



the partnership  
for water sustainability in bc

Waterbucket eNews on October 24, 2023  
<https://waterbucket.ca/wscblog/>

# Living Water Smart in British Columbia:

*Our land ethic has  
consequences for water!*



## Note to Reader:

Waterbucket eNews<sup>1</sup> celebrates the leadership of individuals and organizations who are guided by the vision for [Living Water Smart in British Columbia](#)<sup>2</sup>.

The edition published on October 24, 2023 featured Eric Bonham and his story behind the story of the creation of the BC Lake Stewardship Society (BCLSS) in 1997 by Ministry of Environment colleagues Rick Nordin and Ken Ashley.

The umbrella for Partnership initiatives and programs is the [Water Sustainability Action Plan for British Columbia](#)<sup>3</sup>. In turn, the Action Plan is nested within [Living Water Smart, British Columbia's Water Plan](#).



Cover Image Credit: photo by Rick Nordin, BC Lake Stewardship Society

<sup>1</sup> <https://waterbucket.ca/wscblog/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://waterbucket.ca/wcp/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/11/livingwatersmart\\_book.pdf](https://waterbucket.ca/wcp/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/11/livingwatersmart_book.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.waterbucket.ca/cfa/sites/wbccfa/documents/media/81.pdf>

## One-Minute Takeaway

### **Our land ethic has consequences for water!**

Eric Bonham is a former Director in two provincial ministries - Environment and Municipal Affairs. While in government, he was a driving force behind the partnership-based Urban Salmon Habitat Program (USHP) of the 1990s.

"The success of the USHP was in the integration and partnership that was encouraged between local government and the steward," recalls Eric Bonham. "The win-win approach greatly enthused citizens and elected officials alike to commit to the program."

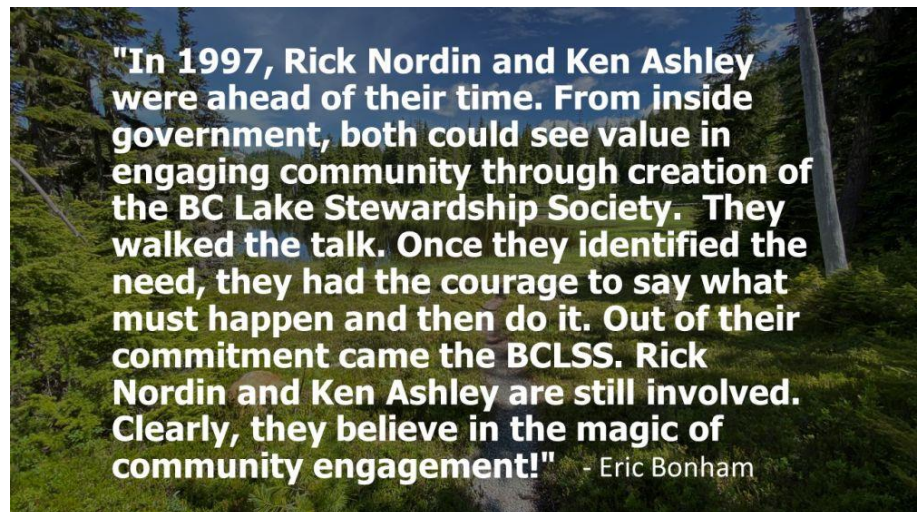
He describes this experience as life-defining because it influenced his history of commitment to his community, with a deep passion for community stewardship and engagement.

### **MISSION POSSIBLE: "top-down and bottom-up" engagement of community**

In this edition of Waterbucket eNews, Eric Bonham shares the "story behind the story" of the BC Lake Stewardship Society of which he is a director. "Stewardship operates under a different dynamic than the private sector or government. Stewards are drawn together for a common cause, like-minded individuals with a vision for the greater good," explains Eric Bonham.

