

Building Bridges for Environmental Protection Solutions Project Report

Aleesha Switzer, RPBio

January 2021



Fraser Valley Conservancy
Placing lands in trust for our future

Acknowledgements

This project was undertaken with funding provided by the Vancouver Foundation's Systems Change grant. This project would not have been possible without the participation of government staff in planning and attending our workshop. Thank you to Environment Canada, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the BC Ministry of Agriculture, the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, and the City of Abbotsford. Special thanks to Peter Abrams of Dovetail Consulting for being our dream facilitator and number one cheerleader. As always, thank you to the Bradner-Mt. Lehman neighbourhood for sharing your thoughts that have allowed us to develop this project.



Contents

- Acknowledgements i
- Introduction 2
- Background 2
- Goals and Objectives 4
 - Goals 4
 - Objectives 4
- Methods 5
- Results 6
 - Intergovernmental Workshop 6
 - Post-Workshop Survey 8
- Systems Change Assessment 8
 - FVC Actions 11
- Conclusion 11
- Appendix A 12
- Appendix B 14
- Appendix C 15

Introduction

The underlying theme of all work done for this project is “environmental protection”. The Fraser Valley Conservancy (FVC) is a land-trust dedicated to the conservation of the local environment for future generations. With decades of combined experience in ecology and environmental education, the FVC is always looking to improve its work by keeping up to date with the latest information and techniques. Systems change approaches to conservation are becoming more widespread and this project offers a unique opportunity for the FVC to develop this new approach to our work.

The *Building Bridges* project is built upon the FVC’s previous Vancouver Foundation Systems Change grant: *Investigating Systems of Environmental Protection* (2019). The *Investigating Systems* project used surveys and interviews to determine which aspects of environmental protection were important to residents of the Bradner – Mt. Lehman Neighbourhood (BMLN) and how systemic issues were preventing more progress on environmental issues. A key result of our report was the identification of a potential role for the FVC in influencing systemic change; by becoming a bridge between different government agencies, we could facilitate collaborative discussion and problem solving for key environmental issues in the BMLN. The *Building Bridges* project was designed to hold an intergovernmental workshop on BMLN tree and stream protection.

This document summarizes the results of our intergovernmental workshop held on October 29, 2020. It also addresses the potential for the FVC to use this approach to influence systems change and suggests future actions for the FVC and our government partners.

Background

The BMLN is an area comprised of two smaller, distinct communities, Bradner and Mt. Lehman, in northwestern Abbotsford. Long-time residents describe these two historic communities as being “like brothers”, willing to help each other out like family while facing separate challenges. It makes sense, then, that the City of Abbotsford (CoA) groups them together as one neighbourhood area (Figure 1). This 63 km² (6,297 ha) neighbourhood is geographically large but has a small population of roughly 4000 people¹. The BMLN is completely within the provincial Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), with the land used predominantly as either hay and fodder (34%), berries (30%), or corn (18%)¹.

¹ City of Abbotsford. 2014. Bradner – Mt. Lehman Demographic Profile. <https://www.abbotsford.ca/Assets/2014+Abbotsford/Planning+and+Development/Planning/Statistics/2014+Bradner+Mt.Lehman+Demographic+Profile.pdf>

The Bradner – Mt. Lehman Neighbourhood is a unique agricultural area in the Fraser Valley for various reasons:

- Numerous creeks and streams in this area have intact riparian buffers
- High density canopy cover, including forests, on the farmland
- Several hobby farms
- Active community groups and politically active residents
- Many long-term residents with historical ties to the area

