



Chair & Committee Reports

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Co-chairs report for 2025

First Things First Okanagan was born in the living rooms of concerned citizens just over 10 years ago. The founders were worried about the future of the planet, for without a livable planet, all else is secondary. And, as the sayings go, we can think globally and act locally--and the antidote to despair is action.

The ensuing ten years have been busy. Board members and volunteers have educated ourselves and others, doing outreach at Farmers' Markets, Earth Days, home shows, nature events, schools and service clubs. We have sponsored films, book clubs, zoom "Deep Dive" presentations, web presence and candidate forums. We have advocated for progressive climate policies and plans to local governments and joined them when possible. We have written letters, signed petitions, and intervened on BCUC (BC Utilities Commission) proceedings on new pipelines and "renewable natural" gas. We have built connections with others committed to climate action.

It would be wonderful if the need for all this work had diminished over the past ten years and the world were on track to meet its climate goals. Unfortunately, there is much more to be done. Now is not the time to give up and our voice has never been more important.

Many thanks to all who have helped First Things First thrive over the years--the Board members, volunteers, and concerned community members who have all been part of it. Together, we will continue to seek a better future for our children and the world we share with other living beings. Join us.

CO-CHAIRS: Khati Hendry and Margaret Holm

- SORCO open house at the South Okanagan Raptor Rehabilitation Centre near Oliver. Support the Burrowing Owl Conservation and chat about how climate is causing habitat change.
- May was also Meadowlark Festival. We joined Benoit Gauthier at Noble Ridge Winery to learn about regenerative farming practices to protect fruit orchards and vineyards.
- Sunshine Rotary slide presentation about how climate change is affecting the Valley and the planet.
- Farmer's Markets in Naramata, Summerland and Penticton through the summer educated the public on personal actions they can take on emission reductions, Emilee was our student staff for the summer and helped set up and tear down the tent, set up info, and chat with the public about climate solutions. Volunteers make the tabling successful.
- August was **Connect the Dots** Picnic at Skaha Lake Pavilion with Seniors for Climate South Okanagan. Games, food, and wind! Fun and Flags of Hope.
- September was the documentary screening and evening with a UBC hydrologist and the director of *Trouble in the Headwaters*. Dr. Younes Alila's spirited revelations of the threat that clearcutting poses for communities facing huge expensive flood disasters, especially Grand Forks which experienced multiple floods from Kettle River clearcut forests 100s of kilometres away. Over 120 people attended.



- *Incandescence* documentary screening was part of the Okanagan College Speakers Series. It is a powerful BC-made NFB film of the 2021 White Rock Lake Fire and the 2023 McDougall Creek Fire, showcasing the impact of wildfires on the region and exploring themes of fire stewardship and community resilience.

- Penticton joined Council of Canadians South Okanagan and dozens of cities across Canada in protest to **Draw the Line** for climate action, peace, migrant rights, jobs, Indigenous rights, and



democracy. About 80 people came to Veterans Park to speak to their concern, sing songs, and connect. September 20.

- November 18 was a province-wide protest to protect Old Growth Forests. Dozen of people came to Penticton from Kelowna, West Kelowna, Princeton, Osoyoos, and Oliver to add their voices to protect watersheds and biodiversity.



2025 EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

Committee Members: Corinne Durston and Bill Laven

The Education Committee works with the BC Sustainable Energy Association (BCSEA) to deliver the Cool It! Program to local schools. The program is presented by an educator to at least two classes per school. The students take a climate challenge to reduce their carbon and ecological footprint and to see which class achieves the most reductions.

Educator, Bobby Bovenzi, delivered the program to a total of eleven classes in Summerland and Penticton schools. The student's actions reduce their impact on the planet by tons of GHG emissions. It's a great opportunity for families to discuss and assess their actions and how they affect the earth. FTFO is committed to promoting the Program and expand it to more schools in 2026.

For a third summer, we received federal funding to employ a student to work during the summer. The student attended local farmers markets and talked to hundreds of residents and visitors about climate concerns. They also produced new material on climate topics to distribute. This outreach will hopefully continue in 2026.

To provide a venue for climate discussion, A "Views & Tales" group was started. One month attendees view a documentary for discussion and the next month, an assigned book is the topic. Nine sessions were held and attendance was between 9-20 people per session. This program continues for 2026.

2025 POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE REPORT (PAC)

Committee members: Sue Kirschmann (Chair), Lori Goldman, Khati Hendry, Margaret Holm, Bill Laven, Henry Sielmann.

PAC had another busy year. We continued to advocate for local municipalities to fast track the Zero Carbon Step Code (ZCSC). We gave another presentation to Penticton City Council with updated ZCSC information, wrote letters, attended building code seminars, and met with City and RDOS staff.

In the spring we again presented to the BC Finance Committee. Our topic for BC's 2026 budget was Enhancing Heat Pump Adoption in BC and our recommendations were: a) to direct-fund heat pump installation ("direct install") via Registered Contractors, and b) to include heat pump installations in BC's Carbon Credits and Financing system.

We have been focusing on buildings as we believe that electrifying homes with electric heat pumps is an easy and affordable way for communities to reduce emissions while also improving people's health.

PAC was part of a group that intervened on the BC Utilities Commission's *Review of Renewable Natural Gas Definition and Accounting*. This was a very technical proceeding but we felt it was important as it could disallow the current practice of gas companies being able to buy RNG credits (on paper) rather than physical RNG. The BCUC has not yet provided a ruling.

In April we partnered with the City of Penticton, RDOS and District of Summerland to present a free three-hour Heat Pump and Retrofit Workshop. Participants heard from heat pump and energy experts as well as homeowners for tips on installing heat pumps.

Committee members continued to engage in local issues by meeting with councilors and staff, and by attending open houses, hearings and council meetings.

Where opportunities arose, we provided input on provincial and federal policy through comment forums, surveys and by writing letters. For example, we wrote to the provincial government expressing concern about their plan to pass legislation to "fast-track" regulatory approval of natural resource and clean energy projects. We also wrote to BC's Minister of the Environment to discourage further development of LNG, and to the Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness to improve professional oversight of clear-cut logging in BC watersheds.

In these turbulent times, with politics and affordability overshadowing the climate emergency, it is important that we continue to work together and motivate each other. Thank you for supporting FTFO this past year.

2025 COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT

Members of the Communication Committee: Lori Goldman, Margaret Holm, Sue Kirschmann, and Henry Sielmann.

The Communication Committee is focused on Goal 1 of our Mission Statement: which is to “Inform Okanagan communities about the consequences of climate change and inspire them to take action.”

Each month, our FTFO e-newsletter is delivered to over 1300 people. The list is stable with new contacts added but some also unsubscribing each month.

Deep Dive webinars continue to be popular with from 20 to 60 people attending each month and a larger group who register receiving a video recording of the evening’s talk. 2025 topics included Green Roofs, clean energy coops in Vernon and Peace River, permaculture and community gardens, the Youth Climate Corps initiative and Doughnut Economics.

In 2025, through a federal summer student grant, we hired Emilee Parr to organize summer displays at farmers markets. The student, directors and volunteers chat with hundreds of people on climate topics. It’s also a great opportunity for FTFO directors to work with and get to know our volunteers.

We continue to produce new information bulletins on varied topics aimed at different levels from children’s climate colouring sheets to issue sheets on climate topics. We also write short information bulletin on relevant topics that are sent to municipal council members. This year, Henry Sielmann produced an excellent outline on “Will there be sufficient electrical power in BC?”

Lori Goldman continues to expand and update our website and post timely topics on Facebook, Instagram, Linked in and Bluesky social media sites.