



Cumulative Effects Framework

Assessing and Managing Cumulative Effects in British Columbia

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 activities and natural processes.

Why do we need to consider cumulative effects?

We need to be able to efficiently and consistently assess the effects of all activities collectively, especially as demand for access to natural resources is growing rapidly in British Columbia and the context for new development is becoming more complex.

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 an environmental assessment considers cumulative effects when evaluating large projects, most proposals are small in size and do not require such assessments. The cumulative effects framework will capture these effects, large and small, in assessments for environmental, social and economic values that are important to the people of British Columbia.

Cumulative effects framework

What is the B.C. cumulative effects framework?

The cumulative effects framework embraces the policy, procedures and tools needed to assess and manage cumulative effects in the natural resource sector across British Columbia.

It sets out consistent and standardized procedures to assess and report cumulative effects for environmental, social and economic values. These assessment reports will support integrated resource management and decision-making.

What are the key benefits of the cumulative framework?

Specifically, the cumulative effects framework will help to:

- Improve the B.C. government's ability to achieve existing legal and policy objectives for resource values
- Allow faster and better decisions, with readily available, accurate and up-to-date information
- Give project proponents timely access to information as they plan the location and design of 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

How does the cumulative effects framework help to manage potential impacts?

Information about current conditions across all sectors 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 communities and the government.

Will the cumulative effects framework limit development?

The cumulative effects framework will provide information to decision makers so they can evaluate management options. Additionally, the framework will provide resource users guidance for known government requirements and objectives for development prior to initiating a project, so expected costs and processes are known upfront. If the assessment shows there are potential concerns for a particular area of interest, conditions could be attached to the authorization.

What are the priorities for implementation?

Implementation of the cumulative effects framework is a multi-year and multi-phase effort. The first phase, which began in 2014, has two priorities:

- Building provincial policy, procedures, standards and tools for assessing and reporting
- Implementing regional assessments and management in selected areas, and evaluating effectiveness

Phase 1 also involves staff extension and training to build capacity and development/implementation of provincial and regional strategies to engage First Nations and provincial stakeholder organizations.

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.

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 and have robust existing data

- 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 to have ‘standard assessment procedures’ developed for them. These initial values are: forest biodiversity, old growth forest, aquatic ecosystems, grizzly bear and moose. As implementation of the cumulative effects framework proceeds, it is intended that more values will be added.

What legal and policy objectives are being considered?

Most of the value assessments have legal or policy objectives that must be considered – such as old growth and riparian objectives under the *Forest and Range Practices Act* or federal air quality objectives.

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 been 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 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. One way to consider socio-economic values might be during the process of establishing legal strategic-level objectives, which will serve as a foundation for the cumulative effects framework.

How will cumulative effects assessments be accessed?

Once cumulative effects assessments are completed they will be easily accessible online on the cumulative effects framework website or Internet portal.

First Nations and stakeholder involvement

How are First Nations and external stakeholders involved?

Meaningful engagement with external audiences is vital for the successful implementation of the cumulative effects framework. We are consulting and collaborating with First Nations, natural resource industries and environmental non-government organizations to ensure that their concerns are considered when developing policy, procedures, assessments and management options.

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

By law, British Columbia 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 subsequent assessment of impacts to First Nations rights and interests. First Nations can also use this information to monitor 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 pilot projects that helped to inform the design of the cumulative effects framework - Northwest, Northeast, Cariboo and Merritt regions - and continue to engage in assessments underway in Elk Valley and Howe Sound today. Insights from First Nation engagement have and continue to be an important influence on the framework design and implementation.