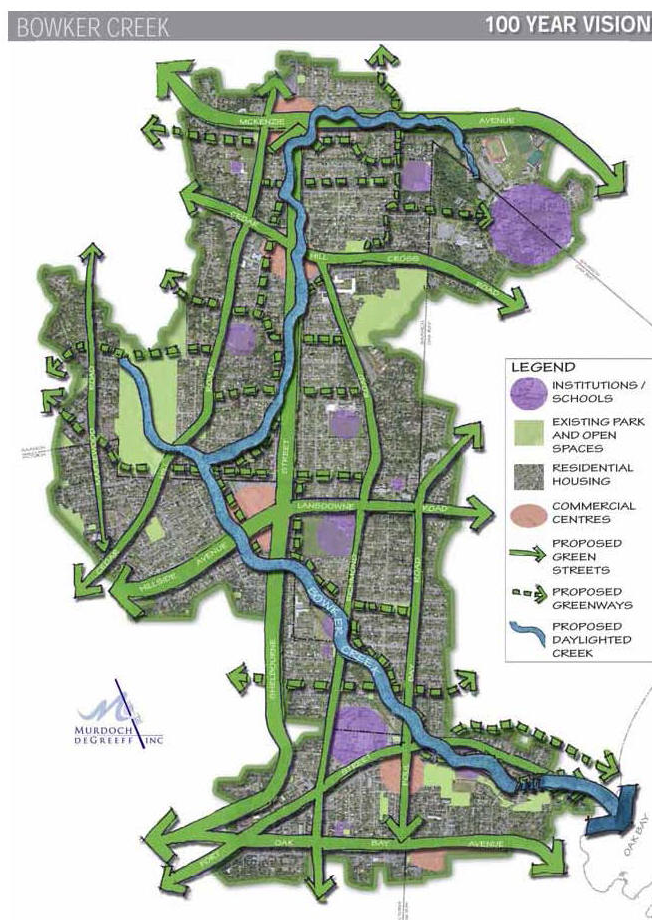




Shared Responsibility: Community Perspectives on Developing and Implementing the 100-Year Action Plan for Watershed Restoration

Community Values Influence Bowker Creek Blueprint Process and Outcome



Bowker Creek Blueprint: A 100-Year Action Plan to Restore Watershed

Water Bucket Web Story #3 posted February 2010

Preface

Leading up to the Bowker Creek Forum, a set of four stories progressively foreshadow and/or elaborate on the core content for the Forum. A fifth story will document the Forum outcomes:

- 1. Week of January 25, 2010:**
Story #1 titled *Convening for Action in the Georgia Basin: Bowker Creek Blueprint establishes precedent for moving from awareness to action* described the Bowker Creek Blueprint, summarized the process that culminated in the 100-Year Action Plan, and synthesized lessons learned.
- 2. Week of February 1, 2010:**
Story #2 titled *Convening for Action in the Georgia Basin: Bowker Creek Forum promotes inter-regional sharing and collaboration* introduced the vision for collaboration among the three regions (CRD, north of the Malahat, Metro Vancouver); and described the 'regional team approach' to achieving water sustainability through implementation of green infrastructure.
- 3. Week of February 8, 2010:**
Story #3 titled *Shared Responsibility: Community Perspectives on Developing and Implementing the 100-Year Action Plan for Watershed Restoration* describes the role played by community groups and associations; and explains how community values influenced the plan development process and are reflected in the Bowker Creek Blueprint.
- 4. Week of February 15, 2010:**
Story #4 titled *Shared Responsibility: Local Government Perspectives on Developing and Implementing the 100-Year Action Plan for Watershed Restoration* will elaborate on what on-the-ground implementation means for municipal staffs which are tasked with making things happen.
- 5. Week of March 1, 2010:**
Story #5 titled *Call to Action: Bowker Creek Forum advances a 'regional team approach' to watershed restoration in the Georgia Basin* will summarize what was accomplished by the Forum, and will foreshadow where the outcomes may lead.

These stories serve as resource materials for participants; and as a publicly accessible record of the Forum process.

