



Inventory And Research Survey Summary: Needs And Priorities of Watershed-Based Groups In British Columbia

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Introduction and Purpose of Survey Project

In British Columbia, discussions about water have historically focused on issues of management. But, underlying water management is governance: how decisions about water are made and how the people making those decisions are held accountable for them (Brandes & Curran, 2009). Good governance is critical to addressing issues of sustainability and building resilience for better water management and increased institutional efficiency. Currently, the provincial government is in the process of reforming B.C.'s *Water Act*, and has indicated an explicit priority to "improve governance" (Ministry of Environment, 2010). The government is considering a range of potential models to drive this change towards a modern *Water Act*, including improving watershed-scale decision-making processes to enhance the implementation of a new approach to water management. A shift to watershed-based governance is apparent internationally, which offers evidence that this type of re-scaled approach to decision-making is becoming increasingly common (Brandes & O'Riordan, 2013). In B.C., early evidence of this approach indicates that is also emerging as a priority; across the province numerous grassroots and more formal organizations are already operating at the watershed scale. A growing body of research emphasizes the importance of a watershed-based approach (see, for example, Baltutis et al., 2012; Brandes & Curran, 2009; Brandes et al., 2005; Nowlan & Bakker, 2007). This survey project builds on this existing research. It seeks to inventory and identify many of those groups that are currently working at a watershed scale within British Columbia, and it begins to determine the role these groups can play in more formalized decision-making going forward.

In November 2008, the Collaborative Watershed Governance Initiative (CWGI)—a partnership initiative supported by the Living Rivers Trust—hosted an intensive workshop for groups and individuals concerned with watershed governance in British Columbia. One of the primary recommendations that resulted from this event was to further study watershed governance approaches in the province and provide opportunities to build capacity for watershed-based groups and boards interested in more formally participating in water decision-making (CWGI, 2008). In addition, the importance of gathering more information about B.C.'s watershed groups, their capacity, and their needs was an explicit theme at the January 2012 event "A Water Gathering: Collaborative Watershed Governance in BC and Beyond—

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Solutions Forum,” which was co-hosted by the British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Fraser Basin Council, Living Lakes Canada, Okanagan Basin Water Board, POLIS Project on Ecological Governance, the Summit Institute, Water Policy and Governance Group, and Wildsight. (PBLI, 2012; see Appendix D for full Water Gathering Conference Release).

Gathering this type of information requires compiling an initial inventory of watershed groups across the province, including information about the organizations’ principal activities and needs. This survey project was conducted to start that process. Another purpose of this project was to gauge the interest of these groups in engaging with similar organizations in other watersheds, and in learning from leading examples from across B.C. and from other jurisdictions about best management practices and new forms of, and opportunities for, governance. The feedback from those groups that responded to the survey are summarized in this briefing note and in the table in Appendix A. Appendix B shows a map of British Columbia, indicating the geographical distribution of surveyed groups across the province. A complete list of the survey questions used is provided in Appendix C. The official conference release from the January 2012 event “A Water Gathering: Collaborative Watershed Governance in BC and Beyond,” which outlines priority actions for watershed governance in B.C., is provided in Appendix D.

This inventory and survey project was carried out by Brian Wilkes and Associates Ltd. with the support of the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance at the University of Victoria.

Methods Used

A list of known watershed organizations was assembled that drew on existing lists from the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance at the University of Victoria and the Fraser Basin Council. Some flexibility was used when defining a “watershed organization”; the list contains some angler groups, streamkeepers, and umbrella organizations that fund local stream improvement groups based on their interests and activities at the watershed scale. Contact persons, including their telephone number and/or email address, were identified. These individuals were initially contacted by phone in early December 2012 and asked if they would be interested in taking part in the survey. The survey consisted of 10 questions (see Appendix C) and was designed and distributed using Survey Monkey, a free online survey software and questionnaire tool. If the person was willing to take part in the survey, the phone call was followed up with an email containing the Survey Monkey web link and a request to complete the survey. The survey took participants approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Forty-six completed surveys were gathered. Of the 54 watershed organization contacts on the original list, 26 completed the survey. The remaining 20 surveys were completed by groups that were not on the original list. These groups received the survey via recommendations from the original groups contacted (i.e. via the snowball effect). These “additional” surveys were completed between December 2012 and March 2013. In response, the list was updated and now includes 76 watershed organizations.

