

## Convening for Action in the South Okanagan: Introducing *Water OUT = Water IN!*

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The Water Sustainability Committee (WSC) of the BCWWA is partnering with the Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture and Land, and the Ministry of Community Services to advance the *water balance way-of-thinking* in the Okanagan. Through outreach and education, a goal of the WSC is to re-focus practitioners on basic water management principles and concepts that are embedded in the equation **Water OUT = Water IN**.

This equation and the water balance approach were unveiled in April 2005 at a **Convening for Action Workshop** that was held in conjunction with the Annual BCWWA Conference at Penticton. Led by the WSC, Convening for Action (CFA) is a provincial partnership initiative that is designed to 'turn ideas into action' through a three-step process that builds capacity by:

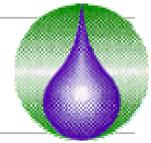
- ☑ Challenging practitioners and others to step back from their existing paradigms (e.g. big pipe solutions, whether for water supply or drainage conveyance);
- ☑ Informing practitioners and others regarding alternatives (e.g. rainwater harvesting to augment water supply and/or reduce rainwater runoff volume); and
- ☑ Giving practitioners the tools and the experience to do things differently.

### Meeting Future Challenges

In September 2005, the Real Estate Foundation provided the WSC with a grant to initiate **Convening for Action in the South Okanagan**. The WSC has a track record of bringing people together who have knowledge and expertise with those who will benefit from this in ways that will help them meet their present and future water sustainability challenges.

The WSC process in this region will reach out to interested parties to begin a chain of events aimed at promoting and informing the adoption and implementation of well-grounded water sustainability policies at regional through local levels; as well as sector focussed water stewardship practices at area and site levels.

The experience of the WSC in the South Okanagan will also provide the foundation for the proposed **Water Balance Management: A Guidebook for British Columbia**. The philosophical framework for Guidebook content is provided by the technical program for the April 2005 Penticton Workshop.



## Moving Towards a Water Balance Way-of-Thinking

Conventional water supply planning is typically based on a narrow understanding of engineering statistics without really understanding the role that climate variability plays. A core message is that the **OUT = IN** equation is variable on both sides. Something to think about is that in mathematics one cannot solve for two variables with a single equation. In other words, the WSC believes it is time for practitioners to go back to the basics and re-think how we approach water supply analysis and planning.

To understand the **OUT = IN** equation in an engineering context, we need to think in terms of a safety margin or factor and what that actually means in practice. In a nutshell, when the service population is small and the safety factor is large, climate variability may be inconsequential. As population and water demand grow, however, the safety factor shrinks. Eventually we reach a condition of vulnerability where a small shift in the water balance can trigger a supply crisis. This has been the prevailing pattern for almost 20 years. We have effectively used up the safety factor because we have not understood climate variability.

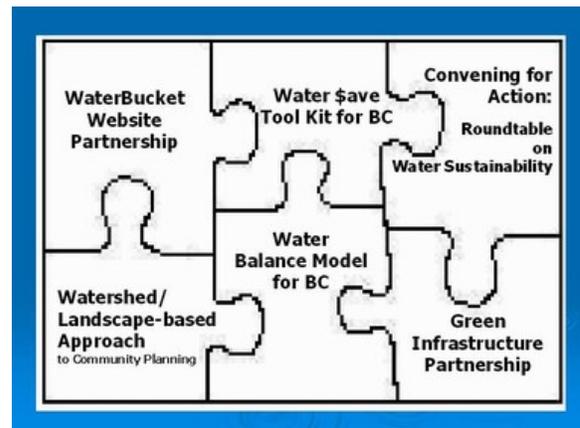
Given there is a need for change in the way we plan and manage water supply systems, a goal of the WSC is to facilitate a breakthrough in practitioner thinking similar to that which has recently been achieved in the practice of urban drainage. In that case, changing the language from 'stormwater management' to 'rainwater management' has had a profound influence on how drainage engineers in particular view their world. This has opened their minds to doing

things differently, so that the Natural Water Balance will be protected and/or restored, by implementing source control measures that reduce the annual volume of rainwater runoff (created as a result of land development).

Building on this successful precedent, the WSC objective is to accelerate the shifts that will see the *water balance way-of-thinking* move beyond rainwater management to embrace all components of the water cycle.

## Water Sustainability Action Plan

Convening for Action is one of six interconnected initiatives that comprise the **Water Sustainability Action Plan for British Columbia**. These initiatives demonstrate how to integrate water management with community planning and development.



The Action Plan is comprehensive in scope and provides a partnership umbrella for on-the-ground initiatives that are promoting water stewardship across the province, and that are also informing Provincial policy through shared responsibility. For information on the Action Plan, please go to: <http://www.waterbucket.ca/waterbucket/home/wbccfaiindex.asp>