

Lifestyle as Medicine:

The Way We Have Always Lived

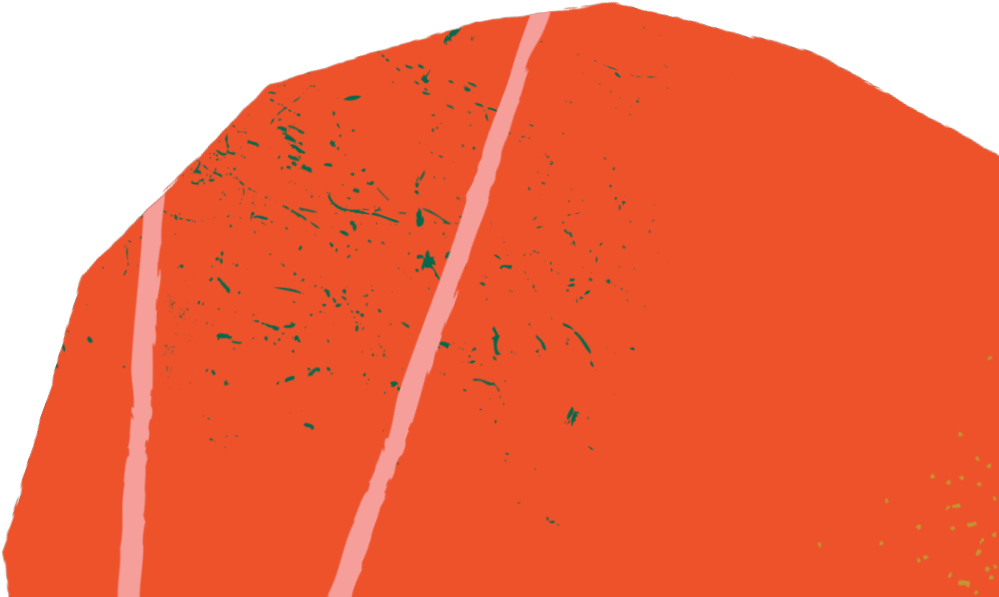
Métis Climate Resilience Gathering Summary

February 15 - 17, 2022



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Executive Summary

In February 2022, the Province of British Columbia (BC) hosted the Métis Climate Resilience Gathering (the Gathering) in collaboration with Alderhill Planning Inc. and the Métis Nation of British Columbia (MNBC) to explore themes of climate resilience through discussions and presentations.

Elder Dean Gladue opened the Gathering with a prayer about Mother Earth and expressed his gratitude for being invited to participate. He reflected that historically, being over 50 years old was important because a lot of Métis people didn't live that long, and so younger people had to carry the knowledge for the next generation before it was gone. Because of this, his definition of Elder is when “the young start coming to you to as an older person for wisdom and guidance” rather than the young waiting to approach someone when they are in their 70s.

He believes that this work is especially important for urban Métis who may not live off the land, but still practice on the land in other ways such as gathering medicine. He emphasized that Métis people need to go back and pray on the land and understand the value of the land because without clean water and food security, “what are we?”

“The best way for us to learn and grow is to continue sharing our stories”

Day 1 was focused on community stories, networking and sharing. The day began with a presentation from the Climate Action Secretariate (CAS) that highlighted the Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy as well as the 2019 Preliminary Strategic Climate Risk Assessment. MNBC followed CAS with their own presentation related to the development of their climate change strategy. The day concluded with three breakout sessions where 12 participants were able to choose between discussions on:

- food security and sovereignty;
- approaches to assessing climate risks and access to basic necessities; and
- mental health and cultural wellness

Day 2 was attended by nine participants and featured Elder Denise McCuaig and keynote speaker Paulette Flamond who shared their experience with climate challenges and their commitment to stewardship as Métis women.

This event took place in order to gain a stronger understanding of how climate change is impacting the Métis Nation. Since the Métis Nation is dispersed throughout the province, having a better understanding of how climate change is impacting their people and chartered communities is an important step in finding ways to build resilience. The intent behind this event was to gain a broader understanding of the implications of climate change from a Métis perspective, given their unique background, historical context, and culture.



Day 1

MNBC Presentation

MNBC presented on their recent climate work which included a 2021 workshop series titled Strengthening Our Resilience to Climate Change that evaluated the impacts of climate change being felt by their diverse membership living in many different regions across BC. In partnership with the Fraser Basin Council, MNBC delivered this series to provide information to participants about climate change programs, projects, and future impacts.

