

# **COLLABORATIVE WATERSHED GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE**

## **A PROSPECTUS**

**October, 2008**

### **Summary**

In this prospectus, it is proposed that a shift needs to occur in the way decisions on natural resources in BC are made. The shift is from the current fragmented model focused on resource allocation to a more integrated and inclusive model based on ecosystem principles. The urgency of making this shift is evident in the gradual reduction or loss of ecosystem products and services, such as clean and sufficient water. In the past, these have been available to British Columbians free or at very low cost, but that is changing. Some valuable resources have become more scarce or threatened, and ecosystem function and resilience is more impaired against uncertainties such as climate change. It is proposed here to focus on watersheds as the base geographic unit for implementing the shift. However it is recognized that other scales may be appropriate, such as large coastal areas. The shift requires new forms of governance that are collaborative, bringing all parties with interests in natural resource decisions together in processes that are guided by a framework that is flexible and able to adapt to regional differences and circumstances. The Living Water Smart document, BC's water plan, refers to such improvements as doing business differently. The plan commits to ensuring land and water managers are equipped with the understanding and tools to work with land and water users to secure stream health. This initiative seeks to determine if there is a willingness among key sectors to work toward a new framework for collaborative governance on a watershed basis.

### **Purpose of this initiative**

The purpose of the Collaborative Watershed Governance Initiative (CWGI) is to establish and implement a framework for collaborative watershed governance in BC. The result would be a shift toward ecosystem management<sup>1</sup> in BC based on watersheds, using advanced governance arrangements and more local decision-making.

### **Why focus on watersheds?**

Typically, watersheds have clearly delineated boundaries; namely the height of land separating water flowing in different directions. The watershed contains terrestrial and aquatic communities of life that interact with each other in complex ways. The land and water base within a watershed provides convenient way to look at ecosystems. The watershed ecosystem is an integrated whole, and is in some ways separated from other watersheds by topography. For this reason, watersheds are also a convenient basis for many forms of management and resource decision-making, and can be thought of as a base unit for better planning and integrating resource demands, supply and protection.

Changes in ecosystem resilience will be manifested in watersheds and begin to effect economic, social and environmental values in ways that will be most immediately felt by the average British Columbian. Increased costs of restorative measures such as replacing infrastructure, treating drinking water, reduction in commercial and recreation fisheries are initial indications of the mounting costs that society will bear when the ecological function of watersheds is impaired.

It is recognized that other geographic scales are also important: watersheds may make up larger river basins, and river basins make up the whole province. Therefore, while a focus on watersheds is called for here, resource decision-making trends and approaches can be organized regionally and provincially.

### **What is collaborative watershed governance?**

Collaborative watershed governance, simply put, is the process of reaching shared outcomes and resolving differences among community, private sector and governmental interests in a fashion consistent with the biophysical and ecosystem resiliency of a watershed. The approach recognizes that to be sustainable and resilient in the face of change, the diverse social and economic activities of humans on land and water need to be planned and managed to preserve essential ecosystem functions and the ecological goods and services watersheds provide. Finding this balance is the challenge.

Natural resources in BC are managed by numerous agencies and decision-making processes, many of which operate in isolation from each other. This fragmentation is seen as part of the problem. In principle, improved collaboration leads to decision-making with a broad basis of support and more enduring outcomes. Collaborative watershed governance provides an opportunity for a major improvement in coordinating natural resource management. The collaboration that is required must lead to a more integrated approach based on ecosystem principles to meet the threats posed by the cumulative impacts of economic activity and climate change.

Other forms of collaborative governance are emerging in BC, and these are attempting to fill needs at specific geographic scales. These include collaborative approaches developing around the Broughton Archipelago, Barkley Sound/Alberni Inlet, and a governance framework for an integrated management area on the Pacific North Coast. These activities are being driven by the same overarching concerns: that issues are complex, ecosystem capacities need to be maintained, there are numerous interests, and decision-making is fragmented.

Watershed management, and the call for a more integrated and collaborative approach, are emerging as central requirements in recent policy related to the sustainability of water and of its benefits and products, including:

- British Columbia's Living Water Smart Plan, which supports communities to do watershed management planning in priority areas; and
- DFO's Wild Salmon Policy's commitment to integrated strategic planning.