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1. Context

This article is the third in a series of resource materials for the 2010 Bowker Creek Forum. The organizing team is encouraging participating planners, engineers and other practitioners and community members to take the time to read and reflect on these articles in preparation for the interactive segments at the Forum.

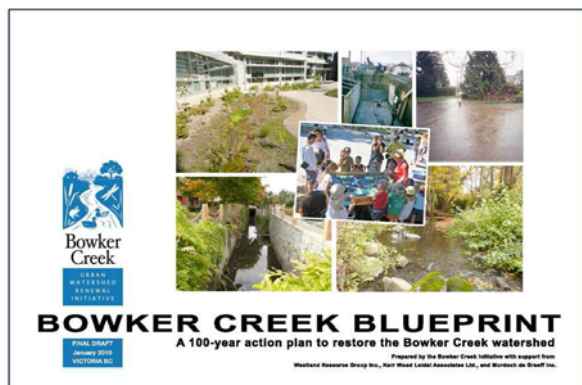
About the Bowker Creek Initiative

Bowker Creek is important to the community and has become a demonstration area for urban watershed management and restoration in the Capital Region, and in the Georgia Basin.

The *Bowker Creek Urban Watershed Renewal Initiative* (BCI) is a unique multi-jurisdictional effort. Local governments, community groups, post-secondary institutions and private citizens are collaborating to improve the health of Bowker Creek and its watershed. In 2004, the BCI was established and a part-time coordinator was hired.

Bowker Creek Blueprint: The BCI developed the 100-Year Action Plan (i.e. "the Blueprint") to guide watershed and creek corridor restoration as the watershed redevelops over time.

Because change can be slow in the urban environment, implementation will take decades. Having an action plan in place will ensure that positive changes can happen incrementally, and that opportunities for major improvements can be realized as they arise.



Community Values Drive Initiative and Blueprint

The establishment of the BCI was truly driven by the community, and the Bowker Creek Blueprint reflects community values. This outcome has been achieved because the BCI is a partnership that has enabled community groups and municipal staffs to coalesce around a shared vision.

"In 2002, there was strong support in the community to develop a management plan for the Bowker Creek watershed," recalls **Jody Watson, BCI Chair**.



"The CRD was asked to lead a community forum to develop a vision for the creek; and a strategy level watershed management plan was developed."

"The input of the community throughout that process and their direct involvement in the steering committee has ensured that the community values are front and centre. Having community representatives at the table with municipal staff has resulted in a much more holistic blueprint."

Create a Legacy through Collaboration

"The role that community groups have played in Blueprint development is impressive," observes **Kim Stephens, Program Coordinator** for the Water Sustainability Action Plan for British Columbia.

"Speaking from experience, it sends a powerful message when community representatives are motivated by the common good and are in a position to express their commitment in terms such as these: *we live here, and we are passionate about the legacy and the quality of life that we leave for our children and grand-children.*"



"It is essential that their story be told so that others will be inspired to follow the BCI lead. Simply put, transformational change will result when decision-makers in government collaborate with grass-root visionaries in the community to create a legacy."

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2. Community Engagement

Community groups and individuals have taken ownership and responsibility for “telling the story” of the Bowker Creek Initiative. Community buy-in has engendered political and staff support for watershed restoration.

“The community groups have stepped up and manned the displays at community events; and they have taken information back from the Bowker Table to inform their associations, neighbours and others,” reports Jody Watson.

Four Community Champions

This article tells the stories of four champions. Through participation on the BCI, this foursome has made a difference to their community:

- **Ian Graeme** - catalyst
- **Chris Jensen** – applied scientist
- **Soren Henrich** - artist
- **Gerald Harris** – teacher

“When I met with them to learn their stories, it was clear that each individual is passionate about the social and ecological wellbeing of the Bowker Creek community,” states Kim Stephens.



