

Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

2024/25 – 2026/27 Service Plan

February 2024



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Minister's Accountability Statement



The Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship 2024/25 – 2026/27 Service Plan was prepared under my direction in accordance with the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act*. I am accountable for the basis on which the plan has been prepared.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nathan Cullen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Honourable Nathan Cullen
Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
February 9, 2024

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Strategic Direction

In 2024/25, the Government of British Columbia will remain focused on providing the services and infrastructure that people depend on to build a good life. Government will continue delivering results that matter to British Columbians including helping people with costs, attainable and affordable housing, strengthened health care, safer communities, and a secure, clean and fair economy. Government will continue working collaboratively with Indigenous Peoples as it implements the Action Plan for the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act and delivers initiatives that advance reconciliation in ways that make a difference in communities throughout the province.

This 2024/25 service plan outlines how the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship will support the government's priorities, including the foundational principles listed above and selected action items identified in the December 2022 Minister's [Mandate Letter](#).

Purpose of the Ministry

The Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (the Ministry) works with other natural resource sector ministries to achieve British Columbia's goals of reconciliation, economic development, and environmental sustainability.

The Ministry is directly responsible for the effective development of water, land and marine use policy and planning as well as biodiversity and ecosystem health, including species at risk policy and program management. The Ministry is also responsible for developing a new vision for water, land and resource management with First Nations that will embrace shared decision-making as part of reconciliation. In addition, the Ministry holds responsibility for the administration of water, lands, fish and wildlife while also directing work across natural resource ministries to develop solutions to sector-wide challenges in policy, permitting, and improving the management of cumulative effects.

To do this work the Ministry is accountable for all or key parts of the [Creston Valley Wildlife Act](#), [Dike Maintenance Act](#), [Drainage Ditch and Dike Act](#), [Environment and Land Use Act](#), [Flathead Watershed Area Conservation Act](#), [Forest and Range Practices Act](#), [Land Act](#), [Land Title Act](#), [Libby Dam Reservoir Act](#), [Ministry of Lands, Parks and Housing Act](#), [Ministry of Environment Act](#), [Ministry of Forests and Range Act](#), [Muskwa-Kechika Management Area Act](#), [Skagit Environmental Enhancement Act](#), [Water Protection Act](#), [Water Sustainability Act](#), [Water Users' Communities Act](#), [Water Utility Act](#) and [Wildlife Act](#).

Operating Environment

B.C. is one of the most biologically diverse areas in Canada. Many species are found nowhere else in Canada, and several are found nowhere else in the world. Natural resource stewardship activities are confronted by challenges that include the intensification of environmental and social pressures, the impacts of climate change on natural resources. Resource management is also undergoing changes in response to growing jurisdictional complexity, complex

permitting processes, recognition of the rights of First Nations, and the Province's commitment to reconciliation.

B.C.'s land and ecosystems provide essential "services" that people rely on: clean water and air, food and fibre production, waste treatment, climate regulation, protection from flooding and erosion, and many other functions, as well as economic opportunities. Human activities have degraded, fragmented, and even eliminated some ecosystems in B.C., making it more important than ever to establish and manage protected areas and manage development activities.

Water is the foundation of life. It sustains all living things—the plants, forests and animals that form our biosphere—and it sustains human communities, economies and cultures. For Indigenous Peoples, water cannot be separated from the interconnected nature of our world. Healthy watersheds are at the forefront of climate resiliency and are the foundation of all social, environmental, and economic systems. However, B.C.'s watersheds are becoming less resilient over time due to threats from the cumulative effects of development, unsustainable land use practices, invasive species, and population growth. Climate change will amplify each of these problems, making ecosystems and communities more vulnerable to acute disasters like the recent floods and wildfires, and chronic stressors, like drought and water scarcity.

Since the creation of the Ministry on April 1, 2022, the Ministry has both a policy leadership and support role in key areas such as: the provision of operational guidance to all Natural Resource Ministries, particularly in respect of reconciliation, improving ecosystem management; working to achieve the goal of conserving 30% of the province by 2030; and working to co-develop a vision for a co-managed land and resource regime with First Nations.

Initiatives such as modernizing land use planning (LUP), collaborative Indigenous stewardship forums, watershed and coastal marine planning, the evolution of a cumulative effects framework, Together for Wildlife and improvements to the Province's permitting approach support ongoing stewardship of the land, water and ecosystems that people rely on. Further, on October 19, 2023, several statutory authorities for the administration of water, lands, fish and wildlife were transferred from the Ministry of Forests to the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship. This realignment of key statutory authorities for water, lands, fish and wildlife under a single ministry ensures clear accountability and brings together the strategic and operational teams to address priority actions. This realignment positions the Ministry to take a greater role in flood and drought management and focus on related natural hazard events. The service plan also includes the responsibilities that come with the October 19, 2023, realignment.

Many of the Ministry's initiatives extend to other natural resource ministries and require a closely coordinated approach between organizations, ensuring alignment with the intended stewardship outcomes and avoiding conflicting or redundant policy development. The Ministry continues to develop and improve governance models to ensure coordination, support the implementation of mandates for the Ministry and other natural resource ministries, and achieve expected outcomes. The Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation

and coordination of internal Regional Management Committees are two examples that show the breadth of this governance related work.

Despite best efforts to integrate decision making, drive transformation of the natural resource sector, provide the right data to better manage cumulative impacts, and introduce a “one-window approach” to permitting and authorizations across the Natural Resource Ministries (NRMs), these concepts have never been fully realized. Permitting and authorizations continue to challenge the natural resource management system, leading to dissatisfaction in First Nations, industry, local governments and other parties.

Consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and affirmed in B.C. through the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act work to advance Ministry legislative mandates must be undertaken in consultation and cooperation of First Nations. In addition, advancing new lands and resource policies require the active involvement and partnership with First Nations. Approaches will need to be developed in partnership with First Nations, in recognition of their rights and title interests. The Ministry also has responsibility to deliver on government’s commitments regarding lands in reconciliation agreements, which is supported through the realignment of legislative authorities that occurred in 2023/24.

Prioritizing the centralized provision of Natural Resource Information and Digital Services to all natural resource ministries provides for the maintenance of current information technology applications, data and infrastructure as well as the development of new applications and infrastructure. Ongoing investment in data acquisition, such as LiDAR, wildlife inventories and critical infrastructure, in existing and future applications, and in infrastructure is an essential component to all natural resource ministries’ ability to deliver on their respective mandates.

Economic Statement

B.C.’s economy posted modest growth last year as interest rate increases weighed on the economy, and employment continued to expand, supported by immigration. Inflation in the province continued to ease and the Bank of Canada has not raised its policy interest rate since July 2023. The impact of higher rates on borrowing costs and elevated household debt led to lower consumer spending and reduced home sales. Lumber, natural gas and coal prices declined in 2023, reducing the value of the province’s goods exports. Meanwhile, there was a record number of housing starts in the province in 2023. There is uncertainty over the transmission of high interest rates to the residential construction sector and the duration of slower growth for the rest of the economy in B.C. and among our trading partners. The Economic Forecast Council (EFC) estimates that B.C. real GDP expanded by 0.9 per cent in 2023 and expects growth of 0.5 per cent in 2024 and 2.1 per cent in 2025. Meanwhile for Canada, the EFC estimates growth of 1.1 per cent in 2023 and projects national real GDP growth of 0.5 per cent in 2024 and 1.9 per cent in 2025. As such, B.C.’s economic growth is expected to be broadly in line with the national average in the coming years. The risks to B.C.’s economic outlook continue to center around interest rates and inflation, including the risk of price increases stemming from geopolitical conflicts, the potential for interest rates remaining higher for longer, and uncertainty around the depth and timing of the impact on housing

markets. Further risks include ongoing uncertainty regarding global trade policies, lower commodity prices, climate change impacts and the volatility of immigration levels.

Performance Planning

The Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship is accountable for integrated land and natural resource management, including objective setting for land and marine environments, effectively managing cumulative effects, and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, environmental sustainability, and economic growth.

Goal 1: First Nations and the provincial government are partners in effective stewardship of water, land and natural resources.

The Ministry will work with First Nations to build a vision for co-management on the land base that embraces shared decision-making and builds an approach for co-management of land and natural resources that will ensure effective management now and in the future.

Objective 1.1: Strengthen Partnerships and Advance Engagement with First Nations in the Stewardship of B.C.'s Natural Resource Values.

The Ministry will develop a path forward with First Nations through partnerships and engagement, which includes the continued development of sector strategies and plans, the alignment of natural resource sector laws and the development of tools and supports.

Key Strategies

- Co-develop with First Nations, the options for policies, programs, legislation, decision-making models, and agreements that advance a co-managed water, land, and resource management system in a manner consistent with the UN Declaration.
- Work with First Nations to co-develop a vision for stewardship, including natural resources co-management and shared decision-making to protect environmental and cultural values and to provide for a balance of economic opportunities.
- Continue working with First Nations to co-develop an integrated approach that supports Indigenous stewardship and guardian activities, including training and expanding the Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Framework.
- Support the BC-First Nations Water Table as an enduring mechanism for leadership on watershed governance, and water policy and legislation
- Implement the Together for Wildlife Strategy to advance wildlife stewardship in partnership with First Nations.
- Advance policy, legislation and business processes that better position the Ministry and First Nations, working together, to manage the cumulative impacts of industrial

development and ensure British Columbia's lands and waters are managed sustainably for generations to come.

- Coordinate implementation of the Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation.

Discussion

The Ministry is guided by its mandate and important reconciliation commitments and obligations to meaningfully transform its relationship with Indigenous Peoples. These commitments include the ongoing implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (including its associated [Action Plan](#), [annual reporting](#) and commitment to ensure provincial laws are consistent with the UN Declaration – all of which must be done in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples); the guidance from the Declaration Act Secretariat's Interim Approach to Implementing the Requirements of Section 3 of the Declaration Act (Interim Approach); the 2018 B.C. and First Nation Leadership Council's [Concrete Actions](#), and the Draft 10 Principles that Guide the Province of British Columbia's Relationship with Indigenous Peoples.

The Ministry has been working collaboratively through the First Nations Leadership Council to establish and implement a collaborative and constructive forum to engage in dialogue and work on issues and initiatives related to co-management as an expression of Government-to-Government relationships in the areas of water, land and resource stewardship. The Ministry continues to work with the Alliance of BC Modern Treaty Nations to ensure work is occurring in support of the commitments outlined in the Shared Priorities Framework.

The Ministry and First Nations, through various venues are creating space to co-develop a new vision for natural resource stewardship that will embrace shared decision-making and co-governance on the land base as part of reconciliation. This currently involves a mix of existing/ongoing approaches such as land and resource management planning, managing for cumulative effects, supporting guardians, Forums for decision-making, as well as any new approaches, strategies, programs, and legal instruments that are identified as essential to realise a co-developed vision.

