

## Regional District of Nanaimo

### Drinking Water & Watershed Protection Program

### 10-Year Review & Action Plan Update

#### ORIGIN & ESTABLISHMENT

In 2009, the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) on Vancouver Island launched its Drinking Water and Watershed Protection (DWWP) program. Its mission was *to provide regional leadership at the watershed scale to support water management, land use planning, and community outreach, and advance drinking water sustainability, climate adaptation, and healthy ecosystems*. The major driver for creating the DWWP program was the combination of a growing population, competing land uses, and shrinking provincial resources. Facing these realities, the RDN Board was motivated to look at ways to address the protection of watersheds and drinking water in cooperation with the many other stakeholders in the region. As the first regional district in British Columbia to create a service to explicitly protect water at a watershed scale, the RDN remains a leading example of how local governments can drive innovation and play an influential leadership role in source drinking water protection and watershed governance.

The DWWP program focuses on watersheds rather than political boundaries for its program activities. To implement initiatives that support the vision of healthy, safe, and resilient water resources in the region, the RDN developed strong collaborative partnerships across jurisdictions, sectors, departments, and geographic areas through water awareness and stewardship; water science and information; and water-centric policy and planning support.

The DWWP service was established via referendum in 2008, with elector assent to requisition an annual parcel tax to secure sustainable funding for implementing the DWWP Action Plan. By 2012, all four member municipalities were part of the service, along with the seven Electoral Areas, making DWWP a truly regional program. The referendum authorized levying up to \$25 per parcel annually. A parcel tax instrument was selected, rather than an assessment, as this was seen as fairer given that water sustainability impacts residents equally. However, the actual tax has never exceeded \$12 per parcel. Affordability has been supported by phased-in contributions from local municipalities so that, at present, all parcels in the region are taxed equally.

By having a reliable funding source for DWWP initiatives, the RDN is able to leverage funding and in-kind contributions from partners in senior government, industry, and the community to accomplish shared objectives with long-term vision.

#### PROGRAM IMPACTS

Select achievements from the initial decade of work include:

- **Implementation of a range of water sustainability rebates, such as rainwater harvesting, well water testing, and irrigation efficiency.** These programs provide financial incentive for residents to invest in water sustainability measures around their property.
- **Water science and data collection to inform planning and decision-making.** Over 60 surface water quality sites are now regularly monitored in the region, and over 30 volunteer monitoring wells track groundwater levels. These regional monitoring networks offer understanding and analysis of trends in water quality and quantity to inform decision-making and provide early warnings about the impacts of drought or local hydrological changes.
- **A cost-effective, engaged approach to data collection.** The use of citizen science leverages local government and provincial resources to enable contributions from skilled, trained community groups. Since 2011, 13 stewardship groups have undertaken “boots-in-the-creek” monitoring efforts in 24 different watersheds.
- **Successful partnerships with senior government, industry, and not-for-profit sectors.** The program has attracted and leveraged other funding sources, expertise, and collaborative working relationships (e.g. Community Watershed Monitoring Network in partnership with local stewardship groups).
- **Region-wide water education programming through Team WaterSmart.** The water-related outreach initiatives offered by the RDN are well recognized in the region, providing resources to support water conservation and stewardship, for urban and rural residents alike. This includes school programming as well as community workshops, events and online materials.

## 10-YEAR REVIEW

To mark the 10-year anniversary of the program, the RDN undertook a comprehensive strategic review in 2018 to reflect on progress, achievements, and challenges. In 2019, it engaged the public, key partners, stakeholders, and committees for input on updating the DWWP Action Plan for 2020 to 2030, and beyond. A technical review and final engagement by the RDN Board endorsed the updated plan on February 25, 2020. The updated DWWP Action Plan reflects current objectives and additional priorities, with a focus on resiliency for a changing climate and emerging water realities. *For information on the update project, see [getinvolved.rdn.ca/dwmp-action-plan-update-2019](http://getinvolved.rdn.ca/dwmp-action-plan-update-2019).*

## WHAT'S NEW FOR THE NEXT DECADE?

As the RDN's DWWP service moves into its second decade, key areas of work will include:

- Formalizing linkages with existing plans, including the Liquid Waste Management Plan regulatory requirements for rainwater management to be delivered through the DWWP service.
- Emphasizing climate change action, including flood and drought planning and management, water for agriculture, and modelling water availability in a changing climate.
- Exploring ecosystem accounting and valuation of watershed natural assets.
- Positioning the RDN to make the best use of the governance and water sustainability tools for local government provided in the provincial *Water Sustainability Act*.
- Updating and redesigning outreach programs to maximize impact.
- Increasing rebate funding and stewardship project support.
- Building collaboration with First Nations



## LEARN MORE

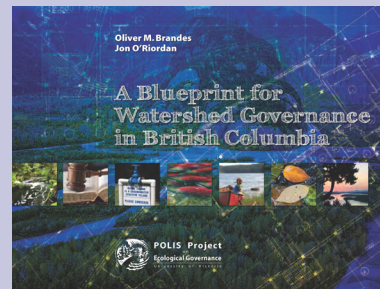
### DWWP Program

[rdn.bc.ca/drinking-water-and-watershed-protection](http://rdn.bc.ca/drinking-water-and-watershed-protection)

### Regional District of Nanaimo's Drinking Water and Watershed Protection Action Plan 2.0 2020-2030+

[rdn.bc.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/DIGITAL%20SINGLE%20PAGES\\_RDN-action-plan31.pdf](http://rdn.bc.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/DIGITAL%20SINGLE%20PAGES_RDN-action-plan31.pdf)

## A Blueprint for Watershed Governance in British Columbia



The Watershed Governance Dispatch series is published by the POLIS Water Sustainability Project, based at the University of Victoria's Centre for Global Studies. The series helps inform decision-makers and practitioners by highlighting leading practical examples and recent developments related to the implementation of watershed governance.

Each Dispatch links to the ongoing work of POLIS and the winning conditions for watershed governance outlined in *A Blueprint for Watershed Governance in British Columbia*. The complementary *Decision-Makers' Brief: A Blueprint for Watershed Governance in B.C.* (Aug 2014) offers what is arguably the strategic path forward to ensure British Columbia's *Water Sustainability Act* is implemented to its fullest potential. Both reports are available at [poliswaterproject.org](http://poliswaterproject.org).



POLIS Project on Ecological Governance

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