

# 2023 ANNUAL STEWARDSHIP FORUMS GATHERING

Meeting Summary



April 4-5, 2023; Vancouver, British Columbia

## Executive Summary

The 2023 Annual Stewardship Forums Gathering was a two-day conference on April 4-5 2023 that was held on the traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations at the Coast Coal Harbour Hotel in Vancouver, British Columbia. It was attended by approximately 125 representatives involved in collaborative stewardship, including First Nations, Indigenous organizations, and provincial ministries. Objectives of the Gathering were to celebrate the work accomplished through Forums and the new long-term mandate for the collaborative stewardship model, confirm the vision moving forward, and determine next steps for the co-developed Recommendations for Long-term Collaborative Stewardship (Joint Recommendations) that were endorsed as part of the mandate. The first day of the Gathering focused on regional Forum presentations and concluded with a reception and performance by the Coastal Wolf Pack Dancers, while the second day focused on break-out groups to identify next steps for implementation of the Joint Recommendations. Information from the breakout sessions was compiled and high-level common themes were identified in a preliminary analysis. It is recommended that further analysis be collaborative, in alignment with Forums operating as a partnership.

## Introduction

On April 4 and 5, 2023, approximately 125 Indigenous and provincial partners involved in regional collaborative stewardship Forums, including those initiated through the Environmental Stewardship Initiative (ESI) and Collaborative Stewardship Framework (CSF), gathered on the traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations at the Coast Coal Harbour Hotel in Vancouver, B.C. for the 2023 Annual Stewardship Forums Gathering (the Gathering).

The Gathering provided an opportunity to celebrate the collaborative work accomplished through ESI and CSF to date, and the renewed long-term mandate designed and developed in partnership with Nation and provincial representatives from the Forums. Under this mandate, ESI and CSF Forums were brought together under the Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Framework (CISF), and this event was the first that allowed ESI and CSF to come together on a broad scale. The Gathering was also an opportunity to look forwards and confirm the vision for regional collaborative stewardship and explore how products generated through Forums are informing shared decisions and co-management. A final focus of the Gathering was on identifying the next steps to implement the co-developed Recommendations for Long-term Collaborative Stewardship (Joint Recommendations) put forward by the Governance Working Group Executive (GWGE) and endorsed by the Environment and Land Use Committee (ELUC) as part of the renewed mandate.

The organizers would like to thank the host Nations, and everyone who attended and helped contribute to the success of the conference, which brought together many valuable perspectives and insights into the future vision and direction of the collaborative stewardship model. A live graphic recording of the event was captured by Sam Bradd of Drawing Change, and the resulting images are included in this summary document.



# Opening Remarks

Dan George of Four Directions Management Services set the tone for the Gathering by providing an overview of the objectives and rules of engagement. Opening remarks began with a pre-recorded message from Honourable Josie Osborne, Minister of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation and a live broadcast from Honourable George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy. The ministers discussed the importance of Forums for effectively co-managing the lands, preserving values that are important to all of us, and helping to ensure we are learning from the past.

Hereditary Chief Malii (Glen Williams) of Gitanyow, Hereditary Chief Angie Bailey of Aitchelitz First Nation, and Councillor Brian Holmes of the Upper Nicola Band also provided opening remarks. They discussed: the progress of Forums in recent years and since inception; the value of trusted relationships and coming together with shared hearts and minds; and the importance of Forum outputs in protecting resources for future generations.

Lisa Helmer, Executive Director for the Resource Stewardship Branch within the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (WLRS) thanked everyone for attending the conference and highlighted the progress of collaborative stewardship Forums over the years as well as the journey ahead.

Common threads of these opening remarks included an acknowledgement of the true partnership between First Nations and the Province, the progress made to date, and the importance of the collaborative stewardship model to protect resources now and in the future.

