

# Convening for Action in British Columbia



## A Look Back to the SmartStorm Forum Series: Genesis for the Water Balance Model



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Water Bucket Web Story

## The SmartStorm Forum Series

A decade ago, the **SmartStorm Forum Series** comprised events on Vancouver Island (Nanaimo in January 1999) and the Sunshine Coast (Sechelt in September 1999), and in the Fraser Valley (Abbotsford and Pitt Meadows in March 2001).

The genesis for the series was a focus group workshop held in October 1997. Convened by the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM), the workshop was part of the rollout process for the *Fish Protection Act*, enacted only a few months before.

The coming together of a group of change agents in October 1997 set in motion a chain of events that has reverberated through time.

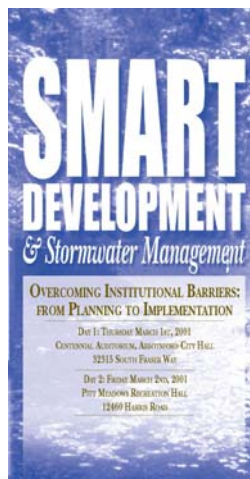
The SmartStorm Forum Series generated the type of momentum that soon led to development of the *Water Balance Model for British Columbia*.

### Series Content

The two Fraser Valley forums built on the momentum and lessons learned from the previous Vancouver Island and Sunshine Coast forums.

From the introduction to the Sunshine Coast brochure:

*"The realization in the early 1970s that upstream activities have downstream impacts was a breakthrough in drainage planning.... Two decades later, concern for the environment has led to another turning point..... Understanding how to collaborate with other disciplines to align roles and responsibilities is key to mitigating both flood hazard and environmental risks, and making science-based strategies a reality."*



## 1997 UBCM Focus Group Workshop

Looking back, and in terms of 'green' rainwater management, much of what has happened in British Columbia can be traced back to October 1997 and who was in the room when the Union of BC Municipalities convened the focus group workshop on the Fish Protection Act.

### Science-Based Ecosystem Approach

At the workshop, **Kim Stephens** and **Bill Derry** led a discussion on a 'science-based' ecosystem approach to rainwater/stormwater management. Through their work with local governments, Stephens and Derry are recognized as having facilitated a paradigm-shift in British Columbia in the late 1990s.

They achieved this by translating the emerging Washington State science into a set of communication graphics. This approach enabled a common understanding among broad and diverse audiences about the impacts of urbanization on stream health. This helped local governments make informed decisions about urban watershed planning.



Kim Stephens



Bill Derry

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#### Early Champions

The idea for the first workshop in the SmartStorm Forum Series originated with **Erik Karlsen**, then with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. **Peter Law** of the Ministry of Environment embraced the idea and got the ball rolling. He formed an inter-agency team to organize the Nanaimo event.

- Erik Karlsen was a principal author of a **Watershed/Landscaped-Based Approach to Community Planning**.

Prepared by an interdisciplinary working group under the umbrella of the Greater Vancouver Regional District, the paper was released in 2002. The underpinning premise is that resource, land use and community design decisions will be made with an eye towards their potential impact on the watershed.



- **Stormwater Planning: A Guidebook for British Columbia** is a prime application of the 'watershed/landscape-based' approach.

Peter Law was Chair of the Stormwater Guidebook Steering Committee, formed in 2000 only a matter of months after the second in the SmartStorm Series. The Guidebook's premise that land development and watershed protection can be compatible represented a radical shift in thinking in 2002.



When **Brian Tutty** of the Department of Fisheries & Oceans joined the organizing committee for the Nanaimo workshop, he advocated a bold vision for a transformational event. This started with moving the workshop from the Beban Recreational Centre to the Coast Bastion Hotel, and re-branding it as a forum.

This bold vision morphed into a transformational series once **Mayor Barry Janyk** of the Town of Gibsons became involved. His high profile involvement added political credibility. Mayor Janyk was the moderator for the last three in the series.

#### An Overwhelming Response

"The response to the SmartStorm Forum Series was simply overwhelming," recalls Mayor Barry Janyk, "For the first event, held in Nanaimo, the doors had to be closed when the surge of last-minute registrations reached the 250 seating capacity of the Coast Bastion venue."

"When we decided to host the second event on the Sunshine Coast, the sceptics asked me who would come to the Sunshine Coast. Well, they did come and they came from far and wide, including a representative of the Ontario Ministry of Environment. We attracted a capacity crowd of some 225 to the local theatre in Sechelt."



"We attracted comparable crowds in Abbotsford and Pitt Meadows. We created a buzz."

#### Subsequent Chain of Events

The first SmartStorm Forum was held in 1999; the last two in March 2001. The kick-off consultation workshop for the Guidebook took place in Nanaimo on February 20, 2001. The SmartStorm Forum Series set in motion the following:

- The SmartStorm Forum Series begat **Stormwater Planning: A Guidebook for British Columbia**, released in mid-2002
- which begat the **Water Balance Model for British Columbia**, completed in 2003
- which provided early credibility for the **Water Sustainability Action Plan for BC**, launched in early 2004
- which led to the formation of the **Green Infrastructure Partnership**, launched in early 2004
- and laid the groundwork for the success of **Convening for Action on Vancouver Island**, launched in late-2006.