

# Resources and nature regs?

## Framing ecological protection in BC in a time of heightened resource extraction

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May 20, 2026

ENVIRONICS  
RESEARCH

 EcoAnalytics

A project of  
 MakeWay

# Agenda



**Context  
& methods**



**Insights  
& guidance**



**Group  
discussion**

# Context & theory of change

- BC's NDP government has a one-seat majority in the legislature
- Is likely to face a more united opposition soon, with new leader taking reins of BC Conservative Party
- Like its federal counterpart, BC is responding to geopolitical / economic pressures & shifts in public opinion
- This includes back-tracking on environmental laws, and reconciliation, in favour of resource development, and PONIs
- Risk of alienating significant number of NDP supporters and others concerned about nature protection.
- **Theory of change:** If BC government believes a majority of voters would back stronger laws protecting nature, as part of a more balanced approach to resource development, then it might pass such laws, to shore up support among concerned members of its base and garner potential support from BC's Green Party.

# Objectives

What this research aims to unlock



# Methodology

## Virtual focus groups — qualitative approach

Environics conducted six online focus groups across BC regions:

### Target Audience:

- Residents aged 18+
- Persuadable middle-grounders
- Identified using EcoAnalytics CA-MAP Segmentation



Progressive  
Activists



Civic  
Nationals



Centrist  
Liberals



Disengaged  
Middle



Populist  
Conservatives

- Mix of age, gender, urban/suburban/rural residents

Group	Region	Date	Participants
1	Metro Vancouver	April 14, 2026	4
2	Surrey	April 14, 2026	6
3	Kelowna	April 15, 2026	6
4	Prince George	April 15, 2026	5
5	BC Southern Interior	April 16, 2025	5
6	Vancouver Island	April 16, 2025	3

# Methodology

## Virtual focus groups — qualitative approach

### Thought journey approach:

Each 90-min session followed a consistent flow starting with their existing baseline views, introducing new information, policies, and reasons to support stronger nature regs throughout the discussion, ending with how their views might have shifted along the journey.

What information did we test to bring participants along the thought journey?	
1	Examples of nature loss and environmental issues
2	Reduction of existing nature protections and fast-tracking of new resource projects
3	30 by 30 conservation goal
4	Reason 1 — Long-term resource development and being able to continue resource development into the future
5	Reason 2 — Protecting what makes BC unique
6	Reason 3 — Reducing risks from resource development and protecting people
7	Conservation economy concept