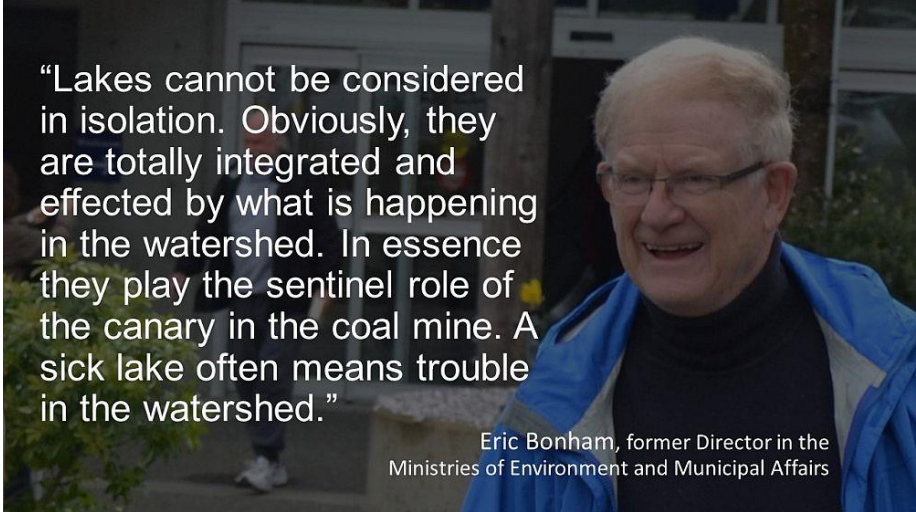


*"I see lake stewards playing a supportive role as a partner in provincial climate change strategies," says Eric Bonham, a director of the BC Lake Stewardship Society*



## Editor's Perspective by Kim A Stephens

### **“Mission Possible” is a call to action**



“Lakes cannot be considered in isolation. Obviously, they are totally integrated and effected by what is happening in the watershed. In essence they play the sentinel role of the canary in the coal mine. A sick lake often means trouble in the watershed.”

Eric Bonham, former Director in the Ministries of Environment and Municipal Affairs

Eric Bonham has long been a source of inspiration for me. When we first met in the mid-1990s, I was instantly impressed by Eric's courage to speak from the heart and "tell it like it is".

We served together on the provincial working group that developed [A Water Conservation Strategy for British Columbia](#), released in 1998. Eric was ahead of his time with his advocacy for a **"One Water"** approach at a time when the notion of water conservation was in its infancy.

Eric Bonham retired from government in 2004, but his mission and commitment to community stewardship and engagement has continued in collaboration with Rick Nordin, Ken Ashley and many others. He frames this as **Mission Possible**. The term aptly describes the "story behind the story" of the BC Lake Stewardship Society as told by Eric Bonham.

### **Call to action**

In his call to action, Eric Bonham would state: “Major breakthroughs happen when decision-makers in government work with grass-roots visionaries in the community to create the future desired by all. Collaboration grows from a shared vision about the future and commitment to action. This is the ‘top down and bottom up’ approach.”

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*In 2006, Eric Bonham was a founding member of CAVI-Convening for Action on Vancouver Island, an initiative of the Partnership for Water Sustainability. Educational in scope, the CAVI program was built around peer-based learning. Eric would open these capacity-building sessions for local government staff with a spirited call to action.*

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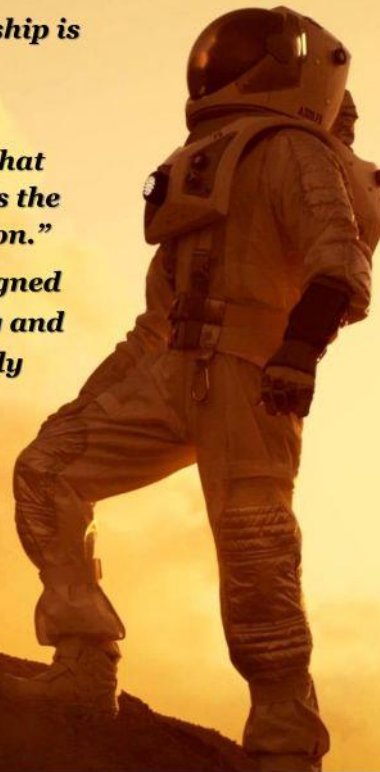
## Mission Possible: Top-Down & Bottom-Up

***“Engagement of community through stewardship is a credible formula to be encouraged and mainstreamed at every opportunity.”***

***“Collaboration, teamwork and a recognition that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts is the energy that stokes creativity and determination.”***

***“When this combination of citizen talent is aligned with a local government that is both visionary and focused, outstanding achievements are not only possible, but realistic.”***

**Eric Bonham**



## STORY BEHIND THE STORY:

# When there is trouble in the lake, there is trouble in the watershed! - *a conversation with Eric Bonham*

In September, the BC Lake Stewardship Society held an in-person conference for the first time since 2019. Appropriately, the venue was Prospect Lake in the District of Saanich.