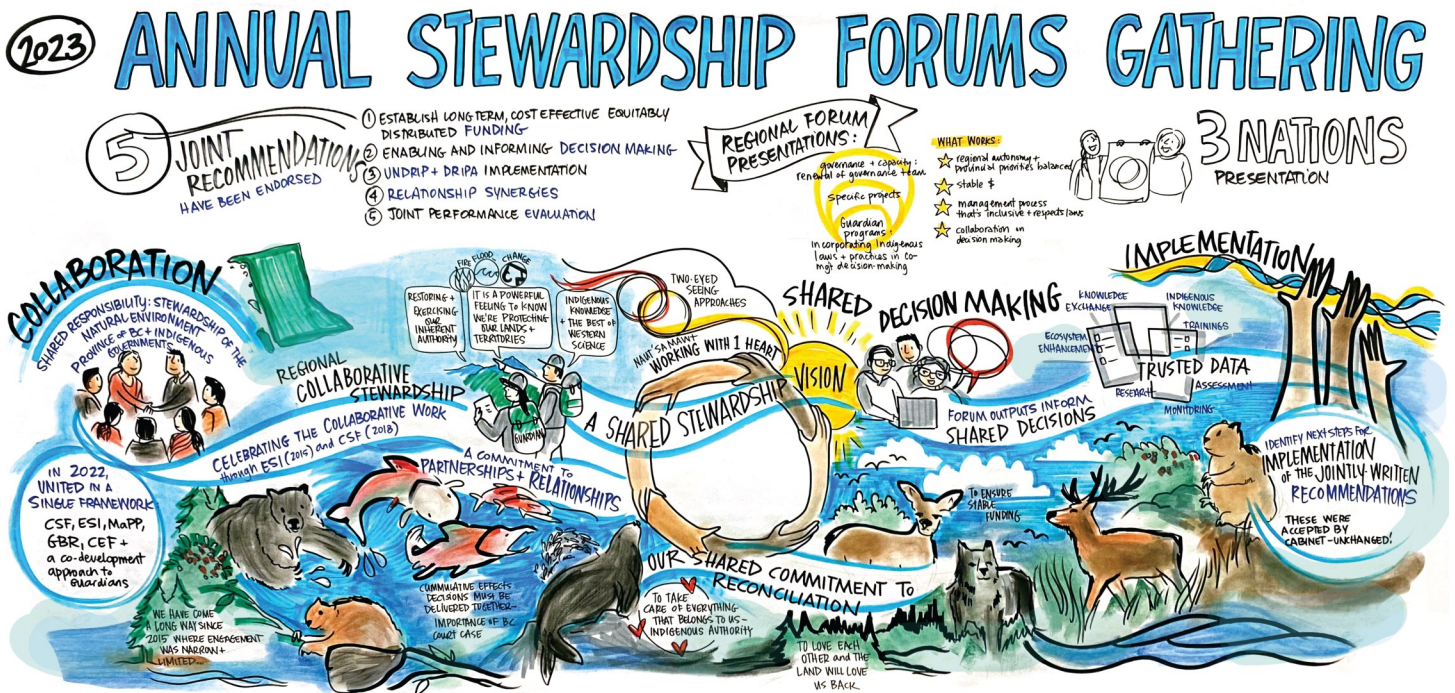


Image: Opening Remarks and Start of Regional Forum Presentations

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# Regional Forum Presentations

The Gathering encouraged information sharing among Environmental Stewardship Initiative (ESI) and Collaborative Stewardship Framework (CSF) regional Forums and associated projects. The regional Forum presentations on the first day of the Gathering demonstrated the substantial work that has been underway for years, while emphasizing the diversity of projects and importance of the products of Forum work and established relationships. Each presentation was followed by a question-and-answer session that provided the opportunity for further engagement between the participants. Presentations and presenters were:

