WHAT FIRST NATIONS YOU(TH) CAN DO FOR CLIMATE ACTION

Purpose

This document is for First Nations youth who care about climate change and are thinking about how they might take action in their own communities. It shares ideas, reflections, examples, and additional resources that came out of conversations with youth, showing how largescale climate priorities can connect to local places and lived experiences. The goal is to offer inspiration and starting points so you can imagine what climate action could look like where you live.

Background

The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is a political collaborative working relationship between the British Columbia Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), the First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs (UBCIC). Mandated by First Nations in B.C., the FNLC engages in advocacy and develops strategies and actions to bring about significant and meaningful change for all First Nations in British Columbia.

The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) launched the B.C. First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan (the Strategy) in April 2022. Within the Capacity and Leadership pathway of the Strategy, Theme 2.6 focuses on a Commitment to Youth. The objectives of this commitment are to 1) Increase opportunities for First Nations youth to take on climate advocacy and leadership positions both within and outside of their communities, and 2) create inclusive and culturally appropriate spaces for First Nations youth, including 2SLGBQQIA+ youth, to participate in climate discussions and respond to and support the implementation of any outcomes.

The First Nations Youth Climate Leaders Project

This document was created through the Uplifting Youth Climate Leaders Project, an initiative of the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC). The project brought First Nations and Indigenous youth

from across British Columbia and beyond together to learn from one another and share how they want to be involved in climate leadership. Through a series of online and in-person discussions, youth:

- Identified shared climate priorities.
- Developed messages to bring forward to leadership.
- Spoke directly about how they want to be involved, empowered, and supported in climate action.

Acknowledgements

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Getting Started

Climate and Mental Health

Being involved and learning about climate change can bring up a lot of challenging feelings and can feel heavy at times. Because of this, wellbeing, relationships, and care for one another are a vital part of climate action.

This group also shared the importance of joy and connection. As one youth said, "*Our entire lives are fighting — it's hard to remember we are allowed to feel joy and have fun.*"

Staying Connected to Community

Staying connected with your communities is important. The work we are doing can really burn you out when you feel isolated or alone. Connecting with community and seeing how you are part of the landscape can restore hope and drive.

- Spend time with your community when you are feeling burnt out.
- Spend time with Knowledge Holders.
- Be around people who restore your hope and energy.
- Ask about family history and connections to land.

Get Out on the Land

Being on the land, harvesting, dancing, and learning language can help you see the bigger picture and the joy and importance of protecting lands and waters. Climate solutions are in our languages, communities, waters, and lands.

- Spend quiet time on the land, learn about the plants, animals, and earth.
- Sit by the water, walk in the forest, watch the sky, listen to birds.
- Participate in traditional harvesting.

Care for your Spirit

Caring for spirit can include creating art, beadwork, participating in cultural practices or ceremony, cleansing yourself, and practicing gratitude for small things.

- Practice setting aside feelings or burdens that are not yours to carry.
- Create art, beadwork, or crafts.
- Participate in cultural practices or ceremonies.
- Practice gratitude for small things like warmth, food, laughter, and sunlight.

Resilience

Resilience takes many forms. Healthy boundaries with work are important. This means knowing when to take a break and not feeling guilty for taking a step back. Climate action can be ongoing, and taking breaks helps make the work more sustainable.

Radical joy is also resilience in action. As young people, especially in countries in the Global North, there can be pressure to carry guilt because of the impacts tied to our systems. This pressure does not always take into account the intersectionality of Indigeneity, colonialism, and the injustice Indigenous youth also experience. Remember that joy is not ignoring the crisis. It can be part of resilience. Let yourself feel joy without guilt.

Being unapologetically joyful and having fun can be part of resisting the idea that you have to be the "perfect environmentalist."

Additionally, protesting can be a healthy way to let out grief and anger. It can turn heavy feelings into action, while also creating community with other people who care about the same things.

- Join a protest, rally, or community action when it feels right and safe.
- Connect with other youth who care about climate justice.
- Use social media to find connections, not just heavy climate news.
- Remember that you do not have to carry everything alone.

Potential Challenges and How to Move Through Them

Being involved in climate action is not without its challenges. Being aware of challenges you may face, or others are experiencing, strengthens both your work and your community. Here are a few challenges that youth have shared, and what helps navigate them.

Access to land and resources

Living away from home or growing up in a different territory is common for Indigenous people. Being away from community or your home does not mean you should not have a say in what happens or that you cannot be involved in climate work. Find ways to connect to the land, territories where you are, and respect the traditions, culture, and protocols of the Nation you're in. Sometimes this means finding and building community.

Youth leadership is growing and being recognized

Remember and share that you and future generations will be the ones to live here and will face the impacts of climate decisions made by leaders today. Remember, you do not need to be the most educated or knowledgeable to have a right to be heard.

Supporting and uplifting one another

At times, harm or tension can show up within climate spaces. Everyone is on a different journey, with different teachings and realities. Speak your truth, walk with kindness, and surround yourself with those who support you. When something doesn't feel right, it's okay to speak up and create space for honesty and care.

From Big Priorities to Local Action

These priorities were identified by youth and are paired with examples of how you can take action in your own community.

WATER SECURITY AND WATERSHED PROTECTION

"Water is life, we must care for it."

There was a shared concern for the health and safety of water across B.C., based on what the youth are seeing in their Nations and communities, including flooding, drought, pollution, water shortages, extreme weather events, and rising sea levels. Water protection was described as cultural and tied to responsibility for future generations and all creations. There was an emphasis on responsibility to care for water and to have faith in the land's ability to heal when given the chance.

