



October 17, 2023

Fin Donnelly, MLA
Parliamentary Secretary, Watershed Restoration
510-2950 Glen Drive,
Coquitlam, BC V3B 0J1

Re: UBCM Meeting on E&N Land Grant Biodiversity Protection and Restoration

Dear Mr. Donnelly:

On behalf of the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) Board, thank you for meeting with AVICC representatives and RDN Directors Paul Manly and Ben Geselbracht at the UBCM convention to discuss prioritizing the identification of areas within Vancouver Island's E&N Land Grant area for protection and conservation of biodiversity. We are grateful for your interest in this important issue, which was the subject of an endorsed regionally-specific resolution at the AVICC annual convention in May 2023.

We applaud the federal and provincial governments' commitments to protect 30% of the land base by 2030 as part of provincial, national, and international agreements to protect biodiversity. As we outlined during our meeting, we feel that protecting areas within the E&N Land Grant area represents a significant opportunity to help meet the 2030 targets. The E&N Land Grant continues to impact community drinking watersheds and limits local government's ability to protect and conserve biodiversity and sensitive ecosystems across much of southeast Vancouver Island. Some large areas within the E&N Land Grant area have very low rates of protection – for example, the Nanaimo River Watershed, one of the largest watersheds on Vancouver Island, has less than 2% of its area designated as a park or protected area. The important and unique cultural, ecological, and geological features within the E&N Land Grant area, which include culturally sensitive sites, provincially red-and blue-listed species, endangered salmon runs, and federally listed species, along with the overall lack of habitat protection within this area supports prioritizing this area for protection.

We appreciated your suggestion that the RDN identify specific priority areas in the Land Grant area where the protection of sensitive ecosystems and sites and the restoration and protection of watersheds is most critical. The RDN is committed to reconciliation, and engagement with First Nations will be of vital importance in this work. We were interested to hear about the potential for funding to support the mapping of priority areas for protection and appreciate any additional information you can share with us about this support. Once again, please accept my sincere thanks for meeting with us; I look forward to our continued conversation on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vanessa Craig". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Vanessa" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Craig".

Vanessa Craig, Chair

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cc. Association of Vancouver Islands and Coastal Communities