

# Water Governance and Watershed Planning in British Columbia First Nations Communities

Principal Investigator – Dr. Leila Harris, University of British Columbia, 2012-2016

## Challenge

First Nations governance processes are particularly complex, with a suite of legislation and federal institutions, as well as the broader context of self-governance important for these communities. This research will contribute to a more complete understanding of the interactions between First Nations and the current water governance framework in British Columbia and the complex interactions First Nations have had within this framework.

Further, it will highlight First Nations perspectives on barriers and priorities for enhanced water governance in British Columbia, at a provincial scale and with particular focus on watershed-level governance. Considering these dimensions will inform the types of responses that are required to make meaningful progress on these issues.

## Project

This research centers on two themes. The first line of inquiry explores the question: What are the barriers and opportunities for enhanced First Nations governance in the current water governance landscape of B.C.? What are the historical precedents of the existing governance setup and its failures?

The second component of the research focuses specifically on the role of First Nations in watershed governance/management processes. Watershed governance is set to become a prominent governance model in British Columbia, as the Water Act Modernization, includes a process for watershed management planning. The need for a “robust” and “genuine” First Nations role in watershed governance is consistently mentioned in the watershed governance literature; however, absent from the discussion are the questions: Does the ‘watershed’ represent a relevant and appropriate scale of governance and analysis for First Nations? What are the implications of watershed governance processes for First Nations? This question is highly relevant in the Similkameen River Watershed, the focus of the research effort, where a plan is currently underway for watershed-based management. Working collaboratively with the Lower Similkameen Indian Band (LSIB), the research explores the LSIB’s experience and role in watershed planning.

## Outputs

This research has been disseminated through several presentations and key end-user oriented workshops:

- Simms, R. (2014). IRES Seminar Series
- Harris, L., Bakker, K. (2014). Water and Innovation: An Interdisciplinary Exploration. Workshop at UBC Peter Wall Institute.

- Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources First Nations Youth Water Leadership Workshop. (2013).

Additionally, the research team hosted a series teleconferences and meetings with the project team and LSIB members to mobilize research efforts and work throughout the project duration.

This research has resulted in scholarly publications:

- Simms, R. (2014). "Water is the basis of everything: First Nations and the shifting water governance landscape in B.C." Master Thesis.
- Simms, R. (2013). Book Review: Mascarenhas, M. (2012). Where the Waters Divide: Neoliberalism, White Privilege, and Environmental Racism in Canada. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 4(3): 1-4.

## Outcomes

Outcomes include:

- Strong relationships have been built with WEPGN partners and the LSIB Community.
- It is anticipated that results of this work will help inform policy moving forward in BC, particularly given the recent approval of the Water Sustainability Act (WSA).
- This research, through thesis and journal article publications, will contribute to increased knowledge on the topics of water governance and First Nations in B.C.
- Several other lines of inquiry, including ongoing monitoring of co-governance arrangements with First nations in BC, are a result of this research.

## Research Team and Partners:

### Research Team:

Dr. Leila Harris, University of British Columbia  
 Dr. Karen Bakker, University of British Columbia  
 Dr. Emma Norman, Northwest Indian College

### Partners:

Federation of Canadian Municipalities  
 Network on Environment and Women's Health  
 Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources  
 Environment Canada  
 Lower Similkameen Indian Band (LSIB)

### Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP):

Rosie Simms, Masters, University of British Columbia  
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