- Water Use Plans developed collaboratively through a process driven by BC Hydro and approved by the provincial Controller of Water Rights.

These policies and approaches articulate a number of important commitments for changing the way governments, organizations and individuals act to steward, protect and manage land and water. Perhaps more importantly, they signal a readiness for a change toward more collaborative approaches.

## **Why this is important now**

*“As the population of BC grows, our land and water consuming footprint is also growing. Forestry, mining, energy production, agriculture, aquaculture and commercial recreation are all expanding on a finite land and water base. These are all legitimately tenured and independently regulated. While we are a rich society, capable of great human opportunity, there are growing concerns that we are also capable, to our long term detriment, of depleting the natural capital of our ecosystems.” (Fraser, 2007)*

The above quote establishes the context for why this initiative is important now. There is growing awareness that not only are we increasing our impact and footprint but our economic activities on land and water are also reducing the restorative capacity of our supporting ecosystems.

Achieving sustainability for ecosystems, watersheds and communities is a responsibility shared across four orders of government including First Nations, business, communities, NGO's and individuals. Despite numerous related policy, legislation, regulation, programs and corporate responsibility initiatives, achieving more sustainable use of natural resources has been hampered by the inability of decision-makers in both the public and private sectors to break out of organizational silos to establish a common vision and more collaborative forms of planning and decision-making to achieve a net positive outcome for both ecosystems and people.

Resource use decisions in watersheds are demand driven. Applications for use are administered by a variety of federal, provincial and local government agencies in accordance with multiple regulations and laws. There is recognition by decision-makers in both the provincial and federal governments that the current segmented approach cannot work in the long run. There is no oversight of whether these decisions, made in isolation of each other, exceed the carrying capacity of watersheds. Accordingly there is a growing concern over gradual reductions of natural capital in watersheds and a resulting loss of their resiliency to accommodate change. Scientists agree that climate change over the coming decades will significantly alter the range of natural variation that has existed over the past century, thereby increasing the importance of maintaining or restoring ecosystem resilience<sup>ii</sup>.

To maintain and restore watershed ecosystem capacity to accommodate this change and continue to provide both ecological goods and services essential for the Province's economy, there needs to be a change in the current input driven administrative model to

an ecosystem based model *where decisions on resource use are made that are consistent with the ecological carrying capacity of watersheds*. This shift in decision-making models is the essence of the collaborative model now needed for watershed governance

This collaborative watershed governance initiative is important now because:

- Simple economics: Society will have to start to pay to restore lost ecological services, such as clean abundant water from healthy watersheds; services previously obtained for free. There is a high degree of public awareness that our land and water ecosystems are the basis of our economy; losing that base simply cannot be allowed to occur.
- Governments at all levels have a reduced capacity to manage, cannot now (and never could) do everything on their own. There are resources available in corporate and civil sectors that, if aligned, can support new governance models for watershed sustainability.
- Issues are more complex than ever, with more demands to be met from more elements of society. Issues are harder to resolve and manage. A more sophisticated, collaborative approach is required.
- Communities and their supporting economic base need better certainty that there will be resources for the future. A more collaborative approach adds to this certainty by enabling decisions with more transparency, accountability and a broader base of support.
- First Nations must be key participants in resource decision-making but in many instances are still only marginally involved.
- Uncertainty exists over the long term effects climate change will have on ecosystems and communities. However, it seems certain that changes are coming, and a collaborative effort to coordinate science, policy and management responses is necessary.

The organizers of this initiative firmly believe that a new framework for collaborative watershed governance will address these concerns more effectively than existing governance arrangements. Through the development and implementation of such a framework, clearer, more realistic sustainability outcomes for the environment, the economy and society will be achieved.

