

Workshop follow-up report from:

## **Environment, Community and Health Impacts of Resource Development in Vanderhoof and the Surrounding Area**

Vanderhoof, BC, April 26, 2018

### **About the Cumulative Impacts Research Consortium**

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

### **About the CIRC Vanderhoof Workshop**

CIRC convened a free public workshop on the traditional territory of Saik'uz First Nation in Vanderhoof, British Columbia (BC) on April 26, 2018 as part of an ongoing project focused on developing new tools and processes to assess and monitor the positive and negative impacts of resource development across northern BC. This project aims to integrate community, environment and health values and perspectives, and account for diverse forms of knowledge and information, to inform the development of cumulative impact assessment tools. These conversations are also an important avenue through which CIRC can better understand how our ongoing research can best enhance on the ground capacity to respond to issues related to cumulative impacts. For more information about the "New Tools" project, please see the [project description](#) on the CIRC website.

This workshop was intended to create space for people living and working in Vanderhoof and the surrounding area to share their perspectives and experiences related to past and ongoing resource development. To help inform this conversation, CIRC staff shared a suite of publicly available information around socioeconomic, health and environmental indicators for Vanderhoof and the Bulkley-Nechako Region. This "regional profile" integrated a variety of data sources to provide a snapshot of change in this area over time. While in no way a complete or comprehensive document, this regional profile was shared with the intention of spurring conversation and reflection in response to the following broad question: *Resource development activities across northern BC have direct and indirect impacts on environment, community and health values. Can you think of a time where those connections seemed most apparent to you?*

### **Key Messages**

For many people at the workshop, Vanderhoof and the Nechako region has been home for many generations. Over this time, people and communities have developed intimate knowledge and deep connections with the land, and with each other. Other participants moved to Vanderhoof more recently, and described the process of getting to know and love the land, and build connections with the community. People came to the CIRC workshop because of a strong interest in learning about issues impacting the lands, watersheds, and communities in which they live, including the cumulative impacts of resource extraction and development. Cumulative impacts in the region, as described by participants,

are the result of a wide array of land use practices and resource industries, including agriculture, forestry, mining, pipelines, and increased access due to resource roads, transmission lines, and other forms of linear disturbance. This is especially concerning for Indigenous people who live off the land, as the health of water and wildlife is their sustainability. In order to address these issues, we heard that it is important to expand our understanding of the interconnections and relationships between the health of the land, water, wildlife, people and communities. The ways in which we collectively respond to these issues must account for these interconnections, and break down jurisdictional and disciplinary silos.

Several participants expressed concerns related to provincial land and resource management, decision-making and regulation. Overall, there was concern that public resources are not being adequately managed in the public interest. Some participants expressed that they are not against all resource development projects, but that it is important to ensure that people and communities are included in land and resource management processes. We heard frustration with the narrow focus of many land-use and resource management processes that inadequately account for the range of relevant issues, important values and diverse community perspectives (i.e. the BC Environmental Assessment process). There was an overall sense that any planning and decision-making around land-use and resource management must provide meaningful opportunities to share community perspectives and concerns, whereby people are actually listened to. Further, all resource development must have the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous communities.

There was significant concern around ongoing forestry practices in the region. We particularly heard about the following issues:

- The negative impacts of glyphosate spraying on forest ecosystems and wildlife populations. People who spend time on the land have been noticing these impacts for many years, and are also noticing an increase in the rate and scale at which glyphosate spraying is occurring.
- Forest replanting practices, enabled through free-to-grow regulations, have significantly impacted forest biodiversity by primarily replacing mature diverse forests with a single tree species. We heard that this practice has had an overall negative impact on the health of forest ecosystems, watersheds, and the health of fish and wildlife populations.
- The rate and scale of harvesting in the region has contributed to a significant decrease in intact forest lands in the region. The short rotation age set by the BC government (60-80 years) has contributed to this decline, and is considered inappropriate for the climate and ecosystems in this area.
- The modernization of both logging practices and sawmill technology has increased the rate and scale of harvesting, while requiring less labour and providing fewer jobs. This has decreased the number of forestry-related jobs available for communities that have historically relied on forestry as a primary source of employment.

