



**the partnership
for water sustainability in bc**

Waterbucket eNews on January 21, 2025
<https://waterbucket.ca/wscblog/>

**Living Water Smart
in British Columbia:**

**Will 2025 be the
year of the re-set?**

Note to Reader:

Waterbucket eNews¹ celebrates the leadership of individuals and organizations who are guided by the vision for **Living Water Smart in British Columbia**².

The edition published on January 21 2025 kicked off the 2025 season of “stories behind the stories” of those who are leading changes in thinking and implementing in BC. The unifying theme for upcoming editions is this question: *Will 2025 be the year when decision-makers within government build on lessons from the past to initiate a re-set that overcomes organizational amnesia?*

The umbrella for Partnership initiatives and programs is the **Water Sustainability Action Plan for British Columbia**³. In turn, the Action Plan is nested within **Living Water Smart, British Columbia's Water Plan**.



Cover Image Credit: photo by Cameron Stephens

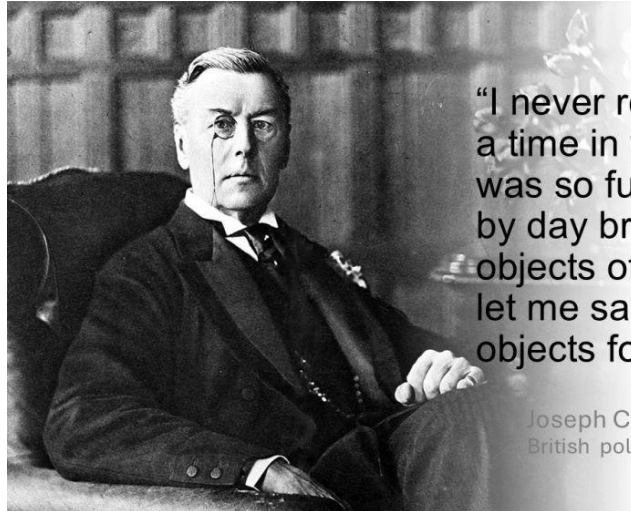
¹ <https://waterbucket.ca/wscblog/>

² https://waterbucket.ca/wcp/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/11/livingwatersmart_book.pdf

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

One-Minute Takeaway

"I think that you will all agree that we are living in most interesting times." - from a speech by British politician Joseph Chamberlain in 1898



"I never remember myself a time in which our history was so full, in which day by day brought us new objects of interest, and, let me say also, new objects for anxiety."

Joseph Chamberlain (1836-1914),
British politician and social reformer

The "may you live in interesting times" quote has an interesting history. In a 1936 speech, Sir Austen Chamberlain used it to great effect in his appeal for rearmament to combat the rise of Nazi Germany. Three decades later, in 1966, Robert F Kennedy popularized the quote with his "Ripple of Hope" speech.

The first documented use of the quote was in a 1898 speech by Joseph Chamberlain, British politician and social reformer. He was the father of both Austen Chamberlain, a Chancellor of the Exchequer in the 1930s, and Neville Chamberlain who was Britain's prime minister at the beginning of WW2.

Memorable quotes that encapsulate wisdom are timeless. Consider what Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr wrote in 1849: the more thing change, the more they stay the same. Despite apparent changes or advancements in society, certain fundamental aspects or patterns of behaviour remain unchanged over time.

May you live in interesting times

A second quote..."may you live in interesting times"...aptly describes the array of local, provincial, national and global challenges that we face today. The phrase is ironic because "interesting" times are usually times of trouble.

Both quotes underscore the value in understanding and learning from history because history does repeat itself, and at different scales.

Waterbucket eNews features stories about the lived experiences of champions in the frontlines at the local and provincial scales.



Lessons from the past inform the future

In the world of government, it helps to understand what works and what does not. Having deep knowledge provides a foundation upon which to base sound decisions. During troubled times, there is no substitute for lessons learned through lived experience.

“Like it or not we live in interesting times. They are times of danger and uncertainty; but they are also more open to the creative energy of men than any other time in history.”

