



**First Nations
Fisheries Council**
of British Columbia

SMOLTALK



APRIL 2026 EDITION

ABOUT FIRST NATIONS FISHERIES COUNCIL OF B.C.

FNFC’s work is driven by First Nations interests. We operate at the intersection of the political/policy and technical/operational levels. We connect First Nations, government, fish, fisheries, aquatic resources and habitat.

The fisheries and aquatic resource management landscape is complex, with many overlapping interests, influences and decision making authorities. FNFC ensures that First Nations’ voices are central to fisheries management through an interconnected framework focused on:



Advancing environmental sustainability: Promoting sustainable fisheries and aquatic ecosystems through climate adaptation, habitat restoration, and enhanced resource management.



Strengthening internal FNFC capacity and decision-making: Building governance, transparency, and accountability to ensure sustainable and effective leadership.



Fostering reciprocal relationships and strong partnerships: Collaborating with First Nations, Crown agencies, and other stakeholders to advance shared priorities and uphold First Nations leadership in fisheries.

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Message from the Executive Director

I hope everyone has had a good first quarter of 2026.

2026 marks the beginning of new terms for FNFC Executive Council. Since becoming Executive Director in 2024, I have committed to ensuring that FNFC's 14 geographic regions are fully represented at the Executive Council table. So far, we have confirmed 12 Council Delegates, and the remaining 2 positions are being finalized. The knowledge and leadership that regional Council Delegates bring will help guide the FNFC as we operationalize *FNFC's Strategic Plan 2025-2030: Advancing First Nations Stewardship and Decision-Making*, strengthen our collective voice to work together across the province to protect the fish, the watersheds that sustain them, and promoting sustainable fisheries benefiting First Nations communities for future generations.

Since our last newsletter edition, FNFC hosted our 2025 FNFC Fall Assembly in Campbell River on October 28 and 29, 2025. Thank you to our host, Wei Wai Kum First Nation for their gracious hospitality and A-Tlegay Fisheries Society for hosting an incredible feast. Thank you to everyone who attended and contributed to making this gathering a success. This year's Assembly was our most well attended to date, and we are grateful for the strong participation and the time, knowledge, and voices you brought to the Assembly. A recap of the Assembly is included on the following pages. We will share more information about our 2026 Fall Assembly in our next newsletter.

Over the last few weeks and months, many of you may have seen concerning communications related to DFO's review of the Salmon Allocation Policy, and accusations about First Nations' intentions. Unfortunately, this campaign capitalized on public anxiety around First Nations rights, and promoted racial division between First Nations and non-Indigenous Canadians based on misinformation about policy proposals being discussed. To be clear, First Nations participants have not called for the elimination of public fisheries. First Nations participants are advocating for better managed fisheries that is consistent with First Nations s.35 affirmed priority fishing rights, and respectful ways to share access to limited fisheries resources. This campaign is hurtful to First Nations in B.C., and we appreciate the First Nations Leadership Council's political advocacy on this issue. We encourage you to learn more about the SAP Review process, which can be found on page 8 in this newsletter.

As part of our ongoing efforts to strengthen communication with our Tier 1 audiences, we have refreshed both the content and design of our external newsletter. What you are reading is FNFC's newest edition of the Communique, now called Smoltalk. We hope you enjoy this fresh new update and find it engaging, informative, and enjoyable to read.

I remain grateful for your continued support of FNFC's work and look forward to our ongoing collaboration and engagement in the years ahead.

