

# University of Victoria's POLIS Water Sustainability Project

## SUBMISSION: Organizing Government for Success

### *Priorities for FLNRORD Re-Organization*

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#### Introduction and Problem Statement

The main issues and challenges concerning natural resource management and stewardship in British Columbia are well understood. Structurally a number of concerns have been identified including:

- Segregated and fragmented development and implementation of provincial policies by individual resource ministries with weak and inconsistent interaction with Regional Operations responsible for policy implementation and service delivery in the field.
- Insufficient financial and staff resources in regions to implement the strategic priorities and mandates set out by the Premier's office.
- Lack of staff skills, training, knowledge and dedicated budgets for delivering the necessary strategic advance thinking; building and supporting local collaboration and planning; ensuring conflict avoidance and resolution; co-governance processes; and, understanding of policy-making, integration and delivery.

The agenda for natural resource stewardship is set out in Minister Mandate Letters requires a fully integrated delivery model that can better address the three identified priorities of nature's values with economic well-being of communities and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

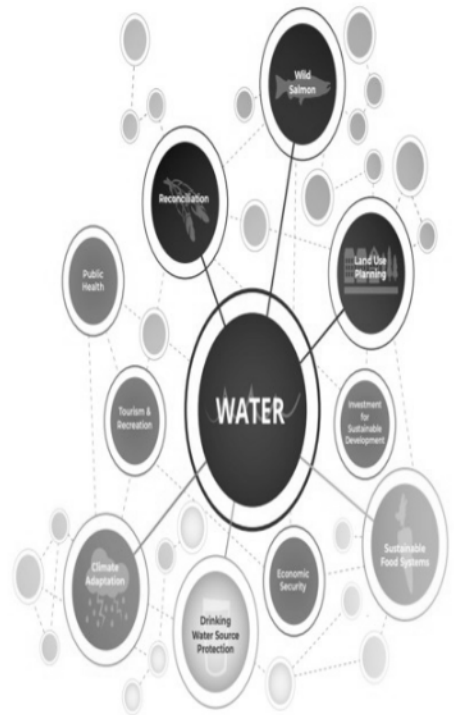
**PROBLEM SUMMARY:** As currently constructed the Ministry of FLNRORD is too large, too unwieldy and under resourced to effectively and systematically deliver on an integrated set of natural resource stewardship initiatives (as articulated in the mandate commitments). A rebalancing of the current approach is needed to better protect nature while also advancing economic opportunity within nature's limits to advance sustainable low carbon economic development and build resilience through stewardship of natural resources as a foundation to supporting meaningful and ongoing reconciliation.

## Provincial Priorities and Goals

Economic recovery; reconciliation; and, environmental conservation and stewardship are clear cross government priorities established by the Premier's office. These priorities will inform and influence resource management and governance and fundamentally government's role as a sustainable land and water manager in the province.

Various mandated commitments and initiatives across numerous Ministries will need to be addressed by a new LNRO Ministry, including:

- Modernized land use planning and pilots
- Reconciliation and implementation of DRIPA
- Watershed Security Strategy and Fund
- Implementation of Old Growth Review recommendations
- Healthy Salmon Strategy and fish habitat protection
- Protect species at risk and enhance biodiversity (including Together for Wildlife Strategy)
- Canada-BC Nature Agreements on conservation
- Adaptation to changing climate



## Solutions and Opportunities to Modernize Government Role in Resource Management in British Columbia

Advancing and implementing the mandate commitments (policies) outlined above requires a more integrated delivery model with an effective land and water manager able to operate at the landscape and watershed scale while connecting effectively across individual resource Ministries. The new LNRO Ministry must be able to advance all three overarching goals simultaneously and must be able to effectively advance and enable watershed scale planning and local co-governance processes with Indigenous nations and mobilize science and knowledge for decision making in regions while also informing and incorporating policy development by individual resource ministries across government.

To be successful a new LNRO Ministry will require capacity for highly competent local field delivery and modernized integrated and governance processes while being able to contextualize and land strategic provincial policies.

