



# The Future of Freshwater Funding in Canada:

## Mobilizing Collective Resources for Healthy Watersheds

by Tim Morris

May 2014

## About the Author

Tim Morris is a consultant specializing in strategic advice to foundations and non-profit organizations working on freshwater protection. Over the last decade, Tim has worked to protect Canada's rivers and lakes as an academic, advocate, grant-maker and capacity builder. For five years, Tim managed the freshwater program at the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation. He has also co-founded a number of freshwater organizations and initiatives including the Forum for Leadership on Water, the Blue Economy Initiative, Canada Water Week and the Canadian Freshwater Alliance. He currently sits on the Canadian Board of Freshwater Future and the Board of The WaterWealth Project.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the 20 funders who provided their insights and perspectives through interviews, and the 40 funders that completed the electronic survey for this study. The author would also like to acknowledge the support of Pegi Dover and Wendy Cooper, including their willingness to review report drafts at short notice, and the National Water Funders Group for their guidance and input during the process. And thanks to Brad Cundiff for his excellent design work and Marci Janecek for her work on the infographics.



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# PREFACE

The Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Network (CEGN) is a membership group of more than 60 funders for sustainability – private, community, public and corporate foundations, and government and corporate funding programs – from Canada and the United States. Our mission is to strengthen the impact of philanthropy in support of an environmentally sound and sustainable future for Canadians. We do this by facilitating collaboration and by generating and sharing knowledge. We also give public voice to the shared aspirations of our members and provide skill-building opportunities designed to help ensure that our members keep pace with a rapidly changing world. And we work with key partners and not-for-profit organizations that provide an essential function to Canadian communities through public engagement and policy development and implementation.

Our National Water Funders' Group is pioneering CEGN's efforts to spur greater funder collaboration. The National Water Funders' Group benefited greatly from the original leadership of Tim Morris and the late Betsy Martin who served as co-chairs of the group. At the time, Tim was with the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, and Betsy was with the Foundation of Greater Montreal. The group is currently co-chaired by Wendy Cooper, of Tides Canada, and Anna Warwick Sears, of the Okanagan Basin Water Board. CEGN is grateful for the strong volunteer leadership that our co-chairs bring to the group.



This report by Tim Morris is an important step forward for CEGN's water funder collaboration work. By documenting and analyzing the existing landscape of water philanthropy in Canada, the report provides us with an understanding of the scope and focus of water funding initiatives across the country – an essential underpinning for tapping the appetite for and charting the opportunities for collaborative work by funders focused on the health of Canada's fresh water. We are very appreciative to Tim for his excellent work in researching and writing this report and for his continued commitment to strengthening collaboration among water funders in order to increase the impact of water philanthropy.



CEGN is grateful to the Dragonfly Fund at Tides Canada for its financial sponsorship of this report and for Tides Canada's own work in spurring greater water funder collaboration – work which included the April 2012 meeting in Vancouver which was co-hosted by Tides Canada and the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation. CEGN also thanks the following additional funders for their support of the National Water Funders' Group in 2014: the Alberta Real Estate Foundation; the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation; and Mountain Equipment Co-op.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pegi Dover". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

**Pegi Dover**  
Executive Director  
CEGN

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Letizia". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

**Pat Letizia**  
Chair, CEGN Board of Directors and  
Executive Director, The Alberta Ecotrust Foundation

# INTRODUCTION

In April 2012, twenty water funders came together with a dozen water leaders for the Canadian Water Funders Retreat. Hosted at the Vancouver Rowing Club on the edge of Stanley Park, participants explored strategies for funders to support freshwater protection in Canada, and to strengthen the water community through collaboration. During the discussion, it was determined that there was a need for a comprehensive survey of Canadian water funders to develop a clearer sense of the interests and priorities of funders across the country, and that this knowledge would set a foundation for greater collaboration.

It was recommended that this exercise examine the landscape of funders supporting freshwater protection, opportunities for funders to work together, and an understanding of the impediments to closer collaboration.

