

Towards a Unifying Watershed Sustainability Vision

Discussion Paper
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A. Advancing Watershed Sustainability in BC

The BC Wildlife Federation (BCWF), in conjunction with funding from the Gordon & Betty Moore Foundation is undertaking a project to advance watershed conservation and sustainability throughout BC. BCWF is delivering the project in partnership with the Fraser Basin Council (FBC). In addition, many other organizations and individuals, representing a diversity of perspectives, experiences and expertise, were engaged in various ways throughout year-one (Fall 2013 – Spring 2014) of this three-year project.

This initiative arose from a concern, shared by many, that watershed ecosystems in BC are losing their resilience and sustainability. The long-term health of watersheds is key to ensure the sustainability of the ecosystems, communities and economies that depend upon them. However, over the years, land and water use decisions and activities have resulted in the gradual loss of ecological function in watersheds including degradation of habitat, declining water quality, inadequate flows for environmental values, and conflict among different sectors that depend upon water. Though there are many diverse organizations and jurisdictions working on the stewardship, management, planning and governance of watersheds and water resources, there is still a need for enhanced coordination and collaboration among these efforts.

The goal of this project is to educate British Columbians on the importance of watershed sustainability and protecting BC's diverse and unique aquatic resources. It also aims to help strengthen capacity in BC to achieve healthy watersheds by considering watershed health and sustainability through several different lenses, or sub-projects. The focus of the sub-projects facilitated by the Fraser Basin Council include the following:

- 1. Vision of Watershed Sustainability – Develop a unifying vision of sustainability for watersheds and landscapes through a collaborative process that engages First Nations organizations and non-governmental conservation organizations.**
2. Watershed Management Actions – Conduct research on the roles, responsibilities and actions required to effectively manage the health and sustainability of BC's watersheds, including an assessment of capacity, challenges and opportunities.
3. Funding and Delivery Models – Conduct research and develop recommendations on funding and delivery models needed to advance watershed health and sustainability at local and regional scales throughout BC.
4. Capacity and Accountability for Shared Decision-Making = Conduct research and develop recommendations regarding capacity requirements and accountability mechanisms for shared decision-making at local, regional and watershed scales.
5. Natural Resource Practices Board – Conduct research and develop recommendations regarding a Natural Resource Practices Board to provide advice on effective, science-based management of natural resources including independent performance audits and reporting.

6. Indicators of Watershed Health – Conduct research and develop a set of indicators to measure the health of watershed and estuarine ecosystems throughout BC.
7. Workshop for Advisors and Practitioners – Plan, deliver and co-host a workshop to present key findings to date and facilitate dialogue and feedback.

Each of the projects outlined above are intended to focus on a particular aspect of watershed management. (e.g. vision, management, governance, capacity, oversight, funding, etc.). However, these different aspects can also be seen as distinct pieces of a more complex and interconnected puzzle. The following is intended to illustrate how the different pieces fit together.

1. Vision – What are our needs, aspirations and goals for our watersheds?

- **Project - Vision of Watershed Sustainability**

2. Implementation – What actions do we take to achieve our vision?

- Project – Watershed Management Actions
- Project – Capacity and Accountability for Shared Decision-Making

3. Resources – What human and financial resources do we allocate – and how – to most efficiently and effectively manage watersheds and achieve our vision?

- Project – Funding and Delivery Models

4. Evaluation and Performance Management – How can we best assess progress towards achieving our vision of healthy watersheds and what auditing and reporting mechanisms can assist?

- Project – Indicators of Watershed Health
- Project – Natural Resources Practices Board

Note: the highlighted project above indicates the focus of this particular discussion paper.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction to a Watershed Sustainability Vision

One of the components of this larger project includes the development of a vision of sustainability for watersheds and landscapes in collaboration with province-wide First Nations organizations and non-governmental conservation organizations.

