



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

# NATIONAL CLIMATE STRATEGY

October 2023



Rosalie LaBillois, AFN National Youth Council Co-Chair and member of Eel River Bar First Nation, addresses the participants of the Youth Gathering, held in advance of the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Climate Gathering in Fredericton, New Brunswick on the traditional unceded territory of the Wolastoqiyik, Mi'kmaq, and Peskotomuhkati peoples.



## Assembly of First Nations

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is the national, political organization of First Nations governments and their citizens, including those living on and off reserve. Every Chief in Canada is entitled to be a member of the Assembly, and the National Chief is elected by the Chiefs in Canada, who in turn are elected by their citizens. The AFN has 634 member nations within its Assembly. The role and function of the AFN is to serve as a nationally delegated forum for determining and harmonizing effective, collective, and co-operative measures on any subject matter that the First Nations delegate for review, study, response, or action, and to advance the aspirations of First Nations.

The AFN supports First Nations by coordinating, facilitating, and advocating for policy change, while the leaders of this change are the First Nations themselves. Chiefs, and the First Nations they represent, must be an integral part of meeting the challenge of sustainable, transformative policy change. From the First Nations-in-Assembly, the AFN has been acting on this responsibility by leading discussions on climate change at the regional, national, and international stage, receiving twelve climate-specific resolutions since 2016. In Resolution 05/2019, Declaring a First Nations Climate Emergency, the First Nations-in-Assembly resolve to:

1. Declare a global climate emergency.
2. Recognize that the climate crisis constitutes a state of emergency for our lands, waters, animals, and peoples, and that we will accordingly utilize our local, national, and international forums and partnerships to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius.
3. Call on local, national, and international communities, governments, organizations, and movements to safeguard the inherent, Treaty and constitutionally protected rights of First Nations, respect Indigenous knowledge, and uphold Treaties and other constructive arrangements between First Nations and the Crown.
4. Direct the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to call on the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to take urgent and transformative climate action that meets the requirements outlined in the reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and Canada in a Changing Climate to reduce emissions in Canada by 60% below 2010 levels by 2030 and reach net-zero emissions by 2050.
5. Call on the AFN, with guidance from the Advisory Committee on Climate Action and the Environment (ACE), AFN regions, First Nations Elders, Knowledge Keepers, women, youth and leadership, to develop a First Nations-led climate strategy, within six months, to achieve the objectives above and simultaneously address income inequality within First Nations as part of the mobilization for a just transition, and to host a National Gathering to advance local, domestic and international climate advocacy.

At the July 2023 Annual General Assembly, the First Nations-in-Assembly furthered this commitment to urgent and transformative climate action in Resolution 36/2023, Urgent and Transformative Action through the AFN National Climate Strategy, resolving to:



1. Reaffirm the declaration of a First Nations Climate Emergency, calling for:
  - a. A recognition that the climate crisis constitutes a state of emergency for our lands, waters, air, ice, animals, and peoples;
  - b. Local, national, and international communities, governments, organizations, and movements to safeguard the inherent, Treaty and constitutionally protected rights of First Nations, respect First Nations knowledge systems, and uphold Treaties and other constructive arrangements between First Nations and the Crown; and
  - c. Federal, provincial, and territorial governments to take urgent and transformative climate action that meets the requirements outlined in the reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and Canada's Changing Climate Report (2019) to reduce emissions in Canada by 60% below 2010 levels by 2030 and reach net-zero emissions by 2050.
2. Fully endorse the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Climate Strategy and its seven key priority areas of action:
  - a. Prioritize First Nation Knowledge Systems, health, languages, cultures, and spiritualities.
  - b. Recognize, respect, and position First Nations inherent jurisdiction and inherent right to self-determination as central to decision-making at all levels.
  - c. Address capacity needs to support First Nations governance and their role as climate leaders.
  - d. Ensure First Nations self-sufficiency in food, water, and energy.
  - e. Close the natural and built infrastructure gap.
  - f. Ensure First Nations are equipped to mitigate, prevent, respond, and recover to all emergencies.
  - g. Leverage the First Nations Climate Lens to reform federal, provincial, and territorial legislation, regulation, policy, and programs.
3. Call on the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to work directly, and in full partnership with, First Nations rights and title holders to implement self-determined First Nations climate priorities, including, but not limited to, those outlined in the AFN National Climate Strategy.
4. Direct the AFN to work with First Nations rights and title holders to advocate to the federal, provincial, and territorial governments for sufficient and sustainable funding to First Nations to implement their own strategies in a manner consistent with Article 39 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
5. Call on the federal government to compensate First Nations with new or additional land for any land that First Nations may lose due to climate change.
6. Direct the AFN to use the AFN National Climate Strategy in national and international contexts as an advocacy tool, including with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.



## Executive Summary

Global greenhouse gas emissions are headed dangerously in the wrong direction. In Canada, the situation is urgent. Irreversible warming trends were confirmed by the Canada in a Changing Climate Report (2019). That report identified that Canada's climate has warmed by 2.3°C since 1948 and will warm further, on average, at about double the magnitude of warming globally, and at least three times the magnitude in the North. These projections come as no surprise as First Nations' Knowledge Keepers have continued to raise their voice for decades to share concerns about the changes they are observing. The Elders' Statement of the Advisory Committee on Climate Action and the Environment ('ACE') speaks clearly to this reality and offers a strong call: "... *We therefore insist on an immediate end to the destruction and desecration of the sacred elements of life based on the human obligation to care for the Land and for future generations.*"

In response to these observations, a growing number of First Nations have declared climate emergencies. In July 2019, the First Nations-in-Assembly declared a First Nations Climate Emergency (Resolution 05/2019), recognizing that "... *climate change constitutes a state of emergency for our lands, waters, animals, and peoples.*" The emergency declaration called for the development of a First Nations-led climate strategy based on First Nations knowledge systems, rights and responsibilities, and jurisdiction, as well as the hosting of National Climate Gatherings.

In line with this mandate, the AFN National Climate Strategy has three main purposes:

- Uplift First Nations' knowledge systems, rights, and self-determination within federal, provincial, and territorial climate action;
- Promote First Nations solutions to the climate crisis, grounded in their knowledge systems, rights, and self-determination; and
- Call for urgent and transformative climate action in line with the First Nations-in-Assembly Declaration of a First Nations Climate Emergency.

The AFN National Climate Strategy advances these purposes through the conceptual framework of the First Nations Climate Lens ('Climate Lens'). The Climate Lens, further elaborated in Section 2, advocates for a fundamental reframing of the climate discourse. It proposes a transition away from the overemphasis on 'technological solutions' and 'market-based mechanisms' towards a framing that emphasizes the centrality of First Nations' knowledge systems, rights, and self-determination. Key to this is the understanding that First Nations are inseparable from the Lands, Waters, and Air. In line with this thinking, the AFN National Climate Strategy advances seven priority areas to elevate First Nations Climate Leadership summarized in the figure below:



## Seven Priority areas



Each priority area coincides with a goal, series of objectives, and a list of strategies and actions. These are not intended to be a comprehensive review of all First Nations priorities related to climate change. Instead, the AFN National Climate Strategy is intended to be an enabling document that creates space for First Nations at the local and regional level to advance their self-determined climate strategies and priorities.

We lift up all the First Nations leadership, Land, Water, and Air protectors, and technicians who participated in the development of this AFN National Climate Strategy. We urge our government and academic partners to walk alongside, or behind, First Nations as they implement climate strategies in their Lands, Waters, and territories.



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ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

# NATIONAL CLIMATE STRATEGY

## List of acronyms and abbreviations

ACE – Advisory Committee on Climate Action and the Environment

AFN - Assembly of First Nations

IKS - Indigenous Knowledge Systems

IPCC – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

UNDA – United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act

UNDRIP - United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change





## Glossary

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**Culture** – refers to the rich and diverse set of traditional teachings, values, values, lifestyles, languages, social structures, and spiritual beliefs of First Nations. These cultures are incredibly diverse and cannot be homogenized.

**Decarbonization** – the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions that a society produces, as well as the increase of the amount being absorbed through a variety of practices including low-carbon energy sources, and rethinking economic models focused on growth.

**First Nations worldview** – the physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual interconnection to the land and to others (family, communities and nations)

**Green Infrastructure** – natural vegetation systems and energy technologies that enhance and restore the surrounding natural environment.

**Ethical Space** – a process to co-create spaces that acknowledge the equality between two distinct, complementary worldviews. The process, which reflects a deep understanding of varying perspectives and values, can result in an ethical space that upholds both knowledge systems, transforming the way we work together. The concept was first written about by Will Ermine and built upon by Elder Dr. Reg Crow shoe.

**More-than-humans** – acknowledges the relationship that First Nations have with other beings in the natural world (trees, medicine, animals, plants and non-living beings), as well as the belief that these beings have spirit.

**Rights– and title– holders** – refers to First Nations, who possess inherent rights stemming from their relationship with the Creator and prior occupation of so-called Canada. These rights are affirmed in our own laws and in Treaties and other agreements entered with the Crown, recognized and protected in Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, as well as re-affirmed in the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Dialogue must occur directly with these rights- and title- holders.

**Self-determination** – refers to the right of a First Nation to determine its own form and structure of governance. First Nations are self-governing, self-determining Nations with Inherent rights, title, and jurisdiction, re-affirmed in the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, including Article 3.

**Spirituality** – refers to the unique physical, mental and emotional connection to the living and non-living world First Nations practice.

**Water** – in a First Nations context, refers not only to all waterbodies (marine and in-land), but also the combined living spirit of all those more-than-human beings, including aquatic plants and other species (living and non-living), that inhabit the water. First Nations, especially women, have a sacred relationship with Water as caretakers of life and protectors of water on Mother Earth.

**Land** – in a First Nations context, refers not only to the physical terrestrial lands and territories, but also the combined living spirit of all more than human-beings, including animals, plants and other species (living and non-living). In this way, the Land is also a spiritual and relational place that is grounded in interconnected and interdependent relationships embedded within a context and cultural position.

**Decolonization** – refers to the dismantling of colonial power structures, cultural and/or social beliefs and governance practices, including how they manifest for Indigenous Peoples living in Canada. The ultimate goal of decolonization is the restoration of Indigenous self-determination, revitalizing Indigenous institutions, and returning to language, ceremony, and the Land.

**Seven Generation Thinking** – refers to a process of decision-making that contemplates the impacts of decision and actions seven generations from now. It is attributed to the Great Law of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and is a tenet practiced by many First Nations.





Elder Dr. Maggie Paul, St. Mary's First Nation, leads the participants of the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Climate Gathering in a final travelling song. Participants locked arms and travelled around the room in a large circle, repeating the lyrics that Elder Maggie shared.



## **A Guiding Vision: Elders' Statement of the Advisory Committee on Climate Action and the Environment ('ACE')**

*We, as First Nations Peoples declare, consistent with the AFN Charter, Mother Earth Accord, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:*

*First Nations Peoples are in a unique position to be leaders in climate change initiatives because of our knowledge of the sacred teachings of the Land, and must be situated as agents of change in climate action, rather than as passive recipients of climate change impacts;*

*The Creator gave us the responsibility to preserve and protect Mother Earth and laws that govern all our relationships for us to coexist interdependently with nature and humanity, defining our rights, responsibilities, and obligations to the Land as men and women;*

*The Creator gave us our spiritual beliefs, languages, cultures, freedom, and a place on Mother Earth to provide us with all our needs;*

*Mother Earth is in a climate crisis. We therefore insist on an immediate end to the destruction and desecration of the sacred elements of life based on the human obligation to care for the Land and for future generations;*

*With our spiritual laws, practices, experiences and relationships with our Lands and territories, First Nations peoples have a vital role in defending and healing Mother Earth.  
This is our obligation;*

*The unbreakable and sacred connection of Land, Air, Water, Sun, Plants, Animals, and our human communities is the material and spiritual basis for our existence;*

*The impacts of climate change now transcend our Lands and territories, requiring free, prior, and informed consent among First Nations peoples to protect Mother Earth for future generations.*

*October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016*

*Fort St John, British Columbia*



## 1. Introduction

Global greenhouse gas emissions are headed dangerously in the wrong direction. Reports by the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2023)*, the *United Nations Environmental Program (2022)*, and the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2022)* confirm that it is highly unlikely the 2°C target of the Paris Agreement will be met. Even with new action by governments, the current emission reduction pledges from the near two hundred Parties to the Paris Agreement will actually increase emissions by 10.6% in 2030, rather than provide the rapid, deep, and immediate emission reductions called for by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.<sup>1</sup> The failure to abide by these international agreements is severe: the United Nations Emission Gap (2022) report projects a global annual temperature increase of 2.8°C by 2100.