Robert Kennedy (1925-1968) –
quote from his “Ripple of Hope”
speech in 1966, reportedly the
greatest of his career



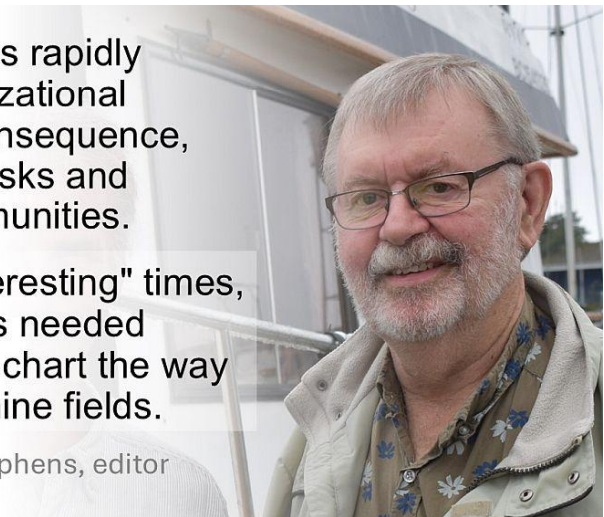
"And everyone here will ultimately be judged - will ultimately judge himself - on the effort he has contributed to building a new world society and the extent to which his ideals and goals have shaped that effort," added Robert Kennedy in his Ripple of Hope speech.

As of 2025, organizational amnesia is "the challenge" for governments to overcome

Deep knowledge is rapidly being lost. Organizational amnesia is the consequence, and this creates risks and liabilities for communities.

In our current "interesting" times, deep knowledge is needed more than ever to chart the way forward through mine fields.

Kim Stephens, editor



Editor's Perspective by Kim A Stephens

A recent conversation with Arnold Schwabe was my source of inspiration for featuring the "may you live in interesting times" quote. In mid-2024, Arnold succeeded Wally Wells as Executive Director of Asset Management BC. Our context for meeting was the passing of the baton from Wally to Arnold to continue the collaboration with the Partnership.

The three of us reflected on the challenges we see facing our partner local governments. Our musings prompted Arnold Schwabe to observe, "If your foundation is weak, it is not going to get you anywhere."

That is the nub of the problem
...organizational amnesia
has weakened foundations.



"So, what do we do? Really, it is about focusing on those areas of restarting and refreshing," states Arnold Schwabe. "And everybody, especially elected officials, having the courage to start making the change that is coming. I want to believe all the things are in place for change to occur, for a reset to take place."

We see 2025 as the year of the re-set for "whole-system asset management"

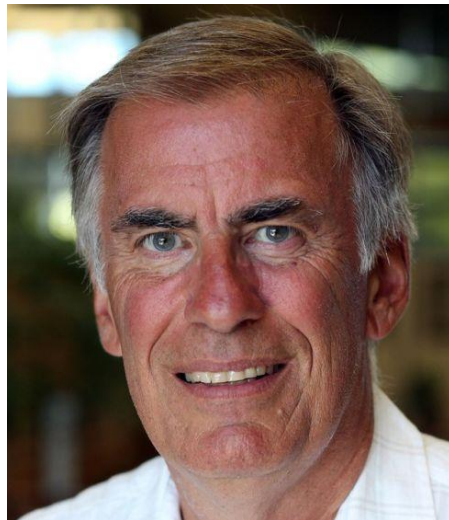
Loss of continuity is happening just when continuity of understanding is needed most. Knowing what we know, the Partnership believes the moment is right to brand 2025 as "THE YEAR OF THE RE-SET" in an effort to create a self-fulfilling prophecy!

Re-set means implement a course correction so that governments would maintain and manage engineered and natural assets as interconnected components within a system that includes the people who live there.

What would success look like? At a high level, the community writ large would buy-in to the need and financial case for funding **SOLUTIONS THAT ARE AFFORDABLE, EFFECTIVE AND PRAGMATIC**. That is the point of departure for setting in motion changes that are for the *common good*.

