



ASSOCIATION OF VANCOUVER ISLAND AND COASTAL COMMUNITIES

MEDIA ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

AVICC Tackles Watershed Security and Land Conservation Issues on Vancouver Island

VANCOUVER ISLAND, B.C. – The Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities (AVICC) is calling for provincial attention to address the critical challenges surrounding watershed security and land conservation, specifically on privately managed forest lands within the historic E&N Land Grant on Vancouver Island.

At the recent 2024 UBCM Convention, AVICC members convened with provincial representatives to discuss resolutions focused on protecting vital ecosystems and ensuring the long-term safety of drinking water. Key issues include the need for adequate conservation funding and the strengthening of environmental regulations to improve protection of critical forest lands that are currently privately owned and managed.

“Our region faces unique challenges in the protection of our watersheds due to the significant presence of privately owned forest lands resulting from the 1883 E&N Land Grant” said **Ben Geselbracht**, President of AVICC. “The security of our watersheds and the preservation of biodiversity are essential to the health and safety of our communities. Protections are slim, for example only 2% of the watershed that all of Nanaimo’s drinking water comes from is protected. We are calling for stronger conservation efforts by the Province and improved environmental protections.”

The association’s discussions highlighted three significant resolutions endorsed in 2023 and 2024: the need for conservation in the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region (MABR), the establishment of a Watershed Security Strategy and Fund, and addressing the ecological impacts of the E&N Land Grant.

Vickey Brown, Mayor of Cumberland, emphasized, “The watersheds in regions like Perseverance Creek, which is 75% privately owned, are essential to our water supply. With climate change, the urgency to protect these lands has never been higher. We need collaborative efforts with both the Province and private landowners to ensure sustainable management.”

Key Highlights from the Meeting:

- **E&N Land Grant Areas:** Focused on the unique conservation needs of lands historically impacted by the 1883 E&N Railway land grant.
- **Private Forest Lands:** Addressed the need to revise the Private Managed Forests Land Act to enhance local governments' ability to manage water quality and conservation in privately managed forests.
- **Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region (MABR):** Discussed the importance of conserving ecologically vital lands in the MABR, home to some of the highest biodiversity in B.C.

AVICC continues to advocate for updated land management strategies to protect the region’s water sources and biodiversity while engaging with the Province and other key stakeholders.

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The Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities (AVICC) represents its member municipalities, regional districts and First Nations of Vancouver Island, Sunshine Coast, qathet/Powell River, the North Coast and the Central Coast. AVICC is one of five area associations of local governments within the Province of British Columbia. All operate under the umbrella of the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM). The Association advocates on behalf of its members on issues and concerns that affect communities ranging from larger urban areas to small rural and remote communities.