Since 2011, the Province has been partnering with over 124 First Nations, covering approximately eighty percent (80%) of the land base across B.C., on collaborative stewardship through the Marine Plan Partnership (MaPP), the Great Bear Rainforest (GBR) initiative, the Environmental Stewardship Initiative (ESI) and the Collaborative Stewardship Framework (CSF). Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Forums under MaPP, GBR, ESI, and CSF are developing high-quality, accessible and trusted environmental information to inform shared stewardship of land and natural resources and decisions on the land-base. The Province and First Nations are working together through a co-governance committee, the Governance Working Group Executive (GWGE), implementing jointly developed recommendations for collaborative stewardship in B.C. These recommendations and a long-term mandate for Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Forums were endorsed by Cabinet in October 2022.

Working collaboratively with conservation financing experts and other natural resources ministries, the Ministry developed a new conservation financing mechanism to support

protection of biodiverse areas. A primary objective of the mechanism is to secure philanthropic or other private funding to support the implementation of new measures that help the province meet its goals to conserve 30% of B.C.'s land and waters by 2030.

Objective 1.2: Advance and modernize Land Use Planning (LUP) for sustainable natural resource management.

Land use planning sets the strategic direction to guide sustainable resource stewardship and management of provincial public land and waters that meet economic, environmental, social, and cultural objectives. Modernized land use planning is led by the B.C. government in partnership with First Nations and includes the engagement of communities, local governments, industry, and other parties.

Key Strategies

- Continue to modernize and advance development of the land use planning program and policies in partnership with First Nations that ensures a transparent process that engages and involves local government, industry, and the public. Key policies to be advanced include providing guidance on how to integrate climate change in a land use planning process, and guidance on understanding a co-governance approach in planning.
- The Ministry will continue to partner with First Nations to develop modern plans that set long term land use objectives and direction for stewardship, advance reconciliation, co-management and shared decision making with First Nations, and create increased predictability for economic activities.
- Coordinate land use planning priorities with other land and water stewardship initiatives to maximize data, information, and opportunities to identify strategic direction that is responsive to climate change, species-at-risk management, wildfires, floods, and drought.

Discussion

Modernizing land use planning will provide updated land and resource management direction that reflects current environmental, economic and cultural interests. Existing strategic land use plans developed in the 1990's and early 2000's in most cases do not reflect the landscape present today or the right and title of First Nations. Developing modernized land use plans is an important component of natural resource stewardship that ensures environmental stewardship and creates increased predictability for resource economies. It supports government-to-government partnerships at a strategic level and plays a key role in building trust with First Nations partners, advancing a collaborative management approach on the land, and implementing reconciliation through the *Declaration Act* Action plan. For this reason, the approach to implementing modernized land use plans will be linked to the provincial approach to co-management led by the Ministry. LUP requires a coordinated approach with other natural resource sector strategies (i.e. Together for Wildlife Strategy, Old Growth Strategic Review, Climate Action Plan, Watershed Security Strategy, Wild Salmon Strategy, Coastal Marine Strategy, Forest Landscape Planning, and strategies that align with

Agricultural Land Reserve principles) and benefits from finding efficiencies and applying (or piloting) new information and process developed through these initiatives at land use planning tables. Land use planning is reliant on other ministries' expertise and data to support socio-economic and environmental analysis of planning values and outcomes. The Ministry will build coordinated reporting on land and water planning initiatives across British Columbia.

Performance Measures

Performance Measure	2023/24 Forecast	2024/25 Target	2025/26 Target	2026/27 Target
1.1 Number of Forum partnerships that support trusted integrated resource management ¹	14	16	18	TBD

Data source: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

¹ Future target will be developed in partnership with Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Forums.

Discussion

At the regional level, the Province works jointly with First Nations representatives to provide oversight to Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Forums (Forums) through a Governance Working Group Executive (GWGE). The GWGE is committed to discussing the onboarding of new regional forums, including the number of forums, where they are located, funding allocation, and membership on the GWGE. Furthermore, the Province is committed to jointly developing with First Nation partners, clear and comprehensive performance measures and targets to accurately assess success of the Forums in a collaborative and ongoing manner.

In recognition of the commitment made to Forums to co-develop performance measures for the Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Frameworks, the Province will work with Forum Partner Nations and will reflect these co-developed performance measures in future Ministry service plans. This work will consider Indigenous metrics, including but not limited to, knowledge transfer, culture, language, joint decision-making, economic justice, ecological restoration, and anti-racism advancements.

Performance Measure	2023/24 Forecast	2024/25 Target	2025/26 Target	2026/27 Target
1.2 Number of land use plans (LUP) underway	12 LUP processes	15 LUP processes	TBD	TBD

Data source: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

Discussion

The LUP process indicates that provincial and First Nations (the partners) are coming together to resolve modern resource management challenges. More specifically, the LUP process means the partners will be co-developing strategic direction to guide sustainable resource stewardship and management of the public land and waters within a given plan area. The inclusive and transparent nature of a LUP process ensures the strategic direction set by the

partners is also informed by input from local governments, stakeholders, and the public. As such, LUPs result in the following outcomes:

1. Advancement of reconciliation with First Nations through the implementation of a co-management approach.
2. New opportunities to unify communities around shared stewardship values.
3. Increased predictability and certainty for resource economies.
4. Support related mandates including achieving 30% protected and conserved areas, including Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, by 2030.

The number of new projects initiated over time will be largely dependent whether LUP is the appropriate tool to solve a given land-based management issue, and whether a new project would support provincial priorities like reconciliation and the economy. Future targets will be determined in consultation with the project partners and will be influenced by their capacity and resources. The number of new projects initiated over time is also subject to Cabinet approval and funding.