Purpose and Rationale for a Vision

The purpose of the proposed vision of watershed sustainability is to explore and identify unifying values, principles and objectives regarding watershed sustainability in BC. The common vision could then inform priorities for collaboration among First Nations and conservation groups throughout BC.

A sustainability vision, developed by and for organizations working for healthy watersheds across BC (both First Nations and NGOs) could support and strengthen coordination and collaboration, as well as the overall success of individual initiatives.

Draft Vision and Guiding Principles

The following draft vision statement and guiding principles are offered for consideration and to solicit feedback.

Vision Statement: Healthy watersheds, communities and economies that are resilient.

Principles:

- Natural capital is best conserved by protecting and enhancing existing natural habitats and populations
- Effective conservation initiatives must be implemented and evaluated at a landscape / watershed scale through collaboration with communities and First Nations
- Landscapes and watersheds have a finite capacity after which natural capital is lost
- Implement adaptive management approaches supported by science and experience

In the remainder of this document, several examples of water or watershed-related visions are provided for further consideration.

B. Examples of Existing Vision Documents

The following are a few examples of vision documents for reference in consideration of the development of a unifying watershed sustainability vision for BC:

1. Collaborative Watershed Governance Accord for BC
2. Okanagan Sustainable Water Strategy – Okanagan Basin Water Board,
3. Northwest Territories (NWT) Water Stewardship Strategy
4. Coquitlam River Watershed Roundtable, Background
5. Charter for Sustainability – Fraser Basin Council
6. Watersheds 2014 Forum Consensus
7. Water for Fish: A Framework for Effective Water Management – First Nations Fisheries Council

Example 1. COLLABORATIVE WATERSHED GOVERNANCE ACCORD FOR BC

Purpose:

To encourage all orders of government (local, First Nations, provincial, and federal), organizations and commercial interests throughout BC to work collaboratively to attain enduring healthy, resilient watersheds for the benefit of those ecosystems, communities, resource users and economies that depend on them.

Guiding Principles:

1. Ecological, social, cultural and economic considerations are integral parts of decision-making
2. Best practices are to be employed to contribute to watershed sustainability in new and existing obligations, jurisdictions and plans
3. Effective collaborative watershed governance is to be carried out in a transparent, accountable and inclusive manner
4. Effective working relationships are to be developed and maintained through open communication, trust and cooperation
5. Decisions are to be based on the best available scientific information and First Nations traditional ecological knowledge, with the goal of achieving watershed sustainability
6. Authorization to use water are to take into account the interests of present and future generations
7. Effective watershed management is to be integrated with land-based resource objectives and activities on a watershed scale
8. Watershed governance is to include shared responsibilities and enable those affected to have input in decision-making processes

The Signatories of the Accord will:

- Encourage interests in watersheds throughout the province to adopt these principles;
- Encourage participation of those active in watersheds to engage collaboratively in watershed planning processes;
- Encourage implementation of measures in support of collaborative watershed planning and management; and,
- Apply lessons learned from other models of collaborative watershed governance.

Source:

Collaborative Watershed Governance Accord for BC, 2012.

http://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/water_cwg_accord.html

Example 2. OKANAGAN SUSTAINABLE WATER STRATEGY – OKANAGAN BASIN WATER BOARD

Vision:

To have a sustainable water system, meeting the needs of BC residents while supporting wildlife and natural areas – now and in the future.

Mandate:

To provide leadership for sustainable water management to protect and enhance the quality of life and environment in the Okanagan Basin.