Hamiya (Thank You),



Stu Barnes (Kil Ts'ak)
Executive Director, FNFC

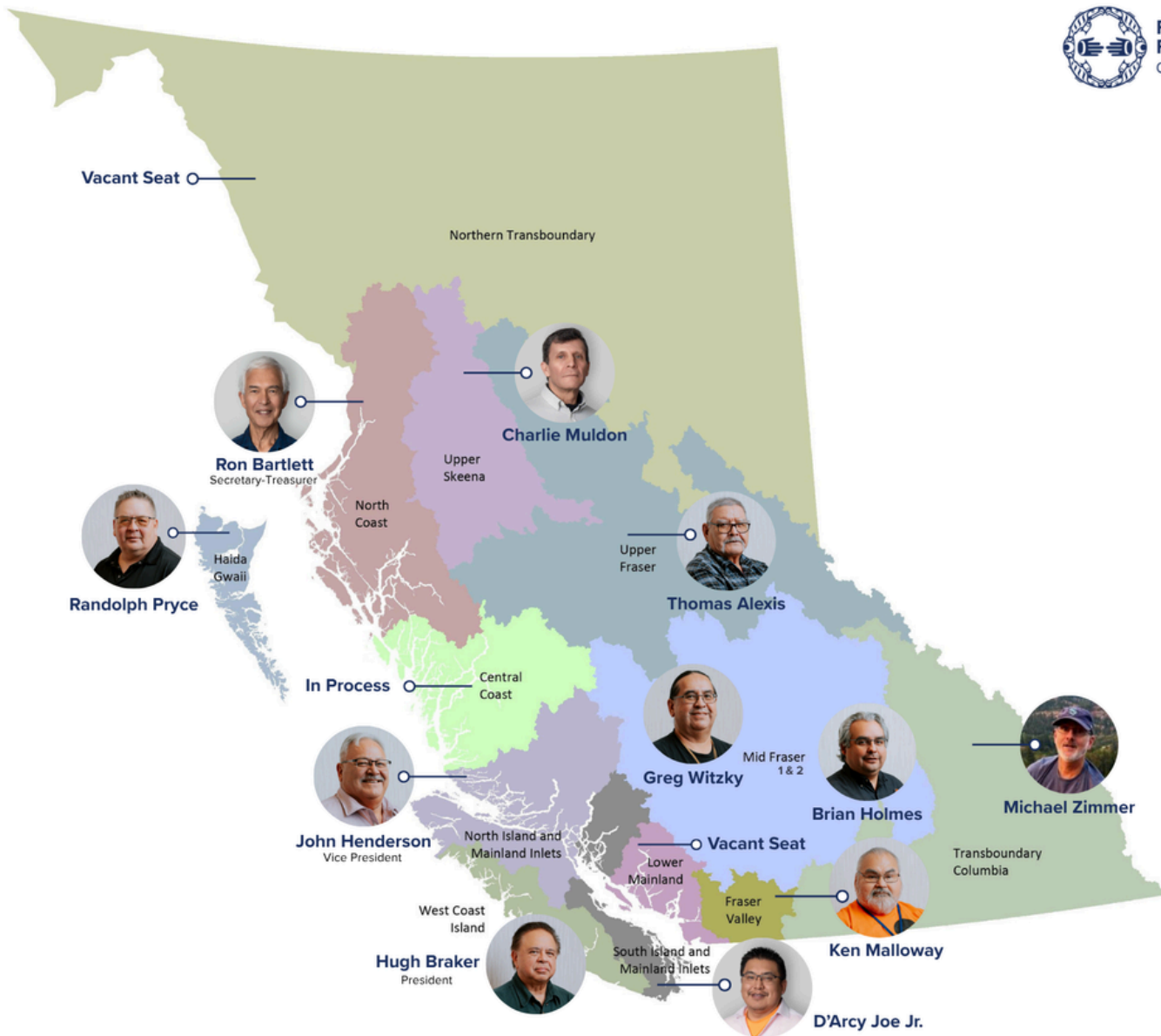


Meet the FNFC Council Delegates

Our Council Delegates are drawn from 14 regions across B.C., reflecting the strength and diversity of our Regional Model. The model recognizes the diversity of geography, ecology, expertise, and priorities among First Nations communities and territories throughout B.C. This coordinated regional approach helps us build relationships, engage broadly with First Nations, and bring a wide range of regional perspectives to discussions on matters of province-wide interest.

The regional structure was ratified by First Nations at the 2009 FNFC Annual General Assembly and supported through resolution by the British Columbia Assembly of First Nations, Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, and First Nations Summit.

Please join us in welcoming our Delegates as they begin their new 2026-2028 term.



The remaining two positions for the Lower Mainland and Northern Transboundary regions are still vacant, and we will share updates as information becomes available.

2025 FNFC Annual General Assembly Recap

FNFC extends our sincere gratitude to all guests who participated in our 2025 Annual General Assembly, held on October 28 and 29, 2025, in Campbell River.

