

BACKGROUND

The **Carbon Neutral Kootenays** project is a collaborative effort between regional districts, municipalities and First Nations in the Kootenays to begin reducing energy consumption and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from municipal, regional, and First Nations operations. Over 170 local governments in British Columbia have signed on to the Province of BC's **Climate Action Charter**, a voluntary commitment to reduce GHG emissions and become carbon neutral in their operations by 2012. Carbon neutrality is achieved by reducing emissions where possible, purchasing carbon offsets to compensate for GHG emissions, or by developing projects to offset emissions. As part of this commitment, local governments will be required to report annually on steps they are taking to become carbon neutral.

In order to meet these Charter commitments, 3 regional districts, 29 municipalities, and 6 First Nations are working collaboratively on the Carbon Neutral Kootenays project to:

- Compile an **energy and GHG inventory** baseline for the operation of each participating local government and First Nations (this includes the energy consumed and the related emissions from buildings, recreation centres, utility services, and fleet vehicles);
- Develop **Carbon Neutral Action Plans**, in consultation with staff, for the operations of each of the three regional districts;
- Identify **potential actions** to reduce energy consumption and GHG emissions for the member municipalities and First Nations to implement;
- Define **options for funding and implementing** energy conservation and climate change actions in the region;
- Evaluate the opportunities for a locally-based **Kootenays carbon offset** system, and;
- **Build capacity** for climate action throughout the Kootenay region.

The Carbon Neutral Kootenays initiative began in 2008 after local governments signed the Climate Action Charter. At that time, the three Chairs of the Regional Districts in the Kootenays decided to join forces and work collaboratively as one project. The Steering Committee formed early in 2009, at the same time as the project consultants began work. Since the spring of 2009, community members, staff, councillors and board members have been attending learning sessions to build capacity in the region for climate action. Simultaneously, the consultants have worked closely with each participating community (municipalities, regional districts, and First Nations) to compile their baseline inventories, which will be finalized in the fall of 2009, and develop corporate climate action plans for the three Regional Districts.

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RELEVANCY TO CURRENT ISSUES

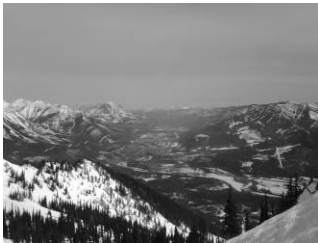
CLIMATE CHANGE: A GLOBAL ISSUE REQUIRING LOCAL ACTION

There is increasing scientific consensus that the rising concentrations of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere are the result of human activities – primarily from the combustion of fossil fuels – and are contributing to global climate change through the ‘greenhouse effect’. These impacts are manifesting themselves in a range of ways including the increased severity and occurrence of precipitation events, sea level rise, changes in wind patterns, and increased drought, flooding and heat waves.



The human-induced component of this global phenomenon is caused by the cumulative effect of the consumption of fossil fuels by the world’s population. In response to this challenge, the reduction of GHG emissions will require a concerted global effort to conserve energy and reduce GHG emissions. No one individual or organization can make a difference to global GHG emissions; individuals and organizations must all act in concert, and all individuals and organizations must contribute to mitigate this challenge.

At a province-wide scale, BC is committed to reducing GHG emissions by 33 per cent below 2007 levels by 2020 and by 80% by 2050 through the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets Act. At the same time, all provincial sector organizations (including provincial ministries, schools, hospitals, etc.) have been legislated to become carbon neutral by 2010.



In 2007 the Province of BC, UBCM and local governments of British Columbia agreed that climate change is real and that taking action on reducing GHGs is essential. This spawned the Climate Action Charter, which, as of March 2009, had 174 local government signatories. Furthermore, the Local Government Act was amended (Bill 27, Green Communities Amendment) to address emission reductions at the community-wide scale. These initiatives support the development of more sustainable communities, where the

management of land and services within the community are made with energy conservation and the reduction of GHGs top-of-mind.

With authority over land use and zoning, public transportation, infrastructure, building regulation and solid and liquid waste management, local governments make long-lasting decisions that impact the environment, energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, local governments play an important role in managing urban growth and helping reduce GHG emissions. Through the Carbon Neutral Kootenays project, local governments and First Nations in the Kootenays have taken a leadership role to address this challenge of dealing with global climate change at a local scale.



LEADERSHIP

PARTNERSHIPS FOR TAKING ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE AT A REGIONAL SCALE

The Carbon Neutral Kootenays project represents unprecedented collaboration by local governments to address climate change. As the first project of its kind in Canada, Carbon Neutral Kootenays assists local governments in meeting their Climate Action Charter commitments and sets the stage for broader action at a regional scale. The three regional districts in the Kootenays have shown leadership in addressing climate change with a unique and innovative approach, which includes:

- Establishing strong **partnerships** to ensure sufficient funding for all communities to participate; and
- Full **participation** of communities, including 6 First Nations, in the Kootenay region.