Key Guiding Principles for the Okanagan Sustainable Water Strategy:

1. Recognize the value of water. Water is a common good that is essential to the survival of people and ecosystems. The consumptive and non-consumptive values of water will be recognized and respected in all water management decisions.
2. Control pollution at its source.
3. Protect and enhance ecological stability and biodiversity. Natural processes in healthy watershed ecosystems are the most effective and cost-efficient means to maintain instream water quality and quantity. Water management will commit to protecting and restoring ecosystems and will ensure that local and cumulative impacts on sensitive habitats are considered in land and water management decisions. A watershed-based approach will be taken to identify the natural features that are essential to protecting water quality and quantity (e.g. wetlands, waterways, adjacent uplands, and riparian areas).
4. Integrate land use planning and water resource management. Integrated water resource management means recognizing the interrelationships between land use and water quantity and quality. Land use decision will work to minimize the impact of urbanization and reduce the human footprint on the environment, which will in turn reduce impacts on water resources.
5. Allocate water within the Okanagan water budget in a clear, transparent, and equitable way.
6. Promote a Basin-wide culture of water conservation and efficiency.
7. Ensure water supplies are flexible and resilient.
8. Think and act like a region.
9. Collect and disseminate scientific information on Okanagan water.
10. Provide sufficient resources for local management initiatives.
11. Encourage active public consultation, education and participation in water management decisions.
12. Practice adaptive water and land management.

Source:

Okanagan Basin Water Board Governance Manual, 2010.

http://www.obwb.ca/structure_governance/

Okanagan Sustainable Water Strategy, Action Plan 1.0, 2008.

http://www.obwb.ca/water_strategy/

Example 3. NORTHWEST TERRITORIES (NWT) WATER STEWARDSHIP STRATEGY

Vision:

The waters of the Northwest Territories will remain clean, abundant and productive for all time.

Guiding Principles:

1. *Respect:*
 - a. Water stewardship decisions respect values held and various lifestyles chosen by NWT residents. These include spiritual, cultural, public health, recreational, economic and ecological values.
 - b. Water stewardship decisions respect Aboriginal rights or treaties including land, resource and self-government agreements.
2. *Sustainability:* Water stewardship decisions sustain healthy and diverse aquatic ecosystems over time. They maintain the ability of current and future generations to choose their way of life.
3. *Responsibility:* Water stewardship is a collective responsibility. Each of us must make thoughtful decisions about our actions that may affect NWT aquatic ecosystems.
4. *Knowledge:*
 - a. Water stewardship decisions are based on accurate and up-to-date traditional, local and western scientific knowledge.
 - b. As knowledge evolves, stewardship decisions evolve accordingly.
 - c. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage to aquatic ecosystems, lack of certainty is not used as a reason to postpone effective measures that can avert the potential threat.
5. *Accountability:*
 - a. Water stewardship decisions are made in an informed, transparent and participatory manner. Those who make decisions must be held responsible for the consequences of those decisions.

Goals of the Strategy:

- Waters that flow into, within or through the NWT are substantially unaltered in quality, quantity and rates of flows
- Residents have access to safe, clean and plentiful drinking water at all times
- Aquatic ecosystems are healthy and diverse
- Residents can rely on their water to sustain their communities and economies
- Residents are involved in and knowledgeable about water stewardship
- All those making water stewardship decision work together to communicate and share information

Source:

Northern Voice, Northern Waters: NWT Water Stewardship Strategy, 2010.

http://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/_live/documents/content/NWT_Water_Stewardship_Strategy.pdf

Example 4. COQUITLAM RIVER WATERSHED ROUNDTABLE

Vision:

A healthy watershed supported and enjoyed by the community in a manner that respects our common values through partnership and collaboration; education, stewardship and monitoring; conservation and green economics; and, responsible decision-making in perpetuity.

Guiding Principles:

Guiding principles are proactive statement about the way the Roundtable will operate to achieve its mission. The guiding principles are:

- Accountable
- Adaptive
- Consensus-based decision making
- Effective and credible
- Efficient with capacity
- Inclusive and respectful
- Influential and responsible
- Proactive approach
- Relationship building

Values for the Watershed:

- Ecosystem integrity
- Home/Heritage/Culture
- Native biodiversity
- Natural beauty
- Natural resources
- Protected areas
- Public access
- Recreation
- Responsibility to protect
- Spiritual qualities
- Sustainability

Source:

Coquitlam River Watershed Roundtable Backgrounder, 2012.

http://www.coquitlamriverwatershed.ca/sites/default/files/CRWRt_Backgrounder_Fall2012.pdf

Example 5. CHARTER FOR SUSTAINABILITY – FRASER BASIN COUNCIL

Vision:

We want to see the Fraser Basin as a place where social well-being is supported by a vibrant economy and sustained by a healthy environment

Sustainability Definition:

Living and managing our activities in a way that balances our social, economic, environmental and institutional considerations to meet our needs and those of future generations.

