

Opinion: We really must move beyond 'shock and yawn'



KIM STEPHENS



MICHAEL BLACKSTOCK



BOB MCDONALD



ERIC BONHAM

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For British Columbians to adapt to a changing and unstable climate, a new culture of water is necessary. *PICASA*

No longer is climate change a future scenario. It has happened more quickly than predicted. The real story is the accelerating rate of change, especially since extreme events create their own weather.

Flood, drought, fire, wind and cold — consider the extremes that British Columbia has experienced in 2015, 2016 and 2017. Instabilities in the water cycle are increasingly apparent. Droughts and wildfires will shape our future.

The message is clear: For British Columbians to adapt to a changing and unstable climate, a new culture of water is necessary. This is a challenge of our time. The process for adapting starts with an attitude change. It costs nothing to change your attitude.

Actually adapting requires transformational changes in how we apply hydrologic understanding, value nature, and service land — this is a unifying

theme for the upcoming Blue Ecology workshop on Nov. 28 in Richmond.

Yet the real issue is public engagement. If communities are to adapt, and be quick about it, we must move beyond “shock and yawn”. In the face of change, individuals will be motivated to take action only if the climate message offers hope.

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Founded on a water-first approach to setting priorities, Blue Ecology is a message of hope. It is an ecological philosophy that looks at the water cycle differently to interweave First Nations and Western thought.

Interweaving is a collaborative process where apparently contradictory ways of knowing water, such as Western Science and Indigenous Knowledge, are brought together as coexisting threads to produce a new cooperative theory called Blue Ecology.

Interweaving requires humility and hope from both partners, as they weave each other's contributing threads of knowledge into a new vision for our future — a new attitude towards water which will unlock creativity to solve climate change problems.

What we are essentially talking about is reconciliation: going back to the headwaters of where we got our relationships with water and with one another wrong; and then starting back down the river of time — this time together — with a full understanding of the importance of embracing a “water-first” approach to planning human interventions in the environment.

The phrase “cathedral thinking” aptly describes the nature of this journey: a far-reaching vision, a well thought-out blueprint, and a shared commitment to long-term implementation.

The central role of water in these changing circumstances calls for a realignment of the water story, embracing both science and indigenous perspectives. Interweaving, as well as an intergenerational approach, seeks common ground and inspires community engagement based upon collaboration across agencies and cultures.

To make the right choices moving forward, decision-makers at all levels and scales must understand how and where the rhythms of water are changing. Hydrologists and water managers can help build a brighter future by rediscovering the meaning of water, and interweaving the predominant Western analytical models with the more intuitive indigenous models. Blue Ecology’s philosophy is meant to be the bridge between these two cultural ways of knowing.

Water is *the* issue of the 21st century, both around the world and even here in Canada where we have more water than anyone. As glaciers disappear and droughts become more frequent, it is vital, in every sense of the word to manage our most precious resource wisely. The big question is: are we collectively up for it?

The authors share a positive vision of the future: water managers would embrace the Blue Ecology water cycle, communities would become more water-resilient, and British Columbians would successfully adapt to a changing climate. It starts with a conversation, which is the purpose of the Blue Ecology workshop, with its overarching theme of interweaving First Nations and Western thought.

Kim Stephens is the executive-director of Partnership for Water Sustainability in B.C.; Bob McDonald is the national science commentator for CBC Television; Michael Blackstock is an independent scholar of

European and Gitxsan descent; Eric Bonham is a former director in two B.C. ministries, environment and municipal affairs.

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