



the partnership
for water sustainability in bc



Capital Region's 'Bowker Creek Blueprint' demonstrates that "Outreach is a Powerful Tool"

Mission Possible: Implementing a New Culture for Urban Watershed Protection and Restoration in British Columbia

Convening for Action on Vancouver Island: Visualize What We Want Our Region to Look Like in 50 years



Create a Legacy: Settlement Change in Balance with Ecology

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

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Preface

A decade ago, local governments in British Columbia were venturing into uncharted waters when undertaking watershed-based plans called Integrated Stormwater Management Plans, and known by the acronym ISMP.

The genesis for ISMPs was a desire to integrate the community, engineering, planning and environmental perspectives. Local governments knew they had to do business differently in order to protect and/or restore watershed health.

Now, the experience of the Bowker Creek Initiative in the Capital Region demonstrates what can be accomplished through a 'regional team approach'. Furthermore, the Bowker Creek precedent serves as a guide for implementing a 'top-down and bottom-up' approach that connects with the community and gets the vision right.

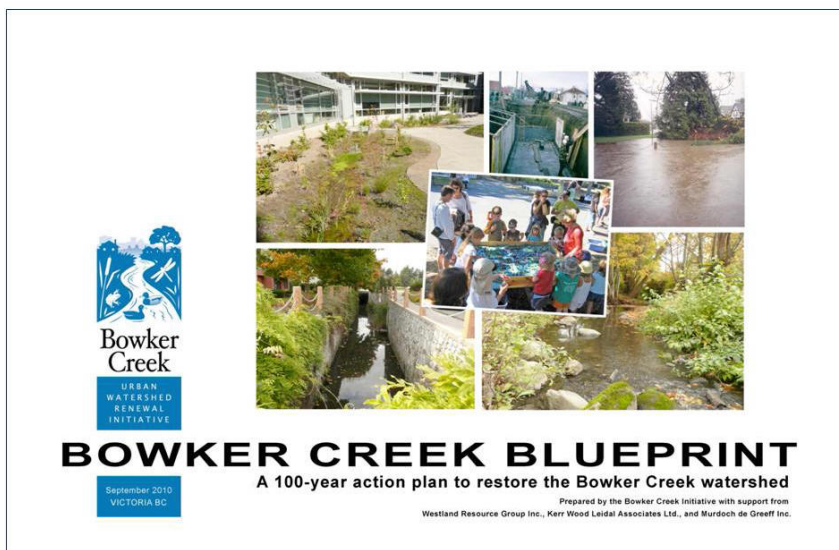
This unique multi-jurisdictional effort has produced the Bowker Creek Blueprint: A 100-Year Action Plan to systematically and incrementally restore the watershed landscape in the heart of BC's Capital Region on Vancouver Island.

The Bowker Creek Initiative has gone well beyond any other plan in terms of how it has achieved consensus; and how it has galvanized commitment to move from planning to action on the ground. It is informing a provincial 'course correction' in how to develop an ISMP that is affordable and effective, and create a legacy.

Figure 1 opposite illustrates the paradigm-shift for implementing a new culture for urban watershed protection and restoration in British Columbia. We describe this as Mission Possible.

This article introduces the Bowker Creek Blueprint as a provincially significant initiative, elaborates on the important role of community engagement, and provides a perspective on the momentum that early successes are generating.

