

MAMP has also funded more than 600 asset management training and learning activities delivered by our partners to local governments across Canada. Many of these are designed to encourage peer learning among municipal participants. Peer groups say they benefit because they:

- Expand their networks in neighboring communities and across Canada
- Discover shared challenges and alternative solutions
- Share tools, examples, plans and software
- Progress on their asset management objectives in similar ways
- Form relationships that extend beyond training

Staff in Whistler enjoyed many of these benefits when they collaborated with Oakville. Their recommendation to other municipalities is to start the collaboration process early and come back to it often.

“We can be more efficient and move faster if we absorb the lessons that others have learned and let them shape our approach,” says **Carlee Price, Director of Finance at Resort Municipality of Whistler**. “Who doesn’t love a shortcut?”

The [Municipal Asset Management Program \(MAMP\)](#) at the [Federation of Canadian Municipalities \(FCM\)](#) aims to support municipalities across Canada to make better infrastructure-related decisions through grants, training and resources.

Are you curious about the benefits of collaborating on asset management within your municipality or with neighbouring communities? Read our new report, [Asset Management Insights: Municipal Collaboration](#), to discover how collaboration around asset management is accelerating municipal innovation and skill development, increasing internal project capacity and creating cost savings.

CONTEXT AND HISTORY DO MATTER:

Droughts, Forest Fires, Floods and Sustainable Service Delivery

*Kim Stephens, M.Eng., P.Eng, Executive Director,
Partnership for Water Sustainability in BC*

Mother Nature has an amazing sense of timing. On the 20th anniversary of the evacuation of 27,000 people from Kelowna due to forest fires, history repeated itself in August in the Kelowna region, in particular West Kelowna.

The fire situation was personal this year because our eldest daughter and her family were visiting from Kelowna when the news broke on a Friday night. Because of the escalating risks to life and property, they delayed their

return to the Okanagan and remained with us until travel restrictions were lifted.

Governments have had two decades to prepare for the obvious and the inevitable. 2003 was the first of a series of “teachable years”, with the full onslaught of a changing climate hitting hard as of 2015.

So, how does this relate to asset management, or more importantly, **Sustainable Service Delivery?**



Context and history do matter.

As a longtime contributor to the Asset Management BC Newsletter, this gives me a good sense of the audience. So, when Wally Wells offered me an opportunity to stir the pot with a provocative article, I thought why not!

When Asset Management BC was birthed circa 2010 as a companion initiative to the Partnership for Water Sustainability, I remember the strategic goal articulated by Glen Brown – **to foster innovation and integration using the provincial grants program as a financial incentive to influence how communities manage land and water.**

A memorable Glen Brown quotable quote from September 2009 captures the WHY and the WHAT behind the vision for sustainable service delivery as a driving force for innovation and integration:

“The reality of an increasing local government infrastructure deficit means that there will be even stiffer competition for available funding. As a result, there is a greater incentive for local governments to demonstrate how their innovation and integration will be effective in meeting the goals of both the Green Communities Initiative and Living Water Smart.”

The spotlight shone brightly on the notion of levels-of-service. And this led to the vision and game plan for [Asset Management for Sustainable Service Delivery](#) which Wally Wells has successfully spearheaded for all these years.

How well are we doing?

When I reflect on the Glen Brown quote, and recall the context, I lament the missed opportunity that the quote symbolizes. Sustainable service delivery should have been

the engine for integration across disciplines, departments, and sectors. But that is not how it turned out.

When Glen Brown introduced the concept in 2011 at our “course on a course correction for watershed planning” in Metro Vancouver, we at the Partnership for Water Sustainability were convinced that **Sustainable Service Delivery** would influence HOW communities develop land, use water, and protect streams. That was our big picture.

Fast forward to 2023. My observation is that “asset management” overshadows or dominates “sustainable service delivery” in everyday thinking. The two ideas have in practice become disconnected. That is unfortunate.

Viewed in the big picture context, it is no surprise that the asset management community has lost its way. We are observing this across sectors. Communities and local governments are being overwhelmed by the issues of the day, losing sight of the goal, and getting lost in the details.

ISSUES OF THE DAY >

How communities accommodate population growth and provide housing

How communities adapt to a changing seasonal water cycle and respond to weather extremes

CLEAR & PRESENT RISKS

Altered landscape

Floods, drought and forest fires

Now what?

The past informs the future.

If done right, I see **Asset Management for Sustainable Service Delivery** as being at the core of **Risk Management**. SSD is a mechanism that can still be leveraged to achieve informed and superior planning for land and water.

It certainly helps that risk management is language that gets the attention of elected representatives. With risk management as the lens, an integrated approach to SSD would help them focus them on levels-of-service and consequences for water, land, and finances.

Layered over risk management is the question of what local government will do to fulfil the spirit of **DRIPA**, the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.