Avoid the solution becoming the problem

Before one can fix a problem, however, decision-makers and the community must believe that there is a problem. Otherwise, the solution becomes the problem. That is the conundrum that Frank Leonard, former Saanich mayor (1996-2014), addressed in the inaugural edition of the Asset Management BC Newsletter in 2010.



"When the solution will require time and/or money, you should follow 2 simple rules; (1) You can't solve a problem in advance of public awareness, and (2) You can't propose a solution in advance of political debate."

Frank Leonard – quote from the inaugural edition of the Asset Management BC Newsletter, Fall 2010

Frank Leonard's pragmatic wisdom has influenced both Asset Management BC and the Partnership in our respective approaches to nudging changes in policy and practice.

The Partnership's four parallel tracks of effort would inform a re-set in 2025

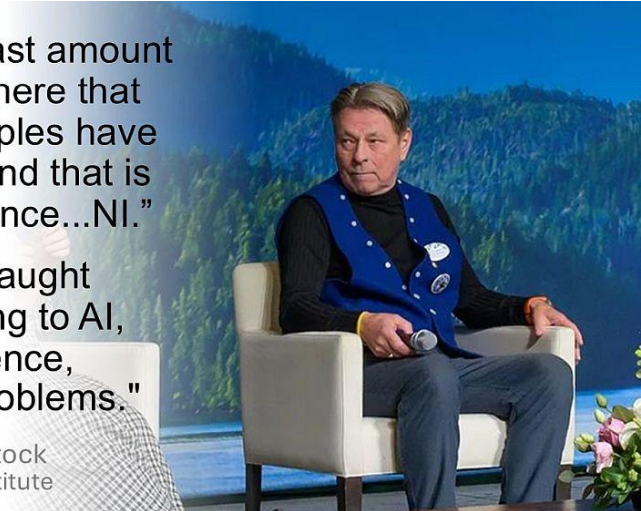
In the case of the Partnership, we are moving along four tracks. *Waterbucket eNews* featured all four theme areas last year. In 2025, we will continue to connect dots through storytelling about lived experience and deep knowledge that points the way forward for a re-set. Stay tuned!

Track #1 is our collaboration with Asset Management BC. **Track #2** is the Partnership's collaboration with Michael Blackstock to mainstream Blue Ecology and Indigenous knowledge as a pathway to Water Reconciliation.

"There is this vast amount of wisdom out there that Indigenous peoples have seen forever...and that is Natural Intelligence...NI."

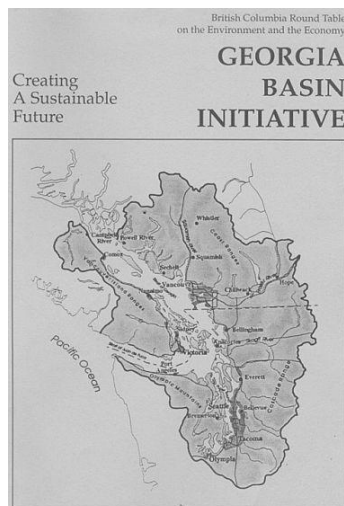
"Avoid getting caught up in only looking to AI, artificial intelligence, to solve your problems."

Michael Blackstock
Blue Ecology Institute



Track #3 is our collaboration with provincial ministries. The Partnership understands how government works and is the “water memory” of the Province. At the request of the Province, the Partnership developed and maintains a suite of online calculators that the provincial water management program relies on.

Track #4 is the legacy of the [Georgia Basin Initiative](#) which is embedded in the [Georgia Basin Inter-Regional Education Initiative](#). There is no formal mechanism to enable or facilitate inter-regional collaboration in BC. Launched in 2012 by the Partnership in collaboration with five regional districts, the IREI fills this gap and fosters peer-based learning among local governments.



"We need to act quickly to avoid the situation faced by other large urbanizing regions, where unmanaged growth is degrading the environment, undermining private and public sector investment and lowering the overall quality of life for the people who live there."