In Canada, the situation is urgent. Irreversible warming trends were confirmed by the *Canada in a Changing Climate Report (2019)*. That report identified that Canada's climate has warmed by 2.3°C since 1948 and will warm further, on average, at about double the magnitude of warming globally, and at least three times the magnitude in the North.<sup>2</sup> In practical terms, even in the highly unlikely scenario that global warming is kept under 2°C (as per the Paris Agreement), Canada will feel an approximate 4°C to 6°C annual average temperature rise. A global temperature increase of over 2°C, two to three times more severe in Canada, will be disastrous for First Nations, people, and ecosystems. These projections come as no surprise; First Nations' knowledge keepers have been raising their voices for decades to share the changes that they are observing: changes in species migration and listings, weather, and irreversible impacts to the Land and Water, among many others. The Elders' Statement of the Advisory Committee on Climate Action and the Environment ('ACE'), above, speaks clearly to this reality and offers a strong call: "... We therefore insist on an immediate end to the destruction and desecration of the sacred elements of life based on the human obligation to care for the Land and for future generations."

First Nations have begun taking matters into their own hands, unable to rely on other governments for robust climate action, calling for rapid de-carbonization to meet the target of the Paris Agreement. One such example is the Vuntut Gwitch'in First Nation (VGFN) in Old Crow, Yukon. Their declaration, entitled "Yeendoo Diinehdo Ji' heezrit Nits'oo Ts' o' Nan He' aa," which translates into "After Our Time, How Will the World Be?", laid the foundation for the First Nations-in-Assembly to declare their own climate emergency.<sup>3</sup> In July 2019, the First Nations-in-Assembly declared a First Nations Climate Emergency (Resolution 05/2019), recognizing that "... climate change constitutes a state of emergency for our lands, waters, animals, and peoples." Far from symbolic, the two emergency declarations expressed how First Nations conceptualize climate solutions: instead of an overreliance on technology and markets, First Nations emphasized how climate solutions must be rooted in a recognition that we must restore balance to our reciprocal relationships with the Land, Water, and more-than-humans.<sup>4</sup>

1 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2022). 2022 NDC Synthesis Report. Retrieved from: <https://unfccc.int/ndc-synthesis-report-2022>.

2 For more details, please refer to *Canada in a Changing Climate (2019)*, found here: <https://changingclimate.ca/>.

3 To learn more about the process in creating the Vuntut Gwitch'in Climate Emergency Declaration, refer to: <https://www.yukon-news.com/news/vuntut-gwitchin-first-nation-officially-declares-climate-emergency/>

4 We use more-than-humans to acknowledge the relationship that First Nations have with their relatives and teachers, also known as the animals, plants, trees, medicines, and other beings in the natural world.



## 1.2 AFN National Climate Strategy

Until recently, the most dominant response for addressing climate change impacts in the lives of First Nations has been their participation in other government-led processes, whether accords, plans, policies, or strategies at the federal, provincial, territorial, or international level. The onus has been put on First Nations to adapt their knowledge systems, rights, and self-determination, to these other policy structures. Based on the current global trajectory, as well as a general disregard of First Nations rights and self-determination, this approach is entirely insufficient.<sup>5</sup> The resolution (05/2019), *Declaring a First Nations Climate Emergency*, joined a number of First Nations initiatives across the country—the Yukon First Nations Climate Action Fellowship and the BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan—to call for the development of a climate strategy based on First Nations knowledge systems, rights and responsibilities, and jurisdiction.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, that resolution directed the AFN to organize National Climate Gatherings and develop a National Climate Strategy. It directed the National Climate Strategy to stress urgent and transformative climate action that reduces emissions in Canada by 60% below 2010 levels by 2030 and reach net-zero emissions by 2050, while simultaneously addressing income inequality within First Nations as part of the mobilization for a just transition.

In line with this mandate, the AFN National Climate Strategy has the following three purposes:

- Uplift First Nations' knowledge systems, rights, and self-determination within federal, provincial, and territorial climate action;
- Promote First Nations solutions to the climate crisis, grounded in their knowledge systems, rights, and self-determination; and
- Call for urgent and transformative climate action in line with the First Nations-in-Assembly Declaration of a First Nations Climate Emergency.

In the coming pages, the Strategy introduces the First Nations Climate Lens (further elaborated in Section 2), the conceptual foundation for the AFN National Climate Strategy. Using the First Nations Climate Lens as the foundation, we then discuss seven opportunities for action to immediately advance and elevate First Nations Climate Leadership:

1. Prioritize First Nations Knowledge Systems, health, languages, cultures, and spiritualities.
2. Recognize, respect, and position First Nations Inherent jurisdiction and right to self-determination as central to climate decision-making at all levels.
3. Address capacity needs to support First Nations governance and their role as climate leaders.
4. Ensure First Nations self-sufficiency in food, water, and energy.
5. Close the natural and build infrastructure gap.
6. Ensure First Nations are equipped to mitigate, prevent, respond, and recover to all emergencies.
7. Leverage the First Nations Climate Lens to reform federal, provincial, and territorial legislation, regulation, policy, and programs.

<sup>5</sup> Reed, G., Gobby, J., Sinclair, R., Ivey, R., & Matthews, H. D. (2021). Indigenizing Climate Policy in Canada: A Critical Examination of the Pan-Canadian Framework and the ZÉN RoadMap. *Frontiers in Sustainable Cities*, 78 and Reed, G., Brunet, N. D., McGregor, D., Scurr, C., Sadik, T., Lavigne, J., & Longboat, S. (2022). Toward Indigenous visions of nature-based solutions: an exploration into Canadian federal climate policy. *Climate Policy*, 22(4), 514-533.

<sup>6</sup> To learn more about the AFN Yukon Climate Action Fellowship and the Reconnection Vision, please refer to: <https://reconnection.vision/>. For more about the BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan, please refer to: [BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan \(fnlclimatestrategy.ca\)](https://bcfnclimatestrategy.ca)



The AFN National Climate Strategy is not intended to be a comprehensive review of all First Nations priorities related to climate change. Instead, the AFN National Climate Strategy is intended to be an enabling document that creates space for First Nations at the local and regional level to advance their self-determined climate strategies and priorities. It will be reviewed and updated as new climate-related issues emerge.

But first, how did we get here?

## 1.3 Learning from First Nations coast to coast to coast

Over the last four years, in collaboration with the Advisory Committee on Climate Action and the Environment ('ACE'), we have had the opportunity to hear from First Nations across the country. The teachings, observations, and experiences that First Nations experts, Knowledge Keepers, leaders, youth, men, women, persons with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ (Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and others) individuals have shared with us has been instrumental to the design and articulation of the AFN National Climate Strategy.

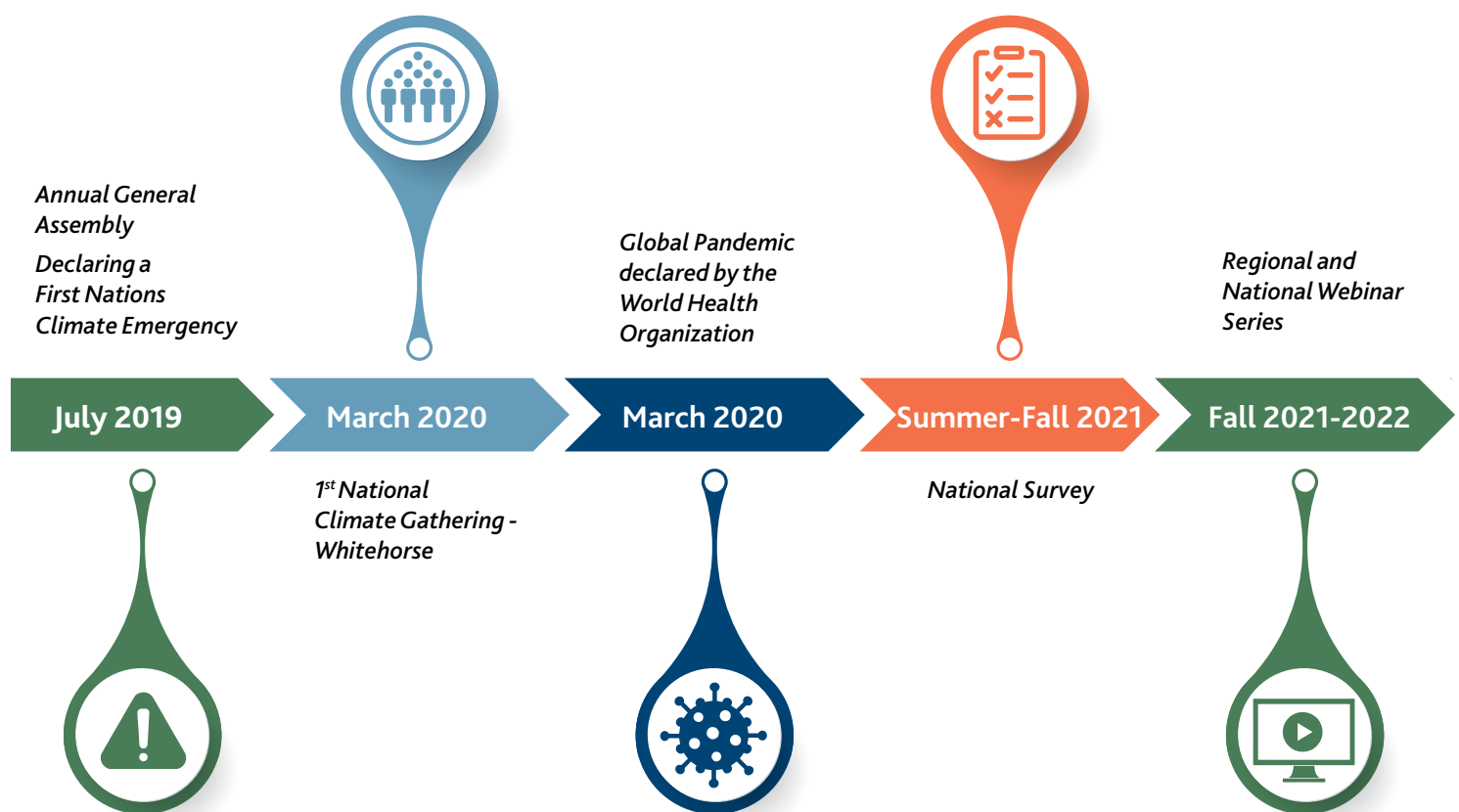


Figure 1: Path to the AFN National Climate Strategy





# NATIONAL CLIMATE STRATEGY

The first gathering to discuss the Climate Strategy and the First Nations Climate Lens took place in March 2020 and was hosted in Whitehorse, Yukon, on the territory of the Ta'an Kwächän and the Kwanlin Dün. Within a week of this Gathering, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global health pandemic (on March 11, 2020). This declaration, and the resulting impact of the global pandemic on hundreds of millions of lives, fundamentally changed how we approached, both in process and substance, the AFN National Climate Strategy.<sup>7</sup> The shift to virtual work required new and innovative ways of working and relating to one another, including shifting our engagement strategy to online webinars and surveys. A total of fifteen webinars, including regional webinars, national webinars, and focused webinars with the ACE, representatives of the AFN's councils, including the Knowledge Keepers, Youth, Women, Veteran, and newly established 2SLGBTQIA+, and members of the AFN secretariat, as well as two national surveys, were used to hear from First Nations from the four directions. A dedicated listening session was also held at the second AFN National Climate Gathering. Figure 1 captures this timeline in detail.