Goal 2: British Columbia is a global leader in stewarding water, land and natural resources.

Modernized land use planning, undertaken with First Nations, will help to identify areas where environmental values are affirmed through protection and sustainable economic opportunities. The Ministry is providing leadership in the co-development of a Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework as part of implementing the recommendations of the Old Growth Strategic Review, implementing Together for Wildlife, and improving species at risk recovery. B.C. has committed to the international target of effectively protecting 30% of the province by 2030. The Ministry is also focussing on strengthening monitoring efforts and ensuring that land and water plans reflect current conditions and consider the changing climate.

Objective 2.1: Improve Stewardship of Land and Water to Enhance Wildlife Management & Biodiversity.

The Ministry identifies opportunities to conserve, manage and protect land and water to improve the health of provincial ecosystems. These efforts result in improved habitat for wildlife and fish, while also realizing additional co-benefits including the restoration of forests impacted by wildfire and pests, and increased carbon sequestration to name a few. This objective highlights the effectiveness of Ministry management activity to conserve, maintain and restore wildlife and fish populations and habitat. The Ministry will collaborate with internal and external partners to develop and improve relationships, agreements, and strategies that enhance wildlife stewardship and biodiversity outcomes.

Key Strategies

- Work in partnership with the First Nations Leadership Council and the federal government to implement the [Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature](#)

[Conservation](#) to reinforce the shared commitment to advance conservation and stewardship in a way that supports reconciliation and economic opportunities.

- Implement the Together for Wildlife (T4W) strategy with the advice of the [Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council](#) and the [First Nations-B.C. Wildlife Stewardship and Habitat Conservation Forum](#) and in partnership with wildlife organizations, First Nations, rural communities, neighbouring jurisdictions and the public.
- Together with First Nations, key interested parties and other B.C. ministries, plan and deliver key actions to stabilize, recover and/or maintain identified habitat and species at risk in B.C.
- Partner with First Nations and work together with key interested parties to advance the Watershed Security, Coastal Marine and Wild Salmon Strategies.
- Connect the systems, tools and people to the transformative work taking place across the natural resource sector and increase the Province's ability to manage for cumulative effects through integrated, traditional knowledge, science-based land, aquatic, resource, and geographic data.

Discussion

In 2022, at the international biodiversity conference in Montreal (COP 15), a resolution was passed as part of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework to ensure that at least 30% of terrestrial areas, inland waters, and marine areas are effectively conserved and managed. Canada and British Columbia committed to this resolution and will work towards those targets through implementation of the Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation. The Ministry will ensure that the principles of transparency, equity and accessibility will shape next steps of implementation, including the development and/or maintenance of communication tools, governance structures, human resources, and availability of financial resources.

The T4W strategy was launched in 2020 and continues to be implemented. This includes the review of the [Wildlife Act](#), currently underway, plus ongoing investment in on-the-ground stewardship and monitoring. Our Ministry will continue to realise the T4W vision of thriving, resilient habitats through continued implementation, continuous improvement and by providing expertise on fish and wildlife habitat, species at risk and stewardship. The Ministry also aims to develop guidelines and tools to support conservation and management of biodiversity, wildlife and habitat.

The Ministry will lead efforts through mechanisms such as modernized land use planning to achieve these targets. This includes identifying new areas and strengthening conservation in other areas that meet international standards for contributing to the targets. In 2023, the Province, alongside 15 First Nations and the federal government, endorsed a Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Action Plan that would help to support this goal on the Pacific North Coast; implementation is now underway.

Objective 2.2: Improve Water Stewardship from Source to Tap.

British Columbians depend on water for drinking, washing, cooking, growing our food, and recreation. Small businesses and industries rely on water to support economic opportunities and growth. Water is essential for aquatic life and sustaining our fisheries. Importantly, water has vital sustenance, cultural, and spiritual significance for Indigenous Peoples that are enshrined in Indigenous laws. The Ministry partners with First Nations, and works with other interested parties to develop strategies and policies, plan, set objectives and invest in accessible information and digital services that guide water stewardship.

Key Strategies

- Co-lead implementation of the Watershed Security Strategy with First Nations, through the BC-First Nations Water Table. Implement the Strategy in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples building on current internal and external work to help ensure British Columbia's watersheds are healthy.
- Lead the collaborative design and implementation of key actions to improve our drinking water protection and drought resilience. Actions will focus on building greater accountability across responsible agencies, defensible surface and groundwater risk assessments, enhanced science and digital services, and evidence-based policies and pathways to solutions.
- Implement a water planning program in collaboration with First Nations, by advancing watershed planning, governance and objective setting that is supported by strong technical assessments and policy development.

Discussion

Improving our water stewardship, from source to tap is a priority for the Ministry. The unprecedented dry conditions experienced throughout B.C. during the summer of 2023 highlighted the need to change our thinking. Water scarcity is no longer an infrequent and localized occurrence. Instead, it is ongoing and widespread throughout B.C. As water is limited, a behavioural change needs to be encouraged. There is a need to reduce consumption of water, adjust when to use it, how to use it and how to distribute it. These changes will ensure a sustained drinking water supply, resilient ecosystems, food security and equitable water sharing. The Ministry is accountable for developing water policy to support such changes.