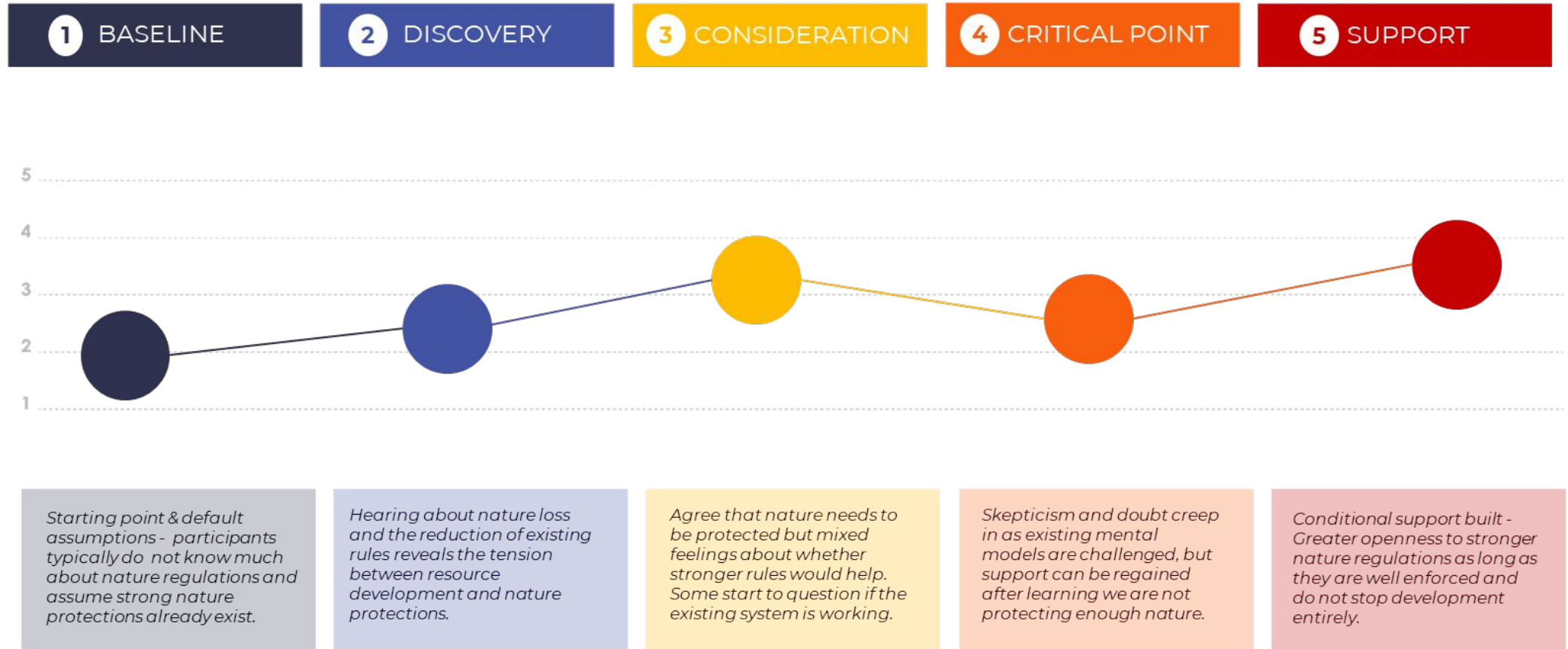
# Insights

Public knowledge and perceptions of resource development,  
and the case for tougher nature regs

# Thought journey

## Stronger nature regulations

THOUGHT JOURNEY  
ALIGNMENT SCALE (1=LOW, 5=HIGH)



# Mental blocks & sticking points

## What made it harder to support stronger nature regs?

- General lack of knowledge on the state of nature protection regulations in BC
- Common belief that strong nature regulations already exist but aren't adequately enforced
- Examples of nature loss are clear but feel difficult to act on
- Nature protection is not instinctively linked to economic benefits

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“It's cheaper to just pay the fine than to fix the problem. So [corporations] keep doing it.” Centrist Liberal, Vancouver Island

“

I don't always know what would actually fix these problems in the long run.” Civic National, Kelowna

“

“I get the idea, but it's not how I usually think about the environment.” Centrist Liberal, Surrey

“

“There's always going to be risks—fires, flooding, things like that. I don't know that more rules would actually stop that.” Centrist Liberal, Vancouver

# Tactics that increased openness

## What makes it easier to support stronger nature regs?

- Reinforcing the intrinsic value of nature (protecting nature for nature's sake) creates emotional buy-in
- Reminders that BC is unique increases local and personal connection
- Learning that seemingly lofty conservation goals are actually the bare scientific minimum increases credibility
- Hearing current progress towards the 30 by 30 goal (only 16%) increases urgency
- Building on existing mental models instead of challenging them leads to simple and intuitive narratives
- Learning that new resource projects are being fast-tracked signals risk

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“Protecting nature because it's who we are — that feels more honest than trying to tie it back to money.” Centrist Liberal, Prince George

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“Once you hear that it's actually the minimum needed, it doesn't feel extreme anymore.” Centrist Liberal, Prince George

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“When you hear about things being fast-tracked, it makes you wonder what's being skipped.” Disengaged Middle, Vancouver Island

# Frames and messages

Communications guidance

# Frame & message selection

The frames, messages and strategic notes that follow aim to:

- Help NGOs advocate for stronger nature regs with decision-makers in the BC government; and...
- Model for you (and government) promising frames and messages for engaging with key voting segments.

The research indicates that voters in smaller cities in the BC interior may experience the impacts of resource development and climate change more keenly than those in Metro Van and southern Vancouver Island.