We welcomed more than 106 participants representing 53 First Nations and First Nation organizations. We also welcomed representatives from Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), as well as our partners, including the Pacific Salmon Foundation (PSF) and the Real Estate Foundation of BC (REFBC).

The 2025 Fall Assembly was a testament to the ongoing commitment of the FNFC to protect and restore salmon populations in B.C. We eagerly anticipate further discussions and meaningful outcomes at our next Assembly. Prince George has been chosen as the host location for our 2026 Fall Assembly. Dates and additional information will be shared in the next Smoltalk.



Chief Chris Roberts and Andrew Puglas of Wei Wai Kum First Nation provided a cultural welcome and song to open our Fall Assembly. We sincerely thank Wei Wai Kum First Nation for hosting us on their territory.

This year, we were honoured to include the Wei Wai Kum Youth Dancers. They shared powerful intergenerational performances that brought energy, pride, and connection to our time together.



Their songs and dances grounded the gathering in community and reminded us that our work is carried forward not only through policies and priorities, but through culture, ceremony, and the next generation of leaders.



This year, we were treated to an incredible feast dinner sponsored by A-Tlegay Fisheries Society.



First Nations Fisheries Excellence Award

Kelsey Campbell

Kelsey Campbell of Wei Wai Kum First Nation, a Stock Management Biologist with the Upper Fraser Fisheries Conservation Alliance (UFFCA), received this year's First Nations Fisheries Excellence Award in recognition of her unwavering leadership and dedication to protecting salmon.

John Henderson, Vice President of FNFC, presented the award, which he also carved himself.



Update on the Salmon Allocation Policy Review and Next Steps

The review of the 1999 Salmon Allocation Policy (SAP) is expected to conclude March 31st, 2026. DFO is finalizing a Briefing Package to the Minister for her decision on proposed policy changes and finalizing an updated policy. It is expected that DFO will document, in their Briefing Package, the consensus agreements developed through the SAP Review process, outstanding areas of disagreement amongst participating groups and their perspectives and rationales.

The conclusion of the SAP Review marks the end of a 3+ year review process to update the 1999 SAP. The *Ahousaht et al.* court decision that recognized and affirmed the five Nuu-chah-nulth Nations (Ahousaht, Ehattesaht, Hesquiaht, Mowachaht/Muchalaht, and Tla-o-qui-aht) constitutionally protected Aboriginal commercial fishing rights, in which the judge directed DFO to address the unjustified infringement in the original 1999 SAP which provided the recreational sector priority access to Chinook and coho salmon. This process has taken far too long to fully implement the court case (7+ years), and effects of the 1999 SAP continue to be felt by and detriment to First Nations rights-holders.

It is imperative that the Minister and DFO make tangible changes to the 1999 SAP that upholds First Nations s.35 protected priority rights fisheries. As First Nations participants have consistently stated during the review, status quo of the allocation framework principles, including retaining the recreational priority for Chinook and coho, is not an option and will not address the infringement and upholding the court's direction. To be clear, First Nations participants have not proposed policy options that will extinguish any sector. Proposed policy options will improve guidance for allocation and management of fisheries in BC to uphold First Nations rights-based fisheries, and to improve the ability to manage and control fisheries-related impacts of the recreational (and commercial) fisheries in a manner that is fair and reflective of the health of fish stocks and fisheries.

It is unfortunate that recreational representatives and their affiliates initiated a public media campaign that mischaracterized the proposed policy options. The misinformation is detrimental to the SAP Review process, inflamed racial division between First Nations and non-Indigenous Canadians, and compromised the integrity of the review process by swaying public opinion and input to the Minister. FNFC appreciates the support of the First Nations Leadership Council and their political advocacy to correct the narrative, as well as First Nations rights-holders and organizations that have addressed the misinformation.

FNFC and the First Nations SAP Working Group participants extends our appreciation to First Nations rights-holders and organizations that have engaged during the SAP Review process and requested for bilateral consultations. It is important that First Nations' input is reflected in the review process, and to help refine and verify policy options being considered. First Nations voices are important and can help influence change, similar to amendments to the Fisheries Act in 2018.

