wildsight
Creston Valley Branch

To: Water Protection and Sustainability Branch, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy

Re: Watershed Security Strategy and Fund Discussion Paper Feedback

Wildsight Creston Valley Branch (WCVB) is engaged in creating healthy, sustainable communities that protect our environment, wildlife and water. We are involved in community-based water monitoring and watershed advocacy.

Wildsight Creston Valley Branch works towards conserving biodiversity and intact ecosystems in the valley. There are many species at risk within the Creston Valley which are sensitive to water regime changes due to climate change. These species are also affected by water pollution and degraded riparian ecosystems.

Several large water bodies, such as the Kootenay and Goat rivers, have been impacted by dams and dykes in the Creston Valley. These changes have impacted the hydrology and ecology of the Creston Valley. Furthermore, many of these changes were implemented without consultation or consent from the Yaqan Nukiy people of the Ktunaxa Nation. Indigenous-led water policy should be a priority within communities in BC and water governance needs to be changed and updated to comply with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and B.C's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA).

The community is also concerned with the increased risk of droughts and flooding related to climate change. Last year, several households ran out of groundwater in the summer. Management of agriculture, industry and domestic supply of water withdrawals is a concern in the valley. Pollution from agriculture and development is also an issue that has been documented in the Creston Valley (Davies, 2008). However, there have not been funds or regulatory reach to follow up on these issues.

Currently, WCVB is involved in advocating for the Duck Creek community watershed that serves several hundred residences and industry. This watershed is proposed to be significantly logged by both private and corporate logging in the next 5-8 years. There is limited ability for public feedback on this land management proposal and no land-use planning. The cumulative effects framework to evaluate the risk to water quality from logging, climate change, recreation, mining and agriculture is ineffective.

The BC government also has a history of favouring industry over the needs of the communities health and wellbeing. " *Administrators within the Ministry of Forests argued, on*

behalf of British Columbians, that the forest industry was more important to the economy than the legislative protection of drinking water." (Koop, 2002)

WCVB is a shareholder in the Creston Valley Community Forest. The community forest was established, in part, due to the concern of cumulative effects on the drinking watersheds in the Creston Valley. WCVB is still involved in advocating for healthy watersheds in the Creston Valley and provides the following feedback on the Watershed Security Paper.

WCVB feedback for the Watershed Security Paper

General Feedback:

- Watershed Security is important to British Columbians. This past year has emphasized the importance of healthy watersheds with droughts, heat dome, floods and fires. Watershed Security is essential to healthy communities, biodiversity, climate and reconciliation.
- There is urgent need for the BC government to take action for Watershed Security. While there is need for strategy and planning, action on watershed security and climate change are important now.
- The Discussion Paper supports the government's commitment to reconciliation and the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the rights of indigenous People (UNDRIP) and B.C's Declaration on the Rights of indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA). These commitments should be honoured through collaboration with Indigenous Nations and peoples.
- Strengthen roles, responsibilities and accountability of watershed governance between levels of government.
- Connect Watershed Security with climate change. Droughts, floods, changes in hydrology, warming of water, invasive species are all related to climate change. Greenhouse gas emissions need to be reduced in order to secure our water supply.
- Protecting ecosystems should be a priority in preserving healthy watersheds.

Outcome One: Support and enable watershed governance

- Enhance land management regulations to consider cumulative impacts on watersheds.
- Governance should be informed by local Indigenous Nations and Indigenous Knowledge.
- The people relying on water often have no ability to plan and advocate for land management in their watershed. Governance should enable and support input from local communities.

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- Prioritize watershed planning and governance with protection of water quality, seasonal quantity and consistency as high level objectives when the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development is re-organized.

Outcome Two: Enhance our understanding of watershed and the risks they face

- Increase funding for government, academic and community-based water monitoring. Knowledge gaps have been identified by hydrologists (Carver, 2017). Local Indigenous and community concern for watershed should also influence water monitoring efforts.
- Support open data platforms like the Columbia Basin Water Hub so that British Columbians can have access to water data.

Outcome Three: Progress with Indigenous peoples using new and improved mechanisms for collaboration on provincial water priorities.

- Prioritize Indigenous-led water initiatives, and fund those initiatives.
- Support place-based approaches to watershed protection, like the “Bringing the Salmon Home Initiative”. This local initiative is a partnership between several Indigenous Nations to restore salmon to the Columbia River.

Outcome Four: Achieve healthy water for everyone

- Improve accountability for drinking water source protection. This may include improved land-management plans and practices, as well as increased monitoring of water quality and quantity.
- Ensure safe drinking water for all communities in B.C immediately. Focus on regulating and limiting industrial activities in drinking watersheds.

Outcome Five: Integrate water more efficiently and effectively into Land Use Planning

- New planning tools and mechanisms must be in place to deal with cumulative impacts in watersheds with regulation based accountability. This needs to be done immediately. Watersheds and ecosystems in the province are in crisis due to pervasive industrial activities, development and climate change.
- Improve the state of watershed reporting. Monitoring from local communities and Indigenous nations ensure that data can support this work.
- Improve forestry management and legislation in order to protect watersheds. Apply the precautionary principle in terms of cutting prescriptions, especially with the uncertainty of climate change. Honour old growth deferrals and recruitment areas.

Outcome Six: Reset the water supply and demand relationship

- Implement the tools under B.C.'s Water Sustainability Act (WSA) to deal with planning and management of drought.
- Update water allocation rules, so they align with UNDRIP and DRIPA.
- Fund education and rebates in order to help communities capture rainwater, treat stormwater, address infrastructure deficits for conservation and make smarter use of water resources.

Outcome Seven: Improve habitats for aquatic ecosystems

- Prioritize watershed security with regard to wild salmon and listed sturgeon. Restore degraded, dyked habitat on rivers. Ensure appropriate flows and limit water withdrawals in critical timing windows.
- Protect functioning of wetlands, ripariarian areas, old growth forests to ensure healthy watersheds. Protect cool climate change refugia.
- Where possible, implement nature-based solutions in developed areas such as rain gardens, surge basins, urban tree planting and riparian restoration.
- Provide funds and incentives to communities and farmers in order to protect riparian habitats.

Outcome Eight: Integrate Indigenous Knowledge into decision-making and management

- Develop the Watershed Security Strategy and fund with Indigenous nations.
- Prioritize Indigenous-led water initiatives.
- Prioritize funding for and partnerships with Indigenous Nations.

Outcome Nine: Strengthen education and outreach about managing water in B.C.

- Build capacity within local communities to understand, monitor and advocate for their watersheds.

Outcome Ten: Create a Watershed Security Fund

- The Fund must flow to Indigenous Nations, local governments and rural communities to be able to manage local watersheds. This fund should be released immediately so that local communities can protect their watersheds.
- Ensure adequate and ongoing funds to support current and future local planning, monitoring and restoration projects.

Thank you.

Wildsight Creston Valley Board

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References

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