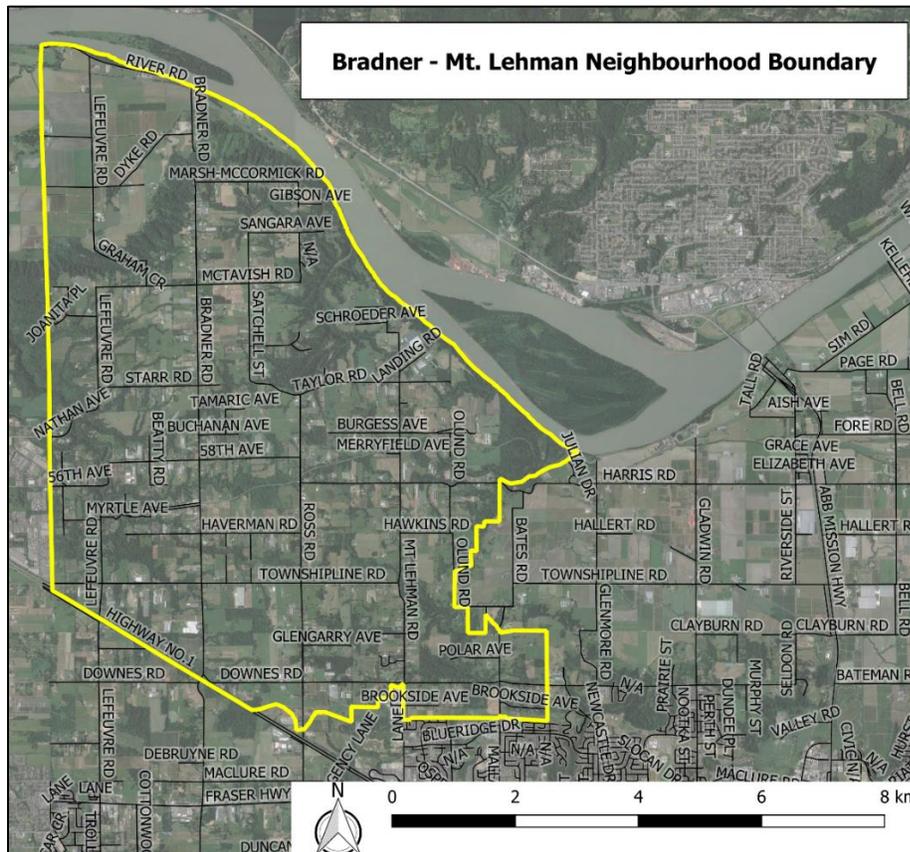


Figure 1: The boundary for the Bradner – Mt. Lehman Neighbourhood in West Abbotsford. The Fraser River marks the northern extent, with the Trans-Canada Highway 1 to the south. The Township of Langley borders this neighbourhood to the west.

The *Investigating Systems of Environmental Protection*² report demonstrated many residents of the BMLN were concerned about the loss of agricultural land to industrial development. Of the residents who participated in the environmental protection survey (71 responses, ~5% household response rate), many expressed concerns about the loss of trees in their neighbourhood, including along sensitive streambanks. Conversations with BMLN residents revealed confusion about tree and stream protection legislation for their agricultural lands, citing mixed messages from municipal, provincial, and federal agencies.

² <https://fraservalleyconservancy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/BMLN-Project-Report.pdf>

Goals and Objectives

Goals

The goal of the Fraser Valley Conservancy's Bradner – Mt. Lehman Neighbourhood project is to help residents manage and protect the environment in their neighbourhood. This requires an understanding of residents' concerns, goals, and challenges related to undertaking environmentally friendly stewardship practices on their land. The first phase of the BMLN project revealed a need for increased clarity about legislation related to environmental protection on agricultural land. The FVC recognized a significant contributor to this lack of clarity was an unfortunate gap in overlapping jurisdictions for trees and riparian areas on agricultural land. To achieve our goal of helping BMLN residents manage and protect the environment, we must also aim to address legislative issues which are hindering effective protection. The FVC's goal is to facilitate and inspire collaborative efforts from government agencies at all levels to influence systemic changes to how the environment is managed on agricultural lands.

Objectives

The objectives of the *Building Bridges* project include:

- Determine appropriate agencies to participate in a workshop and find participants.
- Host an intergovernmental workshop on tree and stream protection in the BMLN.
- Create and distribute a post-workshop survey and project report.
- Plan for the future of the FVC's involvement in systemic change.

