



CleanBC Review

Submission from the Northern
BC Climate Action Network

July 2025

In the North, for the North

NorthCAN emerged because there was no platform for regional collaboration and information-sharing among communities and organizations working to identify and implement local climate solutions. In response, NorthCAN meetings and events exclusively showcase projects and initiatives in northern communities – from both the private and public sectors – with the belief that more awareness of northern community leadership will lead to greater confidence in pursuing local opportunities, replication of successful initiatives, and increased capacity through collaboration.

NorthCAN's unique track record

- We have showcased dozens of local organizations and projects that demonstrate the connections between climate action, local economies, cultures, regional capacity-building, community pride, and resiliency.
- We have secured funding and established partnerships with more than 20 organizations that have supported NorthCAN events and meetings.
- Our work on establishing climate-related connections through the northern region served as a springboard for researchers at UNBC and UVic who have initiated a Northern Regional Energy Dialogues project to amplify northern perspectives on the transition to clean energy, and for officials at Northern Health who have participated in NorthCAN since the beginning and have recently undertaken a climate and sustainability roadmap that will help to sustain our region's health and wellness in a changing climate.

What We've Learned Through NorthCAN and Why It Matters for the CleanBC Review

This submission reflects the NorthCAN experience over the past three years but specifically includes contributions of NorthCAN participants ("NorthCANers") during recent events and activities:

- A special NorthCAN meeting on July 10, 2025 to collect and synthesize feedback for the CleanBC Review, which was attended by more than 30 representatives from communities across Northern BC.
- [The NorthCAN Forum in April 2025](#), the network's third in-person event, which attracted more than 100 registrants from 21 communities and 59 organizations.
- [UNBC Report on NorthCAN's Establishment](#), using the April 2023 NorthCAN workshop at UNBC as well as a survey and interviews with NorthCAN participants.
- The [Northern Regional Energy Dialogues](#) project mentioned above.

The [NorthCAN web page](#) contains additional background information about the network and summaries of all previous meetings and events.

Key Recommendations

1. Recognize Northern BC's distinct context.

Northern BC has geographic, climatic, and capacity realities that are different from elsewhere in the province and, therefore, require tailored climate solutions. Although NorthCANers recognize that “one size doesn’t fit all” in British Columbia, this isn’t always reflected in provincial policy, in part because of the lack of a single regional definition. CleanBC should integrate regionality and more intentionally recognize Northern BC’s distinct context and circumstances to ensure programs are effective and equitable.

“Without an equity lens that recognizes regional and economic disparities, these programs can unintentionally deepen the divide between urban and rural, and between policy ideals and lived reality.”

—NorthCAN CleanBC meeting participant.

2. Climate policy should recognize and incorporate regional environmental, economic, and social objectives.

In Northern BC, climate action can be a pathway to realizing other community and regional priorities and help revitalize an economy being impacted by the evolution of traditional resource sectors. Presenters during NorthCAN meetings consistently highlight local economic development, job creation, better health outcomes, and community pride as primary outcomes of local climate-related initiatives, and they’re often much more immediate and tangible than emissions reductions. Climate initiatives must align with and advance broader community and regional goals.

“The NorthCAN Forum has helped me realize the importance of economic, social, and political development related to community resiliency”

—NorthCAN participant

3. Northern BC can’t be left behind.

NorthCAN communities are committed to climate action and are already demonstrating leadership and innovation. Northern BC doesn’t need lower greenhouse gas emission reduction targets or delays in implementation of provincial initiatives intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. CleanBC should maintain ambitious climate targets province-wide but ensure that implementation supports match regional realities.

“We can’t leave the North behind. The region has a small population but high energy intensity and there are numerous existing, low-carbon solutions that can be implemented here today. It just feels they’re often overlooked by existing provincial programs”

—NorthCAN CleanBC meeting participant

4. Northern BC must be meaningfully included in the design—not just the review—of provincial climate policy.

NorthCANers have expressed frustration with feeling ignored and excluded from opportunities to contribute to the climate policies and priorities that will ultimately affect them. When Northern voices are absent from policy development, communities risk being left behind—or even harmed—by one-size-fits-all solutions. CleanBC has an opportunity to support co-creation of climate policy that is informed by Northern residents who are ready to contribute and lead.

“We’ve felt long-term effects of declining resource sector for a decade and want to be part of the transition, but can’t do it with fewer people, less money, and increasingly complex regulatory hurdles.”

—NorthCAN CleanBC meeting participant.

5. Enable and invest in regional collaboration.

Pervasive capacity challenges at the local level mean that regional collaboration is essential for scaling up climate action in Northern BC. NorthCAN participants consistently rate collaboration as both a top priority and primary outcome of the network. Without coordinated support, communities are simply stretched too thin. CleanBC, however, lacks a framework to support regional-scale implementation. Ongoing provincial engagement and support for the Northern BC Climate Action Network is essential for maintaining momentum, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing among local governments and other public and private sector organizations. A future vision for NorthCAN involves embedding it within a Climate Collaborative, unique in northern Canada but similar to collaboratives in other countries, that would specifically involve key organizations, facilitate information flow, and deliver a range of services to advance regional planning and implementation.

“It is incredibly beneficial to collaborate and share information, successes, and advocacy with fellow northerners as the collaboration is seamless given our shared experiences and culture”

—NorthCAN Forum participant

6. Reliable and regionally relevant support for energy retrofits and climate-resilient new builds will provide multiple benefits to communities and citizens.

