

# ClimateWest Forum: Building Climate Resilience

Being **prepared** | Working **together** | Creating **change**

## Key Takeaways

On May 8 and 9, 2024, the 2nd annual ClimateWest Forum brought together a network of diverse individuals and organizations with one common goal – building climate resilience across Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and beyond. Over 130 in-person guests and 100 virtual participants joined us to hear the voices, stories, and work of those at the forefront of climate adaptation and resiliency action in the Prairie region. Participants learned about the state of knowledge on climate resilience and explored inclusive and collaborative approaches to building stronger, more climate resilient communities.

Over two days we heard from 18 incredible speakers and panelists. The sessions covered a range of topics including weaving Indigenous Knowledges, observed change and future climate projections, youth engagement, climate change impacts on mental health, emergency preparedness, climate communications, and more.

This report highlights some of our key takeaways from the forum and includes a list of resources that were referenced by the speakers.

1

### “Ecosystems don’t care about borders”

Hetxw’ms Gyetxw (Brett D. Huson)

Keynote speaker, Hetxw’ms Gyetxw (Brett D. Huson) spoke of the need to change how communities interact with their ecosystems and how people interact with their lands. Dr. Tim Clark also highlighted this issue when addressing cumulative effects, attributing part of the problem to the broken relationship between people and the land. Hetxw’ms Gyetxw urged a shift away from border-thinking, emphasizing that municipal decisions impact watersheds regardless of municipal or provincial boundaries.

In the preparedness, water scarcity and emergency planning panel, Emmeline Marshall-Hill also noted that emergencies similarly do not adhere to borders when speaking of the need for collaboration and partnerships.

# Key Takeaways



2

## "We are not going back. We need to adapt."

Dr. Heather Morrison, Environment and Climate Change Canada

During our Foundations Session, Dr. Heather Morrison shared climate model simulations indicating that at the point of reaching net zero, global temperatures will stabilize rather than decrease. Our climate will not return to that of the past. Understanding what to expect from our changed and changing climate - more humid summers, severe drought, and heatwaves - and learning how to adapt is crucial.

Dr. Richard Schneider went on to explain the impact of our rapidly warming climate on biodiversity and ecosystems in the Prairie region. Due to the fast rate of change, although some species will adapt, if climate change continues unabated others may be left behind.

Both presenters highlighted that the effects of a warming climate are more pronounced in the Prairie provinces compared to most other regions of Canada.

3

## "Resilience means planning."

Andre Asselin, Alberta Water Council

During the forum, speakers emphasized the importance of not only understanding the necessity of being prepared but also how to achieve preparedness. Andre Asselin shared how the Alberta Water Council developed a guide to assist municipalities build resilience to drought and conducted simulation exercises to ready themselves for more frequent droughts, while Emmeline Marshall-Hill detailed five key steps in emergency management preparedness: People, Plans, Equipment, Training, and Exercises. Jill Yanch shared the Resilient Rurals' Resilience Model and resources such as the Rural Ready Program, a guide designed to help communities conduct mock emergency event scenarios.

A common thread in the conversations emphasized the value of uniting people, embracing diverse perspectives, honoring others' values, and establishing meaningful and equitable partnerships to forge a sustainable path forward.

# Key Takeaways



4

## “Experiencing climate change anxiety is higher in the Prairies than some regions.”

Dr. Sherilee Harper, Hannah Bayne, & Stephanie Olsen , University of Alberta

Climate change has already had severe and widespread mental health impacts. Dr. Sherilee Harper revealed the results of a new, high-quality, generalizable national survey on Canadians' perceptions of climate change. The survey findings indicated that the likelihood of experiencing heightened levels of climate change anxiety was greater in the Prairies than in Ontario and the Atlantic region. Other climate-related emotions such as grief, sadness, worry, and anger were lower in the Prairies than in other places but still experienced by most Albertans, Saskatchewanians, and Manitobans.

Emotions connected to climate change was a recurring theme throughout the forum, especially during the youth engagement and local initiatives panels. Lily Halton, a junior high school student, shared how her climate change emotions inspired her to establish a school climate club, a safe space for students to express their eco-grief, anxiety, hopes, and dreams for a better future and to enable them to take action within their schools and communities. In sharing his tips on youth engagement, Austin Zacharko highlighted the importance of acknowledging and validating feelings of frustration and anger, and not to minimize or dismiss them.

