

# Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters

## Purpose Statement

### Who We Are

The Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters is a non-partisan coalition of organizations that have come together to advocate for the health<sup>1</sup> of fresh water—including all inland waters—across Canada. From rivers to aquifers, wetlands to estuaries, and lakes to glaciers, our waters are fundamental to the health, economic prosperity, social well-being and resilience of communities across Canada, and to the healthy functioning of the planet's ecosystems.

Collectively, the organizations of the Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters have hundreds of thousands of supporters from different walks of life, from coast to coast to coast.

The Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters is a non-Indigenous led coalition. Any statement or policy position coming from the Coalition does not speak for Indigenous Peoples.

### What Unites Us

Waters across the country are under [threat](#). The myth of Canadian freshwater abundance—and the false sense of security that accompanies it—has been thoroughly debunked. It is now undeniable that our rivers, streams, lakes, aquifers, and wetlands are experiencing unprecedented challenges, especially in the face of the [ongoing climate crisis](#). Water supply is increasingly erratic, water quality is degrading in many places, and extreme weather events are increasing in both frequency and severity. Climate change is adding to and exacerbating existing threats to our waters caused by pollution, overuse, habitat loss and fragmentation, alteration of flow, and invasive species.

**Changing course and realizing healthy waters requires a bold vision to shift the way we relate to, manage, and govern fresh water across the country.** This must be a collaborative effort that involves all levels of government, engages Canadians, and leverages the population's wealth of scientific, ecological, and traditional water knowledge.

**The federal government has a critical role to play in leading this transformation, and the Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters is united around advocating for the federal government to play a *strong and appropriate* leadership role.**

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<sup>1</sup> WWF-Canada's [Watershed Reports](#) assess watershed health through four indicators of water health: water flow, water quality, benthic invertebrates, and fish.

# The Foundational Pillars

The federal government can play a *strong and appropriate* leadership role in protecting and restoring waters across the country by mainstreaming the following cross-cutting foundational pillars<sup>2</sup> in every aspect of the government's many policy and institutional levers—including federal legislation, regulations, policies, institutions, and investments:

**Advancing Reconciliation.** Meaningfully advance the federal government's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, including recognizing and upholding inherent Indigenous water rights and authority and fulfilling the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

**Supporting Knowledge Creation and Mobilization.** Play a key role in creating and mobilizing the knowledge and tools—both Western and Indigenous—needed to understand, predict, and respond to water challenges and opportunities, particularly against the backdrop of climate change.

**Strengthening Cooperative Federalism.** Strengthen cooperative federalism around shared water decision-making and management among different levels of government, especially considering the transboundary nature of watersheds in Canada and the impacts of climate change.

**Cultivating a Watershed Approach.** Lead an approach that emphasizes the importance of watershed boundaries in all freshwater decision-making. The watershed approach takes into account interconnected ecological, social, economic, and cultural values that must be balanced to ensure the wellbeing of communities and ecosystems across the watershed.

**Pursuing Deep Legislative Reform.** Renew Canada's outdated federal water laws and policies. This will involve engaging with a broad range of actors within and outside the federal government to conduct holistic analysis, and ensure renewed laws and policies provide the right tools and framework to safeguard the health of waters in Canada.

## Our Advocacy Focus

The Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters advocates for federal government leadership around freshwater policy, funding, and capacity-building, and supports legislation, regulations, programs, institutions and investments that advance the foundational pillars.

The Coalition looks for *policy windows* to further our advocacy focus. For example, through the government's commitment to creating a Canada Water Agency, during election time when the parties are creating their platforms, or through the budget process where there may be opportunities to advocate for investments that support healthy waters.

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<sup>2</sup> These foundational pillars are drawn from a [joint submission](#) made on the Canada Water Agency, which lays out additional information and specific actions beneath each pillar.

Current policy windows that we are focused on are (Last updated: March, 2021):

- A Canada Water Agency built on the five foundational pillars;
- A Canada Water Fund to support water projects right across the country;
- Renewal of the *Canada Water Act*.