"The conference identified the value and benefit of the BCLSS lake stewardship program, working as it does, collaboratively with scientists, environmental professionals, First Nations, lakeshore residents, government officials and the general public to assist with maintaining healthy lakes throughout the province," explains Eric Bonham.



## THE BIG THREE: Climate Change, Introduced Species, and Eutrophication

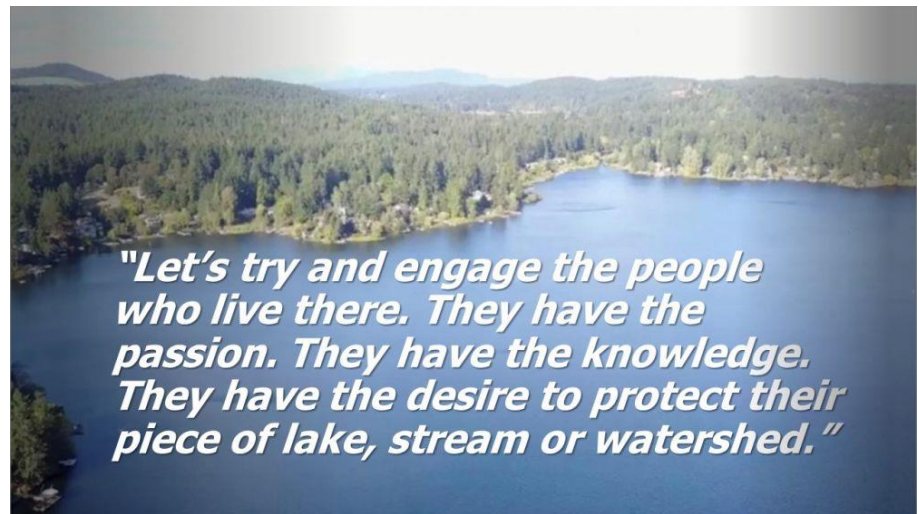
"What I found really valuable about the conference is that the subject matter captures writ large the big picture of what is happening in a lot of our lakes. Climate change, introduced species, eutrophication...each one represents the existing situation somewhere in BC."

“The importance of each has been brought into focus or accentuated because of climate change. I look at lakes as the end of the chain. **When there is trouble in the lake, there is trouble in the watershed!**”

“And therein we find the value of the lake stewardship initiative. To put that in context, the Province cannot possibly do or cover the range of challenges in our lakes in BC.”

## **Genesis of the BC Lake Stewardship Society**

“In 1997, former Ministry of Environment colleagues Rick Nordin and Ken Ashley understood this existential dilemma. They were ahead of their time when they boldly said:



“And that is how the BC Lake Stewardship Society came into being. From that humble beginning in 1997, the BCLSS has grown into a provincial network of lake stewards. A quarter-century later, there are some 50-plus member groups located around the province.”

“Lake stewards offer a vital contribution, namely passion and commitment, and in a volunteer capacity, leadership within their community.”

