



Meeting Minutes

Public Forum on Water in the Nicola Valley

Civic Centre, Merritt BC

Wednesday, November 20, 2024 6:30 pm

6:30 pm Welcome

John Anderson (NWCRT) opened the Forum with a welcome to the community and a land acknowledgement to the Nlaka'pamux and Sylix Nations.

A 1000 ltr. container had been brought to the front of the room with a mark at 742 ltr. to help visualize the amount of water used by each Merritt resident daily (provincial average 503 ltr.)

The purpose and goal of the public forum are to discuss where the water in the Nicola Valley comes from, provide the opportunity to give feedback and deliver clear directions to decision-makers who will listen to public input.

The NWCRT is believed to be the longest-running roundtable in Canada, having been established in 1984.

The rules of engagement for the forum were explained:

- be respectful, speak respectfully, be curious and humble, and listen to each other

6:37 - 6:45 pm Opening Circle

All attendees were invited to share their names and where their water comes from.

There was diverse representation from city residents, ranchers, residents from outside city limits, and First Nations. Water sources mentioned were: city water, gravity-fed water systems, aquifers, deep wells, and shallow wells.

6:45 - 6:55 pm Overview of the NWCRT and honouring Elizabeth Salomon-de-Friedberg

Judith Guichon presented an overview of the NWCRT

- Formed in 1994 in response to a need to look at land & resource management in a new way, for everyone's voice to be heard in a safe space
- Concerned with long-term sustainability that's community-driven
- The size of the Nicola Watershed is 728,000 ha = 1.8 million acres - ranging from Spences Bridge to Logan Lake, Stump Lake, Pennask Lake, and Brookmere
- Two major rivers: Nicola River and Coldwater River
- Four major lakes: Douglas Lake, Nicola Lake, Pennask Lake, and Stump Lake

- WUMP (Water Use Management Plan) was a major project from 2004 - 2010 that was completed in more than 100 meetings
- The Grasslands Interpretive Site near Lundbom Lake is an informative and educational asset maintained by dedicated volunteers.
- After 30 years since its inception, the NWCRT is believed to be the longest-running roundtable in Canada

Kate Anderson mentioned and honoured Elizabeth Salomon-de-Friedberg

- A dedicated, long-time volunteer and integral part of the NWCRT, Elizabeth passed away earlier this year
- Recognized for her work - integral to the roundtable and the development of WUMP
- Elizabeth excelled in organizing, following up & following through, and keeping people accountable
- She was interested in her community and compassionate, and she is sorely missed

6:55 - 7:10 pm Katherine Gizikoff Presentation about WUMP (Water Use Management Plan)

- A strategic plan for the Nicola Watershed was developed by the government in the 1980s but WUMP was community-driven (unique) and thus widely recognized
- In 2004, the Nicola River was declared the most endangered river in BC and as a result, the first meeting for WUMP was held in October 2004 due to community concern
- The purpose of the initial meeting was to have an active part in charting our water future and became the kick-off for the WUMP project
- Vision + Mission statements included to guide sustainable use and supply of quality water for generations to come
- Phase 1 2005 - Confirmation of issues
- Phase 2 2006-2007 - Funding, studies, pilot project, options, analysis
- Phase 3 2008-2009 - Plan evaluation and approval with feedback, open houses, and consultants
- Phase 4 2010 - Plan submitted (implementation)
- 125 people were involved in this community-driven process, a multi-stakeholder committee
- Funding and in-kind support provided by regional and government agencies, private donors, and organizations
- Approximately \$340,000.00 was spent on technical studies - substantial various studies on water demand, governance models and options, fish flow studies, and water budget analysis; 2020 and 2050 water use projections were created
- 37 policy recommendations (available here: <https://www.nwcrt.ca/water-use-management/>) in 5 main categories: water quantity, water quality, environment, management, learning
- WUMP Implementation - formally requested in 2008; 2010 submitted again. In 2011 the government replied that it cannot be legislated - many recommendations are however in use

Katherine Gizikoff ended her presentation by stating that public forums are very important and need to continue, in the interest of sharing information and transparency.

7:10 - 7:20 pm John Anderson presented an overview of the Nicola Watershed

- The water in the Nicola watershed comes from snow, runoff, and rainfall
- Precipitation changes rivers, lakes, aquifers
- Aquifers: confined aquifers don't interact with other groundwater, unconfined aquifers interact with river flows and groundwater
- The City of Merritt has two main wells, both affected by the Nicola and Coldwater rivers
- Water storage like dams can be used to recharge aquifers
- Dams can be human-made or made by nature such as wetlands; they are very important for natural storage levels and any work on the landscape has a big impact on the watershed
- The biggest challenge is the distribution - from Spring runoff to lower for longer stream levels; how we manage and use water is important

7:20 - 7:40 pm breakout discussion sessions at community tables

- 10 tables total, with eight participants including one facilitator
- Each table appoints a scribe and a presenter
- Each facilitator presents two questions for discussion
- Participants answer the two questions and record/present any additional questions that arise during the discussion

7:40 - 8:00 pm break

8:00 - 8:30 pm Presentation of Discussion outcomes (see separate document)

8:30 - 8:35 pm John Parks (Nicola Ranch) presented about co-managing the Clapperton Water System with Lower Nicola Indian Band - Success Story

- After the 2017 flood, the Clapperton Water System needed to be rebuilt and a consultation process began with the Lower Nicola Band after 105 years of co-management of the water system
- First Nations input has grown significantly in a new era of co-management
- Water values are similar despite very different uses for the water
- 2 pillars of co-management: both the ranch and the band need confidence & assurance, and each party needs to be heard
- Timing of water releases with a common understanding has yielded great results
- The next phase of co-management will be to obtain a conservation water license
- There is a need to balance the ecosystem and irrigation needs (for food production)
- Learning outcome: we need to store more water

8:35 - 8:45 pm Tom Willms presented about Beaver Dam Analogues - Success Story

- Pre-colonial rivers were very different from today's rivers (many channels, beaver dams) - there has been a loss of beaver habitat
- Beavers are ecosystem engineers, nature's flood managers
- Beaver dams increase watershed sponginess and are natural fire breaks

- BC's first BDA (Beaver Dam Analogue - man-made beaver dam) Project (partnership w/ Nlaka'pamux NAtion) in Kane Valley in 2021 has yielded encouraging results

8:45 - 9:05 pm Closing Circle

All attendees were invited to share their impressions of the public forum. There was a consensus that it was a wonderful event with a great sense of community. Other remarks included: great rapport, great discussions and conversations, great respect, a strong sense of place, and more interest in learning about demand and water storage.

The Public Forum ended at 9:05 pm.