5

## “Canadians are making sense of climate change through extreme weather.”

Amber Bennett, Re.Climate

While perspectives on climate change vary based on political views and geographical location, extreme weather is our most important communication tool. Amber Bennett recommended making the connection between extreme weather and climate change in order to build understanding and literacy. Emphasizing human safety, security, and health in messages helps people to relate to our changing climate and is more likely to inspire preparedness. Amber advised keeping messages clear, simple, and vivid, and using stories to convey emotion, overcome defenses, and align with values to build a shared understanding.

# Key Takeaways



6

**“Young people see a future of radical change and action.”**

Hannah Bayne, University of Alberta

During the panel on youth engagement, many of the conversations revolved around how young people envision their future and how we can work with them to define it. At the outset of youth engagement, Hannah Bayne recommended being clear on what age you want to engage and recognize that their perception of the future, and therefore what’s important to them, varies based on their age. Acknowledging that the visions of their future might be uncomfortable because they challenge the status quo, sit with the discomfort and challenge your own preconceived ideas. “Why can’t we just \_\_\_\_\_?”

A question from the audience on providing youth with agency led to a conversation about advocacy and activism. These essential skills should be instilled early on to empower youth to voice their concerns confidently. Non youth can support by helping youth streamline their ideas before presenting them to a broader audience. In some First Nations, youth are involved in the community’s decision-making processes from a young age, contributing to inter-generational decision-making. Allowing youth to participate in boards and committees creates opportunities for dialogue with decision-makers.

A common assumption that the panel identified is that non youth often underestimate young people's ability to comprehend complex climate issues. While Hannah highlighted the need for access to better quality climate change education, she also emphasized that youth are capable of grasping intricate matters, citing the youth delegation of over 60 young people from around the world who attended COP28 with a platform of decarbonization.

Junior high school student, Lily Halton, gave a compelling speech during the local initiative panel when talking about her school climate club. She reminded us that kids don’t need another thing to be anxious about. As adults, we should take accountability, listen to youth voices, and use our influence to keep and exceed the promises we make.

# Resources

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## Climate Data

- [The Climate Atlas of Canada and Indigenous Climate Atlas](#)
- [ClimateData.ca](#) (Fire Weather Index coming soon)

## Support Services

- [ClimateWest Help Desk](#) - 204-995-6514 / [info@climatewest.ca](mailto:info@climatewest.ca)
- Climate Services Support Desk - 1-833-517-0376 / [ccsc-cccs@ec.gc.ca](mailto:ccsc-cccs@ec.gc.ca)

## Report and Toolkits

- City of Edmonton - [Neighbouring for Climate Toolkit](#)
- [For Our Future: Indigenous Resilience Report](#)
- [Climate Resilience Express Planning Toolkit](#)
- Alberta Water Council - [Building Resiliency to Multi-Year Drought in Alberta Guide and Supporting Documents](#)
- [National Knowledge Assessment Reports](#)

## Projects, Research and Initiatives

- Az Klymiuk - [Plant Mycobiomes](#)
- Janna Wale - [A framework for Indigenous climate resilience: A Gitxsan case study](#)
- Alberta Water Council - [Improving Drought Resilience in Alberta Through Simulation](#)
- Alberta Water Council - [Water Conservation, Efficiency, and Productivity Projects](#)
- [Resilient Rurals](#)

## Youth-Focused Organizations

- [The Youth Harbour](#)
- [FES](#)
- [For Our Kids](#)

# Resources

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## Mental Health

- [Good Grief Network](#)
- [Climate Psychology Alliance](#)
- [Climate Psychology Alliance North America](#)
  - [Climate aware therapist directory](#)
  - [Resources to Support Processing Climate Emotions](#)
- [Mental Health and Climate Change Alliance](#)
- [UBC Climate Hub](#) and [Wellbeing Resources](#)
- [Refugia Retreats](#)
- [Work That Reconnects](#) and [Joanna Macy](#)

## Books and Reading

- Hetxw'ms Gyetxw (Brett D. Huson)'s Mothers of Xsan [Book Series](#) ([Portage and Main Press](#))
- [Red Rising Magazine](#)
- Generation Dread by Dr. Britt Wray
- A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety by Sarah Jaquette Ray
- Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World by Dr. Katharine Hayhoe
- [Biodiversity Conservation in Canada - From Theory to Practice](#) by Dr. Richard Schneider ([Chapter 9, Climate Change](#))



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