

Opportunities and Best Practices for Community-based Land Use Planning and Management in the Upper Columbia

A RESEARCH BRIEF

With mounting pressure on ecosystems and increased conflict between user groups, the need for land use planning in the Upper Columbia is strong. While approaches to land management in British Columbia are shifting, resources are limited for regions to participate in the Modernized Land Use Planning Program.

What can communities do to get ready for land use planning? What are the tools for success?

This research brief offers an overview of best practices and criteria for readiness to participate in land use planning processes in B.C., based on a recent review of case studies and interviews with government officials and practitioners advancing this work.

Read the full report at
y2y.net/UpperColumbiaPlanning



Research questions

- 1 How can communities in the Upper Columbia region influence (within existing legal and policy frameworks) how the lands surrounding them are used and managed?
- 2 How can communities be ready to engage in a modernized land use process led by the provincial government if/when that opportunity arises?
- 3 What factors should be considered in the design of planning processes or management bodies that facilitate the involvement of community interests in land use planning?

Methods

The project team reviewed literature and analyzed examples of community-based land use planning mainly from within B.C., with a few examples from the Yukon and Western U.S. The aim of the analysis was to generate an overview of factors that should be considered in the design of community-based planning, as well as identify factors that act as barriers and bridges to success.

The team conducted 11 key informant interviews with representatives of case study communities, researchers and practitioners advancing this work in B.C., and key government officials involved in the design and implementation of the province's modernized land use planning framework. The goals of the interviews were to understand success factors and strategies for implementing a community-based initiative in the Upper Columbia. Given the shortage of available literature on community-led land use management applicable to the specific context in B.C., these interviews provided critical data for this study.

Recognizing there is already substantial research effort and guidance dedicated to the involvement of Indigenous communities in modern land use planning, this study focused on opportunities for primarily non-Indigenous communities to initiate or lead some form of planning for use of the public lands that surround them.



A NOTE ABOUT “PUBLIC LAND”

Recently in B.C., the term “public land” is beginning to replace usage of “Crown land” when discussing areas not privately owned or designated through a Treaty. Historically, the term “Crown land” has been used in such cases; this term defines land as a public asset, for all citizens to use, and has its roots in British colonization of Canada. “Crown land” is legally inaccurate as Indigenous Peoples have not surrendered their land to the monarch, Canada, or B.C., – the land is in fact unceded. Although it remains inadequate in capturing the true meaning of unceded Indigenous land, for this project we use the term “public land,” and acknowledge a shift in language is underway.

This research was commissioned by Y2Y in 2021 and completed by Maureen Nadeau and Lauren Rethoret of Selkirk Innovates.

What is community-based planning?

Community-based planning is a process where people work together to shape their future by developing a comprehensive plan, informed by their needs. It is centered on open dialogue, deep collaboration, and consensus decision-making. Planning efforts are conducted by residents in ways that link to local, provincial, or Indigenous government planning systems. The process directly engages leaders and the public in an active effort to “move their community from today’s reality to tomorrow’s possibilities.”

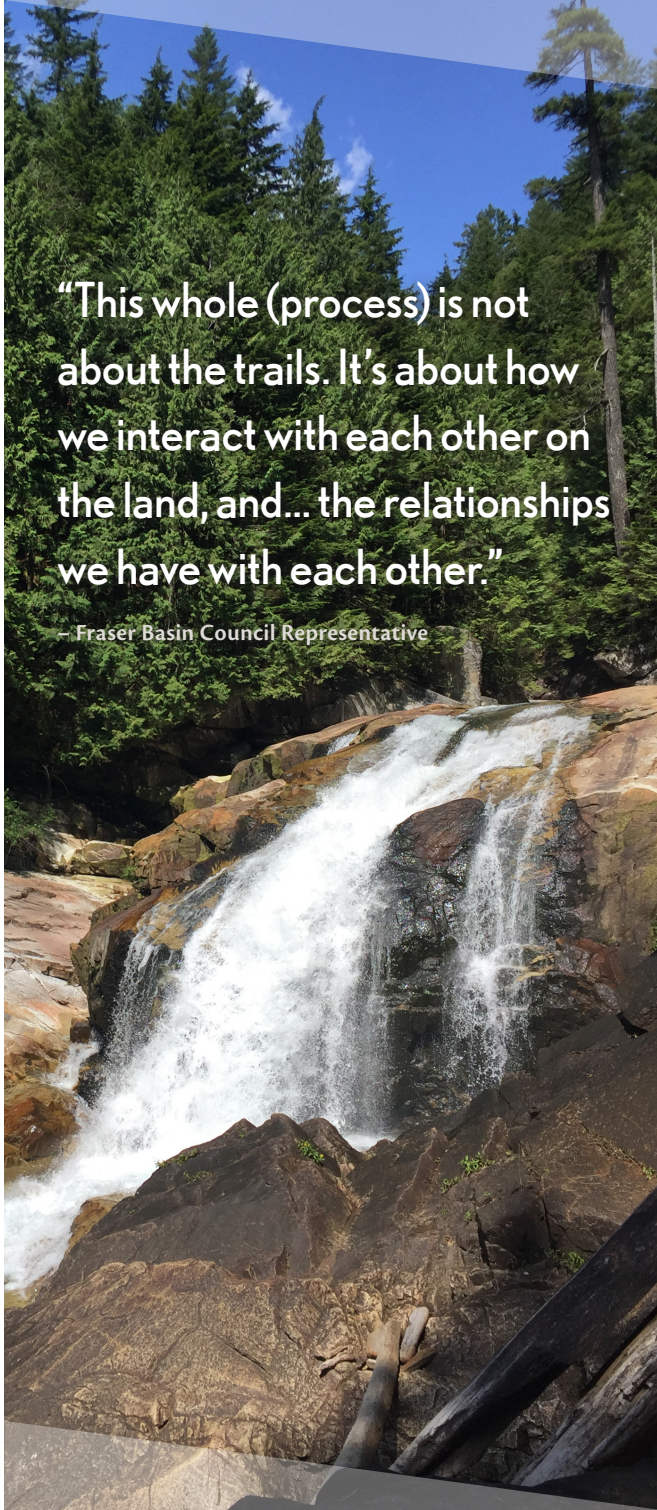
Why is it beneficial?