Summary of Survey Results

Based on the updated list of 76 watershed organizations, the 46 completed surveys represent feedback from approximately 60 per cent of the total groups contacted. Preliminary survey review indicates that there is a great deal of activity going on across the province, and there seem to be specific regional centres of interest. For example, there is a more obvious intensity of activity on Vancouver Island, in the lower mainland, and in the Kootenays.

Most groups are loosely engaged in some form of “governance” activity; all are trying to change activities and decision-making processes in their watersheds to ensure better citizen participation and promote ecological outcomes. Some groups focus on stream improvement, others on public education and building

awareness. Still others engage in multiple activities, including “influencing decision-making.” This “influencing” ranges from making presentations, to public awareness activities and engagement. Fewer groups are directly involved in governance in a stricter, more traditional, sense, in which they actually participate in some form of decision-making processes or with decision-making agencies.

By far, the most often-cited primary activities of the groups surveyed were increasing awareness and educating the public. We interpret this to mean educating and building awareness to increase the number of people who think about issues the way they do, and, with that new perception, take appropriate political action. Umbrella organizations, such as Living Lakes Canada and the Columbia Basin Trust, tended to cite capacity building for the groups they foster as their principal activity. However, only a few umbrella organizations were surveyed. Other groups have principal activities that encompass habitat improvement, river restoration or rehabilitation, stewardship, and water quality monitoring, amongst others.

The survey asked if there was a specific catalyzing event that led to the creation of the organization. The development of just under half of the organizations surveyed was sparked by a clear problem or concern. The others came together more informally (organically) as a result of local citizens having shared concerns about the direction of change in a watershed, or lack of or decreasing attention from formal bodies, such as local or senior government, for water management.

When asked what groups feel they need beyond funding in order to best further their aims, three categories of responses were most commonly mentioned:

- more volunteers and capacity to execute (termed “social capital” in Appendix A table); group survival and effectiveness hinges on there being enough bodies to add resources and accomplish tasks;
- technical expertise of various sorts (e.g. hydrology, water quality); and
- web and social media skills to better engage the broader public.

The survey asked if the groups would be interested in participating in a province-wide forum focused on watershed governance for the purposes of creating a peer-to-peer learning space, developing skills and capacity, and exchanging information and experiences. Almost all responses were affirmative, and some were quite enthusiastic. Several groups, although interested in such a forum, responded that their attendance would depend on resources, and which specific skills development opportunities would be available.

Discussion

It is difficult to determine exactly how many of the total number of watershed groups in the province were missed by this initial survey project. We suspect northern BC is underrepresented. Some groups that we are aware of, such as the Friends of the Stikine, might no longer be active, while others may be dormant until another issue arises. We think it is possible that there may be as many as 10 to 20 additional B.C. watershed groups that exist but were not part of this project.

When designing the survey, we initially thought responses would divide into roughly three groupings:

- organizations that participate in a decision-making apparatus, usually of local government;
- organizations that are at the periphery of such decision-making activities (but wish to be more active); and
- organizations that are more specifically directed at non-governance activities, such as cleaning up streams, general education, and water “awareness”.

However, we found these distinctions were quite blurred. For example, by far the most common response groups gave regarding their activities was “influencing decision-making.” This could mean direct participation, lobbying, public campaigns, letter writing, or other forms of activism. It is also possible that some organizations participate more fully over time and then back off, depending on the issue and the opportunity.

The strong interest in a potential province-wide forum on watershed governance indicates a clear need for peer-to-peer learning between existing organizations, as well as opportunities to build capacity for improved leadership and decision-making processes across the province. Based on feedback from this survey project, if such a forum is organized it must be carefully planned to optimize attendance, and focus on those interests common to most B.C. watershed groups; this includes building local networks, finding resources to build capacity (human and financial), effective engagement strategies, and lessons from other successful projects (including pitfalls to avoid). This initial collective interest, indicated by the survey, in watershed governance approaches being implemented across the province also points to an opportunity for engagement and better understanding regarding the direction the provincial government should be—and might consider—taking for improving water governance as part of its Living Water Smart commitments and *Water Act* reform.