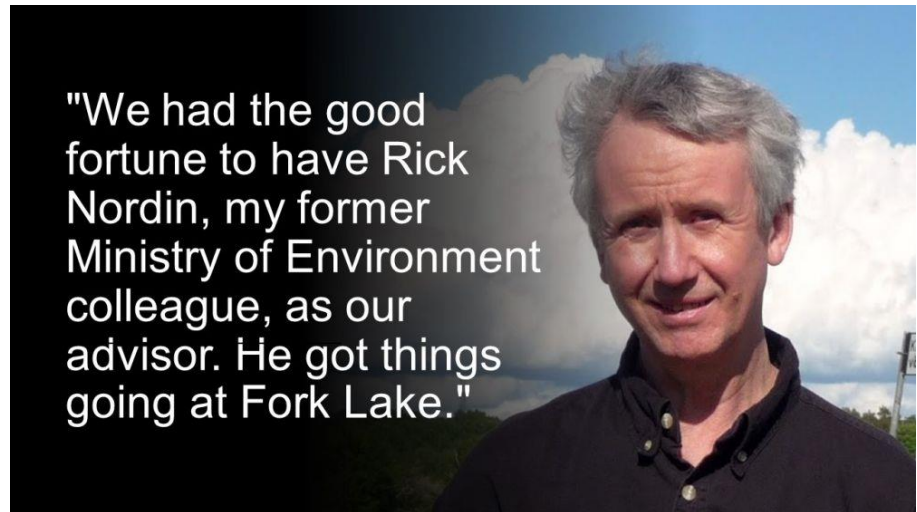
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## **A community response to climate change is a call for all hands on-deck**

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“My involvement with the BCLSS began around the year 2000 through the **Friends of Fork Lake** stewardship group in the District of Highlands where I lived.”

"You suddenly hit a button that everybody did not know what to do, but said, how do we get involved. And then you realize that working together we can make a difference through lake stewardship."

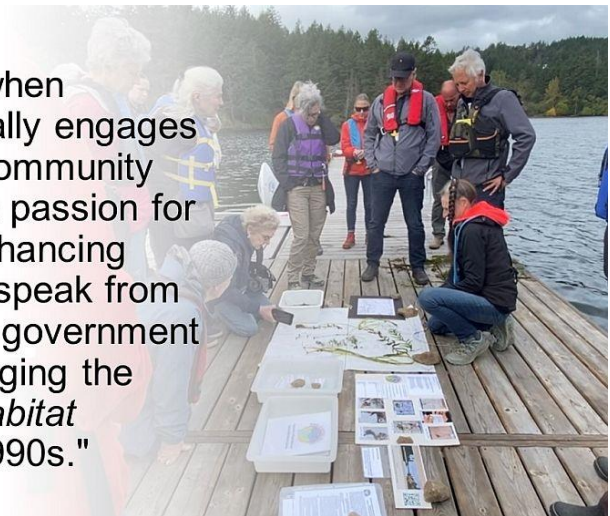


### **There is magic in a shared purpose**

"Another thing that I like to put in context is that, with climate change, we must have all hands on-deck. But I doubt that the provincial government realizes...YET...the value of community taking responsibility in some aspect of its local area."

"Engaging citizen lake stewards throughout the province would extend the ability of government, as we face climate change. It is a growing agency, with huge potential, of embracing provincial direction with engagement of its citizens."

"There is magic when government actually engages community and community members share a passion for protecting and enhancing aquatic habitat. I speak from my experience in government when I was managing the *Urban Salmon Habitat Program* in the 1990s."





## Combining the heart and the head

"A stewardship ethic is something that you cannot explain in political terms because you are talking about a different system and a different way of thinking about the world around us."

"You are talking about what I call combining the heart and the head. You go forward because you believe in the concept and what you are doing. You also have to have pragmatism. Otherwise, it is just airy-fairy talk."

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## Our relationship with water has to change

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"There are so many things happening around a lake that we are not aware might influence the health of that lake. It is time for us all to take responsibility and look at water differently. We must be pragmatic and inclusive."

"Lakes cannot be considered in isolation, but rather within an integrated whole watershed system context, for the health of the lake is vulnerable and dependent upon land use activities in the surrounding watershed."

"It has also become evident that the integration of indigenous knowledge and western science is long overdue as we reframe, through partnership, our relationship with water," concludes Eric Bonham.



