

**Ministry of Water, Land and Resource
Stewardship**

**2023/24
Annual Service Plan Report**

August 2024



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Minister's Accountability Statement



The Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship 2023/24 Annual Service Plan Report compares the Ministry's actual results to the expected results identified in the 2023/24 – 2025/26 Service Plan published in 2023. I am accountable for those results as reported.

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
August 12, 2024

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Letter from the Minister

I am pleased to present the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship Annual Service Plan Report. The achievements outlined in this Annual Service Plan Report demonstrate this Ministry's many efforts to meet key priorities and commitments that support the people of British Columbia.

One of our provincial strengths is the incredible variety of ecosystems that hold immense significance for people. At the same time these ecosystems support habitats for our diverse animals, fish and plants. We all rely on the water, clean air and other resources that are provided. Actions that will sustain us all into the next generations are important and those are at the heart of the Ministry. In October 2023, the ministry took over full statutory authorities for water, lands, fish and wildlife to ensure clear accountability for these provincial strengths.

I am proud of the November 3, 2023 signing of the Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation with First Nations Leadership Council, the Province of British Columbia, and Canada to protect and conserve biodiversity, habitats, and species at risk in the province. This agreement enables action rooted in recognition of First Nations title and rights to reach B.C. and Canada's goal of protecting thirty percent of lands and waters in B.C. by 2030.

Our work with First Nations, industry, stakeholders and the public have led to great progress on the Watershed Security Strategy and the Coastal Marine Strategy. These will set a roadmap for the province to achieve long term success in water management and coastal resource stewardship. The Ministry took further action on hazards by releasing [From Flood Risk to Resilience: a B.C. Flood Strategy to 2035](#), and to enhance drought communications, preparedness, and response by developing Drought Advisory Tables to be activated in drought-prone areas so that water needs are cared for in a way that includes input from all water users.

Improvements to natural resource permit processes that support housing saw the establishment of Permit Connect BC - a single-window service for integrated permit application intake for homebuilders - to connect homebuilders to the Housing Navigator Service and the Single Housing Application Service (SHAS) and resulting in a 40% reduction in the number of days to process housing permits.

Recognizing that First Nations have deep connections to the land, the co-development of the Guardians and Stewardship Training Initiative was completed, and the Guardians program was implemented with 124 partner First Nations through collaborative stewardship.



Honourable Nathan Cullen
Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
August 12, 2024

Purpose of the Annual Service Plan Report

This annual service plan report has been developed to meet the requirements of the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act (BTAA), which sets out the legislative framework for planning, reporting and accountability for Government organizations. Under the BTAA, the Minister is required to report on the actual results of the Ministry's performance related to the forecasted targets stated in the service plan for the reported year.

Strategic Direction

The strategic direction set by Government in 2020 and Minister Nathan Cullen's 2022 [Mandate Letter](#) shaped the goals, objectives, performance measures and financial plan outlined in the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship [2023/24 – 2025/26 Service Plan](#) and the actual results reported on in this annual report.

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, data and technology and improving the management of cumulative effects.

To do this work the Ministry is accountable for all or key parts of the [Boundary Act](#), [Canadian Pacific Railway \(Stone and Timber\) Settlement Act](#), [Creston Valley Wildlife Act](#), [Dike Maintenance Act](#), [Drainage, Ditch and Dike Act](#), [Drinking Water Protection Act](#), [Environment and Land Use Act](#), [Environmental Management Act](#), [Fish and Seafood Act](#), [Flathead Watershed Area Conservation Act](#), [Forest and Range Practices Act](#), [Greenbelt Act](#), [Hunting and Fishing Heritage Act](#), [Industrial Operation Compensation Act](#), [Land \(Spouse Protection\) Act](#), [Land Act](#), [Land Settlement and Development \(Repeal\) Act](#), [Land Survey Act](#), [Land Surveyors Act](#), [Land Title Act](#), [Land Title Inquiry Act](#), [Land Transfer Form Act](#), [Libby Dam Reservoir Act](#), [Ministry of Environment Act](#), [Ministry of Forests and Range Act](#), [Ministry of Lands, Parks and Housing Act](#), [Muskwa-Kechicka Management Area Act](#), [Off-Road Vehicle Act](#), [Railway Act](#), [Riparian Areas Protection Act](#), [Skagit Environmental Enhancement Act](#), [University Endowment Land Act](#), [Water Protection Act](#), [Water Sustainability Act](#), [Water Users' Communities Act](#), [Water Utility Act](#), and [Wildlife Act](#).