Another initiative aimed to enhance MNBC's efforts to support Métis communities for future emergency preparedness planning and provide a platform to discuss regional priorities. As part of this project, a survey was sent out to gather feedback from MNBC membership on a variety of topics related to emergency preparedness, climate, and other issues that may require attention and future discussion to guide initiatives. The survey also provided an opportunity for respondents to identify their regional concerns, which ranged from extreme storms and pandemics to missing persons, forest fires and earthquakes.

“Climate change is exposing Métis to changes in extreme weather patterns and more frequent extreme events, placing communities at risk and impacting the health and wellness of community members”

The importance of access to hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering was highlighted during the presentation as it assists with stewardship and monitoring the health of the land. Métis citizens can apply for Harvester Cards through the MNBC Ministry of Environmental Protection & Métis Rights. MNBC documents land use including hunting (small game, big game, upland birds and migratory birds), fishing (freshwater, saltwater, and invertebrates), trapping, and gathering (plants, earth materials, and prospecting). Harvesters provide the amount, location (Management Units – MU's), and season of harvesting for these activities. The survey includes questions about recreational and cultural land use as well. The information shared creates a rich story of not only what is harvested, but also observations regarding species at risk, changes in habitats, and other issues that may require attention; such as correct location, and best season for harvesting to ensure these practices can be maintained for future generations.

“Harvesting is a very measured and carefully considered practice to protect the land”

CAS Presentation

CAS provided an overview of the work their group has done related to climate resilience in the province. To understand what the future may hold for BC, the CAS team completed the Preliminary Strategic Climate Risk Assessment in 2019 to better understand climate-related risk in BC and help government develop appropriate measures to address those risks. Looking at 15 unique climate events, CAS investigated trends and consequences to understand how they translated into a range of values in BC.

“How can we do a better job of conducting those kinds of risk assessments with a broader view to ensure Indigenous values are central and part of that analysis?”

- In addition to the Risk Assessment noted above, the CAS team has been working to develop Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy for BC (the Strategy). The development of the draft Strategy has emphasized that climate impacts will differ depending on the geographic location within BC. Because of this, several considerations must be taken into account:
 - how and where climate change will affect BC;
 - how people will interact with the environment;
 - how climate change will impact how people interact with government;

- what kinds of services governments will deliver; and
- what communities can do to prepare.

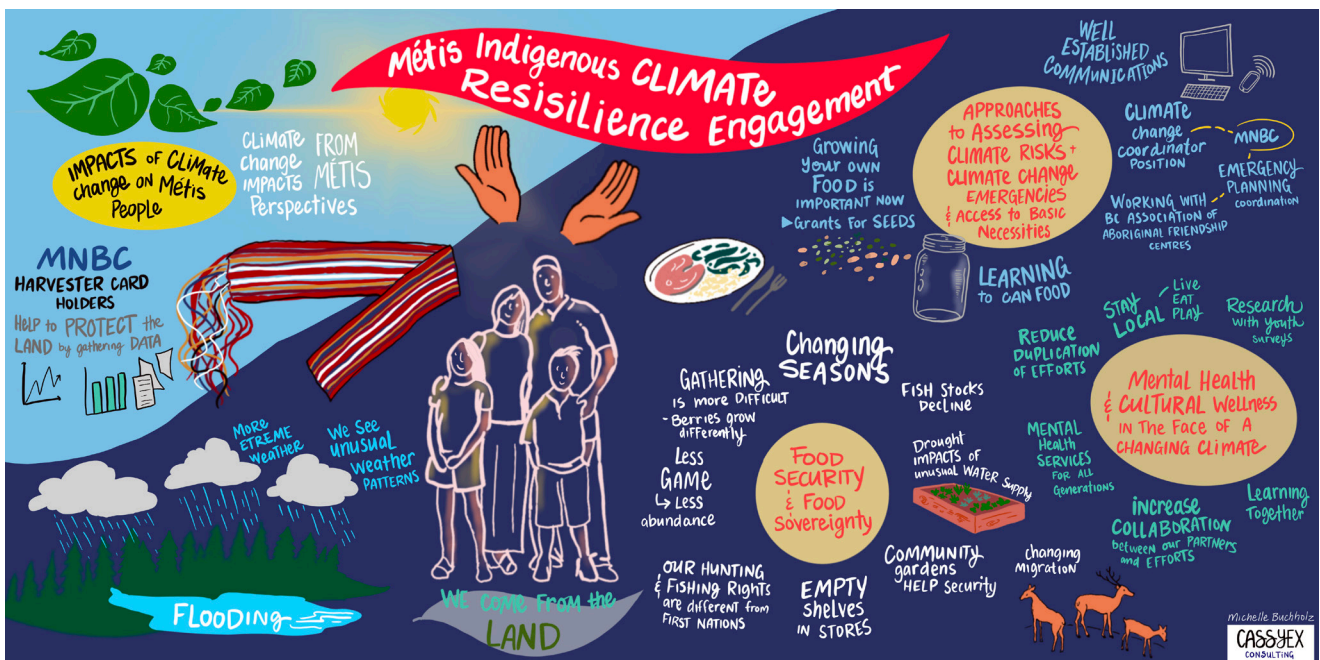
The draft Strategy was completed in June 2021 and CAS acknowledged that while what they were doing was important, how they were doing it was equally important. With that in mind, they developed 6 guiding principles to support CAS as they moved forward with Indigenous peoples the work on climate preparedness and adaptation. These principles include having a shared path with Indigenous peoples that is informed by equity considerations, promoting nature-based solutions, and aligning adaptation and emissions reductions. CAS noted that during the engagements on the draft Strategy, many people came forward to highlight the importance of working with nature and using the power of nature as part of solutions for climate change.