Looking ahead, it is uncertain when the Minister will make her decision, and when consultations will take place on a new draft policy. First Nations participants have reminded DFO that they have a duty to consult with First Nations rights-holders on a new draft SAP, and provide opportunities to review new policy language prior to finalization. First Nations participants would like to co-write the policy with DFO. As more information becomes available, FNFC will continue to update through our media channels.

For more information about the SAP Review or other policy initiatives, please refer to the **FNFC website** or contact **Janson Wong** at **janson@fnfisheriescouncil.ca**.

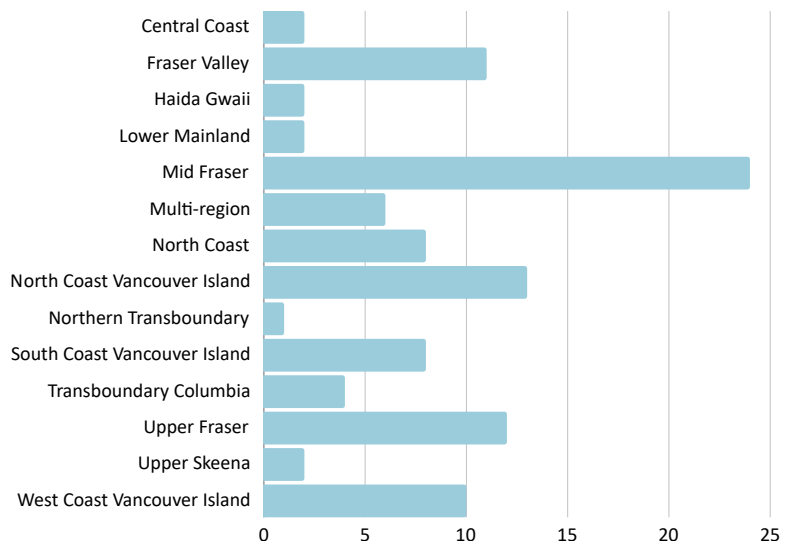
Growing Our Relationships with First Nations across B.C.

In FNFC's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan, a key priority is to strengthen its relationships with B.C. First Nations by expanding communications, meeting with Nations in their communities, and providing more consistent and regular updates. Over the past year, FNFC has directly engaged with 111 First Nations and First Nations organizations through broad-scale, FNFC-hosted events, including FNFC's Annual Fall Assembly, the Political Salmon Advocacy Forum, Knowledge Sharing Forum, and regional Pacific Salmon Treaty engagements.

One-on-One Community Engagements

Over the past year, FNFC has worked to meet with individual First Nations communities to better understand their priorities and concerns as it relates to fish and fish habitat. These engagements enable FNFC to better understand regional priorities and identify ways the organization can better align its work to support the goals and initiatives of First Nations across B.C. If you're interested in meeting with FNFC, please email **Etana Tam** at **etana@fnfisheriescouncil.ca**.

First Nations/Organizations Engaged per Region



A "What We Heard" report is currently being developed and will be shared with all participants later this spring.

Building collaborative processes to advance recovery of Wild Pacific Salmon

FNFC's Knowledge Sharing Forum

FNFC hosted a Knowledge Sharing Forum in Richmond, B.C., on March 10th-11th, 2026. This two-day Forum provided space for 42 participants from 31 different First Nations and First Nations organizations across B.C. to gather and discuss topics of interest related to fish, fish habitat, and watershed stewardship. Presentations included stories and perspectives from across the province, from the headwaters to the ocean. Presenters also shared their experiences with the people and systems that enable watershed stewardship including governance, data management, and training strategies. Dedicated time was also provided throughout the forum to build connections amongst Tier 1 participants with a networking hour and group activity.



Funding and Opportunities for First Nations in B.C.

Below is a selection of funding programs, opportunity hubs, and useful resources that may be relevant to First Nations in B.C. Program details and deadlines can change quickly, so it is always best to confirm the latest information on the funder's website before applying.

FNFC/ ISF CLIMATE EMERGENCY GRANT & SALMON RESILIENCY GRANT

A new intake for the two grants has opened as of April 2026. Check the website for updates.



INDIGENOUS CLIMATE HUB

Supports First Nations-led climate adaptation projects south of the 60th parallel, including work related to flooding, wildfire, drought, water, fisheries, forestry, and cultural sites.



