

NEWS

FACT
3
WETLANDS REQUIRE VERY SPECIFIC PROTECTION



PROTECTING PUDDLES
The Creston Mudflats
PHOTO: DUCKS UNLIMITED CANADA

NEWS

Sustainability 101

As public sentiment shifts towards new ways to offset the effects of climate change, it's no surprise a variety of programs are cropping up to help educate businesses about sustainable practices and the tools available.

William Koty, director of the UBC Continuing Studies Centre for Sustainability at the University of British Columbia, helps to develop courses and curriculum that educate on sustainability.

“At its core, sustainability is a conversation about what kind of future we want as a society,” says Koty. “Business is a key driver in that conversation.”

Craft a conservation plan

The Centre for Sustainability tailors its curriculum for “small businesses, large corporations, not-for-profits and even governmental institutions that are trying to figure out how to minimize their ecological footprint and do good for society while still delivering customer value that translates to profit.”

Meliorin Pouladian, a purchasing manager at Lululemon Athletica, is a graduate of the UBC Summer Institute in Sustainability and is currently taking professional development courses in the Sustainability Management Program.

She says the program is “designed to test traditional practices and teach us how to help transform an organization to support a future in sustainability.”

“[The program] has allowed me to elevate sustainability within my department and to shift my mindset allowing me to keep all aspects of sustainability in mind when operating and making decisions,” says Pouladian.

Koty says to expect a future littered with these kinds of programs.

“The climate is changing— we are just at the beginning of a long-term 20 to 30 year effort to redefine economic value,” says Koty. “Businesses that can see past the next quarterly or annual report stand to benefit greatly by starting to embed sustainability principles and methods today.”

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Water, water everywhere!

As environmentalists, industry leaders and British Columbians patiently await a new “modernized” Water Sustainability Act, the spotlight is pointed at the Province’s at-risk wetlands and watersheds.

Brad Arner, manager of conservation programs for Ducks Unlimited Canada, a non-profit focused on wetlands management and protection, says the wetlands “need to be given very specific protection under the water act.”

“There are over 200,000 acres of protected habitat in B.C.,” says Arner. “It sounds like a lot but when you look at a province of this size there’s still a lot more we can do.”

In addition to being highly diverse when it comes to plant and animal life, wetlands can function as flood control and natural purification systems for wastewater.

To the polls

According to a poll commissioned by

World Wildlife Foundation’s (WWF) Vancouver chapter, 91 percent of the province’s inhabitants say fresh water is B.C.’s most precious resource, and 86 percent think fresh water is extremely important to the prosperity and quality of life in the province.

But despite the polls showing an eco-leaning public, it’s a give-and-take situation.

“It’s always a fight—the immediate and direct payment is what we’re accustomed to,” says Arner. “Everyone’s kind of cautious of ‘what’s this going to mean to me and my day to day life?’”

But looking beyond that “take what you need and address the consequences later” attitude is what’s needed to ensure no one has to go without water, according to environmentalists.

“We can’t sustain widespread impacts. It’s going to affect us further down the road,” says Arner. “We don’t want to get there.”

Getting our act together

The environmental community as a

whole echoes Arner’s sentiments.

“Right now there are 44 000 water licenses in B.C.,” says Linda Nowlan, director of Pacific Conservation for WWF Canada. “Those licenses are given out under a law that didn’t really pay attention to conservation needs.”

Nowlan, who also works as a public interest environmental lawyer and consultant, says even the drilling community that relies on extracting water for their livelihood, has noticed a drop in the watershed.

She says she hopes the new act will place environmental flows—the amount of water needed in a watercourse to sustain a healthy ecosystem—as a priority.

Natural capital

Nancy Olewiler, a professor in the Department of Economics and director of the Public Policy Program at Simon Fraser University, says the new act needs to put policies in place that protect the wetlands in order to preserve the quality of water.

“If you don’t invest in it now and protect it you’re going to have a huge debt in the future,” says Olewiler, of the strong proponent of “natural capital.”

She notes that programs like Environmental Canada’s Ecological Gift Program—which is a donation of land or a partial interest in land—are steps forward in protecting sensitive ecosystems but more initiatives are needed.

“We’ve got some good stuff going, but is it enough? No,” says Olewiler.

Oliver Brandes, associate director and water sustainability project leader at the University of Victoria’s POLIS Project on Ecological Governance, says increased dialogue between industry stakeholders, lobbyists and the public is necessary to establish a more sustainable water act.

“(The old Act) represented a useful skill set for a different era,” says Brandes. “We need to connect the decision-making with those that are affected.”



Going. Going. Almost gone.

Wetlands are nature’s best water filters. And they’re disappearing. Fast. More than 80 acres of wetlands are lost every day.

Canada is facing an environmental crisis. Despite significant efforts to conserve and restore wetlands, destruction and degradation of these valuable natural assets continues. For every day that we allow wetland loss to continue, we lose their ability to help improve our water quality, provide homes for wildlife and store flood waters. **We need to act, now, while we can.**

Ducks Unlimited Canada’s wetland conservation programs provide a solution. We work with government, industry, landowners and people like you to save our precious wetland resources. Join us now.

Save wetlands. Change lives.



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