

NEWS RELEASE

Study Signals Support for Shared Control of Watersheds in B.C.

VANCOUVER, B.C., July 17, 2013 – With changes to the role of senior government in B.C. and the uncertainty of a changing climate, the way decisions are made about fresh water in British Columbia is also changing. According to a new research report, B.C. has the potential to become a global leader in freshwater protection and sustainability.

“B.C. could be a real leader in this field,” said co-author and consultant Tim Morris. “By establishing a new approach to watershed governance that builds on the strengths of local leadership, community capacity, and a stewardship culture for fresh water, this province could be a true leader for ensuring those affected have a real say in protecting rivers and lakes.”

A range of experts and community leaders in the freshwater field would welcome a balance of local control and collaboration—through, for example, watershed boards—with strong provincial oversight and regulatory backstop.

Published today by the Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia and the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance at the University of Victoria, the report compiles data from interviews with 11 select freshwater leaders and an online survey completed by 61 non-governmental organizations working in watersheds across B.C.

The findings of this study suggest there are real challenges to achieving this vision. Major provincial priorities identified by the research include:

- Modernization of the century-old B.C. *Water Act*;
- First Nations water rights and shared decision-making; and
- Impacts of a changing climate.

The study also found that:

- More than 230 organizations are working to ensure a clean and abundant supply of fresh water in B.C.'s streams, rivers, lakes, and aquifers, but there is a lack of communication and knowledge-sharing amongst these groups;
- Most survey respondent organizations seek to improve water protection by influencing government decision-making at local, regional, and/or provincial levels; and
- Challenges to overcome in making progress towards a new approach for water governance in B.C. include lack of government capacity, fragmented knowledge about watershed governance in B.C., the need for sustainable funding, and outdated rules for freshwater protection in the province.

“The next five years will be critical,” said co-author Oliver Brandes, co-director of the POLIS Project. “This is a dynamic and exciting time for water protection in the province. Progress will depend greatly on the strength, capacity, and cohesion of the on-the-ground players in this emerging B.C. water movement and on the Province’s commitment to follow through on modernizing the B.C. *Water Act*.”

"Sustainable water use is an integral part of sustainable land use," said Jack Wong, CEO of the Real Estate Foundation of B.C. "How we as British Columbians plan and build communities, and the policies we use to guide development, help determine the health of our waterways. A clean, abundant supply of fresh water is vital, and it's in our best interests to work together to manage it wisely."

Full report: <http://poliswaterproject.org/publication/561>

The POLIS Project on Ecological Governance is an action-based research organization based at the University of Victoria’s Centre for Global Studies. It represents a unique blend of multidisciplinary academic research and community action. Researchers work to make ecological thinking and practice a core value in all aspects of society and dismantle the notion that the environment is merely another “sector.” The POLIS Water Sustainability Project is an initiative that works with industry, government, civil society, environmental not-for-profits, and individuals to develop and embed water conservation strategies that benefit the economy, communities, and the environment. To learn more, visit www.polisproject.org and www.poliswaterproject.org.

The Real Estate Foundation of B.C. seeks to transform land use attitudes and practices to create more resilient, healthy communities and natural environments in B.C. It offers funding programs that support research, education, and law and policy reform. It also provides information to support and connect organizations working to enable positive change on real estate and land use issues. Since 1988 the foundation has approved more than \$64 million in grants. To learn more, visit www.refbc.com.

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