

Governance for Watershed-Based Source Water Protection in Canada: A National Assessment

Overview of the Proposed Project

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Background

The Canadian Water Network (CWN) has called for proposals for projects that address pressing water management challenges in Canada. Projects that are funded will last 4 years, and will begin on April 1, 2008. Proposals are due on March 23, 2007.

One of the key topics the CWN is funding is *governance for watershed-based source water protection*. Our team is developing a project to address this topic. This document provides a brief overview of our proposed project.

The Proposed Project

Source waters are the raw water supplies in lakes, rivers and aquifers that provide water for drinking water systems. Source water protection (SWP) involves identifying risks to source waters and implementing strategies that will help to ensure that the quality and quantity of these waters are not jeopardized. It is widely believed that SWP is best approached from a *watershed* perspective.

Governments cannot protect source waters on their own. As a result, governments, First Nations communities, land owners, water users, and non-government organizations have to work together. The process of working together in an environment of shared decision-making responsibility is often referred to as *governance*.

Across Canada, many approaches to SWP governance are being developed. People are facing similar governance challenges, and solving them in different ways.

- Which approaches balance the roles and responsibilities of government and non-government stakeholders most effectively at various scales (local, regional, provincial)?
- How is SWP being integrated with land use planning, watershed management and related concerns?
- How effectively are regulatory and non-regulatory approaches to SWP being used?

This proposed project tackles these kinds of questions through a broad, national study of SWP governance in Canada, and through several in-depth initiatives focused on the following critical concerns:

- Integrating SWP with watershed management and land use planning in New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia
- Exploring First Nations perspectives and approaches to SWP in Ontario and Manitoba
- Designing SWP strategies using a mix of non-regulatory and regulatory approaches in Alberta and Ontario

Importantly, our overall goal in this project is to provide knowledge, tools and resources that will support and promote effective SWP governance across Canada.

The Team

The project is led by Rob de Loë, from the University of Guelph's *Guelph Water Management Group*, and includes researchers and partners from across Canada.

- Researchers are based at the universities of Guelph (Rob de Loë, Reid Kreutzwiser), Waterloo (Sarah Michaels, Dave Rudolph), Brock (Ryan Plummer), Manitoba (John Sinclair), Lethbridge (Henning Bjornlund, Kurt Klein), Victoria (Oliver Brandes), and Lancaster (Nigel Watson).
- Partnerships with key stakeholders are a hallmark of CWN projects. Our partners represent governments, environmental non-government agencies, First Nations communities, industries, and private foundations that are involved in water governance in Canada.

Who Will Benefit?

The project is focused on generating knowledge and tools that people involved in SWP in Canada need and can use. These people include the following:

- Provincial and territorial officials responsible for developing and implementing policies and programs relating to SWP
- Municipal officials across Canada responsible for land use planning and implementation of water resources protection strategies
- Local water management organizations with implementation responsibilities, e.g., conservation authorities in Ontario, Watershed Planning Advisory Councils in Alberta
- Industries whose activities affect water quality or quantity
- Civil society groups that participate in national and/or provincial policy making, or in stewardship at the watershed scale
- First Nations communities
- Federal government officials in organizations with water management responsibilities, or who are involved in water policy development

What Will the Project Produce, and How Will this Benefit People Involved in SWP Governance?

Across the country, governments, NGOs, industry groups, First Nations communities and others have recognized the need to protect source waters, and are responding in various ways. Through the partnerships we are forming, and through the work we will do, the project will *support* and *complement* these efforts. To illustrate:

- Before we begin the national assessment of SWP governance in Canada, we will work closely with stakeholders drawn from the groups listed above to identify their knowledge needs, the governance concerns they're facing, and the kinds of outputs that will be useful. This will allow us to focus our review of the national state-of-the-art in SWP governance in a way most useful to people involved.
- Some of our partners have told us that in their jurisdictions they need plain language primers to help citizens understand what governance is, which approaches exist and might be suitable, and, importantly, how they can form successful partnerships for SWP at the watershed scale. Producing these kinds of resources will be an important task in the project, and the members of our team have the necessary expertise.