



## ***Creating a Blue Dialogue Webinar Summary*** **Evolving Water Planning Processes in B.C.** **September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**Attendance:** Approximately 60 federal, provincial, and local government staff; students and researchers; private sector professionals; First Nations; environmental NGOs

### **Introduction**

Watershed planning processes are essential to watershed governance, as they bring together key rights holders and interests to articulate a common vision, including priorities, problems, and management actions. Watershed-based plans can provide a framework for preventing and mediating conflicts, protecting ecosystems, and preparing for future challenges. Many local leaders across B.C. are pursuing watershed planning processes, and anticipate that B.C.'s Water Sustainability Act—which enables “water sustainability plans (WSPs)” —could give existing or future plans legal ‘teeth’, increasing their legitimacy and impact. Although WSPs are new legal tools under the Act, many regions have significant experience in various forms of water and watershed planning.

This summary is based on the September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016 webinar where speakers explored key components of effective water planning and Indigenous-led water planning initiatives. In her presentation, Lee Failing (Compass Resource Management) explored elements that constitute a robust watershed plan. Lee opened with a brief history of Water Use Plans (WUPs), and provided ten lessons from the WUP process that are relevant to other forms of watershed planning. Lee also compared WUPs to a new planning tool under the *Water Sustainability Act* (water sustainability plans). Next, Kate Cave discussed the role of the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) in supporting watershed planning activities within First Nations communities. Kate explained key elements of the First Nation Integrated Watershed Planning process, as well as key lessons for successful watershed planning more broadly.

### **About the Series**

Hosted by the POLIS Water Sustainability Project at the Centre for Global Studies, University of Victoria, *Creating a Blue Dialogue* 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 serves to strengthen the national capacity to engage with and solve problems, and raises awareness about emerging Canadian water issues, best practices, and policies.

### **Guest Speakers**

**Lee Failing**, Principal, Compass Resource Management Ltd.

**Kate Cave**, Project Manager, Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources

## Water Use Plans: History and Background

The Water Use Planning (WUP) process was developed in British Columbia in the 1990s to address longstanding issues and conflicts around water use and hydroelectric facilities. WUPs were established through a collaborative process that brought together different stakeholders, rights holders, key partners, and the public to develop operating rules for each hydroelectric facility that address the particular interests at stake. From 1998 to 2004, twenty-three WUPs were developed for hydroelectric facilities across the province. The plans are widely recognized as a success, with important ecological and social gains that strike a better balance between multiple water users. Twenty-two of the plans achieved consensus, and in total the project saw an 85% approval rating by participants.

Structured decision-making was a key instrument in developing WUPs. The process was designed to facilitate informed decision-making by defining objectives, considering different courses of action, evaluating trade-offs, and monitoring (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Six key steps of structured decision-making. The cycle is iterative as learning occurs through-out.

## Ten Key Lessons and Insights from WUPs

The WUP process offers several relevant learnings for other forms of water planning, including the following ten elements that help to support an effective planning process:

### 1. Confirm the link between the planning process and decision-making

Confirming and understanding the link between the planning process and the decision-making process is an important step to ensure trust and participation. The decision-maker will ideally be aware and supportive of the terms of reference of the planning process and committed to meaningfully considering its recommendations. In addition, parties involved should clearly understand the decision at hand and who has decision-making authority.

### 2. Bound the scope

While it may be tempting to address a vast array of problems affecting a watershed, this broad scope not always lead to successful results. Limiting scope can be hard, but can be key to achieving tangible on-the-ground results. A clear operational budget also helps to manage expectations and ensure planning committees are considering realistic options.

### 3. Follow a structured and rigorous process

Structured decision-making is credited as a best-practice for decision-making, especially with diverse stakeholder groups who need to make plans or choices involving complex technical information and hard value judgments. It provides a clear six-step road map that ensures steady progress.

#### **4. Provide equal emphasis on the treatment of both facts and values**

Facts provide an information base for understanding consequences and it is critical to base decisions on sound scientific data. However, it is equally as important to allow people to openly discuss trade-offs, preferences, and why these are justified. For this to occur, technical information must be communicated effectively so that all participants can make informed value-based decisions.

