



**BC's LACK OF EFFECTIVE, ENFORCEABLE, REGULATIONS:
SSI WPS GUEST SPEAKER, OLIVER BRANDES**

Oliver Brandes, associate Director of the U.Vic Polis Project on Ecological Governance, was the guest speaker at the Salt Spring Island Water Preservation Society AGM in Ganges on Jan. 21, 2011.

Brandes, who has a degree in economics from Queens University and a law degree from U.Vic, spoke on the topic of **“Water Law and Governance Reform: Think like a watershed”**, using a power point presentation.

He began by explaining that POLIS is the Greek word meaning “a collective gathering together for better decision-making”, and that the Polis Project on Ecological Governance works on policy, through U.Vic (and other universities) developing directions for practice as it intersects with sustainability.

Governance is different from government, he pointed out. The core governance belief is that there are biophysical limits and the economy is a subset of the ecosystem.

There is a fresh water crisis through the growing, concentrated demands by urbanization, energy needs and industrial agriculture. Persistent pollution and over-allocation result in crucial shortages, including ‘fish in the mud’. Disrupting natural flows has often resulted in unforeseen

consequences, a caution to be considered with our SSI lakes.

But where are we in this crisis, in BC?

Oliver Brandes calls it the “BC Water Muddle” because BC lacks effective enforceable regulations. Decisions are highly discretionary and uncoordinated and not related to their ecological function

So how can we get past the muddle? What are the province’s constitutional responsibilities? What are the limits of its power? What are the public’s property and civil rights and what are the actual practices?

The BC government’s recent initiative, called LIVING WATER SMART (booklet, website, etc.) has a lot of potential, but its words can only be effectively activated when there are enough resources given to carry through.

Water Law is a process (see the website www.polisproject.org). The U.Vic Polis study has made reform recommendations, and the government has been involved in some discussions. But BC needs to

develop “hydro-citizenship” where the protection of all our waters is a priority, including the watersheds, and collaboration with First Nation communities.

This entails “whole system thinking”: water is not free, but a public trust, now and into the future. There needs to be a new water Infrastructure based on conservation, stewardship and reuse, with accountability through independent oversight.

Oliver Brandes: “In a healthy society, economy always follows ecology and education precedes them both”. We need to engage all in governance and ecology for we are just beginning to understand both. Beyond the 3 R’s, schools need to teach and experience ecology.



See the full report on the website ssiwaterpreservationsociety.ca

Eileen Wittewaall