In response to this need, the National Water Funders Group (a group hosted by the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Network) commissioned the Water Funders Mapping Project. The findings from this project are compiled in this report as well as an associated Water Funders Matrix, which inventories the priorities and interests of each funder that was surveyed (available at [www.cegn.org](http://www.cegn.org)). These findings are based on an electronic survey of 40 water funders from across Canada, as well as telephone interviews with 20 of these funders.

What emerges from these findings is a picture of a surprisingly diverse set of water funders that represent a wide range of funder types, regions, and approaches. Currently, these funders are largely disconnected and pursuing isolated strategies. The lack of collaboration is not due to lack of interest or

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appreciation of its importance; insights from the interviews indicate that funders recognize multiple benefits with collaboration, but there are a number of barriers that inhibit funders from working together more often and more effectively.

The report concludes with a ten-year vision for freshwater funding in Canada and three core ideas for making progress towards this vision: investing in social infrastructure; intelligence gathering; and a leadership education campaign aimed at senior management and the Board level. The objective behind these recommendations is to develop and sustain the social ecosystem and collaborative culture required for freshwater funders to contribute to systemic change. Freshwater funders have a critical role to play in protecting and restoring fresh water. This is a role most effectively fulfilled if they work together.



# THE BIG PICTURE





# Why This Report? Why Now?

## Our Most Important Natural Resource

It is often stated that Canada has vast supplies of fresh water. Many commentators quote that Canada has one fifth of the world's water supply and more water than any other country in the world. While this statistic is misleading (Canada only has 6.5% of the world's *renewable*<sup>i</sup> supply), Canada has undoubtedly been blessed with a spectacular endowment of lakes and rivers. With all this water, one might wonder why Canadians would have any concerns about this seemingly abundant resource.

Yet, Canadians share a deep connection to water. Public opinion surveys consistently show that Canadians consider fresh water to be the country's most important natural resource, far ahead of oil and gas and other resources. They also show that Canadians are becoming increasingly anxious about what will happen to our water resources over the next 10 years.<sup>ii</sup>

In many ways, the water issue extends far beyond water itself. How we manage water directly affects decisions related to energy production and management, how we grow food, how we plan our cities, how we respond to climate change and even diplomatic relations between Canada and its closest ally. In February 2014, Gary Doer, Canada's ambassador to the United States, predicted that tensions over water will come to dominate diplomatic relations in the next five years:

"I think five years from now we will be spending a lot of our time diplomatically and a lot of our work on dealing with water... We're blessed with a lot of water, but we cannot take it for granted. We have to manage it more effectively and that means waterflows south to north

i Canada has a very large volume of non-renewable water trapped in glaciers and lakes. Renewable supply is a more relevant figure and is the amount of water that falls from the sky and runs off in rivers and passes through lakes or aquifers on the way to the ocean. These flows represent Canada's water supply. In comparison to other countries, Canada has substantially less renewable supply than Brazil or Russia (countries of comparable size) and about the same as the United States and China. See Bakker (ed), *Eau Canada: The Future of Canada's Water* (2007) (Chapter 2).

ii RBC Water Attitudes Study 2014 (<http://www.rbc.com/community-sustainability/environment/rbc-blue-water/water-attitude-study.html>). A national poll conducted by Fathom6 Strategies for Canadian Freshwater Alliance found that 77% of Canadians believe water degradation will become a serious problem in 10 years if nothing is done to improve its management (Freshwater Insights Canada 2013: A National Survey of Canadian Attitudes on Fresh Water)



and north to south ... There will be pressure on water quality and water quantity. I think it will make a debate about going from 85 to 86 pipelines look silly.”<sup>1</sup>

So water is more than just the stuff that flows from our taps. It is a connector of people with place, an economic integrator, and a key determining factor in the country’s future.

