

CLIMATE RESILIENT FUTURES:

Empowering People through Knowledge, Tools, and Stories

Key Takeaways

On June 17 and 18, 2025, we gathered for our 3rd annual ClimateWest Forum in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The event welcomed 150 in-person guests and 199 virtual participants to learn about prairie-based approaches to building climate resilience, through dynamic presentations and panel sessions, networking opportunities, and tools and resource sharing.

Over the course of two days, participants heard from 24 inspiring thought leaders and practitioners who shared their strategies, experiences and reflections on working to adapt to the changing climate in the prairie provinces. Presenters explored the impacts of climate change on both people and the land; the importance of working with nature to build resilience; adaptation strategies from northern, Indigenous, and rural communities; water and drought management; and strengthening local food systems in a changing climate. The forum also introduced practical, interactive tools designed to support climate preparedness across sectors.

By convening prairie-based leaders in climate services and adaptation, and showcasing grounded examples of resilience in action, we were able to exchange knowledge, strengthen networks, and identify shared priorities for building regional climate resilience. This report summarizes some of our key takeaways from the Forum.



Drought management as a key adaptation measure

"Severe drought frequency is projected to increase in the Prairies."

Dr. Elaine Barrow, Canadian Centre for Climate Services

Dr. Elaine Barrow, who is based in Regina, opened the forum with an overview of the projected climate change impacts across Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. According to current climate models, the southern prairie region is projected to experience increases in severe drought under a moderate emissions scenario (SSP2-4.5). Under a high emissions scenario (SSP5-8.5), the region could experience severe





drought conditions 50% of the time by the end of this century. This underscores the importance of drought preparedness as a critical climate adaptation measure.

We heard from several organizations working to address this growing challenge. Chuck Deschamps from <u>Ducks Unlimited Canada</u> and Bridget Andrews from <u>Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds</u> highlighted their work to enhance water conservation on the prairies through wetland and native grassland restoration. The <u>City of Saskatoon</u> shared some of their targeted infrastructure upgrades to improve water conservation including the installation of more efficient nozzles at spray pads.

While drought preparedness is essential, Scott Millar from the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance and Michael Martineau from the Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations pointed out in their presentation on a Drought Resilience Needs Assessment project for First Nations in Alberta, that water security more broadly is an overarching concern for many First Nations, as numerous communities still lack the critical infrastructure needed for safe, reliable access to clean water.



Youth are the future and are powerful leaders, but need support and empowerment

"If we empower young people... give them all the tools, all the understanding that we've gathered... if we provide youth the opportunity, they can change the community."

Jordyn Burnouf, Land-Based Practitioner and Youth Leader

In the opening session, the audience heard from two inspiring youth leaders, Jordyn Burnouf, and Abhay Singh Sachal from <u>Break the Divide</u>. Their passion, moral clarity and deep understanding of the challenges posed by a changing climate underscored the vital importance of engaging young people in climate action. Jordyn also shared stories about working directly with youth; young people understand the issues clearly but emphasized the need to empower them. Jason Cardinal from Flying Dust Market Garden (FDMG) introduced an innovative co-learning exchange program. This initiative involves hosting students from around the world, allowing them to bring fresh perspectives to farm operations while FDMG is able to share their traditional knowledge and sustainability practices globally.

2





However, it was also acknowledged that youth needed more support, encouragement, and platforms to grow into confident climate leaders, and recognize their leadership skills in this space.

While youth can be powerful agents of change, Abhay's presentation highlighted a sobering truth: the climate crisis is taking a serious toll on their mental health. Crippled with heavy emotions like climate grief, anxiety, and fear, many youth feel overwhelmed by the uncertainties that lie ahead. Developing emotional intelligence and fostering relationships with each other and with the land not only helps to alleviate this but is essential for moving youth from paralysis to engaging in meaningful action. As Abhay poignantly stated, "to heal the planet, we have to collectively heal ourselves. Let's start with young people."

3

The importance of place-based climate adaptation

"Lasting prairie resilience depends on working lands and working lands depend on the people who care for them and the communities who surround them."

Nicole Baldwin, ALUS

Grounding climate adaptation in the local context and recognizing the importance of stewardship are key to success. Roger Daniels from <u>Mistawasis Nêhiyawak</u> reflected on how his community deepened their commitment to land stewardship after regaining sovereignty over their land management decisions. In the natural infrastructure session, Renny Grilz from <u>Meewasin Valley</u> stated that "stewardship sustains resilience." In the final session on agriculture, Nicole Baldwin from <u>ALUS</u> and Adrienne Tastad from <u>Living Lab – Central Prairies</u> both shared how the active participation of farmers in their programs helped shape practical, locally-adapted regenerative agriculture practices on the prairies.

Jordyn Burnouf urged the audience to recognize the vital role of knowledge keepers and land-based practitioners, whose intergenerational knowledge and intimate understanding of the land are essential to climate adaptation. Michaela Sidloski from the University of Saskatchewan advocated for the need to embrace complexity, iteration, and nuance when working with communities on adaptation planning.





