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ENVIRONMENTAL
STEWARDSHIP
INITIATIVE

ESI

Environmental Stewardship Initiative

The Environmental Stewardship Initiative (ESI) is an innovative form of collaboration and partnership between the Province, First Nations and industry designed to produce high-quality, accessible and trusted environmental information. Projects are designed to focus on:

- Ecosystem assessment and monitoring;
- Ecosystem restoration and enhancement;
- Ecosystem research and knowledge exchange; and
- Stewardship education and training.

To date, representatives from approximately 30 First Nations, the natural gas industry, and the federal and provincial governments have participated in meetings and workshops to develop regional environmental stewardship projects and governance structures.

ESI working groups continue to implement demonstration projects and work on collaborative governance to ensure a positive environmental legacy in B.C.

North Coast Cumulative Effects Project

The North Coast Regional Stewardship Forum is implementing two projects in the region – the Cumulative Effects Project and the Ecosystem Restoration Project.

The North Coast Cumulative Effects Project focuses initial efforts on three key values including aquatic habitat – estuary, access to resources, and salmon.

The project has developed in close collaboration with the Marine Planning Partnership (MaPP) North Coast sub-region, which is another partnership between the Province and member First Nations implementing marine use plans for B.C.'s North Pacific Coast.

Field work on the North Coast Cumulative Effects Project was initiated during the summer of 2017 and focused on water

quality, sediment chemistry, bivalve tissue chemistry, and eelgrass condition and extent. Field work is planned to continue this summer, with the addition of monitoring of several more estuary health related components and will provide training and employment opportunities for technical staff from the participating First Nations.

The ongoing field work will provide data to establish protocols to assess the current condition and cumulative effects on the values and identify areas for continued assessment and monitoring.

“One of the reasons the North Coast Cumulative Effects Project has been effective is the willingness to collaborate between First Nations and Provincial Government initiatives such as the

Environmental Stewardship Initiative and Marine Plan Partnership,” said Bruce Watkinson, fisheries manager and marine program co-ordinator for the Gitxaala Nation.

“ESI is a fascinating venue for Kitselas First Nation to learn, share and collaborate with our neighbours while providing a platform for our nation to preserve and protect Kitselas lands and resources. I believe that initiatives such as these are the start of a necessary exploration into modern mechanisms that empower Kitselas and other First Nations and facilitates a new era of indigenous self-governance,” said Chris Apps, director with the Kitselas First Nation Land and Resources Department.



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Renewing the Commitment to Collaboration

In the Spring of 2018, the participating First Nations leadership and Provincial ministers endorsed an extension until March 2021 of enabling agreements for the Environmental Stewardship Initiative (ESI) in the North Coast, Skeena, Omineca, and Northeast regions.

Each enabling agreement is unique and sets out the scope, purpose and objectives of each of the ESI demonstration projects, and how the parties will work together in a shared decision-making model.

ESI is a true collaboration between 30 First Nations and the Province in the north areas of British Columbia. It is focused on generating trusted data through collaborative design of cumulative effects assessment and monitoring of key values according to the priorities jointly identified in each area. The methods being developed

and the resulting information incorporate Indigenous perspectives and traditional ecological knowledge alongside western science.

Within the collaborative ESI model, every decision around project design, governance, budget, results and management recommendations is made jointly by the participating First Nations and the Province. A Governance Working Group, with representation from all the parties, is developing overarching ESI governance principles, guidance and operating structure.

ESI provides capacity and support for Indigenous communities to be partners in the stewardship of their territories.

To date, approximately \$11 million has been expended in support of ESI projects out of a total allocation of \$30 million.



North Coast Region

The Environmental Stewardship Initiative (ESI) North Coast Regional Stewardship Forum (NC RSF) has developed two projects that support both habitat restoration projects on the landbase and longer-term value based assessment and monitoring of cumulative effects within the traditional territories of the six participating North Coast Nations: Kitsumkalum, Kitselas, Metlakatla, Haisla, Gitxaala, and Gitga'at:

- ◇ The North Coast Ecosystem Restoration Project will be delivered through Nation-led Indigenous Stewardship Projects (ISP) with collaboration occurring through shared data, lessons learned, methodologies, and site visits. Project proposals must meet jointly developed criteria that have been endorsed by the NC RSF.
- ◇ The North Coast Cumulative Effects Project is continuing work on the assessment and monitoring of three key values: aquatic habitat—estuary, salmon, and access to resources. A field monitoring program on the aquatic habitat—estuary value took place during the Summer of 2017 and is under development for Summer 2018 within the geographic scope of the Skeena River estuary. Concurrently, the team is developing a cumulative effects assessment protocol for the aquatic habitat- estuary value. The NC RSF recently approved objectives for the access to resources and salmon values and the team has started working toward draft conceptual models and indicator development.