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## Canada is Facing a Freshwater Crisis

Public opinion research, media commentary, scientific studies, and expert reports suggest a growing unease about the state of our water resources. The threats to rivers, lakes, and groundwater are very real and appear to be gathering momentum. These threats include:

- **A Thirst for Energy** – we are seeing more and larger-scale conflicts between the energy sector and communities over water, such as: concerns over oil sands pollution in Alberta and Saskatchewan; natural gas fracking in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec and northern BC; oil pipeline proposals in British Columbia; and large-scale mineral and aggregate mining across the country.
- **Expanding Cities** – as the population of Canadian cities increases, the pressure of urban sprawl on our water bodies on both water use and water quality is growing. Many older cities still lack effective sewage treatment, and as these cities expand, so does the sewage entering our lakes and rivers.
- **Agricultural Pollution** – agricultural runoff is contributing to toxic algal blooms that are choking some of our largest lakes, such as Lake Winnipeg and Lake Erie.

- **Climate Change** – all of these threats will, or are already, being compounded by global climate change.

These pressures are being reflected in the deteriorating conditions of many of Canada's water bodies. While we currently lack a national assessment of the health of our freshwater systems,<sup>iii</sup> there is enough evidence to suggest that many of our rivers, lakes and aquifers are not as healthy as they once were (see Figure 1 – Canadian Freshwater 'Hot Spots').

## Governments Are Failing, But Solutions Are Out There

At this time, the threats seem to be outpacing the willingness or ability of governments to respond. The federal government, in particular, has been rolling back important water protection laws such as the Fisheries Act, Navigable Waters Protection Act, and environmental assessment processes. The provinces have taken up some of the slack but are struggling to respond effectively, often constrained by budget cuts and competing priorities. While the challenges are significant, they are not insurmountable.

