

2022 ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES FORUM QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

INTRODUCTION

As we are now acutely aware, global climate change is the greatest environmental challenge ever to confront human societies. We know the list: drought, fire, severe storms, record high temperatures, famine, warming oceans, sea level rise. These are increasingly impacting communities around the world. BC has recently been devastated by several extreme climate events – heat, fires and floods, which caused hundreds of deaths and damaged billions of dollars of natural and built infrastructure.

Simultaneously, the entire planet is undergoing a silent biodiversity crisis called the 6th Mass Extinction. Species extinction rates are estimated at 1,000 to 10,000 times higher than the natural rate. Unlike previous extinction events caused by natural phenomena, the sixth extinction is driven by the human activities of unsustainable use of land, water and energy, and by human-caused climate change, which decreases biodiversity and makes ecosystems ever more vulnerable to disturbance and less able to provide the invaluable ecosystem services humans need to survive (clean air, water, fertile soil, etc.).

There are many actions Local Governments in BC can take to both mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss. In a very real sense, as elected officials, it falls to you to lead the way to protect natural systems and the benefits they provide – to our communities and to global health as a whole.

All of the questions we pose to candidates below are within the jurisdiction of the local government you hope to represent.

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

For each of the questions below we have provided a brief background, and supporting information through links to outside materials. If you require more information about any of these topics, we would be happy to provide it for you.

We ask that each candidate please indicate their level of support for our approach to addressing the issue (support/neutral/oppose) and provide a written response to the question.

1. Join the “Climate Caucus”

Elected officials need support to lead well on climate change issues. ‘[Climate Caucus](#)’ is a nonpartisan network of local elected officials and 1000+ allies across Canada. Its mission is to “create and implement socially-just policies which align with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).”

QUESTION

If elected, will you commit to engaging with the Climate Caucus and ensuring that all Council and/or Board decisions are considered through the lens of mitigating climate change, protecting biodiversity and sustainably managing ‘natural assets’?

Director Donna McMahon is already a member, and an avid supporter, of the initiative, and I look forward to learning more through her about how we can move forward as a region. Managing our natural assets is the only way we can afford to adapt to climate change. To build hard infrastructure for climate change adaptation locally could easily cost our community millions of dollars.

2. Improved Environmental Regulation through Environmental DPAs

Scientific and economic studies repeatedly show that preserving natural ecosystems creates more benefits for local governments and communities than developing and/or replacing them with engineered infrastructure. The 2019 UN Climate Action Summit brought great political attention to the power of Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) for climate and sustainable development. It makes economic, social, and environmental sense for local governments to preserve Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) and “natural assets” for their [‘ecosystem services.’](#)

[Environmental Development Permit Areas \(EDPAs\)](#) are one of few legal tools local governments have to mitigate impacts of private land development. EDPAs are clearly identified areas within which development and land alteration must be regulated in order to protect natural assets and Environmentally Sensitive Areas. However, if DPA guidelines are not clear and [supported with permitting policy and bylaws](#), they may become cumbersome or ineffective.

QUESTION

As an elected official will you agree to the following commitments?

- **Improving your awareness of EDPAs and how they may be used to support environmental protection;**
- **Supporting the creation, use, and improvement of EDPAs, including bylaws and policies to protect ecological and natural asset values in your community and throughout the Sunshine Coast.**

We already have some fairly stringent requirements about riparian area set backs, making sure that work done meets with sensitive ecosystem management, etc. Our OCP contains DPA's for water courses as well as marine, foreshore, and shoreline areas. We have additional DPA's pertaining to steep slope and rockfall hazards, so we're pretty covered on places we shouldn't be building. As the field of natural asset management matures, I look forward to Sechelt following the lead of Gibsons, and discovering the ways that we can collaborate on initiatives that affect us all.

3. Sue Big Oil for costs of Climate Impacts on Infrastructure

For decades, oil and gas corporations have known that burning fossil fuels would cause the heat waves, wildfires, drought and flooding that we're now experiencing in BC. These multinational companies spent millions to deceive, deny and distract us on their way to billions in profit — specifically, 3 billion dollars per day for 50 years — by preventing action on climate change.

In 2018, the District of Sechelt, along with the Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities, voted to join 13 other communities around BC and send Climate Accountability letters to the Big Oil companies. Now, West Coast Environmental Law is spearheading a [Sue Big Oil campaign](#) to force oil and gas corporations to change their business practices and pay their fair share for the harm they're causing. [The City of Vancouver has already signed on.](#)

QUESTION

Will you commit to protecting taxpayers by seeking to recover a fair share of climate costs from the fossil fuel companies who profit from selling products that cause climate change? Specifically, if elected, would you ask your Council to do the following:

- **take urgent action to reduce our fossil fuel use and protect us from future heat waves, wildfires, flooding and other climate impacts;**
- **set aside at least \$1 per person towards a community fund to sue Big Oil;**
- **join with other local governments to file a class action lawsuit to recover a fair share of our climate costs;**
- **work to build equitable, sustainable systems for transportation, housing and food that put people and the planet before corporate profits; and**
- **cooperate with Indigenous peoples in doing so.**

This is a fundamental shift in community values that I believe needs to come from the community in the form of a well represented, and high signature petition. If such a petition comes forward to show that our community is supportive of this endeavor, then I will support it. I do recognize the value of resource extraction in our country, and the sheer number of items that require petroleum to function. I'm also not opposed to an EPR fee being applied to petroleum in order to help fund the climate adaptation work that we're going to have to undertake as a society. I look forward to hearing from our community on this initiative.