The Ministry provides strategic policy and science leadership across a range of statutes that influence water stewardship, and support for the implementation of the *Water Sustainability Act* is one of the Ministry's core functions. The Ministry supports decision makers on how to apply legislation to manage and protect our water. Watershed scale planning and Watershed Security Strategy co-development with First Nations are two other key strategies the Ministry is advancing to achieve a more secure water future. These strategies are supported by the Ministry's strategic and operational water policy and forward-thinking water science. Consistent throughout this work is a focus on co-development with First Nations and collaboration with Indigenous Peoples. Progress towards improving water stewardship in

British Columbia is monitored by tracking the development and future implementation of major strategies and key policies that support water stewardship.

Objective 2.3: Advance Permitting Solutions that Increases Predictability, Transparency and Public Trust in the Permitting Regime.

Government issued permits are critical components to advancing government priorities, including a sustainable clean economy, and other broad government strategies and priorities. The Ministry is responsible for water, land, fish and wildlife permits, all of which support opportunities to gather data and mitigate risks in the management of these resources. This work aligns to strategic work the Ministry is leading across priority projects to address provincial priorities such as housing, connectivity, electrification, critical mineral extraction, and positions the Ministry to scale these solutions across other priorities, sectors and processes, while maintaining high environmental standards.

Key Strategies

- Continue focus on Housing-related permits as a priority project to deliver short-term results, while continuing to build scalable policy frameworks and solutions that advance towards substantive, long-term changes for all natural resource authorizations.
- Develop strategic shifts to impact authorization processes, including potential changes to reporting analytics, policy, process, legislation, and provincial decision-making models.
- Reduce permitting backlogs across the Natural Resource Sector through focused identification and prioritization of permitting priorities such as housing, connectivity and electrification projects.
- Work in partnership with applicants to promote improved and informed applications, greater collaboration and increased transparency and consistency across the Natural Resource Sector.

Discussion

The Ministry will work with First Nations, other ministries, and industry to advance key areas to transform the permitting regime in the province. Through these consultations and partnerships, the Ministry will lead the transformation of permitting and authorizations that addresses priority projects through strategic shifts to policy, process, legislation, and systems to help address competing interests on the land base, climate change, First Nations Rights and Title and changing industries. These strategic shifts include enhanced stewardship, improving technology systems and data, and reducing administrative burden. The ultimate transformation of the land and resource management regime will see the reduction of the day to day transactional relationship with First Nations from permitting to more strategic “upstream” planning on the land base that is responsive to climate change, addresses cumulative effects and brings certainty to the land base by determining what activities will take place where.

Objective 2.4: Advance actions that reduce risk and increase community resiliency in response to increasing natural hazards.

The Province constantly strives to reduce the risk of natural hazards impacting the lives of British Columbians. With the diverse range of geography and climate in British Columbia, water availability differs throughout the province and varies throughout the seasons. Natural hazards, such as floods or drought, pose risks to the health of the environment, communities and the economy. There are about 1,900 regulated dams that provide electricity, irrigation and flood control for the people of B.C. Also, failures of dams can be disastrous for people, the environment and property. The Ministry works in partnership with the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR), other natural resource ministries, First Nations, and local authorities, to ensure there is a collaborative approach on the actions to mitigate the risk for all British Columbians.

Key Strategies:

- Strengthen the Province's flood resilience through completion of the B.C. Flood Strategy and begin the work to translate the Strategy into action.
- Advance provincially coordinated floodplain mapping by facilitating connections among all orders of government and building upon current investments to provide accessible, standardized flood hazard data for communities to contribute to future flood risk assessments alongside local values and knowledge.
- Accelerate improvement of B.C.'s communication, planning, response and mitigation of water scarcity and drought conditions in collaboration with Indigenous Governing Bodies, other levels of government, economic sector organizations and Health Authorities.

Discussion

The atmospheric river event of November 2021 was the most expensive natural disaster B.C. has ever experienced, with catastrophic impacts to communities, the economy, the environment, and critical infrastructure. The event's flooding and landslides contributed to loss of life, income, severe damage to highway infrastructure, power outages, agricultural devastation, natural gas interruption, and supply chain impacts due to road, rail, and port interruptions and closures. Since then, government has made efforts to reduce our collective risks by advancing the B.C. Flood Strategy, increasing early warning systems and capacity, and advancing our understanding of risks through provincial flood hazard mapping. This work has been achieved through partnerships with First Nations and working closely with local governments and other interested parties across B.C.'s major watersheds.

The drought conditions of 2023 highlighted that our weather patterns are changing and the times of year and the volume of water available to recharge aquifers and maintain stream flows are more variable. The Ministry recognizes that B.C. must improve its watershed security through multiple means, including improved data collection, water conservation and storage practices and advance planning to minimize the impacts of drought on drinking water supplies for communities, the environment and the many sectors that contribute to our vibrant economy.

The updated [Emergency and Disaster Management Act \(EDMA\)](#) (brought into force November 8, 2023) reflects the realities of our current world and shifts from focusing on emergency response to the four phases of emergency management (mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery). The Ministry is reviewing the new legislation and planning how to better support local authorities meet their risk assessment and emergency management planning accountabilities, as well as anticipating and planning for the Ministry’s own responsibilities under EDMA.

In addition, the Ministry is committed to implementing the tools provided by the *Water Sustainability Act* to allocate water sustainably, take action to protect critical ecosystems and fish populations, and develop plans to achieve greater watershed security. The Ministry will continue to work with government partners, including First Nations and local governments, to support local water management and water restriction enforcement. Industry and large water users, including food producers, will be directly engaged to support them in preserving water for essential needs and to encourage efficient water use for conservation. The Ministry will continue to reach out to water licensees in water-scarce areas to improve coordination and communication on voluntary water conservation and reduction measures and any regulatory actions required to balance the needs of other watershed values.