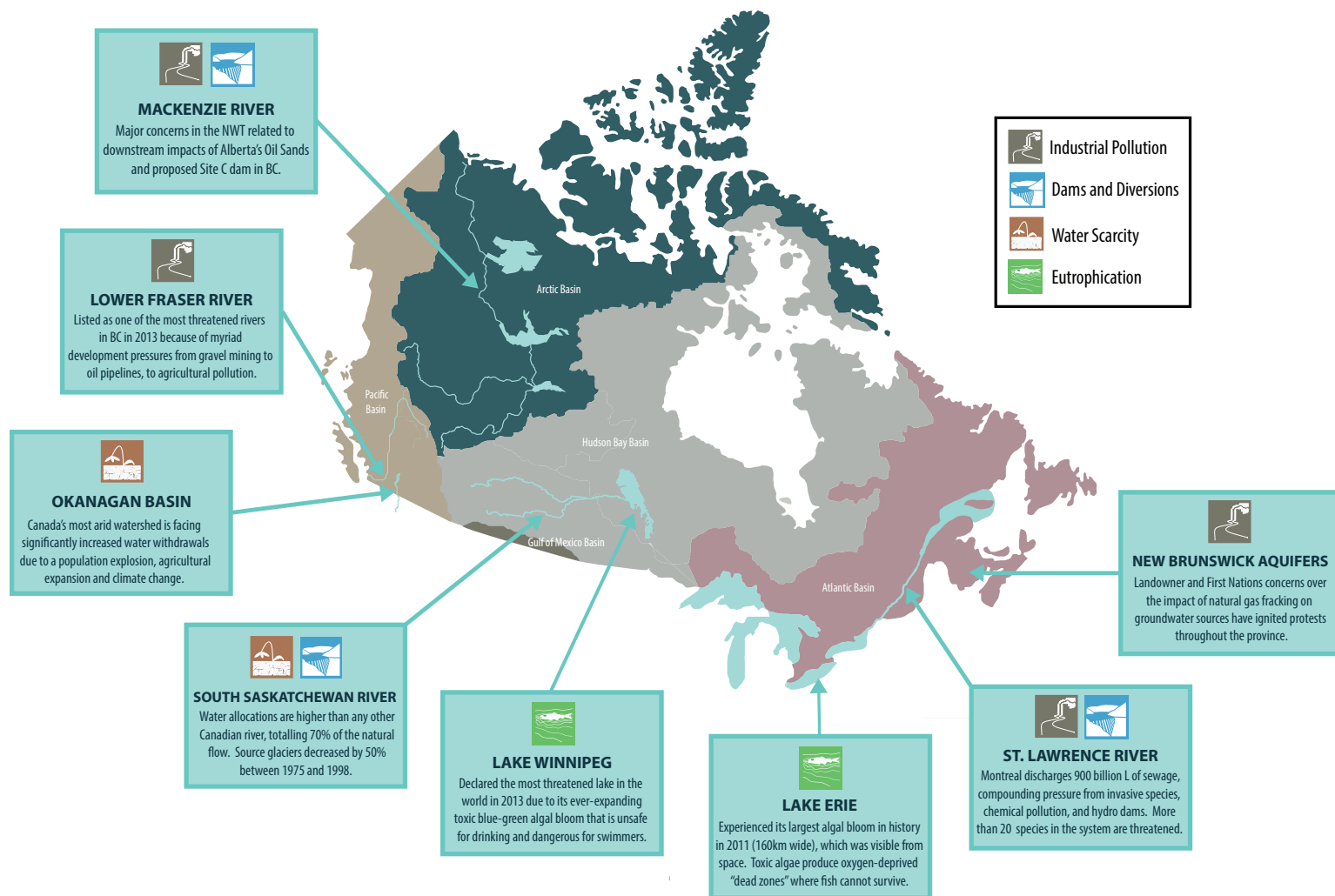
### Healing Our Lakes

Lake Erie was declared a dead lake in the 1970s and then restored to full health, an effort that received international acclaim. While the problems are more complex this time around, the International Joint Commission is confident that it can be saved again.<sup>3</sup> Lake Winnipeg is enduring similar problems with massive algal blooms sucking the life from the lake and presenting a serious health hazard. But as with Lake Erie, implementing effective land-use practices and sewage treatment can reverse its decline.<sup>4</sup>

iii WWF Canada has launched an initiative to conduct Freshwater Health Assessments for Canada's major water systems and has found that Canada lacks appropriate data to measure the health of many of these systems. <http://www.wwf.ca/conservation/freshwater/freshwaterhealth/>



Figure 1. Canadian Freshwater 'Hot Spots' <sup>2</sup>



## Thinking Like a Watershed

An encouraging trend occurring across Canada is the increasing awareness and recognition of the idea of integrated watershed planning and management. Several provinces and territories have now established watershed entities or boards that undertake planning, educate the public, and lead local water protection initiatives. There are also emerging models of co-management between indigenous and non-indigenous communities. The Cowichan Watershed Board in British Columbia<sup>5</sup> is one such example.

## Community Ambassadors

As threats to their home waters increase, there is evidence that communities are becoming more connected to their local waterways. In some situations, they are filling the roles that government has vacated through citizen science and monitoring, such as in the award-winning Lake Windermere water quality monitoring project.<sup>6</sup> In the Mackenzie River Basin, indigenous communities are partnering with the Government of the Northwest Territories to apply western science and traditional knowledge to monitor the well-being of their waterways.<sup>7</sup> The Yukon River Watershed is another example of community-driven science and traditional knowledge re-connecting people to their home waters.<sup>8</sup>

## Blue Communities

In urban Canada, cities such as Guelph, Ontario and Okotoks, Alberta, are working with their residents to drive innovation in water conservation and green infrastructure to stay within the limits of local water availability. Larger cities are also taking progressive steps in urban water management, illustrated by the development of closed-loop water systems in building design in Victoria, efforts to deal with leaky water infrastructure in Halifax, and performance incentives for water efficiency in Edmonton.<sup>9</sup>

What is clear from these examples is that solutions to Canada's water problems are out there, but Canadians can no longer afford to wait for our governments to take the lead.

