

# Evaluating the Coquitlam River Watershed Roundtable Planning Process

## INTRODUCTION

Globally, sustainable water resource management is an issue of major concern. The problems of water resource management have become increasingly urgent and complex, as rapid and pervasive land-use changes mount, industrial and agricultural activity intensifies, and urban populations become more concentrated. Traditionally, water resource management often dealt with problems in isolation, without sufficiently accounting for interactions and potentially undesirable long-term consequences. An absence of integration in water management resulted in governing bodies being unable to reconcile conflicting interests, the development of policies without adequate consideration of the implications for other water users, and poor consultation across sectors and the public.

Over the past two decades, new approaches to water resource management that consider economic, ecological, social and cultural values of water through the inclusion of different forms of knowledge and the involvement of a broader range of stakeholders have increasingly emerged to address the perceived shortcomings of traditional approaches. A particularly important example of a better management approach is the rapid growth of community-based watershed initiatives, acting as locally based decision-making organizations.

In British Columbia, community-based initiatives are increasingly becoming involved in decisions that affect their local watersheds. The rapid emergence of community-based watershed planning and management reflects a broader desire for the public and local interests to have a more formal and established role in watershed management. However, notwithstanding the genuine enthusiasm and intent of many community-based initiatives, they often face significant operational challenges. As such, it is critical to evaluate the effectiveness of planning processes applied by community-based initiatives and their impacts on watershed-related problems in order to enhance our collective knowledge about how to improve watershed planning and management in these settings.

## THE COQUITLAM RIVER WATERSHED ROUNDTABLE

The Coquitlam River Watershed Roundtable (CRWR) formed in 2011 as an outcome of a multi-phased Coquitlam River Watershed Strategy. The Coquitlam River Watershed Strategy, led by the City of Coquitlam in partnership with the Kwikwetlem First Nation and with the support of the Coquitlam River Aggregate Advisory Committee, engaged community members and stakeholders associated with the watershed to complete a four-phased Watershed Management Plan Initiative. This initiative resulted in the formation of the CRWR. Early in the CRWR visioning process, individuals and organizations representing various interests and perspectives on the watershed developed a mission statement and a set of values and guiding principles. These foundational documents show that the intent of the CRWR is to facilitate collaborative resolution of problems arising from urban growth and natural resource use pressures, inform and educate people about these matters, and promote and support conservation of a sustainable, healthy watershed environment through the development of an integrated watershed management plan. In 2012, the Roundtable received funding from the Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia, Metro Vancouver and the Bullitt Foundation through the Watershed Watch Salmon Society to begin its watershed management planning process. The plan covers the most developed part of the watershed – from the dam at Coquitlam Lake Reservoir to the mouth of the Coquitlam River, where it enters the Fraser River. To develop the plan, the Roundtable followed the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation framework, an adaptive management planning approach<sup>1</sup>.

## EVALUATING THE COQUITLAM RIVER WATERSHED ROUNDTABLE PLANNING PROCESS AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

This research project was the outcome of a collaborative effort between the CRWR and Simon Fraser University's Resource and Environmental Management Program, and funded by a Mitacs Accelerate internship grant. The research evaluated the CRWR planning process and its subsequent integrated watershed management plan. An integrated watershed management evaluative framework was developed from previous research conducted by the Collaborative Planning Lab

at the School of Resource and Environmental Management at SFU, and from academic literature on international best practices for integrated watershed management (IWRM) and adaptive governance. The framework consists of 24 criteria and 52 associated indicators, organized into four broad categories<sup>2</sup>:

- 1 Collaborative Planning;
- 2 Holistic Approach;
- 3 Authority and Control; and
- 4 Learning and Adjusting with Experience.

Interview and documentary data were used to evaluate the planning process. Interviews were conducted in 2014 with thirteen members of the Roundtable Core Committee. This group of respondents included representatives from municipal, regional, First Nations and federal governments, the private sector, non-profit organizations, and environmental stewards.

The CRWR planning process and watershed management plan were evaluated based on a performance rating system. In this system, the evaluator assigns each indicator a performance rating. After each indicator is assigned a rating, an overall performance rating for each criterion is determined by compiling the ratings of all indicators associated with it, using the following scale:

- **Fully met** = all indicators for the criterion are satisfied;
- **Largely met** = more than 50 per cent of the indicators for the criterion are satisfied;
- **Partially met** = 50 per cent or less of the indicators for the criterion are satisfied; and
- **Not met** = none of the indicators for the criterion are satisfied.

A major output of this research was the creation of a “report card” for the CRWR that highlights the organization’s strengths and identifies areas for improvement.

## RESULTS

The evaluation revealed the following (Table 1.0):

- **Collaborative Planning:** six criteria were fully met, four criteria were largely met, two criteria were partially met and three criteria could not be assessed;
- **Holistic Approach:** one criterion was fully met, one criterion was largely met, one criterion was not met and one criterion could not be assessed;
- **Authority and Control:** all three criterion were partially met; and
- **Learning and Adjusting with Experience:** one criterion was partially met and the other criterion could not be assessed.