The fundamental nature of this project involves bringing the concerns of the BMLN residents to different government agencies to facilitate discussion and inspire collaborative action. While the FVC is a registered charity dedicated to environmental conservation, we aim to adhere to underlying goal of this project: to assist the BMLN with stewarding their land according to their needs and desires. The issues brought forward to the government participants are those of the residents.

The FVC also respects the government staff who work to serve the public interest. We do not intend to blame any one person or agency for any environmental issue, as we are aware of the many barriers to creating change (for better or for worse) in government systems. In order to facilitate meaningful discussion amongst government staff, we intend to create a "government only" space in our workshop. This will ensure our participants do not feel pressure to answer to the public and they can focus on collaborative problem solving.

Methods

This project originally included an in-person workshop scheduled to take place in the early summer of 2020. The global COVID-19 pandemic put the project on hold while adaptations for virtual participation were created. A virtual workshop was planned via Zoom for the fall of 2020. Workshop planning assistance was graciously provided by Peter Abrams of Dovetail Consulting.

Potential participants were emailed an invitation (Appendix A) to the workshop and asked to fill out a survey on their likelihood of participation, preferred dates and meeting platforms, as well as other potential workshop participants.

Once a date was selected, potential participants were provided with an agenda (Appendix B) and the following goal and objectives for the workshop:

Goal: To collaboratively develop ways to strengthen government support to improve tree and stream protection in the Bradner-Mt. Lehman Neighbourhood (BMLN).

Objectives:

1. Strengthen our understanding of the legal, policy and program context for tree and stream protection in the BMLN, and related key community concerns;
2. Identify key issues internal to government that are contributing to tree and stream protection concerns in the BMLN, and obstacles to addressing these issues;
3. Identify opportunities and actions for addressing key internal government issues and obstacles;
4. Discuss next steps to maintain our momentum and strengthen interagency networks.

Two key environmental issues were selected as the focal points for this workshop: (1) The loss of tree canopy in the neighbourhood; (2) The impacts of riparian area degradation on salmon bearing streams. A brief summary of the FVC's BMLN project and the community concerns brought forward was designed to be delivered at the beginning of the workshop. The workshop was designed to split the attendees into two groups to first discuss one of two topics, and then return to plenary for a recap of their discussions. The FVC challenged workshop participants to consider issues internal to government that are contributing to the two key environmental issues brought forward by the residents of the BMLN.

In addition to the FVC's BMLN presentation, a guest speaker was invited to provide context for other examples of intergovernmental collaboration resulting in positive action for big issues. Emily MacNair of the BC Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative created a presentation highlighting climate action projects which require multiple partners to work together, as an external indication of the importance of this workshop and inspiration to address internal issues.

An online workspace was created using the MURAL platform to coordinate these discussions (Appendix C). MURAL utilizes virtual sticky notes to allow for the quick collection of ideas and summarization of discussions. The workspace was split into two groups with four main sections that participants would work through over the course of the workshop. Participants were required to participate in the Zoom call to communicate with each other while using the MURAL space to visualize the progression of the discussion in an attempt to replicate traditional in-person workshop methodologies.

An online survey was created to follow up with workshop participants. This survey aimed to determine the success of the workshop in achieving its goal and to plan for future actions for the FVC. Follow up research was conducted by the FVC to create an implementation plan for future work.

Results

Intergovernmental Workshop

A total of 37 individuals were sent invitations to participate in the workshop. Of these, 14 participated in the pre-workshop survey. These respondents rated their interest in the workshop at an average of four on a scale of 1-5. Responses included staff from the Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD) and the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC). Unfortunately, these two agencies did not attend the workshop.

The “Intergovernmental Workshop on Tree and Stream protection in the Bradner – Mt. Lehman Neighbourhood” was delivered via Zoom on October 29, 2020. A total of ten government representatives from five agencies participated in the workshop, as well as two non-government guest speakers (Table 1).

Table 1: Workshop attendees and their affiliations.

