

Northern Regional Energy Dialogues is an Accelerating Community Energy Transformation (ACET) project led by Sinead Earley, Tamara Krawchenko and Kara Shaw in partnership with the University of Victoria, University of Northern British Columbia, and through support from the Community Energy Association and Northern British Columbia Climate Action Network (NorthCAN).

We are working with diverse communities and First Nations across Northern British Columbia to help them identify their interests, needs and opportunities in support of renewable energy transitions. The current phase of the project is focused on convening community based and regional energy dialogues. Future phases will support targeted and community-identified capacity building initiatives and help formalize them with enduring peer networks.

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## Community Report: Farmington

*This document shares a summary of the Community Energy Dialogue held on **June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025**, in Farmington, an unincorporated farming community northwest of Dawson Creek in the Peace River Regional District. The conversation involved eleven community members and was facilitated by Sinead Earley. Quotes have been reported anonymously.*

*The Farmington Dialogue centered on two primary topics. First, the lessons learned, challenges, and opportunities associated with the oil and gas sector, and second, emerging issues related to wind farm development. Community members provided a brief history of intensive shale gas resource development in the area, with activities peaking between 2016-2019. They also describe a recent and rapid shift to industrial scale wind power, identifying key concerns such as a lack of regulatory oversight, legal supports for lease negotiations, and transparent information on environmental and health impacts. The importance of balancing economic opportunities with community well-being was strongly emphasized. Community members are seeking impartial information on emerging renewable energy technologies and greater levels of advocacy to protect farmers' rights and interests.*

### Key Recommendations:

- Improve access to full, transparent, non-proponent-driven information on renewable energy technologies
- Strengthen advocacy networks representing community interests as they navigate wind power development
- Strengthen communication channels between community and government on evolving regulatory frameworks
- Conduct cumulative impact assessments to support decision-making
- Develop a more robust regulatory framework for renewable energy projects
- Create opportunities for Farmington to share experiences with other communities/regions navigating overlapping oil, gas, and wind development
- Develop legal and decision-making supports for landowners navigating lease agreements and compensation for legal costs

## Overview

The energy story in Farmington is one of cumulative impacts of energy development on farmlands and farmers. The community is situated in one of the most densely developed shale gas fields in the Montney Formation, and is now experiencing heightened activity around wind energy projects. A key concern is that this new layer of industrial activity is rapidly expanding while supports for communities and regulatory guidance are not in place.

Experience with the oil and gas sector has been varied. Some people have had very positive relationships with companies while others have not. One community member characterized the oil and gas activity as a “determined, relentless industry. It was overwhelming” while another describes it as such:

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“It’s the flares, the vibration, the earthquakes, and thinking now the wind turbines might have drilling. It just flattens a person, because we get whomping. You know, it gets to be too much.”

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“Here there is a gas plant every two miles, and we find the oil companies, although they’re intrusive, they’ve been really good to work with. It’s pretty lucrative. I know some companies are better than others. We do tend to work with a range of companies out there, but we kind of look at it as we all want something reliable, affordable. You know, for energy, nobody can live without oil and gas products, and you just kind of work with the oil companies and make the best of it to everybody’s advantage. It’s not necessarily that they’re a bad thing to have around. It’s the relationship that you have with them.”

In many ways, the area was the testing ground for oil and gas development, and it took a long time for regulations to catch up to a rapidly expanding sector. This experience – fast-paced exploration and drilling with no regulatory or legal support – was deeply frustrating and in many cases devastating, as residents were left to manage impacts on their own. The current concern is that they are now facing the same scenario with a different energy sector. Participants expressed fear of having to navigate similar challenges, in particular, the rapid expansion of an industry in the absence of effective regulation, which leads to a preference for what is known and familiar. With wind projects “we’re kind of the guinea pigs. At least with oil and gas, we’ve got a 60–70-year history in oil and gas. We know what the regulations are, and it’s well regulated. So at least it’s a known risk, a known quantity. This is a free flow.”