Operating Environment

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), the Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Framework (CISF) and associated Forums, watershed and coastal marine planning, the evolution of a cumulative effects framework, continued support for Guardians, Together for Wildlife and improvements to the Province's permitting approach, support ongoing stewardship of the land, water and ecosystems that people, communities, and industry rely on.

On October 19, 2023, over twenty 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. It included transferring over 900 positions from the Ministry of Forests to the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship that brought together the strategic and operational teams to address priority actions. This realignment of authorities saw the Ministry take a greater role in flood and drought management and focus on related natural hazard events. This also includes the responsibilities that come with the October 19, 2023, realignment.

Many of the Ministry's initiatives extended to other natural resource ministries and required a closely coordinated approach between organizations, ensuring alignment with the intended stewardship outcomes and avoiding conflicting or redundant policy development. The Ministry continued 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.

Natural Resource Permitting system transformation with the additional prioritization and resources on housing related permitting, saw the Ministry lead and direct the coordination across the natural resource ministries to transform and improve the efficiency of the natural resource permitting system.

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 are to 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, in recognition of their rights and title interests. The Ministry also has responsibility to deliver on government's commitments regarding land

through reconciliation agreements, which is supported through the realignment of legislative authorities that occurred in 2023/24.

Economic Statement

Following two years of strong recovery from the pandemic, economic growth in British Columbia moderated in 2023. After expanding by 3.9 per cent in 2022, B.C.'s real GDP increased by 1.6 per cent in 2023, the second highest growth rate among provinces (tied with Saskatchewan and Ontario) and outperforming the national average. Growth in B.C.'s real GDP was supported by service-producing industries such as real estate, rental and leasing; professional, scientific and technical services; transportation and warehousing; and healthcare. Despite steady growth in the construction and mining, quarrying and oil and gas extraction sectors, output for goods-producing industries decreased in 2023, partly due to lower manufacturing activity. While B.C.'s economy continued to expand in 2023, some sectors such as transportation and warehousing and accommodation and food services have yet to fully return to pre-pandemic levels.

B.C.'s labour market continued to grow in 2023, with employment growth of 1.6 per cent and wages and salaries increasing by 6.9 per cent. However, B.C.'s unemployment rate rose to 5.2 per cent in 2023 from 4.6 per cent in the previous year as the labour force, supported by record high immigration, grew faster than employment. High interest rates tempered consumer spending on goods in 2023 and nominal retail sales edged down 0.1 per cent. In 2023, price pressures in B.C. moderated among a broad number of goods and services but remained elevated. B.C.'s inflation rate averaged 3.9 per cent in 2023, down from 6.9 per cent in 2022. B.C. home construction activity strengthened in 2023. Housing starts totalled 50,490 units in 2023, the highest annual pace on record and up 8.1 per cent compared to the previous year. High interest rates continued to weigh on home sales activity last year. B.C. MLS home sales decreased by 9.2 per cent in 2023, while the MLS average home sale price was 2.6 per cent lower than 2022. On the external front, B.C.'s international merchandise exports declined by 13.5 per cent in 2023, due to weaker global demand and lower commodity prices compared to 2022.

Report on Performance: Goals, Objectives, and Results

The following goals, objectives and performance measures have been restated from the 2023/24 – 2025/26 service plan. For forward-looking planning information, including current targets for 2024/25 – 2026/27, please see the latest service plan on the [BC Budget website](#).

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 Results

- Co-developed a Relationship Protocol between the Ministry and the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) to establish and implement a collaborative and constructive relationship through supporting structures to engage in dialogue and work on issues and initiatives relating to water, land and resource stewardship in B.C.
- Established a working group to implement a structured framework for enhancing partnerships and increasing engagement to support decision-making and policy changes.
- Completed co-development of the Guardians and Stewardship Training Initiative with First Nations, supported through the [Future Ready Action Plan](#).
- Established two new Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Forums (Forums) in the Province; one each in the southern interior and on Vancouver Island.
- Implemented a Guardians program with 124 partner First Nations through collaborative stewardship.

Summary of progress made in 2023/24

The Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Framework (CISF) program facilitates regionally-based partnerships between over 124 First Nations, the province of British Columbia, and other First Nations on stewardship projects. The program objective is to support resource management by incorporating local and Indigenous knowledge and developing trusted cumulative effects assessment information that can inform a range of natural resource decisions from strategic planning to operational permitting and authorizations. Forums are critical to the collaborative delivery of cumulative effects management. They are a proven model for collaborative stewardship achieved through an integrated approach that supports Indigenous stewardship and guardian activities, including training and knowledge exchange. Trusted information collected through Collaborative Stewardship Forums supported the following key stewardship/conservation initiatives; cumulative effects assessments, land-based monitoring through Guardians, forest landscape planning, land use planning, identification, field-verification and maintenance of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, Timber Supply Reviews, shared decision-making pilots and unique conservation measures (i.e. moose habitat plans, biodiversity management areas, ungulate winter range, estuary habitat protection plan).