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June 2011*



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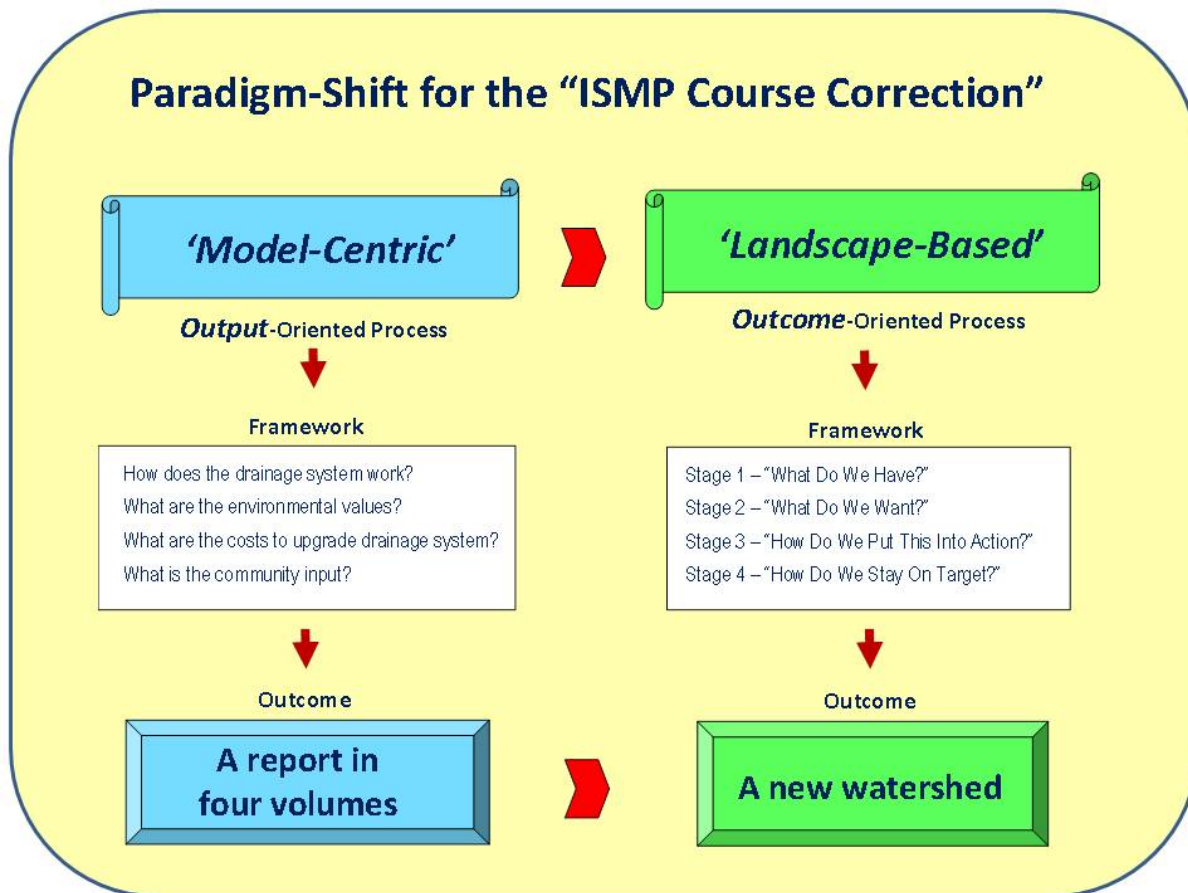
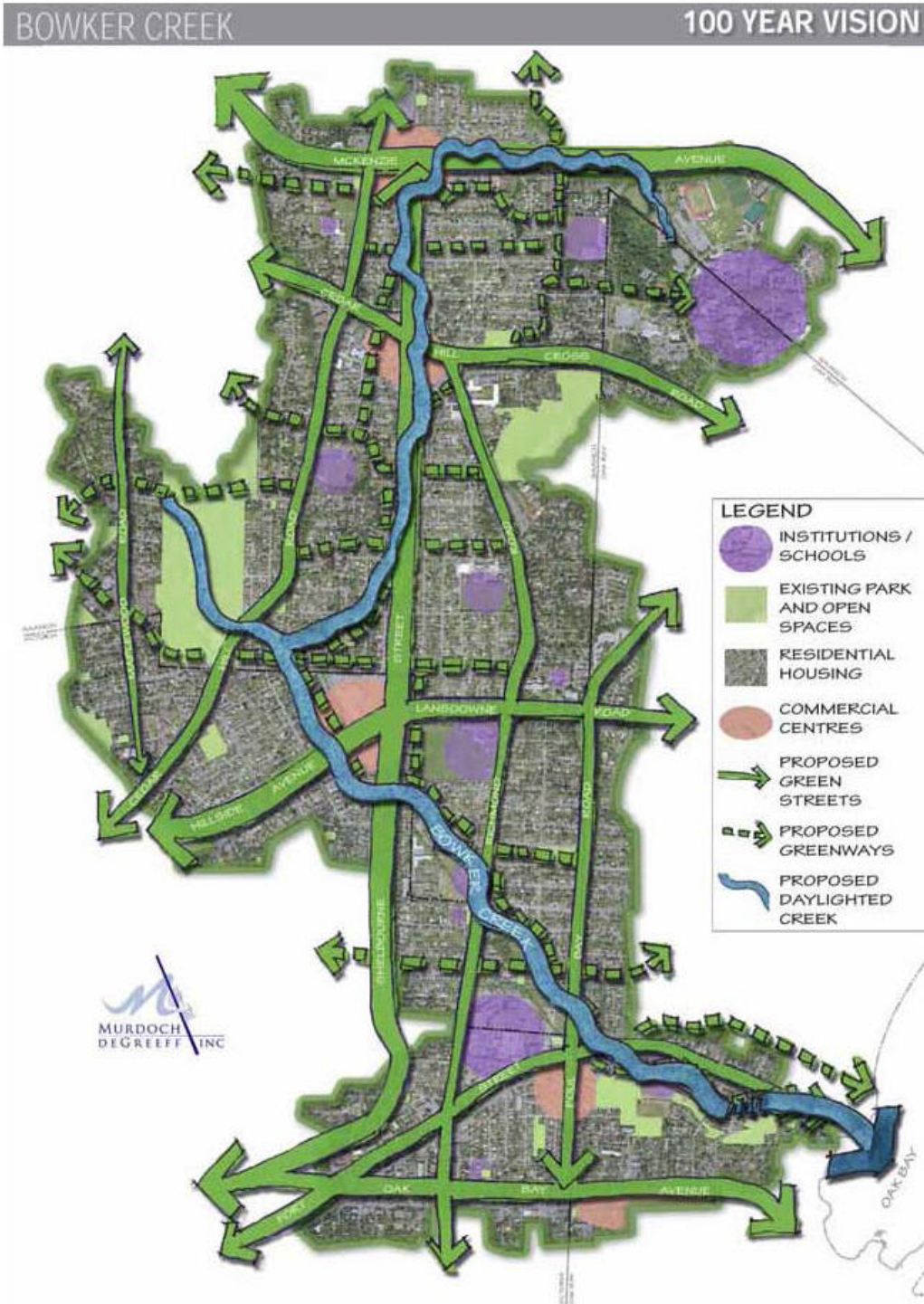