<sup>7</sup> The pandemic also unearthed structural vulnerabilities within Canada's healthcare system for many structurally oppressed groups, including First Nations, and required us to think deeply about the need for wholistic and multidimensional responses that recognize the interconnected nature of all living systems is needed to address both the health and climate crisis. The pandemic reinforced First Nation calls to simultaneously address the systemic inequities and gaps arising from the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization, while proposing urgent and transformative climate action.



The second AFN National Climate Gathering was hosted in Fredericton, New Brunswick, in September 2022, on the traditional unceded territory of the Wolastoqiyik, Mi'kmaq, and Peskotomuhkati peoples. Combined, nearly 1000 First Nation experts, leaders, youth, men, women, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, Knowledge Keepers, professionals, and allies from coast-to-coast-to-coast participated in the two Gatherings. The Gatherings explored diverse solutions that First Nations are advancing in the face of rapid change at the local, regional, national, and international levels. Sessions spanned the range of realities and expertise of First Nations experience with climate impacts and actions. Topics included accessibility and disability awareness, emergency response and management, Land Back, clean energy, food security, health, youth leadership, biodiversity, and conservation. Sessions offered a unique opportunity to consider these issues with both youth and Knowledge Keepers and to challenge the false dichotomy between humans and the natural world.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the two National Climate Gatherings, the AFN National Climate Strategy has been discussed regularly with the ACE, both on weekly video conferences and at in-person meetings, as well as presented at Dialogue Sessions held in conjunction with Annual General Assemblies and Special Chiefs Assemblies. Members of the AFN Secretariat have also been analyzing federal and international climate legislation, regulation, policy, and programs. To finalize this version of AFN National Climate Strategy, we held a series of additional webinars with the ACE, the AFN Secretariat, and representatives of the Knowledge Keepers' Council and the National Youth Council. We reflected these changes in the updated version being considered by the First Nations-in-Assembly.

<sup>8</sup> The National Climate Gathering Report (2020) from Whitehorse can be found here:

[https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Climate\\_Gathering\\_Report\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Climate_Gathering_Report_ENG.pdf). The second National Climate Gathering Report (2022) can be found here: [https://afn.bynder.com/m/4a0353ae41b4e4d9/original/Climate\\_Summary-Report-ENG.pdf](https://afn.bynder.com/m/4a0353ae41b4e4d9/original/Climate_Summary-Report-ENG.pdf)



Members of the AFN Yukon Climate Action Fellowship alongside Assembly of First Nations technical staff laughed with locked arms as Elder Maggie leads the circle in a final travelling song at the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Climate Gathering.



Hands grasped together as participants of the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Climate Gathering in Fredericton, New Brunswick, on the traditional unceded territory of the Wolastoqiyik, Mi'kmaq, and Peskotomuhkati peoples, concludes with a final travelling song by Elder Dr. Maggie Paul.



## 2. A First Nations Climate Lens<sup>9</sup>

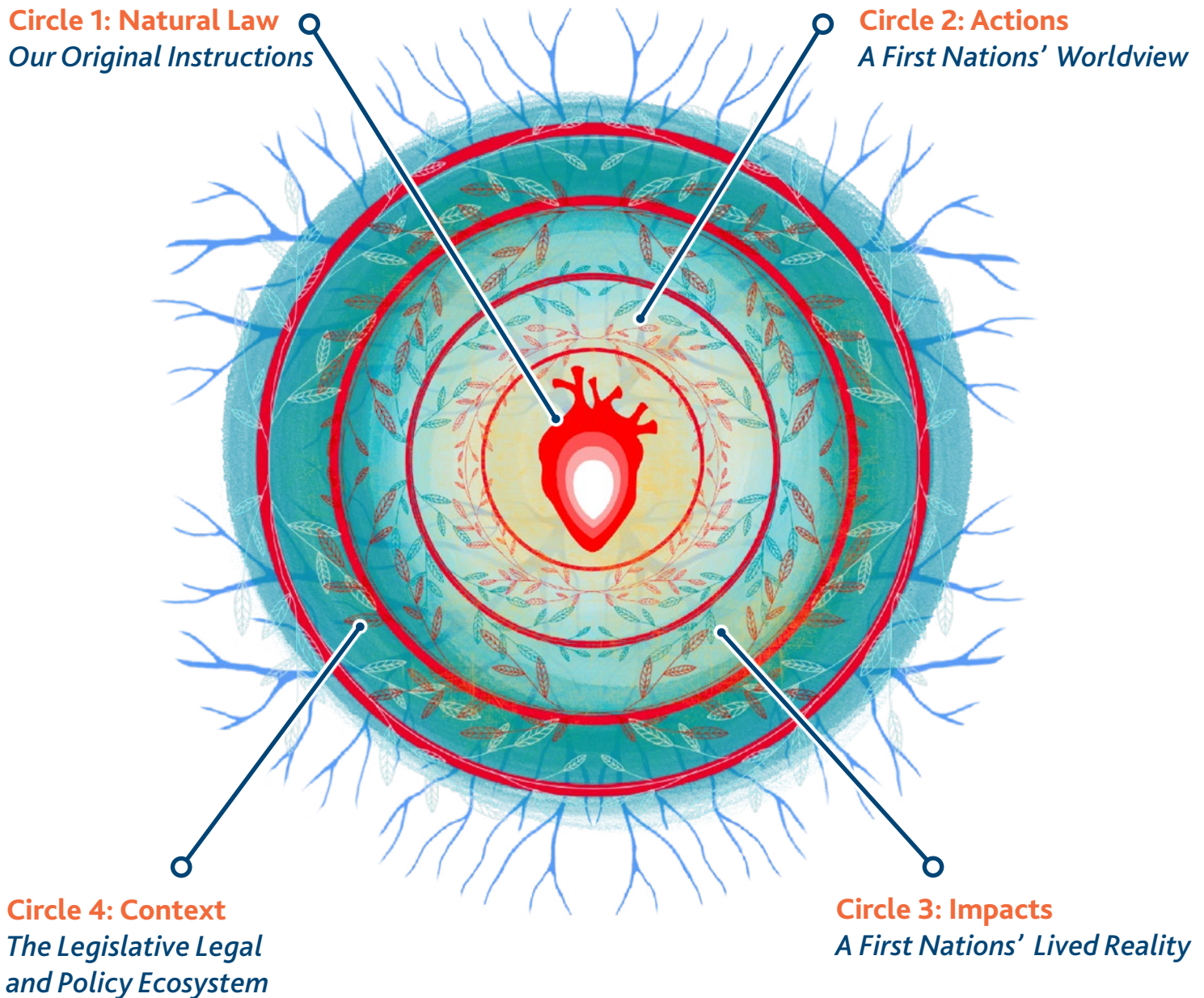


Figure 2: First Nations Climate Lens

<sup>9</sup> Eruoma Awashish is an Atikamekw Nehirowisiw mother and artist who is committed to her nation. She works in a variety of mediums, including painting, installation, performance, video, silkscreening and traditional dance. Awashish grew up in the community of Opitciwan. She is now established in Pekuakami (Lac-Saint-Jean), and her studio is located in the Innu community of Mashteuiatsh. She holds an interdisciplinary Bachelor of Arts from the University of Quebec at Chicoutimi.



First Nations face unique climate risks because of how colonialism, in conjunction with capitalism, has shaped where we live, our socio-economic conditions, and how we exercise our rights and relationships with Mother Earth. These experiences and interconnections cannot be overlooked when contemplating climate related solutions for (or by) First Nations. To better understand this reality, and advance First Nations climate solutions, the AFN has developed the concept of a First Nations 'Climate Lens' (Figure 2).

**Circle 1: Natural Law – Our Original Instructions:** First Nations Knowledge Keepers have described climate change as a symptom of a greater problem: a set of human values, based on the separation of humans from the natural world, that guide a series of destructive human behaviours and activities blatantly disrespecting Natural Law. Natural Law is a set of laws that originate directly from the Creator, based in our diverse languages, oral histories, and ceremonies, to govern how we must interact with the Land, Water, and more-than-human relatives to ensure balance and reciprocity.

**Circle 2: Action – A First Nations' Worldview:** First Nations-led solutions are multidimensional, interrelated, interconnected, and grounded in First Nations spiritualities, legal systems, knowledges, languages, and governances. The core of a First Nations worldview is an understanding that we are one with the Land. This recognition lays the foundation for a set of legal principles and orders that, while unique to each individual First Nation, represent natural, spiritual, and environmental law. It is this sacred responsibility that continues to guide how First Nations interact with, protect, and respect Mother Earth.

**Circle 3: Impacts – The First Nations' Lived Reality:** In Canada, climate conversations often disregard the historical legacy of colonization, which included relocating First Nations; forcibly removing children from their families and placing them in Residential Institutions; and prohibiting the use of traditional languages and practices, among other atrocities. Climate change exacerbates many of the resulting impacts of colonization, including those related to health, mental health and well-being, poverty, poor housing, food and water insecurity, and the erosion of rights, culture, and access to lands. The lived reality of First Nations must be understood and incorporated into analyses of the distribution and experience of climate-related impacts. In this regard, addressing the climate crisis cannot be separated from the broader project of First Nations self-determination and reconciliation.

**Circle 4: Context – The Legislative, Legal and Policy Ecosystem:** For First Nations, climate action is a rights- and Inherent responsibilities- based activity to be established, mandated, and implemented within First Nations governance, and working in concert with colonial legislative, legal, and policy contexts at the federal, provincial, territorial, and international level. This stems from our Inherent jurisdiction over our Lands, Waters, and territories, as well as our affirmed right to self-determination. The broader ecosystem for this includes the federal government's passing of legislation to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration), its commitment to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, as well as the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. It also includes First Nations-specific jurisprudence and the protections afforded to First Nations by the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

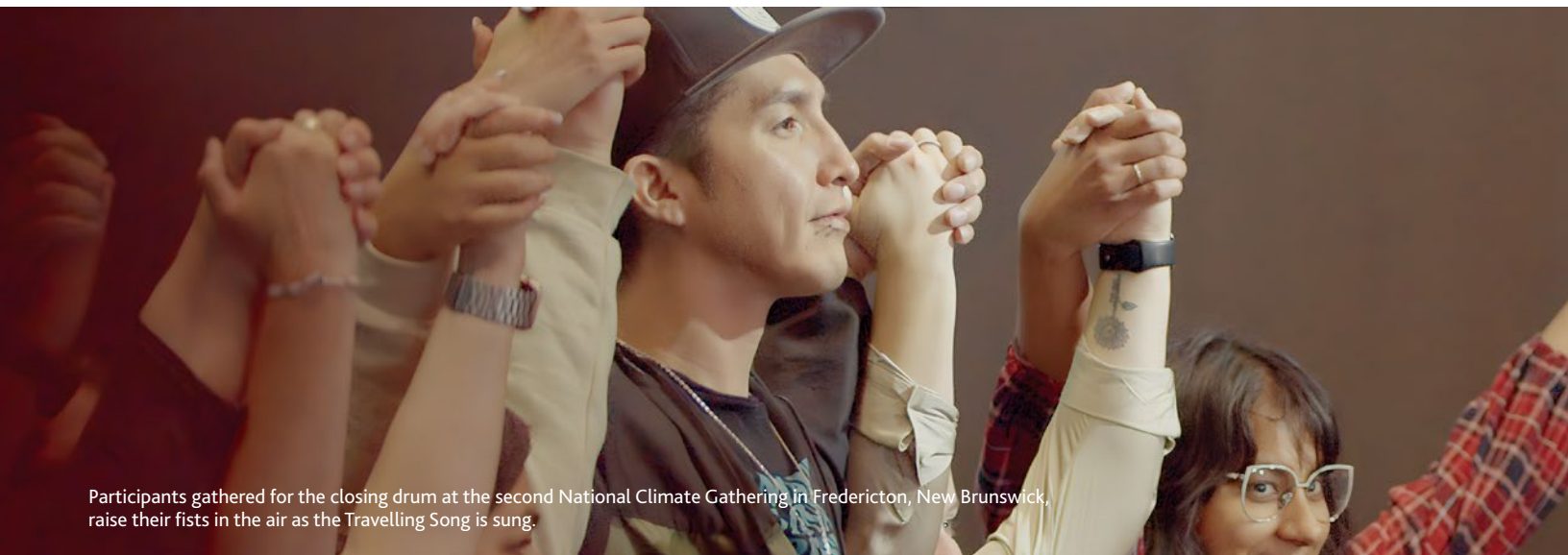


## 2.2 First Nations Climate Leadership

The Climate Lens challenges conventional conceptualizations of First Nations as ‘vulnerable’ populations and ‘passive recipients’ of climate impacts. Our deep connection to the Land, Water, Air, and more-than-human beings have enabled us to live reciprocally and in balance with all of Creation. The cultural, spiritual, social, and physical connection to the Land and Water may increase First Nations’ exposure and sensitivity to climate change impacts, but it also provides a unique source of strength, understanding and resilience. This way of being must be held up as an example of a path forward to effect the necessary change in society’s relationship with our natural world. First Nations are climate leaders and, as such, are key to restoring right relations with the Land, Water, and more-than-humans (animals, plants, medicines, among many others).