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Appendix A:

Summary of Responses to Survey from Watershed Groups in British Columbia

Organization	Primary Activities	Role in Governance	Key Resource Needs	Interest in Province-Wide Forum
Alouette River Management Society	Education, restoration, monitoring, lobbying	Influencing decisions, community planning	Grant writing capacity, IT skills, engagement tools and skills	Yes
Arrowsmith Watersheds Coalition Society	Watershed protection and management	Influencing decisions	Social capital	Depends on agenda and location
Arrow Lakes Environment Stewardship Society	Water quality monitoring and awareness	Influencing decisions, watershed planning	Specialized skills and knowledge	Yes
Bilston Watershed Habitat Protection Association	River restoration and rehabilitation, awareness/education	Influencing and participating in decision-making process	Volunteers/social capital	Yes
Bowker Creek Initiative	Restoration, management	Influencing decisions	Volunteers, stakeholder cooperation	Yes

Organization	Primary Activities	Role in Governance	Key Resource Needs	Interest in Province-Wide Forum
British Columbia Lake Stewardship Society	Education and monitoring	Limited	Professional expertise	Likely
Byrne Creek Streamkeepers Society	Awareness/education, monitoring	Limited	Not much	Yes
Canadian Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fisheries Commission	Habitat protection and restoration, education/awareness/engagement, policy, research	Influencing and participating in decision-making process	Capacity	Yes
Cariboo Chilcotin Conservation Society	Ecosystem preservation, education	Participating in decision-making process	Professional expertise	Depends on agenda and location
Columbia Basin Trust	Community, social, economic, ecosystem, education...	Influencing and participating in decision-making process	N/A	Yes
Comox Valley Project Watershed Society	Awareness/education, watershed restoration, research, monitoring	Limited	Guidance/assistance with developing a five-year strategic plan	Depends on agenda and location

Organization	Primary Activities	Role in Governance	Key Resource Needs	Interest in Province-Wide Forum
Cowichan Land Trust	Stewardship, conservation and protection, awareness/education	Limited	Communications—technical skills	Yes
Cowichan Watershed Board	Addressing low flow issues, water quality, fisheries, riparian, communications, ecosystem approach, fund-raising, partnerships, governance.	Influencing the decision-making process	secure source of revenue, empowerment, ongoing relevant achievements	Yes
Elk River Alliance (Wildsight Program)	Awareness/education, monitoring	Participating in decision-making process	Technical skills, group management, board accountability	Yes
False Creek Watershed Society	Awareness/education, community engagement	Influencing the decision-making process	Improved organization skills	Depends on agenda and location
Friends of French Creek Conservation Society	Habitat restoration, awareness and education, monitoring	Influencing the decision-making process	Social capital	Yes
Friends of Tod Creek Watershed	Improving/restoration of habitat, awareness/education	Limited	Professional expertise, development of management plan	Yes

Organization	Primary Activities	Role in Governance	Key Resource Needs	Interest in Province-Wide Forum
Goward Springs Watershed Stewards	Habitat restoration, education	Limited	Engagement tools	Yes
Howe Sound Watershed Environmental Science Network (Dormant)	Education, information sharing	Limited	Communication tools, governance model	Yes
Kaslo and District Community Forest Society	Improving watershed and knowledge	Participating in decision-making process	N/A	Yes
KENNES (Hagan/Graham Creek) Watershed Project	Fund raising/lobbying, education/awareness	Influencing and participating in decision-making process	Increased involvement of all government levels	Yes
Lake Windermere Ambassadors	Education/awareness, monitoring, restoration	Influencing decision-making process	Community involvement, social capital	Yes/ Depends on agenda and location
Living Lakes Canada	Capacity building for grassroots organizations, education/awareness	Influencing decision-making process	Increased coordination/communication between groups	Yes

