

Convening for Action on Vancouver Island  
Leadership in Water Sustainability



## **An Integrated Watershed Approach to Settlement Change**

Nature Without Borders - Building on the Comox Valley Regional Conservation Strategy



# **The New Business As Usual:** **Visualize What We Want Vancouver Island to Look Like in 50 years**

## ***The Mission is to Create a Legacy***

- 1. Influence choices by individuals and organizations***
- 2. Use the term "sustainability" as a lens for considering approaches that influence choices***

# 2009 Vancouver Island Learning Lunch Seminar Series

## Comox Valley is the Provincial Pilot for a Regional Team Approach

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Water Bucket Web Story #5 posted September 2009

## Preface

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A series of stories published on the Convening for Action community-of-interest on the Water Bucket progressively foreshadow and/or elaborate on the curriculum for the 2009 Comox Valley Learning Lunch Seminar Series. Briefly:

- **On July 14, 2009:** Story #1 titled *Comox Valley Regional District will host 2009 Learning Lunch Seminar Series* introduced the purpose of a 'regional team approach' as a springboard beyond the Comox Valley.
- **On July 28, 2009:** Story #2 titled *CAVI releases program details for 2009 Vancouver Island Learning Lunch Seminar Series* provided context for a paradigm-shift that will result in regional alignment around the concept of settlement in balance with ecology.
- **On August 24, 2009:** Story #3 titled *What Drives Settlement on the East Coast of Vancouver Island* initiated a conversation about "one market, from Cobble Hill to Campbell River".
- **On September 9, 2009:** This Story #4 titled *A Regional Perspective on Water Supply in the Comox Valley* provided a broad-brush picture of source identification, source quality and watershed protection, population-source capacity, infrastructure upgrading and implementation issues.
- **On September 9, 2009:** Story #5 titled *An Integrated Watershed Approach to Settlement Change* connects the dots between the Comox Valley Conservation Strategy and the regional team approach.
- **On September 15, 2009:** Story #6 titled *The Comox Valley Learning Lunch Seminar Series is for Implementers* will reflect the perspectives of municipal staffs who will be tasked with implementing regional outcomes.
- **On September 22, 2009:** Story #7 titled *Today's Expectations are Tomorrow's Standards* will elaborate on provincial expectations and programs that provide direction as to where the Province wants to go.

Additional stories will be published during the October through December 2009 period to summarize what was accomplished at each seminar.

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# 2009 Vancouver Island Learning Lunch Seminar Series

## Comox Valley is the Provincial Pilot for a Regional Team Approach

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### 1. Context

This article is the fifth in a series of resource materials for the 2009 Learning Lunch Series. The organizing team is encouraging participating planners, engineers and other practitioners to take the time to read and reflect on these articles in preparation for the Town Hall sharing sessions.

#### Regional Team Approach

By sharing core concepts and key information in advance, the organizing team hopes this will inspire practitioners to think about collaboration and the roles they can play in implementing a 'regional team approach' as follows:

*"How we will simultaneously work together as staff within a municipality and as a region AND externally with the stewardship sector, developers and other private sector players, to ensure we implement sustainable approaches to development"*

The Comox Valley is the designated provincial pilot for a 'regional team approach' to implementing green infrastructure practices that in turn will lead to water sustainability, a process that involves key local government departments.

**Connecting the Dots:** This article describes how the *Comox Valley Regional Conservation Strategy, An Integrated Watershed Approach to Settlement Change* and the 'regional team approach' are connected. This will set the stage for a 'call to courage' by Derek Richmond and Jack Minard to kick-off Seminar #1.

An initiative of the Comox Valley Land Trust, and a decade in the making, the **Comox Valley Regional Conservation Strategy** is an exciting initiative to create a region-wide strategy for land conservation in consultation with the community and decision-makers in the Comox Valley.

The vision for **An Integrated Watershed Approach to Settlement Change** is an early outcome of the 2009 Learning Lunch series.