Developing strong local relationships with Indigenous peoples and Ministry stakeholders should help coordinate limited resources and recognize the value of multiple stewardship perspectives. The relationships will also help provide trusted data to inform decisions and management priorities, foster collaboration over competition to support sustainable outcomes, and integrate with the delivery of key components of our ministry's mandate.

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 Ministry in partnership with First Nations and includes the engagement of communities, local governments, industry, and other stakeholders.

Key Results

- Produced [Land Use Planning Principles](#) that were developed in collaboration with First Nations through regional-scale workshops, provincial-scale workshops, and advisory services.
- Advanced the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act's \(DRIPA\) Action Plan](#), and associated co-management commitments, through ongoing land use planning projects.
- Established strategic and technical interministerial committees to improve alignment and coordination across planning and stewardship programs and provincial approaches to climate change, species-at-risk management, wildfires, floods, and droughts.

Summary of progress made in 2023/24

The Ministry advanced government-to-government relationships and a partnership approach to planning with the 14 land use planning projects underway. Public and stakeholder engagement on active planning projects has increased awareness and understanding of current planning activities and issues, has assisted in achieving transparency and openness in the planning process, and assisted in ensuring future land direction scenarios have considered a wide variety of perspectives.

Regional teams continue to advance discussions with First Nation governments on their planning interests to support a co-management approach on the land. The Ministry continues developing LUP guidance through collaborative discussions and workshops with Indigenous peoples and advisors and engagements with external experts. This year the Ministry focused on development of LUP guidance to support land use planning tables with building relationships and considering climate change in future land direction and management. The Ministry also produced the LUP Principles that were developed in collaboration with First Nations and are intended to provide clarity on the intended scope of LUP and the necessity to ensure local governments and communities, industry and stakeholders are actively engaged in land use planning efforts.

Performance measure(s) and related discussion

Performance Measure	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Target	2023/24 Actual
1.1 Number of Forum partnerships that support trusted integrated resource management ¹²	12	14	13

Data source: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

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

² PM 1.1 targets for 2024/25 and 2025/26 were stated in the 2023/24 service plan as N/A and N/A, respectively.

The CISF program currently has 13 active Forums throughout the province, representing a partnership approach to shared stewardship at the regional level. CISF is collaborating with Nations to establish new Forums where there is willingness and a need to further advance towards co-management at the regional level. The Ministry's initial assessment in 2022/23 was that Sylix and Okanagan Nations would coalesce around two Forums. Based on this assessment, the Ministry's target for 2023/24 was set at 14 Forums. The Ministry established two new Forums - one each in the Okanagan Region and on Vancouver Island. Subsequently, these two Forums of Sylix Nations came together (merged) under one Forum.

The Ministry continued to work with First Nations partners to co-develop more relevant and culturally specific measures of success that reflect First Nation perspectives. Therefore, this performance measure may change in future Service Plans as the Ministry continues to work with our First Nations partners, and to be informed and guided by their knowledge and insight.

Performance Measure	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Target	2023/24 Actual
1.2 Number of land use plans (LUP) underway ¹	14	14	14

Data source: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

¹ PM 1.2 targets for 2024/25 and 2025/26 were stated in the 2023/24 service plan as 17 and 20, respectively.

The Ministry did not increase the number of land use plans for the 2023/2024 fiscal year. Instead, the Ministry advanced pre-planning discussions with First Nations on the scope of proposed LUP projects throughout the province. Targeted engagement with affected parties was required to understand the full extent of land use interests in proposed planning areas. The time required to complete these initial scoping conversations impacted our targets for the 2023/2024 fiscal year but upheld the principles of relationship building and transparency that are central to the LUP program.