Figure 1

Capital Region's 'Bowker Creek Blueprint' demonstrates that "Outreach is a Powerful Tool"



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From 'Collective Indifference' to 'Design with Nature'

The *Bowker Creek Urban Watershed Renewal Initiative* (BCI) is a unique multi-jurisdictional effort. Four local governments (Capital Regional District, City of Victoria, District of Saanich and City of Oak Bay), community groups, post-secondary institutions and private citizens are collaborating to improve the health of Bowker Creek and its watershed.

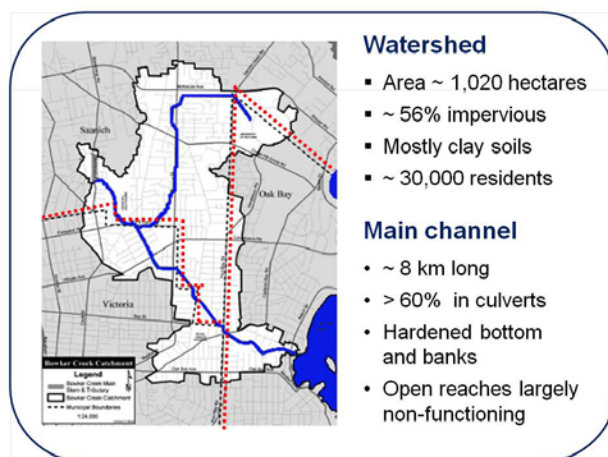
In January 2010, the BCI released the Bowker Creek Blueprint in "draft". The document was finalized in September 2010.

100-Year Action Plan

The Bowker Creek Blueprint is a 100-Year Action Plan to guide watershed and creek restoration as the various neighbourhoods redevelop over time.

Although it is not characterized as an ISMP, the outcome-oriented Blueprint has established a benchmark for judging whether an ISMP meets this test: *Does it create a vision of a future watershed complete with intact environmental values, healthy streams and abundant fishery resources?*

The *Bowker Creek Forum*, held in February 2010, was a celebration of the Blueprint. In addition, the Forum provided an opportunity for Georgia Basin inter-regional sharing.



Vision for 'Islands of Nature'

The Bowker Creek watershed is highly urbanized, and is home to more than 30,000 residents. The creek channel originates at the University of Victoria and discharges to the sea through the City of Oak Bay.

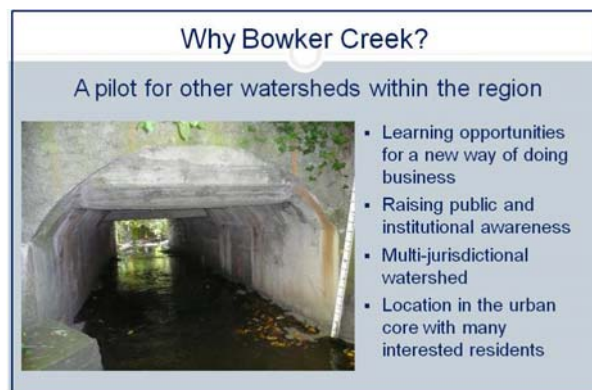
Much of the original creek channel has either been straightened or enclosed in underground pipes. Today, less than 40% remains above ground.

Despite the degradation it has suffered, Bowker Creek offers connections to the environment, and provides an opportunity to restore 'islands of nature' within the built environment.