Georgia Basin Initiative: Creating a Sustainable Future, 1993

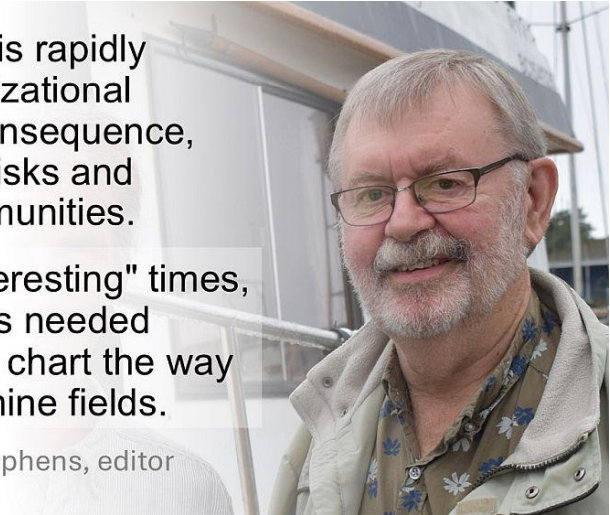
STORY BEHIND THE STORY:

Will 2025 be the year of the re-set?

Deep knowledge is rapidly being lost. Organizational amnesia is the consequence, and this creates risks and liabilities for communities.

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Kim Stephens, editor



For over two years, I have been writing a sweeping narrative that I title the [Chronicle of Green Infrastructure Innovation in Metro Vancouver from 1994 through 2024](#). It is a work-in-progress because the story is still playing out in real-time.

What did you learn along the way, current local government staff would ask me, and where did that lead each time. Their questions prompted me to dig deeper. So, I expanded my "story behind the story" interviews to delve into motivating factors.



The passage of time does provide perspective. Themes emerged. With each interview, I gained more and more insight into my own lived experience - for example, my conversational interview with former premier Mike Harcourt yielded "context for my context".

Nine cascading factors that must be in alignment to implement a course correction

Next, I had to find a way to distil and communicate three decades into an easy-to-tell story of how the Metro Vancouver region got to where we are today. I boiled 700 pages down to a table. Four distinct eras define the past three decades, with the period of time for each varying between 6 and 9 years.

Lessons from the past inform the future

The *Table of Cascading Factors* provides historical context

This reality check serves as a springboard to the Year 2025 and beyond



Table of Cascading Factors

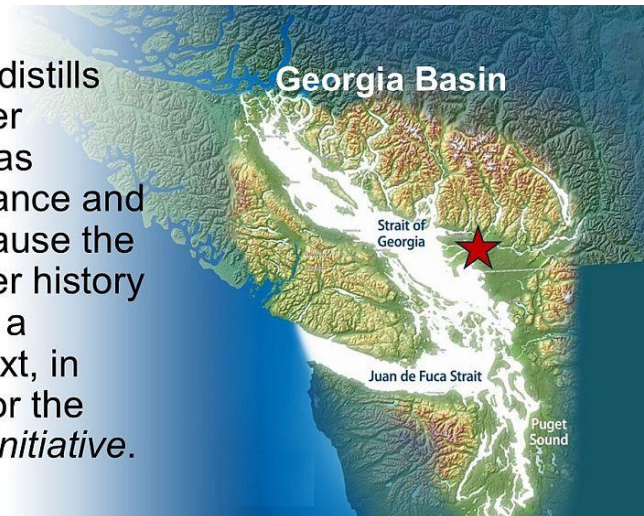
The table below is distilled from my lived experience over the past three decades. When one is in the heat of the moment, it can be hard to see the forest for the trees. With a multi-decade perspective of time, however, one can see a picture. And that is what the table represents.