Moving Forward

North Coast ESI is advancing towards developing cumulative effects protocols for current condition and cumulative assessments on the three key values and working towards implementing ecosystem restoration projects across the region.

Omineca Region

The Omineca ESI Demonstration Project is changing the way B.C. and the Carrier Sekani First Nations (CSFNs) talk about land and resource stewardship issues.

“The process is great for information sharing and building the level of trust. And we are finally working on cumulative effects” (Bev Boerson, Saikuz First Nation).

The project team has been building an understanding of the current state of the CSFN's territories and the broader Omineca region, based on a set of priority values that CSFN and B.C. have defined collaboratively. These values are moose, forest biodiversity and watersheds. The indicators of these values have been used to assess their current state and the cumulative effects of natural and development-related disturbance.

A series of future state models have been created that illustrate options for changes to resource management and their potential implications. These models are Informing engagement with resource sector proponents.

Moving Forward

Over the next year the project team will be engaging with communities, resource proponents and the public to scope the potential for broader resource planning that can address priority Omineca ESI values and how the values may interface with caribou recovery pressures.

Skeena Region

Skeena First Nations and the Province, through the creation of the Skeena Sustainability Assessment Forum (SSAF), are collaboratively establishing a process for collecting trusted data on five key environmental values: medicinal plants, grizzly bear, fish and fish habitat, moose, and wetlands.

The Skeena ESI Nations are designing and implementing environmental assessment and monitoring protocols on the identified values. The resulting data will support informed and trusted resource management decisions, operational guidance, restoration and enhancement opportunities in the region.

Participating First Nations include Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs, Gitksan Nation, Lake Babine Nation, Witset First Nation, Nee Tahi Buhn Band, Office of the Wet'suwet'en (representing Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs), Hagwilget Village Council, Skin Tyee Nation, and Wet'suwet'en First Nation.

The highlight of the past year for the SSAF was implementation of a training program for Indigenous participants, completion of a five year plan, and implementation of expert workshops held in November and December 2017 on four of the values. The expert workshops were designed to gain a common understanding of the key factors influencing the state of each value from a scientific perspective, informed by Indigenous perspectives and traditional knowledge, and are an important step forward in prioritizing the indicators and protocols to use for each value. Participants in the workshops included SSAF's Science and Technical Committee, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers from all SSAF Nations, provincial staff, and experts from the scientific community including experts from Alaska, British Columbia, Oregon and Alberta.

Moving Forward

“I support ESI because of its collaborative nature; consensus-based decision-making, and strong environmental focus... We can use ESI as a foundation for other G2G work in the Skeena region around EA reform, consent based protocols and regional strategic environmental assessments” (Tara Marsden, Wilp Sustainability Director, Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs).

Moving forward the SSAF is building on the work from the expert workshops, and is preparing to produce a State of Values Report which will include the status and trends for each of the five values based on Indigenous perspectives.

Northeast Region

The Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment (RSEA) agreement between the Province and seven Treaty 8 First Nations (Blueberry River, Doig River, Halfway River, Prophet River, Saulteau, West Moberly and McLeod Lake) laid the groundwork for ESI project development in the Northeast region.

The RSEA team is assessing the cumulative effects of natural resource development activities on values associated with the practice of Treaty 8 rights. The identified values for the project are: old forest/ forest biodiversity, water, moose, peaceful enjoyment and environmental livelihoods.

The project has identified a study area near and overlaying the Montney shale gas basin and anticipates the results of the assessment to inform and recommend management responses.

Moving Forward

Building on the completed assessments for key values, scenario analysis modelling is under development. Scenario analysis will test the response of values and the development interests of the parties to various forecast scenarios. This analysis will support the development of management recommendations which may be desired for the optimization of the practice of Treaty 8 rights with resource development on the land base.



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