"Our relationship with water has to change, Dr. Shannon Waters said, so that we relate to water as **kin** rather than as a **commodity**. Her inspiring presentation at the lake stewardship conference in September 2023 underscored the value and importance of having knowledgeably trained lake stewards." - Eric Bonham

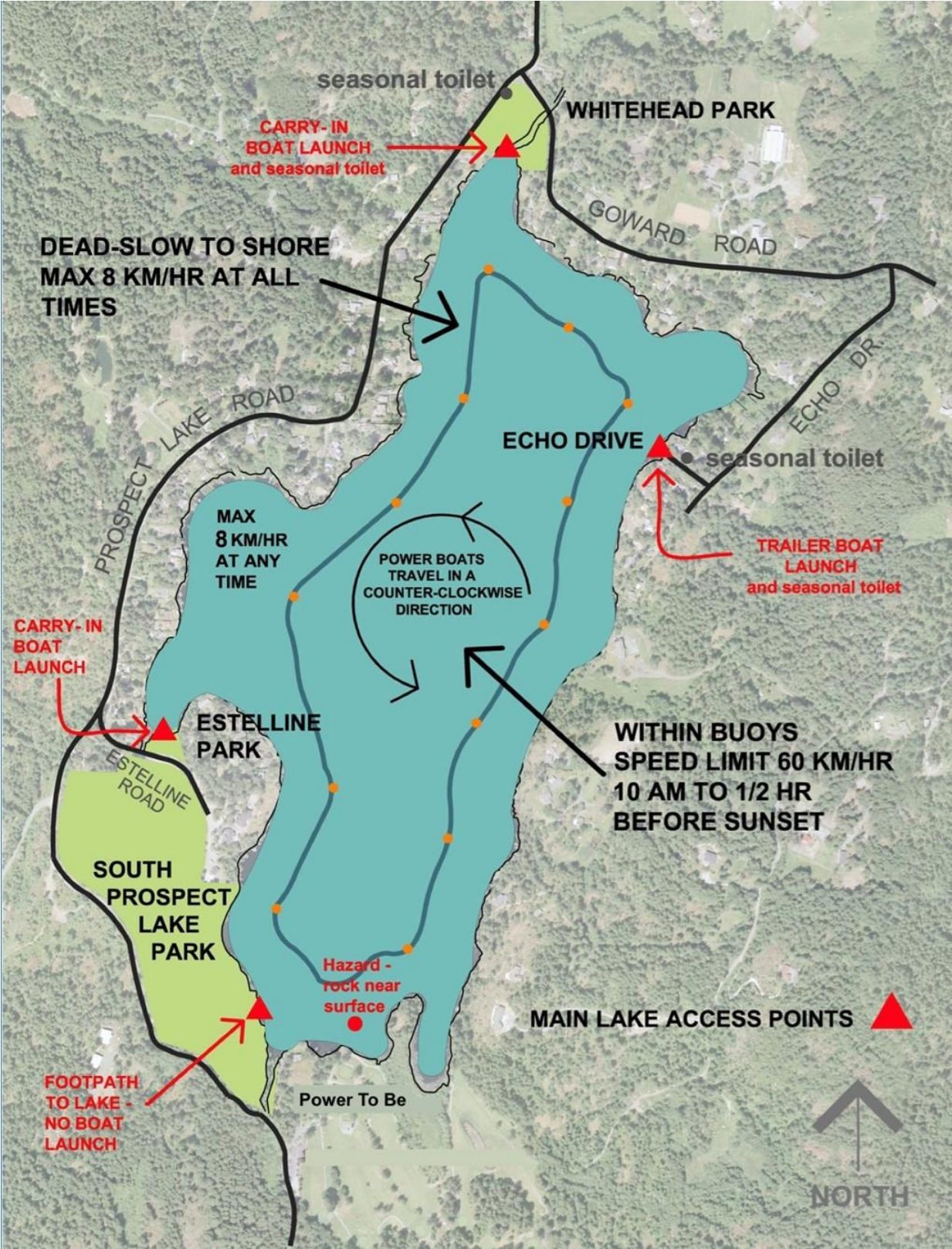
APPENDIX A

**The Big Three: Climate  
Change, Introduced  
Species, and Eutrophication**

*Solutions from Traditional  
Knowledge and Western  
Perspectives on Lake Stewardship*

An essay by Eric Bonham

This figure shows the “lake zoning” that the District of Saanich has put in place to deal with recreational use at Prospect Lake



## An essay about the BC Lake Stewardship Society by Eric Bonham

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### Report on the 2023 Conference: An emphasis on solutions

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The BC Lake Stewardship Society (BCLSS) held their annual conference at the "Power to Be" location on Prospect Lake, Victoria, September 23,24, 2023.