Guiding Principles:

1. *Mutual Dependence:* Land, water, air and all living organisms including humans are integral parts of the ecosystem. Biodiversity must be conserved.
2. *Accountability:* Each of us is responsible for the social, economic and environmental consequences of our decisions and accountable for our actions.
3. *Equity:* All communities and regions must have equal opportunities to provide for the social, economic and environmental needs of residents.
4. *Integration:* Consideration of social, economic and environmental costs and benefits must be an integral part of all decision-making.
5. *Adaptive Approaches:* Plans and activities must be adaptable and able to respond to external pressures and changing social values.
6. *Coordinated and Cooperative Efforts:* Coordinated and cooperative efforts are needed among all government and non-government interests.
7. *Open and Informed Decision-Making:* Open decision-making depends on the best available information.
8. *Exercising Caution:* Caution must be exercised when shaping decisions to avoid making irreversible mistakes.
9. *Managing Uncertainty:* A lack of certainty should not prevent decisive actions for sustainability.
10. *Recognition:* There must be recognition of existing rights, agreements and obligations in all decision-making.
11. *Aboriginal Rights and Title:* We recognize that Aboriginal Nations within the Fraser Basin assert Aboriginal rights and title. These rights and title, now being defined, must be acknowledged and reconciled in a just and fair manner.
12. *Transition Takes Time:* Sustainability is a journey that requires constant feedback, learning and adjustment. In the short-term, the elements of sustainability may not always be in balance.

Four Directions of the Charter for Sustainability:

1. Understanding Sustainability
2. Caring for Ecosystems
3. Strengthening Communities
4. Improving Decision Making

Source: Charter for Sustainability, 1997.

http://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/Library/Fraser_Basin_Council/charter_for_sustainability.pdf

Example 6. WATERSHEDS 2014 FORUM CONSENSUS

Vision: ('Our Common Values')

Water is life. Water is our relation. Water bonds us across time and place to our ancestors, to our descendants, and to our land. Water nourishes, replenishes, cleanses, and refreshes. It is the source of food, sustains our salmon, supports our rich environment, and powers our economy. It is critical to our community and economic prosperity.

Water cannot be owned as it is shared by all life on Earth. It is a public trust that provides a universal link between all cultures and species, requiring us to understand each other's experiences, histories, and identities. As such, we each have a duty of stewardship and share a mutual responsibility to ensure water is protected and stewarded to provide for its availability for the health and resilience of all life.

Guiding Principles:

- **Water for Nature** – building resilience in ecosystems as the foundation of the economy.
- **Connected Systems** – including surface and groundwater, land-water interactions, and cumulative impacts.
- **Transparency and Collaboration** – community engagement and deliberation with all key rights holders and stakeholders, involving public, non-profit, and private actors, ensures cross-sector perspectives and solutions.
- **Clear Roles and Responsibilities** – involving nesting watershed organizations and institutions across scales.
- **Knowledge of Watershed Health** – reliable, consistent monitoring and reporting of the function of local watersheds.
- **Sustainable Financing and Capacity** – maintains longevity and ongoing capacity to respond to new and emergent issues.
- **Accountability and Oversight** – ensures legitimacy in decision-making and is the foundation of good governance.

