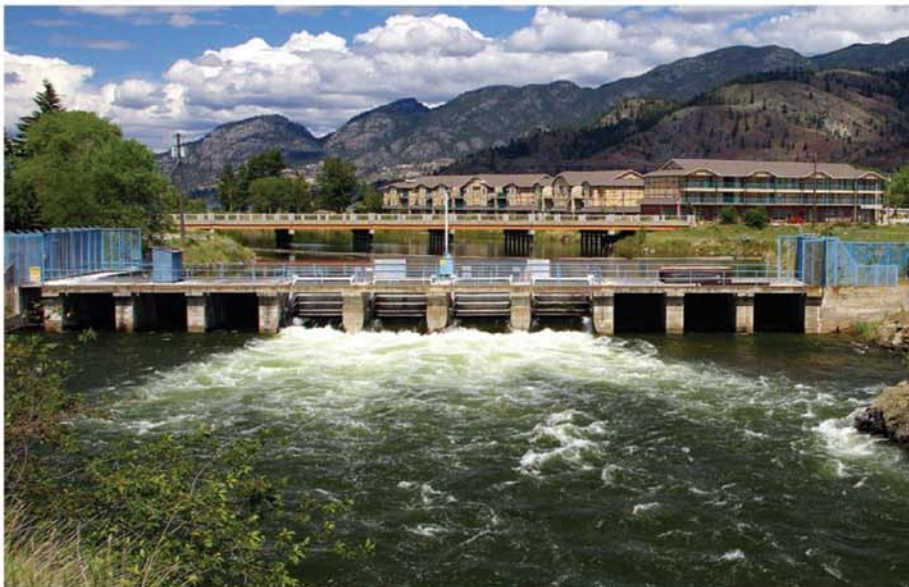


Water sustainability: from awareness to action in British Columbia

By Kim A Stephens



Water dam used to control water levels in an Okanagan irrigation canal.

Partnerships, partnerships, partnerships! This was the key message at a half-day reporting out session on 'Water Sustainability – Convening for Action in British Columbia', held as part of the 2007 Annual Conference of the British Columbia Water & Waste Association (BCWWA).

The British Columbia landscape is being transformed by settlement and economic growth. While the Province has been experiencing enhanced social and economic well-being, the need to mitigate pressures on land and water resources has provided a driver for a 'green infrastructure' movement that is:

- water-centric,
- founded on a natural systems approach, and
- keyed to partnerships.

Water-centric means planning with a view to water – whether for a single site or the entire Province.

Infrastructure design is changing. Cumulative benefits are achievable, one property at a time, through changes in the policies, programs, practices and standards that determine how land is developed and water is used. By implementing design with nature infrastructure practices and regulation, the 'convening for action' vision is that British Columbia

will be well on the way to achieving water sustainability by 2010.

The objective when 'convening for action' is to influence practitioners to learn about and use practices that better balance the necessary relationships of settlement activity and ecological assets in local and regional landscapes. Practitioners are defined as those whose professions, vocations and volunteer tasks relate to use and conservation of water, land and real estate.

Water Sustainability Action Plan for British Columbia

The Convening for Action session at the BCWWA Conference provided implementation updates on how a water-centric approach to community planning and development is being advanced under the partnership umbrella of the 'Water Sustainability Action Plan for British Columbia'.

The Action Plan comprises inter-connected program elements that give local governments and practitioners the tools and experience to do things differently. The program elements are categorized as shown on Figure 1 and as listed below:

- Products and Tools
- Networking and Outreach
- Education and Training
- Capacity Building

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The Convening for Action presentations addressed each of these elements. First, context was provided by explaining how the Water Sustainability Action Plan is being delivered by the BCWWA Water Sustainability Committee through a partnership with the BC Ministry of Environment. Then, three regional pilot programs were described. The final presentation was about the Water Bucket Website, which was a unifying thread through all the presentations.

