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Collaborative Watershed Governance - Inspiring Leaders for Change



Almost a month out and the buzz generated at PBLI and The Summit Institute's *A Water Gathering: Collaborative Watershed Governance in BC and Beyond - Solutions Forum* is still going!

On January 26th & 27th, watershed managers, users and government at all levels, including First Nations, gathered to discuss opportunities for collaborative watershed governance in BC and across Canada. The event was co-hosted by the BC Ministry of Environment, Fraser Basin Council, Living Lakes Canada, Okanagan Basin Water Board, POLIS Project on Ecological Governance, Water Policy and Governance Group and Wildsight. Special thanks to the event co-chairs, the Honourable Iona Campagnolo and Grand Chief Edward John, and the Steering Committee for all their hard work. The following highlights the event's key outcomes.

British Columbians care about water and agree we need to guarantee its protection and ensure those affected have a say in decisions.

Freshwater and functioning watersheds are essential to society and strategic assets increasing in importance and absolutely fundamental to community and economic prosperity. Loss of natural capital and watershed function will continue unless new practices and priorities are adopted.

First Nations have clear interests in water, including those relating to constitutional Aboriginal or treaty rights. First Nations have a crucial role to play in decisions about water and the activities that impact water.

Collaborative watershed governance is not another layer of government - but instead improves the connection between citizens and decision makers. It is an emerging priority for British Columbians and has many benefits including:

- building resilience to **adapt to change** and enabling **innovation**;
- leveraging expertise and **additional resources** for management;
- clarifying roles and responsibilities thus increasing **accountability**;
- creating opportunities for **shared learning** and **builds capacity**; and
- reduces conflict and increases **public confidence**.

Effective collaborative governance requires leadership and new approaches and priorities by watershed managers, users and government at all levels.

Conference delegates identified the following three priority actions:

1. Prioritize completion of the proposed new *Water Sustainability Act* including explicit attention to enabling collaborative watershed governance
2. Establish an annual conference of watershed-based groups and users from across BC to build capacity and exchange best practices and lessons on the ground
3. Establish a government-to-government forum - First Nations to Provincial and Federal Government - to enhance mutual understanding of interests with respect to water governance in BC.





Special thanks to the event sponsors, The Real Estate Foundation of BC and the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation.

Posted on October 10, 2017 | Comments (0)

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