

**Malahat**

**MÁLEXEŁ (MALAHAT NATION)**

# **Watershed Governance Framework Report and Action Plan**

Developed in Collaboration with Dillon Consulting Limited

March 31, 2026

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# Part 1

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Setting the Stage

## 1.0 Part 1: Setting the Stage

### 1.1 Introduction

There is an increasing focus on transitioning water governance towards approaches that are watershed-based, emphasizing collaboration and the involvement of Indigenous communities in decision-making processes. Examples include the Cowichan Watershed Board and the Nicola Watershed Governance Partnership. Effective policies and tools to support these partnerships include establishing Government-to-Government (G2G) agreements and regionally focused collectives made up of Indigenous partners (Rights holders), various levels of government, and stakeholders<sup>1</sup>. Ultimately, collaborative watershed governance entities should demonstrate collective decision making and the integration of Indigenous principles.

In MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat Nation) unceded Traditional Territory, watershed governance and authority are currently overseen by the Province through the *Water Sustainability Act* and the Ministry of Land, Water, and Resource Stewardship. Regional governments manage development, and private forestry is managed under the Private Managed Forest Land Act. The MÁLEXEŁ Nation is mostly excluded from all the processes listed above. MÁLEXEŁ is working to build G2G relationships to better address these matters, while ensuring sustainable governance of our watersheds. These relationships help focus on strategies that balance impacts and benefits, and work to guarantee adequate water resources that help protect inherent Rights.

This document lays out the first phase of developing a MÁLEXEŁ-led Watershed Governance Framework for the Malahat Benchlands and Shawnigan Creek Watersheds, both of which lie within MÁLEXEŁ Nation's Traditional Unceded Territory. The project written about in this report has been fully led by the MÁLEXEŁ Nation, with participation and collaboration of partners.



### 1.2 Purpose of a MÁLEXEŁ Watershed Governance Framework

By building a strong foundation through research and three in-person workshops, this document seeks to empower the MÁLEXEŁ Nation with the knowledge and tools necessary to advance existing efforts of watershed management. By developing a Watershed Governance Framework, MÁLEXEŁ is continuing to build on current strategies for the governance of lands and waters through framing out actions and next steps that frame our goals of long-term stewardship and ecological resilience. Moreover, this document will help to instruct MÁLEXEŁ leadership and staff in understanding where capacity gaps need to be filled.

<sup>1</sup> To view a summary of such partnerships, please see the Watershed Governance Framework Research Memo, created by Dillon Consulting Limited for MÁLEXEŁ Nation, 2025.

A key goal of this process is to formalize relationships of the partner organizations invited to join in collective watershed management (see **Section 1.4**), and secure commitments of watershed stewardship so that the work will outlive leadership and staff change. Through the act of collaboration, there is hope that priorities defined during the workshops will bind people together to continue reaching the group’s collective interests. In hul’q’umi’num’, we call this principle of reciprocity **ts’its’uw’a’tul’ hakwush tthun ‘uy’ shqwaluwun**.

1.2.1 Project Timeline

Where We’ve Been, Where We Are, Where We’re Going



Figure 1: Project Timeline Summary

The MÁLEXEŁ Nation Lands and Environment Department has been working with Dillon Consulting Limited (Dillon) and SOAR Professional Services (SOAR) in the production of a Research Memo on Indigenous-led watershed governance, and the creation and facilitation of 3 workshops with MÁLEXEŁ partner organizations. During July 2025, October 2025, and January 2026, three workshops took place at the MÁLEXEŁ Nation’s administrative office. Partners gathered in person and online. After setting the stage at the first workshop, the second two workshops were iterative, building on what was heard and learned from partner participants in the previous workshops. This report has been created from what was shared during the three workshops, as well as meetings held between the MÁLEXEŁ Nation, Dillon, and SOAR.

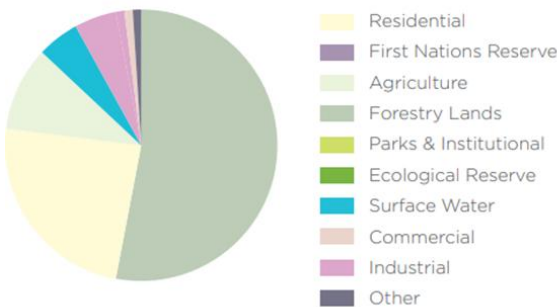
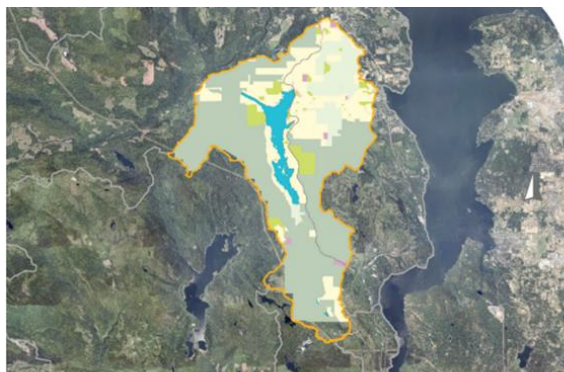
## 1.3 About the Watersheds

Within MÁLEXEŁ Traditional Territories there are several watersheds. A watershed is defined as an area of land that catches rain and snow, draining all surface water and groundwater into a common outlet such as a river, lake, or ocean. Acting as a catchment or funnel, watersheds include all land, water, plants, and animals within its boundaries, which are defined by surrounding high elevations like ridges or hills. To begin watershed planning on a manageable a smaller scale<sup>2</sup>, the MÁLEXEŁ Nation has strategically begun with two watersheds: The Shawnigan Creek Watershed, and the MÁLEXEŁ Benchlands Watershed.

