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Drinking water protection and economic diversification among top sustainability issues in rural BC – new research

PRINCE GEORGE — Key sustainability planning issues for rural BC residents are part of a new study released today by the Fraser Basin Council's Smart Planning for Communities (SPC) program.

The study, funded by the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS), finds that communities in rural areas of the province consider *protecting drinking water supplies* (80%) and *pursuing economic diversification* (60%) as the most important aspects of a successful sustainability strategy. Over one hundred local government elected officials and staff, along with academics and consultants, participated in surveys and focus group sessions as part of this research.

“The future supply and quality of water are quickly becoming critical concerns as the climate changes, even in a temperate province like BC” says PICS executive director Tom Pedersen. “The impacts now upon us impose requirements to adapt that affect rural agriculture as much as they affect municipal supplies. This report reinforces the need for regional planning in BC that firmly recognizes the climate changes that are rushing down the pipeline towards us.”

The research shows differences between rural municipalities and regional districts. In addition to *protecting drinking water supplies*, regional district respondents chose *protecting agricultural land* and *preventing rural sprawl* as their top priorities. Municipal respondents chose *pursuing economic development* and *supporting higher density development suitable for a small town*, as their top priorities, in addition to drinking water.

“Another strong message from the rural local governments regarding their ability to become sustainable communities is the importance of economic diversification, particularly the influence of natural resource based sectors, along with health and education - all of which are provincial jurisdiction.” says Joan Chess, lead researcher and sustainability facilitator with the Smart Planning for Communities Program.

The respondents also identified *support from elected officials and community leaders* (79%), *access to funding* (78%) and *implementation costs* (75%) as the most important factors for choosing actions for a sustainability strategy in rural areas.

The results of the research suggest that rural sustainability planning and the resulting processes, strategies and actions must be adapted to local circumstances to be effective.



More information

The full report with a summary of tools and recommendations for successful ICSP action for rural BC is available at http://smartplanningbc.ca/tools_resources.html.

For more information about the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS), visit <http://pics.uvic.ca>

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