#### Call to Courage

"We have a great opportunity to move ahead with implementing the real elements of 'integrated planning'. We have recognized the need, realized the benefits, talked about examples of where this has happened and now we need to get to grips with more clearly defined ways of how to facilitate this on an ongoing and consistent basis," states **Derek Richmond, Manager of Engineering** with the City of Courtenay. "The next step is to define a process at the ground level that is easily understood by all parties."



**Learning Lunch Outcomes:** "The 2009 Learning Lunch Series will serve as the springboard to advance **integration** of current Comox Valley regional initiatives in 2010. The series will also serve as a springboard beyond the Comox Valley."

"At the conclusion of the third and the final seminar we will be seeking **commitment** to a Comox Valley regional team approach. How the four Comox Valley local governments **make it real** will inform the regional team approach in other regions."

**Design of Seminar #1:** The first seminar will be structured in four parts; these will be linked and will cascade as follows:

- Hour #1 is the bridge from the 2008 Series.
- Hour #2 is for lunchtime networking.
- Hour #3 is about "what drives settlement".
- Hour #4 is a town hall sharing session.

Derek Richmond and Jack Minard will tag-team to provide the bridge from the 2008 Series. They will issue the 'call to courage' that sets the context for the town hall sharing in Hour #4.

Hour #4 will cover local government use of *Development Permit Areas* (DPAs); and will serve as the on-the-ground example to inform the discussion and **make it real**.



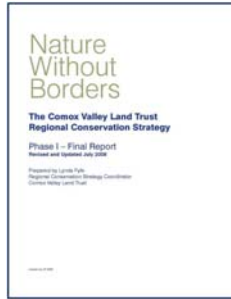
# 2009 Vancouver Island Learning Lunch Seminar Series

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## 2. Comox Valley Regional Conservation Strategy

The *Comox Valley Regional Conservation Strategy* is a long-term approach to use and conservation of land, and was initiated by the Comox Valley Land Trust. **Nature Without Borders** is the title of the report that lays out a community vision. It was released in July 2008.



"The Strategy aims to provide reliable and accessible conservation information to politicians, planners, developers, community groups and residents, and to assist in wise and informed land use decisions and conservation actions," states **Jack Minard, Executive Director** of the Comox Valley Land Trust.



"The desired outcome in developing the Strategy is to contribute to the quality of life of Comox Valley residents by working to protect the lands that are essential for ecosystem function, human health and well-being, economic sustainability, and civic pride."

### Nature Without Borders

According to Jack Minard, "the main purpose of the Strategy is to prioritize sensitive ecosystems, linkages via expanded riparian strips and designated upland wildlife corridors; and to create a new and exciting watershed-based land use planning framework." The foreword provides this context:

*"Nature has no borders; it does not recognize political or philosophical boundaries and it is essential for the health of human and non-human communities alike. To view nature in this way represents not a 'special interest' approach but a modern advance in civil society. We are realizing that the current loss of ecosystems and biodiversity cannot continue, yet pressures to develop land for human use are placing huge demands on what remains."*

### Local Government Endorsement

In June 2008, the Comox Valley Regional District and its three member municipalities agreed to a regional-based approach to conservation planning; and by Joint Resolution formally endorsed the Regional Conservation Strategy.

"Looking back, the story of how the Joint Resolution came about is an early application of the regional team approach," reflects **Jack Minard**. "We brought together the four planning departments as an advisory board during the preparation of *Nature Without Borders*."

"My understanding is that this was the first time in Valley history that all four were in the same room at the same time for a shared purpose. It took us three working sessions to build trust and foster collaboration; and at the end of #3, we had a Joint Resolution that they took back to their politicians."

"The Resolution linked the Regional Conservation Strategy to the Regional Growth Strategy; endorsed regional conservation planning as a first step in land use and regional growth management planning; and directed regional and municipal staff to identify cross-jurisdictional conservation projects and develop partnership opportunities for implementation of projects."