### 1.3.1 Snapshot of the Watersheds

#### 1.3.1.1 The Shawnigan Creek Watershed

The Shawnigan Creek watershed is a heavily utilized hydrological system centered around Shawnigan Lake, the second-largest lake on southern Vancouver Island. Spanning approximately 11,000 hectares, the watershed functions in two distinct sections: the upper reach, which feeds into the lake from forestry lands and creeks, and the lower reach, where water exits the lake's north end, flows through the community of Mill Bay, and discharges into the Saanich Inlet. The lake acts as a massive settling basin and reservoir, with water levels artificially stabilized by a weir to ensure a consistent supply of



#### Shawnigan Creek at a glance:

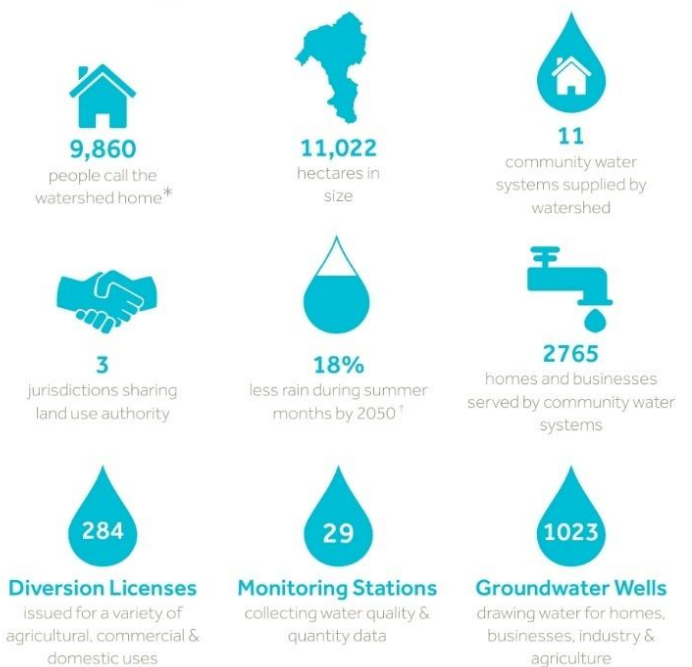


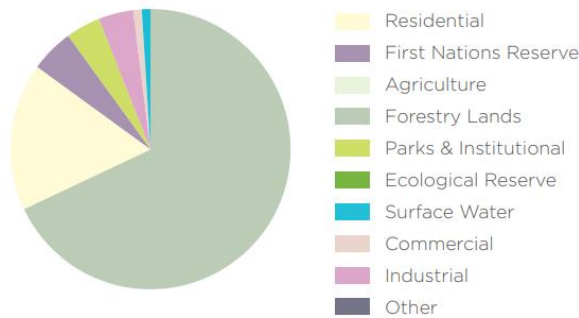
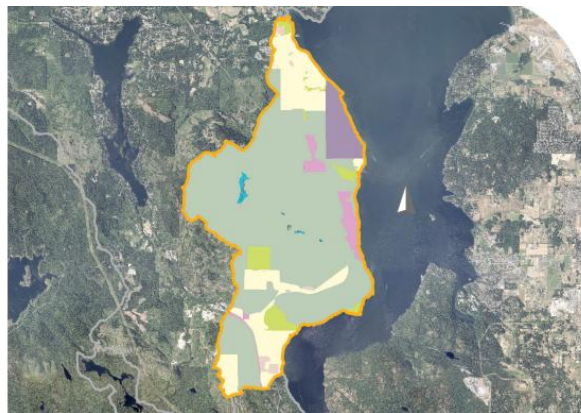
Figure 2: Shawnigan Creek Watershed – CVRD Watershed Snapshot Series

<sup>2</sup> The Goldstream and T'Sou-ke watersheds are also within MÁLEXEŁ Traditional Territories.

water for the surrounding communities. The watershed is a complex mix of high recreational use, residential development, and sensitive habitat. While the lower creek supports anadromous runs of Coho and Chum salmon, the lake ecosystem struggles with invasive species such as Smallmouth Bass and Yellow perch, as well as nutrient loading<sup>3</sup> from aging septic systems.

1.3.1.2 Malahat Benchlands Watershed

The MÁLEXEŁ Benchlands watershed, located on the southeast coast of Vancouver Island, forms a unique hydrological system defined by steep, stepped terrain rather than a single river valley. Descending from the high Malahat Ridge to the Saanich Inlet, the landscape is characterized by flat plateaus or benches separated by deep ravines. This topography supports a cluster of parallel streams that exhibit a flashy flow regime, rising rapidly during storms and dropping quickly afterward. These watercourses rely heavily on fractured bedrock aquifers stored within the benches to maintain flow during dry periods, acting as vital freshwater inputs that regulate salinity and nutrient levels in the Saanich Inlet.