First Nations Climate Leadership means many things. For some, it represents an opportunity to shift societal thinking about the relationships humans have with the natural world, including climate. First Nations Climate Leadership offers an opportunity to re-operationalize First Nations legal systems laws and assert First Nations jurisdiction. For others, First Nations Climate Leadership means holding all levels of government accountable for their Paris obligations and creating space for First Nations to lead the way with decarbonization plans. It also represents a return to our roots, having a new frame of mind that’s based on the concept of “all our relations”, found in numerous First Nation languages. In Cree, for example, *wahkotowin* means “all our relationships’ and *kanawehitatan askiy* means “taking care of the land.” Finally, First Nations Climate Leadership shows us that no action is too small by rejecting the tendency to individualize climate action and instead focus on addressing things wholistically with a community and individual response. We are all connected to one another and must work together for the planet.

The application of the Climate Lens to federal, provincial, and territorial climate policy is essential to garner a more progressive and decolonial dialogue about climate action. This dialogue must avoid lapsing into failed narratives about balancing economy and environment, or quick-fix technological solutions, and instead engage ethically and equitably with First Nations knowledge systems. A true application of the Climate Lens, such as the application to the concept of net-zero emissions in Box 1, to federal, provincial, and territorial climate policy would begin with establishing a shared understanding of what is driving the climate crisis, and based on that shared understanding, determine appropriate actions using this starting point. This approach seeks to enable a reset with the systems and structures of colonization and capitalism that seem to trap us in an unproductive cycle, while advancing the self-determination of First Nations to reclaim their rightful place as Nations.





Regional Chief Kluane Adamek addresses participants at the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Climate Gathering in Fredericton, New Brunswick on the traditional unceded territory of the Wolastoqiyik, Mi'kmaq, and Peskotomuhkati.



### ***Case Story 1: Applying the First Nations Climate Lens: an example.***

The First Nations Climate Lens has important procedural, conceptual, and substantive applications to the understanding and implementation of climate solutions. In this case story, we will apply it to the concept of net-zero emissions.

First, the commitment to net-zero must not be interpreted as an end goal, where the only focus is on arriving at a point when anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases are balanced by anthropogenic removals. Net-zero, instead, must be conceptualized as a process founded on the First Nation's right to self-determination. To do so, the process to arrive at a just, equitable, and resilient future must be grounded in the leadership and direction of First Nations, guided by commitments to implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UN Declaration).

Second, a First Nations approach will confront the conventional "mitigation-adaptation" dichotomy—the separation between discussions on mitigation or adaptation action—rampant in federal climate perspectives. The conventional mitigation-adaptation dichotomy rarely considers the complex and multi-dimensional nature of First Nations climate solutions—such as returning to the Land and Water, a focus on food sovereignty, locally generated power systems, and language revitalization. This false dichotomy must be challenged to enable an acknowledgement of holistic, integrated, and systems-based solutions that must address the existential threat that is climate change.

Third, a new narrative is needed that does not rely on technological solutions and market-based approaches that presume a continuation of the structurally inequitable and racist systems that led us to this compounding environmental crisis in the first place. Rather, the Climate Lens offers an opportunity to shift our focus towards the interrelationship between the three C's—carbon, colonialism, and capitalism—centering an approach rooted in relationships that value the nexus of people and Land, and their mutual reciprocity. Such an approach recognizes that First Nations knowledge systems, while unique to each individual First Nation, describes the drivers of the climate crisis differently than mainstream systems.

Finally, the Climate Lens internalizes the tenets of Seven Generation thinking to guide how climate policy is prepared to ensure future and ongoing discussions that inform accountability mechanisms (such as the Net Zero Emissions Accountability Act). A Seven Generation decision-making model requires comprehensive and critical thought on balancing benefits in the present with those of future generations. Future generations, including plants, animals, and medicines, must have all the benefits and gifts of Mother Earth—such as clean water, a stable food supply, and a livable environment—so that they too can live a rich and meaningful life.





## 3. Priority Areas for Action

Seven priority areas, captured in Figure 3 and described further below, emerged from discussions on the AFN National Climate Strategy with First Nations across the country, both in-person and virtually since 2019. They are not intended to represent an exercise of enumerating First Nations climate priorities but are intended to offer broad themes to support First Nations in setting their own priorities. Furthermore, the seven priorities represent interconnected steps towards the long-term goal: dismantling of the structural legacy of colonialism and capitalism to support the self-determination of First Nations to develop community-based, community-controlled, and community-determined priorities, supported by multiple other layers of First Nations governance, such as at the Tribal Council (e.g., Grand Council Treaty 3), Treaty Level (e.g., Confederacy of Treaty 6 Nations), and provincial or territorial levels (e.g., Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs). As such, these must be understood in the context of enabling, rather than a prescriptive set of priorities for each First Nation at every level. Deeper and more meaningful discussions must occur with rights- and title- holders, Knowledge-Keepers, and First Nations leadership.



Figure 3: AFN National Climate Strategy Priority Areas



## 3.1 Prioritize First Nations Knowledge Systems, health, languages, cultures, and spiritualities.

First Nations Knowledge Keepers have shared how to address the climate crisis, based in prophecies, experiences, and Natural Law. Key to understanding these teachings is the restoration of respectful relations with the Land, Water, Air, and more-than-humans grounded in the revitalization of First Nations' knowledge systems, languages, cultures, and spiritualities. Combined, this is essential to heal Mother Earth and ensure health and wellness for First Nations.

First Nations consider spirituality (of beings, including the Land, Water, Air, animals) an essential component of life. The natural world is viewed as a sacred gift from the Creator—a gift to be cared for, respected, and stewarded in a good way. These worldviews are grounded in First Nations languages, which are predominantly verb-based, that connect humans with the natural world. Empowering First Nations Climate Leadership requires the incorporation of First Nations' knowledge systems into the design, implementation, and governance of climate policies, programs, legislation, and decisions at the federal, provincial, and territorial level.

***Goal: First Nations use, without restrictions, their knowledge systems, languages, cultures, spiritualities, and legal systems to respond to the climate crisis today and in the future.***

### Objectives:

- 3.1.1 Prioritize the preservation, retention, and use of First Nations' knowledge systems, languages, cultures, spiritualities, and legal systems by First Nations as a foundation to respond to the climate and biodiversity crises.
- 3.1.2 Provide stable, adequate, and long-term funding to First Nations to revitalize their legal and governance systems to guide climate change responses.
- 3.1.3 Ensure First Nations' knowledge systems ethically and equitably lead federal, provincial, and territorial understandings of the root causes of the climate crisis, as well as their decision-making processes.
- 3.1.4 Ensure First Nations are positioned to understand the short- and long- term impacts of climate change on their health and wellness to design and implement climate policy and programs to reflect these understandings.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	PRIORITY	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.1.1</b>		
Immediate increase in financial resources for First Nations to invest in practices, such as Land-based culture camps, documentation, and language apps, that protect, preserve, and share First Nations languages, cultures, and knowledge systems, based on the leadership and guidance of First Nations at all levels, as well as the participation of Knowledge Keepers, youth, women, men, persons with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.	Immediate	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Create opportunities for climate action collaboration between Knowledge Keepers, including fire and water keepers, and youth, with targeted support to return to the Land and Water.	Ongoing	First Nations.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.1.2</b>		
Prioritize the revitalization of First Nations languages and legal systems, including sovereignty over data, through stable, adequate, and long-term funding, to ensure their full inclusion in decision-making and climate response.	Immediate	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Explore partnerships with educational institutions and organizations to collaborate in the revitalization and use of First Nations languages and legal systems in the climate context.	Immediate	First Nations, educational institutions, and allied organizations.
Strengthen First Nations' legal systems, data sovereignty, and governance to support First Nations in generating, managing, and accessing climate data and information, in line with Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP®) principles, to inform decision-making and climate response.	Ongoing	First Nations.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.1.3</b>		
Develop First Nations-led protocols for ethical and equitable engagement with First Nations knowledge systems (e.g., Ethical Space <sup>10</sup> ) for all federal, provincial, and territorial multi-interest climate mitigation and adaptation tables.	Immediate	First Nations, in collaboration with federal, provincial, and territorial departments.

<sup>10</sup> The Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE), in [We Rise Together](#) 2018, describes ethical space as “a venue for collaboration and advice, sharing and cross-validation (where one side validates the other’s decisions)” (pg. 7).



## 3.1 PRIORITIZE FIRST NATIONS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS, HEALTH, LANGUAGES, CULTURES, AND SPIRITUALITIES

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	PRIORITY	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Seek out and abide by First Nations' knowledge and language protocols in all processes seeking to engage First Nations knowledge systems ethically and equitably in federal, provincial, and territorial processes.	Immediate	First Nations, in collaboration with federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Increase presence and participation of Knowledge Keepers and language speakers in federal, provincial, and territorial climate and biodiversity discussions and response initiatives.	Ongoing	First Nations, in collaboration with federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Create intersectional and diverse processes for federal, provincial, and territorial governments to dialogue directly with Knowledge Keepers, youth, women, persons with disabilities and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals regarding changes on the Land and Water.	Ongoing	First Nations, in collaboration with federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.1.4</b>		
Stable, adequate, and long-term funding for to First Nations to implement climate crisis and health-related programs that integrate culture, knowledge, spirituality, language, and community support.	Immediate	Federal, provincial, and territorial health departments.
Facilitate First Nations-led research, based on OCAP® principles and community research protocols, to better understand the intersectional health impacts of climate change on First Nations.	Ongoing	First Nations, in collaboration with educational institutions and health organizations.
Provide First Nations with financial and technical resources to develop culturally appropriate public awareness and education programs on climate change and to ensure that public health workers are aware of climate-related infectious diseases and mental health stressors.	Ongoing	First Nations, in collaboration with federal, provincial, and territorial health departments.
Ensure First Nations and non-Indigenous health agencies undertake culturally appropriate and periodic climate change health assessments in communities to inform climate responses, with a special emphasis on First Nations living in urban centers.	Ongoing	First Nations in collaboration with federal, provincial, and territorial health departments.



Members of Sisters of the Drum, the closing drum at the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Climate Gathering in Fredericton, New Brunswick, raise their fist in the air as the Women's Water Song is being sung.



