

June 26, 2026

The Honourable David Eby, Premier of the Province of British Columbia  
The Honourable Ravi Parmar, Minister of Forests  
The Honourable Randene Neill, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship  
PO Box 9041 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Via email: [premier@gov.bc.ca](mailto:premier@gov.bc.ca)

Dear Premier Eby and Ministers:

**RE: Urgent request for emergency enforcement and watershed protection at the Banon Creek Forest Service Road access**

On behalf of the Town of Ladysmith, I am writing to bring urgent attention to an escalating crisis within our municipal watershed that presents an immediate, catastrophic risk of wildfire and/or water contamination.

## Background

The Town of Ladysmith obtains its drinking water from the Stocking Lake and Holland Lake watersheds, which are accessed via the Banon Creek Forest Service Road (FSR).

Together, these watersheds, located outside Town boundaries and managed under provincial timber licences held by private forestry companies and Indigenous forestry operators, supply drinking water to approximately 12,000 residents across the Town of Ladysmith, Stz'uminus First Nation, the Diamond Improvement District, and the Saltair area within the Cowichan Valley Regional District.

The continuous presence of unauthorized, long-term encampments within this sensitive ecosystem has created an untenable situation that poses significant risk to human life and infrastructure.

- **Wildfire risk**

The BC Drought Map shows that Ladysmith area is already in Drought Level 4 at mid-June. The continued presence of unregulated human activity in remote, dry, and heavily forested provincial lands significantly increases the likelihood of ignition during peak fire conditions. Activities such as open flames, cooking fires, smoking, and unmanaged fuel use occur without oversight in an area with limited suppression access and constrained egress routes. In the event of ignition, fire could rapidly spread through surrounding woodlots and forest stands, threatening

critical watershed infrastructure, compromising drinking water supply systems, and placing nearby communities and response personnel at immediate risk.

- **Water contamination risk**

The accumulation of waste, illegal dumping, derelict vehicles, and unmanaged sanitation practices within the watershed corridor poses a direct and ongoing threat to source water quality. Hazardous materials, human waste, and debris can enter local waterways through surface runoff, particularly during rainfall events or seasonal flooding. Given the proximity to municipal intake infrastructure, any contamination event could compromise potable water supply, requiring costly treatment interventions, potential service disruptions, and long-term remediation efforts to restore water quality standards.

- **Demand on agency resources:**

- Local RCMP resources remain significantly strained, with more than 120 call-outs to the Banon Creek FSR area over the past year.
- On May 19, 2026, South Island Natural Resource District Manager implemented a temporary closure of the Banon Creek Forest Service Road gate under Section 22.2 of the *Forest and Range Practices Act (FRPA)*, restricting motorized access to the area.
- On June 4, 2026, Town of Ladysmith Fire/Rescue provided fire suppression support at the request of BC Wildfire Services to protect inorganics in the encampment location as a health and safety measure for an active wildfire along the Banon Creek FSR.

The Town recognizes that the temporary closure of Banon Creek FSR was a necessary but difficult decision, supported by local stakeholders, First Nations, and the RCMP. We appreciate the continued efforts of the RCMP, local service agencies, and ministry staff as they work with individuals at the encampments, encouraging them to leave the area safely and helping connect them with supports during this transition.

### Current Situation

Since the gate was secured on May 19, 2026, conditions within the Banon Creek Forest Service Road area have continued to deteriorate. Despite the implementation of access controls, these measures are failing against escalating active criminal defiance.

- **Repeated vandalism**

Gate locks have been intentionally cut and removed on at least six separate occasions. The locks are cut less than 24 hours after installation.

- **Targeted damage**  
Since the installation of a newly fabricated high-security locking system, the infrastructure has been deliberately damaged and rendered inoperable on three additional occasions. In one instance, Ladysmith Fire/Rescue and the RCMP were responding to an emergency call on Banon Creek Forest Service Road but were delayed because the gate could not be opened due to vandalism of the locking mechanism. This type of access failure creates a serious and potentially life-threatening risk to emergency response and public safety.
- **Staff safety concerns**  
In recent days, Town staff accessing the watershed and treatment facility have encountered increasingly volatile conditions at the site, with large gatherings of individuals and instances of intimidation. Town staff attend this location without protective equipment or security support, creating a serious occupational health and safety concern.
- **Provincial outreach**  
Teams from the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction continue to provide housing and support services, many individuals are relocating within the provincial forest rather than exiting the area. The current 14-day camping provisions under the *Land Act* are being used in a way that undermines enforcement efforts, resulting in an unrelenting cycle of displacement and environmental and safety risks.
- **Immediate threat to over 12,000 citizens**  
The ongoing presence of unauthorized, long-term encampments within the watershed presents a clear and escalating risk to public health, safety, and critical infrastructure serving more than 12,000 residents across the Town of Ladysmith, Stz'uminus First Nation, the Diamond Improvement District, and the Saltair area within the Cowichan Valley Regional District. The combination of sustained illegal human activity, environmental degradation, and limited enforceable access control creates conditions in which a single incident could trigger severe and potentially irreversible consequences.

### Our Requests

The Town of Ladysmith is facing a serious and urgent situation. We are acutely concerned that continued provincial inaction could lead to a catastrophic wildfire, significant damage to the Town's water infrastructure, or serious injury or loss of life.



It is for these reasons that the Town is requesting the following actions be taken immediately by the province:

### 1. Emergency infrastructure funding

Immediate capital to install military-grade, tamper-proof barriers, heavy-duty automated gates, and continuous remote camera monitoring at the Banon Forest Service Road access point.

### 2. Dedicated enforcement resourcing

Increased, sustained physical patrols by Natural Resource Officers and specialized provincial conservation personnel to support the overburdened local RCMP.

### 3. Special electoral/district variance

Legal mechanisms or expedited trespass notices that supersede standard 14-day *Land Act* camping permissions within designated municipal watersheds due to the extreme, overlapping threats to public health and safety.

### Conclusion

The Town of Ladysmith cannot afford to wait any longer for action. It is neither prudent nor acceptable to rely on a catastrophic wildfire or a compromised water system to spark retroactive policy responses.

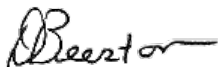
The Province has already acknowledged the severity of the risk by closing the road; it must now ensure that this measure is supported by the necessary physical infrastructure, enforcement capacity, and operational resources required to make the closure effective.

The Town cannot continue to accept conditions that place residents of all affected communities and others at daily risk.

The Town will continue to strongly advocate for action from the Province until the situation improves in a meaningful and measurable way.

The Town of Ladysmith looks forward to your prompt response and to a commitment to protecting the water, land, and lives of the Ladysmith-area communities.

Sincerely,



Deena Beeston  
Mayor

cc: Town of Ladysmith Council, Stz'uminus First Nation, Halalt First Nation, South Island Natural Resource District Manager, Ladysmith RCMP, Island Health, Cowichan Valley Regional District