Successful climate adaptation depends on listening to communities, involving them in decision making and prioritising long-lasting relationships. It requires flexibility and deep respect for lived experience and local and traditional knowledge, all of which contribute to long-term community resilience.



The benefits of working with nature

"We can look at natural infrastructure as a way to meet many of our adaptation needs and many co-benefits at lower costs."

Dimple Roy, International Institute for Sustainable Development

Successful adaptation is not merely a matter of staving off the worst consequences of climate change. When done effectively, it can also help address other socio-economic and environmental issues, and often at lower costs. This is especially the case for natural infrastructure, as was highlighted throughout the forum. For example, the City of Saskatoon's Green Network provides an estimated \$48 million annually in ecosystem services from storm water management and temperature regulation, to support cultural and economic activities like tourism. Meewasin Valley has been exploring how the restoration of ecological processes—such as controlled burns and targeted grazing—can strengthen native grassland ecosystems. This approach enhances their ability to retain water, sequester carbon, and provide habitat, thereby addressing the various needs of climate resilience, mitigation, and biodiversity improvement. The farmers we heard from, Alanna Carlson and Keaton Sinclair from AKreGeneration, and Mark Hoimyr owner and operator of Box H Farm, further underscored how working with nature can increase yields while also reducing input costs for farmers, making their operations, and communities, more resilient.

While nature provides many quantifiable benefits, it is also important to remember that the natural world has value in its own right beyond what can be measured in dollars, as many of our Indigenous speakers emphasized throughout the forum.







The importance of cooperation and interconnectedness in resilience building

"A fence does not divide, what happens on one side happens on the other side."

Roger Daniels, Mistawasis Nêhiyawak

As was evident in each session, the prairie provinces face numerous challenges in their path to becoming climate resilient. As Dr. Elaine Barrow noted, the prairie region is warming faster than the majority of Canada, with significant drying already taking place – an issue underscored by the intense wildfire season in the region. Other speakers noted additional barriers, including the rural to urban divide, increasing polarization and misinformation, lack of critical infrastructure, and the challenges inherent in forging a path towards reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

Despite these challenges, one theme echoed clearly across all presentations: the spirit of collaboration remains a powerful force in the prairie provinces. In every session, we heard story after story of presenters working together, amplifying their impact through partnership. Mistawasis Nêhiyawak worked with Ducks Unlimited Canada on establishing conservation easements under Mistawasis's land law; Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds is collaborating with ALUS to help farmers implement nature-based solutions; and the City of Saskatoon is partnering with Meewasin Valley on protecting wetlands and swales. It's through this sharing of knowledge, resources and responsibilities, that our provinces will be able to weather these storms together. After all, nature doesn't exist in a vacuum, nor should our work.

Presentations and recordings from the ClimateWest 2025 Forum can be

accessed on the ClimateWest website







RESOURCES

The following resources were shared at the Forum:

Support Services

- ClimateWest Help Desk 204-995-6514 / info@climatewest.ca
- Climate Services Support Desk 1-833-517-0376 / ccsc-cccs@ec.gc.ca

Tools

- <u>Climate Insight</u>
- Resilient Rurals
- HealthyPlan.City
- ClimateData.ca
 - Spatial Analogues
 - Seasonal to Decadal Forecasts
 - Fire Weather App

Programs

- Ducks Unlimited Canada Landowner Programs
- Growing Roots: ALUS' Regenerative Agriculture Program
- Saskatchewan Watersheds Agriculture Environment Program (SWEAP)

Education and Training

- Canadian Prairies Prescribed Fire Exchange
- Ducks Unlimited Climate Change Resource Pack (for teachers and students)
- <u>FaRM Resilience Mentorship</u>
- ImaGENation Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program

Reports

- Building Resilience to Multi-Year Drought in Alberta, Alberta Water Council
- Kinship and Prosperity: Proven Solutions for a Clean Energy Landscape
- <u>Synthesis of Science: Findings on Canadian Prairie Wetland Drainage</u>





Plans and Strategies

- City of Saskatoon Adaptation Strategy
- <u>City of Saskatoon Green Infrastructure Strategy</u>
- City of Saskatoon Green Network
- City of Saskatoon Low Emissions Community Plan
- City of Saskatoon Water Conservation Strategy
- Meewasin Northeast Swale Master Plan

Mental Health

- Climate Mental Health Terminology Resource
- Climate Psychiatry Alliance

Videos, Podcasts, and Books

Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds videos:

- Floating Treatment Wetlands
- Forestry and Climate Resiliency
- Rotational Grazing, A Climate Adaption Resiliency Tool

Podcasts

- Nôhcimihk | Into The Bush
- Rural Routes to Climate Solutions
- Regenerative Agriculture

Books

· Corvus by Harold Johnson