The conference topic, [The Big Three: Climate Change, Introduced Species and Eutrophication](#), reflected a timely acknowledgement of climate change and its impact on freshwater lakes throughout British Columbia. An informative technical program, combined with educational field trips and the bridging of indigenous knowledge with western science ensured a stimulating and creative conference.



Overall view of Prospect Lake. *Photo credit: Power to Be*



*Photo credit: Prospect Lake Preservation Society*

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## ***BC Lake Stewardship Society***

*BCLSS is a non-profit organization representing an extensive network of lake groups, volunteers, and environmental monitors throughout the province.*

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### **Providing context, it is relevant to share the origins of the BCLSS organization**

Dr Rick Nordin and Dr Ken Ashley, both employed with the provincial Ministry of Environment in 1997, were ahead of their time when they realized the value of a citizen lake stewardship program.

The program provides citizen science information to both local and provincial government, as well as assisting communities with the protection of healthy lakes.

In essence, the BCLSS evolution has been a success story, lake stewards gather invaluable lake monitoring data, control invasive species, provide education and stewardship training programs, and as a result, raise community awareness of the need for sound lake management in BC.

There are currently 50 active stewardship groups province wide and going forward, due to the information collected, lake stewardship has an effective role to play within a broader provincial climate change strategy.

Lake stewards offer another vital contribution, namely passion, commitment, and in a volunteer capacity, leadership within their community.

## Conference presenters identified concerns regarding the current health of a number of provincial lakes

Climate change, eutrophication and the increased presence of aquatic invasive species such as Eurasian Watermilfoil has had a negative impact on the health and appearance of some lakes, noticeably so during the summer season.

Furthermore, depletion of dissolved oxygen and warmer temperatures at deeper lake levels have also raised concerns on fish survival.

A number of related factors cause water quality deterioration in some lakes, including urban development, clear-cut logging, agriculture, faulty septic systems, and intense recreational use.

As noted, climate change has further exacerbated the situation. For example, the impact from forest fires experienced in 2023 caused excessive sediment loading during runoff with a noticeable increase of nutrient and algal growth in lakes.

***A reminder that the loss of tree canopy and its effect on lake management are inextricably linked.*** The impacts from recreational use at Elk Lake on Vancouver Island, Cultus Lake in the Fraser Valley, and lakes within the Whistler area were highlighted.

The Whistler Lakes Conservation Association, noted for example, the challenge of creating a lake stewardship ethic in a world-destination resort where a year-round residential population of 14,700 can exceed 2.5 million, given the vibrant tourist industry in the area throughout the year.

Clearly visitor awareness, education and engagement are essential factors in order to maintain the environmental integrity of lakes within the Whistler area.

***The conference feature speaker, Dr. Shannon Waters,*** a public health and preventative medicine physician, reminds us of the need to align emotional, physical and spiritual values, inspiring us to work through collaborative partnerships towards the collective well-being and common good.

This pragmatic endeavour aligns different perspectives, age groups and disciplines to, with common purpose, address the reality of climate change, ensuring the implementation of practical solutions from the local to the global, based upon knowledge, wisdom, respect, responsibility, and relationships.



*Dr. Shannon Waters, a medical health officer in the Cowichan Valley, spoke of the need for a more holistic relationship with water, through the integration of indigenous knowledge and western science. To relate to water as "kin" rather than a "commodity" for "Water is Life", (Hulit un tst tu' qa').*

Dr Waters inspiring presentation underscored the value and importance of having knowledgeably trained lake stewards with an understanding of lake ecology and the gathering of reliable water quality data. Equally important is the assurance that this information once collected is stored in a province wide data base accessible to all.

## **BCLSS has developed a range of educational initiatives**

Educational initiatives undertaken by BCLSS include the [BC Lake Stewardship and Monitoring Program](#), the [BC Lake Stewardship Engagement Initiative](#) and a [BC LakeKeepers Manual](#), a handy guide to the stewardship and monitoring of lakes.