Name(s)	Agency
Celina Willis, Chloe Boynton	Environment Canada
Jeanne Hughes	BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations
Kim Sutherland, Andrea Shaw, Kevin Eastwood	BC Ministry of Agriculture
Perry Powers, Lynda Ritchie, Teri Ridley	Department of Fisheries and Oceans
Tanya Bettles	City of Abbotsford
Emily MacNair (guest speaker)	BC Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative
Joanne Neilson (guest speaker)	Fraser Valley Conservancy

While this was a six-hour workshop, many interesting points were raised but there was not enough time to discuss them in-depth. The workshop served as an invitation to critically examine the issues as a group. Some of the key issues identified include:

- It is difficult to create tree protection laws on farmland as they may interfere with farming practices. There is a need to focus on where it makes sense to protect trees and where it does not. Farmers need to be able to farm.
- Public confusion around legislation is valid as confusion exists internally, as well. Conflicts arise on how to legally define streams and ditches, and when and where different pieces of legislation apply. It is difficult for staff to answer public questions clearly, and some landowners are punished by one agency after receiving instructions or advice from another.
- In an area like the ALR where tree protection is not currently mandated incentives are needed to protect natural areas. There is a lack of incentivization.
- The public supports the ALR not only for agriculture but also due to its greenspace protection role. A tree bylaw could be accepted.
- Staffing resources and funding limitations can be very challenging. The issues of tree loss and stream degradation are known to government, but when agencies try to solve them independently, there simply aren't enough resources to do it. There is a need for coordinated effort and coordinated funding. Enforcement capacity is lacking in many agencies.
- Government staff do not have nearly enough interagency communication. It often feels as though they work in silos with separate, and sometimes competing, mandates.
- Political will is very important. Without buy-in from local politicians and various government agencies, tree protection laws will not move forward.
- Baseline reports and assessments of the environmental impacts from tree-loss on agricultural land in this area may help to drive political uptake of the issue.
- An intergovernmental working group is needed to move these ideas forward. Staff level working groups set from the top down have seen success tackling big issues.

Government staff participants closed the workshop by sharing their main takeaway from these conversations. A large majority indicated just how important intergovernmental collaboration was and how this workshop highlighted the need for more collaborative work on the issues of tree and stream protection in the BMLN. The response was extremely positive, with many expressing their desire to see a working group created to further examine the issues. Shortly after the workshop ended, participants were sent a contact list of workshop attendees, a pdf copy of the MURAL board to reference in future discussions, and a follow-up survey.

Post-Workshop Survey

Of the ten workshop participants, five responded to the post-workshop survey. The average rating for the workshop was 4/5, with 5 being “Excellent” and 1 being “Poor”. Respondents indicated they found the MURAL tool easy (3), useful (4) and clarifying (1). All five participants agreed the most valuable part of the workshop was the ability to connect with other agencies. Participants also shared conflicting responses of wanting more thorough discussions on topics, while also feeling the workshop was too long. This may be due, in part, to the virtual delivery of the workshop which did not allow for the natural breaks and side conversations that in-person workshops can provide. When asked if these participants would be interested in becoming involved in a tree and stream protection working group, all but one participant responded with “Yes”. The single “No” response was from a government worker whose portfolio no longer included this work, but they knew of a colleague who would be interested in joining.

The positive response received from this survey indicate this workshop was a success. Future workshops delivered using an online platform should consider shorter time commitments, more focused discussion topics, visual aids like MURAL for clarity, a full range of government agency representation, and the use of a virtual platform that allows for all staff to use camera and microphones such as Microsoft Teams.

Systems Change Assessment

The *Investigating System of Environmental Protection* project revealed a potential way for systemic change to occur in the Brader – Mt. Lehman Neighbourhood: the FVC could act as bridges between the community and the government, as well as between different levels of government. Though the *Building Bridges* project we aimed to start from the top-down approach, investigating the validity of an intergovernmental working group approach to addressing community concerns about tree and stream protection. Based on the results of this workshop, we believe a working group bringing different government agencies together to tackle environmental issues in the ALR is a valid and important approach to changing the overall system of environmental protection in the BMLN. Additionally, as indicated by the government staff, community education continues to be extremely important in tackling these issues. At the same time, political will is critical to seeing the acceptance and implementation of any new environmental protection laws. Community pressure and support is a huge driver of political will. The FVC can act as a critical bridge between the government staff by creating a working group, and between the government staff and the community by sharing the importance of environmental protection and creating more by-in, driving political will. Increased community support, and resulting political support, will assist the working group with their environmental protection law goals. This systemic shift is highlighted in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

