January storms have produced substantial snow and rainfall on the west coast, but how much of that precious resource is just going down the drain? By re-examining conventional stormwater management, Canada can reduce long-term water costs, promote innovation, and build water security and resilience according to a new publication from the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance in partnership with University of Victoria’s Environmental Law Centre (ELC).

"Peeling Back the Pavement: A Blueprint for Reinventing Rainwater Management in Canada’s Communities" provides a comprehensive blueprint that outlines the crucial steps necessary to change the way communities manage and, importantly, govern stormwater. The blueprint describes detailed actions that local and senior levels of government can take now to move from the current system of stormwater management to one based on a whole-system approach that treats rainwater as a resource.

"Making headway on a more progressive approach to rainwater management requires dealing with the thorny and complex problems associated with governance," says Oliver M. Brandes who wrote the publication with fellow POLIS researcher Susanne Porter-Bopp and Calvin Sandborn, legal director of the ELC. “A shift to watershed-based governance is not a question of if but of when. An integrated watershed-based approach offers significant opportunity to create truly sustainable communities that will protect the natural water cycle now and into the future.”

A main focus of the publication is addressing the fragmented responsibility for fresh water across and within jurisdictions—one of the greatest challenges to reinventing rainwater management.

"Peeling Back the Pavement" is aimed at decision makers, community leaders, policy analysts, and government staff who want to take action to improve stormwater management and make a fundamental shift toward water-centric planning,” explains Laura Brandes, communications director at the POLIS Water Sustainability Project. “Rethinking the way we deal with rain and snowmelt in our cities means replacing conventional pipe-and-convey systems with an approach that recognizes rainwater as a valuable resource while, at the same time, reducing runoff volume and improving runoff quality.”

Electronic copies of "Peeling Back the Pavement: A Blueprint for Reinventing Rainwater Management in Canada’s Communities" are available for download from http://poliswaterproject.org/publication/426. “Reinventing Rainwater Management” was also the focus of a POLIS webinar that took place in October 2011. To download a recording of the webinar please visit http://poliswaterproject.org/webinar/428.

The POLIS Water Sustainability Project (WSP) is an action-based research group that recognizes water scarcity is a social dilemma that cannot be addressed by technical solutions alone. It publishes leading research and develops innovative legal, institutional, and practical approaches to water management and governance. The WSP is an initiative of the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance at UVic.
The ELC is a non-profit society that operates the ELC Clinic at UVic’s Faculty of Law. Its mission is to provide citizens with the tools and resources to advocate effectively for the restoration, conservation, and protection of British Columbia’s unique and diverse environment.

— 30 —

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