

September Boot Tales Director's News

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Contact

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"The Water Issue"

Rather than follow my usual format this month, I'm going to devote nearly all of the space to the topic that has been on the forefront of most people's minds as of late. I hope to share some information, some perspective, and opinion on the Regional District's leadership role in addressing our current water situation.

A Global Perspective

We have heard water called "the new oil", perhaps an imperfect comparison, but one meant to highlight the value of the resource. In a country that contains approximately 1/3 of all the accessible fresh water on the planet, it is difficult to comprehend that we might be experiencing a local shortage of an arguably "renewable" resource.

This summer's drought has brought home some of the global realities that we have been largely insulated from in the past. The fact that we live on a finite planet with ecological limits to things like fresh water, arable land, fish stocks and fossil fuels is not generally reflected in the predominant culture of "More". The impacts of climate change, now visible on the coast, province wide, and globally will make living within those limits more challenging and also more pressing.

The above is not news to most of us, and the degree of ecological literacy in Roberts Creek is part of what has attracted many of us to the community. It's a good time to consider our respective ecological footprints, including the "shadow" footprint of indirect water consumption involved in the production, transportation, and packaging of all goods.

Water Supply on the Sunshine Coast

The provision of water was a key driver in the formation of the Regional District in the late 1960's. The history of its provision and protection are laid out in a number of sources, several of which have been noted in my previous newsletters (available on my website). **Of all the important roles of the RD, this one is fundamental.**

A quick look at a map will highlight the relative lack of lakes on the lower Sunshine Coast in comparison to Powell River or Vancouver. The source of the Regional Water System, Chapman and Edwards Lakes, lies within a Class A Provincial Park. Our coast is underrepresented in terms of provincially protected areas, and Tetrahedron Park came about as a result of hard work by local citizens. This designation has the dual effect of protecting the area's inherent ecosystem services, (including water quality), while at the same time adding a layer of public process and legislation to any changes to infrastructure within the park.

There are further considerations that impact our regional water supply. One is the ecological and legislated imperative to maintain flows in Chapman Creek below the water treatment plant at a level that will support salmon. Also to be factored in is the increasing cost of maintaining ageing infrastructure such as pipes, reservoirs and pumps. A further consideration is that on pre-restriction peak use days, we begin to approach the 25 million liter per day upper limit of the Chapman treatment plant.

Growth

Of course population growth plays a big part in this picture. The paradox of an economic system that

with the equitable distribution of limited resources is an uncomfortable one. District planning includes a 2% growth rate, which has in reality tended more toward 1% of late. Good or bad news, depending on whom you ask. We also have many businesses on the coast that depend on summer tourism. Interestingly, staff point to peak use days that don't fall on weekends. While we joke about "raising the drawbridge" once we arrive on the coast, we can remind ourselves of the current generosity of spirit of the shishálh and Skwxwú7mesh Nations.

What we can do is pay particular attention to the **Smart Growth aspects of our Official Community Plans** (the tool used to control that growth). We can ensure water considerations form part of development proposal reviews and explore requirements around building practices that include rain and grey water harvesting.

Clearly, there is no easy one-stop solution to the water situation that we find ourselves in. Pointing fingers at previous Boards (who were operating at a time when climate change was still under public debate) or staff (who, of course, act on direction of board) is not particularly helpful. Staff, in my view, have done an admirable job of responding to the current situation through communication, outreach, and enforcement, implementing existing plans and implementing backup provisions. Record breaking drought on the south coast is beyond the control of engineers and Boards. However, planning for a rapidly changing future is not.

Moving Forwards

What are the leadership opportunities for the SCRD? A diversity of approaches is in order. This looks like **balancing the supply/storage side with a range of conservation initiatives**, all the while ensuring that water rates are appropriate.

In terms of **conservation**, the installation of water meters is a recognized best practice in regional water conservation, and staff will be moving forwards with that program. Numbers vary, but an estimate of water volume savings is 20-25%. Meter fee schedules, yet to be determined, will replace existing flat rates, and better reflect individual household use and water savings. Fees collected stay within the regional water function. Progressive legislative tools and incentives around new building and retrofits can also be explored.

Rewarding and **empowering individual property-level conservation** that has been exhibited so extensively this summer is another piece of the puzzle. In addition to meters, staff has been asked to report on the viability of cistern incentive programs (a previous rain barrel program was discontinued a few years back due to lack of public uptake and limited barrel capacity). New technological developments, entrepreneurial opportunities, and best practices from elsewhere hold promise. The SCRD is not alone in dealing with this issue.

I touched on the **supply/storage** situation earlier, but at present, the Comprehensive Regional Water Plan includes a survey of groundwater aquifer sources, and points towards digging an engineered storage lake. Neither option is without its issues. A review of existing Plans, even recent ones such as the 2013 CRWP and 2014 Drought Management Plan update, and 2012 Source Assessment Response Plan, in light of new data and recent experience, may be in order.

A Summer of Learning

There have been some upsides to this summer of sacrifice, sweat, and smoke. Perhaps the most significant has been how our community has adapted in the face of challenge. Having our drinking water, fire protection and ability to grow food threatened is not an easy place to be. Often our most significant learnings arise from a place of discomfort. This ability to shift our norms and habits will serve us well as we strive to be an increasingly compassionate, resilient community.

Beginning where I started, "Less" is not a particularly popular political message, but I believe that in this day and age it is one that elected leaders need to carry, as we come face to face with the new realities of climate change, peak oil and limited carrying capacity.

Goodness. Upon re-reading, my newsletter has morphed into a speech! Oh well.

As always, I appreciate the time that Creekers take to share their views on this or any other topic with me, either by email, or better yet by dropping by the Gumboot on Saturday mornings (details above).

SCRD Meeting Schedule

After not sitting in August, the Board resumes the following meeting schedule. Agendas generally are published a week in advance on the District's website. **Issues and reports tend to receive more discussion at the Committee level and are reviewed before implementation during Board meetings.**

Infrastructure Committee, 1st Thursday of the month, 1:30 PM, SCR D Boardroom

Planning and Development, 2nd Thursday of the month, 1:30 PM, SCR D Boardroom

Community Services, 3rd Thursday of the month, 1:30 PM SCR D Boardroom

Corporate and Administrative Services, 4th Thursday, 1:30 Boardroom (but Sept 17th)

Transportation and Policing, Bi-monthly, 1st Monday of month, (but starting Sept 14)

Board Meetings, 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month, 7:30 PM, SCR D Boardroom