

Workshop Follow-up Report from:

A Community Conversation on Cumulative Impacts in the Peace River Region

Fort St. John, BC
November 29, 2016

About the Cumulative Impacts Research Consortium

The Cumulative Impacts Research Consortium (CIRC) is a research and community outreach initiative at the University of Northern British Columbia that is dedicated to enhancing the understanding of the cumulative environmental, community, and health impacts of resource development. For more information on our on-going research and related initiatives, please visit www.unbc.ca/cumulative-impacts.

About the CIRC Fort St. John Workshop

CIRC convened a half-day public workshop in Fort St. John as part of our ongoing research and outreach activities in relation to the project “Developing new tools for assessing the cumulative impacts of resource development across Northern BC: Integrating environmental, socioeconomic and human health assessment methods.” This was one of several community events organized by the CIRC on the topic of the cumulative impacts of resource development as a part of this project, and focused specifically on the Peace River Region in northeast BC as one of three case study communities.

Part of this project is to better understand local knowledge needs and values to generate new supports for local communities in understanding and addressing the cumulative environmental, community and health impacts of resource development operations. Our primary goals in convening a dialogue in the Peace River Region included creating a platform for people living and working in the area to come together to share and learn about the positive and negative impacts of resource development, build and strengthen relationships with individuals and communities, and share stories and individual experiences around the values that are important to maintain in the Peace River Region.

The first part of the workshop focused on learning about the approaches of various organizations in responding to the issue of cumulative impacts, while the latter part of the workshop focused on sharing experiences related to cumulative impacts and local values. These conversations will help to inform the CIRC’s understanding of how we can best support ongoing work around cumulative impacts in this region in relation to locally-important values. This

report provides a brief overview of the key themes that emerged throughout the half-day workshop.