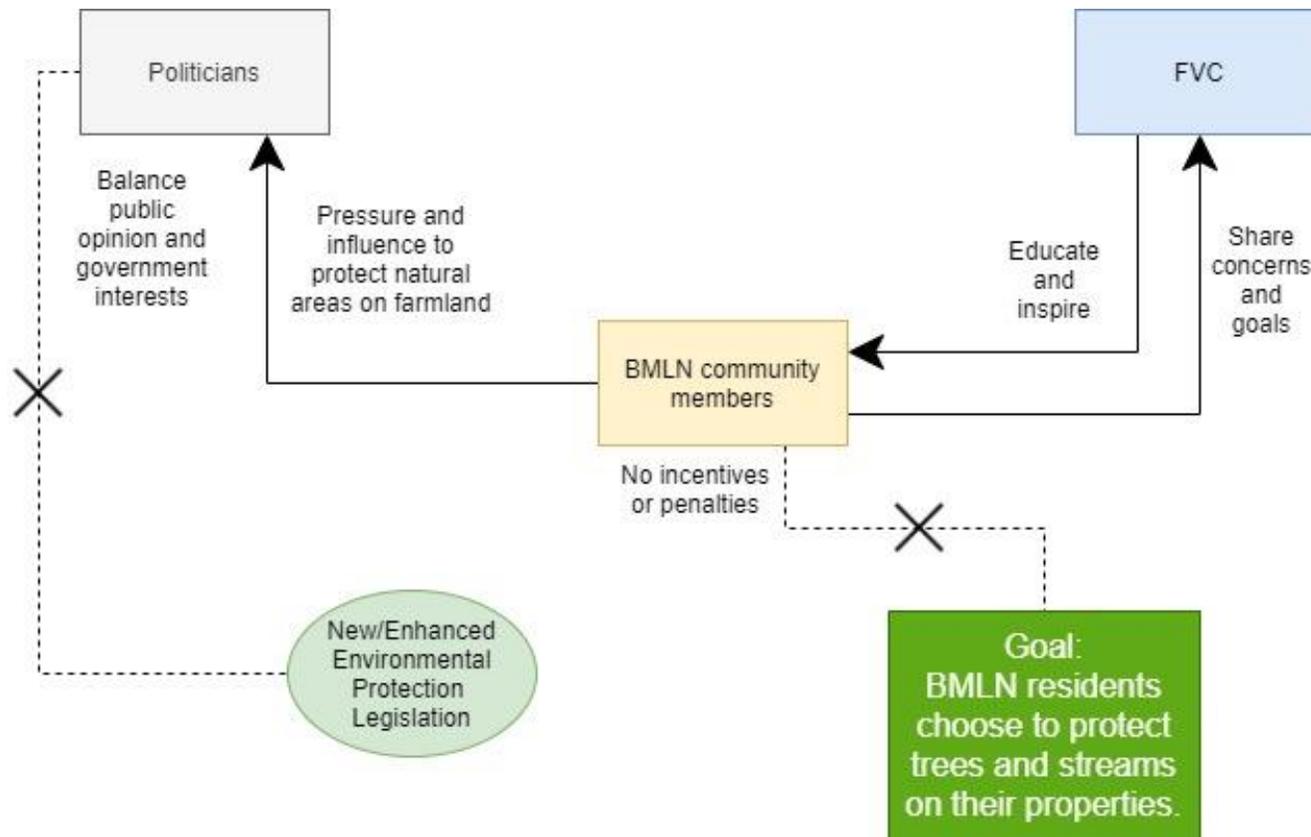


Figure 2: The current system in place for encouraging BMLN residents to choose to protect trees and streams on their properties. Without incentives or penalties, FVC education is not enough to see this goal fulfilled. Public pressure alone is will not change political will enough to see environmental protection legislation created or enhanced to protect trees and streams. Dashed lines indicate the system pathways are not functioning.