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“What worked was comprehensive regulations that spelled out our rights and gave us avenues to dispute things and to learn about things. It gave us a little bit of a way to represent ourselves.”

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They have learned a lot from their experience with the oil and gas sector: regulatory oversight is necessary but needs to be done before new projects accelerate and not during, which is the path that wind energy projects are currently on. The community suggests that this history is useful: “Before an industry like this begins in our province, I mean, it’s not that it’s necessarily the beginning, but if they’re now revamping their

regulatory process, learn from the whole oil and gas process, the last 10 years, where they really put into

place good liability management, and the orphan fund. They finally got that put together properly, and then the whole dormancy process. Learn from that energy sector and put all that in place now.”

When asked what worked in terms of navigating the oil and gas sector and helping to collectively come to terms with the positive and negative impacts, they answered: “comprehensive regulations that spelled out our rights and gave us avenues to dispute things and to learn about things. It gave us a little bit of a way to represent ourselves.”

An important takeaway is that the area identified for wind energy development coincides with one of the most intensively developed areas of the Montney Formation. Clear documentation of the cumulative impacts of industrial development is needed, and there is little indication that wind farm companies are coming to the table with any understanding of either the industrial history of the region or the need for attentiveness to cumulative impacts. Both sectors are spatially intensive, requiring high-density drill and flare platforms, compressor stations, and turbine installation and access. At the height of natural gas extraction, the sky lit up at night and there are similar concerns related to wind turbines: “It's one thing to have a lease over the hill, you know, you smell it now and again, or you hear it or something, but to have a 100 meter wind tower a mile from somebody's place, that's pretty intrusive. You know, if you don't want it, you have to look out your front window at this thing every day.” Moreso, development in both sectors has led to conflict within the community and between landowners: “whoever gets that pad is lucky, and the other guys don't get nothing, right? They get the noise or traffic, but not the revenue.” Economic opportunity is not available to everyone, especially those who are renters or who own smaller parcels of land, but health and environmental concerns cut across property lines.

### **Key Assets & Infrastructures**

Farmington’s broader asset is as flat, open, prairie land, with associated potentials for wind and geothermal energy. The Montney Formation and natural gas development has brought gas wells, pads, pipelines, compressor stations, and expanded road infrastructure to the community. Many people stress the economic benefits that have come from the sector: “It's probably also the biggest economic driver in this area. One of our sons works in the oil patch, he's done very well. It's paid for a lot of bills. [Companies] do buy into the community. They sponsor a lot of things. They upkeep the roads that we're using. They do put a lot back in. The government does not. Try and get a government grader out to get the washboards or the potholes out of the road. It's like pulling teeth.”

Road systems supporting farming activities have always been critical in the area, with significant expansion coinciding with construction and maintenance of gas extraction sites. This has led to major changes in road use, and evolving conversations about who is responsible for oversight and maintenance. While many government transportation services are contracted out, oil and gas companies are playing a larger role, and the community is increasingly frustrated by the lack of government effort. According to one participant: “I find with the oil and gas industry, that they maintain the road better than the provincial government does. Yes, that's a huge, huge, issue. Like, you're taking all our money, but you can't put it back in? The roads around every lease, [companies] also take care of them, where nobody lives. So, for the farmers taking equipment down roads, we depend on those oil and gas companies to keep those roads up. The government, if they wash out, the government says, woo hoo. Drive six miles around and try and get your combine through.”

## Key Actors & Organizations

The private sector actors that were referenced in the meeting include oil and natural gas companies (Canadian Natural Resources, Shell, Cenovus, and Birchcliff Energy, and wind energy companies (Innergex). Bear Mountain Wind Park was also referenced as a first and well-established power project in the region (operational as of 2009). Supportive non-governmental bodies that people are connected to in the region include the Farmers Information Service, Regional Cattleman’s Association, Community Pastures, the South Peace Synergy Group, and the Surface Rights Board of BC.