- **3 Nations-BC Collaborative Stewardship Forum:** Feddie Louie (Tahltan, 3 Nations Society), Anne-Marie Roberts (WLRs)
- **Carrier Sekani First Nations Environmental Stewardship Initiative:** Cassandra Turbide (Saik'uz First Nation), Rosemarie Sam (Nak'azdli Whut'en), Keri Dresen (WLRs)
- **Ktunaxa-BC Forum:** Craig Paskin (Ktunaxa Nation Council)
- **Liard Collaborative Stewardship Forum:** Lana Lowe (Fort Nelson First Nation), Dustin Twin (Prophet River First Nation)
- **Nicola Watershed Governance Partnership:** Councillor Brian Holmes (Upper Nicola), Eric Valdal (WLRs)
- **North Coast Cumulative Effects Program:** Maya Paul (North Coast-Skeena First Nations Stewardship Society), Alli Morrison (WLRs)
- **Southern Dakelh Nation Alliance Forum:** Nobu Suzuki (Southern Dakelh Nation Alliance)
- **Tsay Keh Dene Nation Environmental Stewardship Initiative Forum:** Sean Rapai (Tsay Keh Dene Nation, Chu Cho Environmental), Jill Irwin (WLRs); Also see [informational video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6akfUI4iHk) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6akfUI4iHk) about TKDN ESI prepared by Chu Cho Environmental
- **Skeena Sustainability Assessment Forum:** Megan Spooner (Gitanyow), Dallas Nikal (Witset), Sean Mitchell (WLRs)
- **S'ólh Téméxw Stewardship Alliance BC Collaborative Stewardship Forum:** Dave Schaepe (S'ólh Téméxw Stewardship Alliance), Carissa Logue (Ministry of Forests)