Performance Measures

Performance Measure	2021/2022 Baseline	2023/24 Forecast	2024/25 Target	2025/26 Target	2026/27 Target
2.1 Increase the amount of effective area-based conservation of lands, inland waters, and marine areas that contribute to 30% of international conservation target by 2030.	19.5%	Guiding principles for OECM identification established	Approach to 30 by 30 completed	Reporting progress to achieve 30 by 30 commitments	TBD

Data Source: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

Discussion

Scientific analysis led by the International Union on the Conservation of Nature shows that 30% is a minimum target for land, sea, and freshwater to protect and conserve key biodiversity values, including species at risk, high-biodiversity areas, key migration sites, spawning areas, and ecologically intact areas which protect large-scale ecological processes and ensure the ecosystem services human society depends on. These conservation targets were recently adopted by Canada at COP 15 in Montreal.

The Province is committed to achieve 30% conservation by 2030 and work to advance is being done in partnership with First Nations and in consultation with key stakeholders and technical

experts. Protected areas have historically been used to conserve biodiversity. However, in 2010 the international community recognized that biodiversity can be conserved outside of protected areas when an area of land is managed or used in such a way that biodiversity protection is achieved. These areas are called Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs). B.C. will use both protected areas and OECMs to achieve 30 by 30. By incorporating OECMs into the path to 30 by 30, B.C. can achieve effective biodiversity conservation and still derive sustainable economic and cultural benefits from the land. The Ministry is developing a “made in B.C.” approach to identifying, managing, and reporting OECMs. The approach will be developed collaboratively with First Nations, will align with international OECM standards, and will incorporate cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values.

Modernized land use planning is the preferred approach to considering new conserved areas because it is conducted in full partnership with First Nations rights and title holders and includes engaging with industry, stakeholders and local communities. It also considers environmental, economic and reconciliation outcomes, as opposed to single, one-off conservation proposals.

Some First Nations have identified their long-term stewardship interests through Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCA) proposals or other Indigenous land use proposals or plans. IPCAs provide valuable understanding of Indigenous perspectives for the management of lands and waters. The Province will work with First Nations through strategic and operational government-to-government initiatives such as modernized land use planning, Forest Landscape Planning, and Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Forums.

Performance Measure	2023/24 Forecast	2024/25 Target	2025/26 Target	2026/27 Target
2.2 Improve watershed security and health throughout the province by implementing the Watershed Security Strategy	WSS released	WSS actions implemented	WSS actions implemented and tracking of outcomes initiated	TBD

Data source: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, manually compiled.

Discussion

Implementation of the Strategy requires long term coordinated and strategic resourcing both internal and external to government. Coordinated leadership and a whole of government approach supporting healthy and secure watersheds are key to achieving the vision of the Strategy. Continued significant climate related events that necessitate short term focus both underscore the need for a long-term strategy but also pose a risk to meeting that longer term strategic approach. Detailed targets are developing as part of Strategy implementation planning, monitoring, and assessment.

Climate emergencies both highlights need for planning and delay our ability to plan as resources are directed to responding to urgencies. Co-development of water sustainability plans with Indigenous Nations can help address water use conflicts, especially during times of

scarcity. Engagement with all interests in the watershed throughout the development is also a key to success. New performance measures will be developed to track co-development of water sustainability plans in the future.

Stable and adequate supplies of water are dependent on how B.C. understands and adapt to the changing climate and how to address impacts from land use activities. An updated B.C. Water Scarcity and Drought Response Plan which better serves First Nations’ interests, improves communication and incorporates planning and mitigation ensures the Province is adapting to the changing climate and protecting B.C.’s future. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities, improved data collection, structured assessment, and communication of risks, and planning ahead for water scarcity are critical factors to success. Performance measures to track these items will be developed in future years, focusing on drinking water and drought risk assessments and planning for scarcity and drought.

Performance Measure	2022/23 Baseline	2023/24 Forecast	2024/25 Target	2025/26 Target	2026/27 Target
2.3 Streamline permitting to build efficiencies so that processing time ¹ for applications received for housing permits across the Natural Resource Ministries ² is reduced.	185 days	139 days	111 days	TBD	TBD

Data Source: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

¹Median Permitting related to NR Ministries and Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure

Discussion

In 2023, the Ministry established the Applications & Authorizations Insights tool with a focus on Natural Resource Ministry Housing-related permits. This tool was developed to identify and track housing permits across the Natural Resource Ministries involved in Housing permits. This is the first time that the Natural Resource Ministries have developed an activity-based reporting tool that has the capability to report data across ministries. The Ministry has been tracking housing-related permits across Ministries for 1 year and can now report out with more certainty on permit turnaround times (the time from application to decision) and trends in permitting for housing. The performance measure is based on median permitting turnaround time across the NR Ministries and Transportation and Infrastructure for permits commonly associated with a housing project as this measure better communicates the various turnaround time across the permit types.

Housing continues to be a priority for the province and for the Natural Resource Ministries. The Housing Action Taskforce, established in January 2023, is led by the Ministry of Water Land and Resource Stewardship and includes the Ministries of Environment, Forests, Transportation and Infrastructure and Water Land and Resource Stewardship. In 2023, the Housing Action

Taskforce made significant strides to identify, prioritize and reduce the existing backlog of housing-related applications across the Natural Resource Ministries. In 2024, the Housing Action Taskforce will focus on integrating and coordinating housing projects across the Ministries to accelerate and streamlined the housing project process for homebuilders.