Malahat Benchlands at a glance:

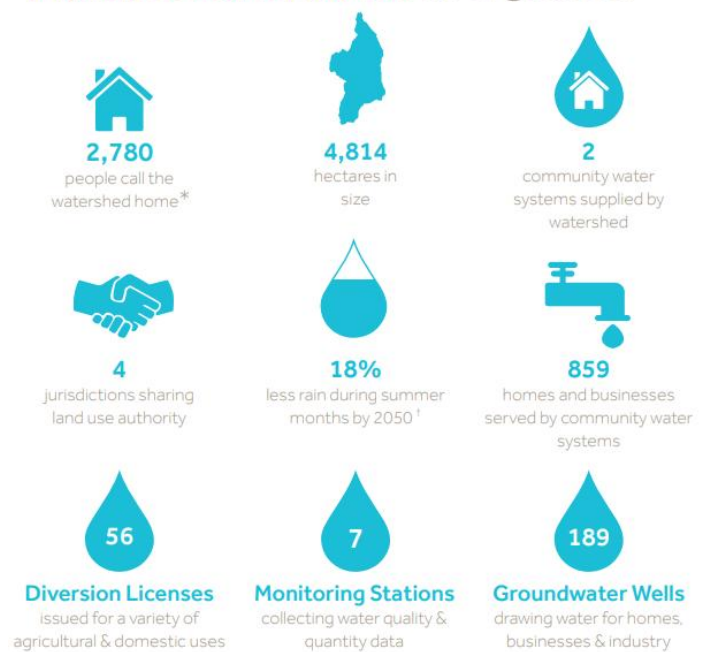


Figure 3: MÁLEXEŁ Benchlands Watershed – CVRD Watershed Snapshot Series

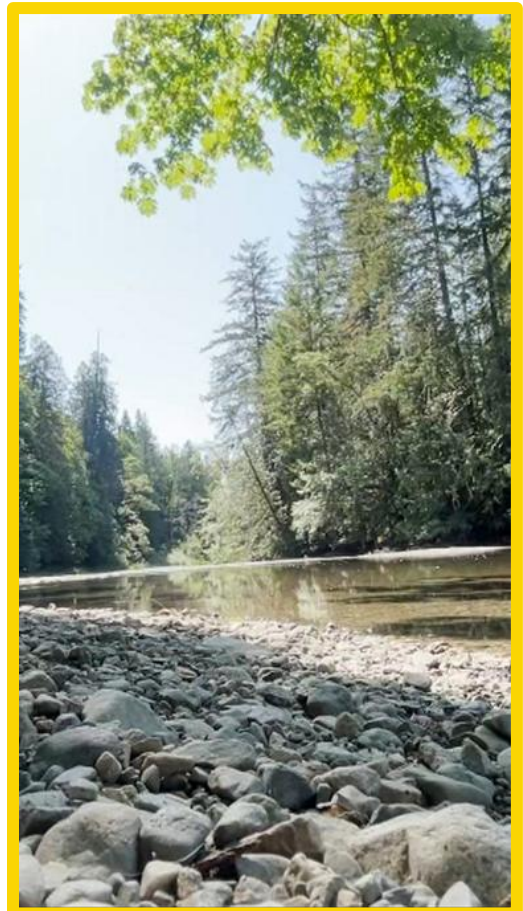
<sup>3</sup> Nutrient loading is the excessive introduction of nutrients (primarily nitrogen and phosphorus) into aquatic ecosystems from sources like agricultural runoff, sewage, and fertilizer. It causes severe environmental damage by driving eutrophication, which leads to harmful algal blooms, oxygen depletion (hypoxia), and the formation of aquatic "dead zones".

The watershed contains a diversity of ecosystems, including rare wetlands, Douglas-fir, and arbutus forests – serving as a critical transition between upland forests and the marine environment. However, the Benchlands face significant pressures from the Trans-Canada Highway, which bisects the watershed and introduces runoff into the creeks. Residential reliance on groundwater, increasing development pressures associated with population growth, and a rise in localized industrial activity are compounding pressures on the watershed’s groundwater and surface water hydrological system.

### 1.3.2 State of the Watersheds

#### 1.3.2.1 The Shawnigan Creek Watershed

53% of the watershed is being managed as forestry lands by Mosaic Forestry. With heavier development and land use impacts than most other watersheds in the region, the Shawnigan Creek watershed is more susceptible to ground and surface water contamination and fluctuation in surface water supply. A temperate climate and an abundance of natural beauty make the Cowichan Region a highly desirable place to live, resulting in the population growing steadily. This growth is occurring in tandem with a changing climate where summertime drought and wintertime flooding are the new normal.



#### 1.3.2.2 Malahat Benchlands Watershed

68% of the watershed is being managed as private forestry lands with Mosaic Forestry. With limited natural surface water storage, the Malahat Benchlands are more susceptible to periods of drought and flood than many of the other watersheds in the region. Ecosystems in the Benchlands depends heavily on groundwater, however, expanding human populations place increasing stress on these critical water sources. Risk in the Malahat Benchlands watershed is largely driven by drought, summer low flow rates, and ground and surface water contamination.