Cascading factors that must be in alignment for change to happen	1997 - 2005	2006 - 2011	2012 - 2017	2018-2024	2025 and beyond
	Crucible Period	Golden Period	Unfulfilled Promise	Memory Loss	Overcome Amnesia
Shared Vision	✓	✓	✓	✗	what if
Political Commitment	✓	✓	✓	✗	what if
Champions	✓	✓	dropping out	✗	what if
Forums	✓	✓	infrequent	✗	what if
Credibility, Respect and Trust	✓	✓	✓	✗	what if
Collaborative Leadership	✓	✓	lacking	✗	what if
Learn by doing	✓	✓	declining	✗	what if
Funding	✓	✓	inconsistent	✗	what if
Roundtable for action	✓	✓	missing in action	✗	what if

The descriptors for the cascading factors are succinct for ease of recall. But the words have deep meaning and substance. My lived experience is that the nine must all be in alignment to effect change. All it takes is one factor to be out of alignment and that can be enough to derail a process and progress. Yet it may be years before that consequence becomes apparent.

Along the way, inter-regional collaboration allowed us to cross-pollinate Metro Vancouver, Vancouver Island and Okanagan experiences.

While the table distills Metro Vancouver experience, it has provincial relevance and application because the Metro Vancouver history is nested within a provincial context, in particular that for the *Georgia Basin Initiative*.



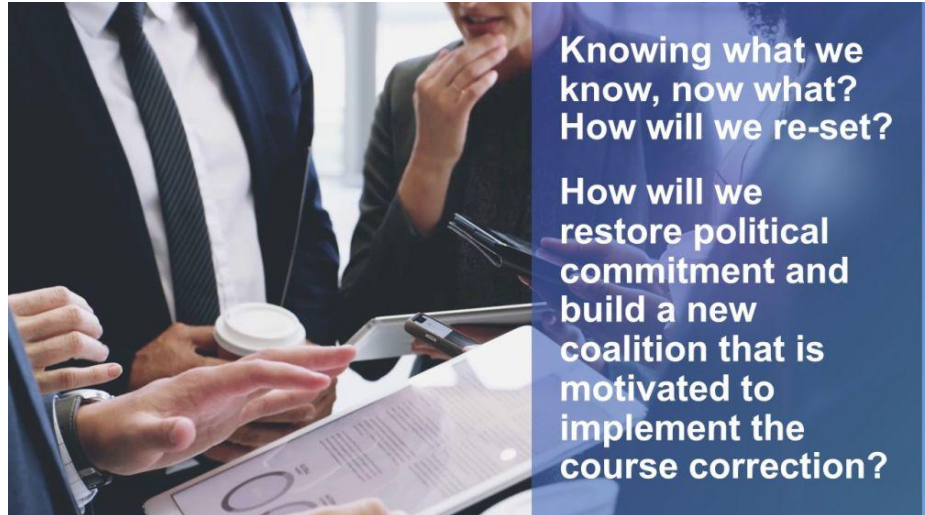
The difference between Vancouver Island and Metro Vancouver, for example, is that enough champions who remember are still in the frontlines on Vancouver Island to hold things together. For now, that is enough to offset memory loss region-wide. But the window is narrowing until those champions age out.

Restore political commitment and build a new coalition

In the 2000s, Metro Vancouver put British Columbia on the international map because the region was viewed by many as a beacon of inspiration. Could lightning strike twice? Could the region re-emerge as a beacon of inspiration?

Of course it could. But it will come down to whether the right people are in the room at the right time, and whether they can learn from and build on past experience. Staff can only carry things so far. When an elected leader who is respected is THE CHAMPION, momentum can quickly accelerate.

Released by the Partnership in November 2024, the **Table of Cascading Factors** is a communication tool, has value as a conversation starter, and is resonating with audiences. Because it is a conversation starter, the table allows us to pivot from the past to the future, and pose question such as:



“Knowing what we know, it is not as simple as going from an X to a tick mark in each column.”

“You have to build new political commitment and basically start all over again in a new crucible phase...where you coalition-build to develop a new shared vision, etc.”

Ray Fung, retired municipal director of engineering

At the top of the list of cascading factors is political leadership and commitment to the shared vision. Leadership boils down to a willingness to act and bring together other champions willing to provide the type of energy and organizational drive that overcomes inertia.