Be mindful of such regional differences when engaging with different urban communities & decision-makers.

# Frame: Super, natural British Columbia

**Framing statement:** Strong nature protection is important because BC's lands, waters and wildlife are part of what makes our province unique — and we need to protect this for future generations.

**Appeal:** Frame appeals to what people love most about BC, and to their pride, and is logical and feasible, and familiar.

**Sticking point:** It is familiar and doesn't foreground the destruction of ecosystems being wrought by industry and climate change impacts; so it could lull people into a sense of *business as usual*, rather than emergency.

# Frame: Super, natural BC



## Main messages:

- As British Columbians, we have a responsibility to protect nature in our province — our greatest legacy.
- And not just for ourselves but future generations, as our children and theirs deserve the same clean air, safe water, and healthy forests, lakes and oceans that we've enjoyed.
- People all of the world come here to experience BC's natural splendour, creating jobs and prosperity — destroying this puts our future at risk.
- Nature in BC is a huge *natural* asset at a time when Canada's sovereignty could depend on wise stewardship of its resources: balancing economic development with protection.
- We also need to protect nature for nature's sake – to remain super, natural.

# Super, natural BC

Decision-maker's concern	Response
<p>This is a <i>motherhood</i> frame, one that everyone can get behind, but it might not motivate the support needed for specific legislative reforms needed to really protect ecosystems.</p> <p>Super, natural British Columbia is a dated frame. At a time of high prices, tariffs, and fear mongering about property rights, this may not hold people's attention.</p>	<p>If the frame is compelling it can accommodate diverse messages that help people understand the need for ecological protections, and get behind them.</p> <p>This frame also personalizes the issue, adding to its power.</p> <p>Actually, it may hold their attention, partly <i>because of</i> those other negative concerns: its positive, and reminds people of all political stripes about something they cherish, something unique and accessible to all.</p>

# Frame: Reducing risk, protecting communities

**Framing statement:** Strong nature protection, strictly enforced, reduces the risks of resource development — pollution, contaminated water, wildfires, flooding, etc. It establishes guardrails to protect the natural resources that BC communities depend on, while enabling responsible growth.

**Appeal:** Less emotive than the first frame, this was viewed as a reasonable and balanced argument, one that alludes to the economic and environmental benefits of nature protection (if enforced). People liked the guardrails metaphor as it doesn't prohibit development; and are opposed to development *at any cost*.

**Sticking point:** This appeals more to people's heads, than their hearts, and doesn't evoke powerful images or memories as does the previous frame.

# Frame: Reducing risk, protecting communities



## Main messages:

- Ecological guardrails, or strong laws protecting nature, provide balance: encouraging responsible resource development that doesn't degrade the air, water and nature that healthy communities depend on.
- Sturdy guardrails, including strong enforcement of nature laws, are what is needed to foster responsible growth.
- Local economies and communities, as well as natural systems, can suffer when large corporations — loggers, miners, oil and gas companies, utilities — are not publicly accountable.

# Frame: Reducing risk, protecting communities

Decision-maker's concern	Response
<p>Voters may support the notion of guardrails, but be opposed to establishing them locally, when the trade-offs between jobs and the environment become clear.</p> <p>British Columbians may not be so risk averse. Most know that you can't make any omelette, without breaking a few eggs, or strengthen Canada's economy and national sovereignty without doing things a little differently.</p>	<p>Research suggests the concept of guardrails is viewed as rational and balanced by middle-ground voters, so government communicators should be able to make the case for them, even at the local level.</p> <p>That could be true. But our research indicates that BC voters do not support resource development at any cost. And that folks in the moveable middle could move against a government that is perceived as reckless: one that ignore the need for ecological guardrails, including stronger enforcement, .</p>

# Frame: Duty to protect (30 by 30)

**Framing statement:** British Columbia has committed to protect 30% of its land and waters by 2030. We have a duty to protect this as it's the bare minimum that scientists say is needed for the survival of our province's unique natural systems, and just under 16% is currently protected.