## 1.4

## Partners of the Watershed Governance Collective

This project builds on MÁLEXEŁ Nation’s regular meetings and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Ministry of Water, Lands, and Resource Stewardship (WLRS), where MÁLEXEŁ-led regional and watershed planning and governance has been a topic of discussion. The MÁLEXEŁ Nation understands that managing the watershed goes beyond our MOU to manage water licenses with WLRS; it involves collective stewardship and decision making with local government, industry, local Environmental Non-Profit Organizations (ENGOS), and the Water Authority. By inviting others to come sit at the table, the MÁLEXEŁ Nation is seeking a commitment from the collective working group (see below) to work together on both a technical ‘boots on the ground’ level and a collaborative governance level. This report represents a continuation of the ongoing discussions between the MÁLEXEŁ Nation and WLRS, and expands to include the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), Island Health, and the Shawnigan Creek Watershed Basin Society. Mosaic Forestry and the Mill Bay Water District were invited to attend, yet declined the invitation.

**Table 1: Participants from Partner Organizations**

Attendance	Name	Company	Role
In Person	Melissa Tokarek	MÁLEXEŁ Nation	Director of Lands and Environment
	Carmen Pavlov	MÁLEXEŁ Nation	Lands and Environment Department
	Charles (Charlie) Thorne	MÁLEXEŁ Nation	Lands Guardian
	Shane Sylvester	MÁLEXEŁ Nation	Council Member
	Kate Richey	MÁLEXEŁ Nation	Lands and Environment Department
	Josh Handsides	MÁLEXEŁ Nation	Chief Administrative Officer
	Cali Melnechenko	Ministry of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship (WLRS)	Water Authorizations
	Michelle Pressman,	CVRD	Manager Developmental Services
	Galen McMenamin	CVRD	Senior Environmental Analyst
	Jeff Moore	CVRD	Manager, Environmental Services
	Ann Kjerulf	CVRD	General Manager, Land Use Services
	Keith Lawrence	CVRD	First Nations Relations
	Bernie Juurlink	Shawnigan Creek Basin Society	
	Dave Munday	Shawnigan Creek Basin Society	President

Attendance	Name	Company	Role
Online	Jennifer Gardener	Island Health	Environmental Health Officer for Malahat/Millbay and Shawnigan
	Stacey Sowa	Island Health	Drinking Water Coordinator
	Rory Beise	Island Health	Regional Env. Public Health Consultant
	Craig Nowakowski	Island Health	Supervisor of Env. Public Health Program
	Vanessa Thompson	CVRD	Senior Manager Utilities Division
	Mike Tippet	CVRD	Manager – Community Planning Division

## 1.5 Vision Statement

During the three workshops, participants went through a facilitated discussion focused on future aspirations for the watershed governance. Below is a vision statement of what was shared.

*To build positive working relationships and create a strong network focused on sharing knowledge, resources, and insights regarding water and watershed health. We advocate for a holistic, ecosystem-based, and place-based approach that upholds MÁLEXEŁ's jurisdiction and recognizes the uniqueness of the Malahat-Cowichan region, developing tailored solutions to our communities and environment.*

*By breaking down silos and coordinating effectively, we aim to build an innovative and comprehensive road map for watershed governance that moves away from conventional management practices and dismantles the legal and regulatory barriers hindering progress. This work is grounded in a commitment to integrating MÁLEXEŁ wisdom and knowledge, aiming for proactive policy alignment, innovation, and dedicated collective efforts toward sustainable water management.*

## 1.6 MÁLEXEŁ Core Values

During the first workshop, participants discussed the value of upholding MÁLEXEŁ values as a way to interact, hold space, and discuss topics with each other. The following values are from the 2024 MÁLEXEŁ Strategic Plan, and were referenced in the workshops.

1. **yu ts'its'usum' 'u q'ushintul' tst** - We are growing together
  - a. Operations, business and economic development on-reserve is relevant to the MÁLEXEŁ mustimuhw, and provide access to services.
2. **ts'ewuthaam** - They will help you
  - a. Inclusive community services support the wellbeing of the MÁLEXEŁ mustimuhw.
3. **nutsa'maat shqwaluwun** - Having good feelings, working together as one

- a. MÁLEXEŁ mustimuhw, young and old, take care of one another in a strong community.
- 4. **snuw'uyulh** - The good teachings from the ones that went before us
  - a. MÁLEXEŁ mustimuhw celebrate and carry forward the spirit of MÁLEXEŁ culture with pride.
- 5. **snuw'uyulhstuhw** - Managing to follow the teachings
  - a. MÁLEXEŁ culture and values are well-known, acknowledged and embraced.
- 6. **thuy' shenum** - Getting ready for the future
  - a. MÁLEXEŁ mustimuhw have leadership roles in the community and are supported in accomplishing personal career goals.
- 7. **yaays tthu thulh tst** - We work in the truth
  - a. The MÁLEXEŁ government makes decisions and provides services with openness, accountability, and transparency.