Ian Graeme



Chris Jensen



Soren Henrich



Gerald Harris

The Power of One

“Conversations about the Bowker Creek Initiative inevitably seem to focus on the leadership role that Ian Graeme has quietly played since the mid 1990s,” notes Kim Stephens. “As I learned about Ian’s accomplishments over time, it struck me that the word **catalyst** is the most appropriate descriptor to personify what Ian Graeme means to the enduring success of the BCI.”

Grass-Roots Community Leadership: “A theme that emerged from my conversations with the four champions can be summed up this way: at the heart of grass-roots community leadership is a commitment to the *common good*.”

“Community leadership is founded on trust and mutual respect. It is also about leading by example; being inclusive and collaborative; being patient, positive and staying the course. These are phrases that his colleagues used when describing Ian Graeme’s leadership style.”

“When Ian Graeme told me the story of the genesis of the Bowker Creek Initiative, my Ah-Ha moment was seeing why he epitomizes what can be accomplished through the ‘power of one’. And after further reflection, I saw that each of the four champions demonstrates the ‘power of one’ in what they each bring to the BCI.”

“Viewed from the outside, the strength of the Bowker Creek Initiative lies in the complementary talents and passions of its de facto leadership team. In a nutshell, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The key is that they believe in the mission: *This is what we want our watershed to look like in 100 years, and these are the steps we will take to get there.*”

Alignment with Local Government

“Another key theme that emerged during the interviews is an appreciation for the importance of community alignment with the job realities of local government staff. It is powerful once both parties realize how supporting each other can make good things happen: for example, community leaders can help staff by bringing forward ideas and approaches that staff otherwise could not.”

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3. The Stewardship Ethic

Ian Graeme, Chris Jensen, Soren Henrich and Gerald Harris have an affinity for creeks that is rooted in their childhoods. Their actions as adults are guided by a community stewardship ethic.

Ian Graeme: In his own words

"Five generations of my family have lived in Victoria. As a child, Bowker Creek was a place to explore and cultivate my curiosity. Looking back, a defining moment for me was in the early 1970s. Riding my bike to and from school, I recall my disappointment as a section of creek was progressively culverted."

"After graduation from university, my forestry career took me to a number of small north coast communities, an experience that connected me with the land and community, and raised my awareness of **watershed thinking**. When I returned to Victoria in the 1990s, my interest in urban watersheds and planning was a natural progression."

"In 1995, I got involved in a Local Area Plan that was under development in Saanich; and started advocating for changes in watershed and stream protection policies. To draw attention to the need for action, I organized a series of community walks and developed a 'watershed tour' slideshow and took it around the community."



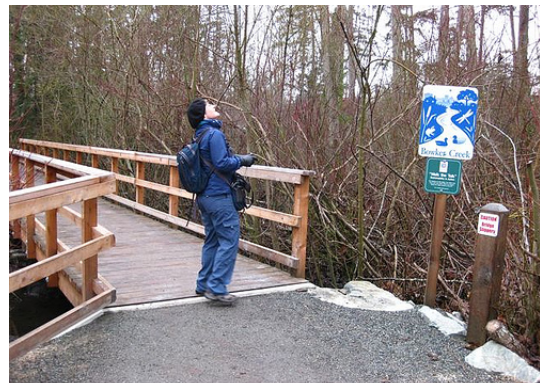
Chris Jensen: In his own words

"I grew up by Elk Lake on a farm property which had a creek, a pond and a wetland. So I played in water all the time. The water features connected me to nature."

"Then the day came that my parents subdivided our property and all the water features were removed. The land was paved and sterilized, drained and filled.....there was no longer a place to play. During this time I also noticed that as the watershed was developed, the more the water quality in local lakes deteriorated. I wondered if there was a link. I wondered if the land my family developed was part of the problem."

"This experience directly influenced what I would later go onto study at university. I specialized in hydrology so I could learn how to achieve a balance between development and nature."

"I wanted to apply this knowledge locally and take it from theory to practice. I didn't have to look any further than the watershed I live in for the opportunity to do so. I connected with Ian Graeme and together we have been working to improve watershed health for almost 10 years."



