

UNDERSTANDING PROVINCIAL LAND, WATER AND FOREST PLANNING

Importance of Land, Water and Forest Planning in B.C.

Land, water and forests in B.C.'s provide many cultural, social, environmental and economic benefits to First Nations, communities, businesses, residents and visitors. The B.C. Government supports land and water planning to guide sustainable resource stewardship and management to meet local and provincial objectives. Land and water plans describe "what" activities can occur on the land base, "where" they can occur and "how".

Why we need land and water plans

- Plans provide an important opportunity to:
 - meet B.C.'s commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, consistent with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) and the B.C. *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' Act* (the Declaration Act); and
 - create a collaborative vision for long-term stewardship of land and water that reflects the collective interests of all British Columbians.
- Plans provide a path to sustainably managing the multiple values, uses and activities on the land. This includes a strong, resilient economy and lasting economic benefits to all people that call B.C. home.
- There is increasing demand for natural resources throughout B.C., and plans can provide direction that can avoid or minimize cumulative impacts.
- Plans allow us to anticipate, mitigate and adapt to climate change effects (e.g., wildfire, drought, floods and effects on fish and wildlife, including species at risk) and manage ecosystem health and resiliency.

For more information about UNDRIP, the Declaration Act and the Declaration Act Action Plan can be found at declaration.gov.bc.ca

Common Features of All Provincial Land and Water Planning Processes

Since 2018, the Government of B.C. has been working to modernize its approach to land and water planning. The following are foundational features of all planning processes going forward. A key feature is partnerships between the B.C. and First Nations Governments and effective engagement with communities, stakeholders and the public.

- Plans are undertaken as a partnership between the Province and First Nations. They are respectful of the rights, interests, knowledge and traditions of First Nations.
- Planning occurs in collaboration with local governments, recognizing that local interests, such as employment, services, recreation and the local economy, may be affected by provincial land use decisions.
- Planning is transparent and public-facing. Engagement occurs regularly with industry, other stakeholders and the public on plan inputs and products.
- Planning involves understanding the current socio-economic and environmental context to provide a reference point for understanding the implications of proposed changes in land use and direction.
- Each plan has a commitment for monitoring and adjustments over time.

All land and water plans direct human activities and create a common understanding of what can occur in an area. These plans are outcome-focused. They describe how to manage for values across space and time and consider all users.



Designing the Planning Process

The B.C. Government has a variety of planning processes and legal tools that can be used to plan for the mix of values, issues and priorities in an area. There are several types of plans under development in B.C.. Each type of plan has distinct features suited to the specific set of values and activities under consideration, the areas of interest and pressures on the values(s) of concern. The Province is moving towards a more integrated approach to planning which may result in a coordinated process to achieve multiple planning objectives. This has the benefit of transitioning from individual planning programs into more comprehensive “planning for lands and waters” that spans different scales and levels of direction in planning. Historical plans that resulted in legal direction remain in effect unless or until they are amended or replaced by new direction.

The information included in this brochure focuses on three key types of plans in the planning toolbox:

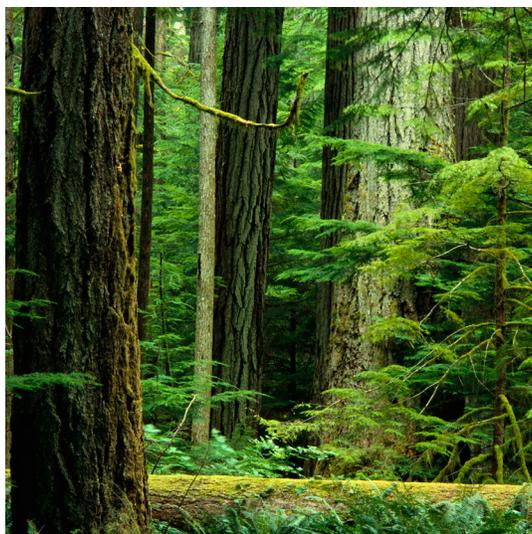
Strategic land use plans under the Land Use Planning Program

Water planning under the *Water Sustainability Act* (WSA), including water sustainability plans (WSPs), WSA objectives and other area-based regulations or tools

Forest landscape plans as required under the *Forest and Range Practices Act*

These plans are described in more detail on page 3. The choice of plan depends on the following five Ws:

- **What** are the values of concern? Is the focus on a single value, e.g., water, or a broader suite of values? What are the pressures on those values?
- **Who** are the users of the lands and waters under discussion? Which First Nations call the area home? Is one sector, such as forestry, driving change or multiple sectors? Who is likely to be affected by the outcome?
- **Where** is the geographic land base to be discussed? What is the area of focus for the values and issues under discussion? Does planning involve public and/or private land?
- **When** will planning occur? How urgently do issues need to be addressed? How long will the process take?
- **How** can identified issues best be addressed? Will the outcome of planning result in significant changes to resource-based uses or activities?



Comparing Three Key Planning Tools

The table below summarizes the features of the three main types of planning processes underway in B.C. in 2024.