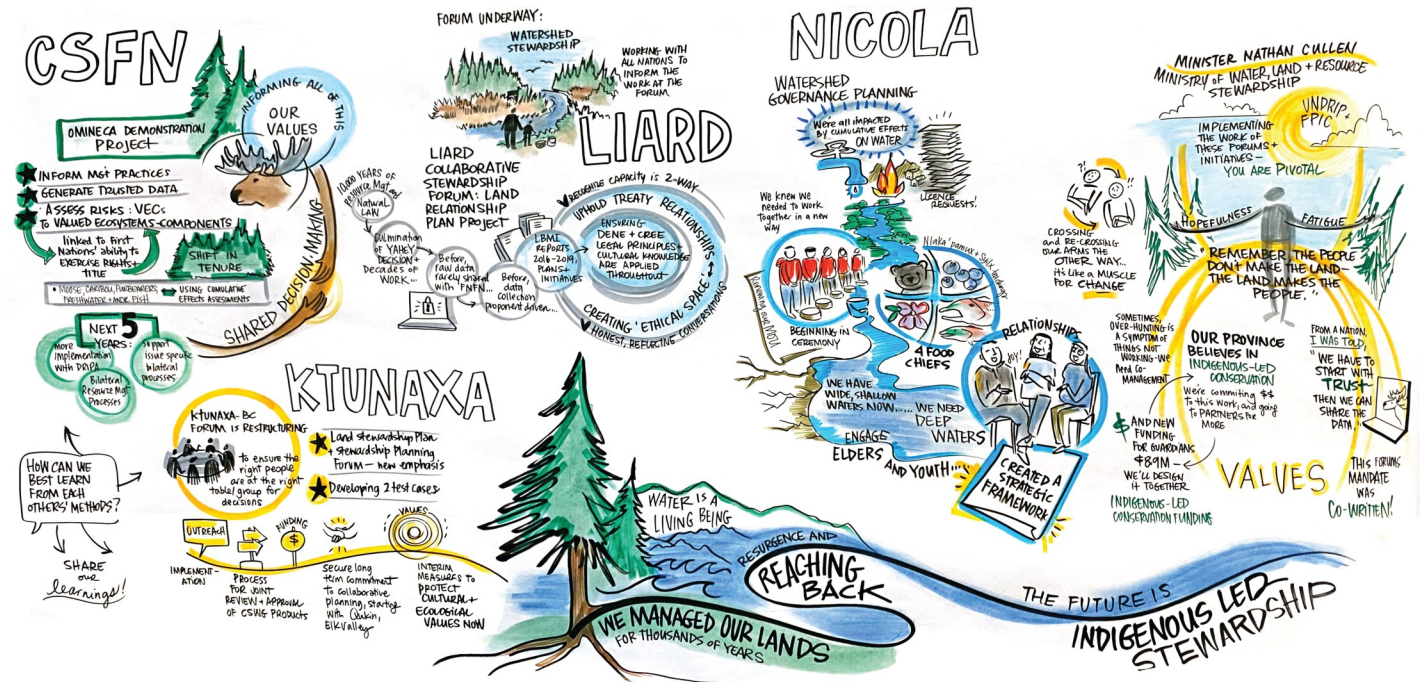


Image: Regional Forum Presentations

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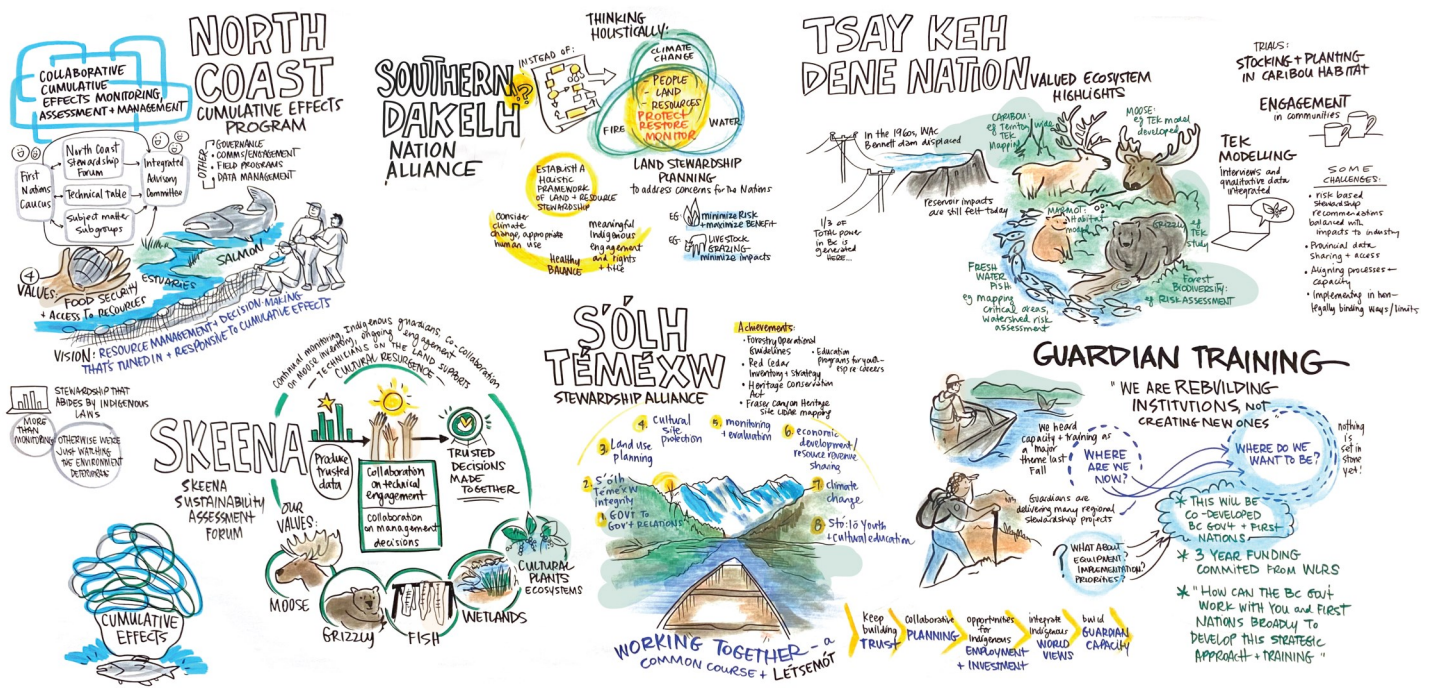