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Soren Henrich: In his own words

"I had been a director of a neighbourhood association. We were always reacting to development requests. We were in the front lines and this was taking a toll on me. It was not fun."

"At that point in my life, I was only vaguely aware of Bowker Creek; and as a homeowner who was busy raising a young family, I certainly had no concept of **watershed**. And then I experienced an Ah-Ha moment when my path intersected with that of Ian Graeme."

"It was such a wonderful moment. I saw my neighbourhood differently. As I first began to think in terms of 'what is a watershed' and then 'what is an urban watershed', I felt connected to the earth. And I felt a responsibility."



"I realized then that my thing is Bowker Creek. I wanted to be able to answer the question: where is Bowker Creek. And I wanted to ask others: do you know that you live in a watershed. After reading the book *Neighbor Power* by Seattle's Jim Diers, I was inspired to make a difference by engaging community through art events and education."

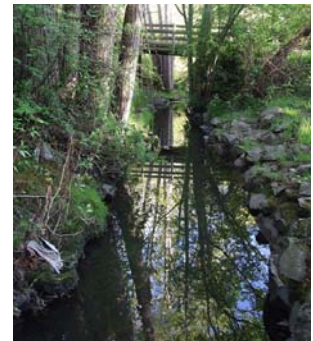


Gerald Harris: In his own words

"I grew up by slough in Matsqui. Later I worked as a fisheries tech and writer with DFO. My area of interest was the small coho streams which are always under pressure from development."

"My epiphany occurred in the 1970s when I was driving on the highway on the Sunshine Coast. As I crossed stream after stream, it made me think that Vancouver must have had streams too. This led to a project to research history by talking to old-timers. This history is recorded on the map known as *The Lost Streams of Vancouver*."

"I am a 3-year resident of the Bowker Creek watershed. I love the creek, and I was dismayed by its condition. I want it to be wholesome again. It was a brochure for a Bioengineering Workshop that caught my attention. It was an opportunity to become involved in a hands-on way."



"Working with others in the stream is a vital part for me. That's when we become a community. The experience taps something tribal in us."



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4. Shared Responsibility

Ian Graeme and Chris Jensen are volunteer watershed stewards and founding members of the BCI Steering Committee. Soren Henrich and Gerald Harris are community representatives on the BCI Outreach Subcommittee.

“Community and local government collaboration to develop and implement the Bowker Creek Blueprint exemplifies **shared responsibility** in action,” observes Kim Stephens. “The Bowker story demonstrates that solutions will follow when players with different perspectives and responsibilities are candid with each other about how they can work together more effectively.”

The Right People at the Right Time

Both Ian Graeme and Chris Jensen emphasized the crucial role played by **Rob Miller**, former Supervisor of the Capital Regional District Stormwater Quality Program.

“Ian was the key community leader and Rob the key government leader,” reflects **Chris Jensen**. “Through their collaboration, they started the trickle which has led to the flood of momentum.”

“When I first got involved, I contacted Rob Miller for streamflow data for the purposes of my university studies. But there was none. Because Rob was receptive to my need, he connected me with Peter Fell who was then instrumental in having two stations established. These have proven to be invaluable.”

“Collaboration works both ways. Rob needed community support to be effective in his job and Ian showed that there was a community voice. Together they worked to create the **Bowker Creek Forum** in 2002. This event was the start of the real coordinated effort.”

“Rob was a bright light and was prepared to take risks,” adds **Ian Graeme**. “Rob was passionate about water and watersheds, and was genuinely interested in starting a dialogue with the community. He recognized and built relationships with people who had knowledge. Rob facilitated positive change.”

The Turning Point

“The Bowker Creek Forum was THE turning point,” emphasizes Chris Jensen. “Use whatever analogy you wish to use to describe the situation, the reality is that there had been a progressive deterioration in creek health and we were at the bottom of the curve. Subsequent to the Forum, there has been a slow progression upwards.”

“During the period 2002 through 2009, it took a sustained effort to get all the players to the point where we now have agreement to proceed with the CURE. We have identified a number of remedies and we are ready to implement the CURE. Others can learn from our experience and avoid the problems and issues that we have had to deal with over the years.”

