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Putting the “Sustainable” in B.C.’s New Water Law

Posted on November 15, 2015

By Rosie Simms and Oliver M. Brandes

With the replacement of its over a century-old *Water Act* with the new *Water Sustainability Act* in 2014, British Columbia has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to modernize its freshwater legislation and usher in a new era of water stewardship. The *Water Sustainability Act* has many promising features that can better protect the province’s freshwater resources. Yet full implementation of the new Act hinges on passing critical supporting regulations that will provide the necessary details to make the Act fully functional.

Released on November 16th, 2015, a new research report from the University of Victoria’s POLIS Project on Ecological Governance outlines what is needed to put the “sustainable” in the *Water Sustainability Act*. This report provides a timely analysis of the core regulations required for the *Water Sustainability Act* to reach its full potential as a comprehensive and modern water law. *Awash with Opportunity: Ensuring the Sustainability of British Columbia’s New Water Law* offers clear recommendations to develop the necessary regulations based on leading international practices in five key areas: groundwater, environmental flows, monitoring and reporting, water objectives, and planning and governance.

“Mounting water concerns in the province underscore the urgent need to reform water management and the supporting legal structures,” says Deborah Curran, Hakai Professor in Environmental Law and Sustainability, and report co-author. British Columbia’s fresh water is under pressure from an array of threats, including climate change, population growth, and escalating and competing demands for water. Watersheds across the province are showing signs of stress, with recent mounting water issues—from unprecedented droughts to water quality degradation and conflicts over water use—only increasing the urgency to act.

If British Columbia does not change its approach to freshwater management to respond to these realities, the consequences may be significant, as demonstrated by the recent water crises experienced in California and Washington, and indeed globally.

“A comprehensive water law regime that includes a fully implemented *Water Sustainability Act* and a full suite of supporting regulations is a necessary condition to ensure that future water challenges do not become debilitating water crises,” says Oliver M. Brandes, Co-Director of POLIS, who authored the report together with Deborah Curran and colleagues at POLIS.

The report offers the Provincial government the specific advice and insights needed to move beyond crisis response toward a fresh partnership approach with shared roles and responsibilities to protect British Columbia’s water resources now and into the future.

The report, *Awash With Opportunity: Ensuring the Sustainability of British Columbia’s New Water Law*, is available on the POLIS website.



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- November 17, 7:00 PM: UNU-IWEH Annual Lecture Series
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- November 23-27, 2015: FCM Webinar Series: Funding opportunities with FCM’s Green Fund
- November 23, 2015: Low Impact Development (LID) Stormwater Management (SWM) Training Design Practices
- November 24, 2015: 2nd Canadian Gender Conference on Water and Wastewater Management
- November 25-27, 2015 Canadian Science Conference
- November 30 - December 2, 2015: Environmental Compliance Essentials 2015
- December 2, 2015: POWI Lecture - Elixir Security and a Need for a National Strategy
- December 17, 2015: CleanTech North 2015 Winter Forum