

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:00PM ON TUESDAY JULY 28

Strategy for climate, resource and community resilience

Introduction

“Resilience” has emerged as a buzzword in recent months, as COVID-19 has revealed our vulnerability to crises. Resilience is the capacity to recover from challenges. It means ensuring that people have the resources to live healthy lives even through hard times, and that they can get back on their feet quickly when a crisis abates.

Resilience is not a new concept to the B.C. Greens. In fact, it is one of the most commonly used words in our 2017 platform. This is because we recognize that governments need to plan beyond a four-year election cycle. We have so many challenges - income insecurity, the affordability crisis, and climate change - that require long-term planning. Resilience will not only serve as a defensive mechanism in times of crisis, but it will also enable us to achieve greater levels of success in the good times.

Improving resilience is also crucial to addressing inequality. We have seen from COVID-19 how certain groups like women and youth feel the brunt of a crisis first and hardest. In B.C., our history of colonialism has meant that our resources have not adequately benefitted First Nations people. Forestry-dependent communities have seen job losses despite increased harvest levels. Many B.C. communities face threats to their drinking water from clear-cut logging, industrial activity, and aging infrastructure.

Climate change is also threatening our communities in myriad ways, including wildfires, drought, sea level rise, and flooding. Like any crisis, these impacts will disproportionately affect the most vulnerable among us. While we need to do everything we can to limit increases in global warming, sadly inaction by previous and current governments means that the earth has already warmed by 1 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels, with Canada warming nearly twice as fast as the global average. We need plans to adapt to climate change that is already underway.

By taking action now, we can make ourselves resilient to the inevitable changes we will experience in coming years, while also creating jobs and opportunities for British Columbians. We can make sure we are managing our resources sustainably and responsibly so that our communities derive maximum value from them now, and British Columbians can derive benefits and security from them for generations to come.

Sonia Furstenau

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Platform

The goal: Establish a resilient province where all people are safe, secure and healthy in times of crisis, and can thrive once we're out of them.

1. Create a Resilient B.C. Strategy to:
 - Protect communities from wildfires and flooding through landscape level, ecologically-centred, forest management and fuel treatment projects.
 - Build capacity in communities at risk of extreme weather events and natural disasters and to support effective disaster response and recovery.
 - Diversify fuel sources in rural communities to assist with transition off of diesel generators to clean tech through transition programs.
 - Create jobs throughout the province by investing in ecological and biodiversity protection programs.

2. Recognize that access to clean water is a human right and ensure B.C. communities have long-term, reliable, and equitable access to clean water by:
 - Creating a dedicated Watershed Security Fund.
 - Including watersheds as part of an ecosystem-based management approach to development.
 - Working with local governments, school districts and other stakeholders to upgrade municipal infrastructure and replace household pipes through grants and incentives.
 - Exploring science-based solutions to reduce water acidity.

3. Create a Food Secure B.C. strategy to make B.C. agriculture more climate resilient, improve local food security and support agricultural producers.

4. Consult with industry, labour and stakeholders to ensure the benefits of B.C. resource flow to local communities by directly sharing more resource revenues with local First Nations, municipalities, and regional districts.

5. Involve First Nations, municipalities, and regional districts as partners in a broader area-based land use planning process.

6. Further our investment in value-added wood-based industries through research funding and access to fibre.

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7. Explore policies to increase community forests.
8. Immediately halt logging of old-growth forests that are very high risk from a biodiversity perspective.

Background and policy research

2017 and 2018 set records for B.C.'s worst-ever forest fire seasons, with the province spending over a billion dollars to fight over those two smoke-filled summers, many times more than what we set aside in our provincial budget.¹ In addition to wildfires, B.C. communities face risks like drought, flooding and sea level rise. A 2019 government risk assessment rates 11 out of 15 of potential climate change-related events as potentially "catastrophic" by 2050.²

Due to inaction by previous governments and the continued subsidization of fossil fuels by current ones, the world has already warmed more than 1 degree Celsius above industrial levels. Canada is warming at twice the global rate, with 1.7 degrees of warming already having occurred.³ This means that some climate change is inevitable. While we need to do everything we can to prevent additional warming, we also need to proactively adapt to these changes. Doing so before we are in crisis will mean we are able to keep costs down in the medium and long-term.