Planning Tool	Focus	Planning Area	Who is involved?	Included	Not Included
Land Use Plan	Stewardship of public lands and resources that reflects the values and interests of all B.C. residents. May include multiple resource values/sectors/ activities.	Public lands only; size and scope vary depending on the values and key interests identified.	<i>Planning partners:</i> B.C. and First Nations Governments. <i>Engagement with:</i> Local governments and First Nation communities, stakeholders, industry and members of the public.	Broad land use zoning and objectives; can result in long-term changes to land use, e.g., through land use zones or areas of exclusion, such as protected areas and other types of conservation zoning. Outcomes apply across resource sectors and development activities.	Detailed direction on how to implement zones and objectives on the ground, through operational activities.
Watershed Plan	Water quality, water quantity and aquatic ecosystems.	Public and/or private lands, depending on the issue. Plan area can be tailored to a specific stream, aquifer, watershed or other area.	<i>Planning partners:</i> B.C. and First Nations Governments. Could also include local governments and/or stakeholders. <i>Engagement with:</i> Local governments, Indigenous communities, stakeholders, members of the public.	WSA objectives and regulations to meet goals for water; can result in permanent prohibition of activities of specific sectors, including impacting existing water rights; can limit water use in areas being considered for protection; can influence statutory decisions and other planning processes.	Will not result in new protected areas or other types of conservation zoning.
Forest Landscape Plan	Forestry resources and activities under the <i>Forest and Range Practices Act</i> .	Public lands only; size and scope vary depending on the values and key interests identified.	<i>Planning partners:</i> B.C. and First Nations Governments. Could also include forest tenure holders. <i>Engagement with:</i> Local governments, Indigenous communities, forest tenure holders, other stakeholders, members of the public.	Outcomes to define desired conditions for forest values and planning guidelines that identify forest practices to achieve outcomes, set out in legal orders established by the Chief Forester. Aligns forest management direction to strategic land and water objectives and plans	Will not set new long-term, strategic land use direction such as land use zones and protected areas. May set interim directions to maintain resource values until a strategic land use plan is completed.



Why Integrate Planning Processes?

Integration is key to successful implementation of planning in B.C. Discussions with partner First Nations and input from stakeholders and communities will be required to develop a coordinated process for achieving objectives at multiple planning scales. This approach will support uniting or combining aspects of different planning processes into a single process. This has the benefit of transitioning from individual planning programs into more comprehensive “planning for lands and waters” that spans different scales and levels of direction in planning.

Flexibility is required to enable each planning process to be designed to address its particular set of issues and solutions. Those engaged in planning focus on the desired future state of values of interest and concern and actions to achieve that future state. Plan coordinators determine the most appropriate process and mix of planning tools to make that happen. This may require one or more specific plans to be completed, concurrently or in sequence on a priority basis. To the extent possible, all plans are integrated across time and space to minimize effort and ensure the best possible outcomes.

Integrated Planning in a Fictional Landscape Unit

Every planning process will be unique depending on the set of values, issues and priorities identified by the planning partners, with engagement of local governments, Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, stakeholders and the public. Below is a hypothetical example; the planning area has 3 watersheds, high cultural values to the local First Nations, significant amount of private land used for agriculture, a mix of values that include habitat for species of concern (grizzly bear, moose, black-tailed deer), species at risk, and important salmon runs in the river. Examples below illustrate the planning tools that could be used to manage resource values in the area and show how a value-driven process results in different plans.

ISSUE 1 Grizzly bear mortality

Bear mortality has been above average in this area. Road densities are high due to historic logging activities and mineral exploration and the area is popular with hunters and recreationists with frequent bear-human conflicts in some seasons.

Planning tool(s): Strategic land use planning to discuss access and corridor management, including strategic opportunities to reduce road densities. Strategic plan direction informs access and road management considerations in Forest Landscape Plans.

ISSUE 2 Loss of habitat for multiple species of wildlife

Part of the landscape unit provides important habitat and movement corridors for wildlife. One watershed is less developed than other areas and provides linkages from the river to adjacent watersheds. There is strong interest to protect some or all of this watershed from development.

Planning tool: Strategic land use planning to discuss conservation area zoning.

ISSUE 3 Water

In three of the past five years, water levels have reached critically low levels in summer months, threatening the viability of anadromous and resident fish. Demand for water is highest in summer months to support agriculture and domestic use. Human activities on public and private lands contribute to water quantity and flow.

Planning tool: Area-based planning under the *Water Sustainability Act*.

ISSUE 4 Declining amounts of old forest

The area of old forest in this landscape unit is less than 3% but a large amount of the unit (>50%) is in mature forest cover that will become old forest in another 20–40 years. Old forests provide habitat for fisher, a species at risk.

Planning tool: Forest landscape planning (FLP) can include scheduling for forestry activities to maintain and restore areas of old forest, now and into the future.

FLPs help to implement strategic land use plans and WSA area-based plans and provide additional direction to conserve non-forestry values while maintaining economic opportunities. In this example, FLPs can address road locations over time to implement access management direction (Issue 1) and leave areas for habitat refugia (Issue 2).

ISSUE 5 Need for economic activities to support jobs in the local community

Local governments have strongly voiced their interest in maintaining economic opportunities in the area, including support for forestry and the proposed mine.

Planning tool: Strategic land use plans can include zoning to promote opportunities for economic activity, e.g., enhanced resource development zones.

Forest landscape planning can identify direction for forestry activities and practices that increase economic certainty and sustainable forest management.

All plans must consider trade-offs between environmental, social, cultural and economic interests that result in outcomes that benefit all British Columbians.

A next step for this fictional planning table would be to determine the priority for addressing issues—which issue(s) should be worked on first? As noted previously, planning tools are not mutually exclusive. For example, forest landscape planning to address the loss of old forest could also affect water. Likewise, strategic planning for access management has a strong link to forestry activities. An integrated approach to planning recognizes and considers these linkages concurrently to ensure stronger outcomes across all values.

For more information visit planninginpartnership.ca