Image: Regional Forum Presentations and Guardians Presentation

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## Keynote Speaker: Honourable Nathan Cullen

Honourable Nathan Cullen, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, provided a keynote speech over lunch on the first day. He discussed the importance of working through change and highlighted the opportunity ahead for Forums to influence decisions, underscoring the valuable and innovative material collaboratively developed by First Nations and the Province. He acknowledged that funding for Forums for fiscal year 2023-2024 was less than what was requested but emphasized the benefit of now having base funding that can be spent immediately. The renewed long-term mandate for the Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Framework also includes an expanded Cumulative Effects Framework (CEF) and a co-developed approach to Guardians programs, reflecting the fact that CEF, regional Forums, and Guardians have a shared focus on stewardship and co-management. The Minister concluded his speech by announcing an investment of \$8.9M over the next three years for the Guardians and Stewardship Training Initiative (<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2023WLR0009-000444>). He emphasized that the initiative will be regionally specific and collaboratively developed.

## Collaborative Approach to Guardians

Alanya Smith, Executive Director of the Reconciliation and Natural Resource Sector Policy Division of the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship followed Minister Cullen’s announcement with a presentation about the Guardians and Stewardship Training Initiative. She explained that the term *Guardians* is used to describe First Nations-led initiatives that fall within a spectrum of stewardship activities such as safety, compliance, monitoring, or cultural activities on lands and waters. *(continued on P 6)*

(continued from P 5) The investment announced by Minister Cullen will be used to co-develop a training initiative in partnership with First Nations, to support Guardians activities on a community level. This initiative is in the early stages and it is meant to support, not replace, Guardians activities and programs that already exist. Participants were given a two-page hand-out about the announcement and were encouraged to reach out to Alanya Smith to engage with the Province in a Guardians Advisory Working Group.

## Cultural Performance

The first day of the Gathering concluded with a reception and cultural performance by the Coastal Wolf Pack Dancers.



*Image (above): Minister Cullen with the Guardians representatives who attended the Gathering*



*Image (left): Coastal Wolf Pack Dancers performing during the reception.*

## Breakout Sessions

The second day of the Gathering included breakout sessions that focused on the implementation of the endorsed Joint Recommendations co-developed by First Nations and provincial representatives in 2021. The five recommendations, each with accompanying sub-recommendations, provide broad guidance for the effective functioning of Forums in future. Eight breakout groups discussed and identified next steps for implementation of the recommendations, and then reported out to the broader group on one proposed action for each of the five recommendations. A graphical overview of this process was captured and is shown on the following page. The eight break out groups also produced notes that constituted the raw data from these sessions.