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. Various planning partnerships with First Nations are delivering measurable outcomes on that ground that will lead to B.C.'s commitment to the international target of effectively protecting 30% of the province by 2030. The Ministry also focuses 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 habitats 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 measure highlights the effectiveness of the Ministry's management activity to conserve, maintain, and restore wildlife and fish populations and habitats. 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 Results

- The [Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation](#) was signed by the First Nations Leadership Council, the Province of British Columbia, and Canada to strengthen their shared commitment to advancing conservation and stewardship in a manner that fosters reconciliation and economic opportunities.
- Published [publicly-available cumulative effects assessments](#) for old growth, grizzly bear, and aquatics values across B.C., including a new [Human Disturbance Visualization Tool](#).
- Advanced implementation of caribou recovery actions including: approval of the [Boreal Caribou Protection and Recovery Plan](#), engagement with First Nations on habitat objectives in Southern Group of Southern Mountain Caribou, and numerous partnerships to restore and protect habitat in the Central Group of Southern Mountain Caribou.
- Implemented multiple policy initiatives under the [Together for Wildlife Strategy](#), focusing on wildlife management and stewardship projects, engagement on the Wildlife Act review, and assessment of impacts of wildfire on wildlife and ecosystems, with advice from the [Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council](#) and the [First Nations B.C. Wildlife Stewardship and Habitat Conservation Forum](#).

Summary of progress made in 2023/24

The [Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation](#) is a groundbreaking commitment that aligns global, federal, provincial, and First Nations' conservation goals, aiming for true reconciliation and the protection of 30 percent of provincial lands by 2030, enhancement and restoration of priority habitats, species at risk recovery, and improved accessibility to data and information to better support partnerships. Its focus is on integrating existing initiatives and funding to maximize benefits and mitigate negative impacts, with the Tripartite Nature Committee driving governance improvements and tracking progress. Various provincial programs and initiatives such as modernized Land Use Planning and Forest Landscape Planning, Cumulative Effects Framework, the Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Framework, the Boreal Caribou Protection and Recovery Plan and the Together for Wildlife Strategy support and complement the implementation of the Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation.

The implementation of the [Cumulative Effects Framework](#) has seen significant advancements, with current condition reporting on five existing values—Grizzly Bear, Old Growth Forests, Forest Biodiversity, Aquatic Ecosystems, and Moose—and the introduction of Marine Ecosystems. Likewise, the Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Framework continues to generate trusted data, essential for informed decision-making in Land Use Planning, Forest Landscape Planning, watershed planning and operational decisions.

Additionally, the [Boreal Caribou Protection and Recovery Plan](#), collaboratively developed with the Fort Nelson First Nation with input from the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality and

endorsed for phased implementation, represents a critical step forward. B.C. is also making progress on key commitments for the Southern Mountain Caribou with West Moberly and Saulteau First Nations. The Central Caribou Partnership Agreement celebrated the tenth year of the Klinse-za maternity pen and collaborating on initial caribou habitat restoration implementation plan. Furthermore, the Together for Wildlife Strategy, supported by advisory groups including the Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council and the First Nations B.C. Wildlife Stewardship and Habitat Conservation Forum, has provided invaluable input on biodiversity, ecosystem health, and co-management policies. The establishment of regional advisory bodies in the Thompson Okanagan and Kootenay Boundary regions marks another milestone in B.C.'s collaborative efforts to improve wildlife stewardship at the local level. B.C.'s commitment to these initiatives underscores our dedication to sustainable conservation and meaningful partnerships with First Nations.

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 power our economy. 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 works with First Nation governments, stakeholders, and partners to develop strategies and policies, plan, set objectives and invest in accessible information and digital services that guide water stewardship.

Key Results

- Progressed efforts to co-develop a proposed Watershed Security Strategy and initiated development of an implementation plan.
- Supported the Real Estate Foundation of B.C. and the First Nations Water Caucus (with the First Nations Fisheries Council) to launch the [Watershed Security Fund](#).
- Developed Drought Advisory Tables to be activated in drought-prone areas and enhance drought communications, preparedness, and response.
- Completed and published [Water Quality Guidelines](#) for aluminum, antimony and zinc as well as updates to the [Burrard Inlet Water Quality Objectives](#).

Summary of progress made in 2023/24

The Ministry engaged on the Watershed Security Strategy [Intentions paper](#) with a broad range of watershed interests, receiving numerous written submissions and meetings to inform the co-development work of the BC-First Nations Water Table and collaboration with Modern Treaty Nations. The outcome was the development of a proposed Watershed Security Strategy in early 2024 and work now is focused on building an implementation plan identifying early priorities. Another key focus for the Ministry was [drought preparedness](#). The Ministry completed a post-drought action review that informed a substantive revision to [B.C.'s Drought and Water Scarcity Response Plan](#). A data collection survey to build an accurate catalogue of

water supply systems across the province was developed. This allows an ongoing connection between water suppliers and the province on water availability and allows for characterizing hazards and vulnerabilities of drinking water sources. The Ministry continued relationships with ten First Nations and advanced water planning and governance projects in six watersheds, many of which are regularly impacted by drought. Significant milestones include signing an [Agreement](#) with the Cowichan Tribes and designating them as [responsible](#) for developing the [Xwulqw'selu \(Koksilah\) Water Sustainability Plan](#). The Ministry also completed an Indigenous Elders Circle workshop to guide knowledge building priorities in the Liard River basin under the BC-YT and BC-NWT Bilateral [Water Management Agreements](#) and worked with Fort Nelson First Nation to prioritize sub-basins for further work. The Ministry also advanced permitting solutions by streamlining the groundwater authorization permitting process.