## *Case Story 2: Climate Change Impacts on First Nations Health and Well-being*

Climate change has measurable consequences on the health and well-being of First Nations. It is expected that climate events will exacerbate respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular conditions, diabetes, and cancers, as well as vector-borne illness (e.g., Lyme Disease and West Nile Virus), and water and food-borne infections (e.g., gastroenteritis, skin, and neurological conditions). When First Nations contend with weakened transportation and infrastructures due to extreme climate-related events, this severely impacts their ability to reinforce the continuity of care and their access to health services, medications (i.e., Non-Insured Health Benefits program), diagnostics, and treatment. Evacuations due to wildfires and floods may increase First Nations' exposure to mental health stress, addictions, violence, racism, financial hardships, and food insecurity. Displacement from communities disrupts First Nations' ability to participate in Land-based activities, food sharing networks, the ability to pass on knowledge, and cultural practices: all of which are important for physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

The AFN, led by the Health Sector, is working to ensure the well-being of First Nations in a rapidly changing climate, including the:

- development of self-determined climate adaptations and strategies;
- recognition that knowledge systems are foundation to community resiliency;
- need to address the systemic, structural, jurisdictional, and infrastructural issues that place First Nations' physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health at greater risk due to climate-related emergencies;
- implement digital health systems to safeguard medical and prescription stability;
- identify strategies for First Nations people living with disabilities and reduced mobility in the event of climate emergencies and evacuations; and
- press for the reorientation of governmental support from reactionary and recovery to community-centered planning and preparedness.



## **3.2 Recognize, respect, and position First Nations Inherent jurisdiction and right to self-determination as central to climate decision-making at all levels.**

The structural exclusion of First Nations from federal, provincial, and territorial climate governance and decision-making processes cannot continue. First Nations, who hold Inherent and Treaty rights, title, and jurisdiction, must be recognized and treated as the decision-makers over for their Land, Waters, and Air. Federal, provincial, and territorial governments, as well as municipalities and industries, must respect, recognize, and safeguard First Nations rights, re-affirmed in the UN Declaration, in all climate-related discussions.

***Goal: First Nations' Inherent jurisdiction and right to self-determination is recognized and upheld in climate governance, legislation, regulation, and policies at all levels.***

### **Objectives:**

- 3.2.1** Ensure federal, provincial, and territorial climate governance, legislation, regulation, and policies, as well as other relevant initiatives, recognize, protect, and safeguard First Nations rights to self-determination.
- 3.2.2** Empower, facilitate, and ensure the development and implementation of local and regional First Nations climate change strategies, amplifying their unique and essential role in climate action.
- 3.2.3** Respect and facilitate First Nations in developing, maintaining, and implementing their own institutions, governing bodies, and political, economic, and social structures related to climate change.
- 3.2.4** Facilitate and enhance development and implementation of First Nations-led terrestrial, aquatic, and marine conservation, including First Nation Land and Water Guardians.
- 3.2.5** Enhance public knowledge and understanding of the societal, cultural, health, and economic consequences of climate change impacts on First Nations.



## 3.2 RECOGNIZE, RESPECT, AND POSITION FIRST NATIONS INHERENT JURISDICTION AND RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION AS CENTRAL TO CLIMATE DECISION-MAKING AT ALL LEVELS

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	PRIORITY	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.2.1</b>		
Transform federal, provincial, and territorial decision-making processes, in full partnership with First Nations, to ensure the recognition of First Nations' Inherent jurisdiction and the right to self-determination in climate governance, legislation, policy development, and implementation.	Immediate	First Nations in partnership with federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Ensure federal, provincial, and territorial governments streamline horizontal coordination on climate-related activities and ensure any engagement and partnership processes with First Nations respects First Nation engagement protocols and the <i>Best Practices for Federal Departments Working with First Nations on Climate Change</i> <sup>11</sup> .	Ongoing	First Nations.
Mandate cultural safety and awareness training and assessment for all federal, provincial, and territorial officials regarding the 'Nation-to-Nation' relationship, the true history of Canada, and the rights, jurisdiction, and diversity of First Nations.	Immediate	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Decolonize federal, provincial, and territorial climate and environmental decision-making processes (including legislation, regulation, policy, and program delivery) to create space for the respect and implementation of First Nations legal systems, policies, plans, or programs.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments, with leadership from First Nations.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.2.2</b>		
Develop a toolkit to support First Nations to develop local and regional climate change strategies.	Immediate	AFN, with support from First Nations.
Create a First Nations-led mechanism to support coordination, discussion, and peer-to-peer exchange between First Nations on experiences, impacts, and solutions to climate change (e.g., a center of observations).	Immediate	First Nations, with support from AFN.
Provide stable, adequate, and long-term funding to First Nations to support the development and implementation of local and regional climate change strategies.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.2.3</b>		
Work jointly with First Nations to update the Additions-to-Reserve Policy and Process to proactively support First Nations in dealing with the impacts of climate change, such as flooding, fires, erosion, landslides, and other climate disasters to ensure rapid relocation, and, where necessary, compensation.	Immediate	First Nations, in partnership with federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Affirm First Nations rights to the Lands, territories, and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupies or otherwise used or acquired, and give legal protections to these Lands, territories and resources.	Immediate	First Nations, in partnership with federal, provincial, and territorial departments.

<sup>11</sup> The Best Practices Guide for Federal Departments Working with First Nations on Climate Change can be found in the 2020 Joint Committee on Climate Action Annual Report here: <https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/21-0015-JCCA-Annual-Report-EN.pdf>





## 3.2 RECOGNIZE, RESPECT, AND POSITION FIRST NATIONS INHERENT JURISDICTION AND RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION AS CENTRAL TO CLIMATE DECISION-MAKING AT ALL LEVELS

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	PRIORITY	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Accelerate settlement and implementation of land claims and self-government agreements to recognize First Nations' authority and support the design and implementation of measures to adapt to predicted impacts of climate change on Lands and Waters upon which First Nations depend for economic, social, cultural, spiritual, medicinal, and political uses.	Ongoing	First Nations, in partnership with federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Provide stable, adequate, and long-term funding to First Nations to support the revitalization of their legal and governance systems to enable First Nations self-determination in climate-related processes and decision-making frameworks.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.2.4</b>		
Support LAND BACK and WATER BACK initiatives led by First Nations to re-assert jurisdiction on their Lands and Waters, ensuring full protection for all Land and Water defenders.	Immediate	First Nations, in partnership with federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Support and, where desired, partner with First Nations in the designation of terrestrial and marine Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) from coast-to-coast-to-coast to meet and exceed the Global Biodiversity Framework's targets for land, freshwater, and marine conservation in a manner that respects free, prior, and informed consent as well as OCAP® principles.	Ongoing	AFN, in partnership with First Nations.
Support the development and implementation of First Nation-led terrestrial, freshwater, aquatic, and marine conservation plans and projects that enhance conservation, restoration, and climate mitigation goals.	Ongoing	First Nations, with support from the AFN.
Provide stable, adequate, and long-term funding to First Nations to create Land and Water Guardian programs.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.2.5</b>		
Implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action (#62, #63 & #64) regarding education to ensure that all those living in Canada are taught the importance of the 'Nation-to-Nation' relationship, the true history of Canada, and the rights, jurisdiction, and diversity of First Nations.	Ongoing	Educational institutions
Develop publicly available educational materials (pamphlets, webpages, reports, videos) highlighting First Nations approaches, impacts, and solutions to climate change.	Ongoing	AFN, in partnership with First Nations.
Provide stable, adequate, and long-term funding to First Nations to develop education and capacity building to create awareness and respond to climate change through the development of local and regional First Nations climate change strategies.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.



### 3.3 Address capacity needs to support First Nations governance and their role as climate leaders.

The most effective way to combat the climate crisis and create resiliency is to recognize the critical leadership role of First Nations in climate, conservation, and environmental action.<sup>12</sup> Central to the recognition of this role is the acknowledgement that First Nations continue to deal with the historic and structural legacy of colonization, relating directly to the chronic underfunding of all elements of our lives—education, health, and infrastructure, among many others. Therefore, stable, adequate, and ongoing investments in the financial, technical, and human capacity needs of First Nations will be essential to supporting this role, and ultimately securing a future for all our future generations.

**Goal:** *First Nations have the financial, technical, and human capacity to lead the response to the climate crisis now and in the future.*

#### Objectives:

- 3.3.1 Address known barriers that limit First Nation's access to, and participation in, federal, provincial, and territorial climate-related funding programs.
- 3.3.2 Identify financial, technical, and human capacity needs of each First Nation to mobilize stable, adequate, and long-term investment to strengthen their planning, decision-making, and response to climate change.
- 3.3.3 Strengthen knowledge and awareness within, and between, First Nations on climate change, including local impacts, mitigation approaches, adaptation, and emergency responses.
- 3.3.4 Strengthen climate-related training and skills development, grounded in both First Nations knowledge systems and Western knowledge, for First Nations in all locations.
- 3.3.5 Remove all barriers facing First Nations women, men, knowledge keepers, members with disabilities, youth, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals to unlock their full contributions to climate action.

<sup>12</sup> For example, A report, *Indigenous Resistance Against Carbon* (2021), reviews the impacts Indigenous resistance to fossil fuel projects in the United States and Canada have had on greenhouse gas emissions over the past 10 years, delaying or stopping infrastructure that is equivalent to at least 25 percent of annual U.S. and Canadian emissions.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	PRIORITY	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.3.1</b>		
Immediately amend federal, provincial, and territorial program design, application processes, and implementation to reflect the <i>Best Practices for Program Design and Implementation</i> <sup>13</sup> , including flexibility, full engagement of First Nations in selection, decision-making, implementation, and joint evaluation.	Immediate	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments, including central agencies, in partnership with First Nations.
In line with the New Fiscal Relationship, end the practice of designing boutique funding programs for First Nations climate action and move towards models of direct transfer to First Nation governments in support of their self-determination.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments, in partnership with First Nations.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.3.2</b>		
Enhance financial and technical support to First Nations to act on self-determined ecosystem stewardship priorities, such as food and water security, monitoring and stewardship programs, habitat preservation, protection and restoration, and the protection of traditional medicines and sacred species at risk (salmon and caribou, for example).	Immediate	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments in partnership with First Nations.
Create a national network of First Nations climate and emergency coordinators at the community and regional level to support planning, decision-making, and responses to climate change.	Ongoing	AFN, in partnership with First Nations.
Create a First Nations Climate Institute, broadly responsible for expert support, facilitation, and coordination for First Nations-led climate initiatives, in full partnership with First Nation rights- and title- holders.	Immediate	AFN, in partnership with First Nations, and with support from federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.3.3</b>		
Support for First Nation governments to conduct climate change risk, health impacts, and vulnerability assessments, as well as provide stable, ongoing, and long-term financial, technical, and human support to implement the identified priorities.	Immediate	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Support the development and implementation of First Nations-led monitoring and data collection frameworks to establish robust baseline data on climate, environmental, social, cultural, and economic factors to inform First Nations-led climate responses, including through the creation of a First Nations Climate Change Observation Center.	Ongoing	First Nations.
Create opportunities for First Nations to have peer-to-peer climate discussions and information sharing (climate data, resources, templates) through the development of an online climate network and discussion forum.	Ongoing	AFN, in partnership with First Nations.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.3.4</b>		
Provide financial and technical support to First Nations governments and organizations to create jobs, including in traditional economies, education, training, and skills development for employment in the low-carbon transition.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.

<sup>13</sup> The Best Practices for Program Design and Implementation was developed by the Joint Committee on Climate Action and the Environment, found within the 2020 JCCA Annual Report referenced in footnote 10.