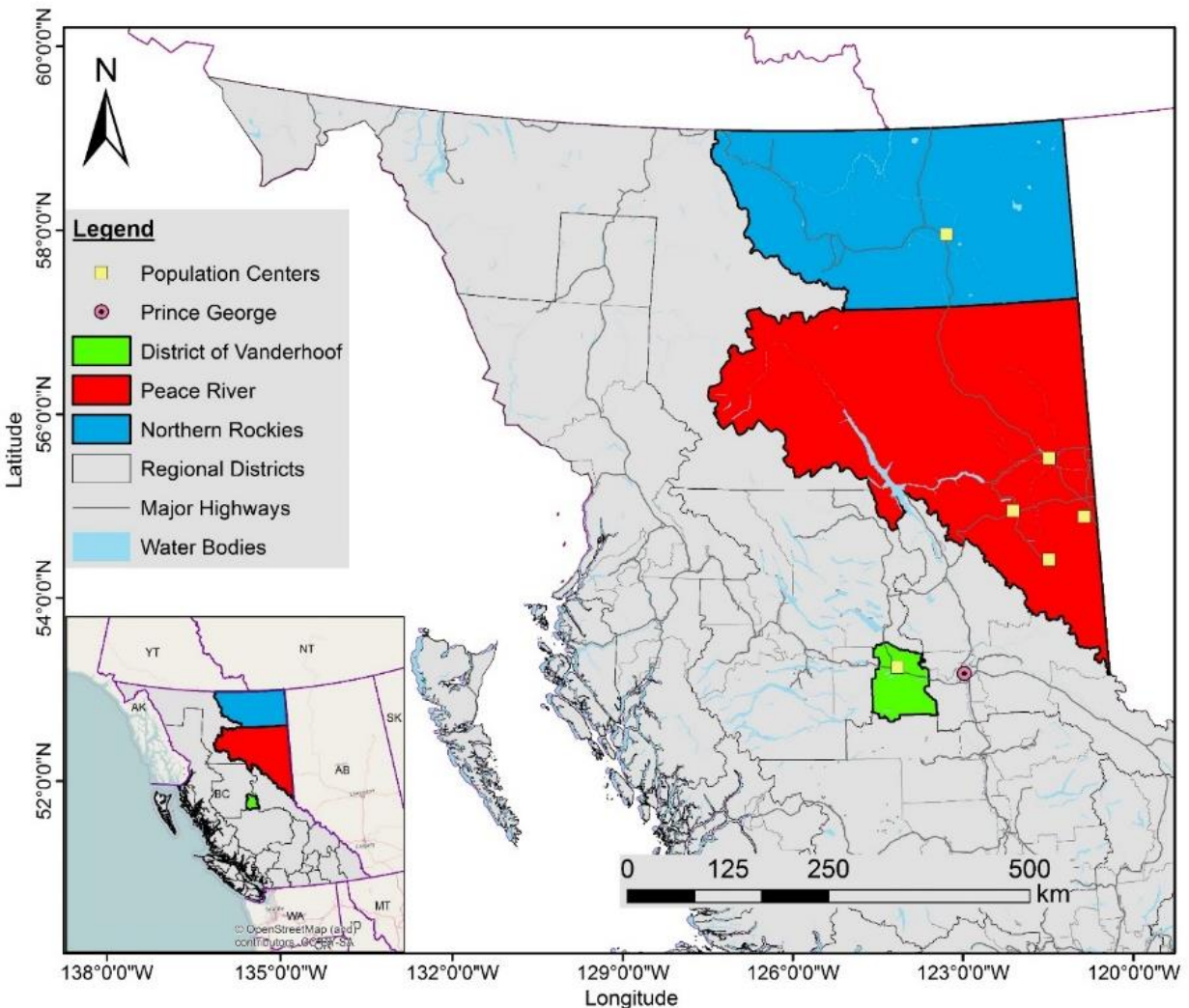


Figure 1. Three case study communities involved in the project titled: “Developing new tools for assessing the cumulative impacts of resource development across Northern BC: Integrating environmental, socioeconomic and human health assessment methods”.

Part I: Perspectives on Cumulative Impacts Monitoring and Assessment

Over the course of four different presentations, presenters shared their perspectives on current and emerging cumulative impacts monitoring and assessment projects and approaches. Slide decks from these presentations are available for viewing [online](#).

Anna Regnier from the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (MoFLNRO) provided an overview of the BC Cumulative Effects Framework (CEF). The BC CEF

includes policy, procedures, and decision-support tools to improve coordination, consistency, and capacity to manage the cumulative effects of all natural resource activities across the province. The BC CEF will consider impacts to identified economic, social, and environmental values, including impacts to Aboriginal and Treaty rights and interests. More information on this framework, including information around ongoing pilot projects, can be found [online](#).

Sean Curry from the BC Oil and Gas Commission (BCOGC) discussed the [Area Based Analysis](#) (ABA) tool, a systematic method of analyzing the cumulative impacts of all industrial development in relation to nine broad values utilized by the BCOGC when making decisions on oil and gas project applications. The ABA tool is a promising attempt to actualize cumulative effects monitoring in northeast BC, and is guided by the province's Cumulative Effects Framework.

Hannah Askew from West Coast Environmental Law (WCEL) discussed the merits of Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment (RSEA) as one approach to overcome the limitations of current environmental assessment processes, including cumulative effects assessments (CEA). This approach analyses the impacts of future possible development situations on regional values established through broad-based public conversations, and could help illuminate what future scenarios have the greatest mutually reinforcing ecological, social, and economic benefits for communities, while upholding Aboriginal title and rights of First Nations communities. These themes are explored extensively in the WCEL report [Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment for Northern British Columbia: The Case and the Opportunity](#).

Clayton Davis, Environmental Monitor Field Coordinator for the McLeod Lake Indian Band, presented on the ongoing work of the First Nations Cumulative Effects Framework (FN CEF) Working Group. The FN CEF Working Group is an independent First Nations working group established by several Treaty 8 First Nations in part due to concerns around the impacts of multiple resource industries in the Murray River watershed, and the limited scope and focus of current CEA in regards to Indigenous values and Treaty rights. The FN CEF Working Group is developing a framework for CEA that meaningfully includes Treaty rights and community-based Valued Components into Treaty Rights Assessment Requirements.

Part II: Roundtable Discussions on Values in the Peace River Region

In the second half of this workshop participants engaged in roundtable discussions to surface local values in the Peace River Region related to resource development activities. Overall, the goal of CIRC's "Developing new tools" project is to provide more comprehensive information to support the development of cumulative impact monitoring, assessment, and decision-making tools in relation to local values. As such, the goal of these roundtable discussions was to share and learn about the many important values in the Peace River Region, and to encourage participants to think through the challenges associated with both value identification and decision-making processes around the protection and preservation of those values.

Working in small groups, participants brainstormed broad lists of community, health, and environmental values, as well as values that cut across these and other themes. After generating these collections of local values, group discussions shifted towards collectively identifying the top two most important values on their list.

