

From: Joanne Malar <jmalar@rdos.bc.ca>

Sent: Wednesday, February 11, 2026 12:35 PM

Subject: Request for support: Orphan Dike Advocacy Letter

Hello Regional District CAOs,

The Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) has received board approval to send an **Orphan Dike Advocacy Letter** to the Honourable David Eby, Premier of BC, requesting that the Province assume responsibility for orphan dikes and establish a provincial management program (see RDOS administrative report attached and RDOS motion below from February 5, 2026).

The RDOS is reaching out to all Regional Districts in British Columbia to request your support and authorization to include your name and logo as signatories on this advocacy letter (see draft letter attached).

We are kindly seeking your support to:

- Request that your board authorize your Regional District to support this advocacy letter and include your RD's name and logo as signatories
- Ask your member municipalities to seek endorsement from their councils to support this advocacy letter
- Please provide your intentions of support to communications@rdos.bc.ca

The RDOS has also sent out a letter to First Nation communities requesting the same support.

Effective management of orphan dikes is critical for Regional Districts, as unmanaged and ownerless flood protection infrastructure poses significant risks to life safety, homes, agriculture, transportation corridors, and shared critical infrastructure. Given incomplete provincial inventories and the legacy nature of flood protection works, no Regional District in British Columbia can conclusively demonstrate the absence of orphan dikes within its jurisdiction. These risks extend beyond jurisdictional boundaries: even Regional Districts without known orphan dikes may be impacted by downstream or regional failures, which can trigger widespread flooding, strain emergency response and recovery resources, and cause economic disruption that exceeds local capacity. As a result, orphan dike management represents a collective, province-wide concern requiring coordinated stewardship, governance, and long-term investment.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Your support is invaluable to address this critical issue.



Sincerely,

Joanne Malar on behalf of RDOS CAO, Jim Zaffino

One Region Working Together

Joanne Malar (she/her) ● Communications Coordinator

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The RDOS is located within the traditional and ancestral territory of the syilx Okanagan and sməłqmíx peoples.

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RDOS MOTION

(Unweighted Corporate Vote - Simple Majority)

- **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.

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

-
- 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

Date: TBA

To: The Honorable David Eby

Premier of British Columbia

Office of the Premier

PO Box 9041 STN Prov Gov't

Victoria BC V8W 9E1

Province of British Columbia

Re: Provincial leadership needed for orphan dike responsibility and long-term flood protection

Dear Premier

We, the undersigned First Nations, Municipal, and Regional District governments across British Columbia, are writing to collectively express our deep concern regarding the condition, safety risks, and lack of governance surrounding orphan dikes, many of which are located on Crown land.

British Columbia has more than 100 orphan dikes structures, totaling approximately 85km in length, however, there is no identified diking authority, no responsible owner, and no long-term maintenance plan. Many of these dikes were constructed during historical emergency events without engineering standards and now fail to meet provincial safety requirements.

The Fraser Basin Council's provincial risk assessment, funded by the Province, confirmed widespread deficiencies and highlighted the significant risk these structures pose to communities, yet no long-term strategy or provincial stewardship program has followed.

The Province is stating that the responsibility for orphan dikes lies with local governments. However, orphan dikes, especially those on Crown land, fall outside any jurisdiction, leaving communities vulnerable. An example is the 2021 failure of the Similkameen River orphan dike, which resulted in severe flooding and property damage. The failure of the orphan dike is evidence of the real danger posed when no authority is responsible for these structures.

First Nations and local governments cannot assume responsibility for these assets. The Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) and provincial reviews clearly state that the costs of restoring, upgrading, and maintaining orphan dikes far exceed the financial capacity of local jurisdictions.

Compounding this, a dike failure presents a direct risk to life safety, homes, agricultural land, transportation networks, and community infrastructure. Fragmented responsibility and unclear

ownership are unacceptable given the risks. A single point of responsibility is necessary to ensure consistent standards, proper engineering oversight, and effective emergency response.

Accordingly, we formally request that the Province of British Columbia:

1. Assume full responsibility for all orphan dike.
2. Establish and fund in conjunction with a provincial orphan dike management program including upgrades, rehabilitation, and long-term maintenance.
3. Ensure the program includes stable, predictable provincial funding for ongoing operations and emergency preparedness.
4. Designate a single accountable provincial authority for oversight and maintenance of these structures.
5. Engage in meaningful collaboration with First Nations, municipalities, and regional districts throughout implementation.

We urge the Province to take immediate action to address these longstanding safety and governance gaps and to protect the lives, property, and economies of communities throughout the province.

We look forward to your leadership and stand ready to collaborate on this critical matter.

Respectfully,

[Signing First Nations / Municipal / Regional District]

[Names and Titles of Authorized Representatives]