Another theme that flowed from the engagements is the increasingly strong linkage between physical and mental health and climate impacts. While much work in climate adaptation has been historically centered around infrastructure and engineering, a much broader view is now being taken that looks at how climate impacts people as beings and the communities they live in with a focus on being proactive. It is important to do things in an integrated and proactive way so that people are not waiting for climate events to happen, but they are thinking ahead and planning for their health, safety, and the economy.

“We recognize, and deeply respect the inherent strength of Indigenous communities, and have heard throughout our engagement about the importance and strength of Indigenous-led climate solutions”

CAS recognizes that there are long histories of community resilience and adaptation, and is committed to lifting up Indigenous knowledge systems by reaching out to people who are working in communities on climate adaptation to ensure CAS is aware of the experience at the community level. As a government, BC is learning how to interact with Indigenous knowledge keepers, and ways of knowing and being respectful by following the right cultural protocols. To further this commitment, CAS established the Indigenous Climate Adaptation Working Group (ICAWG) to help shape their approach, language, and actions for the draft Strategy. BC acknowledged the need for more Métis voices within ICAWG and within the climate adaptation work moving forward.

“Climate resilience is a very important topic, and this year has certainly served to highlight how important the topic is that’s impacting everyone, and particularly Indigenous people. I know that our group really wants to strengthen its relationship with MNBC and to help advance reconciliation with Métis in BC.”



Breakout Group Summaries

Each participant chose which breakout group to attend and contribute to depending on which topic was the most interesting to them. The breakout groups considered guiding questions and participants were encouraged to share and listen to each other. Note that participants were situated in different geographic regions around the province.

Group #1: Food Security and Sovereignty

Impacts & Challenges

Participants voiced their concerns about how flooding, fires, extreme heat and climate change are not only affecting supply and demand at grocery stores but are also impacting:

- the cost of food, especially for urban Métis who have limited space to grow food;
- the ability for people to raise their own crops for food;
- harvesting spotty plants and mushrooms on the land where they use to grow abundantly;
- species decline for fish and moose; and
- a change in migration patterns.

Solutions

Participants suggested that there has been a greater need for people to grow their own foods and an impetus for MNBC to teach people how to grow their own food, noting that the cost of this initiative is high. This can be done both indoors and outdoors, depending on the plants and growing season. One participant shared that she recently benefitted from a gardening grant for Métis people that was part of a partnership with West Coast Seeds.

