

## Returning to the basics of water sustainability



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Published: **September 22, 2016 09:00 AM**

Updated: **September 22, 2016 09:539 AM**

Floods, droughts and wildfires over the past couple decades have proven valuable "teachable" moments for researchers and advocates of watershed health and science, according to Kim Stephens.

Stephens, an engineer and executive director of the B.C. Partnership for Water Sustainability (PWS) was speaking at Mid Vancouver Island Habitat Enhancement Society's (MVIHES) AGM Tuesday.

"Everyone learns about the water cycle in elementary school, but by high school most have forgotten what they learned," he said of what he called a return to basics in our understanding of water systems.

"What does this mean for communities? Consider that a legacy of community and infrastructure design practices has failed to protect the natural water balance (hydrologic integrity)," he said, adding that that failure "has financial, level-of-service and life-cycle impacts and implications for taxpayers."

The results can be very expensive to fix, he said of resulting disasters or trying to add infrastructure after the fact.

"Local governments are starting to recognize that watersheds are natural assets that have value, ecosystem services have a role in municipal service delivery, and so they need to be integrated into their asset management programs."

It's crucial to include watersheds in wider planning and manage and protect them like the valuable infrastructure they are, he said.

Sparked by the coho salmon crisis in the 1990s, Stephens said B.C. researchers have been working with counterparts in Washington state on how to "ensure that science-based understanding is applied properly and effectively in B.C. communities to implement solutions and practices that actually restore the water balance of watersheds."

Stephens and MVIHES used the Tuesday meeting in Errington to launch a magazine-style primer that's meant to be easily accessible and understandable for everyone.

Peter Law, PWS director said in a news release that "Implementation of 'whole systems' thinking would include incorporating the benefits provided by nature into the delivery of local government services."

Stephens and Law both praised the work of small local stewardship groups like

MVIHES in helping people understand the complex science and in doing the actual on the ground work to help restore and maintain the watersheds.

"Today, community organizations partner with local governments to monitor and restore local watershed health," Law said. "These groups provide thousands of volunteer hours to restore aquatic habitats."

The PWS's primer is available on their website (<http://waterbucket.ca/>) with a lot of other good information and through MVIHES.

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