## Unlocking Solutions: A Critical Role for Philanthropy

### Risk-Taking and Experimentation

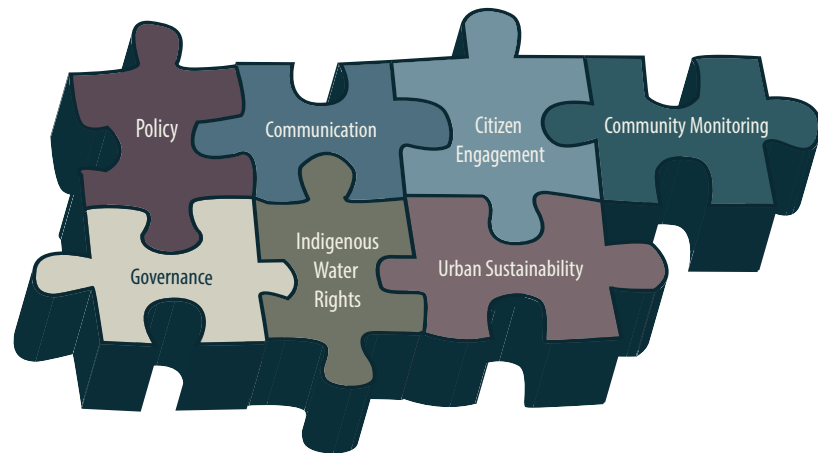
The philanthropic sector has a critical role to play in addressing Canada's water problems. Finding the keys to unlock the best solutions will require innovation, experimentation, and a willingness to learn from failures in order to succeed. These are not the strengths of an increasingly risk-averse and capacity deficient public sector. And while some suggest the private sector holds the answers, it would be imprudent to assume that market forces are currently prioritizing the health of our rivers, lakes and aquifers. Philanthropy, with its comfort around risk-taking and its alignment with community and civil society interests, has an essential part to play in sparking innovation, fostering debate, disrupting entrenched systems, and demonstrating new approaches that can be brought to scale in partnership with other sectors.

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### Supporting Integrated Solutions

Philanthropy can also help by supporting the types of integrated systems-based solutions that are required to address complex issues like water protection. Government bureaucracies, by their very nature, create distinct silos with different departments and ministries acting in isolation from each other. The frequent

lack of communication between these silos means that government is inherently challenged when it comes to connecting the dots between inter-related problems and opportunities. For philanthropy to assist society in making progress on protecting and restoring the health of our watersheds, it will need to support actions in a number of interconnected areas, such as those outlined in Box 1. Like jigsaw pieces, it will be important to figure out how strategies in these and other areas connect and reinforce one another. Philanthropy can help ensure these connections are made.



## Employing the Power to Convene

Government ‘stakeholder’ processes are frequently tainted by a lack of trust and openness amongst participants, which undermines the potential for these fora to uncover constructive solutions. In contrast, philanthropic organizations have a privileged vantage point to identify potential partnerships or synergies among different groups, sectors or initiatives. Through their convening role, funders have the ability to bring the right mix of players together to apply diverse skill-sets to tackle multi-dimensional problems.





## Box 1. Areas Where Philanthropy Can Make a Difference

(not an exhaustive list and not in order of priority):

**Public Policy Development & Implementation** – the *development* of public policy frameworks that protect freshwater and the effective *implementation* and enforcement of existing laws and policies.

**Watershed Governance** – while some progress has been made in Canada, most provinces/territories have yet to provide the resources or powers to truly enable watershed scale decision making.

**Indigenous Water Rights and Governance** – although the full extent of indigenous rights to water is still being defined, there are emerging examples of co-management between indigenous and non-indigenous communities that may pave the way for new forms of innovative watershed governance.

**Community-Based Monitoring** – while government funding for science and monitoring is declining, community-based monitoring can be a powerful tool for monitoring watershed health and impacts.

**Citizen Engagement** – there is an increasing realization that making progress in areas such as public policy and new governance arrangements requires constituencies of citizen support that are heard by elected representatives and participate in decision-making processes.

**Public Communication** – the public narratives around water are still largely ill-defined. Certainly, there are regions in Canada where communities' connection with water is palpable but this has yet to be scaled up or knitted together into a strong and consistent national water ethic.