### 3.3 ADDRESS CAPACITY NEEDS TO SUPPORT FIRST NATIONS GOVERNANCE AND THEIR ROLE AS CLIMATE LEADERS

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	PRIORITY	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Support First Nations governments and organizations to enter into collaboration and partnership agreements with climate-relevant sectors to support pathways to employment for First Nations workers.	Ongoing	First Nations.
Establish training and mentorship opportunities, beginning in primary school all the way to university, for First Nations youth, in collaboration with First Nations climate leaders, Knowledge Keepers, Land and Water protectors, and allies, to empower, develop, and implement climate solutions.	Ongoing	First Nations, with support from federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Invest in community-led training programs, such as First Nations Land and Water Guardians, that equip First Nations and their members with the skills necessary to understand, access, and use climate change tools, such as the Climate Atlas, to make locally-relevant, informed decisions.	Immediate	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.3.5</b>		
Create space for First Nations youth to participate, contribute to, and lead discussions at the regional, national, and international level, including through the creation of a First Nations Youth Advisory Council on Climate Change in partnership with the AFN National Youth Council.	Immediate	AFN, in partnership with First Nations.
Develop a National First Nations Accessibility and Disability Inclusion Climate Action Tool Kit to ensure First Nations persons with disabilities and persons of all abilities inform climate decision-making plans and the development of inclusive culturally safe protocols and building back better from climate disasters.	Immediate	AFN, in partnership with First Nations.
Access to stable, adequate, and long-term funding to develop culturally appropriate tools, measures, and resources to address climate risks in collaboration with community members, knowledge keepers, members living with disabilities, youth and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.	Ongoing	First Nations.
Apply a distinctions-based approach and an intersectional lens to climate planning and response, recognizing and accounting for different lived experiences within First Nations.	Ongoing	First Nations, with support from federal, provincial, and departments.
Implement the Calls for Justice in the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.

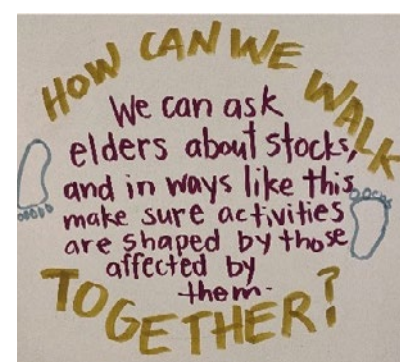
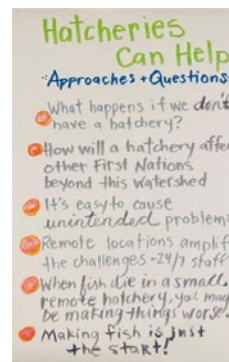


Norma Kassi, citizen of the Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation and co-Master of Ceremony, sits with Dr. David Suzuki during a panel at the 1<sup>st</sup> National Climate Gathering in Whitehorse on the territory of the Ta'an Kwächän and the Kwanlin Dün.

### ***Case Story 3: Yukon First Nations Salmon Stewardship Alliance: Climate change, disappearance of salmon, and contemplating new strategies for First Nations conservation.***

The Yukon salmon hold a great significance to the cultural heritage of the Yukon First Nations people and, until recent times, were a significant dietary component. In the face of declining salmon abundance, the Yukon First Nations have invested considerable resources into the conservation, preservation, and stewardship of the local salmon and salmon habitats. These efforts include knowledge sharing, leading and participating in salmon management, and restoration projects from local Knowledge Keepers. Despite these efforts, salmon have continued to decline as the Yukon River salmon have reached critically low abundances in 2022. This decline is believed to be linked to climate change, and given the north is warming two to three times faster than the global average, the future of the Yukon salmon is uncertain. In response to concerns over the Yukon salmon, the Yukon First Nation Salmon Stewardship Alliance hosted a workshop in 2022 to discuss whether hatcheries could play a role in salmon restoration efforts. The Yukon First Nations, Knowledge Keepers, hatchery experts, and project partners were invited to the discussion. Attendees considered presentations, group discussions, expert panel recommendations, and advice from Knowledge Keepers. The workshop agreed that further conversation should be carried forward to the community level where each Yukon First Nation can individually determine whether a hatchery would be a viable restoration tool for their respective communities. The Yukon First Nations Salmon Stewardship Alliance was established in 2021 within the Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN) to support First Nations in their fisheries work, with specific focus on salmon in recognition of the current salmon crisis. The unit is operating under a five-year strategic plan and works to support enhanced connections across First Nations and the development of common approaches and priorities.

*Images provided by Heidi Marion.*



## 3.4 ENSURE FIRST NATIONS SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN FOOD, WATER, AND ENERGY



### 3.4 Ensure First Nations self-sufficiency in food, water, and energy.

Climate change, in conjunction with colonization, has deeply impacted the self-sufficiency of First Nations. For First Nations, the interconnections between food, water, and energy are essential to maintaining self-determination, cultural continuity, and protecting community members from severe climate impacts. Self-sufficiency must be defined by each First Nation, but broadly it represents: the maintenance and return to traditional foods and food systems from colonial and processed diets; a return to Land- and Water-based teachings and knowledge systems; prioritizing clean and accessible water; a recognition of the sacredness of water; the ability to grow and harvest foods locally in all seasons; and a community owned and controlled source of energy that is clean and reliable.

**Goal:** *First Nations are self-sufficient in the areas of food, water, and energy, supporting the health and resilience of future generations*

#### Objectives:

- 3.4.1** Recognize that self-sufficiency in food, water, and energy represents a foundational element of First Nations self-determination, supporting the restoration of jurisdiction and authority over First Nations Lands and Waters.
- 3.4.2** Support First Nations in creating and enhancing mechanisms to effectively understand, plan, and respond to the impacts of climate change on traditional food systems, water sources, and energy systems.
- 3.4.3** Ensure food security and establish self-sufficiency within all First Nations, especially those in colder climates and those most vulnerable to climate-related impacts.
- 3.4.4** Ensure respect and recognition of First Nations' water governance and authority to work in relationship with water sources, including watersheds, wetlands, groundwater, rainwater, and the ocean.
- 3.4.5** Facilitate First Nations' energy independence and energy security by supporting the participation and ownership in the generation, transmission, and distribution of energy, including through power purchase agreements.



## 3.4 ENSURE FIRST NATIONS SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN FOOD, WATER, AND ENERGY

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	PRIORITY	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.4.1</b>		
Recognize and support First Nations authority and right to define, use, and manage their own food systems, including harvesting, gathering, and trapping processes and markets.	Ongoing	First Nations, with support from federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Uplift First Nations jurisdiction and authority to work in relationship with water sources, including watersheds, wetlands, groundwater, rainwater, and the ocean.	Ongoing	First Nations, with support from federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Empower First Nations-led energy systems to combat climate change, including, but not limited to, rights-based resource revenue sharing from federal, provincial, and territorial public energy projects.	Ongoing	First Nations, with support from federal, provincial, and territorial departments, utility companies, and other relevant organizations.
Identify, protect, and restore ecosystems and natural habitats impacted by climate change and human activity, including resource extraction and other urban/industrial projects, to protect more-than-human beings, sustain traditional food systems, as well as traditional relationships with Water.	Ongoing	First Nations, with support from federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.4.2</b>		
Support First Nations in developing mechanisms for community planning, monitoring, assessment, and data collection of information related to food, water, and energy self-sufficiency, following the OCAP® principles to support First Nations-led decision-making.	Immediate	First Nations, with support from federal, provincial, and territorial governments.
Ensure culturally significant species—such as salmon, caribou, eels, bison—are protected and restored for current and future generations, including through the establishment and support for First Nations-led stewardship plans, such as climate change strategies, monitoring plans, and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs).	Immediate	First Nations.
Develop educational initiatives, specifically for First Nations youth, related to the importance of restoring and maintaining traditional food diets; the protection of watersheds, source water, and oceans; as well as the re-localization of First Nations-led energy systems to combat climate change.	Ongoing	First Nations, with support from educational institutions and federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.4.3</b>		
Support for First Nation governments to conduct climate change risk, health impacts, and vulnerability assessments, as well as provide stable, ongoing, and long-term financial, technical, and human support to implement the identified priorities.	Immediate	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Support the development and implementation of First Nations-led monitoring and data collection frameworks to establish robust baseline data on climate, environmental, social, cultural, and economic factors to inform First Nations-led climate responses, including through the creation of a First Nations Climate Change Observation Center.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.





### 3.4 ENSURE FIRST NATIONS SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN FOOD, WATER, AND ENERGY

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	PRIORITY	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Create opportunities for First Nations to have peer-to-peer climate discussions and information sharing (climate data, resources, templates) through the development of an online climate network and discussion forum.	Ongoing	First Nations.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.4.4</b>		
Develop partnership agreements with First Nations to acknowledge their water governance and authority to work in relationship with water sources, including watersheds, wetlands, groundwater, rainwater, and the ocean.	Immediate	First Nations, in partnership with federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Support First Nations in the development and implementation of water protection and stewardship plans that include a climate change analysis and appropriate responses.	Ongoing	First Nations.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.4.5</b>		
Advance the development of a focused First Nations Energy Strategy (in alignment with Resolution 55/2017, <i>First Nations Energy Strategy</i> ) to ensure First Nations are positioned to lead the clean energy transition and prevent any disproportionate impact from the energy transition on First Nations, especially those that are transitioning away from diesel generation or using natural gas for heating.	Immediate	AFN, in partnership with First Nations.
Restore the ability for First Nations to generate revenue from selling electricity through agreements with provinces, territories, and utility companies, such as electricity purchase agreements for small projects and/or other alternatives that allow for economic opportunities related to clean energy.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments, utility companies, in partnership with First Nations.
Reduce energy poverty in First Nations by ensuring access to clean, affordable, and reliable energy and energy sources that reduce total greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate environmental impacts relative to alternative sources, as per local and regional climate-preparedness realities, priorities, and aspirations.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Provide stable, adequate, and long-term funding to First Nations to address the human, environmental, and hydrologic impacts from abandoned oil and gas wells, including methane releases.	Ongoing	First Nations, with support from federal, provincial, and territorial departments.



Paily Sias, Dän Keyi Renewable Resource Council, and Grace Southwick, Kluane First Nation, presenting at their concurrent session, *Indigenous Knowledge, Science and Understandings of Environmental Change: Stories from Yukon's Kluane First Nation*, at the 1st National Climate Gathering in Whitehorse on the territory of the Ta'an Kwächän and the Kwanlin Dün.

## 3.5 CLOSE THE NATURAL AND BUILT INFRASTRUCTURE GAP



### 3.5 Close the natural and built infrastructure gap.

First Nations jurisdiction and self-determination over infrastructure projects and decision-making must be prioritized when it comes to resources and funding. We must have stable, adequate, and long-term funding to support First Nations to plan, retrofit, and design new assets to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of a changing climate and close the natural and built infrastructure gap within First Nations. These infrastructure gaps have occurred as a result of chronic underfunding by federal, provincial, and territorial governments. Climate change exacerbates the negative repercussions of these gaps (inequities) experienced by First Nations, including in areas such as connectivity, housing, infrastructure, and transportation. This puts First Nations at a disproportionate risk from climate events compared to other segments of the Canadian population. Central to this is a recognition that the existing natural and built infrastructure gap must be addressed simultaneously with building climate resiliency for First Nations. Infrastructure development and projects need to be designed and developed by the Nations themselves, supporting the longer-term transition from federal infrastructure programming to First Nations care, control, and management. In addition to protecting First Nations from known and unknown climate impacts, investment in First Nations climate resiliency will promote the reduction of emissions while boosting economic growth.

**Goal:** *First Nations close the natural and built infrastructure gap, enabling an effective and self-determined response to current and projected climate impacts.*

#### Objectives:

- 3.5.1** Assess the climate vulnerability of existing natural and built infrastructure across First Nations, as well as the gaps, to quantify the need for stable, adequate, and long-term investments to First Nations to build resiliency in a changing climate.
- 3.5.2** Establish appropriate natural and built infrastructure within First Nations to protect community and ecosystem health, reduce emissions and reliance on fossil fuels, and adapt to current and projected climate impacts.
- 3.5.3** Support agreements, laws, initiatives, and networks that promote and enhance local and regional collaboration between First Nations to protect the Lands, Waters, and Air for future generations.
- 3.5.4** Ensure reliable, accessible, safe, and affordable low-carbon and active transportation within and between First Nations.
- 3.5.5** Support First Nations to ensure that housing and buildings within their territories are culturally appropriate, energy-efficient, and resilient to climate change.



