform in various strategies, partnering with Indigenous nations and working with allies and governments.

Today, through the RELAW (Revitalizing Indigenous Law for Land, Air & Water) Program, the RELAW team provides free legal services and co-learning opportunities for community members, focused on approaches to researching, applying and enforcing Indigenous Law.





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