**Urban Water Sustainability** – with the majority of Canadians living in urban areas, finding new ways to plan and design our cities to live within the carrying capacity of local watersheds is both a big challenge and a major opportunity for some cutting edge innovation.

## Summary

It is clear then, that philanthropy has a critical role in freshwater protection and it's a role that extends far beyond the administrative function of making grants. However, to fully capitalize on their potential as change agents, water funders will need to actively work together as a community to leverage their resources, exchange knowledge, develop coordinated strategies and support integrated solutions. As the next section highlights, there is plenty of room to improve the dialogue and collaboration currently occurring between water funders.



### Box 2. The Limits of Philanthropy

Philanthropy has an essential role in catalyzing new approaches, revealing solutions, and integrating strategies, but it is also important to acknowledge its limitations. Philanthropy is not a substitute for publicly funded programs. For example, philanthropic organizations have neither the finances nor the mandate to replace government in the ongoing funding of long-term public water monitoring programs. Philanthropy also cannot dig Canada out of its whopping water and wastewater infrastructure debt (valued at \$80 billion by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities<sup>10</sup>).

However, philanthropy can provide an infusion of 'disruptive' capital to reveal new approaches to large-scale challenges. For example, philanthropy can help fund community-based monitoring systems and support their standardization so that they can be integrated with government monitoring programs, or pilot 'green infrastructure' projects that demonstrate more cost-efficient forms of water infrastructure. And of course, philanthropy can provide funding for initiatives that seek to inform public policy innovation, which may result in mobilizing government resources to deal with these challenges. Funders can also help unlock capital from other sources, such as by supporting and working with leaders in social finance.

# TODAY'S WATERSCAPE: DIVERSE & DISCONNECTED



## Water Funders are All Over the Map!

The findings in this section are based on an online survey completed by 40 funding organizations. Through extensive research of more than 200 philanthropic organizations funding in Canada, a shortlist of 65 funders were identified as existing or potential water funders and were sent the survey. The survey was also distributed through the listserv of the National Water Funders Group and the broader listserv of the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Network.<sup>iv</sup> Thirty-five of the survey participants identified themselves as currently funding water projects. Five funders were not currently funding water projects. Out of those five funders, four said they were interested in funding freshwater work in the future and one funder responded that it was uncertain if they would be funding freshwater projects but thought it was possible. Findings also draw on telephone interviews with 20 water funders.

The most consistent finding from this study is the inconsistency. Water funders come in all shapes and sizes and this diversity is apparent in many ways, as outlined below.

## How Much Funding Goes to Fresh Water in Canada?

At this time, it is not possible to say with absolute precision how much funding is being allocated to water causes in Canada. From the water funders' survey, 26 funders voluntarily responded with their annual grant totals for water and the aggregate amount was a range of \$11,127,000 to \$15,502,000.<sup>v</sup> Amongst these funders, there is considerable variation in the size of grantmaking between

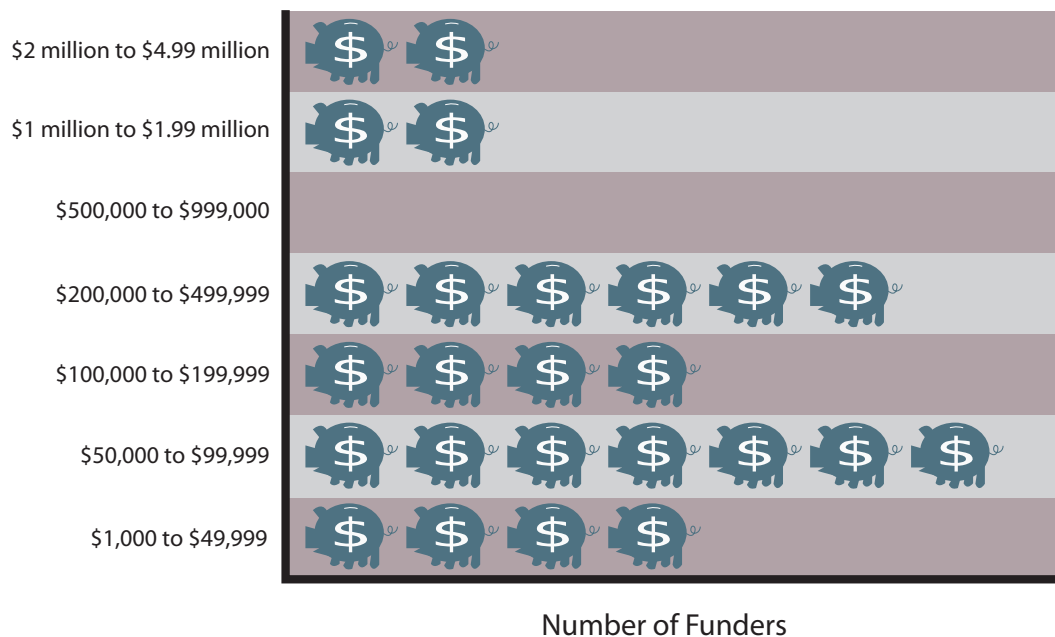
iv For a full list of the organizations that completed the survey see Appendix.