The Ministry supported approximately \$0.408 million in watershed science projects and development and maintenance of critical digital services. This work includes the development of [water quality guidelines](#), maintaining public water digital service applications (i.e. [GWELLS](#), [Emerging Contaminant Aquatic Life Benchmarks tool](#), [water quality guideline lookup tool](#)), conducting aquifer mapping and surface water-groundwater modelling, and other studies of complex water issues. Water science reports are accessible via ministry's water digital service applications, on the public [EcoCat library](#), and/or provincial [water-related web pages](#).

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

Government permits and authorizations are critical components to the use of land and water, natural resource management, and resource stewardship and provide opportunities to gather data and mitigate risks. Working through priority projects to address provincial priorities such as housing and connectivity will allow the Ministry to address important government priorities while applying the learnings and momentum to implementing longer-term solutions in the natural resource sector.

Key Results

- Established [Permit Connect BC](#) - a single-window service for integrated permit application intake for homebuilders - to connect homebuilders to the Housing Navigator Service and the Single Housing Application Service (SHAS).
- Established a Housing Action Taskforce to prioritize housing applications, improve efficiency in the housing application process and develop a systematic method for prioritizing and overcoming permitting obstacles.
- Implemented multi-agency Area Hub Teams for the North, South, and Coast regions, with a specific focus on [Connectivity projects](#) to enhance coordination between ministries, streamline application review processes, improve First Nations consultation practices, and expedite decision-making for faster decisions of Connectivity applications.

- Released [Connectivity Permitting Guidebook](#) that provides comprehensive permitting information and guidance to proponents to improve application process transparency and supporting the submission of complete high quality permit applications for efficient review and faster turnaround times.
- In partnership with BC Hydro, enabled the broad approval of sub-tenures whereby internet service providers can work directly with BC Hydro to gain rights and access to land within established BC Hydro right of ways, no longer having to obtain separate overlapping authorization from the province.
- Implemented a new process for Existing Use Groundwater (EUGW) applications to facilitate expedited permitting decisions and reduce backlogs.

Summary of progress made in 2023/24

The Ministry advanced cross-ministry approaches to facilitate collaboration across various ministries. This includes taking a holistic and strategic approach to permitting transformation by addressing policy, process, people, and technology. Through strategic policy initiatives, the Ministry made progress in reducing the volume of required decisions, increasing the pace at which decisions are made across Housing, Connectivity and other key sectors and increasing opportunities for the involvement of qualified professionals.

To enhance the efficiency of advancing legislative and regulatory changes related to permitting transformation, the ministry coordinates efforts across Natural Resource ministries and agencies to advance legislative and regulatory changes needed to improve the permitting regime. The Ministry leads cross-ministry process efficiencies to promote streamlined decision-making for housing and connectivity projects requiring multiple authorizations. The establishment of the Housing Action Taskforce and the Connectivity Area Hub Teams enabled expedited processing of priority permit applications and provided models and transferrable learnings that will be applied to expedite other types of activity-based authorizations, such as Electrification. Through the efforts across the housing priority project, 90% of the initial baseline of housing applications (914) were processed to decision and there was a 280% increase in connectivity-related decisions (from the May 2023 baseline).

Further, to enhance predictability, transparency, and public trust in permitting, the ministry established a first-ever Natural Resource Ministry Dashboard. This dashboard offers comprehensive analysis and insights into application backlogs within the natural resource ministries, providing visibility into current and future government priorities. This reliable cross-ministry permitting data and analytics will facilitate the ministry to foster trust and predictability for all stakeholders involved in the permitting process. The Ministry is working towards making the data and dashboard publicly accessible in the future.

In the fall of 2023 restructuring, regional operations related to water, land, and fish and wildlife were transferred to the Ministry. This restructuring has allowed the Ministry to facilitate a more structured and coordinated involvement in permitting solutions, decision-making processes, and collaboration with FrontCounter BC to continue to advance comprehensive solutions for permitting.