In September 2023, the Ministry launched the Single Housing Application Service (SHAS) which is the first step in providing a singular coordinated housing permitting process for homebuilders across the Natural Resource Ministries. The SHAS connects homebuilders to “navigators,” dedicated staff in the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, who guide homebuilders through all stages of housing projects, by acting as the single, dedicated point of contact for Natural Resource Ministry permits involved in housing projects and partners with homebuilders to co-ordinate permitting across ministries. In 2024, the focus will be on expanding services to homebuilders such as a client-facing dashboard to understand the status of Natural Resource Ministry permits.

Goal 3: B.C. is a global leader in the stewardship of marine and coastal values for environmental protection, economic development and reconciliation.

This goal addresses the Ministry’s role in working with First Nations and partners to ensure sustainable use of our coastal and marine spaces, marine fisheries, and production in the aquaculture sector as part of the government’s broader goals on economic recovery, rural and coastal community growth, and food security. Supporting these efforts requires investing in the conservation and restoration of species and their habitats, infrastructure, and programs addressing healthy fish populations and sustainable harvests.

Objective 3.1: Address Fish Species Declines.

Wild Pacific Salmon are iconic in British Columbia due to their importance to our culture, ecology and economy. However, many populations are currently experiencing unprecedented declines. The Ministry is working to integrate provincial programs that address wild salmon and other fish species declines, as well as coastal fisheries economies. Investments are aligning with recommendations from B.C.’s Wild Salmon Advisory Council and other fisheries reviews and work to leverage funds where viable.

Key Strategies

- Work with the federal government, First Nations leadership, and key parties to continue to implement strategies for wild salmon recovery and revitalization in B.C.
- Explore ways to continue investment in high value projects through the British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund (BCSRIF), a contribution program funded jointly by the federal and provincial governments.
- Explore options for unlocking under-utilized salmon habitat rendered impassable by natural or human causes.

- Explore policies to prioritize wild salmon and other fish species recovery in provincial natural resource programs.
- Further integrate wild salmon values within provincial strategies including the Coastal Marine Strategy and Water Sustainability Strategy etc.

Discussion

The Ministry is committed to collaborating with federal, First Nations and local governments to protect fish and fish habitats and advance meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, grow the economy and ensure a sustainable environment. With our relevant partners, the Ministry will monitor this work through the implementation of programs such as the British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund (BCSRIF) and direct outcomes such as the area of aquatic habitat restored.

Objective 3.2: Launch a Coastal Marine Strategy to Promote Healthy Marine Ecosystems and Coastal Communities.

The Province has committed to developing a new coastal marine strategy, in cooperation with the federal government, Indigenous Peoples, and coastal communities, to provide a blueprint for future stewardship, economic resilience and management of our coastal waters. This complements work on a network of Marine Protected Areas in the Northern Shelf Bioregion and continued implementation of the integrated marine plans developed under the Marine Plan Partnership.

Key Strategies

- Support the implementation of agreements and shared initiatives including the Marine Plan Partnership for the North Pacific Coast.
- Working with First Nations, federal and local governments, and other natural resource ministries, launch the first provincial Coastal Marine Strategy that includes policies and actions to better protect coastal habitat while supporting coastal economies.
- In partnership with First Nations and the federal government, continue to implement the first-ever Marine Protected Area Network in Canada.
- Continue to work with Marine Plan Partnership First Nations partners to advance shared priorities, update plans, and co-deliver a durable and stable implementation financing model. Work to develop a long-term vision of dedicated ongoing cleanup of B.C.'s coasts.

Discussion

This objective has been revised to focus on the Ministry's transition from strategy development to implementation. It continues to emphasize two key elements of strategy development – the importance of completing this work collaboratively with First Nations, federal agencies, and coastal communities, and the need for the Province's new strategy to be comprehensive in addressing the range of issues and desired outcomes for the coast. In assessing progress through implementation, the Ministry will look both at the level of collaboration achieved as

well as the breadth and scope of strategies and actions delivered. Successfully delivering on this objective will require the active engagement of multiple parties and the effective, efficient use of new and existing committees and governance mechanisms. Although completing this work in partnership with others takes time, the results are expected to be more durable, equitable, and consistent with the aims and interests of coastal communities.

Performance Measures

Performance Measure	2021/22 Baseline	2023/24 Forecast	2024/25 Target	2025/26 Target	2026/27 Target
3.1 Aquatic Habitat restored or enhanced through Ministry activities	1,167,160 square meters	1,705,503 square meters	5% increase from previous year	7% increase from previous year	9% increase from previous year

Data source: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

Discussion

Increasing the number of square meters of aquatic habitat restored or enhanced through Ministry activities will increase the area where fish can thrive and grow their populations. Increasing aquatic habitat will work toward ensuring that fish have clean flowing water which is at the right temperature for their developmental needs. Additionally, it provides a complex natural environment for them to grow and return to, which will provide the shelter, nutrition and required conditions for all stages of life. By supporting aquatic habitat restoration, the Province is also investing in job creation and training for British Columbians, and in the case of salmon, helping a keystone species that has far-reaching environmental impacts. Wild Pacific salmon are also vitally important for food and cultural purposes of many Indigenous communities throughout British Columbia.