Source: The Watersheds 2014 Forum Consensus, 2014.

http://poliswaterproject.org/sites/default/files/watersheds2014/Watersheds2014Consensus_FINAL.pdf

Example 7. WATER FOR FISH, A FRAMEWORK FOR EFFECTIVE WATER MANAGEMENT, FIRST NATIONS FISHERIES COUNCIL

Water for Fish Themes and Objectives:

The following themes and objectives provide the framework for First Nations engagement in water governance and management processes to benefit salmon, freshwater fish, and aquatic resources. They also aim to ensure that water management processes in BC are respectful and inclusive of Aboriginal and Treaty Rights.

- **Theme 1:** Water Governance, Authority and Accountability
- **Theme 2:** Healthy Aquatic Ecosystems
- **Theme 3:** Water Management and Planning
- **Theme 4:** Collaboration and Opportunities
- **Theme 5:** Capacity Building

Collaborative Management Principles:

- **Aboriginal and Treaty Rights** must be recognized and respected as a fundamental principle in all aspects of governance and management processes.
- **First Nations Jurisdiction and Authority** arise from prior use and occupation of the land and marine spaces, and include rights to use and manage fisheries and aquatic resources.
- **Meaningful Engagement, Consultation and Accommodation** of First Nations and their rights is a constitutional obligation of the Crown and must be embedded in the mechanisms that shape the management of fisheries and aquatic resources.
- **Shared Responsibility** of First Nations, Federal and Provincial governments to hold primary responsibility for the management of fisheries and aquatic resources.
- **Cooperation, Collaboration and Capacity Development** to conduct all manner of decision-making, engagement, advocacy, technical understandings and related interactions.
- **Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK)** must be respected and incorporated in governance and management processes.
- **Conservation and Stewardship** of fisheries and aquatic resources, their habitats and ecosystems, must be a resource management priority.
- **Trust and Relationship Building** to create strong and enduring relationships.
- **Transparency and Accountability** in decision-making processes.
- **Communication** must be accessible, relevant and timely.

Source: Water for Fish, 2014

<http://www.fnfisheriescouncil.ca/downloads/water-framework-brochure.pdf>

C. Options for Development of a Watershed Sustainability Vision

At the outset of this initiative two approaches were identified as being necessary steps to develop a unifying watershed sustainability vision. First, a review was undertaken of examples of visions relevant to watershed health and sustainability. This information has been collated within section B of this discussion paper. The second approach was to facilitate a process of dialogue, consultation and consensus-building to develop a vision with people and organizations working towards watershed health and sustainability. Although some outreach was undertaken in this regard, further engagement is recommended in year 2 of the project. Two different options are proposed for further engagement to develop a vision.

1. Build From a Pre-Existing Vision Document
2. Focus on a Specific Region or Watershed

1. Build From a Pre-Existing Vision Document

The first option is to continue to engage interested organization regarding a pre-existing vision document such as the Collaborative Watershed Governance Accord. The Accord is already associated with widespread support among local government, First Nations organizations, the federal government and several private sector associations. A process could be facilitated to continue engagement regarding the Accord with a particular emphasis with conservation NGOs and First Nations organizations. A risk with this option is that the language of the Accord has resulted from prior dialogue and consultation. It could be challenging to re-open the language of the Accord that many organizations have already endorsed. By bringing in new collaborators at this stage there may be an interest in changing the Accord text to secure the endorsement of new parties such as conservation NGOs.

2. Focus on a Specific Region or Watershed

The second option is to work with existing and/or emerging organizations within a particular region or watershed to develop a watershed-scale vision of sustainability. Given that actions to advance sustainability often take place at the local, regional or watershed scale, it may be appropriate to develop a watershed sustainability vision at this scale rather than at a province-wide scale. Watershed sustainability is very much context-specific. Therefore engagement of specific interests and organizations within the context of a specific watershed may be a more natural scale to discuss and develop a watershed vision. There are many organizations and initiatives to advance sustainability at local, regional and watershed scales. These are tailored for the specific ecological, social, economic and cultural characteristics in the watershed as well as the specific priority issues, challenges and opportunities.

It is suggested that further consideration be given regarding the optimal path to develop, and ultimately implement, a unifying vision for watershed sustainability.