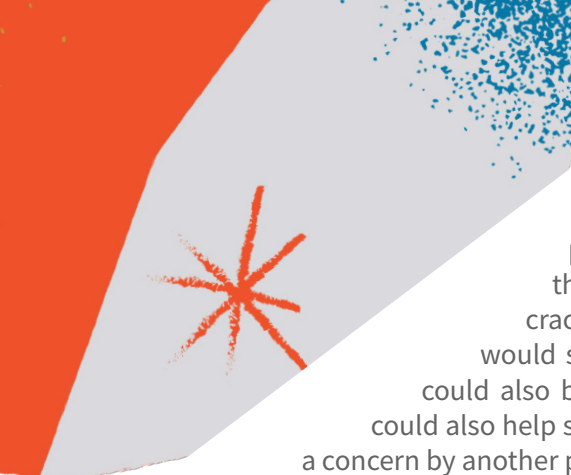
“There are all kinds of effects on the micro-climate, I tend to just think macro, but I think the micro-climate that we have is being changed”

Other suggestions included food boxes and baskets with traditional, healthy, and local foods that are distributed monthly to families and seniors. Some participants spoke about communal living with friends and family and how knowledge transfer around processing and preserving food can happen more easily in communal environments where people are closely connected with one another.

Finally, one participant suggested that in this digital age, Métis could be sharing more knowledge online around different traditional remedies and canning foods when they don't have access to land or other local knowledge. This is especially true given that Métis communities are dispersed across the province and could benefit from connections to other communities both within BC or in other provinces or territories.

Group #2: Approaches to Planning and Access to Basic Necessities

Approaches to planning considers what to do and where to go during an emergency. For Métis in BC who are spread throughout the Province, there are geographical challenges, but virtual networks of support that enable collective efforts in times of need. One participant commented that collaboration with local authorities is important, although not always sufficient, but this gap is often filled by the additional support within the Métis community—enhancing community resilience. For example, Métis people and groups have stepped up to provide emergency funding and homes to host people displaced during floods or fires.



This system was developed over time as people started reaching out to do the best they could, whether by fostering pets who had been left behind during an extreme weather event or collecting donations for supplies. While the system appears to work well, one participant felt a full-time, community driven position was needed to connect to government to identify and handle issues that arise, noting that there are always marginalized people who fall through the cracks and need extra support. It was suggested that a climate change coordinator would support the core need, with an additional suggestion that Friendship Centres could also be an excellent partner with MNBC for emergency planning. This coordinator could also help support individuals who want to help, but don't know how, as was expressed as a concern by another participant.

Participants, noticing the obvious connection, also spoke on the topic of food security. “I was raised with a garden, hunting etc.” one participant commented. “It wasn't unique, but now we're dependent on grocery stores and people realize that climate change impacts the dynamics, food gets more costly. I think we're going to see an increase in more of our Métis people going hungry.” Another participant commented, “Kitimat is the end of the road, trucks can't get up here so folks are remembering how important and valuable it is to grow your own food. Last summer I started growing things, and this year I saw that MNBC offers a gardening grant (in partnership with West Coast seeds) ... It was scary this year when we couldn't get food from the stores.”

When asked what would support community members in acquiring basic necessities during climate emergencies, a participant suggested workshops on canning, emphasizing the opportunity for community connection and cultural benefits that could compliment this initiative.

Group #3: Mental Health and Cultural Wellness in the face of Changing Climate

This group had only two participants. They spoke of how individuals and communities can have a real impact at the local level, but on a global scale, climate change can often feel like an insurmountable challenge to tackle. Some people attempt to balance taking action on mitigation versus adaptation, but putting energy into adaptation can sometimes feel defeatist for some.

Climate and ecological grief are now seen as legitimate mental health issues. Some participants have attempted to counter this grief in both their personal and professional lives through strategies like gardening year-round, working on local restoration projects with youth, and educating themselves on available resources such as “A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety”.

A participant explained the grief associated with harvesting salmon; they spend all weekend fishing and only catch 3 or 4, which is a very different experience for her father who has been fishing his whole life. The same participant commented on the grief accumulated through their workplace—she works in a hospital and is seeing more and more people with smoke-related issues from wildfires.

The other participant shared that inviting Elders in gathering data and supporting research has been helping her cope with climate anxiety. However, it is hard to stay optimistic, she noted, when there is lots of discrepancy across the region in terms of protecting land versus support for oil and gas; “Without the land, we have nothing.”

When asked for any inspiring examples of individuals/groups supporting Métis mental and cultural wellness, participants commented that small, local, land-based projects are effective, as well as ecological grief strategies and clinical counseling interventions.

Day 2

Presentation by Elder Denise McCuaig

Elder Denise shared that growing up she remembers going out to the blueberry patch every year with her extended family to pick berries and sing songs. For her, this was living her culture as a Métis person, but she didn't always recognize the ways in which she was expressing her cultural identity or have the language to articulate it.