In many cases, we can make smart investments that will serve as bulwarks against these changes. We can build dikes and seawalls, and we can invest in more sustainable forest management practices that will make our forests less vulnerable to fires. These initiatives will also create good paying, sustainable jobs, especially in rural communities where they are most needed.

As Leader, I would develop a Resilient B.C. Strategy to protect communities from wildfires and flooding through landscape level, ecologically-centred, forest management and fuel treatment projects. This could include planting (or encouraging) deciduous trees, thinning, limbing, piling and burning, and grazing. I would also work to build capacity in communities at risk of extreme weather events and natural disasters and to support effective disaster response and recovery, and diversify fuel sources in rural communities to assist with transition off of diesel generators to cleantech through a lease to own cleantech transition program.

I would also push for funding for ecological conservation and biodiversity projects. The evidence shows that protecting and improving biodiversity has positive impacts on the health of our ecosystems and on human health. In fact, the United Nations Secretary General recently highlighted how conservation efforts can help prevent crises like COVID-19, saying: "COVID-19

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<https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2019/05/13/what-you-need-to-know-about-bcs-2019-wildfire-season-so-far.html>

² <https://globalnews.ca/news/5713852/bc-climate-change-risk-report/>

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-47754189>

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- which emanated from the wild - has shown how human health is intimately connected with our relationship to the natural world. As we encroach on nature and deplete vital habitats, increasing numbers of species are at risk. That includes humanity and the future we want.⁴ Investing in projects that will protect biodiversity and improve ecological conservation can also create jobs. This is an idea that is being advocated by many different BC groups, and has been done in BC before through past programs like the Conservation Corps, which created work for recent graduates and students.⁵

Another challenge facing many B.C. communities is a lack of or threatened access to clean drinking water. In the former case, many British Columbians are facing unsafe levels of heavy metals in their drinking water due to aging infrastructure. Most concerning, this includes lead in many of our schools. As Leader, I would work with local governments, school districts and other stakeholders to upgrade municipal infrastructure and replace household pipes through grants and incentives, and explore science-based solutions to reduce water acidity.⁶

In the latter case, many communities are facing threats to their only source of drinking water due to logging and other industrial activities. This is an issue near and dear to my heart due to what happened in my community of Shawnigan Lake, where the province awarded a permit for a mining company to dump contaminated soil at the headwaters of our drinking watershed. I know firsthand what it feels like to have a resource so vital to your day-to-day survival threatened due to decisions being made at the provincial level that do not put the health, safety and economic viability of local communities first. We need to get back to provincial-level decision making that puts people, not special interests, wealthy donors, or big corporations first.

The province must recognize that access to clean water is a human right and ensure that all B.C. communities have long-term, reliable and equitable access to clean water. As Leader, I would take action by creating a dedicated Watershed Security Fund and including watersheds as part of an ecosystem-based management approach to development.

COVID-19 has also raised the issue of local supply chains and food security. Even before the pandemic, food insecurity was experienced by four million people in Canada, and “disproportionately by Indigenous, racialized and marginalized communities.”⁷ Currently, B.C. gets approximately 70% of its fresh produce from California, which is facing major climate threats like wildfire and drought. As California increasingly experiences these disasters, the cost of our produce goes up.⁸ B.C. is also experiencing the impacts of climate change, but we can help our agricultural producers adapt by investing in research and development. B.C. has

⁴ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1064752>

⁵ <https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hfd/library/documents/bib96789.pdf>

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<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/2019/11/22/furstenau-lead-worries-in-water-should-be-a-wake-up-call-for-us-all.html>

⁷ <https://foodsecurecanada.org/first-national-food-policy-for-canada>

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<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/cost-of-fruit-and-veg-rising-in-b-c-due-to-california-drought-1.2692682>

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significant agricultural lands that can be harnessed to improve local food security, while also creating economic opportunities for British Columbians.