There were several themes that resonated across the values generated and prioritized by each group. We heard about the necessity of safeguarding the basic requirements of life: clean air, clean water, and fertile soil. In addition to these requirements, participants emphasized the need for economic diversity and stability, and local employment opportunities. As one table explained, local employment opportunities attract families to a community while services and infrastructure ensure people thrive and ultimately stay in that community. Identified services included recreation, healthcare, education, food security, social services, and social programs.

Participants reported that building and maintaining strong families and connected communities relies on a myriad of elements, including local engagement, volunteerism, affordable housing, stable employment, and other factors that contribute to overall quality of life. Cultivating and maintaining a sense of community, safety, pride, and independence in the Peace River Region was seen as an underlying value to all of the elements listed above. Many of the values identified by each group integrated environmental, economic, community, and health themes, illustrating the ways in which these elements act together to sustain a particular quality of life, as one group identified, and rely on consistent and effective communication, as another group identified. The top two priority values indicated by each group are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Top two values identified by each discussion group.

Table No.	Value 1	Value 2
1	Strong economy	Sustainability and value-added industries
2	Clean water, air and soil	Basic means of life
3	Community infrastructure	Quality of life
4	Communication	
5	Strong families and strong communities	Access to a healthy lifestyle
6	Jobs	Access to services
7	Economic stability	Balance between economic stability and overall quality of life
8	Clean water, clean air, fertile soil	

In light of all the information presented and shared by each group, we finished the afternoon with an open-ended group discussion around themes that emerged throughout the workshop and relevant next steps to carry these conversations forward. This broad-ranging conversation touched on many complex topics, including the importance of ensuring the positive impacts of resource development, and cultural and historical importance and ongoing reliance on natural resource development, are included in conversations around cumulative impacts. We also discussed that the process of value prioritization is relatively straightforward when you are

working with small groups of like-minded people. These conversations are made more difficult, however, when the protection of one set of values infringes on another value, when access to information for the purposes of monitoring and measuring values is limited, and when it comes down to making decisions that ultimately affect these values, such as decisions around resource development projects, environmental protection, and local social and economic development.

In order to engage in conversations that might be difficult or uncomfortable, participants highlighted that more time and future workshops may be required. Further, it was emphasized that it is important to continue to have conversations around cumulative impacts on an ongoing, consistent basis. These conversations must be convened in a manner that supports the safety of all participants to express their opinions. Indeed, participants identified the importance of avoiding polarization around difficult issues by building mutual trust and understanding and by collectively acknowledging the necessity of making compromises. In addition, participants highlighted the fact that when engaging in these collaborative processes, Aboriginal rights and title and Treaty rights must be respected and upheld, as historically, Indigenous communities have been disproportionately impacted by the negative aspects of resource development. We also heard that having local influence in conversations that have important implications for the future of communities in northeastern BC is essential in ensuring that policy- and decision-making processes better reflect local needs, values, and contexts. Overall, we heard that there is a desire to work together to collaboratively create solutions and take tangible actions that holistically address cumulative impacts in the Peace River Region.

Part III: Next Steps for Positive Action

The appetite to continue to work collaboratively to address cumulative impacts in the Peace River Region was evident throughout this workshop. We invite you to keep us informed as these processes emerge, and to utilize the CIRC's resources wherever useful.

Based on recommendations received to date, we will continue to convene conversations and conduct research to support local capacity building to understand and address cumulative impacts. We will also continue to build our capacity to act as a hub of information by building the [Cumulative Impacts Living Library](#), an online, freely accessible repository of information around various organizations, initiatives, and projects broadly related to cumulative impacts.

Over the next year, the CIRC will be facilitating other similar community meetings in the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality, the Peace River Region and the District of Vanderhoof. Through this process, we will be continuing to gather information around local understandings of cumulative impacts and soliciting feedback about how the CIRC can best support on the ground capacity issues and knowledge gaps given the kinds of tools, information, and resources we have at our disposal. Analysis of results from these meetings will be on-going, and the CIRC is committed to sharing data and analytic information as it becomes available. For more information or to get involved in these and related processes, we encourage you to contact us at the contact information listed below.

Acknowledgements

This event would not have been possible without the generous support of our funders. CIRC would like to recognize and thank the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions and the Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia for contributing funds to support this event. We would also like to thank the Northeast BC Resource Municipalities Coalition for making this workshop possible, and to everyone who participated in this event.



Pacific Institute
for Climate Solutions
Knowledge. Insight. Action.

For more information about this event and the CIRC, please contact:

Madeline Wilson
CIRC Communications Lead
Madeline.wilson@unbc.ca
1.250.960.5994

Chris Buse
CIRC Project Lead
Chris.buse@unbc.ca
1.250.960.5778