



POLIS Project on Ecological Governance

watersustainabilityproject



Webinar Summary

May 25, 2020

Investing in our Watersheds: Stimulus & Sustainable Funding for Water Security

Attendance

Approximately 170, including local, First Nation, provincial, and federal government representatives; students and researchers; environmental NGOs; and law firms.

Introduction

On May 25th, 2020, the POLIS Water Sustainability Project hosted the latest webinar in its Creating a Blue Dialogue series, *Investing in our Watersheds: Stimulus & Sustainable Funding for Water Security*. In this collaborative virtual event, Rosie Simms, Research Lead and Project Manager at the POLIS Water Sustainability Project; Zita Botelho, Program Director at Watersheds BC; and Tim Morris, Project Director at the BC Freshwater Legacy Initiative brought their voices on the line to explore potential opportunities to unlock both long-term sustainable funding for watershed governance in B.C. and short-term stimulus funding in the era of COVID-19.

What is Creating a Blue Dialogue?

The Creating a Blue Dialogue webinar series brings together expert water practitioners and thinkers, as well as emerging water leaders, to engage with innovative ideas on water policy and governance in Canada. By creating an online community of interest, the webinar series strengthens the national capacity to engage with and solve problems, and raises awareness about emerging Canadian water issues, best practices, and policies.

It has been hosted since 2010 by the POLIS Water Sustainability Project, based at the University of Victoria's Centre for Global Studies.

Part 1: The Need for Sustainable Funding

Presented by Rosie Simms (POLIS Water Sustainability Project)

The need for sustainable funding is not a new challenge. In 2014, sustainable funding was identified as one of the “winning conditions” needed to catalyze and sustain a move toward a more collaborative and ecologically based watershed governance regime in B.C. (see [A Blueprint for Watershed Governance in British Columbia](#) (POLIS, 2014)).



Figure 1. An image, shared by Tim Morris, which depicts what water security could look like.

Lack of sustainable funding was confirmed as a pattern problem in subsequent research, including the [Illumination survey](#) (POLIS, 2016), where respondents identified insufficient or project-based funding as one of the key challenges in advancing watershed governance. In 2016, a [systematic review](#) of Indigenous water initiatives conducted by the First Nations Fisheries Council and Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources again found capacity gaps to be the top barrier for First

Nations to participate and engage in water management and water governance.

Part 2: Sustainable Funding for Watershed Governance Initiative

Presented by Zita Botelho (Watersheds BC)

Recently, there have been two parallel streams of work underway to better understand what is needed and possible in the realm of sustainable funding in B.C.: the Sustainable Funding for Watershed Governance Initiative and the Watershed Security Fund.

The objective of the Sustainable Funding for Watershed Governance Initiative was three-fold: improve knowledge about new and existing funding mechanisms, test out what is possible through pilot projects, and share learnings and knowledge. The Initiative supported two pilot projects, in the Nechako Watershed and the Cowichan Watershed Board, which both examined local funding mechanisms through regional services. The Cowichan Watershed Board worked with the Cowichan Regional District to pursue a watershed-based service. The pilots revealed several limits to local government funding mechanisms as well as

Watershed Jobs: Oregon Case Study

- Per \$1 million of investment, restoration activities create: “[M]ore than twice the number of jobs as comparable investments in coal; and more than three times the number of jobs as comparable investments in oil or natural gas.”
- Majority of jobs are located in rural communities, in places that were hardest hit by the 2008 economic downturn and that 80% of the dollars generated stayed in the local economy.
- Learn more [here](#)

conditions which must be aligned to successfully unlock funding. The Initiative identified four recommendations:

1. The provincial government has a role to play and should prioritize the development of a sustainable source of funding for watershed government initiatives.
2. There are federal fiscal barriers facing Indigenous governments that need to be addressed and Indigenous demonstration projects should be undertaken in B.C. to investigate, test, and scale-up sustainable mechanisms for Indigenous nations.
3. A concerted effort should be taken to support shared learning among local governments and watershed organizations on the opportunities to implement sustainable funding mechanisms that will help scale up this work.
4. Additional partnerships and research should be pursued to deepen the understanding and feasibility of innovative financial instruments and tools that could support watershed governance, including partnerships with private, academic, and green financial sectors to further investigate possible opportunities.