**2008 Learning Lunch Series:** According to Jack Minard, the 2008 Comox Valley Learning Lunch Series played a pivotal role in solidifying commitment to collaborate regionally.

"It takes time for people to wrap their minds around a concept such as *regional-based planning*; and understand what it really means on the ground, and on a daily basis. So, one could describe the months following adoption of the Joint Resolution as a somewhat fragile period."

"Timing is everything. In a very real sense, the 2008 Series provided the first public test of commitment to the *regional team approach*. There was an amazing moment in Seminar #3, and it was captured on a YouTube video."

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### 3. 2008 Vancouver Island Learning Lunch Series

**Living Water Smart, BC's Water Plan** provided the context that helped frame the learning outcomes for the 2008 Vancouver Island Learning Lunch Seminar Series, in particular:

- **Create Liveable Communities and Protect Stream Health:** *By 2012, all land and water managers will know what makes a stream healthy, and therefore be able to help land and water users factor in new approaches to securing stream health and the full range of stream benefits* (p 43 Living Water Smart)

The 2008 Series developed a common understanding of what rainwater management and green infrastructure means, and explored a regional team approach to ensure consistency at local government front counters. The Cowichan Valley Regional District and City of Courtenay hosted successive series; with the Comox series adapting the lessons learned during the first series.

#### High-Level Endorsement

High-level endorsement for a 'regional team approach' was provided when Mayors and Chief Administrative Officers representing the four Comox Valley local governments dropped in to show their support for the Learning Lunch Seminar Series. This moment is recorded on YouTube.



**Sandy Gray, City of Courtenay CAO**, lauded the objectives of the Learning Lunch Seminar Series. "We are thrilled by the work of CAVI. It is a tremendous initiative," he said. "The cooperation that is taking place around a consistent approach to development is very critical to all of Vancouver Island."



#### Millard/Piercy Pilot Project

"The Joint Resolution adopted in June 2008 included a commitment to undertake a policy and regulatory gap analysis of a multi-jurisdictional watershed," states Jack Minard.



"The **Millard/Piercy Gaps Analysis Project** is being undertaken as a regional pilot pursuant to the Joint Resolution. As an outcome of the Learning Lunch series, the pilot project has evolved beyond a simple regulatory gaps analysis. It has created the opportunity to develop a template that enables us to move toward watershed-based land use planning and entrench the regional team approach."



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#### 4. An Integrated Watershed Approach to Settlement Change

“To be successful, we all need to work outside our normal boundaries; and we need to proactively communicate and work with others,” states **Derek Richmond**. “We need to think of ourselves as a team, not as individuals within silos; getting there means we will have to break down boundaries through **communication, collaboration, cooperation** and **coordination**.”

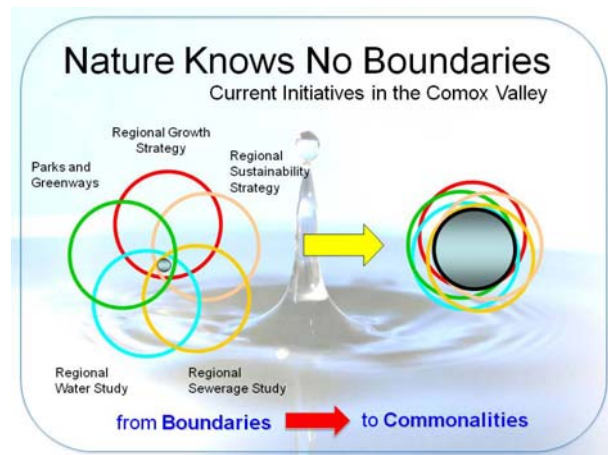
##### Bottom-Up Approach

“The Millard/Piercy pilot illustrates how the Learning Lunch series is enabling practitioners to get together to collaborate at a starting point,” observes **Tim Pringle, Director of Special Programs** for the Real Estate Foundation.



