

BRIEFING NOTE FOR INFORMATION

DATE: May 15, 2023

PREPARED FOR: Honourable Nathan Cullen, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

ISSUE: British Columbia's perspective on cumulative effects on biodiversity

KEY POINTS:

- Addressing cumulative effects on biodiversity requires a comprehensive approach that includes conservation measures, sustainable land and resource management practices, pollution reduction, invasive species management, and efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- B.C. has taken progressive steps toward addressing cumulative effects on biodiversity through governance; alignment of laws, policies, and programs; and reconciliation with First Nations.
- Fundamental to this work is the need to work in close partnership with First Nations to develop trusted data on current conditions of ecosystems.

BACKGROUND:

- Land conversion, over-use of resources, pollution, invasive species, and climate change are the major threats to biodiversity. Individual impacts often interact to amplify the negative effects on biodiversity. For example, habitat loss can make species more vulnerable to the impacts of pollution or climate change, while climate change can exacerbate the spread and impact of invasive species.
- There is no overarching legal framework for biodiversity or the management of cumulative effects. B.C. has, however, taken progressive steps to better protect and conserve important ecosystems, establish land use objectives, integrate laws, and resource management, and better understand the condition of values to inform decisions and mitigate the risk of cumulative effects.
- The Cumulative Effects Framework (CEF) Interim Policy outlines expectations for the assessment, reporting, and consideration of cumulative effects in decision making. The implementation of the policy is overseen by cross ministry executive committees.
- In the 2021, B.C. supreme court decision *Yahey v. British Columbia* concluded that the Province has not implemented a fully functioning regime to address the cumulative impacts of development and that this has infringed on Treaty rights. In response to this decision, the Province and Blueberry River First Nations have finalized an agreement that includes commitments for cumulative effects management, ecosystem-based management, and land use planning.

DISCUSSION:

- To further advance integrated resource stewardship in British Columbia, the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (WLRS) was created in 2022. WLRS has the mandate to increase the Province's capacity to manage for cumulative effects through integration of science-based land, aquatic, resource, geographic and Indigenous knowledge so evidence-informed policy and decisions can be made by statutory decision makers.

- WLRS leads Action 2.6 of Declaration Act Action Plan to “co-develop strategic-level policies, programs and initiatives to advance collaborative stewardship of the environment, land and resources, that address cumulative effects and respects Indigenous Knowledge”.
- Some examples of how B.C. is improving the management of cumulative effects to biodiversity include, but is not limited to:
 - Improving knowledge on the condition of values through Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Forums, Together for Wildlife Goal 2 actions, and acquisition of remotely sensed data (Lidar).
 - Establishing objectives for resource use and the expected condition of values in partnership with Title and Rights holders through Modernized Land Use Planning (MLUP).
 - Protecting, conserving, and restoring priority areas, in partnership with Title and Rights holders, through MLUP, Caribou Recovery Program, and Together for Wildlife Goal 3 actions.
 - Improving data management and guidance systems to effectively support statutory decision makers.
 - Improving implementation monitoring through expansion of First Nation Guardian programs.
- Strategic policy is also being co-developed with First Nations for broader engagement with interest holders and the public including a Watershed Security Strategy a Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework.
- This work is complemented by the leadership from other ministries. For example, advancing all 14 recommendations from the Old Growth Strategic Review and Forest Landscape Planning (to improve the sustainable use of forests, while effectively conserving non-timber values and ecosystem services), the CleanBC Roadmap, and StrongerBC Economic Plan.
- These actions are important to ensure that future generations can realize the social and economic benefits of healthy ecosystems and are not burden by higher costs of environmental liabilities (e.g., orphaned well sites) and climate disasters.
- These initiatives are broadly supported by the public and necessary to effectively manage cumulative effects on biodiversity, however, many challenges to implementation exist including organizational (lack of capacity, experience), relational (lack of trust to advance innovation in a timely manner), and changes in revenue structures and budget costs.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES:

- Indigenous peoples in B.C. have a deep connection to the land and are often at the forefront of efforts to protect biodiversity. They have long recognized the cumulative effects of development on their traditional territories and the resulting impacts on ecosystems, wildlife, and traditional practices. Indigenous perspectives emphasize the need for a holistic approach to land and resource management that considers cumulative effects and respects Indigenous rights and knowledge.

MINISTRY RESPONSE:

- B.C. is advancing a rights-based approach to integrated natural resource stewardship that prioritizes biodiversity and ecosystem health to effectively mitigate cumulative effects and ensure healthy and resilient communities and economies for generations to come.
- Western science, indigenous knowledge, data systems, governance, decision support, and relationships are all key aspects to effectively managing cumulative effects.



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	Initials	Date
DM	LH	May 17, 2023
ADM	DM	May 15, 2023
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