COAST FUNDS

Coast Funds has compiled a list of external grants and opportunities for First Nations projects in stewardship, sustainable energy, training, culture, and economic development.



FIRST NATIONS HEALTH AUTHORITY

Supports health and wellness for First Nations people in B.C. through culturally safe, community-driven programs and services.



B.C. COMMUNITY CLIMATE FUNDING

An ongoing B.C. resource that compiles climate-related funding opportunities for Indigenous communities and local governments.



WATERSHED SECURITY FUND

Provides communities with access to critical and timely funding, supporting watershed work and partnerships in all regions of B.C. The next intake will open in Fall 2026. Check the website for updates.



On the Land, On the Water: Brian Holmes on Stewardship

Stewardship is easy to talk about. Living it, week after week and season after season, is something else. For Brian Holmes, that work is part of everyday life.

In this edition of the FNFC Smoltalk, we hear from Brian, FNFC Council Delegate for Mid Fraser (2), now serving his second term on Council. His experience has shaped how he understands land and water: not as abstract issues, but as living systems that require care and responsibility.

“

Water is essential to our way of life as a human species. I often share with my boys that if the water is not healthy, then we cannot live here. That's how connected we are.

Brian Holmes is a member of the Syilx Nation living in spaxmn (Douglas Lake). He carries the traditional name **yx^wyx^wutxn**, which means Badger. He worked for Douglas Lake Cattle Company for 20 years, rising from farm hand to farm foreman, and has served five consecutive terms on Upper Nicola Band Chief and Council since 2011. From 2023 to 2025, he completed a secondment with the B.C. government as Executive Director - Indigenous Leader with Water, Land and Resource Stewardship.



Brian holds training in restorative justice facilitation, a diploma in Police Sciences, and a Land Guardian Certificate. He serves as President of the Okanagan Indian Education Society, the Nicola Valley Community Justice Services Society, and the Indigenous Stewardship Fund. He is also the Mid-Fraser representative on the First Nations Fisheries Council, participates in the First Nations Water Caucus as a Commissioner, and leads community projects including invasive species eradication, water quality monitoring, and streamflow monitoring.

Remembering Healthy Water



Nicola River below Douglas Lake, near the swimming hole.

When Brian was a child, summer meant swimming downstream from Douglas Lake. He and other youth from the community would gather at the local swimming hole, sometimes twenty at a time, diving into deep, clear water that felt endless.

Back then, there was plenty of water, he recalls. It was so deep that you just had to be careful.

Today, no one swims there. Algae clings to the rocks. Water levels are much lower. The season grows shorter each year.

“It's changed, and that hits harder when I think about my own kids. They haven't experienced it the way we did. Now, if they want to be in the water, I have to take them to a swimming pool, and that's just sad.” For Brian, those changes are deeply personal. They are not distant environmental trends, but something he has witnessed across his own lifetime.

Stewardship Begins on the Land

“Looking after the watershed is a big task,” Brian emphasizes. *“For me, it starts with being on the land. It's important to get out there, not just talk about it in an office or meeting room.”*

For Brian, time on the land is what makes stewardship real. Returning to the same places again and again means noticing change as it happens. You remember how things used to look and feel, and that memory becomes part of your knowledge base. Sometimes, he says, you can learn more by observing how nature works than by trying to predict or model it from afar. Stewardship is about learning to listen to the water, rather than deciding what is best for it.

When Stewardship Becomes Personal

One of the experiences that most shaped Brian's approach to stewardship took place in 2019, when a logging operation behind his community damaged local water areas. Despite the community's efforts to stop the logging, the work continued. He also recalls activity that was difficult to monitor, including operations happening late at night.

Brian witnessed the impacts firsthand, carefully documented what happened, and brought those concerns forward. When government representatives came to see the damage, they acknowledged what had happened but said there was nothing they could pursue under Canadian law. The community was left to deal with the issue on its own.

For Brian, the experience reinforced how limited the system can be when communities try to rely on Canadian law to protect water. It also made clear that Indigenous law and responsibility are too often overlooked. As he puts it, *"the colonial system isn't really up to understanding or protecting our law in a way that we need."*



Wildfire smoke in 2021.



Headwaters of the Nicola River during the 2021 heat dome.