The Provincial government plays a central role, heightened within the contexts of *Bill 14 Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act*, passed in May 2025. As described previously, the fast-tracking of energy development within a weak regulatory apparatus is something this community has already gone through with oil and gas development, and they are not interested in going down that road again. Participants describe the current situation as a regulatory vacuum that has sown high levels of uncertainty.

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“There's no one we can go to for advice or for decisions on enforcement.”

“We know the government's going to rubber stamp them, because they're doing the fast track thing. But there were so many questions that they couldn't answer”

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With wind projects, they find themselves with no avenues to communicate with government, and no concrete or clear answers when they do find an audience. People have been told, “your concerns will be answered at the environmental assessment, but they've already been told they don't have to do an environmental assessment, so it's going around in circles.” The information they are receiving from the Provincial government is messy, as are the communication pathways. In this way, the expanded authority of the BC Energy Regulator under Bill 14 is significant, and people need more guidance and transparency from quasi-judicial bodies. As expressed by one participant: “There are no regulations about this anywhere, so we don't know. At least with oil and gas, there's a precedent, because you have regulations, and most of us either know the regulations or know who we can contact and ask, what exactly is wrong? This is like the Wild West. We don't know if we can believe them. We took our [contract] to a lawyer, and there's a lot of red flags.”

The Peace River Regional District (PRRD) also plays an important role for the community and for the wider farming region. The message from participants is that PRRD is trying to support communities and carry forward the message that the region has already lost too much farmland to energy development, but their representatives are also not receiving clear answers. The message people are receiving is that “the government's not even talking to the Regional District anymore.”

## Challenges

### Negotiating Energy Leases

One of the most immediate challenges for land-owners is negotiating wind energy leases. They are encountering a wide variety of contractual agreements and inconsistent information. This is sowing confusion and people feel like developers are taking advantage of vulnerabilities, such as financial duress or lack of access to information. For example, “I see one option to lease, which is a few pages, but the other one's 40 pages. I'm not trained, but I've seen enough things to go – I don't think so.” People are seeking clear, non-ambiguous contracts, and a common source to go to for information that is not company (financially) or government (politically) driven. They are also seeking legal supports to help them navigate these contracts with energy companies.

A description of one person's experience: “Everything's wonderful. We go to page 24 of that lease and there's a paragraph about using extreme caution and to make sure anybody visiting or any of your people get insurance,” and from another, “they don't call it non-disclosure agreement, but it is exactly what it is, it's an absolute gag order.” “We just started saying to pipeline companies, if you have an NDA, don't even come because you've obviously got something to hide.” All of this comes at a cost, emotionally and financially. They are paying out-of-pocket for legal advice and are not compensated. They are also dedicating time to discussions with developers. This time commitment is not an easy burden for farmers to carry.

Community members expressed feelings of powerlessness when it comes to flows of energy investments. With oil and gas, and now with wind power, there is a feeling of inevitability – that this kind of development will happen whether they want it to or not. So, they negotiate. As described by one participant, “I kind of look at it as, they

bought the resource under the ground. It's going in one way or another. They will expropriate you if they have to, or they'll go to the neighbors and do the same thing under your ground. So, we've always found that the best thing to do is sit down and say, hey, this is our concern. We don't want a road going right across the middle of the field. Can you put your lease right here? Can you mitigate the noise? Whatever your conditions are. And we have been fortunate that the companies we've worked with have been good to go with.” In

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“We've been working on a contract with a wind developer, and there's too many red flags. I mean, some of them are explained, but some of them aren't. But the fact is that we have to go to a lawyer, pay the lawyer. There's zero benefit to us.”

“It's to protect ourselves, right? We can't read these contracts. They're jargon. So, we took it into a lawyer, we paid 500 bucks for him to tell us, these are all the red flags. But that's on our bill and we're not going get reimbursed unless we sign up. Then they said, well, if you sign up, we'll pay your legal bill.”

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“The time that people spend just talking through problems...coming out and walking on the land with them, to really get them to see what's going on. That's all your personal time. Anyone's trying to fit that in with their agricultural business, and some people have agricultural business plus other jobs, right?”