There has been some good work done on this file under the current minority government, but we are just scratching the surface of our potential. As Leader, I would create a Food Secure B.C. strategy to make B.C. agriculture more climate resilient, improve local food security and support agricultural producers. Washington Governor Jay Inslee's excellent Evergreen Action Plan outlines some compelling, evidence-based policies that could work here in B.C. as well. Possible policies from Inslee's Plan that we should explore include incentives for cover cropping, crop rotation and rotational grazing, investments in waste management and increased funding for research and development.⁹ Other policies could include incentives to reduce high-emissions inputs and expanding the Buy BC Program. These ideas, along with many other interesting ones, were recently proposed by Farm Folk City Folk, a diverse group of people working on improving local food and sustainable agriculture in B.C.¹⁰

As we look for new opportunities like agriculture, we need to rethink our management of the resources that have long served as the bedrock of our economy. B.C.'s forestry industry is in crisis as mills close in communities that depend on them for their survival. What is most alarming about the loss of forestry jobs in B.C. is that it has come even as we have harvested more wood, BC forestry employment declined from nearly 100,000 jobs in 2000 to about 50,000 jobs in 2017 with no correlation to annual harvest levels.¹¹ We are harvesting more wood but are seeing fewer benefits. The profits from our forestry industry have increasingly been flowing to big, multinational companies rather than to our local communities. This has to stop.

There are policies that will make a difference. As Leader, I would consult with industry, labour and stakeholders to ensure the benefits of B.C. resource flow to local communities by directly sharing more resource revenues with local First Nations, municipalities, and regional districts. There is currently one revenue-sharing agreement being negotiated between the provincial government and northern local governments.¹² This style of agreement should become the norm for communities across the province. I would also further provincial investment in value-added wood based industries, which create sustainable, well-paying jobs by harnessing our skilled workforce potential and entrepreneurs' good ideas, through research funding and access to fibre.

Directly sharing resource revenues with First Nations is a crucial component of advancing reconciliation. Revenue sharing agreements with local governments should not inhibit individual financial agreements between the province and First Nations, nor are they a replacement for cooperative management agreements. Much of B.C. is on unceded territories and our history of expropriating resources from First Nations territories is part of our racist history of colonialism. To advance reconciliation and combat systemic racism, we need to

⁹ <https://medium.com/@sam.t.ricketts/evergreen-action-plan-3f705ecb500a>

¹⁰ <https://www.farmfolkcityfolk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Open-Letter.pdf>

¹¹ <https://theyee.ca/Analysis/2019/10/07/Political-Amnesia-Fall-Of-BC-Timber/>

¹²

<https://www.terracestandard.com/news/province-commits-to-negotiating-revenue-sharing-agreement-with-northwest-b-c-municipalities/>

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ensure First Nations are treated as equal partners in resource development. As such, as Leader, I would involve First Nations, as well as municipalities and regional districts, as partners in a broader area-based land use planning process.

Additionally, I would explore policies to expand community forests. Community forests are an emerging model where local communities manage the land using the three pillars of sustainable development: social, ecological, and economic sustainability.¹³ By investing more in community forests, we can ensure the benefits of our wood fibre stays in local communities, while also looking after our forest ecosystems.

Finally, I would continue the BC Green prioritization of protecting old growth forests. As part of my work as an MLA, I have called for a moratorium on the logging of old growth on Vancouver Island.¹⁴ Since my colleague Adam Olsen and I worked on that policy, new research has surfaced that suggests just 3% of B.C.'s remaining forests are productive old growth that can support large trees. They propose an immediate halt to logging in ecosystems with less than 10% of large trees remaining. These figures are alarming, and we need to take immediate action if we want to protect the ecological, economic and cultural value of our old growth. As Leader, I would follow the advice of scientists and immediately halt logging of old-growth forests that are at critically low levels.¹⁵

¹³ <https://bccfa.ca/what-is-community-forestry/>

¹⁴ https://www.bcgreens.ca/forestry_solutions

¹⁵ <https://veridianecological.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/bcs-old-growth-forest-report-web.pdf>