



# RDCK to clarify its role in watershed governance

Focus is on land-use decisions that affect fresh water

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The Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) will conduct a study to clarify its role in watershed governance, in a move that could result in the formation of a new water governance body with members from many sectors.

Currently, if a rural community suspects an industrial operation is going to affect its water supply, the RDCK's responsibility to the community is not entirely clear.

If there's a landslide due to industrial activity, heavy rains or some other cause, what is the RDCK's role in mitigating the damage caused? What about the compounded risks from a tendency toward dryer summers and wetter winters because of climate change?

Those issues too must be resolved.

The common denominator in all these questions is water.

Area E director Ramona Faust points out that the RDCK is already a water manager, running 19 rural water systems.

“But there are many dozens more that are run by small rural communities with varying degrees of organization and coordination,” she told the *Nelson Star*.

“When those independent water system users want to have water treatment, or want to upgrade, or want to be protected from a mine or a logging operation, they come to the RDCK for help.”

For example, at Laird Creek near Balfour, many water users don't trust a logging company that wants to open up an old logging road, so they want a new, independent study of the slope stability, in addition to the study the logging company has already done.

But it is not clear who would hire and pay for the independent consultant, what status the report would have, and what influence it might have on the logging operation, if any.

As a result of puzzles like this, the RDCK is planning to apply for funding from the Real Estate Foundation of BC to do a scoping study that would assess the responsibilities of the RDCK, based on case studies of areas still to be decided.

The initiative follows a workshop attended by RDCK officials in May 2018, conducted by the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance at the University of Victoria. POLIS is the author of *A Blueprint for Watershed Governance in British Columbia*.

A backgrounder to the RDCK's proposed water governance initiative states that "when encountering such realities, RDCK communities, staff and elected officials have expressed the frustration and fear of being unable to influence upstream activities and therefore the watersheds as a whole."

The backgrounder also states that while the responsibilities of a new watershed governance entity still need to be established, it would be a "space for collaborative dialogue, meaningful engagement, and informed planning to produce long-term strategies and short-term responses."