v Some funders provided an estimated range as opposed to a specific figure.



different funders. Nearly two-thirds of the funders that submitted grants data allocate \$200,000 or less in water grants annually (as shown in Figure 2 – Water Funders by Annual Grants). So while there are a handful of larger funders that allocated over \$1 million per year to freshwater projects, the majority of funders are on the small to medium end of the funding scale.

**Figure 2. Water Funders by Annual Grants**

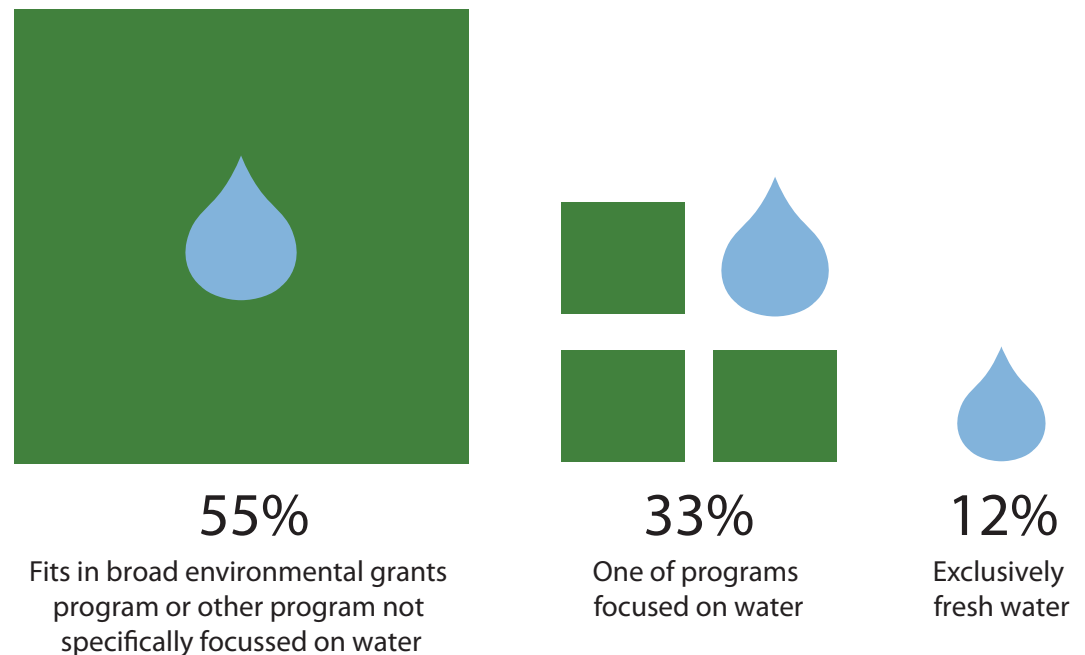




## Most Water Funders are Not Just Water Funders

For a majority of funders that responded to the water survey (55%), their support for freshwater projects fits within a broad environmental grants program or another program that is not specifically focused on water (such as urban ecology). One third of funders (33%) said they have a program area specifically focused on fresh water, while a smaller percentage (12%) stated it was the only issue they worked on (see Figure 3 – Where Fresh Water Fits into Grant Programs).