Performance measure(s) and related discussion

Performance Measure	2021/22 Baseline	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Target	2023/24 Actual
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. ¹	19.5%	19.6%	TBD	19.7%

Data source: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

¹ PM 2.1 targets for 2024/25 and 2025/26 were stated in the 2023/24 service plan as TBD and TBD, respectively.

In 2022, [the international Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) was endorsed to address and support global efforts to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. The framework includes the nature conservation target of protecting 30 per cent of earth’s lands and oceans by 2030. B.C. has committed to achieving this target.

Conserving biodiversity and ecosystem health is important for community well-being, economic stability, and climate change mitigation. Using the 2021 other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) identification process developed nationally, the province, at the end of 2023, has reported to [the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database \(CPCAD\)](#) 19.7% of the land base as conserved within protected areas (15.6%) or other effective area-based conservation measures (4.1%). In 2023, the protected areas total went up by 0.1% due to establishment of the Incomappleux Conservancy and the Peace River Corridor Protected Area as well as adding several regional and local government areas.

B.C.’s commitment to 30% conservation will build on the identified protected areas and through qualifying existing areas that provide effective conservation and by establishing new designated areas through land use planning. To support this work the Ministry is developing updated and modern policy and tools for identifying OECMs in B.C. This approach will be developed in partnership with First Nations and with input from subject matter experts, including from industry, academia, and the non-governmental sector, and will align with international guidance. B.C. has paused assessment and reporting of OECMs while this approach is under development. New procedures and policy are anticipated to support resumed reporting in 2025.

Performance Measure	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Target	2023/24 Actual
2.2 Improve watershed security and health throughout the province by developing and implementing the Watershed Security Strategy and Fund (WSS+F) ¹	WSS in development	WSS released	WSS developed pending an implementation plan

Data source: Data source: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

¹ PM 2.2 targets for 2024/25 and 2025/26 were stated in the 2023/24 service plan as ‘Fund established’ and ‘WSS + F being implemented’, respectively.

In 2023/24 a proposed Watershed Security Strategy was co-developed by First Nations and the Province based on extensive engagement with British Columbians and interest groups. Work has now shifted to development of a resource implementation plan.

The BC-First Nations Water Table, established in June 2022 with an initial focus on Strategy co-development, continued its work to complete co-development of the Strategy. Valuable collaboration with Modern Treaty Nations also informed Strategy co-development.

Performance Measure	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Target	2023/24 Actual
2.3 Permitting efficiencies for priority Housing projects ¹	185 days	148 days (20% reduction)	111 days (40% reduction)

Data source: Data source: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

¹ PM 2.3 targets for 2024/25 and 2025/26 were stated in the 2023/24 service plan as TBD and TBD, respectively.

In 2023/24, the Ministry planned and was able to establish baseline metrics for housing-related permitting applications, such as processing time. The Ministry then built efficiencies, and cleared a backlog of permitting applications. Median timelines for housing-related applications steadily decreased by 40% - from 185 days in April 2023 to 111 days in March 2024. The reduction was achieved due to various prioritization efforts across ministries, strategic and policy changes, and comprehensive process transformations related to permitting process. The Permit Connect BC website was established to act as a single-window service for application intake. Projects can be assigned a navigator to facilitate applicants in navigating the permitting process and consolidate applications involving multiple agency permit authorizations.

The Ministry also implemented a first-ever dashboard view on the status of housing and connectivity applications authorizations across ministries. This work includes establishing the first-ever key performance indicators to measure the success of permitting transformation efforts.

New applications received (in fiscal FY2023/24) through Navigator and Single Housing Application Service (SHAS) were processed with an average turnaround time of 83 days

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 species have become increasingly threatened. The Ministry has worked to reinvigorate 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, other fisheries reviews, and work to leverage funds where viable.

Key Results

- Funded \$17.25 million in grants for the First Nations Fisheries Council and the Pacific Salmon Foundation to support wild salmon recovery and First Nation capacity in communities across B.C. to protect wild salmon populations.
- Allocated \$125.519 million for 73 projects under the second phase of the British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund (BCSRIF) a contribution program funded jointly by the federal and provincial governments.
- Restored or enhanced over 838,755 square meters of aquatic habitat through Ministry activities.
- Wild salmon protection and restoration has been included in the development of government strategies including the Coastal Marine Strategy, the Watershed Security Strategy and Fund, and the Flood Strategy.