Defining statement for each era

In the image that follows on the next page, the chronicle of the past three decades is distilled into a set of defining statements to describe each of the five sub-periods. The first four provide the springboard for a re-set and course correction beginning in 2025.



Now what will we do to overcome organizational amnesia?

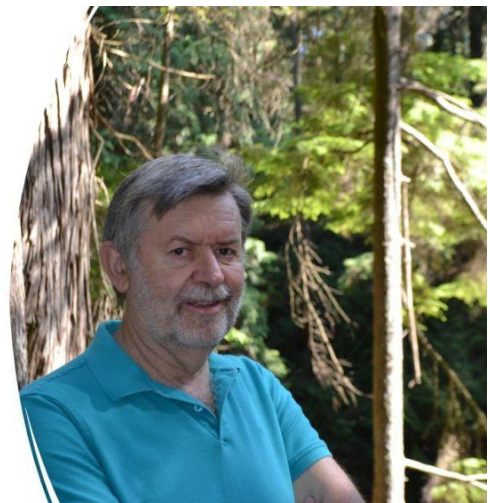
I am an eternal optimist. The glass is half-full and the water level is rising. You just have to play the long game and be patient until there is a **reachable moment** when minds are open and thus receptive to the message.

Then it is *carpe diem* to convert the window of opportunity into a **teachable moment** that changes history! Timing is everything. It always is. In my experience, the most effective city managers are the ones who anticipate an issue and are ready with a recommendation when council is primed for the moment.

The takeaway message from this season opening edition of Waterbucket eNews is **EMBRACE THE INTERGENERATIONAL BATON AND LEARN TO LOOK BACK TO SEE AHEAD**. In closing, I offer readers this cautionary note about the essential need to build a coalition:

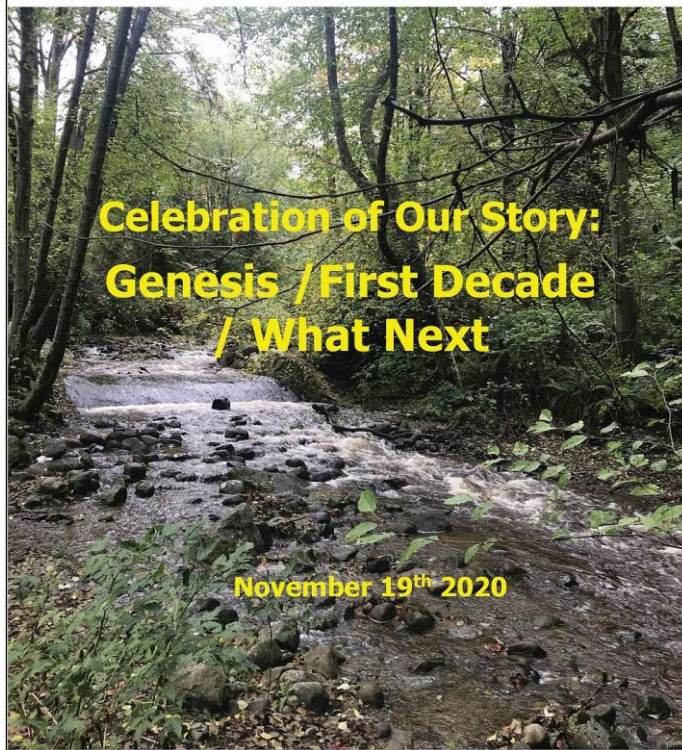
"Before one can fix a problem, others who are able to make a difference must also believe that there is a problem, as well as understand the reasons why this is the case and that there are affordable and effective solutions."

Kim Stephens
Executive Director
Partnership for Water Sustainability
in British Columbia





the partnership
for water sustainability in bc



Celebration of Our Story:
Genesis / First Decade
/ What Next

November 19th 2020

TO LEARN MORE, VISIT:

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

About the Partnership for Water Sustainability in British Columbia

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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