That lesson returned during the White Rock Lake fire, which began on July 13, 2021, during the heat dome. As the fire grew, so did concerns about water and culturally important sites near the burn area. Brian had seen, and heard from others, how bulldozed fire guards could cut through creeks, disturb wetlands, and damage important grasslands. While his brother served as eyes on the ground, helping ensure fire crews did not bulldoze through creeks and cultural sites, Brian worked to inform incident command about the cultural importance of the waterways and surrounding area. As he emphasizes, once a fire is out, it is the community that must live with the long-term impacts on the water. Through their advocacy and on-the-ground knowledge, they were able to help protect important water crossings, grasslands, and cultural sites.

Since then, these experiences have strengthened Brian's commitment to uphold his Nation's laws and responsibilities, while still navigating collaboration with colonial systems where necessary. He connects them to a broader pattern across B.C., especially when Nations are trying to protect culturally and ecologically important places. Too often, he explains, decisions are made from *"an economic lens rather than a living lens,"* instead of recognizing water, land, and the natural world as living beings with their own rights.

Water Health Is Community Health



In our ceremonies, we sing, pray, and drum to offer our energy to the water as it travels its path. That relationship is reciprocal.

For Brian, the connection between watershed health and community well-being goes far beyond drinking water. Healthy water supports recreation and sustains cultural and ceremonial practices, including the ability to gather safely and spend time on the land. When water quality declines, it changes how people interact with the watershed and whether they feel safe using the water as they always have.

He also points to mental and emotional well-being as an often overlooked part of stewardship. Brian shares, *“Our elders always taught us to go sit by the water. It will calm you. It will change your mind.”* That teaching reflects a deeper relationship with water, not just as a resource, but as a living being. It is a relative that supports our well-being, carries energy, gives energy in return, and deserves respect.

Because the watershed is all connected, the impacts of stressed or contaminated water do not stay in one place. They move through the whole system, creating a domino effect downstream into communities, through the Thompson and Fraser, and out to the ocean. That affects salmon, fish, wildlife, and the many living systems that depend on healthy water along the entire corridor.

His message is direct: *“If this water becomes contaminated or there is no water, then we don’t exist here because we cannot exist without that clean water.”*

Protecting Water at the Source

Right now, Brian is focused on understanding and protecting source water, an area that has received far too little attention. Few baselines have been established, limited data has been collected, and most work has focused on areas already impacted downstream. For him, the goal is to understand what is happening at the start of the system, before damage becomes irreversible. That means paying attention not only to major waterways, but also to the smaller drainages that are often overlooked. He also points to pressures that are less visible but increasingly important in the headwaters, including wildfire, smoke, and air pollution.

Since invasive yellow perch was found in Douglas Lake in 2018, Brian has led a trapping program to help eradicate the fish. For him, the perch became a turning point, prompting deeper questions about the health of the lake and the water system as a whole. One possible response would have been to reset the lake ecosystem to eliminate the perch. But before making that kind of decision, it was necessary to understand the condition of Douglas Lake itself and what it would mean for existing sustenance fisheries. That led to research into a potential satellite hatchery for burbot, as well as a deeper understanding of the food sources the lake needs to support. It also led to years of collecting data on Douglas Lake, including water chemistry, water temperature, and other key indicators.



Brian Holmes' son fishing while he was collecting stream measurements.

As that work continued, another concern emerged. Cyanobacteria became an increasing issue while lake health data was being gathered. Algae blooms had long been common, but by 2023 their toxic potential had become a much more serious concern. Living by the lake and working on the ground, Brian found himself watching blooms form within hours and taking samples during peak events. Over time, he developed a close understanding of cyanobacteria: how different algae form, which are beneficial, which are harmful, and how algae have long played a role in the ecosystem.



Collecting data on Douglas Lake.

The more Brian learned about algae and water chemistry, the more he came to understand the broader effects invasive species can have on native fish and the lake ecosystem as a whole. He continues to ask difficult questions, including whether perch may be contributing to declining water quality. Many questions remain unanswered, but for Brian, that only reinforces the need to keep learning.