The new LNRO Ministry must also build on and enhance areas of existing operations and capacity including its role as:

- “One land manager” issuing coordinated and integrated authorizations in a timely and integrated way for land and water resource uses
- Working with local Indigenous nations for shared decision making and Free Prior and Informed Consent as required by UNDRIP and DRIPA.

In addition to these operational priorities the new LNRO Ministry will need to develop a priority around collaboration (which should be added to the seven supporting principles proposed by the LNRO Secretariat). Collaboration in the context of sustainable resource management and governance entails creating supportive and long-term relationships both with Indigenous and non -Indigenous communities for planning, adaptive management and ongoing decision processes as well as ensuring integration across Ministries and between headquarters and Regional Operations.

Water as priority and tool to advance an integrated approach

The University of Victoria’s POLIS Water Sustainability Project has a strong track record and interest in watershed security, water sustainability and watershed governance. The mandate for a Watershed Security Strategy and supporting Fund is only one mandate among the many outlined above, however, we believe it lies at a critical nexus of the many challenges facing the new LNRO ministry around integration, governance and sustainable resource management.

The Watershed Security Strategy and Fund has the potential to drive significant change in how resources are managed and governed and build resilience at the landscape and watershed scale. At its foundation a Watershed Security Strategy will require a better attention to ensuring watershed health and function (which entails protecting nature) which then provides better certainty for investment and thus ongoing economic opportunity. Implementing the key aspects of Watershed Security will be a central task and priority for the new LNRO Ministry as water and a watershed approach is fundamental to a modern integrated resource management and governance approach and thus offers an ability to efficiently integrate with all the other mandated commitments listed above and address issue on the ground (and in the water).

It is increasingly well understood that access to clean and abundant water is becoming more insecure due to climate change; increasing conflicts between users for extractive and in-stream uses; poor land based resource management practices and lack of attention to processes and opportunities for Indigenous and non Indigenous communities to directly engage in decision making. This water and watershed insecurity drives conflict and creates uncertainty. More explicit attention to water and watershed management and governance offers an avenue to address

and advance the cross cutting provincial goals and support the numerous commitments and mandates – for example water and watershed security is critical to modernized land use planning, a meaningful salmon strategy, supporting wild life and biodiversity, adaptation to climate change, responding to Auditor General's recommendations on drinking water, and, of course, fundamentally related to reconciliation as fisheries, sacred spaces and self-determination (including title) by necessity requires health protected waters and functioning watersheds.

Security of water and watersheds will also boost economic activity in watershed sectors such as tourism, restoration, carbon storage, water infrastructure and management and Indigenous guardians for example. It will also contribute to resilience and environmental stewardship though reducing future costs (and conflicts) for example by modernizing forest activity to reduce risk of flooding and sedimentation; protection of key old growth areas; restoring wild salmon populations, improving drinking water quality and offers an opportunity for enticing funding from the federal government due to alignment with its conservation goals. And, as stated previously water is fundamental to reconciliation as secure access to, and protection of, water lies at the core of Indigenous priorities and culture across the province.

The supporting Watershed Security Fund is critical to the success of the Strategy as such a Fund will create capacity in Indigenous and non Indigenous communities to engage and support the shift in the resource economy from a predominately industrial base to a more integrated one supporting conservation oriented employment and adaptation to the changing climate.

### One Big Idea

Over the coming decade, the Province needs to transition its economic base from the current industrial resource extraction model which has significant implications for biodiversity, salmon, water quality and quantity including drinking water, and the general loss of natural capital and function. Inevitably the economic model will need to shift to one that is more resilient and supports a nature-based economy. This transition will ensure watersheds are resilient to climatic change, protect sufficient good quality water and resilient watersheds for sustainable farming and community quality of life that provide higher levels of carbon storage contributing to a carbon neutral future all while building an enduring co- governance and shared authority model with Indigenous nations based on their long-term values.

To help achieve this sustainable resource management and governance transition will need to include a strong service orientation (eg as provided by FrontCounter BC) with a regionally based focus (and better local decision making) delivering integrated policies supported by a cohesive set of resource ministries creating the supporting policies. The new LNRO Ministry can thrive only with additional resourcing and capable staff supported by ongoing training, skills building and planning and co-governance capacity.