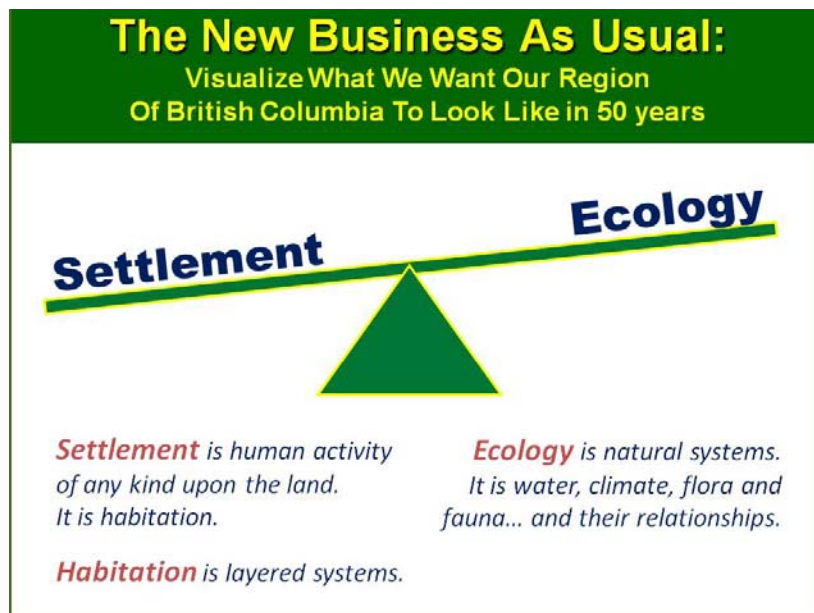


How does a community weigh the benefits and liabilities of change driven by demand for land use?

Tim Pringle explains what “Settlement in Balance with Ecology” means



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Balancing Settlement Change and Ecology

The phrase **Settlement in Balance with Ecology** is now an essential element of the branding for *Convening for Action in British Columbia*, a partnership initiative under the umbrella of the **Water Sustainability Action Plan**.

“The goal when convening for action is to facilitate integration of land and water resource management at all scales, from the province to the site, to balance settlement change and ecology,” states **Glen Brown, Chair** of the Water Sustainability Committee of the BC Water & Waste Association. The BCWWA is the managing partner for Action Plan program delivery. The Action Plan is co-funded by the Province of British Columbia and the Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia (REFBC).



Doing Business Differently

This article describes the genesis in the South Okanagan of the **Settlement in Balance with Ecology** way-of-thinking, and how its’ application has evolved over the past three years through **Convening for Action on Vancouver Island**. Known by the acronym CAVI, this multi-year outreach and educational program serves practitioners; and is the provincial pilot for convening for action at a regional scale.

“The concept of balancing settlement change and ecology has led us to think in terms of **A Positive Settlement Strategy for Vancouver Island**, and what it could look like,” explains **John Finnie, CAVI Chair**.



“CAVI partners are working hard to establish ‘design with nature’ expectations ...for community and green infrastructure design... through the use of outcome-oriented language such as: *The New Business As Usual*; and *Green Value Development*.”

2006 Whistler Mini-Summit on Water for Life and Livelihoods

The need for an approach that balances settlement change and ecology was first introduced by **Tim Pringle** at the **Mini-Summit on Water for Life and Livelihoods**, held in Whistler in May 2006 in conjunction with the BCWWA Annual Conference. For 20 years, Tim Pringle was REFBC Executive Director. He is currently the REFBC’s Director of Special Programs.

The phrase *water for life and livelihoods* was “borrowed” from work done in the United Kingdom. It conveys the fundamental principles of sustainability of natural systems in their own right and in relation to the health and wellbeing of people who benefit from the use of water for basic life needs and economic activity.

The “settlement in balance with ecology” principle is an extension of “water for life and livelihoods”.

Wellbeing Explained

At the Mini-Summit, Tim Pringle posed these two questions when he presented his paper titled **Water Sustainability in the South Okanagan: Balancing Settlement and Ecology**: “How does a community weigh the benefits and liabilities of change driven by demand for land use? What will determine long-term **wellbeing** for a community or region?”



“Wellbeing is a core concept,” stated Tim Pringle. “In a nutshell, ‘wellbeing’ is about sustainability of what communities allow or prevent happening on the land. Wellbeing is about accommodating settlement change while avoiding loss of ecological values.”

During the period 2005 – 2006, the *Convening for Action in the South Okanagan* provincial pilot established a precedent at the sub-basin (or sub-regional) scale for integration of water-centric thinking in a Regional Growth Strategy process.