**Appeal:** The goal is perceived as prudent, and the minimum we should protect, when people understand the science-based rationale behind it.

**Sticking point:** It needs explanation. Few middle-grounders have heard of 30 by 30, fewer still the reasons underpinning the goal; so most view it with skepticism initially, and as a possible barrier to resource development.

# Frame: Duty to protect (30 by 30)



## Main messages:

- BC's goal, known as 30 by 30, is part of a national and international commitment to protect nature.
- Scientists agree that 30% of lands and water is the *absolute minimum* that needs to be put off limits for ecological systems to avoid irreversible damage from climate change and industrial development, etc.
- The federal government, BC and other provinces have committed to reach this goal but progress has been slow.
- The 30% includes BC parks, conservancies, and designated protected areas that are generally off limits to industry, but open for recreation.
- The goal leaves plenty of room for resource development, therefore, as well as other benefits for local communities — access for families, camping, hiking and tourism, etc.

# Frame: Duty to protect (30 by 30)

Decision-maker's concern	Response
<p>Few people have heard of BC's biodiversity commitment under the 30 by 30 goals, even though the NDP government has vowed to meet the target—ahead of any other province. So this isn't really on the political radar in this province.</p>	<p>Our research indicates that when folks in the middle ground learn details about 30 by 30, they become highly concerned, quickly: e.g., that 30% is the absolute bare minimum needed to protect ecosystems in BC, and that this province is barely halfway to meeting its goal, with less than four years to go.</p>

# Frame: Tough laws protect against fast-tracking

**Framing statement:** Stronger laws, including tougher enforcement, are needed at a time when fast-tracking of resource projects could allow large corporations to destroy nature, and pollute our air and water.

**Appeal:** Participants were concerned with the mention of “fast-tracking” resource projects, as they associated this with corporate bad behaviour that could put at risk nature and communities.

**Sticking point:** Nearly all participants support resource development and expect governments to sweep aside unnecessary barriers to this (e.g., lengthy environmental assessment).

# Frame: Tough laws protect against fast-tracking



## Main messages:

- Environmental assessments and regulations are designed to protect nature and communities from resource development done irresponsibly and ill effects of this: polluted air, contaminated water, destruction of nature.
- We need to streamline processes (without undermining good assessments and consultation) to get projects done, properly, but...
- Fast-tracking of projects allows corporations to cut corners and take unnecessary risks.
- Strong laws and tough enforcement prevent fast-tracking, and increase public accountability.
- ...Ensuring that resource development is in the best interests of local communities and all British Columbians.
- BC deserves environmental law enforcement with the same teeth as the laws that protect us from foodborne illnesses, toxic chemicals and poisoning.

# Frame: Tough laws protect against fast-tracking

Decision-maker's concern	Response
<p>People may be opposed to fast-tracking, but they strongly support the removal of barriers to speed up resource development; so this strategic frame could be easily neutralized by creative opponents of further regulation (and government communicators).</p>	<p>Complacency is dangerous. Research shows that people throughout BC — most notably in cities in the interior — are noticing nature being overwhelmed by the effects of human activity — e.g., unprecedented wildfires caused by climate change, permitted logging of the last old growth forests, weak regs that led to the Mt Polley Mine disaster — and expect governments to protect against this damage, e.g. by actually enforcing existing laws.</p> <p><i>Fast-tracking</i> triggers some people in the moveable middle, those who feel indignant about corporations breaking the law with impunity</p> <p>It's better for governments to fear the ire of these law-abiding citizens.</p>

# Final notes

If the “conservation economy” frame doesn’t cut it, what next?:

- Test the proposed frames with your audiences, and, ideally, in a provincial survey
- Look for ways to further educate voters about the state of nature and risks of unbridled resource development
- Remember BC voters don’t automatically link *healthy nature* to a healthy economy...
- But the more they know the more they will likely opt for protection.
- Build more bridges with voters in Prince George, Kelowna and the Kootenays
- Do this by preparing for teachable moments, e.g. wildfires — with care.

# Questions?