Water – choosing sustainability for life and livelihoods

The BCWWA Water Sustainability Committee is a roundtable of organizations that have a specific interest or mission in implementing the Action Plan.

In 2006, the BCWWA Water Sustainability Committee borrowed the phrase 'water for life and livelihoods' from the United Kingdom in order to focus British Columbians on what is at stake over both the short and long terms. The phrase conveys the fundamental principles of sustainability of natural systems in their own right and in relation to the health and well-being of people who benefit from the use of water for basic life needs and economic activity.

In the lead-off co-presentation, Raymond Fung (Chair of the Water Sustainability Committee) and Lynn Kriwoken (Director of the Ministry of Environment's Water Stewardship Division) elaborated on the relationship between the Ministry of Environment and the BCWWA Water Sustainability Committee in delivering the Action Plan.

In her part, Lynn Kriwoken emphasized that the Ministry of Environment views its partnership with the Water Sustainability

Figure 1



Committee as an essential element in implementing the Ministry's Water Stewardship Outreach Strategy. In his part, Raymond Fung described what Convening for Action means in practice.

According to Lynn Kriwoken, "water is the piece that integrates everything that we care about. You will note that we are using the phrase water stewardship, not water management. Stewardship is about replacing self interest, dependency and control with service, responsibility and partnership."

"Stewardship is an obligation that we all have", stated Raymond Fung, "and the key to moving from awareness to action is to form partnerships. Partnerships provide a good way to share risks. The Water Balance Model is a prime example of spreading the risk by banding together."

Developed by an Inter-Governmental

Partnership as an extension of 'Stormwater Planning: A Guidebook for British Columbia', the Water Balance Model is a web-based decision support and scenario modeling tool that is found at www.waterbalance.ca. It enables users to visualize how to implement green infrastructure solutions that achieve rainwater runoff source control at the site scale. Published in 2002, the Guidebook was a catalyst for change that has resulted in British Columbia achieving international recognition as a leader in implementing a natural systems approach to rainwater management.

Fung provided context for each of the three regional pilots for Convening for Action: "In the South Okanagan, we have helped bring a voice to water issues. In Greater Vancouver, practitioners working for local governments told us they did not

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want more documents that simply go on a shelf; rather, they wanted to network and share their experiences. On Vancouver Island, we have an ambitious program to bring people together and apply/adapt what we have learned in the Okanagan and in Greater Vancouver."

Convening for Action in the South Okanagan

Within the next 10 to 15 years it is projected that the available water in the Okanagan Basin will be fully allocated. At the same time, agricultural development is also expected to increase, with potential growth in the grape and wine sector leading the way. Also, the region will continue to experience both the benefits and consequences of climate change – that is, a longer growing season and changes in form and pattern of precipitation and runoff, respectively.

The purpose in 'convening for action' is to build regional capacity and understanding of what Water OUT = Water IN means in the context of a Regional Growth Strategy and its goals.

"Everything is connected, and how we develop land determines how water is used and how water runs off the land. Because water has been identified as the #1 concern of the public, the South Okanagan Regional Growth Strategy is a provincial pilot for advancing the water balance way-of-thinking and acting", noted Ted van der Gulik, Senior Engineer with the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands. He is also Vice-Chair of the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council, Vice-Chair of the Water Sustainability Committee of the BCWWA, and Chair of the Inter-Governmental Partnership that developed the Water Balance Model.

Convening for Action in the Greater Vancouver Region

In the Greater Vancouver region, the Green Infrastructure Partnership has implemented a program called 'Celebrating Green Infrastructure: Showcasing Innovation Series'. According to Paul Ham, Chair of the Green Infrastructure Partnership, "the goal in showcasing on-the-ground innovation is to build regional capacity through sharing of green infrastructure approaches, experiences and lessons learned as an outcome of designing with nature."

"When we talk to practitioners in local government, it doesn't matter what the region, the message is the same...they tell us that they are too busy to communicate with their colleagues in neighbouring municipalities. Yet the irony is that there is much to learn by sharing in

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