## 1.7 Challenges and Limitations

Throughout the three workshops, the group discussed several thematic challenges that stand in the way of achieving their goals and vision for overarching watershed health. These include:

- **Legislation:** Limitations within current legislation pose challenges to working together effectively.
- **Lack of Capacity:** Limited staff and resources affect the capacity for the MÁLEXEŁ Nation, WLRS, and the CVRD to engage watershed stewardship activities to the degree required. For example, MÁLEXEŁ team members often need to take on multiple roles rather than assume a single position's responsibilities.
- **Missing Players:**
  - **Mosaic Forestry** owns and operates within a significant portion of the two watershed's landscapes. Their forestry practices are often not aligned with the group's ecosystem-based stewardship values. Without their active collaboration in the watershed governance collective, the group's goals in overall watershed health will be difficult if not impossible to achieve. Private forest lands are a significant barrier to watershed governance.
  - **Mill Bay Water District** is an independent business. There has been a change in management recently, and they have not accepted an invite to participate in this group. As major water users, securing their seat at the table is of utmost importance.
- **Water Quantity Metering:** Domestic and agriculture needs are the primary water users in both watersheds. Although water systems are monitored within the watershed, there is no requirement to meter or report on private wells. Knowing how much water is being fully taken out of the watershed will be an important step of overarching watershed stewardship.
- **Enforcement Mechanisms:** The mechanisms in place by local, regional and provincial governments to enforce water quality and quantity lack adequate funding and are weak, with minimal penalties for non-compliance.
- **Water Purveyors:** The CVRD's current bylaws do not allow First Nations to act as water purveyors or utility providers, and the *Water Sustainability Act* does not recognize their authority in this capacity.

- **Senior Staff for Governance Tables:** There are currently not enough senior level government officials to sit at an official 'Watershed Board' for the two watersheds. The group also acknowledges the dedicated work of the Cowichan Watershed Board, and may seek a similar framework of watershed governance down the road.
- **Organizational Funding:** There may be a burden on the tax base to fund this work through a tax-based model.



# Part 2

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The Watershed Governance  
Framework: Key Themes, Goals,  
and Objectives

## 2.0 Part 2: Watershed Governance Framework

A key part of the workshops was to develop a series of high-level themes and goals based on each organization's feedback. Below are the key themes, goals, and objectives towards MÁLEXEŁ-led watershed governance and watershed health.

### 2.1 Key Themes: Governance Framework

The following themes arose in how the group envisions developing a watershed governance framework.

#### 2.1.1 Theme 1: Developing the Collective Relationship

**The group will establish and build positive working relationship by:**

- Building open and trusting relationships among stakeholders and partners;
- Upholding the values of respect, transparency, empathy, understanding, active listening and kindness;
- Grounding the work in cultural respect for MÁLEXEŁ Nation and Indigenous Knowledges;
- Affirming a shared vision for the future of the watershed;
- Utilizing a consensus-based decision-making model;
- Deepening and solidifying partner relationships by initiating a stream restoration project; and,
- Building relationships of trust with the stakeholders by initial joint projects, such as a stream restoration project.

#### 2.1.2 Theme 2: Using an Incremental Approach

**Participants foresee developing the framework by using an incremental approach:**

- An incremental approach will help the collective to be inclusive and reflective of member organization's needs;
- Utilizing an incremental approach will help to strengthen relationships, build processes, and further the collaborative efforts required to implement co-governance;
- An incremental approach allows the group time to understanding the roles and jurisdictions of each organization involved; this will help to identify gaps and collaboratively address the group's needs and challenges; and
- There is interest in focusing on what can be done in the near-term that does not require a significant financial commitment, as establishing funding and capacity will take time.

### 2.1.3 Theme 3: Honouring MÁLEXEŁ Knowledge

#### MÁLEXEŁ Knowledge to be honoured by:

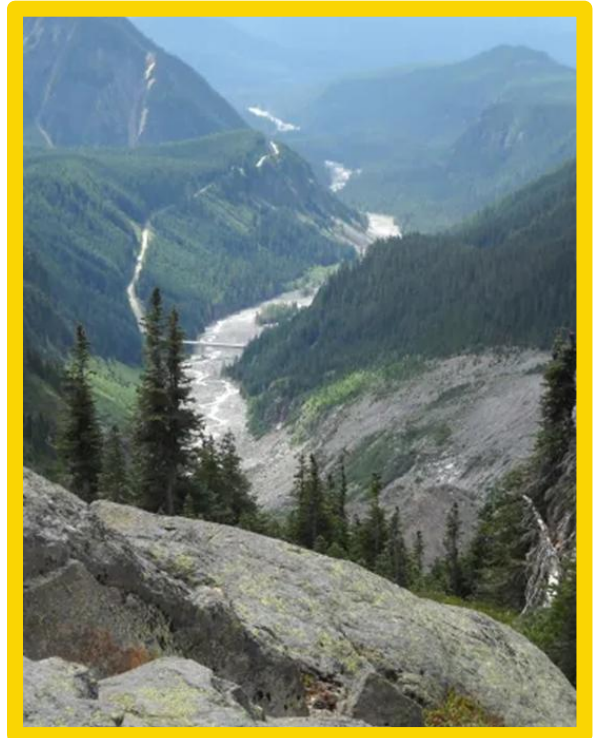
- Upholding MÁLEXEŁ Knowledge and local knowledge to inform decision-making;
- The values and principles of MÁLEXEŁ Snuwuyulh are to be upheld and integrated;
- Integrating Indigenous Knowledge with Western science to enhance the effectiveness of watershed management practices; and,
- Recognition of MÁLEXEŁ Inherent Rights and Title.

## 2.2 Key Themes: Watershed Health

Themes connected to establishing healthy watersheds were primarily connected to concerns about ecosystem health and establishing baseline data to understand the ‘state of the watershed’.