British Columbia has a wide range of climate zones identified in the BC Building Code but the majority of the BC population lives in the one with the mildest climate. Many CleanBC programs, therefore, benefit southern climates and urban contexts, overlooking solutions that are well-suited to northern conditions. Tailored incentives, accessible financing, and regulatory reforms that recognize BC’s varied climates, encourage the use of local products, and address local wildfire risks and limited contractor availability would encourage rapidly deployable, high-performing buildings. Better buildings aren’t just more energy-efficient, they are more comfortable, longer-lasting, more affordable, and provide the possibility for homes to be multi-generational. CleanBC policies should provide long-term, stable support for energy retrofits and climate-resilient new builds that reflect the unique challenges in northern and rural communities.

“Make the rebate processes simpler, provide greater clarity as to where the rebates apply, better recognize that technologies have different levels of meeting needs in the north.”

—NorthCAN CleanBC meeting participant.

“There are issues related to access and implementation in Northern BC, and a need to reduce barriers to participation. How many communities/people in Northern BC are actually benefitting from CleanBC programs and incentives?”

—NorthCAN CleanBC meeting participant.

7. Workforce development must be regionally appropriate and accessible to provide the labour needed for local and regional implementation of low-carbon options.

A shortage of skilled professionals is nothing new to Northern BC and this currently applies to those who have the skills and experience to design, implement, and support low-carbon solutions across various sectors. Some examples include specialists in home energy retrofits, heat pump installers, and energy advisors. Shortages are compounded by population decline and demographic change, limited access to local training and certification programs, and low recognition of the transferability of existing skills. Targeted training programs, Indigenous-led

workforce development, more local apprenticeships, and partnerships with regional post-secondary institutions would enhance uptake of CleanBC programs in the region and contribute to job-creation and community resilience.

“There's lots of opportunities to train up workers, to train up businesses, to train up municipalities because there's a gap compared to where peers in other regions might be...But because there are those gaps, there's also lots of opportunities.”

—NorthCAN participant in UNBC's report about the establishment of NorthCAN

8. Northern BC needs sustained investment in equitable, low-carbon transportation solutions that reflect regional and rural realities.

This includes expanded regional transit, inter-community connections, active transportation designed for northern conditions, and financial incentives for zero-emission options—ensuring all communities, not just urban centres, can practically participate in the energy transition. Northern BC's challenges include long distances between communities, limited options for inter-community travel, insufficient public transit and active transportation options both within and between communities, a persistent stigma around electric vehicles, and limited access to qualified EV mechanics. Dedicated funding, rural-focused design support, investment in charging infrastructure, relevant communications, and climate-resilient upgrades to existing infrastructure are essential to make walking, biking, and low-carbon travel safe, accessible, and viable in smaller and remote communities.

“Historic community planning and infrastructure has been a barrier to active transportation and clean transportation generally. Community/regional planning for low carbon future needs to be priority.”

—NorthCAN CleanBC meeting participant.

“The transportation gap is stark for remote communities; people travel hundreds of kilometres for medical care or basic services, raising equity and safety concerns.”

—NorthCAN CleanBC meeting participant.

“More positive messaging is needed around EVs in northern communities and more level 3 chargers.”

—NorthCAN CleanBC meeting participant.

9. Infrastructure investment in Northern BC must be prioritized.

Climate resilience has been a central theme within NorthCAN discussions and NorthCANers support better integration between mitigation and adaptation policies and programs. Resilient infrastructure investment includes upgrading aging assets based on localized climate risk assessments, expanding support for Indigenous and rural workforce development, and enabling nature-based and culturally inclusive design. Long-term resilience in the North depends not only on funding but also on local capacity, public engagement, and regionally tailored tools.

“There is a need to prioritize upgrading existing infrastructure and address aging assets to meet future climate risks, including consideration of flood-resistant, fire-smart, and culturally inclusive design.”

—Participant at the NorthCAN Forum.

10. Northern communities are particularly suited to implementing community-based, renewable energy solutions but need support and opportunities for information-sharing and collaboration.

From microgrids and bioenergy to geothermal and solar, there is strong interest and potential in community-owned systems that foster energy security and affordability. NorthCAN activities that have showcased examples of local renewable energy systems have revealed how they are critical for enhancing local capacity and comfort with the energy transition, providing additional local revenues for community priorities, enhancing resiliency, and reducing demands on utility-scale services. There are also strong opportunities in Northern BC to collaborate with industry on clean energy solutions—such as repurposing excess heat—by taking a more holistic, integrated approach to emissions reduction and energy efficiency. CleanBC efforts to reduce regulatory barriers, provide targeted grants, and showcase learnings from early adopters would help facilitate implementation of renewable energy solutions in the North.

“Additional funding to support renewable energy projects in the North should be a higher priority, along with less red tape.”

—NorthCAN CleanBC meeting participant

Conclusion

This submission provides a glimpse of the depth of climate leadership, innovation, and commitment evident across Northern BC. Fully realizing the potential of this region, however, requires that CleanBC be more intentional about reflecting northern geographic, economic, social, and cultural contexts in the design and creation of policy and regulations, the implementation of programs, and the distribution of funding and other supports. Ultimately, to be effective and equitable, CleanBC's path forward must not only *acknowledge* regional differences, but *embrace* them as strengths. This is the NorthCAN spirit.

NorthCAN is a unique platform for information-sharing, relationship-building, and collaboration that simply did not exist during the formation of CleanBC or the Roadmap to 2030. To attend and participate in its meetings and events is to feel part of a movement that is positive, future-focused, action-oriented, and rooted in pride for what the region and its people can accomplish in the face of climate change and multiple challenges to community resiliency. Today, NorthCAN is a valuable conduit for ongoing engagement on climate action and is an example of how collaborative and supportive climate action can be encouraged in Northern BC.

A final note: NorthCAN is one of 17 peer networks currently being facilitated and delivered by CEA. These include networks on specific climate-related topics, for specific constituencies, and focused on different regions. CEA is coordinating a separate submission to the CleanBC review on behalf other peer networks.