

It's not just sustainability . . . it's your children's future

Jack Blaney, Chair, Fraser Basin Council

Sustainability was the focus of the Fraser Basin Council's recent "State of the Fraser Basin" conference. More than 350 people from all parts of the Basin attended the conference, which brought together community and environmental organizations, business and industry, and four orders of government to look at the state of the Fraser River Basin and to develop an action plan for its future sustainability.

Achieving a sustainable Fraser River Basin is perhaps the most critical challenge facing the 2.6 million British Columbians who live, work, and play within the Basin. In 30 years, the population of the Basin is expected to reach 4 million people. Managing this growth in ways that enhance the Basin's social, economic, and environmental health is an important responsibility and an urgent priority.

During the conference, attended by Lieutenant-Governor Iona Campagnolo and former premier Mike Harcourt, awards were presented to FORREX–Forest Research Extension Partnership and other sustainability champions. Another highlight was the release of the groundbreaking *State of the Fraser Basin Report: A Snapshot on Sustainability* (www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/indicatorsRpt_2003.html). The report is the equivalent of a medical check-up for the Fraser River Basin—it gives us a broad picture of where we stand today, and of how we can create a sustainable future.

The good news is that, in many ways, we are doing fairly well. We're living longer. Water quality has generally improved throughout the Basin. Far more people have a university education than ever before. The service sector, which includes high tech and other clean industries, is now the largest employer in all regions of the Basin. In addition, about half the salmon stocks in the Basin are increasing.

However, the Basin also has some major challenges, including some urgent ones that need to be addressed immediately.

There are far more "boil water" advisories than there were 20 years ago. More people are developing respiratory illnesses, perhaps related to poor air quality. Child obesity has skyrocketed. Fewer of us are volunteering or voting, and we're giving less to charity. For 20% of the population, housing is inadequate or too expensive. The mountain pine beetle is devastating forests throughout the Interior. "Noxious weeds"—or non-native plant species—are invading large tracts of agricultural land. Some communities are not adequately protected from the next great Fraser River flood. Progress on settling First Nations land claims is slow, and half of our salmon stocks are declining.

What became disturbingly evident from coverage of the event and other reactions to the report is that many people—including some senior public officials and many members of the media—still do not have a clear concept of sustainability. For many, sustainability is only an environmental issue.

* Adapted from the State of the Basin address given by Dr. Jack Blaney, Chair of the Fraser Basin Council and former President of Simon Fraser University.

So What Is Sustainability?

The Fraser Basin Council believes that sustainability is not just about the environment, nor is it just about the economy. It's about integrating economic, social, and environmental considerations into all of our planning for the future health and prosperity of the Basin.

It's about new ways of thinking. It's about developing new, collaborative models of leadership that can effectively grapple with the big issues—issues like climate change, economic diversification, protecting our ecosystems, and building constructive Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships.

Sustainability is about change that rejects the status quo. It's about the interdependence of people, the economy, and the environment. Sustainability requires that we all work together to find the common ground on which to craft constructive solutions.

Perhaps we should stop trying to define the word and just think of sustainability as working together to build a better future for our children.

To do that, we need leadership that is collaborative, courageous, compelling, and committed.

Overall, the message to decision makers is pretty clear: British Columbians want courageous decisions that will leave a clean environment *and* a healthy economy for future generations, because both are needed for enduring prosperity.

Sustainability Awards: FORREX Honoured

The Fraser Basin Council's "Improving Decision Making" Award for 2002 went to FORREX—Forest Research Extension Partnership. This award celebrates processes that show collaborative decision making, create innovative agreements, and achieve common goals that meet people's different needs in the Fraser River Basin. Working with its 63 government and non-government partners, FORREX fosters improved natural resource decision making and practices in British Columbia, and links the province's forest resource practitioners with the information they need.

The Fraser Basin Council

Formed in 1997, the non-political and independent Fraser Basin Council is a custom-built vehicle that brings people together to find solutions to long-standing issues and conflicts and to take advantage of opportunities. The mandate of the Council is to ensure that decisions we make about the Basin today will protect and advance its economic, environmental, and social sustainability into the future.



The Council's 36-member board includes individuals from all regions of the Fraser Basin, with representatives from federal, provincial, local, and First Nations governments, as well as from the private sector and community and environmental organizations.

For more information, or to receive a copy of the *State of the Fraser Basin Report*, contact:

Raymond McAllister, Director of Communications
Fraser Basin Council
1st Floor, 470 Granville Street, Vancouver BC V6C 1V5
Tel: 604.488.5350 Fax: 604.488.5351
E-mail: rmcallister@fraserbasin.bc.ca

Editor's Note

Julie Schooling, *JEM* Managing Editor

Jack Blaney's State of the Basin address outlines the challenge that faces us provincially, nationally, and globally. We must implement sustainable solutions before we fully understand what it takes to achieve sustainability. The remarkable increase in readership of this journal indicates that we are satisfying the urgent demand for cutting-edge information about knowledge-based management of British Columbia's natural resources. We receive new subscriptions to the print version of *JEM* every day, and the growth of on-line access is notable. From the second to third quarters of this fiscal year, the number of unique visitors to the *JEM* Web site increased 166%, while the number of documents downloaded doubled to over 8000! This is wonderful news for past and prospective authors—articles in *JEM* reach a rapidly growing audience. It's also good news for managers and stakeholders who will benefit as the flow of information intensifies and the dialogue in *JEM* expands. Watch for a new Reader Response feature in our next print issue—this section will be your opportunity to contribute to this important dialogue, and to play your part in responding to Jack Blaney's challenge. Let's build a better future now as we wait for the definition of "sustainability" to crystallize.