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## Watersheds 2014: Moving Forward

Posted on February 3, 2014

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*Quw'utsun' Cultural and Conference Centre in Duncan was the setting for Watersheds 2014.  
(Photo: Jack Wong, REFBC)*

From January 27th to 29th, 180 people from across Canada gathered at the Quw'utsun' Cultural and Conference Centre in Duncan for the forum, "**Watersheds 2014: Towards Watershed Governance in British Columbia and Beyond**". First Nations leaders, elders, youth and community members, along with representatives of community and watershed groups, researchers, professional resource managers,

local government staff and elected leaders came together to learn from one another.

The goal? Re-envisioning the way we use, share and respect our freshwater resources. That is, the streams, lakes, rivers, groundwater and wetlands that plants and animals (including humans) depend on, not only for survival, but also for the well being of our cultures, societies and economies.

This emerging approach is called community-based watershed governance, and it involves reorganizing our decision-making processes to align with the ecological boundaries of watersheds as well as the social and cultural values of the communities that steward them.

Some jurisdictions are already using community based watershed governance approaches. **Ontario's conservation authorities** are one example. BC has the **Okanagan Basin Water Board** and the **Cowichan Watershed Board**. Pilot projects in the **Lake Windermere** and **Similkameen watersheds** are exploring collaborative decision-making in their own local contexts.

Billed as a "roll-up-your-sleeves-and-get-to-work" event, the forum addressed topics such as:

- How do we shift from aiming for control, predictability and efficiency to long-term adaptability and resiliency?
- How can we move beyond the notion of simply "including" traditional First Nations knowledge into western, science-based watershed management to a vision of shared leadership in watershed governance?
- How can we use new social finance tools as a component of a sustainable financing for watershed stewardship and governance?

In her closing remarks, Tessa, the First Nations youth witness to the proceedings, said, "There was a shift in dialogue during this conference from a focus on plans and policy to that of responsibility and respect. I hope people will go home and take action and make real change. I recommend you go and sit by the river and reflect. Then go and share your knowledge."

We echo Tessa's advice.

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*The Real Estate Foundation is supporting some potentially transformative work in **freshwater sustainability** in BC. Our grants are one resource we can offer. Other*

*pivotal roles we play are: connecting people and ideas; working with other "water funders"; sharing information about the many BC water projects we are aware of with **decision makers** and public audiences; and supporting and participating in events like this forum. Being as plugged-in as possible is important to the Foundation's ability to be strategic about projects we fund.*

## News & Events



**February 27, 2014**

It's AGM Season!

**February 26, 2014**

BC Public Opinion Study: 93% Say Water Is Our Most Precious Resource

**February 17, 2014**

Guest Blog: Coquitlam River Watershed Roundtable Is Developing a Different Kind of Watershed Plan

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