“The Learning Lunch Series provides a beginning and expertise around an issue. This starts the conversation and generates the energy and passion. After that, it really is a matter of connecting the dots to create collaboration.”

“The challenge for Comox Valley practitioners is to work around and with boundaries,” adds **Derek Richmond**. “Through the 2009 Series, we would like to shift the paradigm from **boundaries** to **areas of commonality**.”



##### From Boundaries to Areas of Commonality

“In the Comox Valley we have talked the talk and now it is time to do the walking. ‘The converted’ are saying, show us the way and we will follow,” continues Derek Richmond.

“We are now (or we should be) at the ‘process’ stage of this initiative. The next step is to define a process at the ground level that is easily understood by all parties.”

**Rising to the Challenge:** “The immediate challenge in the Comox Valley is to articulate an example (of how a review / planning / approval situation is dealt with / processed), and have the Regional District players respond to the scenario of WHO is involved in the process, WHAT they do, and HOW, WHY and WHEN they do it.”

“Part of the exercise also involves who their counterparts are in the adjoining municipalities, and have them similarly articulate: the expected / anticipated interaction between the various parties; what the expected outcomes and benefits are, and how a process might be monitored and documented to achieve consistent results.”

**Road Map for Implementation:** “The missing element is the mandate. Having recognized the need for legislative tools, a challenge is to draw attention to the need for ‘formal’ commitment from all levels of government and follow through by developing an action plan to focus attention on implementing legislation.”

“At the local level we need to (have staff) develop a working agreement for the 4 C’s as they apply to a review, monitoring and implementation process – one that includes the principles of all of the key initiatives, but emphasizes integrated planning on a watershed basis.”

“It is important that we state our vision and provide a road map for implementation. Opportunities do not come without challenges and progress is not made without taking risks,” concludes Derek Richmond.



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## 5. Provincial Context for a Regional Team Approach

A *regional team approach* is founded on partnerships and collaboration; and seeks to align actions at three scales – provincial, regional and local. The key word is alignment: ***this is what we want to collectively achieve, and this is how we will work together to get there.***

Under the umbrella of the **Water Sustainability Action Plan for British Columbia** (for background, go to [www.conveningforaction.ca](http://www.conveningforaction.ca)):

- The 'regional team approach' had its genesis in the **2008 Vancouver Island Learning Lunch Seminar Series**.
- The 'regional team approach' was then introduced to the Metro Vancouver region at the **2009 Surrey Water Balance Model Forum**.
- The 'regional team approach' was subsequently showcased provincially at the **2009 Penticton Forum**.
- Application of the 'regional team approach' is now being demonstrated in the Comox Valley.

**The Penticton Forum:** "Held in conjunction with the Annual BCWWA Conference, the Penticton Forum showcased how **partnerships, collaboration, innovation and integration** are helping local governments in three regions make the best choices for living water smart," reports **Kim Stephens, Program Coordinator** for the Water Sustainability Action Plan.



"Derek Richmond told the story of the Vancouver Island Learning Lunch Seminar Series in a presentation titled *Springboard to a Regional Team Approach*. Derek's presentation was built around the 4Cs – **communicate, collaborate, cooperate and coordinate.**"

### Build a Vision, Create a Legacy

"The Penticton Forum will be a milestone for advancing the regional team concept and its alignment with provincial goals for water sustainability and other cross-boundary realities for managing the built environment," continues **Kim Stephens**. "Context presentations, including the one by Derek Richmond, informed and stimulated the Town Hall Sharing Sessions at the Forum."

**What We Heard at Penticton:** Lynn Kriwoken, Director of the Water Stewardship Division in the Ministry of Environment, distilled the essence of what participants said in the Penticton sharing sessions down to these three statements:

1. ***I am here to save the planet.***
2. ***I will lead from where I stand.***
3. ***I will be bold and take risks.***

"To get to the big picture, it starts with an understanding of the smallest pieces and how they fit together. The goal, when 'convening for action', is to establish expectations that will influence the form and function of the built environment."