Relationships and Commitment

“As I reflect on my Bowker Creek involvement over the past decade, relationships have been so key to building a foundation for success; and these relationships have been complemented by long-term personal commitment to the common good.”

“Other descriptors that come to mind include *consistency* and *dedication*. It takes time to bring about change. As much as some of the community wants immediate change now, we recognize that the Bowker Creek Blueprint is a 100-year plan. It will take time to implement,” reflects Chris Jensen.

“However, our early successes are significant and impressive. Just think where we will be in 95 years!”

Delivering the Blueprint

“The Bowker Creek story is more than about producing a plan,” states Ian Graeme. “It is about engaging the community. If the community is actively engaged, they will take greater responsibility for delivery.”

“My Ah-Ha moment was when I realized that the three municipalities could not deliver a plan for stream and watershed restoration – unless the community drives and supports delivery.”

“Effective community engagement depends on involving people in decisions, sharing responsibility and also making them more accountable. This includes engaging generations, old and new. Our connection to the past should inform the future.”

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5. Outreach – A Powerful Tool

"For the first four years, outreach was the BCI focus," states Jody Watson. "Soren Henrich is a professional graphic artist. Among his many outreach contributions is the BCI logo."

"The arts are an effective way to engage the broader community," continues Soren Henrich. "Community celebration events draw people out and bring them together. Our experience is that the community events are the forums for engagement."

"People eagerly embrace the opportunities for engagement and education. They really want to share their thoughts and experiences. Residents have a stake in restoring watershed health. There is so much experience that we can mine. We who live in the watershed are the experts."



The Timeless Way of Building

"My participation in the BCI has been profoundly influenced by two books written by Christopher Alexander. The first was *The Timeless Way of Building*, published in 1979. This presents a guiding philosophy. The book's thesis is that the people who live and use the land and waterways are the best-positioned to design the urban world. The second book, *A Pattern Language*, is the how-to workbook."



Neighbours attend various fun and awareness-raising events hosted by the Bowker Creek Initiative, such as this parade in June 2008

Celebrate Where We Are in Time

Soren Henrich views his mission in terms of introducing the two books as a way of guiding the restoration of the Bowker Creek urban watershed.

The Timeless Way is a gradual process borne from community experience. The design of our cities and neighbourhoods is truly all about mining the experience of the community," states Soren Henrich. "We must also celebrate the urban watershed the way it is now. Be accepting of it. Enjoy the moment. Avoid becoming frustrated. Then we might see the way to improvement. It is a positive method."

"This realization resulted from another Ah-Ha moment, this time at a community event, when I learned about a group of cyclists who like to go for a midnight ride through a box culvert that is a piped section of the creek. If we eventually daylight the creek, the midnight ride experience will be history. In the meantime, it is a way for some people to connect with the creek."

Pennant Workshop Connects People

"My personal passion is the Bowker Creek Pennant Printing Workshops. At these family-friendly events, we teach the basic steps of relief printmaking to make colourful cloth pennants. We are stringing the pennants together to create banners. We are connecting people with the watershed. My dream is that there will be so many pennants that the total length of the banners will reach 8 kilometres. This would equal the creek channel length."



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6. Stream Restoration

"A role of the Outreach Subcommittee is to focus public support for those who are in local government," states **Gerald Harris**. "We know that there is public support; and we also know that there are critical moments in time when the public must be seen to be clearly interested."

"The members of the Outreach Subcommittee have considerable latitude in terms of the kinds of activities we initiate. Each of us leads in some activities and supports the other members in theirs. Physical work along the stream is most motivating for me, restoration and cleanup, particularly involving children and families. Working together along the creek is one kind of social glue for the committee members. It also draws in community members who enjoy physical work with nature."