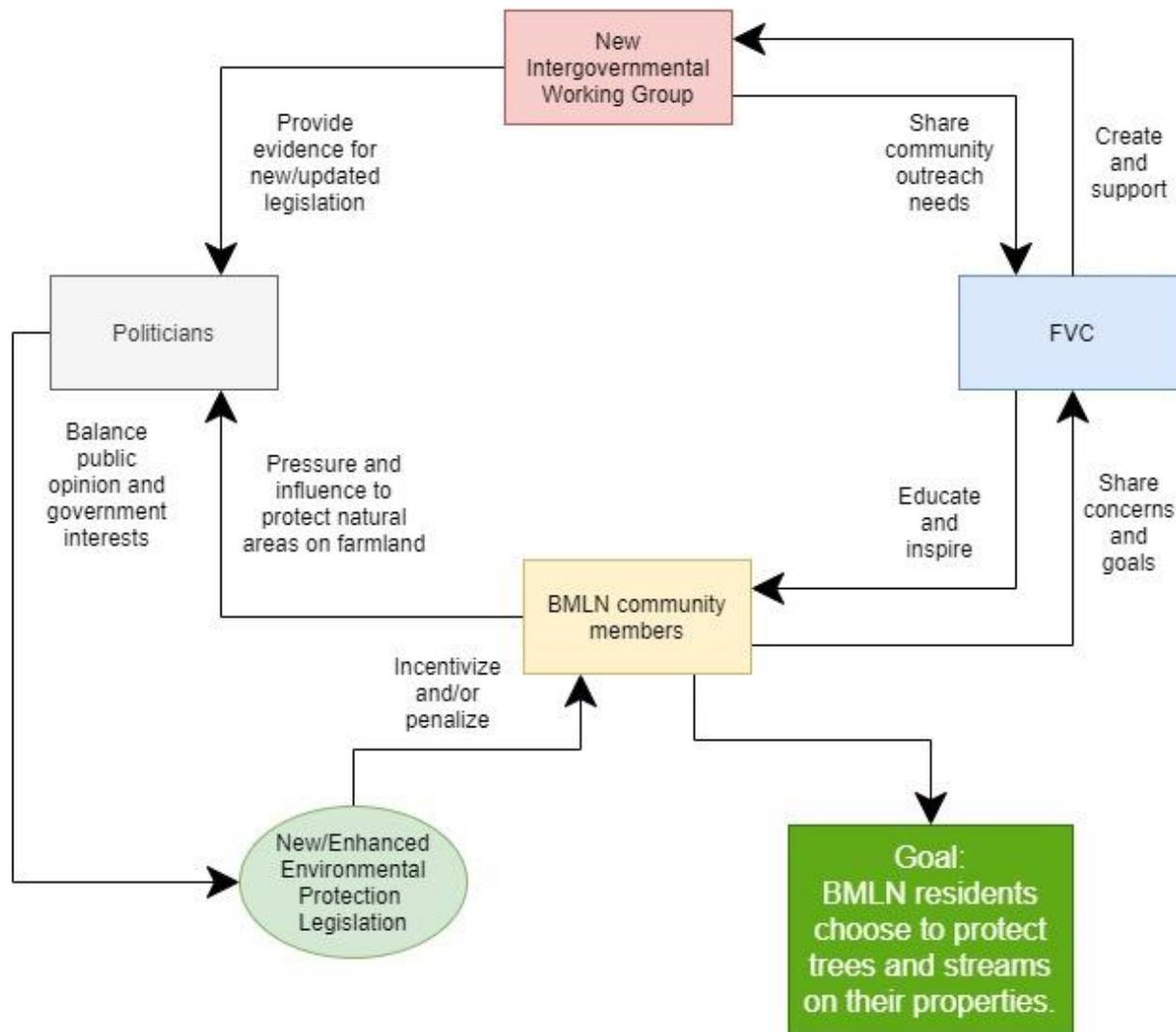


Figure 3: The new system proposed by the FVC to influence systems change for environmental protection in the BMLN. The addition of a tree and stream protection working group created and supported by the FVC will allow for a new dynamic between the FVC, the BMLN community members, and politicians. With the addition of evidence for new environmental legislation provided by the working group, and new incentives or penalties created by the legislation, we can achieve our goal of improving tree and stream protection in the BMLN.