## 3.5 CLOSE THE NATURAL AND BUILT INFRASTRUCTURE GAP

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	PRIORITY	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.5.1</b>		
Make immediate investments (\$349.2 billion) to Close the First Nations Infrastructure Gap by 2030, in areas of housing, digital connectivity, education, road access, and infrastructure, among many others, outlined in the AFN report.	Immediate	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments, in partnership with First Nations.
Support First Nations to develop and establish culturally appropriate community wellness centers and programs to provide services for members and to incorporate traditional practices, language, ceremony, and medicines.	Ongoing	First Nations.
Create funding mechanisms to support First Nations in the management and treatment of waste, including innovative solutions to address these challenges in remote areas.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Promote access and reduce barriers for First Nations to access capital for major infrastructure development.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments, and allied organizations in partnership with First Nations.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.5.2</b>		
Explore the development and implementation of a First Nations Green Infrastructure Fund, modeled off the Canada Infrastructure Bank but led by First Nations, to support First Nations self-determination in addressing the natural and infrastructure deficit.	Immediate	AFN, in partnership with First Nations.
Support First Nations in developing and operating their own infrastructure management plans and systems to effectively respond to current and projected climate impacts.	Immediate	First Nations, with support from federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Support the development of infrastructure-related training opportunities within First Nations, with a special emphasis on First Nations youth, persons with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQIA+.	Ongoing	First Nations.
Conduct a nation-wide assessment, including vulnerability, on critical infrastructure gaps in First Nations territories (e.g., transportation, communications, and connectivity) that impact First Nations' health, wellness, and continuity of care during climate-emergencies.	Immediate	First Nations, with support from federal, provincial, and territorial departments.



## 3.5 CLOSE THE NATURAL AND BUILT INFRASTRUCTURE GAP

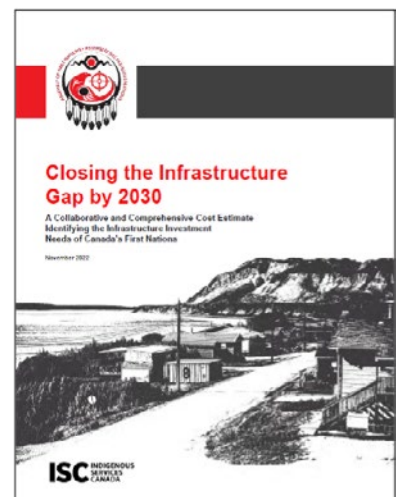
STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	PRIORITY	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.5.3</b>		
Ensure any proposed infrastructure project on First Nations territories is designed in partnership with First Nations, based on the full recognition of First Nations jurisdiction and self-determination.	Ongoing	First Nations, project proponents, and relevant federal, provincial, and territorial departments and regulatory bodies.
Empower First Nations to manage their own resources and generate own-source revenue by decolonizing federal, provincial, and territorial legislation, regulation, and policy to enable economic reconciliation.	Immediate	First Nations, in partnership with federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.5.4</b>		
Map and proactively address concerns with transportation networks, including winter roads and high costs of shipping, that will be exacerbated by climate impacts, in full partnership with First Nations.	Immediate	First Nations, with support from relevant federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Provide First Nations with the staple, adequate, and long-term funding to develop a First Nations transportation strategy that proposes recommendations to develop safe, accessible, and low-carbon transportation.	Ongoing	First Nations, with support from AFN.
Ensure any proposed transportation project on First Nations territories is designed in partnership with First Nations, based on the full recognition of First Nations jurisdiction and self-determination.	Ongoing	First Nations, project proponents, and relevant federal, provincial, and territorial departments and regulatory bodies.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.5.5</b>		
Take immediate action to address the systemic inequity of housing security for First Nations, both on and off reserve, as a component of building resiliency and adaptation to climate change.	Immediate	First Nations, with support from federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Provide stable, adequate, and long-term funding to First Nations to build culturally appropriate, energy efficient, and resilient housing to help address the current homelessness and overcrowding crisis.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Strengthen training opportunities for First Nations on housing and energy-efficient design, construction and maintenance, materials, and technologies, building inspection, energy advising, and other areas.	Ongoing	First Nations, allied organizations (Indigenous Clean Energy), and federal, provincial, and territorial departments.

## ***Case Story 4: Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030: Implementation and Prioritization Plan***

For the last three years, the AFN and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) have been working with a multidisciplinary team to produce a report, *Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030* ('Infrastructure Gap Report'), that works to advance First Nations' socioeconomic outcomes by fulfilling the Government of Canada's existing fiduciary, legal, and public commitments to First Nations. The investment required to close this gap is **\$349.2 billion**.

A key focus of this report was on climate change adaptation and net-zero preparedness. The Infrastructure Gap Report identifies the most significant climate hazards that will affect First Nations in nine regions or provinces: the Atlantic provinces, Québec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and the Yukon and Northwest Territories. The eight hazards are extreme heat, drought, wildfires, high winds, freezing rain, localized flooding, creek-river-lake flooding, and changes in sea levels. These hazards will compound exposure that First Nations infrastructure already faces, and is projected to increase over the coming decade, and likely escalate rapidly thereafter. First Nation assets will experience greater seasonal stress resulting in increased costs related to changing frequency or type of maintenance, reduced asset lifespans, and a likely increase in insurance liability incurred by the vulnerability of assets in the absence of some form of climate adaptation strategy. The climate adaptation, or resiliency, of First Nation assets to climate change is necessary to lower current and future financial expenditures in addition to ensuring First Nation community health and longevity of First Nation infrastructure assets is sustained. To build resiliency of First Nations infrastructure, an investment of **\$30.9 billion until 2030 is required**.

The Infrastructure Gap Report also examines the costs to replace ice-roads with conventional concrete roadway structures. Currently, 67 First Nations rely on ice-roads for transportation connectivity in Canada spread between Manitoba (19 First Nations and 2119km), Ontario (31 First Nations and 3160km), and Saskatchewan, Alberta, and the territories (17 First Nations and 2721km). These ice-roads, and their ability to bear transportation vehicles, are under the threat of global temperature rise. An investment of \$29.128 billion until 2030 is required to begin the planning of ice-road replacement and avoid the negative market and health impacts of loss of ice-roads.





## 3.6 ENSURE FIRST NATIONS ARE EQUIPPED TO MITIGATE, PREVENT, RESPOND, AND RECOVER TO ALL EMERGENCIES



### 3.6 Ensure First Nations are equipped to mitigate, prevent, respond, and recover to all emergencies.

First Nations must be positioned to regain authority in controlling and developing their own emergency management programs, with capacity equitable to other communities. First Nations must also be empowered to partner on equal terms with the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, as well as regional emergency management organizations, such as the First Nations Emergency Services Society in British Columbia.<sup>14</sup> First Nations are often disproportionately affected by emergency events compared to other governments in Canada due to remoteness, lack of critical infrastructure, resources, and capacity. This is exacerbated by the ongoing structural legacy of colonization. When an event does happen, First Nations are often reliant on other levels of government—federal, provincial, and territorial—to provide the critical supports to keep their community safe. Without their own emergency management regime or funding, First Nations are at a severe disadvantage. First Nations face additional risks because they may lack equipment and the personnel to develop plans to incorporate prevention and mitigation strategies, training, and evacuation procedures in the event of an emergency and/or natural disaster.

**Goal:** *First Nations are equipped with the financial, technical, and human resources to control their own emergency management programs, systems, and strategies to mitigate, prevent, respond, and recover to all emergencies*

#### Objectives:

- 3.6.1** Respect, promote, and safeguard First Nations knowledge systems, rights, and self-determination in all federal, provincial, and territorial emergency management, including mitigation, prevention, response, and recovery.
- 3.6.2** Strengthen First Nations-led emergency management at the community, regional, and national level, including mitigation, prevention, response, and recovery, to effectively respond to climate-related impacts, risks, and emergencies.
- 3.6.3** Provide financial technical and human capacity to First Nations to support the development, implementation, and monitoring of emergency management strategies, action plans, and risk assessments.
- 3.6.4** Enhance First Nations' financial, technical, and human capacity to conduct community-based climate-related assessments and monitoring to generate their own data, in line with OCAP®, and inform their self-determined emergency management, including mitigation, prevention, response, recovery.

<sup>14</sup> With the support of the First Nation Leadership Council, First Nations Emergency Services Society (FNESS) is the organization that First Nations in B.C. reach out to for support and delivery of essential emergency and forest fuel management programs and services. More can be found here: <https://www.fness.bc.ca/>



## 3.6 ENSURE FIRST NATIONS ARE EQUIPPED TO MITIGATE, PREVENT, RESPOND, AND RECOVER TO ALL EMERGENCIES

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	PRIORITY	IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATION
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.6.1</b>		
Empower First Nations to enter into emergency management agreements based on the full respect of First Nations' knowledge systems, rights, and self-determination with relevant federal, provincial, and territorial governments.	Immediate	First Nations.
Ethically and equitably engage First Nations knowledge systems through the development of culturally specific knowledge protocols into emergency management planning and decision-making to enhance risk assessment, preparedness, and response strategies.	Ongoing	First Nations, in partnership with federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Integrate emergency management planning into climate change response by merging disaster risk reduction with climate adaptation actions at the federal, provincial, territorial level, while respecting First Nations' rights, jurisdiction, and knowledge systems.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Institutionalize cultural sensitivity training to emergency management personnel to enhance their understanding of First Nations cultures, histories, and protocols, especially in the case of an evacuation order.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments, in partnership with First Nations.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.6.2</b>		
Immediately strengthen emergency mitigation, prevention, response, and recovery systems within First Nations to ensure preparedness from rising severe climate impacts, including catastrophic weather events and natural disasters.	Immediate	First Nations, with support from federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Provide direct support to First Nations to create regional or community emergency management coordinators and establish emergency management plans that uplift First Nations jurisdiction and self-determination, including regional strategies when relevant.	Immediate	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Invest in improving infrastructure in First Nations, including accessible, reliable and low-carbon transportation, communication networks, cooling centers, air purifiers, and emergency response facilities.	Ongoing	First Nations, with support from federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Develop specific emergency responses for Knowledge Keepers, seniors, women, persons with disabilities, children and youth, 2SLGBTQIAA+ individuals, to ensure that no one is left behind.	Immediate	First Nations.





## 3.6 ENSURE FIRST NATIONS ARE EQUIPPED TO MITIGATE, PREVENT, RESPOND, AND RECOVER TO ALL EMERGENCIES

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	PRIORITY	IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATION
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.6.3</b>		
Provide First Nations with stable, adequate, and long-term funding to support the development of resources, including training to access the centralized database for climate change impacts and natural disaster information, to conduct local and culturally relevant disaster mitigation and recovery planning.	Ongoing	Federal, provincial, and territorial governments.
Provide stable, adequate, and long-term funding to First Nations to conduct vulnerability and risk mapping studies, implement preventative measures (such as cultural burning and Fire Smart programs), support community-led implementation measures, and maintain personnel and equipment for emergency responses.	Immediate	Federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Increase capacity training, both in First Nations knowledge systems and Western science, for First Nations to deal with, and address, a wide range of emergencies.	Ongoing	First Nations, in partnership with educational institutions and allied organizations.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.6.4</b>		
Promote education and awareness campaigns within First Nations to enhance preparedness and responses, including disseminating culturally appropriate information on emergency planning, response procedures, and available resources.	Immediate	First Nations, with support from federal, provincial, and territorial departments.
Develop and implement strategies to provide emergency information and support in First Nation languages. This includes translation services, bilingual emergency alerts, and hiring First Nations language speakers as part of emergency response teams.	Ongoing	First Nations.