**Table 1.0 The Coquitlam River Watershed Roundtable’s planning process and watershed management plan performance rating results.**

EVALUATIVE CRITERION	PERFORMANCE RATING
<b>COLLABORATIVE PLANNING CRITERIA</b>	
Shared Purpose and Goals	Largely Met
Inclusive Representation	Partially Met
Voluntary Participation and Commitment	Fully Met
Equitable	Largely Met
Self-design	Fully Met
Clear Ground Rules	Largely Met
Conflict Resolution Techniques	Fully Met
Independent Facilitation	Not Assessed
Effective Process Management	Not Assessed
Mutual Trust	Fully Met
Transparency	Fully Met
Accountability	Largely Met
Reasonable Expectations	Fully Met
Time Limits	Partially Met
Commitment to Implementation and Monitoring	Not Assessed
<b>HOLISTIC APPROACH CRITERIA</b>	
Commitment to Sustainability Over Multiple Generations	Not Assessed
Diverse Knowledge Sources are Used	Largely Met
Planning and Management Is Set At the Watershed Scale	Not Met
Integration	Fully Met
<b>AUTHORITY AND CONTROL CRITERIA</b>	
Capacity	Partially Met
Legitimacy and Political Influence	Partially Met
Multijurisdictional Cooperation	Partially Met
<b>LEARNING AND ADJUSTING WITH EXPERIENCE</b>	
Flexible and Adaptive	Partially Met
Learning from Experience	Not Assessed

## KEY STRENGTHS

According to the results, the CRWR performed exceptionally well in the Collaborative Planning category. Some of the main strengths identified in this category were:

- 1. Defining a shared vision:** Participants invested the time at the beginning of the planning process to collectively define a common purpose and vision;
- 2. Inclusive representation:** The vast majority of participants indicated that all valid interests and values were represented on the Roundtable;
- 3. Voluntary participation and commitment:** Respondents demonstrated their collective commitment to the process through voluntary participation, willingness to collaborate, and championing the process;
- 4. Consensus-based conflict resolution:** Participants collectively designed consensus-based conflict resolution techniques and applied them when needed; and
- 5. Mutual trust:** Mutual trust was established among participants through consistent and open communication about stakeholders' perspectives and interests, collectively designing clear ground rules and operating procedures, and ensuring transparency throughout the process.

Under the Holistic Approach category, two main strengths were identified:

- 1. Diverse knowledge sources are used:** The majority of interviewees indicated that the watershed management plan was informed by diverse sources of knowledge such as natural sciences, social sciences, community-based and local knowledge and traditional ecological knowledge; and
- 2. Integration:** The watershed management plan included integration within the natural system and human system, taking into account the interactions between water and land-based resources, social development and economic development, as a means of achieving holistic and sustainable water resource management.

Under the Authority and Control category, three main strengths were identified:

- 1. Capacity:** The extensive expertise and knowledge that exists among Core Committee members was considered by participants as a fundamental strength of the organization;
- 2. Multijurisdictional cooperation:** More than one jurisdiction was involved, spanning political boundaries, thereby increasing the political influence and support of the organization; and
- 3. Legitimacy and Political Influence:** Despite the lack of

formal legislation, the Roundtable was able to attain legitimacy and a sense of authority indirectly through the combined influence of the organization's participants and the Roundtable's creative leadership efforts, and by securing strong committed champions who possessed political acumen.

Last, under the Learning and Adjusting with Experience category, the Roundtable demonstrated its commitment to maintaining flexibility within the organization by embedding space for reflection and assessment on organizational performance, integrating new and varied sources of knowledge into the management plan and decision-making process, and making adjustments when required, a critical component of an organization's ability to respond to change.

## AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study also highlight areas where improvement can occur as the Roundtable moves forward. Below, recommendations are provided to address some of the challenges experienced by the Roundtable:

- 1. Define clear goals:** Participants sometimes had difficulty articulating specific established goals. In the absence of clearly articulated goals, initiatives can become reactive and crisis-oriented. Establishing more specific goals would also allow the CRWR to define measurable targets that could be used to evaluate their progress and goal achievements;
- 2. Clear ground rules:** The findings revealed several ways in which the Roundtable could further improve its operating procedures: (1) ensure that all the necessary expertise exist when forming sub-groups; (2) clearly define the level of time commitment expected from Core Committee members; and (3) define an explicit process for replacing Core Committee members, to ensure institutional memory, expertise and knowledge persists upon replacement of Core Committee members;
- 3. Communications strategy:** Interviewees stated that the CRWR planning process could be improved if a formal communications strategy was developed. Concrete and effective strategies for communicating with the broader public and enhancing opportunities for active participation are essential to ensure accountability by keeping community members up to date on the process;
- 4. Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK):** The findings showed that opportunities exist to further utilize and integrate TEK to inform decision making processes. Going forward, the Roundtable must actively design their process in a way that fosters and supports the mobilisation and the effective and appropriate use of TEK.

**5. Sustainable long-term funding:** All respondents indicated that the single largest challenge the CRWR endured was a lack of consistent and stable long-term funding for its operations. This finding is not a criticism of the Roundtable itself, but rather it highlights the reality of operational difficulties that community-based initiatives experience and the subsequent challenges for long-term planning by these organizations.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this research demonstrate that the CRWR has created a strong foundation for successful collaborative planning in order to navigate complex watershed management issues. In an operating environment where agencies are increasingly interdependent, resources are scarce, and demands for integrated solutions are high, the CRWR has recognized the value and importance of collaboration to develop an integrated watershed management plan. By adopting the recommendations from this research, the CRWR can solidify its role as a leader in community-based watershed management and better position itself for implementation of its watershed plan.

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## REFERENCES

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## Coquitlam River Watershed Roundtable

**Kwikwetlem, known as “Red fish up the river.” A living river that reveals its spirit.**



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