



Cumulative Effects Framework

Assessing and Managing Cumulative Effects in British Columbia

The Cumulative Effects Framework Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What are cumulative effects?

Cumulative effects are changes to environmental, social and economic values caused by the combined effect of past, present and potential future human activities and natural processes.

Why do we need to consider cumulative effects?

As the demand for natural resources continues to grow in British Columbia, we need to be able to efficiently and consistently assess the combined effects of activities on environmental, social and economic values. Many laws, regulations and policies around natural resource management in British Columbia focus on a specific sector – such as forestry, mining, and oil and gas. While formal environmental assessments consider cumulative effects when evaluating large projects, many proposals are small in size and do not require such assessments. The cumulative effects framework will help capture these combined effects, large and small, in assessments for values that are important to the people of British Columbia.

Cumulative effects framework

What is the cumulative effects framework?

The cumulative effects framework is a set of policies, procedures and decision-support tools that helps identify and manage cumulative effects consistently and transparently across British Columbia's natural resource sector.

The cumulative effects framework does not create new legislative requirements; rather it informs and guides cumulative effects considerations through existing natural resource sector legislation, policies, programs and initiatives. Integrating the cumulative effects framework into existing natural resource decision-making processes and enabling cross-sector governance will ensure cumulative effects are identified, considered and managed consistently.

What are the key benefits of the cumulative framework?

Specifically, the cumulative effects framework will help to:

- improve government's ability to achieve existing legal and policy objectives for values
- allow faster and better decisions, with readily available and up-to-date information
- give project proponents timely access to information for planning resource activities - large and small
- help government meet its legal obligation to consider cumulative impacts as they relate to First Nations aboriginal and treaty rights
- avoid costly mitigation and delays with durable and consistent decision-making

How does the cumulative effects framework help manage potential impacts?

Information about the current conditions of values will allow resource managers, decision makers and interagency committees to make well-informed decisions that support better environmental outcomes and increase social and economic benefits for both communities and government. The cumulative effects framework set of policies, procedures and decision-support tools can help identify cumulative effects considerations and guide management options to lessen any potential environmental impacts of natural resource activities.

Will the cumulative effects framework limit development?

The cumulative effects framework does not establish limits for development. Cumulative effects framework assessments will provide information and guidance to resource users for the condition of values and government's objectives prior to initiating a project. Thus, expected costs of mitigating undesirable impacts can be known upfront by the resource user and decision makers can better evaluate management options relevant to requested activities. If assessments show there are potential concerns for a particular value, mitigation actions could be added to the application by the proponent or conditions may be attached to an authorization by the decision maker. The authority to determine whether any residual impacts of a specific authorization are acceptable rests with the statutory decision maker.

What are the priorities for implementation?

Implementation of the cumulative effects framework is a multi-year and multi-phase effort. Phased implementation allows the cumulative effects framework to evolve and adapt over time. Engagement and collaboration help to ensure continual policy improvement throughout the phased implementation. The current priorities for implementation are:

- build and improve provincial policy, procedures, standards and tools for assessing and reporting
- develop and implement regional assessments and management responses in selected areas
- evaluate effectiveness of cumulative effects framework interim policy and value assessments
- support staff extension and training to build cumulative effects framework capacity
- implement provincial and regional strategies to engage First Nations and stakeholders

The phased implementation of the cumulative effects framework will use an adaptive management approach that can incorporate new information and refined assessment methodologies to allow for the continuous improvement of the framework.

Who leads the cumulative effects framework?

The framework is led jointly by the Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations and the Minister of Environment. However, a team of executive members of the government's five natural resource sector ministries reviews all cumulative effects framework policy and procedures and provides advice and guidance to the ministers.

How does the cumulative effects framework relate to existing land use objectives?

The framework recognizes existing land use objectives, which establish government direction or desired outcomes for a range of natural resource values. These objectives are set through legislative or policy processes that typically involve external consultation – for example, Strategic Land Use Plans or legal orders for objectives under the *Land Act* or *Forest and Range Practices Act*. The framework itself does not set new objectives nor does it affect any existing statutory decision making authority.

Selecting values

What criteria were used to select the initial set of values?

The framework used a consistent set of criteria across the province to select values, including:

- values that have legal or policy objectives in existing legislation, land use plans, case law or other forms of management direction
- values identified in strategic engagement and other agreements with First Nations, or otherwise identified as supporting an Aboriginal or treaty right
- values that can be mapped
- values that allow the nesting of fine-scale values within them, for example, forest dependent species included under forest biodiversity

What values were selected?

In 2014, an initial set of five values was prioritized for developing assessment procedures. These initial values were: old growth forest, aquatic ecosystems, grizzly bear, forest biodiversity and moose. As implementation of the cumulative effects framework proceeds, it is intended that more values will be added and assessed.

How will socio-economic values be assessed?

It is a principle and commitment of the cumulative effects framework to assess cumulative effects in relation to socio-economic values. The initial stage of the framework implementation has focused on developing standard assessment approaches for a priority set of environmental values, including biodiversity, old growth, aquatic ecosystems, grizzly bear, and moose. Because these values also have socio-economic implications, work is concurrently underway to confirm a standard approach to assessing such implications. The approach is being developed through discussions with industry, communities, and First Nations.

How will cumulative effects assessments be accessed?

Once cumulative effects assessments are completed they will be easily accessible online through the cumulative effects framework website (assessment reports), BC Government warehouse (assessment results data) and iMapBC (assessment maps). Assessment result data and associated guidance will also be centrally accessible through the Natural Resource Sector Online Services.

First Nations and stakeholder involvement

How are First Nations involved?

Engagement with First Nations is an expectation established under the cumulative effects framework interim policy when values are either selected or assessed and when management options are defined. Collaboration through government-to-government agreements on cumulative effect issues, including assessment, management and cross jurisdictional governance are also underway in some areas of the province.

How does the framework help address Aboriginal interests in natural resource decisions?

Government must consider potential cumulative impacts to values related to Aboriginal and treaty rights and interests in natural resource decisions. By providing open access to the most current information for values, the cumulative effects framework will help support government's obligation to provide cumulative effects information on potential impacts to First Nations rights and interests. First Nations can also use this information to monitor and manage the condition of values in their own areas of interest.

How were First Nations involved in the development of the framework?

First Nations have been engaged to varying degrees in regional pilot projects that helped to inform the design of the cumulative effects framework (e.g., Northwest, Northeast, Cariboo and Merritt regions). First Nations engagement continues to expand to other areas of the province, both through cumulative effects framework implementation and related initiatives like the Marine Planning Partnership and LNG Environmental Stewardship Initiative. Insights from First Nation engagement have and continue to be an important influence on the framework design, development and implementation.

How are external stakeholders involved?

Consultation and collaboration with natural resource sector stakeholders and environmental non-government organizations remain ongoing to ensure their concerns are considered when developing policy, procedures, assessments and management options. Formal engagement sessions occurred in 2015 and 2016.

How can I provide comment and feedback on the cumulative effects framework?

Comments and feedback are always welcomed and will ensure the cumulative effects framework remains responsive and continuously improved over time. Please submit any feedback to CumulativeEffects@gov.bc.ca.