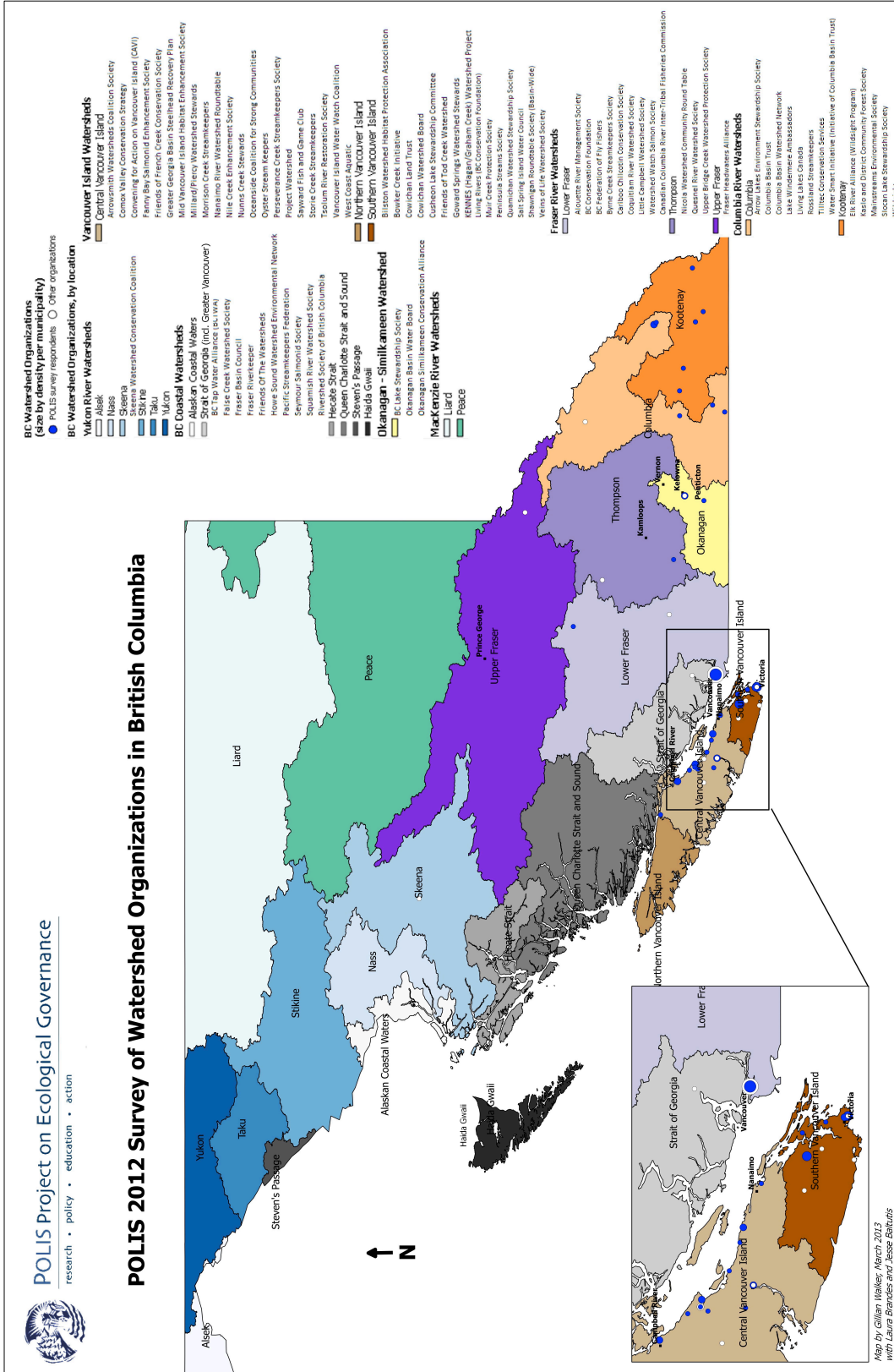
Organization	Primary Activities	Role in Governance	Key Resource Needs	Interest in Province-Wide Forum
Mainstreams Environmental Society	Habitat stewardship, education/awareness	Influencing decision-making process	Improved communication skills/plan, board renewal	Yes
Mid Vancouver Island Habitat Enhancement Society	Habitat enhancement, community engagement/education	Influencing and participating in decision-making process	Improved communication skills	Yes
Morrison Creek Streamkeepers	Habitat stewardship, education/awareness	Influencing decision-making process	Improved coordination	Depends on agenda and location
Nanaimo River Watershed Roundtable	Watershed stewardship, education	Influencing and participating in decision-making process	Improved knowledge/expertise	Yes
Nicola Watershed Community Round Table Society	Education/awareness, support community initiatives	Limited	Social capital	Depends on agenda and location
Nile Creek Enhancement Society	Habitat restoration, education/awareness, monitoring	Limited	Social capital	Depends on agenda and location
Nunns Creek Stewards	Habitat stewardship	Limited	A permanent CA	Yes

Organization	Primary Activities	Role in Governance	Key Resource Needs	Interest in Province-Wide Forum
Oceanside Coalition for Strong Communities	Education/awareness, organizing community forums	Limited	Organization viability	Depends on agenda and location
Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance	Public outreach, education/awareness	Limited	Social capital	No
Oyster Stream Keepers	Habitat protection	Limited	Increased regulations/enforcement	No
Peninsula Streams Society	Watershed stewardship, education/awareness	Limited	Social capital, increased exposure	Yes
Perseverance Creek Streamkeepers Society	Education/awareness, fry rescue, organizing board and setting new priorities	Limited	Professional expertise/advise	Yes
Quamichan Watershed Stewardship Society	Watershed stewardship, education/awareness, promoting ecological sustainability	Influencing decision-making process	N/A	Yes

