

INFORMATION BULLETIN #5



Nechako Environmental
Enhancement Fund

May 22, 2012

PHASE 3 - CONFIRMATION

Your feedback is requested!

The NEEF Management Committee invites you to its next public meeting on **May 31** at 7:00 PM in the Seniors Friendship Centre in Vanderhoof. We want to share with you what we have heard about the priority uses of the Nechako Environmental Enhancement Fund (NEEF) and present our thoughts in response to the input we have received to date. The objectives of the public meeting are (1) to present a summary of the input we have received, (2) provide an opportunity for you to clarify or add to input already received and (3) share our preliminary thoughts on uses of the NEEF.

As in the consultation phase, we may use a workshop format to ensure everyone has an opportunity to be heard and we are also willing to meet again individually with interested groups. Upon completion of this third set of meetings we will finalise our review and prepare the final report.

Update on NEEF MC Activities

As we discussed in our public presentation in March, the Management committee met with the Nechako Watershed Council (NWC), the District of Vanderhoof, the Nechako Environment & Water Stewardship Society (NEWSS), the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery initiative (NWSRI) and Freshwater Fisheries Society of British Columbia (FFSBC), and met twice with the Cheslatta Carrier Nation (CCN). Each of these groups presented their ideas and priorities for use of the NEEF. We also received written input from several individuals.

In addition to the public and stakeholder meetings we held workshops in April and early May with scientists and technical experts to discuss various topics including hydrology, geomorphology, fish and fish habitat, and hydraulic engineering matters related to the Nechako.

Summary of Proposed NEEF Options

To help prepare for the upcoming public meeting, below is a summary of information we received regarding options for the use of the NEEF. Copies of the presentations and a record of the workshops have been posted on our website, and we encourage you to read them before the meeting at the end of May.

Water Release Facility (WRF) at Kenney Dam

We heard support from a variety of people and organisations for building a WRF at Kenney Dam. A proposal forwarded by the Cheslatta Carrier Nation and partners is to build a hydro-electric generating station in conjunction with a WRF in order to help with financing and create additional economic and social benefits.

It is understood that a WRF at Kenney Dam would:

- allow for rehabilitation of the Cheslatta watershed by removing a significant portion of the large volume flows released from Skins Lake Spillway; and
- rewater the Nechako canyon downstream of Kenney Dam.

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Requested is a NEEF contribution ranging from \$35 million upwards, a portion of which would be used to address environmental risk associated with the project.

White Sturgeon Recovery

Since 2000, when people first became aware of declining white sturgeon population numbers, the adult sturgeon population has declined a further 50%. The species is now listed as endangered under the federal *Species at Risk Act*. Recovery work is required immediately to avoid extinction of this genetically unique fish population in the Nechako watershed.

A recovery strategy to preserve and enhance the Nechako White Sturgeon population has been developed by the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative, and stable funding of \$0.8 million/year for at least 10 years is requested to carry out the strategy. The strategy consists of:

- 1) Operation of a White Sturgeon recovery centre in Vanderhoof (building funds and land are already secured);
- 2) Brood capture and rearing of juveniles;
- 3) Habitat research toward population sustainability; and
- 4) Stewardship functions.

Tributary Watershed Restoration and Stewardship

We received a proposal from the Nechako Environment & Water Stewardship Society for restoring tributary streams flowing into the main-stem Nechako River. This initiative would scale up from successes in the Murray Creek watershed and work to increase awareness of and encourage water stewardship, re-establish or repair riparian habitat, and ensure culverts provide proper access for fish. Tributary stream restoration would, in turn, help improve main stem conditions through delivery of cooler water and reduce sediment deposition into the Nechako River.

Requested is up to \$1 million/year for twenty years.

Legacy Fund

The idea of establishing a legacy fund was proposed by a number of groups. Conceptually the interest derived from the legacy fund would be available over a long term for a variety of environment enhancement projects, and would provide flexibility to address both currently known issues as well as issues that may surface in future. For every \$10 million invested at 4% return for example, \$0.4 million would be available annually for appropriate projects.