What you can do

- Take part in a ceremony with youth on land and water. This can be as simple as giving an offering to the water.
- Be involved in protecting and monitoring local water systems.
- Learn about watershed planning and water governance.
- Reconnect with local water systems to understand their life cycles.

SALMON AND AQUATIC ECOSYSTEM PROTECTION AND RESTORATION

"Hope for salmon returning."

Salmon and aquatic life were identified as culturally and ecologically important, and there was a shared concern about declining salmon populations based on what youth are seeing in B.C. waterways. Climate change, warming waters, development, mining, and sea-level rise were identified as threats to salmon and the waterways they depend on. At the same time, youth expressed hope for salmon returning and for communities restoring aquatic ecosystems through long-term stewardship.

What you can do

- Participate in hands-on learning about salmon life cycles.
- Practice traditional salmon harvesting.
- Join salmon restoration or monitoring activities.
- Reconnect with waterways and territory tied to salmon.

CONSENT-BASED DECISION-MAKING FOR DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCE EXTRACTION WITH SUSTAINABILITY AT THE CORE

"Supporting First Nations self-determination and sovereignty."

The group noticed ongoing pressures from resource extraction, mining, and development in communities and across B.C., and raised concern about projects moving forward without First Nations' consent. Youth emphasized the need for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and for Nations to have real decision-making authority over projects that impact their lands and waters and

expressed hope for governance systems where Indigenous laws, responsibilities to land, and future generations guide decisions.

What you can do

- Learn about laws, protocol, and governance in your Nation.
- Be involved in discussions about development and land use.
- Connect with leaders, Elders, or mentors to understand FPIC.
- Participate in youth councils or decision-making spaces where possible.

CARING FOR LANDS AND FORESTS (WILDFIRE AND DEVELOPMENT)

> *"Sustaining life systems that support all relations."*

Youth identified increasing wildfire risk, forest degradation, habitat loss, and ecosystem disruption as urgent concerns based on what they are seeing in their communities. Protecting old growth and caring for land in ways that support biodiversity, cultural practices, and long-term ecosystem health were emphasized. Youth shared hope for land-care practices rooted in traditional knowledge, proactive stewardship for forests that support biodiversity, cultural practices, and overall community wellbeing.

What you can do

- Take part in land stewardship activities.
- Learn about cultural fire practices and land care.
- Participate in environmental monitoring.
- Support inter-tribal knowledge sharing.

Language, Traditional Knowledge, and Climate Education

Youth identified Indigenous language and traditional knowledge as central to climate education and action. Concerns were raised about the loss of traditional practices and knowledge, alongside impacts from colonial systems that devalue land-based and oral ways of learning. Youth shared hope for climate education and action rooted in Indigenous languages, storytelling, and learning directly from Elders and Knowledge Holders through land-based, intergenerational approaches.

What you can do

- Learning and applying traditional and scientific approaches together.
- Revitalizing language and culture through climate and land work.
- Sharing knowledge through storytelling and learning with Elders and Knowledge Holders.
- Take part in hands-on, land-based learning on home territories.

SUPPORTING FIRST NATIONS YOUTH LEADERSHIP, WELLBEING, AND INTERGENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE SHARING

> *"Youth-led movements growing stronger each year."*

The youth described the desire and necessity of youth holding meaningful roles related to climate solutions but recognized that the weight can also be discouraging and difficult to bear alone. They emphasized the need for long-term involvement of First Nations youth across British Columbia, rooted in local values, relationships to land and water, and

shared responsibilities to each other and future generations. Youth highlighted the importance of safe spaces, mental wellness support, strong connections with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and land-based learning that supports healing and leadership.

What you can do

- Join or create safe spaces for youth to gather and connect regularly.
- Seek mentorship from Elders or Knowledge Holders.
- Take part in youth councils or youth committees.
- Support youth teaching youth.

Resources

The ideas shared in this document are a starting point and are meant to offer inspiration. The resources below can help you go further by deepening your learning, offering practical support, and sharing frameworks to take climate action.

Community action plan toolkits:

- Back to the Land: A Vision for Climate Justice in Our Communities
- Community Culture Climate Justice: Climate Action Toolkit. - VIDEA

Youth Priorities:

- FNPSS Youth Engagement Roundtable Summary

Youth Action Grants:

- Indigenous Youth Fund - The Youth Harbour

Youth Leadership Programs:

- Climate Leadership Training — Indigenous Climate Action
- Parliamentary Internship for the Environment | GreenPAC
- Indigenous Clean Energy - Our Programs

Principles of Youth Engagement:

- Core Principles for Meaningful Youth Participation in Intergovernmental Processes and Across the Work of the UN

Conclusion

This document reflects the voices and lived experiences of First Nations youth who participated in this project. It shows that while climate change can feel overwhelming, many youth are already thinking about what action looks like.

These examples and starting points shared here are not meant to be complete or fixed. They are invitations to learn, to connect, and to take action while building on previous and future work.

There is not one single path forward; there are many ways to get involved, whether through connection to land, culture, community, or each other. The Uplifting Youth Climate Leaders project highlights that climate action is not separate from wellbeing, identity, and relationships; it is part of how we care for ourselves, our Nations, and future generations. While there are many actions here for you to take, remember you are a part of a broader community of people taking action.