

New Westminster-Coquitlam Riding

Jennifer Whiteside - NDP

1. Environmental Leadership

What qualifications or experiences make you a strong candidate for voters who prioritize environmental issues in British Columbia?

I feel very fortunate to live on the banks of the Fraser River. I see daily the critical importance of this ecosystem, and I'm grateful in particular for the lessons from local First Nations about the importance of protecting our environment. As a candidate (person?) deeply committed to environmental stewardship, I believe that all voters should prioritize environmental issues—not just during election season but in our daily lives. The BC NDP and I are dedicated to protecting BC's rich land, air, water, wildlife, and biodiversity while respecting the cultural diversity that makes our province unique. Our ecosystems require careful stewardship, and as voters and citizens, we all share responsibility for this vital work.

The energy and passion of youth climate activists like the Monkey Rebel Club in New West constantly inspire me. Their commitment to safeguarding our planet pushes me to fight harder for stronger environmental policies.

We can't solve these issues in Victoria. We're moving away from a top-down approach. Instead, we are focused on bringing local people to the table—First Nations, local governments, community organizations, residents, and businesses—to set local priorities and create solutions that reflect the unique needs of each ecosystem and community.

With this collaborative approach and our commitment to building a clean-energy economy and holding polluters accountable, I'm proud to stand as a candidate for those who value environmental protection. Together, we are building a sustainable, resilient future for all British Columbians.

2. Environmental Challenges

a) In your view, what is the most pressing environmental challenge facing British Columbia, and how would you address it?

BC is a great place to live. But, life continues to be tough for many people. When families are worried about affording rent or finding childcare, tackling crises like climate change can feel overwhelming – and some people wonder: Does my family have to choose between a healthy environment and putting food on the table or a roof over our heads?

John Rustad is happy to stoke these fears, falsely presenting environmental protection as a threat to the livelihoods of people. Unlike Rustad, who called the protection of critical lands and waters “nonsense,” we don’t believe a healthy environment and a sustainable economy are at odds. We plan to preserve at-risk lands, protect watersheds, strengthen partnerships with First Nations, and work together with young people on actions to preserve ecosystems for future generations.

To do this successfully, we have to avoid either/or thinking. We can create enough affordable homes in our neighbourhoods for young people to live near their parents and grandparents, while preserving green spaces. We can make sure people have good jobs with stable incomes without destroying habitat or wiping out biodiversity. One of the most pressing environmental challenges facing BC is division, which can be addressed by pursuing innovative ways to meet the needs of people and nature at the same time. After all, people aren’t separate from the environment. We’re part of it.

b) What do you see as the most significant environmental challenge in your local riding, and what steps would you take to address it?

As our region grows, preserving our green spaces is more important than ever. I’m proud that New West received \$1.005 million in provincial funding for urban reforestation to improve our tree canopy. Reclaiming areas like Glenbrooke Ravine and the Fraser River foreshore support access to greenspace for our community. Keeping these spaces green and accessible is key to maintaining our quality of life.

I’m also committed to investing in sustainable transportation. Projects like the Agnes Street Greenway promote active transportation by creating safer routes for pedestrians and cyclists. Expanding public

transit and supporting initiatives like these not only reduce emissions but also help build more liveable, connected communities.

As your advocate, I'll continue to fight for a future where development goes hand-in-hand with protecting the environment so that the region remains a city where both nature and residents can thrive.

3. Tree Canopy and Housing Legislation

Recent provincial housing legislation (Bills 44 and 47) permits increased density and larger building footprints without tree protections or minimum planting requirements, potentially reducing tree canopy. Metro Vancouver aims for a 40% tree canopy cover to enhance human health and environmental resilience. What role do you believe the Provincial Government should play in achieving this climate-ready target?

Bills 44 and 47 will help us build enough housing for our rapidly growing population, without contributing to urban sprawl. Gentle density – made possible by encouraging more duplexes, triplexes, and four-plexes – is one of the best ways to promote sustainability and protect green space in residential neighbourhoods.

Planning early and thoughtfully for densification helps governments avoid planning for population growth in panic mode at the 11th hour – a challenge that is more likely to result in skyscrapers and more significant compromises on green space. There's a saying among local urban planners that holds true for Bills 44 and 47: If you want to avoid towers and blacktops in your neighbourhood 10 years from now, support zoning for duplexes, triplexes, and four-plexes now.

The City of Coquitlam has a robust plan for maintaining residential tree canopy – surely due to advocacy from environmental groups like the Burke Mountain Naturalists, RHCS, the Wondrous Tree Fellowship, and others. Bills 44 and 47 do not conflict with those bylaws; they will make it possible to uphold them.

4. Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework

The Provincial Government has introduced a draft Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework. If you support this Framework, what

steps would you advocate for its implementation? If you do not support it, what alternative policies would you propose?

The BC NDP government developed the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework, in partnership with First Nations, community organizations, local governments, scientists, and others. We support this Framework and look forward to further work on it in the upcoming years, if elected. We would seek to implement it the same way it was created – collaboratively, encouraging customized solutions that meet the needs of local ecosystems.

John Rustad would tear up this critical work. We can't afford to let him do that.

5. Nature-Based Solutions

"Nature-based solutions," such as the restoration, conservation, and management of wetlands, grasslands, coastlines, and forests, are essential tools in mitigating and adapting to climate change while supporting biodiversity. How do you envision the Province promoting nature-based solutions to develop climate-resilient communities?

David Eby and the BC NDP are excited about nature-based solutions to climate change. The principles within the draft Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework align well with nature-based solutions. These principles prioritize strong relationships; recognize that people, land, and water are interconnected; encourage flexible and targeted solutions to local matters rather than a one-size-fits-all approach; and highlight long-term solutions that are sustainable over generations.

We have plans to protect critical, at-risk ecosystems, take a more sustainable and innovative approach to natural resource sectors, and support more people to choose careers in sustainability and environmental stewardship.

John Rustad has a proven track record of prioritizing profits over people, animals, waters, and lands. He's promised to get rid of the environmental regulations currently in place, help big businesses suck big money out of the land with very little accountability, and resume a reckless approach to forestry and other natural resource industries. Care

of the environment under Rustad's watch wouldn't even be sustainable for a decade, let alone generations.

Rustad is an environmental risk we can't afford.

6. Climate Change Acknowledgment and Responsibility

Do you agree that climate change, including increased temperature variability, droughts, floods, wildfires, and biodiversity loss, is primarily driven by human activity? What responsibilities do you believe all levels of government have in helping communities mitigate and adapt to these changes, and what specific role should the Provincial Government play?

David Eby and the BC NDP take climate change very seriously. Unlike John Rustad, who believes humans have no influence on climate change – past, present, or future – we know that climate change is a global crisis fueled by human activity; it's something we're all responsible and accountable for.

We take it so seriously that the BC NDP has two cabinet positions with a mandate to prevent, mitigate, and respond to the impacts of climate change – the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy and the Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Change Readiness.

Environmental protection is a matter that spans all governmental jurisdictions – local, provincial, federal, and First Nations. The Province should play a role in preserving biodiversity and habitats, facilitating education, spurring innovation and growing clean energy, and strengthening partnerships with First Nations and other governments so that we learn collectively and take action together. Please spend some time looking through our platform when it is released in the coming days.

We should be deeply concerned about entrusting our sensitive ecosystems, at-risk lands, precious watersheds, and all the diverse communities and cultures that depend on them, to a party that takes its cues on climate change and science more generally from the backwaters of the internet. We can't afford to bury our heads in the sand anymore on climate change, which means we can't afford to have John Rustad in charge.