Part 3: Watershed Security Fund

Presented by Rosie Simms (POLIS Water Sustainability Project)

The vision of the Watershed Security Fund is that it would be used to invest in partnerships, places, and people to better equip communities to build resilience in the face of a changing climate and growing watershed threats. This investment would deliver on provincial priorities relating to the land, economy, and reconciliation. A [position paper](#) produced through collaboration among the POLIS Water Sustainability Project, BC Freshwater Legacy Initiative, Tides Canada, First Nations Fisheries Council, and the BC Wildlife federation outlines a proposed fund structure involving a one-time endowment supplemented by ongoing sustainable revenue streams. Support for this fund has been gaining momentum, receiving endorsement by the B.C. Water Leaders' Network as well as support from the BC Assembly of First Nations and First Nations Fisheries Council. Strong community support for a sustainable annual funding source to support watershed work was reflected in Recommendation 28 of the Report on the [Budget 2020 Consultation](#).

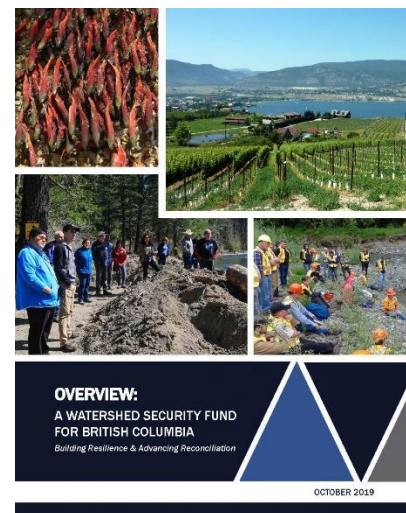


Figure 1. [A Watershed Security Fund for British Columbia](#) Position Paper

Part 4: Watershed Funding in the Era of COVID-19

Presented by Tim Morris (BC Freshwater Legacy Initiative) and Zita Botelho (Watersheds BC)

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing economic challenges, the work on the Watershed Security Fund has made the necessary shift to stimulus funding as the government works toward economic recovery. This moment offers a unique opportunity to secure funding for watershed-related projects as Premier John Horgan has indicated that action on climate will be central to economic recovery as the provincial government strives to “build back better.” In addition to protecting access to clean water and food security, supporting climate resilience, and advancing progress towards reconciliation, investing in watershed stimulus would provide a broad range of direct and indirect employment opportunities in both rural and urban communities working on projects which can be implemented quickly and are amenable to physical distancing.



Figure 3. A map showing the locations of submissions for the 100 Places to Fund Project.

Watersheds BC, a newly formed partnership initiative, in collaboration with the POLIS Water Sustainability Project, developed an inventory of water-related projects where provincial investments could produce economic stimulus and numerous other benefits. The project, appropriately titled “100+ Places to Fund,” is linked to a larger national effort led by Our Living Waters and the Forum for Leadership on Water. To date, the B.C. project has received 145 *shovel worthy* project submissions that focus on habitat restoration, data collection and sharing, public education, and watershed planning. These projects have the potential to generate over 2,500 direct and indirect jobs across the province. The majority (48.1%) of submissions came from the non-profit sector, with considerable input from Indigenous (30.8%) and local governments (11.5%).

Part 5: Next Steps

The webinar concluded with panelists and audience members engaging in a meaningful dialogue on the challenges and opportunities in securing sustainable funding during a forward-looking question and answer period. Key insights from the session, moderated by Oliver Brandes, Co-Director of the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance, include:

- The role of philanthropy in catalyzing innovative approaches and the need for government involvement to scale these approaches into much needed institutional reform.
- The challenge of securing stimulus funding when decision-making occurs at a political level in a highly competitive environment with many groups seeking government funding.
- The importance of ensuring stimulus-funded projects support women and marginalized communities which have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-10 pandemic and economic recession.
- The role of the pandemic in revealing the weakness of our institutions and vulnerability to crisis, providing an opportunity to look at the various elements of community security.
- The long-term benefits of sustainable funding for watershed governance, such as avoiding future costs associated with droughts and flooding.

Kickstarting the Economy: New Zealand as a Leading Example

- A total of \$433 million will be injected into regional environmental projects that will create 4,000 jobs over the next five years.
- The program is aimed at improving New Zealand's waterways in partnership with local government and farmers.
- Learn more [here](#)

Overcoming the challenge of sustainable funding for collaborative watershed governance and watershed security will be a game changer for advancing collaborative and ecologically based watershed governance in B.C. To keep up to date on this work, and find out how you can get involved, visit the Watershed Security Coalition website [here](#).

Support for the POLIS Water Sustainability Project, including its ongoing outreach and network-building via webinar events, is provided by:



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