



Photo: Watershed Watch Salmon Society

Dialogue for Regional Action

Reporting Back Summary 1:

Building Collaboration in the Hope Slough Floodplain

August 27, 2025



Photo: Watershed Watch Salmon Society

Executive Summary

On August 27, 2025, the Lower Fraser Floodplains Coalition convened a farmers-only meeting in the Hope Slough area to begin direct dialogue with farmers about flood risk, food security, and ecological restoration. The discussion surfaced strong interest in collaboration alongside clear concerns about funding, maintenance, permitting, and long-term responsibility. The meeting confirmed both the willingness of farmers to engage and the need for coordinated, practical next steps developed with First Nations and supported by government partners.

The Gathering:

On August 27, 2025, a focused meeting was held with farmers in the Hope Slough area to support collaboration between farmers and First Nations around food security, flood protection, and ecosystem restoration. The gathering was designed as a farmers-only space, with staff from Cheam and Skwah attending briefly to introduce themselves and share project context.

The event was facilitated by Dave Zehnder, rancher and advocate for farmer-led conservation, with representation from the Lower Fraser Floodplains Coalition (LFFC) including Gillian Fuss (Emergency Planning Secretariat) and Lina Azeez (Watershed Watch Salmon Society).

Fifteen individuals attended, representing five farms—DeVry Greenhouses, Corners Pride, West River Farms, and Chilliwack Cattle Company—some of the largest and most economically significant agricultural businesses in the region. Outreach included phone calls to 30 contacts across 15 farms and follow-up email invites. Cheam staff familiar with the area expressed strong satisfaction with the level of engagement, noting that the presence of key farms made the meeting meaningful.

The gathering aimed to engage directly with farmers to understand their perspectives and explore opportunities for collaboration. Specifically, we sought to:

- Gauge interest in working with First Nations on shared land and water stewardship.
- Assess interest in participating in ecological restoration projects focused on water quality and flood risk reduction.
- Encourage attendance at future workshops to build momentum with more farmers.
- Listen to farmers’ experiences and concerns, including:
 - Reasons for hesitation toward restoration efforts (if any).
 - Knowledge and perceptions of First Nations and ecological initiatives.
 - Unique operational challenges beyond issues like dredging and flooding.

Summary of Presentations:

The meeting began with an overview of the Hope Slough’s history, led by Roxanna Kooistra (Environmental Manager, Cheam First Nation), who described pre-contact waterways, the impacts of agricultural expansion, and the slough’s ecological importance, including a unique coho salmon run. She also introduced the “Save the Skwahla – Shxwlistexw te Sqwá:la Shxwelí” project focused on caring for the life spirit of the Hope Slough.

The second half of the presentation, led by Dave Zehnder, explored collaborative land and water stewardship solutions such as:

- Transitioning from stream channelization to riparian buffer management
- Designing drainage systems that support fish habitat and water conveyance
- Nature-based strategies for flood-prone farmland, including riparian planting, rain gardens, retention ponds, contour farming, stepped gabion walls, seasonal wetlands, and organic mulching & cover crops



Photo: Watershed Watch Salmon Society

Summary of Discussions:

After the presentations, other partners left the room to allow open farmer dialogue on restoration, flood management, and collaboration. Farmers showed enthusiasm for working together and emphasized the need for inclusive planning and practical support.

Key Discussion Points:

- **Maintenance & Funding:** Farmers questioned who maintains riparian plantings and whether current funding models ensure long-term upkeep. Skepticism remains about partial restoration efforts.
- **Dredging Impacts:** Concerns included inconsistent dredging – either ineffective or too deep, causing ecological harm and crop damage. Some reported city dredging on private land without coordination.
- **Water Quality & Monitoring:** Farmers raised questions about Cheam’s Backwash Slough project, past Fraser River reconnections, and pollution sources, requesting clarity on water monitoring.
- **Engagement & Representation:** Farmers want broad participation and representation. They offered to support with outreach and asked for early meeting notifications.
- **Collaborative Opportunities:** Dave introduced the Farmland Advantage model, highlighting the benefits of direct collaboration and farmer compensation for stewardship.



Dave Zehnder presenting on nature-based solutions

Next Steps:

Participants expressed interest in a follow-up workshop that would bring farmers and First Nations together to build on shared values and co-develop practical floodplain resilience solutions. A potential agenda discussed included open dialogue, collaborative brainstorming, and learning from successful restoration efforts and funding opportunities, aiming to strengthen relationships and identify actionable strategies rooted in mutual respect, land stewardship, and food security.



The Lower Fraser Floodplains Coalition is a group of BC-based organizations and experts with the shared goal of helping BC's upcoming flood recovery and management efforts achieve the best possible outcomes.

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