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some cases people are able to raise concerns and have companies respond, but others also say there is a fear factor involved, that if they don't agree to the contracts that are handed to them, they won't gain any benefit from what will be built around them whether they sign on or not.

People also feel as though they are not getting the health and environmental protections that they deserve, and that are standard practice elsewhere. For example, "The drilling of the well pads is something that's temporary. Noise and lights. But some of the compressor stations and gas plants, they don't put the mufflers on. It can be unbearable. There is the technology is out there to do it. It's just some of the companies have chosen not to do it."

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*"It would be an excellent resource for landowners if there was some sort of legal support."*

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### **Health Risks**

There is uncertainty around health risks associated with wind turbines, and they are not receiving the level of information that they are expecting about it. It leaves people feeling as if their lives are not valued and that "people are expendable." There is concern about the height of the turbines and 'setback' from residential dwellings, as well as noise concerns.

### ***Priorities Going Forward***

Community members in Farmington want information and a designated advocate that can speak on their behalf, to government and project developers. In general, they are seeking greater representation in energy planning, and protection of their rights and interests.

### **Access to Information: Renewables**

People want to better understand renewable energy technologies and want access to information that is "not agenda-driven", politically from the government or financially from the private sector. There is skepticism around how efficient and sustainable renewable energy technologies truly are – whether they provide a net benefit once construction, maintenance, and disposal are considered – and they want answers to their questions about product life cycles and long-term impacts of new installations. What is the life span of propellers or turbines? What will happen to materials at the end of the life cycle? In simple terms, the public is now demanding full life cycle assessments for renewables and when their questions go unanswered, which is the case in Farmington, skepticism rises and the likelihood of buy-in decreases. They are wanting to get a better grasp on the full picture of what energy power means, across development, construction, installation, operations, maintenance, repowering and/or decommissioning.

They would like to prioritize information related to disposal, remediation, or closure protocols. Companies are not offering this and there are no assurances built into contracts related to project closure. As a community that has dealt first-hand with the permanent impact of drilling and pipeline infrastructure on their properties, they need to be able to understand what a wind farm landscape will look like in 30 years, and what infrastructure and maintenance activities will look like in the meantime.

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“...a way to tabulate [energy options] to see which one is really the most practical, which one really solves our problems. And can we try to get that written by someone who's held accountable for the results and liable for the claims. Yeah, that would be the ideal, right?”

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The community wants to see what the value of any given energy source is, and a way that they can compare revenue potentials, energy efficiencies, and social/environmental benefits or harms. As stated, “if the government's going to throw money at, let's do it sensibly. Why are we throwing money at stuff that's not giving us a return?” Communities need to be able to clearly identify what the return will be for

them, their farms, and their families. They want to see a full picture of, and compare across, the energy options, in ways that consider the full life cycle of a project or material products. They want the ability to decide what is good for their community in an integrated way, taking into account the potential financial, social, and environmental benefits. They need information and tools to help them with decision-making.

Without basic information about emerging technologies, communities are hesitant. Again, drawing from their history with petroleum development, “the oil and gas activity was good, bad, and ugly. We don't know windmills. We don't know solar. We don't know geothermal. We don't know whatever other technologies they're going to come up with. They could be no good either.” Given the information-deficient landscape they are currently working within, interest wanes: “I used to think windmills would be a wonderful thing, to be quite honest, now I changed my tune on that one”

There was also conversation around energy conservation. Given the hard work that has been put into understanding, triggering greater regulation, and managing the oil and gas sector, people are interested in decarbonization strategies (e.g., methane emission abatement and flaring reductions) or increasing efficiencies there, rather than a transition to a new energy source.

## Representation

There is a rising sense of alienation in the region that is connected to the relationship between southern, urban sites of consumption and northern, rural sites of production. People are worried about what the increasing demands for electricity in urban spaces and increasing social and environmental impacts for rural populations and lands will look like. They are not interested in trying to solve an urban/southern

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“Agriculture is probably one of the only industries where everything else gets a footprint in what we do. Oil and gas, wind, wastewater storage, disposal. Why is agriculture not our own? Why can we not just say this is our industry? Community pasture...Does agriculture not count for anything? No. It should be a primary industry.”