Organization	Primary Activities	Role in Governance	Key Resource Needs	Interest in Province-Wide Forum
Rosland Streamkeepers	Fund raising	Influencing decision-making process	Training	Yes
Salt Spring Island Water Council	Discussions regarding drinking water issues; public education/awareness	Influencing decision-making process	Expertise in various potable water issues; facilitators or presenters to give workshops	Yes
Sayward Fish & Game Club	Salmon habitat enhancement	Influencing decision-making process	Social capital	Yes
Seymour Salmonid Society	Education/awareness, improving watershed/habitat	Limited	Training	Yes
Slocan Lake Stewardship Society	Lake stewardship, monitoring, education	Influencing decision-making process	Social capital	No
Storie Creek Streamkeepers	Stream/fish restoration/enhancement	Influencing decision-making process	Active participation	Yes
Tilltec Conservation Services	Conservation, promoting sustainability	Limited	N/A	Yes

Organization	Primary Activities	Role in Governance	Key Resource Needs	Interest in Province-Wide Forum
Tsolum River Restoration Society	Restoration, education, coordination, land use planning	Influencing decision-making process	Improved public communication strategies	Yes
Vancouver Island Water Watch Coalition	Mapping water resources, monitoring, outreach	Influencing decision-making process	Government accountability, public ownership of watersheds	Yes
Watershed Watch Salmon Society	Salmon conservation, habitat protection/restoration, education/outreach, management, promoting sustainability, networking	Influencing decision-making process	Ways to further engage and communicate with public/groups	Yes

Appendix B: Distribution of Surveyed Organizations Across British Columbia



Appendix C:

Survey Questions Used for Study of Watershed Initiatives in British Columbia

1. What is the name of your organization?
2. Was there a catalyzing event for forming your organization? i.e. was it formed to stop a development or to restore ecological integrity to a river, lake, etc.?
3. What is the primary priority for your organization now? Has it changed?
4. Is your organization more interested in improving watersheds/habitat, providing awareness and education, or influencing or participating in the decision-making process (e.g. granting of water or forestry licences, prioritizing community infrastructure spending, watershed or community planning)?
5. What are the primary activities of your organization?
6. How does your organization make decisions? (Is there a board?)
7. Is there broad stakeholder involvement? i.e. is there involvement from groups other than one sector such as environmental groups, recreation, industry, First Nations?
8. Beyond funding, what do you need to keep your organization going? (What skills, knowledge or tools would you need to help run your organization better?)
9. Would you be interested in participating in a province-wide forum on watershed governance to learn about what works elsewhere, and to exchange ideas and lessons with similar groups from across the province?
10. Any other comments?


Appendix D:

Conference Release: A Water Gathering: Collaborative Watershed Governance in BC and Beyond Solutions Forum




Conference Release

CO-HOSTED BY



The Summit Institute



A Water Gathering: Collaborative Watershed Governance in BC and Beyond

Solutions Forum - Inspiring Leaders for Change

Vancouver, BC January 26-27

British Columbians care about water and agree we need to guarantee its protection and ensure those affected have a say in decisions.

Fresh water and functioning watersheds are essential to society and strategic assets increasing in importance and absolutely fundamental to community and economic prosperity. Loss of natural capital and watershed function will continue unless new practices and priorities are adopted.

First Nations have clear interests in water, including those relating to constitutional aboriginal or treaty rights. First Nations have a crucial role to play in decisions about water and the activities that impact the water.

Collaborative watershed governance is not another layer of government – but instead improves the connection between citizens and decision makers. It is an emerging priority for British Columbians and has many benefits including:

- building resilience to **adapt to change** and enabling **innovation**;
- leveraging expertise and **additional resources** for management;
- clarifying roles and responsibilities thus increasing **accountability**;
- creating opportunities for **shared learning** and **builds capacity**; and,
- reduces conflict and increases **public confidence**.

Effective collaborative governance requires leadership and new approaches and priorities by watershed managers, users and government at all levels, including First Nations.

Conference delegates identified the following three priority actions:

1. Prioritize completion of the proposed new *Water Sustainability Act* including explicit attention to enabling collaborative watershed governance
2. Establish an annual conference of watershed-based groups and users from across BC to build capacity and exchange best practices and lessons on the ground
3. Establish a government-to-government forum – First Nations to Provincial and Federal Government – to enhance mutual understanding of interests with respect to water governance in BC.

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