#### **5. Agree on what matters**

The planning process needs to consider all interests, even those that are hard to quantify. These need to be translated into specific objectives, representing different values within the group (e.g. fish health, power production, recreation, spiritual connection, etc.). Everyone involved needs to agree on *the objectives themselves*, but need not agree on the *relative importance* of different objectives—people can agree on a preferred plan even when they weight objectives very differently.

#### **6. Explore a wide range of alternatives**

Shortcuts do not exist in the exploration of alternatives: participants will not make hard trade-offs if they think there is a better alternative that hasn't been brought into the planning process. Participants will require time to explore many different alternatives. This process may be lengthy and take several iterations to refine, but it will help the group reach consensus.

#### **7. Build a shared understanding of consequences**

A commitment should be made to evidence-based decision-making that encompasses both scientific and traditional knowledge. To avoid dueling experts, models and experts should be agreed upon early in the planning process. The analysis should be scaled in accordance with both the issues at stake and the resources available—state-of-the-art analysis isn't always necessary or possible, and simple performance measures can be sufficient and appropriate to inform the choices.

#### **8. Face and talk openly about trade-offs**

By exploring creative alternatives, it's possible to minimize trade-offs, but never eliminate them. The planning process should create an environment where participants can discuss values and value-based trade-offs. During this process, participants will learn together about and accept trade-offs, which will lead to broad support for hard choices.

#### **9. Commit to a realistic to adaptive management**

Adaptive management can be a lengthy, difficult and costly process but committing to it as a means of addressing key uncertainties that arise during a planning process can be a critical component in reaching consensus. Given limited resources it will be important to prioritize and monitor a small number of things well, rather than many things with inconclusive results. It's important to focus on the uncertainties that will most affect future plans and decisions. Monitoring programs will need to be long-term to capture large-scale ecosystem trends, and should be designed in a collaborative manner to reduce conflict over monitoring results.

#### **10. Seek but do not require consensus**

Consensus is a very powerful outcome that is difficult for decision-makers to ignore. However, there are good reasons why it shouldn't be a requirement in all situations. For example, different personalities and skill sets may dominate decision-making groups, and if consensus is required it may not accurately represent the group, or lead to socially optimal outcomes.

WUPs also faced significant challenges—in particular, they required a major time commitment from all groups involved. Two keys to keeping participants engaged and motivated are making steady progress (through a structured process) and ensuring that the outcome will be considered by decision makers. Knowing there will be tangible change as a result of the process is what keeps people at the table.

In summary, the meta-lesson from the WUP experience in BC is that planning processes succeed when they create space and time for people to build learn and talk together—about each other, the objectives that matter, and the difficult value trade-offs that need to be made.

## Considerations for Water Sustainability Plans

Water sustainability plans are a new planning tool introduced in B.C.'s new *Water Sustainability Act*. These plans can be developed to address a variety of conflicts—ranging from water quantity and allocation issues, to water quality and restoration. Water sustainability plans are a very powerful tool as they can be made legally binding through plan-specific regulations. The WUP model described above offers a number of considerations and outstanding questions for the development of future water sustainability plans:

- **Driver and demand:** WUPs were driven by conflict, public mistrust, and legal challenges. What will drive the initiation of water sustainability plans and when are they the most appropriate tool to use?
- **Capacity for multi-party leadership:** Multi-party leadership and collaboration among government agencies were important success factors for the WUP process. Do the relevant provincial agencies today have the capacity or willingness to provide the kind of joint leadership needed?
- **Efficiency (diversity of issues):** WUPs were successful because they were firmly bounded and similar in scope, and the lessons learned on one were easily replicable in another. Because water sustainability plans will be more diverse, it will be harder to gain the same efficiencies, both with the process and technical aspects.
- **Funding:** Rigor in both the process and analysis was critical in the success of WUPs, but required a large amount of resources. WUPs were supported by a funding and compensation mechanism. Water sustainability plans may not all require the same level of resources, but adequate funding will be a critical success factor.
- **The role of First Nations:** Given the standards of the day, WUPs were viewed as successful at engaging with First Nations communities. However, the landscape has changed substantially. In light of recent legal decisions and political commitments to strengthen relationships and reconciliation, and given the range of new tools provided under the WSA, it will be important to examine new and innovative ways to work with First Nations on water sustainability plans.