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problem while creating rural/northern problems in the form of lost farmland and negative health impacts. People also raise questions about new renewables powering industrial electricity consumption (e.g., LNG facility in Kitimat, or Bitcoin or AI data centers).

“If we need reliable, affordable energy really fast, we have an abundance of natural gas. We have a generating facility. Who is it that needs it? Where's this power going? Break that down for us. Why do we have to put up with it, it's like a rodeo over here?”

There are also a lot of questions related to the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and land-use designations in general. People are asking, why are new wind projects not developed on Crown land? Why is this pressure being placed on agricultural lands? As one participant responded, “I think that's why we're sort of being picked on right now, because it's easier to just steamroll over the farmers.” There is concern that “millions of acres of rich soil around the world get lost every year to different energy projects.” People also have questions related to UNDRIP and BC Hydro’s Call for Power mandated minimum equity ownership for Indigenous partners. Without clarity on what implications there might be for lease lands, colonial divides are deepening and reconciliation efforts in the region will be challenged.

Community members are calling for a greater level of awareness of renewable energy impacts on rural spaces, and there is discord between their lived experience and ‘green’ or ‘environmentalist’ agendas, influenced by southern or city perspectives. As participants expressed: “we really don't count. We're not enough of us up here,” and “it's somebody else's priority, and we're the ones having to be inconvenienced or harmed or put out just because somebody else wants power.”

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“The green community that pushes this kind of stuff isn't really informed about how it impacts landowners, what the actual environmental and carbon footprint is, and how it's going to affect our lives.”

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“I think some of us went into it with a bit of a vision. It's a chance for landowners to have an opportunity to say this is what they're experiencing. We break it down by topic and then tackle it as a what kind of solutions can we bring together at that level.”

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“We want renewable this and renewable that. So, let's start putting turbines in downtown Victoria, and let's start putting solar panels on every acre of green space they have, and see how they like it. A lot of this energy stuff is driven from the city, bigger cities. They see the land out here as if there's nobody here and they can do what they want and impose their will onto us. And that's happened with a lot of energy

projects. We do not benefit from all the energy projects. We don't get enough compensation for what goes on. Everything just goes out of the country and we're still left with what we had. We have to put up with a lot of noise pollution, a lot of activity that wasn't here before, and try and make the same living.”

## ***Regional or Community-to-Community Collaboration***

The South Peace Synergy Group was established by the PRRD to bring people together for discussion and as a platform for identifying concerns. One community member described it as, “speaking with landowners, provincial and municipal government agencies, City of Dawson Creek, chambers, oil and gas companies, service companies. A place where anybody and everybody can come together. I think some of us went into it with a bit of a vision. It's a chance for landowners to have an opportunity to say this is what they're experiencing. We break it down by topic and then tackle it as a what kind of solutions can we bring together at that level.”

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*“You need something with some kind of muscle. I guess mostly we need someone that's looking out for us.”*

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The Synergy Group was an important mechanism for dialogue, but it has encountered challenges over time. There is a current gap in leadership and facilitation; the PRRD triggered coordination, hoping that it would evolve to function independently and the group is currently looking for a new facilitator. The forum also encountered challenges in that, in seeking wider inclusion (e.g., residents from Dawson Creek and other larger population centers), the rural and farmer voices and concerns were somewhat overshadowed.

Farmington community members are also very interested in connecting with other communities where wind farms have been built (referencing Germany or southern Alberta, for example), and particularly with other communities who have gone through similar cumulative layers (oil and gas and wind) to hear what their experiences have been like. Beyond the region, they would like to hear from others: “they've been there, done that, and they've learned the hard way.”

They also point to a lot of connections and comparisons with Alberta, describing Alberta as more geared towards the landowner and rights holder, and that communities in BC can learn from that. As one community member described it: “a lot of the oil and gas regulations in Alberta have been in place for a long, long time. BC took a long time to catch up and they're still behind.”