

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: J. Zaffino, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: February 5, 2026

RE: Board support to Sign Orphan Dike Advocacy Letter & Request for Province to Assume Responsibility

Administrative Recommendation:

THAT the Board authorize the Chair to sign the Orphan Dike Advocacy Letter addressed to the Honorable David Eby, Premier of British Columbia, requesting that the Province assume responsibility for orphan dikes and establish a Provincial management program; and,

THAT the CAO be directed to forward the letter to First Nations and Regional Districts across British Columbia, requesting their support and authorization to include their names and logos as signatories; and,

THAT regional districts be asked to contact their member municipalities to encourage their endorsement and authorization to add their names and logos to the collective letter.

Purpose:

To obtain Board authorization for the Chair to sign the Provincial Orphan Dike Advocacy Letter and to coordinate participation from First Nations, Regional Districts, and municipalities. Across British Columbia, more than 100 orphan dikes—totalling approximately 85 kilometres—lack an identified owner, diking authority, or long-term maintenance program. Their deteriorating condition presents significant risks to public safety, infrastructure, and emergency response capacity.

Strategic Priorities:

3.3 Influence Other Orders of Government

ANALYSIS: WHY THE PROVINCE MUST ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY

1. Public Safety Requires Single Responsible Authority

Orphan dikes currently exist in a governance vacuum, with no assigned owner, operator, or qualified diking authority responsible for inspection, maintenance, emergency repair, or long-term capital

upgrades. When structures intended to protect communities from floods have no oversight, the result is uneven standards, inconsistent, or no monitoring, and heightened vulnerability.

The Province's own Fraser Basin Council Flood Risk Assessment identified that many orphan dikes do not meet Provincial safety requirements, lack engineering documentation, and have not been regularly inspected or certified. Without a single authority accountable for maintaining these structures to consistent Provincial standards, communities face unnecessary and avoidable risk.

Centralized responsibility at the Provincial level would ensure uniform engineering practice, risk-based prioritization, and coordinated emergency response across British Columbia's watershed systems — something no individual local government, particularly small or rural jurisdictions, can provide.

2. Local Governments & First Nations Cannot Shoulder the Burden.

Restoring, upgrading, and maintaining orphan dikes requires specialized engineering expertise, ongoing inspection regimes, and significant capital investment. The UBCM and multiple Provincial studies have repeatedly concluded that the financial burden far exceeds the capacity of local governments and First Nations communities.

This especially is true for smaller Indigenous, Regional Districts, and Municipalities with limited tax bases. For these jurisdictions, assuming responsibility would require unsustainable tax increases or reallocation of scarce funds away from critical services.

Furthermore, many communities lack internal technical staff qualified in dike inspection, hydrotechnical engineering, or flood hazard management. As a result, even if funding were available, these communities could not safely or efficiently take over orphan dike responsibility.

Only the Province has the scale, expertise, and fiscal capacity to manage such significant Provincial-scale infrastructure safely and equitably.

3. These Structures Are Often on Crown Land.

A large portion of British Columbia's orphan dikes were constructed decades ago on Crown land, often during past flood emergencies or Federal/Provincial public works programs. First Nations and local

governments do not have jurisdictional authority on these Crown parcels, nor do they derive taxation benefit from the land.

It is unreasonable and legally unclear for First Nations or Local governments to assume responsibility for infrastructure they do not own, cannot legally control, and in many cases cannot access without permission.

This situation creates a governance gap where no level of government has clear authority to intervene, despite the structures posing a public safety risk. Provincial ownership of Crown land means the Province is the only entity with the authority necessary to manage these assets properly.

4. Provincial Risk Assessment Already Identifies the Threat.

The Province funded and received the Fraser Basin Council's Provincial flood and dike risk assessment, which concluded that many orphan dikes are structurally deficient, poorly documented, and high-risk. Despite this, no Provincial program has been implemented to address the findings.

This creates a contradiction:

- The Province has explicit knowledge of the risks.
- The Province has not implemented a long-term stewardship solution.
- Communities remain exposed to hazards identified by Provincial analysis.

Given that the Province already relies on engineering-based flood hazard assessments to guide investment decisions in other areas (e.g., major river systems, coastal flood infrastructure), extending Provincial responsibility to orphan dikes is a logical continuation of existing risk management practice.

5. Coordinated Provincial Stewardship Prevents Future Failures.

The 2021 failure of the Similkameen River orphan dike illustrates the consequences of fragmented responsibility. Without clear oversight, maintenance schedules lapse, structural deficiencies go unaddressed, and no authority steps in until after a disaster occurs.

A Provincial coordinated program would:

- Apply consistent engineering standards province-wide
- Establish long-term maintenance cycles
- Prioritize upgrades based on province-wide hazard assessments
- Provide predictable funding for capital improvements

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- Ensure integrated emergency response coordination
 - Reduce long-term disaster recovery costs that ultimately fall to the Province anyway

A proactive, province-led approach is more cost-effective, more efficient, and more protective of communities compared with the reactive, ad hoc system currently in place.

Financial Implications:

There are no direct financial implications for the RDOS in signing or circulating the letter.

Communication Strategy:

Information will be posted on the RDOS website, social media channels, and sent to local media via email.

Alternatives:

THAT the Board does not authorize the Chair to sign the Orphan Dike Advocacy Letter addressed to the Honorable David Eby, Premier of British Columbia, requesting that the Province assume responsibility for orphan dikes and establish a Provincial management program.

Will a PowerPoint presentation be presented at the meeting? No

Written by staff and reviewed by Copilot - Yes.

Respectfully submitted:

Jim Zaffino

J. Zaffino, Chief Administrative Officer