

# SUMMARY REPORT

## **Indigenous Stewardship of Salmon Watersheds Webinar 1: Sharing Stories on Climate Change and Cumulative Effects**



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With support from the [Watershed Futures Initiative Coordination Team](#)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Watersheds are changing rapidly in response to the cumulative effects of climate change and land use activities. These changes are harming the salmon that call these systems home and impacting the people and cultures that care for and rely on salmon. Thus, cumulative effects is an urgent challenge that calls for new approaches to taking care of, and managing, salmon and their watersheds.

Indigenous Peoples have stewarded salmon and their habitats for millennium and have the fundamental rights and title to maintain and protect salmon. As stewards, rightsholders, and expert witnesses, Indigenous Peoples play key roles in the management of cumulative effects.

In June 2021, more than 50 participants from Indigenous Nations across Western Canada (Figure 2) came together to share their experiences related to cumulative effects in salmon watersheds. This event was designed and delivered by a Planning Committee of Indigenous thought leaders, with support from the Coordination Team of the Watershed Futures Initiative.

The goal of the webinar was to share Indigenous knowledge, observations and perspectives on the observed cumulative impacts of climate change and land use activities on salmon watersheds, and to discuss steps taken by communities and groups to address these changes. The online event included the presentation of three case studies by: Dúqváísł William Housty, Chair of the Board of Directors for the Heiltsuk Integrated Resource Management Department; Cole Morven, Harvest Monitoring Coordinator for Nisga'a Fisheries and Wildlife Department; and Michelle Walsh, Tribal Fisheries Biologist for Secwepemc Fisheries Commission. The presentations were followed by discussions in small groups. Notetakers recorded the conversations, and the notes were analyzed to identify the major themes outlined below.

Participants shared their observations of how salmon systems are changing in their territories. Changes differed across the diverse watersheds represented. Some rivers are warming, and flows

are getting lower but also flashier during extreme rainfall events; salmon migration timing is changing; genetic and population diversity is eroding; salmon size is decreasing in some locations; and abundances are now a fraction of what they once were.

Shared expertise indicated that these changes are being driven by a combination of climate change and the cumulative effects of human activities, which vary regionally. Logging, urban sprawl, road building, agriculture, dams, fish farms, invasive species, mines, pipelines, and sports fishing all featured in the dialogue.

The stories shared from across BC highlighted the deep harm experienced when salmon runs fail. For example, some communities have not been able to consistently access food from traditional salmon fisheries. In addition, as salmon runs change, harvesting practices and traditions are changing or being lost.

Colonial government management of cumulative effects was described as 'siloed', containing serious policy gaps, not meaningfully involving Nations, and also taking a "one-size-fits-all" approach that overlooks local complexities and realities.

Participants also highlighted success stories—emphasizing the benefits of learning from one another, collaborating within communities and with external partners, increasing leadership by Indigenous Peoples in watershed planning and governance, adapting salmon management systems to the changing times, and revitalizing traditional management systems.

Collectively, this event revealed the link between the importance of advancing Indigenous rights and well-being and improving the management of cumulative effects, and it set a strong foundation for future conversations. The next *Indigenous Stewardship of Salmon Watersheds* online event, to be held in early 2022, will identify actionable next steps for Nations and recommendations for collaborators seeking to support Indigenous Peoples and groups on this journey.



# INDIGENOUS STEWARDSHIP of Salmon Watersheds

