



Big Ideas* Growing Here

Idea #06: 'Don't Hog the Water.'

When More is Less

Our famously 'wet' coast is getting wetter. Also drier.

Half a century of observations reveal that more water is cycling through the atmosphere and falling on northern latitudes. British Columbia receives more rain and snow than it used to. So we needn't worry about whether we'll have enough water in the future.... right?

Not exactly.

For one thing, while more precipitation may be falling on BC overall, the increase is concentrated in the north of the province. Southern regions like ours may even be getting drier at the same time as the north gets wetter.

For another, most precipitation we do get in the CVRD falls in the mountains west of Lake Cowichan. Most of our homes and businesses are east of there—where the same

mountains create what geographers call a dry 'rain-shadow' effect. In short: any extra water isn't falling where our growing population needs it.

It's also falling at the 'wrong' time. Winter and spring rains are getting more intense. More extreme run-off is more likely to overtop river banks and overload storm sewers, creating costly and hazardous floods. At the same time, summer droughts are becoming longer and drier, leaving less water for farms to grow food, for wildlife, or to irrigate landscaping. We've felt the effects in recent years when not enough water flowed in the Cowichan River for salmon to reach their spawning channels.

Many of us rely on wells that tap underground aquifers. In the CVRD, many of these are vulnerable to contamination. Others are dropping—indicating we're drawing out more

water than is being replaced.

And while our water is generally clean, that's not always so. When streams drop to a trickle in the summer, pollutants become more concentrated in the water that's left. Heavier recreational use of lakes and rivers means more pollution gets into the water—everything from pop cans and gasoline to human waste.

Not one of us could live more than a day or so without water. Neither can our economy, or the rest of the living environment. But just as water is involved in everything we do, everything we do—from how we log to how we landscape—affects our water.

Your CVRD Environment Commission is working to keep our water flowing. Our first State of the Environment Report (online at www.12things.ca) looked closely at the health of the region's water. With the province, Cowichan

When engineers go green:

Up to now, most communities handled runoff from rain or snow the same way: directing it into pipes that empty into local waterways. But more intense rain is pushing the limits on that approach: the City of Duncan has recorded storm flows up to four times volumes typical of the last century. In response, many communities in the CVRD are choosing 'green' engineering that uses nature as a model. Lake Cowichan has installed 'water garden' landscaping, to filter and absorb storm runoff, help restore aquifers and protect streams. Learn more about green engineering on the Island at: <http://www.waterbucket.ca/>

Tribes and other stakeholders, the CVRD recently sponsored a new Cowichan Watershed Board to help plan a healthy future for our biggest river. The Regional District has also begun an analysis of ground and surface water in the South Cowichan to secure that area's drinking water supply. Involved citizens are tackling other threats to our most vital resource by getting active in efforts like the Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Committee, the Somenos and Quamichan Stewards, and naturalist and stream-keeper groups.

Learn more at <http://www.12things.ca/12things/6.php> and let us know what you think at: 12things@cvrdenviron.com.



In 2009, residents of the CVRD overwhelmingly endorsed the '12 Big Ideas' vision for a Cowichan region that will support a growing population, adapt to a changing climate, and preserve its natural wealth for future generations.