FVC Actions

The Fraser Valley Conservancy is uniquely poised to engage in certain actions thanks to our staff expertise and partnerships with governments and organizations. Our ongoing work includes community education and landowner contact programs. We can also secure funding to engage governments on environmental protection issues. Moving forward, the FVC is committed to undertaking the following actions:

- **Intergovernmental working group creation.** Through a new staff position starting in 2021, the FVC will work to engage governments on the creation of a tree and stream protection on agricultural land working group.
- **Community outreach and education.** increase awareness of environmental stewardship in the BMLN community and throughout the Fraser Valley. Our Nature Stewardship School and other educational campaigns promote protection of natural spaces and creation of habitat
- **Support government staff on environmental issues.** We will work with the City of Abbotsford staff and politicians to bring awareness to the importance of protecting the biodiversity of BMLN and provide expert knowledge and advice to environmental management concerns.
- **Landowner contact for environmental stewardship.** Our Nature Stewards Program focuses on the protection of private property for interested residents with a focus on species at risk.

Conclusion

This short Vancouver Foundation develop grant *Building Bridges for Environmental Protection Solutions* provided us with the opportunities to test whether we could get government staff from various agencies together to discuss tree and stream protection in the Bradner – Mt. Lehman Neighbourhood (BMLN). Our first intergovernmental workshop faced challenges of being politically unpalatable and difficult to deliver due to COVID-19 restrictions. Despite this, we were able to see five government agencies come together to discuss issues of critical concern to the BMLN community. Participants agreed a working group would be necessary to influence change needed to address these issues, and government staff come forward willing to participate. In 2021, the FVC is creating a new staff position dedicated to government engagement. One of their first priorities will be the creation of the new intergovernmental working group on tree and stream protection in the Agricultural Land Reserve. This working group, alongside continued FVC community engagement and landowner contact, has the potential to drastically influence the future of environmental protection not only in the BMLN, but across the province of British Columbia.

Appendix A

Invitation sent to potential workshop participants.

Subject: Invitation to Express Interest in Interagency Workshop

Hello (name),

This is Aleesha Switzer from the Fraser Valley Conservancy Land Trust (FVC). We have been operating in the Fraser Valley for over 20 years delivering expert land stewardship advice to the community. We work extensively with government partners to ensure that our shared conservation goals are achieved.

The Fraser Valley Conservancy is hosting an interagency workshop on improving tree and stream protection in Abbotsford's Bradner-Mt. Lehman Neighbourhood (BMLN) in mid-late fall, 2020. The BMLN is a small farming community (approx. 4000 people) situated entirely in the Agricultural Land Reserve. The area provides a unique contribution to the agricultural landscape in Abbotsford: it contains salmon-bearing streams, critical habitat for endangered species, over 20% of Abbotsford's total tree canopy, and an interesting mix of everything from hobby to large-scale farming operations. However, since 2000, this area has also lost nearly 10% of its tree canopy cover.

The need for this interagency workshop emerged from consultations the FVC held with the BLMN community about environmental issues in their neighbourhood. Over 100 community members participated, and protection of farmland from conversion to industrial land-use zoning, air and water pollution, and loss of tree canopy were the top issues highlighted. Furthermore, one of the biggest challenges identified by the community to successfully addressing these issues was lack of clarity on which government agencies were responsible for what, and how the many agencies' laws applied to the trees and streams in the BMLN. One of the objectives of the interagency workshop will be to provide this clarity. Another objective will be to collaboratively develop ways to strengthen government support to improve tree and stream protection in the BMLN. To ensure ample time for interagency sharing and discussions, this workshop will be open to government participants only. The FVC will follow-up with the community afterward.