### 2.2.1 Theme 4: Research and Knowledge Collection

- Establishing the key issues and concerns within the watersheds.
- Identifying culturally significant and sensitive areas and ecosystems.
- Harmonizing MÁLEXEŁ knowledge, local knowledge and science to inform watershed health indicators, data collection, and policy development.
- Building capacity for MÁLEXEŁ and partners to co-lead the identification and collection of data (water quality and quantity monitoring and research).
- Understanding what is required to return the degraded watersheds to a healthy status. The group acknowledged that this will take significant time, collaboration, and shared learning.
- Determining MÁLEXEŁ-led indicators of watershed health.



## 2.3 Key Themes: MÁLEXEŁ Rights and MÁLEXEŁ Knowledges

The following themes emerged in recognizing the MÁLEXEŁ Nation as a key partner and leader in watershed governance.

### 2.3.1 Theme 5: MÁLEXEŁ Nation Rights and Title

- It is crucial to recognize and uphold MÁLEXEŁ Nations' Rights within the watersheds.

### 2.3.2 Theme 6: MÁLEXEŁ Teachings, Values, and Knowledge

- MÁLEXEŁ's laws and Traditional Knowledge are to be respected and upheld throughout all levels of the planning process and Watershed Governance Framework.
- Stories, stewardship, and history of MÁLEXEŁ to be interwoven into future work.
- It is of significant importance to support MÁLEXEŁ led indicators of watershed health.
- A focus to support the capacity of MÁLEXEŁ to co-lead the identification and collection of data on water quality monitoring and research.

### 2.3.3 Theme 7: MÁLEXEŁ Community Involvement

- The MÁLEXEŁ Nation will be involved in determining watershed projects within and about the watersheds. MÁLEXEŁ Community Members are to have a significant voice in driving project initiatives. This will include enhancing engagement with Community Members, enabling more direct interaction and collaboration, and fostering an environment that prioritizes MÁLEXEŁ voices.

## 2.4 Framework Goals and Objectives

The following Goals and Objectives were shared by participants during the three workshops. A next step to be undertaken by this group will be to strategize which goals will be prioritized first and to develop action planning around each goal.

### 2.4.1 Goal: Enhanced Collaboration to Meet our Shared Priorities

We will align priorities and enhance collaboration between organizations with a vested interest in the health of the MÁLEXEŁ Benchlands and Shawnigan Creek Watersheds by:

#### Objectives

- Grounding our work in a collective sharing of knowledge where we will share information, resources, objectives, assets, and insights between organizations.
- Fostering Government (MÁLEXEŁ Nation) to Government (all levels of Crown government) relationships.

- Developing a relationship building framework. This will help to build the group but also identify other people that could be part of the watershed governance collective, resulting in increased resourcing and coordination.
- Focusing on a unified effort of member organizations and governments to ensure water resources are utilized effectively.
- Supporting one another in fulfilling each organization’s respective mandates that connects to land and water.
- Determining clarity and focusing on cohesion of the linkages between participant organizations’ various projects.
- Bringing Mill Bay Waterworks District and Mosaic Forestry to the table to build the relationship and support alignment with the group’s goals and objectives.

#### **Actions**

- Create a group email thread for continued collaboration
- Secure funding to continue this project:
  - WLRS / Cali can request Indigenous funding within WLRS;
  - CVRD – can access funding through watershed and drinking water protection. They can apply as a local government and apply for a grant with a partner;
  - Shawnigan Basin Society has experience in fundraising and can support; and,
  - MÁLEXEŁ can support writing proposals.

#### **2.4.2 Goal: Develop a Comprehensive and Effective Data Sharing Model**

Understanding the health of the watershed arose as a top priority. In order to gain a clear and cohesive picture, the group has a goal to create a system to share information / data between each other effectively.

#### **Objectives**

- Support and pull together the following organizations’ ongoing water sampling data, potentially through data sharing agreements:
  - CVRD in their ongoing surface water quality sampling as well as current efforts to develop a groundwater sampling collection process;
  - WLRS collects groundwater data that is public. The monitoring data from licensees can’t be shared directly, although WLRS can ask them to share it;
  - MÁLEXEŁ collects subsurface water data; and,
  - The Shawnigan Creek Basin Society have current watershed health data and historical information.
- Consider the Shawnigan Creek Basin Society to lead this work, as they have a strong background in sharing watershed related data. They have also put together data for Cowichan Watershed Board.

## 2.4.3

**Goal: Uphold MÁLEXEŁ Indigenous and Aboriginal Rights within the Governance Framework**

It was expressed by the group that upholding MÁLEXEŁ Nation’s Rights within this process is of paramount importance. This will be achieved by:

**Objectives:**

- Integrating MÁLEXEŁ Natural Law, knowledge and teachings into the watershed governance framework.
- Focusing on MÁLEXEŁ Member engagement so that MÁLEXEŁ Community Members are included in watershed planning and decision-making (the community is driving watershed planning initiatives).
- Braiding MÁLEXEŁ Natural Laws and Knowledge with Western science to enhance understanding and effectiveness in watershed management practices.
- Expanding the public’s understanding of MÁLEXEŁ Indigenous Knowledge, stewardship practices, and inherent Rights of the lands and waters.
- Recording and learning about MÁLEXEŁ’s Ancestors – “The Ones who walked the creeks”. This role of watershed stewardship could be brought back with the MÁLEXEŁ Guardians Program.