Partnerships

The Regional Boards of Central Kootenay, East Kootenay and Kootenay Boundary, together with the Columbia Basin Trust make up the four funding partners for the project. These project partners recognized the need to assist local governments in order to provide efficiency and service to small communities, and to help develop local capacity in addressing climate change. By working together, local governments and First Nations are achieving much more than they would on their own.



The project is governed by a project steering committee that was formed at the outset of the project. The steering committee includes representatives from each of the four funding partners and works together to ensure all communities have access and involvement in the project.

Participation

All 29 municipalities and 3 regional districts in the region, as well as 6 First Nations, are participating in this unique project. In order to prepare inventories, local government staff are participating by providing access to all necessary data. At the end of this project, every community will have an energy and GHG emissions baseline inventory from which they can begin to take action to reduce consumption and emissions. With baselines set for the whole region, doors are opened to a new level of potential for collaborations for implementation and future action.

INNOVATIVE APPROACH

OUTREACH AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOR LONG TERM ACHIEVEMENT

A cornerstone of this project is community education and capacity building in local government staff, the local consulting community, and amongst local NGOs. The project includes numerous activities that are intended to provide the knowledge and skills for local government staff to take ownership of their carbon reduction plans and initiatives for the long term.

Over 120 local staff and elected officials have attended a series of workshops provided throughout the region as part of the Carbon Neutral Kootenays project, including:

Climate Change 101 Learning Sessions

Local government and First Nation councillors, board members and senior staff learned about the science of climate change and the need to take action at a local scale. Participants also engaged in discussion and peer learning on topics that include: finance, technology, governance and management, operations and community action.

Energy and GHG Emissions Inventory Learning Sessions

Local government and First Nations operational staff learned how to compile their own corporate energy and GHG emissions inventories. Although the baseline inventory for each community is being prepared by consultants as part of this project, the intention is to transfer ownership of this to staff and enable them to continue updating their own inventories for the years to come. Participants learned how to calculate GHG emissions from utility bills, fleet vehicle fuel consumption, and solid waste; how to track these emissions. They were also taught how to interpret the inventories to understand where the largest energy consumption and GHG emissions are occurring in their respective community operations.

These learning sessions were also offered to local individuals, organizations and consultants to build capacity in the region for assisting local governments with their climate initiatives in the future.

More remote communities that were unable to attend the workshops in person may partake in webinars that cover the same material. This ensures all communities have access to the same information and learning opportunities.

The scale of this project results in cost efficiencies for local governments who, rather than paying for advisory services to develop inventories and action plans, can attend training sessions and tap into experts from the project team. Both capacity development and the imperative of building momentum for action are embedded in the approach to all of these outreach and education activities. This ensures communities are left with the ability to use the baselines, templates, and tools provided in this project and move to the next step: taking action to reduce energy consumption and GHG emissions.



BUILDING MOMENTUM

PROJECT BENEFITS FOR PARTICIPATING COMMUNITIES AND BEYOND

By taking a leadership role in Canada to addressing climate change at a regional scale, the Carbon Neutral Kootenays project can become a model for regional collaboration and innovative approaches to outreach and capacity building. Participating communities, in particular the smaller and more rural communities, are realizing significant benefits from this regional approach by having access to learning opportunities, a baseline inventory, and access to technical experts that they would not have by working in solitude. In addition to the benefits for the participating communities, other regions in BC and Canada can benefit from the lessons learned in this project.

For local governments in the Kootenays, the benefits and learning associated with this project include:

- An inventory of energy use and emissions for the municipal, regional district, or First Nations operations covered in the Climate Action Charter. The inventory counts emissions from vehicle fuels, natural gas, electricity use, fuel oil or propane associated with services such as:
 - Buildings, fire halls, works yards and other operations facilities;
 - Community centers, arenas, pools and cultural facilities, and;
 - Water, sewer and solid waste, public lighting street, traffic signals, etc.
- An Action Template that lists common actions that local governments can take to reduce the emissions from their operations. The template will define the key areas of GHG emissions and provide a scoping of the potential opportunities that the community may take.
- Opportunities to attend a Climate Change 101 learning session in their region.
- Opportunities to attend an Energy and GHG Emissions Inventory learning session.
- Suggestions on how local governments can track energy and emissions data to enable smoother reporting and assist the communities in applying for their Climate Action Revenue Incentive (the Carbon Tax Rebate).

Capacity development is an important element of the Carbon Neutral Kootenays project. By offering climate-related learning opportunities and training sessions, the project is succeeding at building local knowledge and capacity to address climate change. However, these lessons are not limited to the region. The approach taken by this project can be duplicated throughout BC and across Canada. As a model, there are many lessons to be learned from the Carbon Neutral Kootenays project, including:

- The cost efficiencies created and value added by working at a regional scale;
- The benefit of bringing all local governments and First Nations together – creating a baseline level of knowledge and capacity from which to build;
- A common understanding of issues affecting local governments and First Nations in a particular region – and a shared approach to dealing with these issues; and
- Templates for emissions inventories and action plans, which provide a common methodology for measurement and reporting.