"The stream restoration work is exciting when one recognizes the glorious project one is part of. It is a tremendous bonding experience: *These are my people and we are of this place.*"



Telling the Story

"For the Bowker Creek Blueprint to achieve what we want, watershed residents need to understand ourselves as part of the Bowker Creek story. We belong among many centuries of people who have lived and will live along the creek. This storytelling aspect needs volunteers telling the story and building community celebrations around it. As more people in the community identify ourselves

consciously as Bowker Creek watershed people, the Blueprint will have the political support it needs over the decades."

Understanding the Water Cycle

"There have been salmon and trout in Bowker Creek, and there can be again," Gerald Harris continues. "To me this is what the work is most concretely about. But at another level of awareness, Bowker Creek is part of the water circulation system for the whole world. This means we are responsible for the rain that falls on the Bowker Creek watershed. Ultimately, nobody but us can deliver the rain that falls on our little watershed down to the ocean in good shape, clean and healthy."



Watershed Model: "Angus Stewart, a community volunteer and educator was responsible for building a table-top watershed model. This educational tool was actually built by high school students. The model is a visual way to illustrate how rainwater and pollution move through the watershed."

"Angus uses soya sauce for oil and juice crystals for pesticides. A sponge represents a wetland and shows how colours are absorbed. At the Bowker Creek celebrations Angus and his model are always surrounded by children and adults. It gives them new eyes for seeing the city landscape."



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7. Watershed Restoration

Chris Jensen is an Infrastructure Resource Officer with the Ministry of Community and Rural Development. He is also part of the *Water Climate Impacts Research Centre* at UVic, where he is currently working on his Master's Degree.

Chris Jensen represents the Ministry on the grass-roots Inter-Governmental Partnership (IGP) that developed and maintains the web-based *Water Balance Model for BC*. In addition, he is Co-Chair of the Vancouver Island Coordinating Team, a sub-group of the IGP.

Making a Contribution

"My Master's program is the interface between what I do at the Ministry and my involvement in the community," explains Chris Jensen. "My applied research has direct community application because I am using Bowker Creek as a case study. My focus is on how we can reduce our hydrologic footprint as the watershed redevelops. The results could have provincial significance."



"Looking back to when I was an undergraduate student at UVic, I wondered who was doing what in Bowker Creek. As it turned out, Ian Graeme lived a block away. In 2001, I joined a stewardship group that Ian Graeme and Karl Sturmanis had founded."

Developing Needed Tools: "In 2008, I obtained a research fellowship to do my Master's Degree. The decision to return to UVic is part of my personal evolution from community advocate to developing needed tools for practitioners."

"My research focus is on HOW to restore the rainfall capture capacity of the Bowker Creek watershed as we redevelop the urban landscape. Because this is the first climate change adaptation study of its kind, we have a chance to show the world how small changes can make a big difference to our cities."

Alignment with Provincial Initiatives

The applied research by Chris Jensen aligns with the desired watershed restoration outcomes embodied in *Living Water Smart*, *BC's Water Plan* and the *Green Communities Initiative*.

"An enabling policy framework for local government is in place. The Bowker Creek Initiative is positioned to demonstrate what it means to prepare communities for climate change, choose to live water smart, and strive to build greener communities," states Chris Jensen.

"Ensuring that the community stays connected with the watershed's natural features requires celebration. The purpose and importance of Bowker community events is to maintain positive energy; and keep the spotlight on what it means to live in a healthy watershed."

Alignment within the Watershed

"There is greater alignment now than ever before regarding community goals and the 100-year plan for watershed restoration," states **Ian Graeme**. "Also, the people around the table want the Blueprint to succeed. In addition, the BCI has been successful in securing political support. While I feel we are only beginning to talk about the possibilities, it's a positive story of relationship-building, collaboration and effective partnerships."



"There is a strong vision in the community with many committed champions. There are also some tangible on-the-ground results to provide confidence that we are moving along the right track."

"Developing the Bowker Creek watershed plan and the Blueprint has been a great opportunity to work with some outstanding staff from the regional district and three municipalities. It's been a valuable learning experience and a good model for building community capacity for change. The Blueprint has achieved what a conventional plan could not: it has effectively distilled community values, provides a compelling vision and sense of place, and issues a challenge to each of us to do business differently."