## **Where this initiative came from**

Early in 2008, the Living Rivers Advisory Group (LRAG) requested the Pacific Salmon Foundation, the Fraser Basin Council and the BC Conservation Foundation to plan, coordinate and host a workshop that would report on the innovation, best management practices and new governance models beneficial to salmonids and their watersheds as a result of investments made by the Living Rivers Trust Fund, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Pacific Salmon Endowment Fund, and others in the Fraser Salmon and Watersheds Program (FSWP) and Living Rivers – Georgia Basin/ Vancouver Island (LR-GB/VI).

At the same time the Pacific Salmon Forum was reaching the conclusion that more effective and collaborative forms of governance that would lead to more enduring solutions and inclusive decision-making would result in healthier ecosystems and watersheds. A similar conclusion was being reached in both the FSWP and LR-GB/VI initiatives. In addition, this initiative is felt to be consistent with the direction taken in the recent Living Water Smart Plan, BC's new plan for water. This plan supports water users to find new approaches to securing stream health, supports communities doing watershed management in priority areas, and to conserve and restore stream function.

A coordinated effort of these and a number of other government and non-governmental players provides an opportunity to catalyze and encourage a more integrated and collaborative approach to watershed planning and management. As a result the FSWP, LR-GB/VI and the Pacific Salmon Forum agreed to combine their efforts under the auspices and support of LRAG and launch the following collaborative watershed governance initiative.

This initiative is a collective response to the opportunity, and aims to establish and implement a framework for shifting governance to an ecosystem basis associated with proper watershed functions and conditions. This shift has been identified in the "Living Water Smart" – BC's water plan recently released by the province.

In the longer term, this framework will be consistent with the transition of society to a more sustainable approach to its economic systems as it addresses the challenges of climate change and other external factors. In addition a sharing of the lessons learned in the Fraser and Georgia Basins should help to inform and guide the development of a province-wide strategy that will enable other watersheds throughout BC to benefit from these experiences.

## **Goals of the initiative**

The Initiative wants to achieve the following:

- a. Expand and strengthen the engagement of parties involved and interested in watershed governance, including private sector, civil society and First Nations, local, provincial and federal governance interests. Parties will work to articulate and demonstrate the benefits they see from enhancing their engagement in collaborative watershed governance;
- b. Improve the linkage between watershed planning and decision-making processes, and the type of integrated information bases required to support them, including where relevant social, economic and environmental indicators of watershed resiliency and function;
- c. Improve identification and coordination of investments in watershed and ecosystem sustainability;

- d. Develop a common vision and series of progress steps for collaborative watershed governance. The best outcome would be an agreement to a new framework for watershed governance and management, and an Accord, or Charter documenting the principles in that agreement;
- e. Draw upon practical examples of effective integrated and collaborative approaches to watershed management to document lessons learned for application elsewhere; and
- f. Within the new framework, make recommendations for policy, program, and where appropriate, legislative approaches for enhancing collaborative watershed governance in BC.

## **Key Components of the Watershed Governance Initiative**

The Watershed Governance Initiative is composed of seven main components:

1. A **Project Steering Committee** consisting of key individuals capable of driving the change to collaborative watershed governance, and who can foster linkages to other related activities, such as the Living Rivers Advisory Group, the Fraser Basin Council and Pacific Salmon Foundation, Pacific Salmon Forum, BC Assembly of First Nations and government agencies with direct mandates such as Ministry of Environment and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The Steering Committee will meet as required and direct the initiative, approve the work plan, schedule and other components.
2. A **Project Prospectus** that contains the basic background of how this initiative started, why it is important, and what the process and goals of the initiative are. This prospectus would be used as the main introduction to the initiative for the purposes of engaging participation into the activities that are planned and outlined below.
3. A **Project Work Plan** that lists the tasks that are to be accomplished to achieve the goals listed above, the responsible parties and the timing, resources or key steps that are required to accomplish the work.
4. A **Collaborative Watershed Governance Task Group**, to be comprised of leaders or key individuals from Federal, Provincial, Local and First Nations governments, NGOs, business and others with strong interests or currently working on fisheries, water and land-use aspects of governance from across the province. Participants will be identified through a series of Focus Group meetings, on the basis of their vision, leadership activities and willingness to engage. The focus group meetings will be held in September and early October.
5. A **Workshop**, to be held in late November 2008. This will be an invitation-only event that will create a clear path forward or a terms of reference for the development and implementation of a framework for collaborative watershed

governance in BC, and a commitment among workshop attendees to develop the framework together.