## *Case Story 5: Climate Change and First Nations Housing Crisis*

Climate change and housing are inextricably connected. For First Nations, climate change compounds the already existing housing crisis that impacts health, education, and other socio-economic inequalities. First Nations are often the first to experience the effects of climate change and the last to receive support. Peguis First Nation is a community on the front line of the housing and climate change crisis. Peguis First Nation is located in a flood prone zone 190 km north of Winnipeg, Manitoba, on the Fisher River and has experienced more than five floods in the last 20 years. As recently as 2022, Peguis First Nation experienced the worst flooding ever and evacuated more than 2000 members from the community. Hundreds of homes were damaged causing structural deterioration and mold.

After years and years of appealing to the federal government for funding and sustainable solutions to prevent flooding impacts, Peguis First Nation is on their way to addressing their housing needs. The community is starting to tackle the hundreds of homes that need to be either rebuilt or repaired but is rebuilding to resist future flooding for the safety of many First Nations. As a way of preserving their housing, new housing developments are incorporating clay mounds four to eight feet above the ground on which housing will be built- well above historical flood levels. Peguis First Nation highlights the plight of many First Nations across Canada that experience climate events that exacerbate their housing crisis. First Nations require the Government to work with them to plan and develop sustainable housing structures and climate change investments, policies, and programs to ensure that systems level approaches improve the well-being of the First Nation sustainably for generations.

*Images provided by Grace Martineau*





## 3.7 LEVERAGE THE FIRST NATIONS CLIMATE LENS TO REFORM FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL, AND TERRITORIAL LEGISLATION, REGULATION, POLICY, AND PROGRAMS



### 3.7 Leverage the First Nations Climate Lens to reform federal, provincial, and territorial legislation, regulation, policy, and programs.

The First Nations Climate Lens (outlined in Figure 2) advocates for a fundamental reframing of the climate discourse. It proposes a transition away from the overemphasis on 'technological solutions' and 'market-based mechanisms' towards a framing that emphasizes the centrality of First Nations' rights, self-determination, and knowledge systems to expose the interrelationship between the three 'Cs': colonialism, capitalism, and carbon. A critical and decolonizing lens is essential for equitable, immediate, and transformative action built on solutions that are wholistic, multi-dimensional, and interconnected. By recognizing the diversity of First Nations, the First Nations Climate Lens stresses a rights and responsibilities-based approach to climate action that reiterates the importance of 'place-based' policy led by local and regional First Nations.

**Goal:** *The First Nations Climate Lens is used to guide reform of all legislation, regulation, policy, and programs at the federal, provincial, and territorial level in full partnership with First Nations.*

#### Objectives:

- 3.7.1** Ensure all climate-related legislation, regulation, policies, programs, and their implementation mechanisms at the federal, provincial, and territorial level are aligned with the First Nations Climate Lens.
- 3.7.2** Remove legislative, regulatory, and policy barriers for First Nations to exercise their self-determination in climate planning, decision-making, and response.
- 3.7.3** Increase public understanding of the role of colonization and colonial laws, such as the Indian Act, in limiting and restricting First Nations ability to respond to climate change.
- 3.7.4** Strengthen collaboration and partnership between First Nations and federal, provincial, and territorial governments, as well as with Indigenous Peoples internationally, in climate response, conservation, and environmental protection and stewardship.
- 3.7.5** Develop a toolkit to support First Nations in adapting and applying the First Nations Climate Lens to their local circumstances.



## 3.7 LEVERAGE THE FIRST NATIONS CLIMATE LENS TO REFORM FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL, AND TERRITORIAL LEGISLATION, REGULATION, POLICY, AND PROGRAMS

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	PRIORITY	IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATION
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.7.1 AND 3.7.2</b>		
Empower First Nations to lead the review and reform of all federal, provincial, and territorial legislation, policies, and programs related to emerging concepts in climate discourse, such as net-zero, <i>Critical Minerals</i> , <i>Just Transition</i> , and <i>nature-based solutions</i> , through the First Nations Climate Lens.	Immediate	AFN, in partnership with First Nations, and in collaboration with federal, provincial, and territorial governments.
Update decision-making processes to hold governments and industries accountable for their climate and environmental impact, including through the <i>Canadian Net Zero Emissions Accountability Act</i> , <i>Impact Assessment Agency</i> , and the <i>Canadian Energy Regulator Act</i> , among others.	Immediate	Federal departments, in partnership with First Nations.
Empower First Nations to lead the review and reform of legislation, regulations, policies, and programs related to the carbon pricing, carbon rights, and carbon offsets to ensure alignment with the First Nations Climate Lens, in particular the UN Declaration.	Immediate	AFN, in partnership with First Nations, and in collaboration with federal, provincial, and territorial governments.
Empower First Nations to lead the review and reform of all federal, provincial, and territorial energy legislation, policies, and programs, including the Clean Electricity Standard, to adhere to the First Nations Climate Lens and the UN Declaration, as well as to ensure accessible and equitable opportunities for First Nations.	Immediate	AFN, in partnership with First Nations, and in collaboration with federal, provincial, and territorial governments.
Empower First Nations to lead the review and reform of all federal, provincial, and territorial emergency management legislation, policies, and programs, such <i>Canada's Emergency Management Act</i> , to ensure appropriate response to the current climate emergency and alignment with the First Nations Climate Lens and UN Declaration.	Ongoing	AFN, in partnership with First Nations, and in collaboration with federal, provincial, and territorial governments.
Empower First Nations to lead the review and reform of all federal, provincial, and territorial climate-related policies and programs to ensure they are gender-inclusive, non-binary, and recognize and value the knowledge and ways of knowing of First Nations women, youth, persons with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.	Immediate	AFN, in partnership with First Nations, and in collaboration with federal, provincial, and territorial governments.
Facilitate and support a First Nations-led review of existing policies and legislation to address issues to enable the establishment of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas and First Nation Guardian programs on terrestrial, freshwater, and marine areas.	Ongoing	First Nations, with support from AFN.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.7.3</b>		
Tailor communication materials prepared by First Nations to provide an understanding of the impacts of colonial legislation, such as the <i>Indian Act</i> , on First Nations ability to respond to climate change.	Ongoing	AFN, in partnership with First Nations.
Develop communication materials (videos, infographics, case stories) to raise awareness of the First Nations Climate Lens and support its implementation.	Immediate	AFN, in partnership with First Nations.



## 3.7 LEVERAGE THE FIRST NATIONS CLIMATE LENS TO REFORM FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL, AND TERRITORIAL LEGISLATION, REGULATION, POLICY, AND PROGRAMS

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	PRIORITY	IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATION
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.7.4</b>		
Host an AFN National Climate Gathering every two years to support First Nations to share experiences, impacts, and solutions, as well as update on the implementation of the AFN National Climate Strategy.	Immediate	AFN.
Compile a series of resources on ethical and equitable engagement with First Nations to strengthen collaboration and partnership between First Nations and federal, provincial, and territorial governments.	Ongoing	AFN, in partnership with First Nations.
Support First Nations governments and organizations to enter into collaboration and partnership agreements with Indigenous Peoples, and their representative institutions, internationally.	Ongoing	AFN, in partnership with First Nations.
Establish training and mentorship opportunities, to support First Nations, in particular youth, persons with disabilities, and 2SLGT-BQIAA+ individuals, to participate in relevant national and international discussions on climate response, conservation, and environmental protection and stewardship.	Ongoing	AFN, in partnership with First Nations.
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.7.5</b>		
Develop a toolkit to support First Nations in adapting and applying the First Nations Climate Lens to their local circumstances.	Immediate	AFN, in partnership with First Nations.

## *Case Story 6: First Nations Climate Strategies in British Columbia*

### *BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan*

In 2019 and 2021, First Nations leadership in BC passed resolutions calling for the development of a BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan (UBCIC Resolution No. 2019-02; BCAFN Resolution No. 04/2019; and FNS Resolution No. 2021.15). The First Nations Leadership Council (FNCL) was mandated to coordinate the development of this work in collaboration with First Nations in BC to ensure:

- First Nations' Title, Rights, and Treaty Rights were asserted and protected in addressing climate change.
- First Nations knowledge, laws, legal processes, and worldviews were recognized and implemented in climate planning and response.
- Effective and immediate responses to the climate emergency were identified to reduce impacts and vulnerability within and across communities.

The BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan, released in 2022, is grounded on a vision, five guiding principles, and four priority pathways for climate action: Inherent Title and Rights; Capacity and Leadership; Land and Water Protection; and Climate Response and Preparedness.

The full Strategy, as well as 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action, can be found on the website: <https://fnlclimatestrategy.ca/>



## *Case Story 7: First Nations Climate Strategies in Yukon*

### *The Yukon First Nations Reconnection Vision*

The idea to create the Yukon First Nations Climate Action Fellowship originated at the first-ever Yukon First Nations (YFN) Climate Action Gathering in February 2020. At the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre, Yukon First Nation Chiefs signed a Climate Change Emergency Declaration, which included endorsement of the development of a Yukon First Nations Climate Vision and Action Plan. Key to doing this, according to Yukon First Nations leadership, was ensuring it be youth-led as “it is their future at stake, and they will inherit the decisions made now.” This led to the creation of the Climate Action Fellowship, a cohort of 13 First Nations youth from across the Yukon. Working, growing, and reconnecting together since January 2021, the Fellowship launched their Reconnection Vision (RV) in May 2023. The RV identifies the dominant approach to climate action is to treat the symptoms of climate change (e.g., rising carbon dioxide emissions) rather than the root causes—Disconnected relationships. Their response is to emphasize the concept of Reconnection, framing Reconnection—the practice of getting back into good relationship with

spirit, self, each other, and the Land—as climate action. The tools of Reconnection are held in First Nations cultures. The Reconnection Vision guides people to nurture their whole selves (spiritual, emotional, physical, mental), so they can transform how they make decisions that shape our society — our Wellness, Housing, Food, Energy, Extraction, Economy, Governance, and Education. The full Reconnection can be found on the website: <https://reconnection.vision/>





## 4. Conclusion and Path Forward

Grounded in the vision of the Elders' Statement, the mandate from the First Nations-in-Assembly, and the First Nations Climate Lens, the AFN National Climate Strategy offers a First Nations approach to climate governance, policy, and discussions. Central to this approach is the deep reciprocal relationship between First Nations and the Land, Water, and Air, captured in the Elders' Statement: "...*The Creator gave us the responsibility to preserve and protect Mother Earth and laws that govern all our relationships for us to coexist interdependently with nature and humanity, defining our rights, responsibilities, and obligations to the Land...*"

The original direction from the First Nations-in-Assembly acknowledges this interconnection, recognizing that "...*climate change constitutes a state of emergency for our lands, waters, animals, and peoples.*" Practically, we advanced this declaration through the conceptual framework of the First Nations Climate Lens ('Climate Lens'). The Climate Lens advocates for a fundamental reframing of the climate discourse. It proposes a transition away from the overemphasis on 'technological solutions' and 'market-based mechanisms' towards a framing that emphasizes the centrality of First Nations' rights, self-determination, and knowledge systems. To do this, we introduced seven priority areas to advance and support First Nations Climate Leadership:

- 1. Prioritize First Nations Knowledge Systems, health, languages, cultures, and spiritualities.**
- 2. Recognize, respect, and position First Nations Inherent jurisdiction and right to self-determination as central to climate decision-making at all levels.**
- 3. Address capacity needs to support First Nations governance and their role as climate leaders.**
- 4. Ensure First Nations self-sufficiency in food, water, and energy.**
- 5. Close the natural and build infrastructure gap.**
- 6. Ensure First Nations are equipped to mitigate, prevent, respond, and recover to all emergencies.**
- 7. Leverage the First Nations Climate Lens to reform federal, provincial, and territorial legislation, regulation, policy, and programs.**

The corresponding goal, series of objectives, and list of strategies and actions are enabling, so First Nations at the local and regional level can develop their own climate strategies and priorities grounded in their unique histories, governance, cultures, languages, and legal systems. We urge government, business, and academic partners to walk alongside, or behind, First Nations as they implement these strategies in their Lands, Waters, Airs and Territories.

We look forward to implementing the AFN National Climate Strategy together.