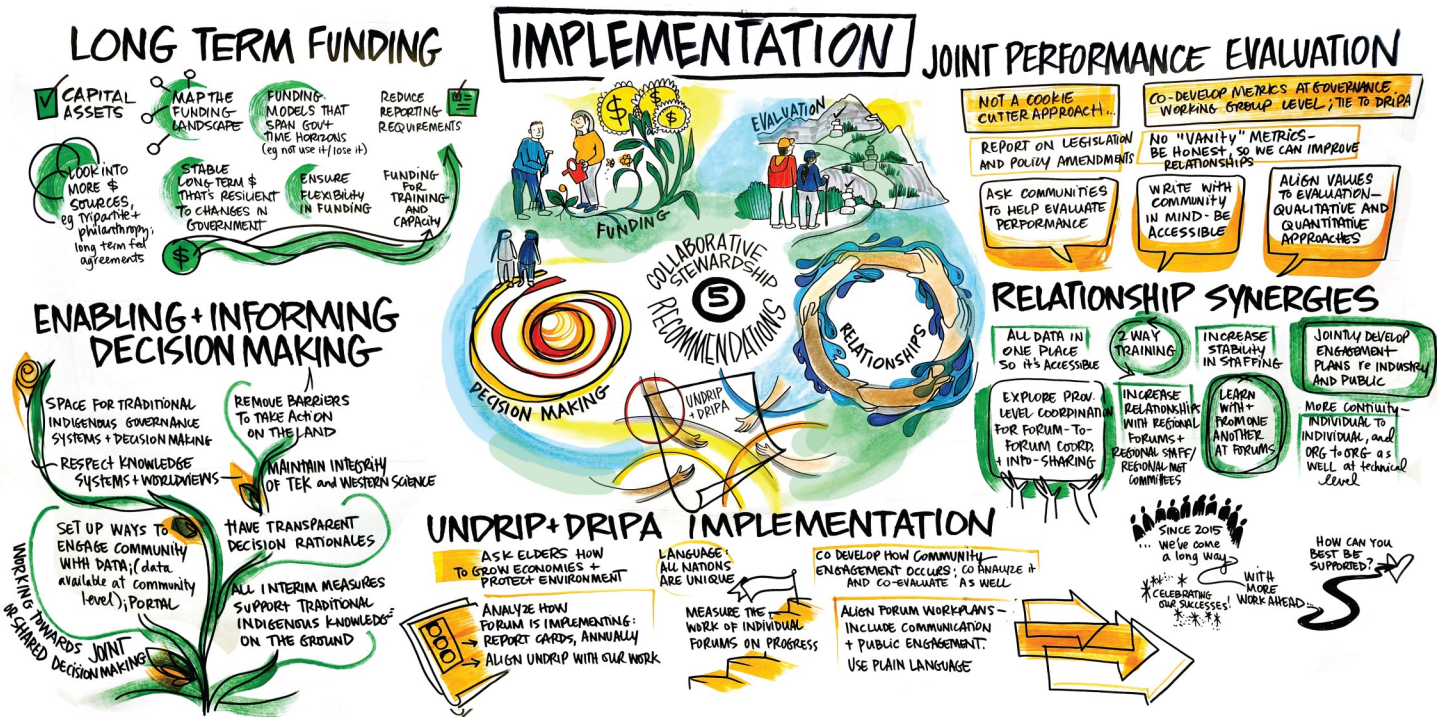


Image: Results of the Breakout Sessions

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Cursory analysis of the raw data provided by the break-out groups revealed recurring themes that spanned multiple recommendations. Some examples of points raised under these recurring themes were:

### Policy

Increase provincial policy coordination and reduce administrative burden for Forums; Shift to a longer-term focus and move away from being constrained to fiscal cycles and changing governments; Explore alternative funding options; Establish interim measures for decision-making to address immediate issues; Pursue legislative changes towards co-governance in partnership with First Nations; Create alignment with value systems and Indigenous laws; Co-evaluate how individual Forums are implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); leverage Regional Management Committees.

### Communication & Training

Increase communication that uses plain language; Increase engagement with First Nations communities, including youth and elders; Create dedicated, centralized communication platform(s); Increase coordination among provincial ministries; Develop more workshops and two-way training; Focus on less but more meaningful engagement (in communities, out on the land); Create opportunities for Forums to meet in person; Build space to reflect on lessons learned; Define clear objectives within Forums.

### Trust & Continuity

Foster trust by creating ethical space, shared accountability, mutual learning, and creating consistency in relationships; Create solutions to staff turnover; Focus on building capacity internal to Forums with a long-term focus.

### Data Management

Create an integrated, flexible and multi-use decision support tool; Co-design a data monitoring framework; Invest in data management capacity for First Nations; Define data ownership.