A spontaneous Vancouver Island workshop at the conference brought together lake stewards from Elk, Prospect, Fork, Quennell, Shawnigan, Cowichan and Mary Lake.

***The conference concluded with an informative aquatic plant sampling demonstration*** at Prospect Lake and a subsequent field visit to Elk and Langford Lake. Eutrophication, low levels of dissolved oxygen and the presence of invasive species has triggered the adoption of an oxygenation program at Elk Lake. The program will commence September 2023.

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### ***Vision for a lake stewards coalition on Vancouver Island***

*There is much to be learned by sharing experiences and it was agreed there was merit in forming a coalition of Vancouver Island Lake stewards to continue the dialogue. An initial gathering has been set for late October 2023.*

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*Demonstration by Friends of Tod Creek Watershed*

## Closing observation

The conference identified the value and benefit of the BCLSS lake stewardship program, working as it does, collaboratively with scientists, environmental professionals, First Nations, lakeshore residents, government officials and the general public to assist with maintaining healthy lakes throughout the province.

That said, lakes cannot be considered in isolation, but rather within an integrated whole watershed system context, for the health of the lake is vulnerable and dependent upon land use activities in the surrounding watershed.

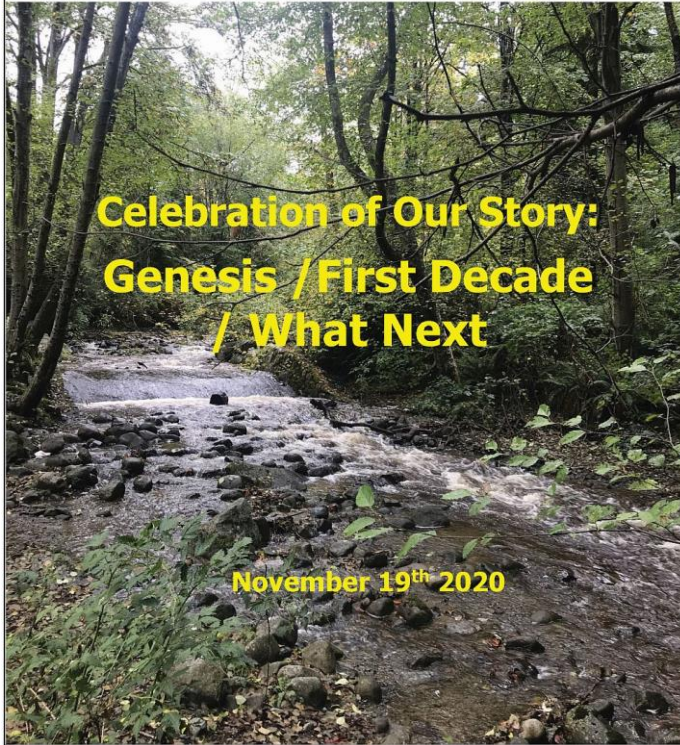
Business as usual does not address the situation, and the ever-increasing frequency of damaging floods and drought continues to remind us that climate change has arrived. In response, it has become evident that the integration of indigenous knowledge and western science is long overdue as we reframe, through partnership, our relationship with water.







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<https://waterbucket.ca/about-us/>

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## About the Partnership for Water Sustainability in British Columbia

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Incorporation of the Partnership for Water Sustainability in British Columbia as a not-for-profit society on November 19, 2010 was a milestone moment. Incorporation signified a bold leap forward.

Over two decades, the Partnership had evolved from a technical committee in the 1990s, to a “water roundtable” in the first decade of the 2000s, and then to a legal entity. The Partnership has its roots in government – local, provincial, federal.

The Partnership has a primary goal, to **build bridges of understanding** and pass the baton from the past to the present and future. To achieve the goal, the Partnership is growing a network in the local government setting. This network embraces collaborative leadership and **inter-generational collaboration**.

The Partnership believes that when each generation is receptive to accepting the inter-generational baton and embracing the wisdom that goes with it, the decisions of successive generations will benefit from and build upon the experience of those who went before them.

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