Summary of progress made in 2023/24

The Province has taken action to protect and restore wild salmon across B.C. Through BCSRIF British Columbia has leveraged funds to get maximum results for wild salmon with the federal government and has successfully launched the next phase of the fund in response to the impact and demand for the program. The Ministry has supported the great work being done by our partners such as the Pacific Salmon Foundation, and First Nations Fisheries Council, because B.C. recognises that wild salmon need everyone working together. The Ministry started working towards a trilateral accord for to address declining salmon populations with Canada and First Nations. Signed on National Indigenous Peoples Day, this agreement represents a historic joint commitment between the Federal Government, Province of B.C. and the First Nations Fisheries Council of B.C. to take urgent action to safeguard the species for future generations. The Province also engaged at international tables for salmon including the Pacific Salmon Commission (PSC) which gave B.C. the opportunity to continue to work with aligned fishing interests, First Nations, US states and tribes, as the renewal of the Pacific Salmon Treaty in 2028 approaches. Lastly, the Ministry strived to ensure that wild salmon protection and restoration was integrated into the development of new government strategies so that they are seen as a value that transcends multiple files given their importance to British Columbia.

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

The Province committed to develop a first ever Coastal Marine Strategy, in cooperation with the federal government, First Nations, and coastal communities, to provide a blueprint for future stewardship, economic resilience and management of our coastal waters. This complements our ongoing work with DFO on the Southern BC Marine Spatial Planning Program, and the implementation of the Marine Protected Area Network in the Northern Shelf Bioregion and continued implementation of the integrated marine plans of the Marine Plan Partnership (MaPP).

Key Results

- Completed the public engagement on the Coastal Marine Strategy Intentions Paper and published the summary of the engagement results.
- Completed the draft of Coastal Marine Strategy in partnership with coastal First Nations and other interested parties, aligning with surveys and outcomes of various engagement sessions.
- Supported First Nations in the ongoing implementation of the Marine Plan Partnership, the Marine Protected Areas Network and Great Bear Sea (GBS) Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) initiative by facilitating \$60.000M Northern Shelf Bioregion grant to Coast Conservation Endowment Fund Foundation (Coast Funds).

Summary of progress made in 2023/24

The Province, for the first time in its history, is co-developing with First Nations partners a cohesive strategy to improve the stewardship of our shared marine resources. The Coastal Marine Strategy presents a vision and outlines a more active role to protect coastal ecosystem health and including wild salmon; to effectively address marine pollution; build resilience to climate change; and to support a blue economy through improved job creation in our communities. The co-development process, using a ‘multiple pathways’ approach with treaty and non-treaty First Nations, established robust relationships that will be called upon when implementation of the strategy is expected to commence later in 2024.

Performance measure(s) and related discussion

Performance Measure	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Target	2023/24 Actual
3.1 Aquatic Habitat restored or enhanced through Ministry activities ¹	836,658 square meters	878,490 square meters ²	888,639 square meters

Data source: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

¹ PM 3.1 targets for 2024/25 and 2025/26 were stated in the 2023/24 service plan as 7% increase and 9% increase, respectively.

² The number 878,490 (5% increase over previous year) is approximation and reflects the aquatic habitat restored or enhanced in the fiscal year 2023/24. The actual numbers will be released by Department of Fisheries and Ocean in January 2025.

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. While the data for the performance measure comes from BCSRIF solely, it is recognized that the Province restores many other habitats through other programs and initiatives that are not reflected here.

Performance Measure	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Target	2023/24 Actual
3.2 Provincial Coastal Marine Strategy developed. ¹	Released Coastal Marine Strategy Intentions Paper for public engagement.	Engage with public, stakeholder, local and federal government. Complete the draft Coastal Marine Strategy.	Engaged with public, stakeholder, local and federal government. Draft Coastal Marine Strategy prepared.

Data source: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

¹ PM 3.2 targets for 2024/25 and 2025/26 were stated in the 2023/24 service plan as 'Complete and release the final Coastal Marine Strategy' and 'Implementation Priorities: 6 intentions from Coastal Marine Strategy identified for action', respectively.

This performance measure was expected to be completed in 2023/24. In 2023/24, a significant milestone was achieved, with the completion of the final draft Strategy for feedback from First Nations, Ministries, and other levels of government. Since the Coastal Marine Strategy was publicly released in July 2024, the Ministry will now focus on co-developing new performance measures related to future implementation in partnership with First Nations and in consultation with stakeholders that most appropriately reflect measures of success.