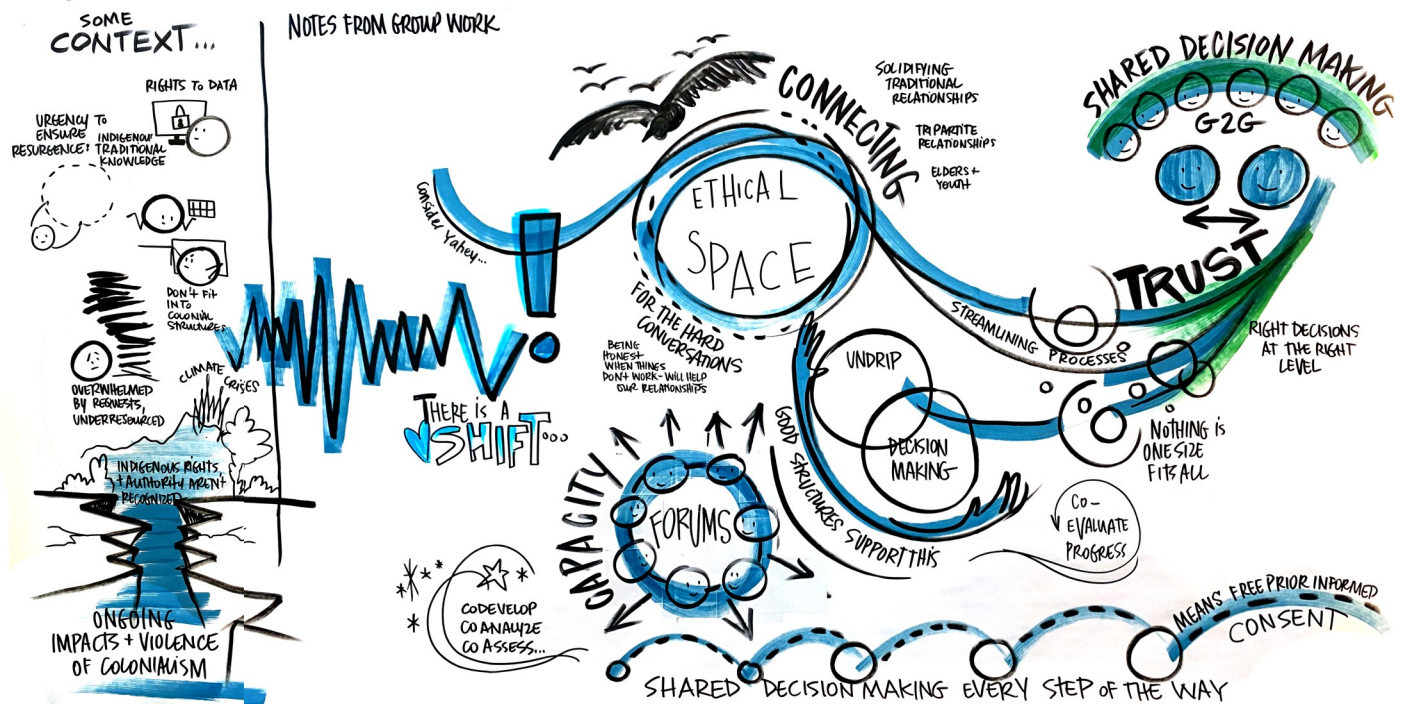


Image: Additional Context from Breakout Session Notes

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Page 7 only provides a snapshot of feedback from the break-out sessions. The raw data from these sessions was collated and retained and it will help inform focused discussions with the Governance Working Group Executive (GWGE) to collectively identify an approach to implement the Joint Recommendations. It is anticipated that dedicated working groups will be formed to collaboratively move the work forward.

## Closing

Closing remarks were provided by Dan George (Four Directions Management Services), Lisa Helmer (WLRS), and Chief Angie Bailey (Aitchelitz), with sentiments expressed to continue to meet in the future. The Gathering was concluded with a prayer provided by Eddie Gardner of the S’ólh Téméxw Stewardship Alliance.

Throughout this event, there were common threads of progress, hope, partnership, and the importance of working through change, even when it is difficult. As Dan George remarked, “We are building the bridge as we are walking on it.” The Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Framework, including regional collaborative stewardship Forums and Guardians, is creating new ways to steward and care for the resources that we all value. Every individual contributes to this goal in their own unique way and when people work together towards a unified cause, it creates something greater than the sum of its parts. This was summarized in two words by Chief Angie Bailey when she spoke of “let’s emo:t,” which in Halq’eme’ylem, can be translated to “one heart one mind”.