The data being used to support this metric will be provided to B.C. from the BCSRIF, which is operated by the Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The source data is being provided by BCSRIF recipients. Targeted increases are based on potential restoration work completion within different projects and may be influenced by extraneous influences such as extreme weather events or staffing shortages. The Ministry will work towards targets that are based on the anticipated results from projects funded by the Province and other measures. Increasing wild salmon and other fish habitat is considered an important means to ensuring these resources are available for future British Columbians and safeguarding species of particular concern including some wild salmon.

Performance Measure	2023/24 Forecast	2024/25 Target	2025/26 Target	2026/27 Target
3.2 Provincial Coastal Marine Strategy launched.	Complete co-development of Coastal Marine Strategy with First Nations	Release the final Coastal Marine Strategy publicly.	Negotiate governance structures and implementation approach with First Nations	Initiate 6 implementation priorities

Data source: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

Discussion

This performance measure tracks the predicted progress of the launch and early implementation of the Coastal Marine Strategy. With consideration of input received through public engagement on the Intentions Paper in 2022-23, the Ministry has been working to co-develop a draft Coastal Marine Strategy with First Nations. At the same time, the Ministry has been continuing to engage with stakeholders, and federal and local governments before seeking final Provincial approval for release in 2024. The Coastal Marine Strategy will articulate proposed actions for the coastal marine environment, and by 2025, the Province will initiate implementation of six near-term priorities for action. This will demonstrate the Ministry's commitment and drive towards improving stewardship, advancing reconciliation, and fostering community resilience. These targets also reflect the development processes and implementation plans for other natural resource management strategies (e.g., Watershed Security Strategy), and will allow the Ministry to take a holistic and integrated approach towards priorities of ecosystem health, reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and economic opportunities for all British Columbians on both the land and water.

Financial Summary

(\$000s)	2023/24 Restated Estimates ¹	2024/25 Estimates	2025/26 Plan	2026/27 Plan
Operating Expenses				
Land Use Planning and Cumulative Effects	57,386	58,428	58,432	58,432
Resource Stewardship	41,147	41,365	41,365	41,365
Water, Fisheries and Coast	13,822	14,244	14,241	14,241
Natural Resource Information and Digital Services	26,225	28,803	28,796	28,796
Reconciliation, Lands and Natural Resource Policy	11,402	11,610	11,612	11,612
Permitting Transformation	29,083	29,516	29,520	29,520
Executive and Support Services	26,537	29,801	29,801	29,801
Crown Land Special Account	500	500	500	500
Total	206,102	214,267	214,267	214,267
Capital Expenditures				
Executive and Support Services	3	3	3	3
Total	3	3	3	3
Other Financing Transactions				
Crown Land Administration Disbursements	6,382	6,382	6,382	6,382
Habitat Conservation Trust Disbursements	6,500	6,500	6,500	6,500
Habitat Conservation Trust Receipts	(6,500)	(6,500)	(6,500)	(6,500)
Total Disbursements	12,882	12,882	12,882	12,882
Total Receipts	(6,500)	(6,500)	(6,500)	(6,500)
Total Net Cash Requirements (Source)	6,382	6,382	6,382	6,382

¹ For comparative purposes, amounts shown for 2023/24 have been restated to be consistent with the presentation of the 2024/25 Estimates.

* Further information on program funding and vote recoveries is available in the [Estimates and Supplement to the Estimates](#).

Appendix A: Public Sector Organizations

As of February 2024 the Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship is responsible and accountable for the following organizations:

Association of British Columbia Land Surveyors

Created by legislative authority *Land Surveyors Act*, s. 6 (9), as a self-governing body charged with the responsibility of setting educational requirements, examining for admission, and regulating professional land surveyors to perform legal surveys within British Columbia, Canada. Their mandate, “To protect the public interest and the integrity of the survey systems in BC by regulating and governing the practice of land surveying in the province.”

[Association of British Columbia Land Surveyors \(abcls.ca\)](https://abcls.ca)

Creston Valley Wildlife Management Authority (CVWMA)

Created through legislation, *Creston Valley Wildlife Act*, s. 16., the operational board is charged with managing the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area. The CVWMA is currently in place to ensure funding provided by BC Hydro is spent on approved projects and activities. The Board provides oversight to the CVWMA work, ensures the same accountability from delivery partners receiving a portion of the same funding, and holds fiduciary responsibility.

[Home - Creston Valley \(crestonwildlife.ca\)](https://crestonwildlife.ca)

Mackenzie River Basin Board

Established to implement the Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement (between the Government of Canada, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon and Northwest Territories), which is non-binding, process focused and publishes State of the Aquatic Ecosystem Report (SOAER) for the Mackenzie River Basin.

[Home • Mackenzie River Basin Board \(mrbb.ca\)](https://mrbb.ca)

Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board

Created through legislation (*Muskwa-Kechika Management Act* and regulation), the M-KAB provides advice and feedback on emerging Government policies that may impact the M-KMA and on potential management activities in the area. The M-KAB reports out to the Premier and the public annually as well as monitoring activities, including resource development activities.

[Home | Muskwa-Kechika Management Area](https://muskwa-kechika.ca)

Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission

Created through legislation (*Skagit Environmental Enhancement Act*) the Commission administers the Skagit Environmental Endowment Fund. The Commission reviews, selects and funds projects which provide or maintain environmental values and recreational facilities in the Skagit watershed south of Hope, B.C.

[Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission – A transboundary watershed in Washington State, USA and British Columbia, Canada \(skagiteec.org\)](http://skagiteec.org)

Wildlife Advisory Council

Formed in 2020, the mandate is to work together to support the implementation of the Together for Wildlife Strategy, as well as advising Ministers on province-wide wildlife and habitat issues on an ongoing basis.

[Home | Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council](#)