## First Nations Watershed Planning

First Nations—as rights holders with unique relationships and responsibilities for water—must play a more significant role in regional watershed management planning processes. In 2011, the Center for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) created a series of Watershed Planning Guidebooks, with the goal of supporting First Nations in watershed management. The process helps communities create a plan to protect their watersheds, or get involved with an existing watershed plan.

## CIER's Five Key Elements of a Watershed Planning Process

Five key elements have been identified for the watershed planning process: (1) Describing your approach; (2) Building partnerships; (3) Knowing your watershed; (4) Achieving consensus on the plan; and (5) Bringing the plan to life. While this process can run in a linear fashion, it can also cycle back and forth between steps to build and revisit different elements as needed. Details of the first three elements include:

### 1. Describing your approach

It is important to understand your community's approach to watershed planning. This involves gathering community members, compiling traditional and scientific knowledge, and understanding your community's governance structure, values, and rights. This process will lead to the development of a strong foundation of values, governance, and community cohesion, and will help ensure the community is brought to all stages of watershed management.

### 2. Building partnerships

No one group or government can care for a watershed on its own—it is important to build relationships with other organizations. Creating partnerships requires establishing trust and respect, reaching consensus on partnership commonalities, and reducing conflicts, all of which will lead to a better chance of a watershed plan being implemented and sustained. Benefits of building partnerships include access to additional resources, increased networks, and sharing of methodologies.

### 3. Know your watershed

Watershed planning cannot occur without a clear understanding of the local water users, issues facing the watershed, and land use activities. Learning about these components may lead to developing a state of watershed report, which can be used in the future as a benchmark to evaluate watershed activities. The process can also confirm and clarify water issue occurring within watersheds, and creates an opportunity for working with different partners within the watershed. The boundaries pertaining to watershed plans are important to consider and vary greatly depending on the community values and vision noted above in 'describing your approach.'

## Lessons for watershed planning

**Build and maintain community motivation:** Identify a community vision and community values. Concerns will convene community members and help individuals remain engaged throughout the lengthy planning process ahead. It is also important to identify key individuals that will be heavily involved in the process.

**Process is as important as the final product:** Establishing relationships takes time. Space and time are necessary to build trust and respect between groups, and to allow people the opportunity to meet and learn with one another. This could begin with a very small gesture such as meeting one-on-one with an individual to listen and learn from each other.

**Capacity and resource needs:** Watershed planning requires a lot of resources; for projects to be successful they need to be transparent about both capacity and needs. This ranges from how much time individuals have to commit to the process, the financial support available to facilitate the process, and the people who want to be involved in the process. There needs to be a commitment to fill in the gaps, and find adequate resources. This is important for both First Nations communities and other stakeholders such as governments and not-for-profit organizations.

## Key Questions from Discussion Period

### **What are key lessons from integrating different knowledge sources into watershed plans?**

Ensuring that appropriate elders and knowledge holders are engaged from the beginning of the planning process is important because often traditional knowledge becomes the foundation of watershed planning. It is also important to be careful and inclusive with definitions (i.e. expert). In doing so, all avenues of knowledge can be explored in an equitable way and all relevant information can be brought forward. Community-based monitoring is an opportunity to gather both traditional and Western data. This is a difficult process so the sooner it is discussed the more of a reality it will become.

### **How important is it to develop good water science before and through a planning process?**

It is always good to have sound science at the beginning of a planning process, but there is a balance. The scope of data necessary to make informed decision will change based on what decisions are being made.

### **What was the folly of the one WUP that did not achieve consensus?**

The group lost the continuity and quality of co-learning. They didn't have the same people throughout the whole process, so not everyone had the same foundational knowledge about each other and the different trade-offs.

### **In the consultative committees in the WUP process, one of the stakeholder groups was "communities." Who was involved in this group?**

The community stakeholder groups varied greatly across different planning tables and may include nominees from recreational or conservation groups, known leaders in the community, and local government officials.

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## Resource

### [Integrated Watershed Planning Guidebooks for First Nation Communities](#)

Created by the Center for Indigenous Environmental Resources, the integrated watershed planning guidebooks are designed to help First Nations communities create a plan to protect their watersheds or to get involved with an existing plan to protect a local watershed.