As an Elder who has supported MNBC, she has continually heard from the youth that they crave knowledge of how to be on the land and participate in traditional activities, understanding this connection as foundational to their identity. This is important to Elder Denise because in her lifetime she has met people who have challenged her cultural identity and her right to call herself 'Aboriginal'. This has made her a passionate advocate for translating Métis ways of knowing and doing to young people as they grow up so that they feel confident in their cultural identity. "We have to be true to our blood memory," she explains to youth. "This tells us that our spirit has been imprinted in our DNA by our ancestors."

"There is a pretty big focus on intergenerational trauma, but it is just as much about intergenerational strength."

Now she lives in Secwepemc territory in Tk'emlúps (Kamloops) and has really felt the impacts of climate change in different ways. Recently she has seen saskatoon berries dried on the tree that were already pemmican quality before the berries could be picked. Making note of observations like this speaks to her commitment to stewardship of the land, which Elder Denise believes is key to fighting climate change. She believes that how Métis people position themselves in their relationship with the land is important, even when others may question this relationship.



Keynote address by Paulette Flamond

Paulette Flamond is a Métis woman who grew up in Battleford, Saskatchewan before finding her way to Treaty 8 territory in the Peace River Region of British Columbia. Paulette spoke about Boreal Gardens, a food forest she created as a way to promote and teach food security and food sovereignty. Boreal Gardens uses a permaculture design that mimics patterns in nature so that food systems are diverse and resilient. The philosophy behind Boreal Gardens is using the elements from the land to sustain regenerative farming with a lot of support and community involvement. The space now acts as an educational centre as well as a farm, regularly hosting youth and other community members who want to connect with the land and learn to grow their own food.

“I really believe we can have influence on people and encourage them to start small - giving them the resources they need to get started. When we work with one family, it leads to other families being motivated.”

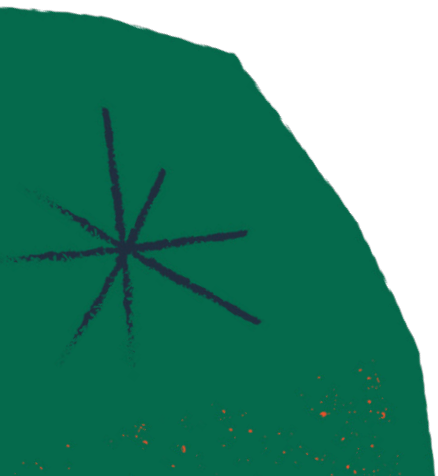


The presentation involved a lot of specific permaculture design tools such as hugelkultur a centuries-old, traditional way of building a garden bed from rotten logs and plant debris as well as sheet mulching. Boreal Gardens encourages and teaches children about Indigenous medicines in the Northeast through practicing wildcrafting and making teas, tinctures, and other medicinal products.

Boreal Gardens also contributes to the local economy, participating in the local farmers markets during the farming season, developing value-added products like canned vegetables and fruits, and delivering programs to teach others about food production.

Paulette emphasized that producing local food not only contributes to the community’s climate resilience, but being out on the land contributes to mental health and physical wellness. It also supports social, cultural, and spiritual connection.

The presentation wrapped up with Paulette expressing the need for knowledge transmission and continuity, stating that it is up to the Elders to teach and share, and it is up to youth to listen, learn, and carry this work forward into the future.



Conclusion

Métis people in BC are providing meaningful contributions to the health of the environment and climate, as well as building their networks for support when extreme weather events occur in their communities. As stewards and harvesters of the land, Métis people are in a unique position to monitor the natural environment as they go out on the land for food and items of cultural significance. The work that MNBC has spearheaded with annual surveys for their Harvester Cards ensures that important environmental data is regularly collected and can be monitored for trends and predictions to build climate resilience.

While it has been recognized that access to land is limited for various reasons, many ideas were shared that showed how Métis people contribute to climate resiliency every day in different ways. Whether that is opening their homes to people who have been displaced due to fires or floods, planting a garden, or teaching their friends how to can food, climate resiliency is alive and well in Métis communities in BC. By working together with BC, MNBC, and different Indigenous groups in the province, Métis people will continue to strengthen their approach to ensure their communities will thrive in the face of climate uncertainty.

Next Steps

This report will be submitted to MNBC, for their records and reference. The data utilized for the purpose of this report will feed into the Climate Action Secretariat's final Indigenous Engagement and Research Summary Report to help inform and guide direction and future actions on climate adaptation within the Province of British Columbia.