## 2.4.4

**Goal: Enhance Local Decision-Making within the Watersheds**

We will centre the voices and needs of those that live in the watershed via a collective governance arrangement by:

**Objectives**

- Engaging creatively and often with those that live in both watersheds.
- Supporting a decision-making process that is informed by MÁLEXEŁ Indigenous Knowledge and local knowledge.
- Fostering an environment that prioritizes local voices.
- Establishing a localized network dedicated to sharing knowledge and information related to water supply, water demand, watershed health.
- Developing mechanisms amongst Indigenous, local, regional, provincial, and federal partners to protect and monitor water sources.
- Aspiring to reach a level of effectiveness and positive change in the MÁLEXEŁ watershed as modeled at the Cowichan Watershed Board.

### 2.4.5 Goal: Achieve Cultural-Ecological Health of the Malahat Benchlands and Shawnigan Creek Watersheds

We will prioritize ecologically sustainable water management within the Malahat Benchlands and Shawnigan Creek Watershed boundaries by:

#### Objectives

- Protecting, enhancing, and maintaining water quality and quantity in both watersheds
- Developing a public education campaign to raise awareness about watershed issues and promote sustainable practices.
- Collectively determining water quantity budgets for domestic and agricultural needs of the watersheds. Begin with one specific area and measure the allocation to account for holistic watershed health. Work together to understand points of recharge.
- Developing enforcement and compliance mechanisms, potentially MÁLEXEŁ Guardian-led.
- Developing information sharing mechanisms that will provide avenues to uncover practical and effective compliance strategies.



### 2.4.6 Goal: Develop Watershed Health Indicators that Braid MÁLEXEŁ Knowledge with Science

Setting indicators for watershed health depends on both MÁLEXEŁ knowledge and western science. We will create indicators by:

#### Objectives

- Support the development of MÁLEXEŁ Indicators with Knowledge Holders, Elders, and Community Members.
- Seek out examples and partnerships with other Nations that are similarly developing Indigenous-led indicators of watershed health.
- Facilitate a workshop for the group to learn and implement this work.
- Focus on harmonization, as each organization will have indicators for watershed health
- Work with the Drinking Water and Watershed Protection Strategy Technical Advisory Team (DWWPS) in their long-term development of watershed plans.

## 2.4.7

**Goal: Protect 30% of Ecosystems Within the Watersheds by 2030 and 50% by 2050 with a Focus on the Habitat of Cultural Keystone Species**

This goal mirrors MÁLEXEŁ Nation, provincial, and federal targets.

**Objectives**

- Researching connectivity corridors between protected areas.
- Recording stories from hunters and Elders on how species historically migrated through the watersheds.
- Collaborating on the CVRD's new Conservation Strategy.
- Creating a group project that focuses on the return of cutthroat trout to MÁLEXEŁ Creek by 2030.
- Supporting summer interns at MÁLEXEŁ and CVRD working together in public education campaigns on this initiative.



# Action Plan

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Watershed Governance Action Plan

## 3.0 Part 3: Watershed Governance Action Plan

Below are the keys steps to building an effective Watershed Governance Framework for MÁLEXEŁ and participant organizations. Note that the MÁLEXEŁ Creek restoration project is a part of the Action Plan.

### 3.1 Step 1: Continue Building Readiness for Effective Co-Management

- A common theme throughout all three workshops was a commitment to improving watershed health in both watersheds.
- As a next step in the action plan, the collective, currently led by MÁLEXEŁ, will continue to organize meetings so that the group can keep the momentum going in building support, cultivating relationships, and securing mandates within member organizations.
- External communication: Information that can be shared with the public should be prioritized – getting the word out to others in connected fields about this group’s vision and work is important.
- Research legislative change: What could legislative and regulatory shared governance look like in a localized shared watershed governance arrangement?

### 3.2 Step 2: Shared Visioning Session

This work began during the workshops, although it is recommended that a half day visioning and priority session be planned that includes Mosaic, the Mill Bay Water District, and the MÁLEXEŁ Lands and Environment Director. By having all the right people at the table, setting a whole-of-watershed vision will help to create the desired social and ecological conditions and provides a shared sense of direction.

### 3.3 Step 3: Continue Building Member Organization’s Participation in the Watershed Governance Collective

Continue bringing existing authorities and resources to the table to begin moving towards implementation of the watershed vision, priorities, goals and objectives. Continue to build on our understanding of partner organization’s perspectives, values, and function.

### 3.4 Step 4: Strengthen Model of Partnership

- Clarify roles and responsibilities.
- Identify and implement structural and operational improvements.
- Determine the multi-party governance model led by MÁLEXEŁ
- When developing policies and procedures about the use of Indigenous Knowledge, include a co-development framework for environmental flow regulations that includes social and cultural values.

## 3.5

## Step 5: Formalize the Group as an Advisory Role in Watershed Decision-Making and Policy Development

Eventually, the group hopes to increase our capacity in decision-making of water allocation and policy decisions within both watersheds. This agreement would be codified into a formal Memorandum of Understanding - so it outlasts political changes.