Tim Pringle explains what “Settlement in Balance with Ecology” means

Settlement and Ecology are Equal Values

“The key principle is that settlement and ecology are equal values and they must be as much in balance as possible for wellbeing of human and natural systems,” stated Tim Pringle at the Whistler Mini-Summit. He then explained that:

- Habitation and ecology are interdependent.
- Although ecology can exist without habitation by man, habitation cannot exist without ecology.
- Both systems are finite and subject to change, including growth, decline and decay – in other words, some end state.
- Balance requires measurement. Often the required metrics are not available.

“Healthy systems thrive. Compromised systems, without elimination of threats and restoration, decay.”

“The principle of balancing settlement and ecology helps clarify the relationships that exist among the players (practitioners), politicians, regional and local planners, First Nations communities, agriculturalists, resorts, water districts, businesses and residential property owners.”

“Through outreach and education, the Convening for Action vision is to influence land and water practitioners to learn about and use practices that better balance the necessary relationships of settlement activity and ecological assets in local and regional landscapes,” he concluded.

Convening for Action on Vancouver Island

A year after the Whistler Mini-Summit, the 2007 Annual Conference of the Association of Vancouver Island Coastal Communities (AVICC) provided an early opportunity to test the receptivity of elected representatives to the **Settlement in Balance with Ecology** way-of-thinking. The success of the AVICC pre-consultation paved the way for the formal rollout of the CAVI program at the *Creating Our Future Consultation Workshop*, held as an adjunct to the 2007 *Gaining Ground Summit* in Victoria.

Commoditizing Nature

“In the non-metropolitan context, residents of growth communities think of themselves as being rural places, but people want urban services,” observed **Tim Pringle**



in leading off the pre-conference session. “Furthermore, the Province is now promoting resort municipality designations which may allow major developments to be undertaken as local government areas. In

short, this means nature is becoming commoditized.”

He presented statistical data on the demand for land as measured by the total dollar value for all development permits. He compared the period 2001-2003 to 2004-2006 for each of the sub-regions that comprise Vancouver Island. Then he compared the Island with other regions in the province.

Demand For Land

Comparing Development Regions
(2001 – 2003 compared to 2004 – 2006)

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| • Vancouver Island Coast | 269% |
| • Northeast | 283% |
| • Thompson Okanagan | 224% |
| • Kootenay | 176% |
| • Mainland South West | 166% |
| • Nechako | 150% |

“Only the Northeast Region has been experiencing a faster growth in demand than Vancouver Island, and that is due to the oil boom in that region,” noted Tim Pringle.

Tim Pringle explains what “Settlement in Balance with Ecology” means

Balance Requires Measurement

“A reality is that we manage what we can measure,” continued Tim Pringle. “While we are very good at measuring settlement, mainly in financial terms, we have not been that effective in quantifying the ecological implications and/or impacts associated with the rapid pace of development that BC has been experiencing. This disconnect in measuring what matters has resulted in an unbalanced approach when making development decisions.”



“If we were in fact measuring ecological values, there would be more ‘weights’ (reliable data) on the ecology side of the balance scale; thus leading to more informed conclusions and hence different decisions.”

A Positive Settlement Strategy

“Beginning in 2007, CAVI encouraged a conversation on Vancouver Island around achieving settlement in balance with ecology,” reflects Tim Pringle. “We set out to shine a spotlight on the necessary link between accommodating settlement growth while protecting the ecological systems upon which community wellbeing depends.”

“This conversation process crystallized the concept of **A Positive Settlement Strategy for Vancouver Island**. Of course, it raises questions about the future:

What will Vancouver Island look like in 50 years?

Will communities protect their wellbeing?

Will they choose to treat settlement change and ecological resources with equal understanding?

Will they find balance?”

The **Green Infrastructure Leadership Forum**, organized by CAVI in partnership with AVICC, served as the formal launch for *A Positive Settlement Strategy* in December 2007. Held in Nanaimo, the purpose of the Forum was to prompt discussion that would lead to a dialogue about the location and form of future development on Vancouver Island.



At the Forum, **John Finnie, CAVI Chair**, stated that: “By 2010, the CAVI vision is that Vancouver Island will be on its way to achieving water sustainability; and further, that this outcome will be achieved through Green Infrastructure practices that reflect a full and proper understanding of the relationship between land and water.” He explained that CAVI is branding the desired outcome as *A Positive Settlement Strategy*.