To help us design an informative and productive workshop, we would value your input on the following:

- What initiatives can you think of related to tree and stream protection work that could be helpful in modelling a successful collaborative approach?
- What interagency partnerships are working on similar issues that we should be aware of?
- Who would you invite (from your agency or another) to participate in this workshop?

Building Bridges for Environmental Protection Solutions Project Report

We've set up a quick survey where you'll be able to answer these questions and indicate whether or not you're interested in attending the workshop. Even if you don't think you'll attend, we'd still appreciate your thoughts and ideas on the questions.

<https://airtable.com/shrAMTI8vZ3TwFLQB>

Please fill in the survey by Friday, August 14th.

(Name), we hope you'll attend the workshop: your participation would enrich our discussions and strengthen the results.

Thank you for your time, and thanks in advance for completing the survey.

Sincerely,

Aleesha Switzer

Appendix B

Workshop agenda sent to participants.

Time	Agenda Item
Setting the stage	
9:00	Welcome: <i>Joanne Neilson, Executive Director, Fraser Valley Conservancy (FVC)</i> Check-in and overview of our day: <i>Facilitator Peter Abrams, Peter Abrams Consulting</i>
9:30	Strengthen our understanding of the context for tree and stream protection in the BMLN: <i>Key issues: Presentation by Emily MacNair, BC Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative</i> <i>Key community concerns: Presentation by Aleesha Switzer, Project Biologist, FVC</i>
10:15	<i>Break</i>
Key internal government issues & obstacles	
10:30	Identify key internal government issues and obstacles contributing to community concerns about tree and stream protection in the BMLN
11:45	Share results
12:15pm	<i>Lunch</i>
Addressing key internal government issues and obstacles	
1:00	Identify opportunities and actions for addressing key internal government issues and obstacles
2:00	Share results
2:15	<i>Break</i>
Moving forward	
2:30	Discuss next steps to maintain our momentum
2:50	Wrap up
3:00pm	Close

Appendix C

Snapshot of the MURAL board and sticky note structure used in the workshop.

The screenshot displays a digital workspace for a workshop. On the left is a toolbar with various icons for text, sticky notes, and images. The main area is divided into two columns. The left column contains three sticky note templates: a 3x3 grid, a 5x3 grid, and a circle sticky note. The right column shows the workshop content, which is organized into two main sections: 'Issue Categorization Area - Group 1' and 'Issue Categorization Area - Group 2'. Each section contains a task description, a table for categorizing issues, and a task instruction. The tables are filled with colorful sticky notes representing different issues.

Issue Categorization Area - Group 1

Task 1 (Part 1): GROUP 1: Loss of trees in our neighbourhood

Task: From your experience, identify the different types of issues that are being contributing to the local and present community context.

Issue Category	Issue	Priority
Loss of trees	Loss of trees in our neighbourhood	High
Loss of trees	Loss of trees in our neighbourhood	Medium
Loss of trees	Loss of trees in our neighbourhood	Low

Task 2: Choose your TOP 3 ISSUES in terms of importance to address. Place them in the grid below.

Issue Category	Issue	Priority
Loss of trees	Loss of trees in our neighbourhood	High
Loss of trees	Loss of trees in our neighbourhood	Medium
Loss of trees	Loss of trees in our neighbourhood	Low

Issue Categorization Area - Group 2

Task 1 (Part 2): GROUP 2: Worried about riparian areas and salmon streams

Task: From your experience, identify the different types of issues that are being contributing to the local and present community context.

Issue Category	Issue	Priority
Riparian areas	Worried about riparian areas and salmon streams	High
Riparian areas	Worried about riparian areas and salmon streams	Medium
Riparian areas	Worried about riparian areas and salmon streams	Low

Task 2: Choose your TOP 3 ISSUES in terms of importance to address. Place them in the grid below.

Issue Category	Issue	Priority
Riparian areas	Worried about riparian areas and salmon streams	High
Riparian areas	Worried about riparian areas and salmon streams	Medium
Riparian areas	Worried about riparian areas and salmon streams	Low