NEWS RELEASE

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Office of the Premier
Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness

Improvements to Abbotsford pump station build resilience, make people safer

ABBOTSFORD – To help protect people, communities and farmland in the Fraser Valley's Sumas Prairie from future flood events, the Barrowtown Pump Station in Abbotsford will receive significant flood-resilience upgrades.

"The November 2021 Sumas Prairie floods were catastrophic and also could have been much worse if the pump station had failed," said Premier David Eby. "We know that we are going to see more frequent and severe weather events that threaten people's homes, livelihoods and communities. Ensuring that the Barrowtown Pump Station is equipped and ready for the near term, while we do longer-term work on international agreements and modernization, is how we will keep people and this community safe for decades to come."

The Barrowtown Pump Station is a critical piece of infrastructure to the Sumas Prairie's flood-protection system. Originally opened in 1983, the pump station was built to pump water out of the low-lying prairie lands via the Sumas Canal and into the Fraser River but was nearly overwhelmed when flood waters breached the Sumas River dike during the atmospheric rivers of November 2021.

"The 2021 atmospheric river event was devastating to people in the Sumas Prairie and they deserve to know that action is being taken to protect them from a future event," said Bowinn Ma, Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness. "We have been working with communities on dike and infrastructure repairs to build resilience in the face of future flooding events, and these upgrades to the Barrowtown Pump Station are the next concrete action to help ensure the safety of people and B.C.'s vital farmland."

The City of Abbotsford is completing several key improvements to better equip the pump station to withstand severe floodwaters from the nearby Sumas and Nooksack rivers. These improvements include adding a six-metre flood wall, upgrading the debris screens and replacing the pump motors. These upgrades will ensure that the pump is better equipped to protect from future flooding events and will guard against other threats, such as debris from the Nooksack and Sumas rivers and power outages in the surrounding area.

The Province has been working closely with the City of Abbotsford throughout its recovery process, including helping to fund the design and preliminary work in spring 2023 needed for these improvements. The Province is now committing $76.6 million to support these critical upgrades to the pump station. With this latest investment, the Province has provided nearly $180 million to support Abbotsford's recovery from the 2021 atmospheric river events to help protect people and communities for years.

“The Barrowtown Pump Station is one of the most integral parts of our community’s flood-mitigation infrastructure, and increasing Barrowtown’s capacity is critical to protecting our city during any future flooding disasters,” said Ross Siemens, mayor of Abbotsford. “Being able to start this capacity-building work is a significant step and we are grateful to the Government of B.C. for this important investment in our community, in our residents and in our businesses. As a city, we will continue advocating for the other components of our urgent flood-works plan to ensure our families, farmers, businesses and our provincial food system remain secure.”

This builds on previous support for Sumas Prairie communities, including more than 30 dike and infrastructure repairs and building a new water system that ensures reliable water service to more than 165,000 people in Abbotsford, Mission and Matsqui First Nation, as well as providing disaster financial assistance to more than 1,000 families, small businesses and farms across the province.

Floods cross jurisdictional boundaries and this work requires co-operation among multiple partners. In April 2023, the Province along with the Semá:th, Matsqui and Leq'á:mel First Nations, the City of Abbotsford and the City of Chilliwack, established the Sumas River Flood Mitigation Collaborative Framework, a multi-government agreement to support the shared work of making Sumas Prairie more resilient to flooding. The framework is supporting the design of mitigation projects in the Sumas River watershed and timely delivery of watershed recovery programs that protect infrastructure and benefit people, the environment and the farming community.

“We extend our gratitude to all those involved in fighting the good fight in ensuring the safety and security of the public,” said Chief Dalton Silver, Sumas First Nation. “Kw'as hó:y – special thanks to the Province for their efforts to collaborate with us. The upgrades to the pump station are a testament to the effort in safeguarding public well-being, and we appreciate everyone’s dedication to this essential cause.”

Additionally, in October 2023, B.C. was joined by Washington state and seven Indigenous and municipal governments in establishing the Transboundary Flood Initiative, which is addressing flood risks and restoring salmon habitat in the Nooksack and Sumas River watersheds on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border.

Any flood mitigation approaches and designs are being developed in a collaborative forum with the Semá:th, Leq'á:mel, and Matsqui First Nations.

Quotes:

Pam Alexis, Minister of Agriculture and Food and MLA for Abbotsford-Mission –

“It is wonderful to see this commitment to making improvements to the Barrowtown Pump Station. We have worked alongside the community since the moment the pumps were in trouble and this work will go a long way in keeping people and farmland safe. I am grateful that we were able to work collaboratively on solutions with so many important voices at the table.”

Ken Popove, mayor of Chilliwack –

“Abbotsford’s Barrowtown Pump Station is a critical piece of flood-protection infrastructure for each of our communities. The City of Chilliwack is grateful to be part of the Sumas River Flood

Mitigation Collaborative Framework with partners who share our goal, and we are pleased the Province recognizes the importance of this investment as we continue to work toward a safer future for our region."

Quick Facts:

- Upgrades to the Barrowtown Pump Station will increase its capacity and resilience to flooding. The improvements include:
  - adding a six-metre floodwall to reduce the possibility of the station shutting down if the Sumas Prairie is flooded;
  - upgrading the debris screen, or trash rack, to reduce fish access to the pumps and prevent large debris from entering the system intake;
  - replacing pump motors to improve station efficiency and operating flexibility, as well as increasing its overall pumping capacity; and
  - transitioning to a dual substation with the addition of a second BC Hydro power feed, to make the pump station's power supply more robust.

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