Tim Pringle explains what “Settlement in Balance with Ecology” means

The New Business As Usual

“Insights gained from the Green Infrastructure Leadership Forum resulted in the next shift in our thinking,” recalls **Kim Stephens, Program Coordinator** for the Water Sustainability Action Plan for British Columbia. “We realized that we had to stop using language that effectively marginalized new ways of doing business.”



“We asked ourselves, for example, why do we continue to refer to desired best practices as Alternative Development Standards? This simply perpetuates the old business as usual. So we decided that we had to jump-start a change in the practitioner mindset by first changing their vocabulary. A light-bulb moment occurred when Tim Pringle said: *Let’s get people thinking and talking in terms of The New Business As Usual.*”

“We are using the slogan **The New Business As Usual** to convey the message that, for change to really occur, practices that until now have been viewed as the exception must become the norm moving forward. We have to build regulatory models and develop models of practice and expertise to support *The New Business As Usual*,” stated **Dale Wall, Deputy Minister** (Community & Rural Development), at the Gaining Ground Summit in May 2008.



Green Value

“The Real Estate Foundation uses the term **Green Value** as a generic reference to use and conservation of land and real estate that achieves social and economic goals while minimizing harmful effects on ecological assets,” states **Tim Pringle**.

In conjunction with the 2008 Gaining Ground Summit, the REFBC organized a **Green Developers Roundtable** as a consultation opportunity to support the CAVI program. Representatives of projects in the Comox Valley, mid-Island and south-Island regions participated.

Tim Pringle presented his research findings that quantified the extent of Green Value development underway and in the permit process on Vancouver Island in mid-2008. The analysis tracks dollar value as well as type of development.

‘Green Value’ refers to the intentions of land owners and developers to implement a range of strategies that recognize and protect ecological values at a watershed, sub-region and/or site scale.



“The key finding is that overnight Green Value development has moved from market-niche to market-share. In 2006 and 2007, development defined as ‘deep green’ accounted for about 10% of the value of residential building permits in five regional districts. Looking at what is currently on the books for projects with a value greater than \$15 million, Green Value development accounts for roughly a 60% market share, a six-fold increase,” Tim Pringle told the Roundtable.

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What Gets Constructed:

“Whether or not these projects actually get constructed, they indicate that the development market sees advantages to incorporating green strategies in the design of large projects. Obviously, Vancouver Island offers numerous locations desirable for such development concepts,” concludes Tim Pringle.

Connecting the Dots

“The analysis of Vancouver Island building permit data confirms that Green Value development is the New Business As Usual. Looking ahead, the next challenge is to ensure that the right development is built in the right place at the right time,” concluded Tim Pringle.

From Market-Niche to Market-Share

At the **2008 Vancouver Island Learning Lunch Seminar Series** hosted by the City of Courtenay, **Margaret (Maggie) Henigman of the Ministry of Environment's Nanaimo regional office** provided this perspective during a town hall sharing session: “Since 1996 I have been working across Vancouver



Island, both reviewing development proposals and monitoring project implementation. In the last couple of years I have been really pleased to see a huge shift take place in the way projects are being done.”

“As I reflect on the current Vancouver Island situation, it strikes me that we have created a new social norm; and it is being accepted by the development community as a whole. The change in attitude is really gaining momentum. Everywhere I go I am seeing evidence of the new ethic. It is not that everyone is perfect, but the change is really coming along.”

What Drives Settlement

“Vancouver Island offers large tracts of land and unique natural amenities, in particular access to waterscapes, which attract large-scale development. We have observed that development proposals for complete communities, resort-based and mixed-use developments usually emphasize water-centric features,” states **Tim Pringle**.

“The curriculum for the **2009 Vancouver Island Learning Lunch Seminar Series**, hosted by the Comox Valley Regional District, will be examining the key factors that drive large-scale real estate development projects on Vancouver Island. We will also be addressing Settlement in Balance with Ecology in a pragmatic way: *Here is what it looks like; this is where it is going.*”



“Settlement and ecology are both complex systems; and the nature of their complexities means there is no easy answer to achieving a balance that will ensure **water for life and livelihoods.**”

“Nevertheless, we need to connect the dots between **Settlement in Balance with Ecology** and **A Positive Settlement Strategy for Vancouver Island**. Hence, it is in our best interests to learn about both sides of the balance....if we are to ensure that Green Value development results in benefits exceeding liabilities at the site, community and regional scales.”

“At the conclusion of the Learning Lunch Series, a desired outcome is that participants will understand **WHY** the notion of ‘sustainable communities’ begins with a discussion of values that communities declare or reflect as changes occur in their landscapes.”