A governance structure would be needed to oversee the legacy fund, develop criteria for its use, invite and review fund applications, and monitor successful projects to ensure project and long-term objectives were being achieved.

Input from Technical Workshops

We heard a number of key messages when we met with scientists and subject experts. They stressed the need to gather baseline information and to monitor as NEEF projects were implemented. Such an approach would provide the necessary feedback to determine whether objectives were being achieved and to guide future decisions. They also informed us that the Mountain Pine Beetle and subsequent logging could affect the hydrology in watersheds and that coordination was warranted to ensure initiatives were not counter-productive.

They mentioned that there are measurable indicators of river health including water quality, biodiversity, aquatic species population health, habitat complexity, bedload mobility and riparian vegetation such as cottonwood.

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The importance of understanding changes resulting from Kenney Dam and the Skins Lake Spillway on main-stem sediment recruitment, movement and deposition, and how it would continue to change for many years before settling into a less dynamic state was also raised.

We discussed the relative importance of flow patterns, variability and volumes. Land use changes resulting from agricultural land clearing, settlement and logging, and natural forces such as fire and mountain pine beetle infestations would have and continue to also affect hydrology and contribute sediments to the tributaries and main-stem Nechako River. They mentioned fine sediments need to be flushed out periodically to prevent the clogging of substrates and maintain gravel beds for fish spawning.

Preliminary NEEF MC Direction

Taking the above input into consideration the NEEF Management Committee has reached some preliminary conclusions on how best to use the NEEF funds to achieve environmental enhancement. Although the details have not been worked through at this point, the MC is considering the following:

ENHANCEMENT OPTION	NEEF CONTRIBUTION (% of total)	OBJECTIVES
Cheslatta watershed study and rehabilitation	2%	-rehabilitate fish populations and habitat -improve future decisions
Water release facility at Kenney Dam: initiate Environmental Impact Assessment process and establish firm commitment to construct	2%	-enhance through flow changes - rehabilitate fish populations and habitat
Water Release Facility at Kenney Dam	Up to 80 %	-enhance through flow changes - rehabilitate fish populations and habitat
White sturgeon recovery centre: operation, brood capture, habitat research & stewardship	8%	-rehabilitate fish populations and habitat -education and stewardship
Tributary rehabilitation and water stewardship	4%	-rehabilitate fish habitat -stewardship and education
Integrated watershed research	2%	-improve future decisions

We are considering reserving the bulk of the NEEF for construction of a water release facility at Kenney Dam for a period of four years, with milestones identified to ensure progress is being made towards this project.

If after up to 4 years the water release facility option has not made progress or received support for the remaining necessary funds (approximately \$300million) the remaining NEEF will be contributed to a Legacy Fund managed by the partners (the Province and RTA) and be available for applications for environmental enhancement, on a matching fund basis.

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This approach would reserve for a time a majority of the NEEF for a water release facility while undertaking important and time sensitive enhancement work now. In doing that it recognizes and affirms the importance of a water release facility for environmental enhancement of the Cheslatta watershed, recognizes that more time and effort will be required before a facility can be built or, conversely, maintains flexibility to address future issues and new opportunities should they arise.

Summary

In summary we heard broad support for:

- Construction of a water release facility at Kenney Dam;
- Immediate operation of a recovery centre for white sturgeon and rehabilitation work on tributary streams including the Cheslatta river; and
- Establishment of a legacy fund.

The NEEF MC has made these tentative decisions based on the input received. We look forward to meeting with you at the end of this month for the third phase of our process!

Our address is: NEEF MC, C/O PO Box 2551, Vanderhoof BC, V0J 3A0 or by email to administrator@neef.ca

We would like to hear from you! Please let us know if you plan to attend the public meeting and workshop on May 30/31 in Vanderhoof.