

Workshop follow-up report from:

**The past, present and future of natural resource communities
in the Peace River Region**

A community workshop to learn and share stories about the positive and
negative impacts of resource development

Hudson's Hope, June 20, 2017

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 ongoing research and related initiatives, please visit www.unbc.ca/cumulative-impacts.

About the CIRC Hudson's Hope Workshop

CIRC staff facilitated a series of free public workshops throughout the Peace River Region between June 19-23, 2017. These workshops were convened in relation to an ongoing CIRC research project focused on developing new tools and processes to assess and monitor the positive and negative impacts of resource development in 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 next generation of cumulative impact assessment tools. These conversations are also an important avenue through which CIRC can better understand the ways in which our ongoing research can best enhance on the ground capacity to respond to issues related to cumulative impacts.

These workshops created space for people living and working in the Peace River Region 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 the Peace River Region. This "regional profile" integrated a variety of data sources to provide a snapshot of change in the Peace River Region 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: "How do we make better land-use decisions that account for long-term impacts to environmental, community and health values?"

Key Messages

In describing what motivated participants to attend the Hudson's Hope workshop, several people expressed concern around what natural resources mean to the community. There was a sense that decisions are made regarding resource development in and around Hudson's Hope by external decision makers who do not have to live with the outcome of the impacts, the primary example of this being the perceived significant long-term impacts of the Site C Dam on the fertile richness and abundant potential of the Peace Valley. We also heard concerns that the legacy of past hydroelectric projects for the Peace River has impacted community and agricultural development around Hudson's Hope in many ways

including the designation of a flood reserve as well as BC Hydro's acquisition and freezing of properties along the river. Participants recognized the number of employment opportunities that existed in Hudson's Hope in the past are not reflected in today's reality, and a sense of both nostalgia in relation to the community's past and discouragement that the benefits from past developments have not sustained the community in a way that allows the next generation to live with such promise.

Hudson's Hope and the Peace Valley were identified as unique places with deep connections to its residents. A few people shared stories of coming to Hudson's Hope for the weekend, buying property because of how affected they were by the beauty of the valley, and staying for the rest of their lives. The valley's microclimate lends itself well to agricultural and alternative energy potential. Alternative energy sources such as solar and wind power as well as geothermal energy were raised as possible economic opportunities, with Hudson's Hope poised to have the biggest municipal solar array in British Columbia.

The issue of future food security was also raised, especially with regard to the flooding associated with Site C Dam and global climate change impacts. Participants felt the agricultural potential of the Peace Valley to address the issue of food security for the region and province should be considered as important as the perceived economic gain from the production of hydroelectricity. Examples of agricultural potential included productivity in beef and livestock and the prolific ability to grow crops such as watermelon, cantaloupe, corn and berries. We also heard about changes to wildlife populations, including a decrease in moose sightings, which may be compounded by populations being displaced by an increase in elk. We also discussed an increase in the number of dead deer on the side of the road, a decline in caribou population to critical levels, and concern over impacts to migrating fish populations as a result of Site C.

Multiple resource industries operate in the Peace region including logging, hydroelectricity, oil and gas, and mining. Concerns over how to manage boom and bust cycles that are inevitable to the region and community were also raised. The scarcity of benefits that accompany periods of low unemployment was highlighted as an influential factor in the resolve of community stakeholders to manage resources more effectively during a bust. Further, uncertainty over future demand was highlighted as a driver that limits the ability for decision-makers to take a step back and assess the situation during the peak of a particular resource cycle.

While there is great concern over the future of the valley due to Site C there is also a strong sense of identity linked to BC Hydro in Hudson's Hope, as they have been a major employer in the community for decades. People in the community have seen a lot of industry come and go over the past several decades and feel that investment in community services and infrastructure has not matched local contributions to the provincial economy. That is, workshop participants felt that the community has not seen the financial benefit of resource development similar to other surrounding communities such as Fort St. John. They argue that the disproportionate investment in communities has impacted local service delivery where people will travel to on the weekend to do their shopping in larger centres. A decrease in the amount of locally available services such as banking, Greyhound public transport and access to medical assistance including pharmacists, have similarly impacted the sense of local community. There has also been a significant decrease in the population of children attending school.

Overall, workshops participants felt that the Hudson's Hope community has experienced piecemeal community engagement by government institutions on issues related to resource development by

which they are directly affected. Despite extensive contributions towards the LRMP process by local community members, the lack of sustained engagement has cultivated an apprehension towards similar community engagement processes where the outcomes and direct benefits for community members are unclear. These conversations affirmed CIRC's commitment to convening ongoing conversations surrounding cumulative impacts in Hudson's Hope, and the importance of providing a venue for the community to be heard. There are diverse understandings of what cumulative impacts mean to people and having a space to share these perspectives has helped people understand different points of view more openly. This reinforces the importance of incorporating lived experiences into cumulative impacts assessment and monitoring processes, and valuing the wisdom of people and communities that have lived in this region for a very long time.

Generating Next Steps for Positive Action

In the coming weeks, 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. Workshop participants can expect a more fulsome report in the next few weeks. As well, these insights will feed into longer term research projects, including the development of publicly available tools and resources. Importantly, both the research process and outcomes are intended to build capacity amongst local communities to respond to cumulative impacts issues, and inform ongoing planning processes around land and resource management. Based on information, ideas, and relationships generated through these workshops, we will work to develop new research projects to respond to issues raised. 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 in place. CIRC staff present at these workshops—Chris Buse, Madeline Wilson and Ryan O'Toole—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

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.



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

Madeline Wilson, CIRC Research Associate
madeline.wilson@unbc.ca; 1.250.960.5994

Chris Buse, CIRC Project Lead
chris.buse@unbc.ca; 1.250.960. 5778

www.unbc.ca/cumulative-impacts
www.cumulativeimpactslivinglibrary.ca