"This is why Derek and Jack's concept for building the Town Hall Sharing Session around DPAs is brilliant. Participants can draw on their daily work experience to connect the dots between regional principles and what goes into a DPA application."

"At the conclusion of the Penticton Forum, we challenged participants to apply what they had learned to create a legacy: make 'green choices' that will be cumulative in creating liveable communities, reducing wasteful water use, and protecting stream health. We will similarly challenge participants in the 2009 Comox Valley Learning Lunch Series," concludes Kim Stephens.

#### ***'Build a Vision, Create a Legacy' means...***

- Apply a science-based approach to create a shared vision of achievable goals
- Facilitate a **participatory decision process** to build stakeholder consensus and agree on expectations
- Obtain **commitment from everyone** to truly integrate water management with land development practices

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## 6. Learning Lunch Program

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The program for Seminar #1 is designed around the premise that local governments have choices; and hence, they can control the destiny of their communities. To reiterate, the seminar structure is:

- Hour #1 - the bridge from the 2008 Series.
- Hour #2 - lunchtime networking.
- Hour #3 - "what drives settlement".
- Hour #4 - town hall sharing session.

In the morning, Jack Minard and Derek Richmond will issue a 'call to courage'. After lunch, Tim Pringle will address this question: *How does a community weigh the benefits and liabilities of change driven by demand for land use?* He will present research findings that will funnel into and inform a town hall session on a regional team approach to *Development Permit Areas*.

### Development Permit Area Explained

The Development Permit Area (DPA) is one of the strongest tools available to local government for shaping new development...to ensure that it respects community values and the environment.

DPAs allow local governments to create site-specific requirements for development over and above basic zoning. A municipality may designate a DPA in which new development will be required to conform to development permit guidelines. A permit must be obtained before a private land owner may subdivide, alter land, or construct or alter a building in a DPA.

Local governments may designate DPAs in an Official Community Plan (OCP) or zoning bylaw for a range of purposes, including the protection of farming. When a DPA is designated, the local government must describe the special site conditions or objectives that justify the designation, and specify guidelines to achieve those objectives. When an owner applies to the local government for a development permit to alter a site within a DPA, the guidelines in the OCP will direct what conditions, if any, staff and council place on the new development.

### Town Hall Sharing Session

The following two-part question will frame the discussion in the Town Hall Sharing Session:

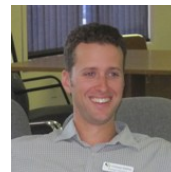
- *How will we implement a regional team approach in the Comox Valley, and how can this inform **A Positive Settlement Strategy for Vancouver Island?***

"We will bring this high-level question down to a practical working level by shining the spotlight on how DPAs can be employed to achieve consistent regional outcomes," explains **Kim Stephens**.

"Because our audience will include local government participants from outside the Comox Valley, this forum creates the opportunity to cross-fertilize DPA examples."

"It would be perfectly reasonable to draft a DPA that requires green infrastructure practices on the ground that will achieve water sustainability. This means focus on the little things that will yield cumulative benefits – for example, a topsoil sponge on development sites **reduces water need** and also **limits water runoff**."

### Making a Commitment



"The town hall session at the end of Seminar #1 sets the stage for the last hour in Seminar #3," states **Michael Zbarsky, CVRD Engineering Analyst**. "First, we all have to understand what we are dealing with; and also, that what we will learn from the series will help us grapple with the growth issue. Looking ahead to the last hour in the series, that is when we will be seeking commitment to a Comox Valley regional team approach."

"To ensure that the first town hall session yields value for everyone, the organizing team will develop a set of probing questions ahead of time. These questions will jump-start the conversation, and will help get us on the same page....so that everyone understands and can visualize what '*commitment to the team*' looks like in practice," concludes **Derek Richmond**.