6. A **Background Paper** or papers, to inform a process of examining watershed governance issues, approaches and opportunities. The Background Papers will be prepared as an input to the Workshop in November, and will be distributed before or at the Workshop. They will include:
  - a. An overview of existing policy and legislation at the local, provincial, and federal government levels that support watershed management activities, and
  - b. An overview (case studies) of existing pilot approaches to watershed planning and governance, including a synthesis of lessons learned.
7. An invitation-based **Conference on Watershed Governance**, proposed for the winter of 2008/09 concerning “Shared responsibilities for sustainable ecosystems, watersheds and communities”. The conference would use the Terms of Reference developed by the task group in the Workshop in November, to refine a draft framework and set the stage for broader consideration and discussion. This invitation only conference would carefully target attendance to include those who can and would bring various attributes (e.g. information, financial support, legal and administrative instruments, networks, etc.) to a new broad strategic framework that would serve as a mechanism for collaboration in the resolution of current and emerging issues affecting watershed and ecosystem health.

In addition, there are some indirect activities, or steps to be taken in the future that are related to this initiative, and with which linkages will be developed. These include:

1. **The BC Water Governance Project.** This is a complementary but different activity spearheaded by the Ministry of Environment. Whereas the CWGI is broadly aimed at improving collaboration in resource governance and decision-making, the BC Water Governance Project is focused on water, not watersheds, and on developing tools for enhanced water governance and management practices.
2. Linkage with **the BC Aquatic Information Partnership**, a data integration and harmonization initiative that will advance aquatic information sharing and monitoring in BC through synergies between its members, partners, and those who use information and monitoring results. This will aid in the development and implementation of Wild Salmon Policy habitat and ecosystem indicators; provide greater integration of and access to information about watershed and salmon habitat health, leading to more advanced tools and models enabling better and more timely decisions and ultimately, supporting the development of integrated watershed governance forums.
3. **Pilot implementation** of the broadly developed and endorsed framework for watershed governance in a specific geographic area still to be identified. Overlap with the geographic boundaries of a salmon conservation unit will be strongly considered.

4. **Support to existing collaborative watershed governance mechanisms** such as Cowichan, Somass-Alberni and Nicola. These are to be strengthened, supported and lessons learned applied elsewhere. A possible network of collaborative watershed governance entities will be considered province-wide to facilitate discussion with all orders of government and key stakeholders. These entities will be of appropriate scale and should work from a province-wide “menu” and basic standards in developing their individual watershed governance plans. The role of LRTF Business Plans in fostering and supporting collaborative watershed governance in various regions throughout British Columbia could be explicitly developed as a part of this process.

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<sup>i</sup> Ecosystem management is generally accepted to mean maintaining or restoring natural ecological processes in ecosystems over the long term, thereby establishing ecosystem integrity, natural biodiversity and resilience against short term threats. Ecosystem management strives to maintain or restore processes that continue to provide the products and services that we need from ecosystems as the basis of our economy. These products include clean ground and surface water, diverse fish and wildlife populations, healthy forests and clean air. Services include flood and erosion control, soil formation, waste assimilation and carbon sequestration.

<sup>ii</sup> Two examples illustrate a loss of ecosystem function that has had enormous economic consequences. The collapse of the Coho salmon population in the Gulf of Georgia is in part related to reductions in the productivity of their natal streams. These reductions are the consequences of subtle changes to stream structure and dynamics brought about through urbanization, infrastructure development and forest harvesting activities. The cumulative effect of these changes to hundreds of small watersheds in coastal BC created circumstances that contributed to the Coho’s decline across the whole region. Another example is the steady spread of the bark beetle in vast stands of mature pine forest that are the most vulnerable to infestation. In addition to more favourable climatic conditions, over sixty years of fire suppression in BC has created circumstances favouring the spread of the beetle. This has been an ironic and unfortunate consequence of applying the conventional wisdom to suppress fires. The forest we thought we were protecting from fire for ourselves is being fed to the beetles instead.