Both in forestry and other industries, there was frustration that resource development activities occurring in the local area do not always bring local benefits, such as jobs, increased investment in health and social services, and increased investment in infrastructure. This is especially frustrating when resource development activities directly and indirectly increase pressure on local health and social services, and on ecosystems that communities rely on to provide clean water, air, food, recreation opportunities, and cultural and spiritual practices. Several participants expressed concern around cumulative impacts to fish and wildlife populations, particularly for salmon. In order to protect salmon, it is important to ensure the health of the Nechako watershed is maintained and protected. Practices

such as ensuring proper culverts are constructed when a resource road crosses a stream are vital to allow for upstream fish travel, and to prevent silt and sediment loading in downstream waterways. We heard concerns around declining moose populations in the area, which may be impacted by the suppression of aspen regrowth through glyphosate spraying. Declining moose populations and an observed increase in forest harvesting has compelled some local hunters to reconsider taking out hunting licenses in recent years; this decline could impact local guide and outfitting operations in the future, which are important contributors to the local economy. As was pointed out by participants, climate change may also exacerbate many of these issues.

Resource development also provides a significant amount of local employment opportunities, both in the form of direct jobs as well as secondary services (including manufacturing, transportation, and local food and retail services). We heard that while it is important to discuss and address the cumulative health, community and environmental impacts of resource development, it should also be recognized that resource development contributes to the local economy, and that many people rely on these industries for their livelihoods. Several participants expressed a desire to see a balance between resource development and maintaining and protecting other values (health, community, environmental). Currently, we heard that this balance is not being achieved. In order to address some of these impacts, participants felt strongly that there is a need for Vanderhoof to diversify its economy in innovative ways (for example, exploring alternative energy initiatives and alternative forestry markets).

In thinking about the future of the community and region, we heard that making both small and large changes is imperative, including policy and regulatory changes and a broader shift in our thinking that reflects the interconnectedness of ecosystems, watersheds, and human communities. With regard to resource industries currently operating in the area, there is an opportunity to adopt more responsible practices. Several ideas were put forward to help improve forestry practices: stop glyphosate spraying, implement a requirement to mill more logs locally; ensure lumber prices accurately reflect the value of harvested trees; require forest companies to replant diverse forest species; and, require forest companies to utilize more of each harvested tree. Participants recognized that making many of the changes necessary to address cumulative impacts will be difficult, as many people are dependent on resource industries for their livelihoods. Individuals and communities may also have deep cultural ties with resource development activities. For these and other reasons, we heard that when individuals or communities have differing opinions regarding a particular project or industry, it can create tension in the community and put strain on relationships even when, in some cases, the project does not move forward due to economic factors. Some of the issues related to cumulative impacts could be addressed by taking a more thoughtful and integrative approach to resource development that considers multiple values and perspectives, and ensures people and communities are meaningfully included in land and resource management.

As we begin to collectively address these challenges, we heard that it is both useful and important to have people come together to have these kinds of conversations. It is especially important that youth are active participants in conversations that inform and shape potential community futures. There was an interest in building on these connections: how can these conversations connect with education? How can educators help to foster connections between students and the places they live? We heard that while the next generation may face challenges in addressing issues related to cumulative impacts, they are part of a generation that has astounding access to information and knowledge, a desire to use this

knowledge, and incredible levels of connectivity; the changes that they will lead are beyond what we can currently imagine.

### **Generating Next Steps for Positive Action**

In the coming months, CIRC staff will continue to process, reflect on, and build this information into our ongoing research directed towards better understanding the cumulative impacts of resource development. Insights gleaned from these workshops continue to feed into longer term research projects, including the development of publicly available tools and resources, all of which are intended to build capacity amongst local communities to respond to cumulative impacts issues, and inform future land and resource management. Throughout this process, we commit to continuing to solicit and respond to feedback through a variety of methods (phone, email, face to face conversations), distribute information widely, act as a hub to enable various individuals and groups to connect with one another, and continue to travel to communities to convene open public conversations about these complex issues. CIRC staff present at this workshop—Chris Buse, Marieka Sax, Ryan O’Toole, and Madeline Wilson—were incredibly humbled and grateful for the willingness of people in the room to share these stories with us, and commit to returning to continue these dialogues.

### **Acknowledgements**

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

**Chris Buse**, CIRC Project Lead

[chris.buse@unbc.ca](mailto:chris.buse@unbc.ca); 1.250.960. 5778

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