

B10 - The Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan--Implementing British Columbia's Living Water Smart Program on Vancouver Island

Presentation title: Moving from planning to action in managing water: Implementation of the Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan

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Abstract

Implementing the Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan--Challenges of Living Water Smart on Vancouver Island. by David Harper, Westland Resource Group Lynn Kriwoken, British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Kate Miller, Cowichan Valley Regional District, and Craig Wightman, British Columbia Conservation Foundation From 2004 to 2007, six government and non-government partners prepared a comprehensive water management plan for the Cowichan Basin on Vancouver Island. The plan seeks to protect valuable ecological assets while maintaining industrial and other economic uses of water. A 26-member Water Management Forum, representing diverse water interests, guided preparation of the plan. The public at large was involved through news media, open houses, brochures, and questionnaires. A remarkable 67% of surveyed residents supported the final plan, although some property owners on Cowichan Lake continue to oppose the plan's recommendation to add 30 cm of seasonal storage behind an existing weir. The six partners to the Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan (CBWMP), the Cowichan Valley Regional District, Cowichan Tribes, Catalyst Paper, Ministry of Environment, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the Pacific Salmon Commission are advancing plan implementation. Even though the plan was action-oriented and contained a clear implementation strategy, the transition from planning to action has faced the following challenges. 1. Organizational and legal issues Achieving cooperation and common purpose among diverse constituencies, a key to effective water management, is slow and difficult. The interests of various governments, First Nations, industry, and public groups are not always convergent. For example, the plan recommends devolution of water management decision-making, an authority presently held by the province. Local water governance would affect provincial agencies, water licence holders, and a new water advisory body that seek a stronger role in water management. 2. Technical issues The CBWMP recommends many technical actions, some of which are already being implemented. For example, the CVRD has initiated flood plain mapping as part of a flood management initiative. Some municipalities are installing water meters, as recommended by the plan. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has recently initiated a Cowichan Chinook Recovery Plan that identifies conservation-based flows as integral to salmon sustainability in the future. 3. Political issues Plans that advocate changes in water governance are likely to encounter political resistance, and the CBWMP is no exception. The structure of regional government has hindered implementation of the full plan, as an upstream-downstream rift among regional directors has frustrated the partners' collective ability to find the consensus needed to advance all of the plan's recommendations. 4. Funding Debates continue about ongoing and reliable funding for water management, and which level of government pays. The Ministry of Environment, CVRD, and British Columbia Conservation Foundation will fund a Water Management Coordinator and formation of a Water Advisory Council. 5. Commitment The enthusiasm that accompanies plan preparation is difficult to sustain during implementation, which requires persistence and difficult negotiations. Turnover and 'burnout' of participants, recognition that everyone does not support changes to the status quo, and battles over property and water rights affect active support for plan implementation. 6. Living Water Smart The CBWMP embodies most of the elements of the province's new Living Water Smart policy. The provincial and Cowichan Basin initiatives seek common goals and will proceed concurrently. Lessons from the implementation process ' Obtaining commitments of various governments to implementing the plan remains challenging, even though the public and the governments support the plan. ' Provincial initiatives such as Living Water Smart signal the province's policy support for locally-based water management. ' Local governments can implement technical

components of plans without waiting for 'high level' support of organizational or institutional change, providing that funding can be secured. ' Substantial effort is needed to overcome public mistrust and suspicion of water management motives and recommendations, effort that needs to persist. ' Opening water management decisions to the public can help to overcome distrust, broaden understanding of factors affecting water management, and bring new perspectives to the decisions. ' Improved methods of funding water management initiatives would resolve many of the obstacles to implementing the Water Management Plan. ' Elected representatives should be engaged during water management planning, so that they understand the plan and will be willing to support its implementation.

Speaker Biography

David Harper is a Director of Westland Resource Group in Victoria who was Project Manager in developing the Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan.

Kate Miller is the Manager of the Regional Environmental Policy Development Division for the Cowichan Valley Regional District. She was active in the design of the Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan and continues to advance implementation strategies.

Craig Wightman, RPBio., Senior Biologist, BC Conservation Foundation, Nanaimo. Mr. Wightman spent 36 years as a provincial government biologist working with BC fish stocks and management-related issues. From 1987 - 2005, Mr. Wightman was the Ministry of Environment's senior fisheries biologist for the Vancouver Island Region, overseeing the activities of four program biologists and technicians. Starting in 1998, he initiated and developed the Vancouver Island Steelhead Recovery Plan, and was a key contributor in the formation and funding of its successor, the Greater Georgia Basin Steelhead Recovery Plan. He spent 3 years as a member of the Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan Forum, and remains a strong advocate of its full implementation through BC's new Water Action Plan (Living Water Smart).

Ted White, Water Policy Advisor with the Ministry of Environment's Water Stewardship Division is a biologist who has worked with the province since 1994, on a number of water related initiatives. These include: the development of new methods for monitoring water quality in community watersheds; planning and performing regulatory review of water licences through the BC Hydro Water Use Planning Program; working with community based water planning initiatives; and the development of Living Water Smart: British Columbia's Water Plan. Ted works with a number of groups to explore opportunities to improve water governance in British Columbia and how that will assist with the implementation of water management plans.