Interweaving Indigenous oral history and Western water science represents an opportunity for BC communities to re-set and get the big picture right when it comes to the WHY, WHAT and HOW of tackling the clear and present risks associated with a fundamentally altered landscape.

What we in the Partnership are essentially talking about is **Water Reconciliation**. That means 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.

Local is the scale where actions matter - Blue Ecology is a pathway to Water Reconciliation and Resilience in BC



On World Rivers Day, the Partnership, and the Watershed Moments Team (which includes local and provincial government members) released the Blue Ecology documentary video for broadcast on the Shaw / Rogers community television network. It is also accessible on YouTube using this link:

<https://waterbucket.ca/wcp/2023/09/14/michael-blackstock-blue-ecology/>

The Blue Ecology video features Michael Blackstock, independent Indigenous scholar, in conversation with two representatives of local government: Richard Boase, North Vancouver District; and Brian Carruthers, former CAO who is now an independent strategic advisor to local governments across BC.

A message of hope

The Watershed Moment Team seeds the idea that hope lies within the spheres of influence for local governments --- whether Indigenous OR non-Indigenous. At its heart, Blue Ecology is about embracing lessons learned from First Nations oral history, taking responsibility for care of the land, and handing off the intergenerational baton.

“Rather than looking through a cumulative effects lens, I also see the concept of ‘cumulative healing’ landing as a way to give back to water and land,” says Michael Blackstock. *“Rather than wondering how much more can we take or impact land before we need to stop, instead we should ask how much longer should we let the water and land heal, before we ask for more?”*

Water brings people together. It is a natural starting point for any conversation about common interests, and by

extension, our shared future. Stories unite us. Water does it. And through his polling research, Angus McCallister proved that a decade ago. “I have learned that people are hardwired to water, at both the functional and emotional levels,” he stated in 2014.

A message of hope is paramount in these times of droughts, forest fires and floods. Through the power and magic of collaboration, BC communities can rise to the challenge and adapt to the new climate reality of seasonal extremes. **Sustainable Service Delivery is essential to the solution.**

Climate change is accelerating. There is no time to re-invent the wheel, fiddle, or go down cul-de-sacs. Understand how the past informs the future and build on that experience.



BCWWA Releases New Report About the Financial Sustainability of BC’s Water Systems

Marian Hand, Chief Operating Officer, BCWWA



The BC Water & Waste Association (BCWWA) is a not-for-profit organization that represents around 4,000 water professionals who are responsible for ensuring safe, sustainable, and secure water, sewer and stormwater systems in BC and the Yukon. The BCWWA has been a part of

the provincial landscape for over fifty years. During this time, the organization has played an integral part in supporting water and wastewater professionals at operational, consulting, government, and academic levels and across a wide swath of specializations.

We have been a proud partner of Asset Management BC since the beginning. Water utilities are responsible for a considerable portion of a community’s infrastructure and are a natural fit with the goals of AMBC. The issues that weigh heavily on water utilities include infrastructure maintenance and renewal, climate change adaptation and accommodating community growth. Understanding a community’s existing and future water infrastructure through asset management practices is a great step in

preparing for ongoing financial sustainability. Additionally, the increased focus on water sustainability and green infrastructure places a greater emphasis on documenting and protecting natural assets such as watersheds and wetlands within a community.

This September, the BCWWA is releasing a new report on municipal financial sustainability called *Are Our Water Systems at Risk? Assessing the Financial Sustainability of BC’s Municipal Water Systems – 2023 Update*. The report was prepared by the BCWWA with consulting support from Urban Systems Ltd. and JW Infrastructure Planning Ltd. This initiative was made available through the Municipal Asset Management Program, which is delivered by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and is funded by the Government of Canada.

This report reviews the public financial reports of 161 municipalities in BC and tracks four key performance indicators. It also provides feedback from a public Ipsos poll regarding public perception on paying for water services and contains interviews from municipalities who have made improvements to their financial sustainability and have some interesting insights into their experiences.

Upon releasing this report, the BCWWA is providing free workshops in September and October for municipal and regional district leaders and their staff to better understand their water systems’ financial risk. Part of the workshop will focus on participants looking at their community’s water system and completing the assessment using the Financial Indicator Tool, designed to align with the financial indicators discussed in the report. The workshop will run for two afternoons and host three different cohorts. For more information or to register for a workshop, please visit the BCWWA events calendar <https://www.bcwwa.org/site/events/calendar>.

The BCWWA will be speaking on the report on October 11, 2023, by webinar, and at different conferences throughout the fall, including the AMBC conference. To download a copy of the report or the Financial Indicator Tool, please look for updates on the BCWWA website www.bcwwa.org.

How to Write a Long-Term Financial Plan for Asset Management, 2023 Edition

Pre AMBC-Conference Workshop
Tuesday November 7, 2023

Back by popular demand! Join **Christopher Paine, Director of Finance and Asset Management for the District of Oak Bay** and Principal of FIT Local Government Finance