## 3.6

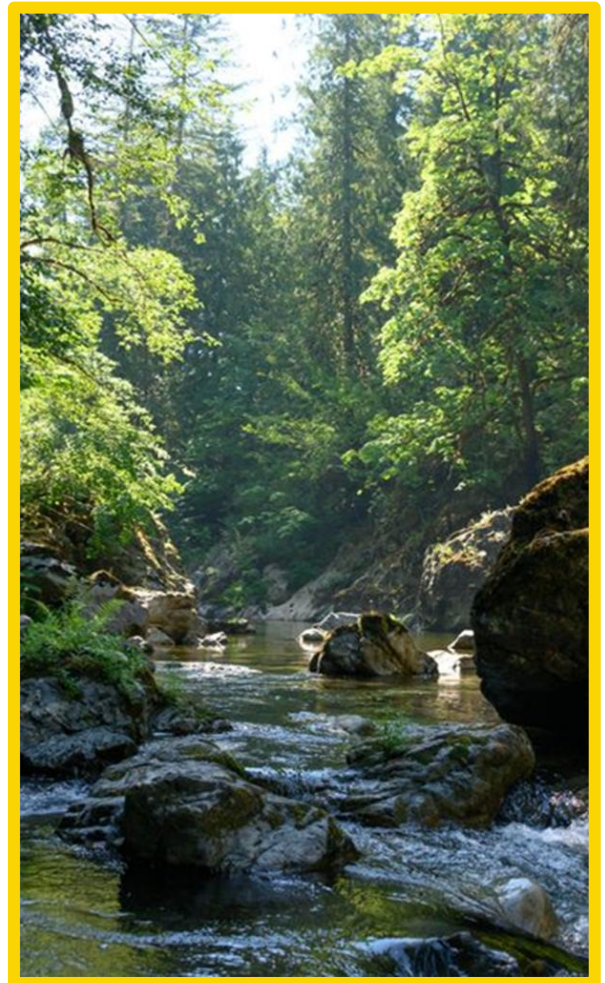
## MÁLEXEŁ Creek Restoration Project

### *Planning in Action*

During Workshop 2, conversations were held about starting a collaborative restoration project on MÁLEXEŁ Creek. This initiative would help to solidify and build partnerships amongst the participants and their respective organizations. By getting “boots on the ground”, the organizations will have the opportunity to foster positive relationships as a basis for longer-term collaboration. Additionally, a collaborative restoration project will help provide a central space to collect data, creating a shared reality of the ecological state of a portion of the watershed while building a strong foundation of how the group will braid MÁLEXEŁ Knowledge and western science.

In watershed governance best practices, collaborating on a shared project is a recommended early step in formalizing the collective. Restoring MÁLEXEŁ Creek would support and target:

- Partner roles and responsibilities;
- Identification of MÁLEXEŁ-led indicators for watershed health; and,
- The development of strategies and methods to engage MÁLEXEŁ Members and the local population in restoration work.



MÁLEXEŁ is currently in the early stages of developing the restoration plan, and welcome the collaboration and support of the group. Much of the MÁLEXEŁ Creek restoration planning still needs to be planned and confirmed. During the workshops, participants discussed the following preliminary ways their organizations can support early restoration project development:

### MÁLEXEŁ Creek Restoration Planning - Project Roles and Responsibilities

Organization	Key Actions
All Project Partners	Communications: Develop a plan to share the project with MÁLEXEŁ Members, public officials, and general the public
MÁLEXEŁ Nation	Connect and hire a Restoration Planning Company
MÁLEXEŁ Nation - Guardians	Execute monthly water sampling of the creek for the duration of the study
MÁLEXEŁ Nation	Work with Elders to gather historical information to assist in defining the creek's reaches and functionality
B.C. Water Lands and Resource Stewardship	Provide a hydrologist to review plans and offer technical advice
	Assist in bringing on a biologist for water quality tasks
	Facilitate the permitting process for in-stream works
Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD)	Conduct baseline data scoping
	Provide water sampling training for MÁLEXEŁ Guardians
	Investigate potential funding sources for lab analysis work
	Provide water sampling training for MÁLEXEŁ Guardians
	Investigate potential funding sources for lab analysis work
Shawnigan Creek Basin Society	Track and monitor creek reaches to determine when they go dry (utilizing the Goldstream model)



# Closing

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## 4.0

## Closing

For the MÁLEXEŁ Nation, watershed planning is both a priority of environmental stewardship and an exercise and assertion of Rights. The watersheds face cumulative impacts from residential development, population growth, localized industrial activity, and pollution. MÁLEXEŁ’s concerns include the risk of contaminated soil, industrial runoff leaching into waterways system, climate change, aquifer recharge rates, and more. Throughout the three workshops, it was expressed that returning to MÁLEXEŁ traditional ways of stewarding water is a priority, as is the involvement of Community Members and Guardians in the development of watershed planning and watershed governance.

Immediate next steps in reaching our collective goals will involve locating funding and working together on the MÁLEXEŁ Creek restoration project. By collaborating on the development and implementation of the MÁLEXEŁ Creek restoration project, the group will build upon the foundation established during the workshops. Simultaneously, the group can continue working towards the shared goals, objectives, and actions held within this document. Connecting again to prioritize the goals and create a robust implementation plan will support us in reaching our vision for the future.

Those present at the workshops are dedicated to working collaboratively to improve the health of the MÁLEXEŁ Benchlands and Shawnigan Creek Watersheds. Through a spirit of collective care for the lands, waters, MÁLEXEŁ Rights and Knowledges, and each other, we are highly capable of solving the challenges identified to reach our vision. “Watershed health from the estuary to the headwaters” is a tagline and an expression of the group’s vision for the two watersheds.



Figure 4: Watershed Governance Framework Workshop #3 Participants (excluding virtual) (January, 2026)