

Cumulative Impacts and Resource Development in Vanderhoof & Central BC

April 6, 2016

Follow-up Report from a Public Meeting

About the CIRC Vanderhoof Meeting

[The Cumulative Impacts Research Consortium \(CIRC\)](#) held a public meeting in Vanderhoof on April 6, 2016, which served as an opportunity to converse a dialogue around cumulative impacts and resource development, as it relates to Vanderhoof and its surrounding region. This report describes the key components of the event and some key themes that emerged from those discussions.

Part I: Learning about Cumulative Impacts

Chris Buse, CIRC Project Lead, gave a presentation, providing an overview of cumulative impacts, the importance of focusing on them at this point in BC's history, the challenges with existing development and impact assessment processes, and what the CIRC is beginning to understand and work towards. The CIRC's approach considers larger spatial and temporal scales (beyond project-focused Environmental Assessments), from local to international, and past, present, and future time scales. It also considers multiple sectors and projects, seeking to integrate health, social, and environmental values into decision-making processes around resource development and land use activities. Slides from the PowerPoint Presentation are available online at www.unbc.ca/cumulative-impacts.

Part II: Sharing Local Knowledge

Participants circled around three tables, each sharing personal stories about their experiences with resource development and cumulative impacts. A large map of central BC was provided for reference, and to write and draw on. While each group discussed separately, some key themes emerged during a large group debrief of this activity. These themes included: traffic and public safety, water quality and over fishing, alternative power sources, public engagement, the role of government, and the need to look into the future and take a long-term approach. For example, trucks regularly drive through the District of Vanderhoof and 9-axel log transport trucks are being trialed. Capable of carrying twice the volume as a standard truck, participants questioned how this might impact the district's infrastructure, the number of jobs available, changes in driving style, and the forest road system. Furthermore, participants questioned whether this change was about increasing the bottom line, at the expense of environmental and community concerns.

Water quality and fish species within the Nechako also emerged as concerns, particularly in relation to historical reductions in snowpack, the implications of dams and the manipulation of natural flows, increases in sediment concentration in the river, changes in temperature, and the effects of overfishing. Alternative power sources particularly wind power and the Innergex wind farm project were brought up. These alternative power sources are seen as necessary, but are not without their challenges. Specific concerns include the challenges for animals as a result of cleared, linear corridors, and what the overall lifecycle costs are for renewable energy projects.

As a small community, participants expressed frustration that they often do not obtain the benefits, or have the same degree of power over decisions that affect their local area relative to larger urban centres, in spite of experiencing the effects and challenges of resource development first hand. Participants recognized the need for smaller communities to have a larger voice in decision-making and how the benefits of resource extraction are allocated. Collaboration between jurisdictions was identified as a pathway forward, although there was recognition that smaller northern communities are already trying to leverage collaborative working arrangements to obtain their fair share of the benefits of resource development operations. It was further identified that decision-making needs to support sustainability, and funding opportunities need to be more flexible, as to reflect local values. This also involves engagement, which participants described as different from consultation. Meaningful public engagement, and the decisions that follow, must be collaborative and co-managed, and local knowledge needs to be used throughout decision-making processes.

Overall, cumulative impacts have intergenerational implications, and workshop participants signaled the need to look into the future and begin planning, mitigating, and managing associated risks. This means evaluating, understanding, and communicating the best science available, and continuing with broad based education campaigns and community dialogue sessions that surface the strengths and challenges of resource development.

Part III: Positive action

Participants were asked what steps they, their organizations, and the CIRC can take to promote positive local action in addressing some of the issues discussed. It was recognized that better information and public engagement are needed to make informed decisions, continuity in leadership is necessary to understand the implications of decisions, and due to changes in values over time, policies need to be fluid, yet consistent. Lastly, participants expressed the importance of having more of these conversations, and the necessity of involving youth. In saying this, the CIRC has recently partnered with the District of Vanderhoof and other northern communities to begin developing the next generation of cumulative impact assessment tools. We are keen to receive public input on the development of this tool and will be in contact with workshop participants and anyone interested in providing input into the design of this research.

For more information about the this event and the CIRC, please contact circ@unbc.ca