A Regional Pilot: "Why did we choose Bowker Creek when it is a rather degraded watershed," Jody Watson asked rhetorically at the 2010 Bowker Creek Forum. "The answer is that we saw it as an opportunity. If we could make it right in Bowker Creek, we could make it right anywhere."

Jody Watson, Harbours and Watersheds Coordinator with the Capital Regional District, is BCI Chair. Her storytelling at the Bowker Creek Forum provided context for the 'collective indifference' that had characterized the urbanization of Bowker Creek for more than a century; and for the 'design with nature' ethic that is now driving watershed restoration.

The 100-Year Action Plan will ensure that positive changes can be implemented incrementally, and opportunities for major improvements can be leveraged as they arise.



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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.



Outreach is a Powerful Tool

The BCI Steering Committee has identified seven key messages that capture the essence of lessons learned and experience gained. The top three are:

1. Community Values Drive BCI and Blueprint
2. Coordinator Role is Crucial
3. Outreach – A Powerful Tool



**Bowker
Creek**

URBAN
WATERSHED
RENEWAL
INITIATIVE

"For the first four years, outreach was the BCI focus because the steering committee recognized that community buy-in would ultimately engender political and staff support for restoration of the watershed," continues Jody Watson.

"Soren Henrich helped build buy-in. He is a professional graphic artist. Among his many contributions is the BCI logo."

"The BCI also engaged politicians in all three municipalities. Beyond the regular council presentations and updates, local councillors have participated in many outreach events, sign unveilings and tours of the watershed. They are informed about what the BCI is doing and they have a clear understanding of what the residents living in the watershed want."

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. And then I experienced an Ah-Ha moment," recalls Soren Henrich.



"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."

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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Bowker Creek Forum

The Bowker Creek Forum on February 23, 2010 was a collaboration of the BCI and *Convening for Action on Vancouver Island*, known by the acronym CAVI.

In addition to celebrating the Bowker Blueprint, the Bowker Forum provided a platform for local government champions from 'north of the Malahat' and from Metro Vancouver to tell their stories.

"The Bowker Blueprint is impressive. The BCI is leading the way with their 'design with nature' strategy for watershed restoration," states John Finnie, CAVI Chair. "By drawing attention to the



Bowker Blueprint, the CAVI team believes this will help us advance the *regional team approach* in other jurisdictions. The 2010 Bowker Forum now can serve as a milestone reference point for judging progress."

One Year Later

"There has been good progress in the year-plus since the Bowker Forum, with success to report in some 13 areas of activity. My particular interest is raising public awareness of the urban watershed through participatory art and educational events; riparian clean-up and planting work projects, and watershed tours," states Soren Henrich.



Soren helps organize community outreach; and also volunteers along with his neighbours to host walkability assessments and presentations in the Shelbourne Valley to inform the Shelbourne Corridor Action Plan (SCAP).

Sense of Place: "People care deeply about where they live and are ripe to learn what it means to live in an urban watershed. I am pleased when I meet neighbours who tell me what they already know about Bowker Creek and urban rainwater management. There is already a very high degree of self-education on the subject – personal experience, eco-history, and local lore."

"We are tapping into the personal sense of place – residents' memories of what Bowker Creek was like before suburbanization; fishing in the creek, the sound of frogs and birds, marshy areas, greenhouses where Hillside Mall stands now, farms, Victoria airport field at Lansdowne, boating on the creek, hunting for muskrats, riding the old trolley car from downtown, the box culvert beneath Doncaster Road installed in the '60's – all part of where we are now," observes Soren Henrich.

A Framework for Action: The Bowker Creek Blueprint has nine over-arching watershed management activities and policies. These provide a framework for coordinated and integrated action.

"The three participating municipalities have demonstrated a strong paradigm-shift in line with the watershed-wide principles and actions outlined in the Blueprint. Moreover, these actions are not limited to the Bowker Creek watershed. They are being applied elsewhere and are positively impacting the municipalities as a whole," states Natalie Bandringa, Bowker Creek Coordinator.

"We are entering a phase of more intensive planning participation for the current big projects within the watershed, in particular: the SCAP, and channel restoration through the Oak Bay High site. These two projects are identified as our top priorities."

Assessing Progress: In reflecting on what is being accomplished, Soren Henrich provides this perspective:

"As we look ahead, a challenge is to strengthen the engagement of the public and allow time for community involvement in the details of the 100-Year Blueprint. It will likely be a hot issue when money is on the table for big changes such as daylighting sections of Bowker Creek and building public greenways."

"I see the movement as relentless glacial groundswell. The Blueprint suggests deliberate cumulative steps. Besides large and small physical repairs we might make, there are plenty of behaviour patterns we could change that will benefit the watershed. We continue to look at the good aspects and celebrate living in an urban watershed."