One unexpected benefit of this work is the quiet that comes with being out on the water: *“There’s no cell service, no Wi-Fi on the lake, so it’s pretty nice and quiet, so I can really listen to the water.”*

The work has also become a space for family connection. *“My boys come out with me, and my dad has been coming out too, so it’s been that family time together while also keeping a responsibility that is passed down through generations.”*



Relationships at the Heart of Stewardship

When Brian reflects on what needs to change, he returns to relationships and responsibility. Stewardship begins with how people treat one another. One of the teachings he often shares through his facilitation work is simple: how people treat each other shapes how they treat the land and water.

The logging damage behind his community in 2019 was proof of that. As he put it, *“Our relationship wasn’t in a good place. In the end, nature was what was damaged because we couldn’t build relationships strong enough to protect the land and water.”*

He also speaks openly about the deeper causes of that fragmentation. The legacy of Residential Schools, the Doctrine of Discovery and other colonial systems have left many communities burdened with social disruption, loss, and disconnection across generations. That history also interrupted the passing down of knowledge. Many knowledge keepers have passed on, and in many places there is a younger generation ready to learn and carry those teachings forward, but there is also a painful gap where so much was lost or interrupted.



Old Homestead at Douglas Lake.

Brian believes this is where patience and education matter. People often want immediate action without fully understanding the history that shaped the challenges communities are still working through today. He knows that sharing this history is not easy. It means revisiting painful truths and carrying collective trauma in the hope that younger generations, including his own children, will not have to explain it all over again.

Even with those challenges, Brian holds on to hope. He sees change in the people who are listening, learning, and beginning to understand Indigenous law and worldview on their own terms, rather than through racism or dismissal.

Stewardship is not only about what happens on the land or in the water. It is also about how people build trust, communicate, and work toward unity.

“

There's a lot to change there. But I think if we keep communicating in a good way, that change will come, and hopefully it'll come before my kids end up having to deal with the issues that we're dealing with now.



**Indigenous
Stewardship
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602-1200 W 73rd Avenue
Vancouver, BC, V6P 6G5

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Supporting First Nations Stewardship: 2025–2026 Highlights

\$1.1 million

to Indigenous-led environmental
projects across BC

In the current fiscal year (2025–2026), the First Nations Fisheries Council (FNFC) and the Indigenous Stewardship Fund (FNFC's charitable entity) disbursed over \$1.1 million directly to First Nations leading environmental stewardship projects across British Columbia.

This includes:

Salmon Resiliency Grant Program

- 12 Nation-led projects supported
- One-year and multi-year grants provided to advancing habitat restoration

Climate Emergency Grant Program

- Funding provided to 5 First Nations responding to climate emergencies and strengthening preparedness

We invite you to explore our impact stories to learn more about the Indigenous-led stewardship projects supported this year.

READ IMPACT STORIES
isfund.ca

Looking Ahead: 2026–2027 Grant Opportunities

In response to feedback from First Nations on the importance of accessing funding earlier in the year, both the Salmon Resiliency Grant Program and the Climate Emergency Grant Program will reopen in **April 2026**. We welcome proposals from First Nations across British Columbia.

Our commitment is to:

- Distribute at least \$1 million annually directly to First Nations
- Continue growing available funding to support more Nations and more projects
- Provide funding that aligns with First Nations priorities and stewardship approaches

The Indigenous Stewardship Fund (ISF) continues to build partnerships to grow this work. In 2025, a new partnership with the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) increased available funding by an additional \$100,000, allowing more support to flow directly to First Nations.

**Subscribe to the ISF Newsletter to receive
updates when our grant programs open.**

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Why are we doing this work?

In 2019, FNFC heard directly from First Nations across British Columbia that many important Nation-led restoration initiatives remained at the planning stage, without the resources needed to bring them to life. In response, FNFC established the Indigenous Stewardship Fund (ISF), an Indigenous-led charity created to help close this funding gap.

ISF exists to support First Nations by:

1

Ensuring First Nations priorities for habitat protection and restoration are resourced and advanced.

2

Providing flexible funding that allows Nations to advance their own stewardship priorities, based on their knowledge, laws, ways of working and long-term visions.

3

Mobilizing new funding from corporate and philanthropic partners who want to support Indigenous-led stewardship but may not know how.

4

Strengthening the presence and leadership of Indigenous-led organizations within the environmental funding landscape.