4. Watershed Protection and Sustainable Drinking Water Supply

The [Sunshine Coast Regional District \(SCRD\)](#) and [Town of Gibsons](#) supply drinking water to over 30,000 residents on the Sunshine Coast. The primary water sources for most residents are the Chapman and Gray Creek Watersheds. Secondary water sources include the groundwater sources, Elphinstone-Gibsons-Soames and Hopkins-Langdale Aquifers (a.k.a. West Howe Sound Watershed).

Like most rural areas in BC, the Sunshine Coast faces ongoing and increasing [resource extraction pressures in our drinking watersheds](#), mainly from logging. Local and First Nations governments have little to no control over industrial activities and their impacts on source area ecosystems. For example, BC Timber Sales is proposing large clear cuts in the West Howe Sound Watershed and the Sunshine Coast Community Forest still has logging tenure in the Chapman and Grey Creek Watersheds.

The BC government has [a suite of legislative and policy tools](#) to protect drinking water and provincial government ministries have overlapping watershed protection, stewardship and reconciliation mandates. And, the new [BC Ministry of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship \(LWRS\)](#) is tasked with [developing new strategies](#) - in partnership with First Nations and federal and local governments – to better protect watersheds, wildlife, wild salmon, species at risk, and biodiversity.

Each local government on the Coast has different and overlapping opportunities to advance water supply and source area conservation.

QUESTION FOR DISTRICT OF SECHLT CANDIDATES

As the sole shareholder of the [Sunshine Coast Community Forest \(SCCF\)](#), what will you do to ensure the SCCF transitions to a sustainable forest management model, stewards ecological values and protects the Chapman and Grey Creek Watersheds?

The SCCF is already undertaking a shift in the way that it operates towards eco-system based management, where they look at the area around a cutblock as well as within it, to ensure they leave wildlife trees and corridors, and generally go a better job of forestry than the private sector ever will. It was the current Council, and a few forward thinking members of the SCCF, that decided to make this transition a priority. Additionally, the SCCF has committed to no logging in the Chapman Creek watershed. That's something that a community operated forestry operation can do. Have you heard the same commitment from BCTS or the private companies?

5. Adapting to and Mitigating Climate Induced Flooding

As the climate changes, we are seeing increasing average annual rainfall and experiencing more frequent intense rainfall events and more rapid snowmelt. Meanwhile, average summer rainfall is decreasing. Extreme precipitation events are happening more often, resulting in increased runoff across a dry landscape. Water isn't absorbed into the soils, riparian areas and aquifers. These conditions create major challenges with runoff and erosion management, increase flood risk and source area recharge. Estimated costs of "rebuilding" after the tragic BC atmospheric river floods (2021) are [in the billions of dollars](#). And, this doesn't account for long term impacts on fish, as the flooding occurred when the salmon were coming home to spawn.

QUESTION

If elected, how will you work with your Council/Board to adapt to these extreme and changing conditions, mitigate impacts on communities, infrastructure and fish habitat?

District of Sechelt staff have been leaders in bringing forward adaptation to current policy around stormwater runoff, culvert maintenance, and other infrastructure issues. We need to continue to support the work that they're doing on that front. As an organization, the District of Sechelt does not have the resources or jurisdiction to be involved everywhere it needs to be. That's where community partnerships (such as eel grass replanting) and advocacy (such as with MOTI around highway infrastructure and drainage in the rural areas) makes a significant difference.

Information Resources

[Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#) - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

[Fact sheet - Biodiversity Climate Change Impacts and Risks](#) - SIXTH ASSESSMENT REPORT Working Group II – Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability IPCC

[Accelerated modern human–induced species losses: Entering the sixth mass extinction](#) - Science

[Vertebrates on the brink as indicators of biological annihilation and the sixth mass extinction](#)

[Nature-based Solutions](#) - IUCN

[The 3rd Edition of the Green Bylaws Toolkit for Protecting and Enhancing the Natural Environment and Green Infrastructure](#) - UVIC Environmental Law Centre

[Understanding Biodiversity in Coastal Forested Landscapes](#), Sunshine Coast Conservation Association (SCCA).

[Climate Solutions](#) - David Suzuki Foundation

[Climate Change](#) - Georgia Strait Alliance

[Submission on the BC Government’s Watershed Security Strategy and Fund Discussion Paper](#) - BC Watershed Security Coalition