Financial Report

Financial Summary

	Estimated (\$000)	Other Authoriz- ations ¹ (\$000)	Total Estimated (\$000)	Actual (\$000)	Variance (\$000)
Operating Expenses					
Land Use Policy and Planning and Ecosystems	57,465	17,300	74,765	70,217	(4,548)
Water, Fisheries and Coastal Policy and Planning	10,355	14,947	25,302	27,396	2,094
Natural Resource Information and Digital Services	26,225	10,968	37,193	37,149	(44)
Reconciliation and Natural Resource Sector Policy	3,254	152,196	155,450	155,450	0
Natural Resource Sector Secretariat	6,953	11,132	18,085	19,520	1,435
Executive and Support Services	19,757	3,110	22,867	23,931	1,064
Statutory					
Integrated Resource Operations (Transfer from Ministry of Forests)	0	37,459	37,459	39,069	1,610
Office of the Chief Forester (Transfer from Ministry of Forests)	0	4,714	4,714	3,635	(1,079)
Regional Operations (Transfer from Ministry of Forests)	0	54,509	54,509	54,118	(391)
Executive and Support Services (Transfer from Ministry of Forests)	0	7,192	7,192	7,053	(139)
Crown Land Special Account (Transfer from Ministry of Forests)	0	500	500	500	0
Sub-total	124,009	314,027	438,036	438,036	0
Adjustment of Prior Year Accrual ²	0	0	0	(44)	(44)
Total	124,009	314,027	438,036	439,992	(44)
Ministry Capital Expenditures					
Corporate Services	3	0	3	0	(3)
Land Use Policy and Planning and Ecosystems	0	2,766	2,766	2,769	3
Total	3	2,766	2,769	2,769	0

	Estimated (\$000)	Other Authoriz- ations ¹ (\$000)	Total Estimated (\$000)	Actual (\$000)	Variance (\$000)
Other Financing Transactions					
Crown Land Administration					
Receipts	0	0	0	0	0
Disbursements	0	6,382	6,382	2,569	(3,813)
Net Cash Requirements (Source)	0	6,382	6,382	2,569	(3,813)
Habitat Conservation Trust					
Receipts	0	(6,500)	(6,500)	(6,563)	(63)
Disbursements	0	6,500	6,500	6,563	63
Net Cash Requirements (Source)	0	0	0	0	0
Summary					
Total Receipts	0	(6,500)	(6,500)	(6,563)	(63)
Total Disbursements	0	12,882	12,882	9,132	(3,750)
Total Net Cash Requirements (Source)	0	6,382	6,382	2,569	(3,813)

¹ "Other Authorizations" include Supplementary Estimates, Statutory Appropriations and Contingencies. Amounts in this column are not related to the "estimated amount" under sections 5(1) and 6(1) of the Balanced Budget and Ministerial Accountability Act for ministerial accountability for operating expenses under the Act.

² The Adjustment of Prior Year Accrual of \$0.044 million is a reversal of accruals in the previous year.

Appendix A: Public Sector Organizations

As of March 31, 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 B.C. 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](#)

Appendix B: Progress on Mandate Letter Priorities

The following is a summary of progress made on priorities as stated in Minister Nathan Cullen’s 2022 Mandate Letter.

2022 Mandate Letter Priority	Status as of March 31, 2024
<p>Lead cross-government work to improve timing and transparency of permitting processes to support sustainable economic development, housing and infrastructure while maintaining high levels of environmental protection.</p>	<p>Refer to objective 2.3</p>
<p>Continue to transform the management and stewardship of our waters, lands and resources, together with First Nations, and work toward modern land use plans and permitting processes rooted in science and Indigenous knowledge that consider new and cumulative impacts to the land base.</p>	<p>Refer to objective 1.2</p>
<p>Lead B.C.’s work on water, watersheds, and our coast, including work to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-develop, complete, and launch the Watershed Security Strategy and Fund and the Coastal Marine Strategy, and continue implementation of the Wild Salmon Strategy; and • Develop and deliver a long-term vision for the Clean Coast, Clean Waters program. 	<p>Refer to objective 2.2 and objective 3.2</p>

2022 Mandate Letter Priority	Status as of March 31, 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect wildlife and species at risk, and work collaboratively with First Nations, other ministries, and the federal government to protect and enhance B.C.'s biodiversity through implementing recommendations of the Old Growth Strategic Review, and the Together for Wildlife Strategy. • Partnering with the federal government, industry, and communities, and working with Indigenous Peoples, lead the work to achieve the Nature Agreement's goals of 30% protection of B.C.'s land base by 2030, including Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas. • Support the Minister of Forests to work together with First Nations to complete work to improve the protection and stewardship of forest resources, habitats, biodiversity, and cultural heritage in the Great Bear Rainforest Agreement. 	<p>Refer to objective 2.1</p>
<p>With support from the Ministers of Forests and Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation, and the Parliamentary Secretary for Environment, develop a new conservation financing mechanism to support protection of biodiverse areas.</p>	<p>Refer to objective 1.1</p>