Almost 95% of the province is designated as public land. Currently, most of this land is managed by the provincial government, with little community consultation. However, that approach is shifting and there is recognition of the importance of considering a community’s needs and values in large-scale decisions that affect everyone’s well-being. Community-based planning shows provincial and Indigenous governments there is interest and commitment and provides constituents an avenue to advocate for their beliefs regarding how the land is shaped around them. This work can have a profound impact on more than land use, including breaking down systemic barriers to societal issues, such as racism and ableism. It connects people, builds relationships, and provides equitable outlets to share stories.

B.C.’s Modernized Land Use Planning program

The MLUP program is part of a provincial mandate to work collaboratively with Indigenous governments to modernize land use planning in B.C., and \$16 million has been allocated between 2018-2021 to conduct this work. The process is led by the B.C. government in partnership with Indigenous governments, and through engagement of communities, local government, industry, and other stakeholders. MLUP focuses on understanding new complexities in planning, such as effects to the land from climate change and cumulative impacts, ensuring communities and stakeholders are engaged throughout the process, growing the economy, and committing to reconciliation with Indigenous governments.

For more history on land use planning in B.C. and government-led land use planning, including Indigenous, local, and provincial governments, please see the more detailed report at y2y.net/UpperColumbiaPlanning.



“This whole (process) is not about the trails. It’s about how we interact with each other on the land, and... the relationships we have with each other.”

– Fraser Basin Council Representative



Getting ready

With limited capacity to lead additional land use planning processes, B.C. government representatives have indicated they are more likely to select communities that demonstrate readiness. The province has not established a set of defined readiness criteria; however, projects that incorporate the items below may be more likely to receive support and realize formal planning processes sooner.

Communities can be better equipped to engage in the MLUP program if/when the opportunity arises if their project:

- advances reconciliation
- addresses cumulative effects
- addresses priorities and commitments for water sustainability, wildfire recovery, and species at risk
- has reliable third-party funding
- has a signed a memorandum of understanding and terms of reference
- supports the resolution of land use/user conflict
- has a current regional plan that requires updating
- has high likelihood of reaching agreement on a plan
- has commitment from a minister or cabinet to conduct the work
- has confirmed support and capacity from regional Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development and Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

Community-based planning is a method to effectively incorporate the goals and visions of a community in land management. It is a powerful tool that can lead to more equitable outcomes, build deeper relationships, and promote the long-term success of a plan. In B.C., as the MLUP framework develops and the Province works to effectively conduct planning activities within their pre-defined priority areas, it is important for communities in need to lay the groundwork for an effective, respectful, inclusive, and well-supported planning process. Communities can make progress on the ultimate objectives of land use planning by initiating their own processes that align with best practices.

Best practices and tools for success

Based on interviews, case studies, and best practices literature, there are several critical aspects of community-based planning that can help communities advance their agendas:

- develop partnerships with Indigenous governments
- choose stakeholders wisely
- hire a third-party consultant
- understand public interests
- ensure adequate funding
- clarify roles and responsibilities
- involve settler governments early
- work within existing legislation and policy
- consider the effects
- develop a communications strategy
- document the process
- commit to implementation

“A land use plan if it’s properly done... is one of the most profound exercises in democracy possible.”

– Peel Watershed Planning Commission Representative

Learn more about the case studies and details from this research that aims to prepare and empower communities in the Upper Columbia at y2y.net/UpperColumbiaPlanning.