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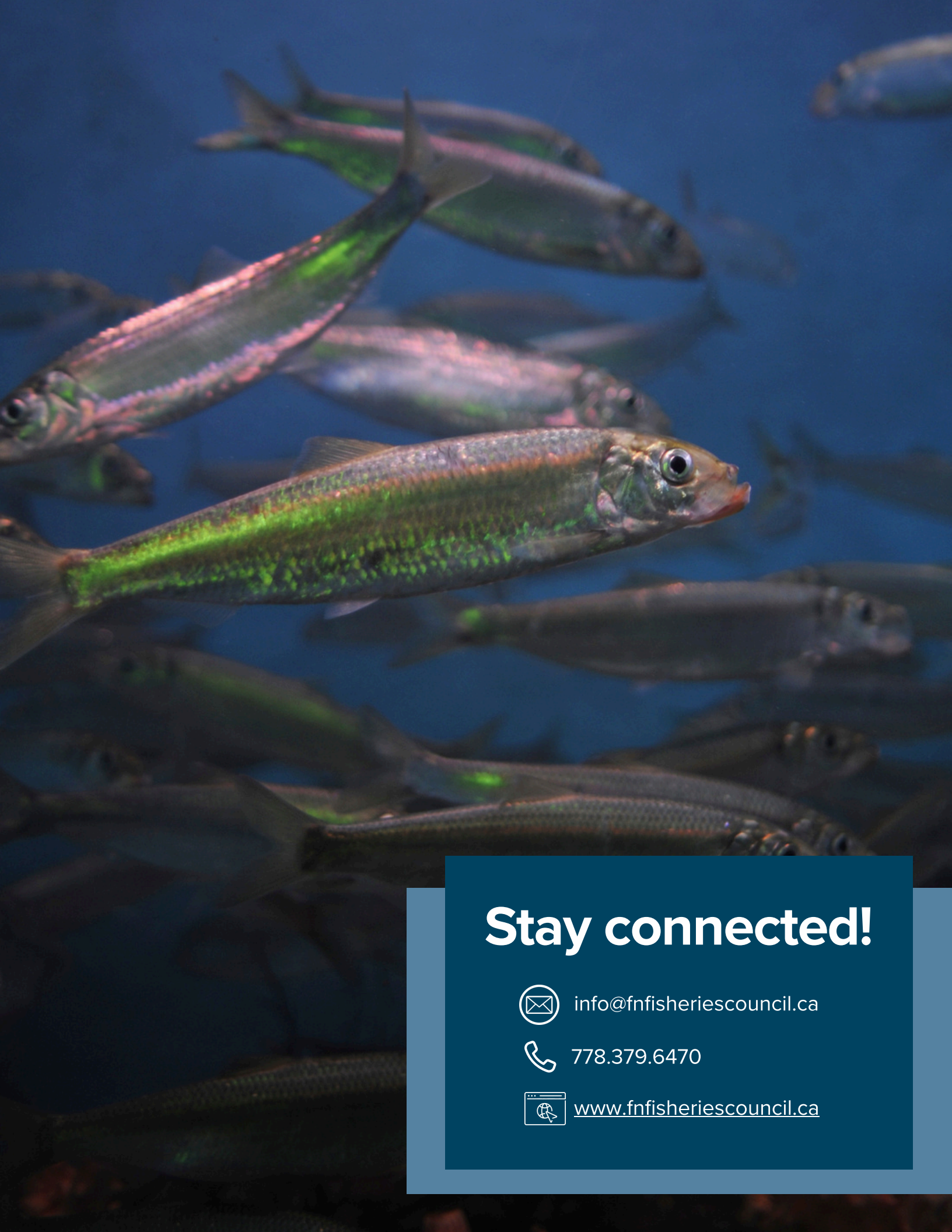
**Indigenous
Stewardship
Fund**

Working together, FNFC and ISF are helping ensure that First Nations have access to the resources needed to protect and restore their territories for current and future generations.

To know more about ISF, we invite you to read our ISF Strategic Plan (2026-2029).

**DOWNLOAD HERE
THE ISF STRATEGIC PLAN (2026-2029)**

isfund.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/ISF-Strat-Plan_2026to2029-1.pdf



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