**Figure 3. Where Fresh Water Fits into Grant Programs**



When asked to rate where freshwater/watershed protection fits in terms of a priority issue or focus, 65% of survey respondents said it was a high priority (rated as 4 or 5 on the priority scale), 23% said it was a moderate priority (rated as 3) and 12% said it was a low priority (rated 1 or 2). These results indicate that water is a high priority but not the sole or necessarily primary focus of most water funders (see Figure 4 – Ranking of Fresh Water as a Funding Priority).

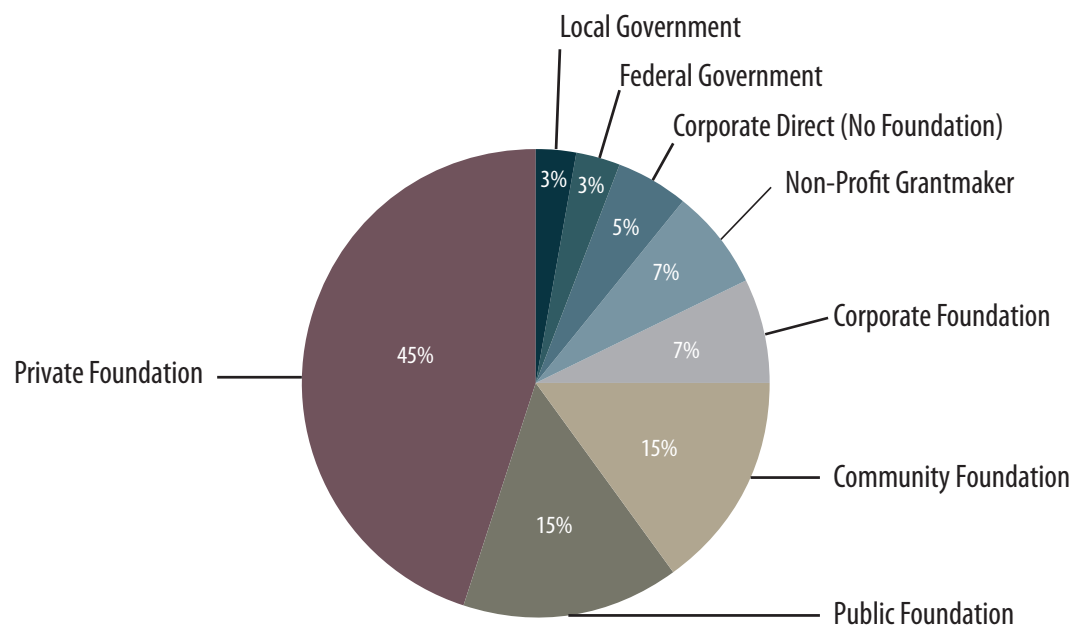
**Figure 4. Ranking of Fresh Water as a Funding Priority**



## An Eclectic Mix of Organizations

Private foundations make up 45% of the funders surveyed. The remaining 55% are an eclectic mix of public foundations, corporate foundations, community foundations, as well as a number of funders that do not fit any of these traditional funder categories. For example, there were also government funders, corporate donors that fund directly (not through corporate or charitable foundations), research networks, local government agencies, charitable groups that make grants, and a cooperative (see Figure 5 – Funder Types).

**Figure 5. Funder Types**



Delving a little deeper, there is significant diversity within these funder categories. For example, in the private foundations category, there are small foundations with family-only Boards and no staff. There are also large foundations with teams of professional staff and large Boards that include a mix of family and non-family board members. The same is true for community foundations. There are large community foundations such as the Vancouver Foundation that have professional staff, multiple programs and a provincial mandate, compared with small community foundations such as the Temagami Community Foundation that have no staff and a very local mandate.

Amongst the public foundations are unique entities like the Real Estate Foundations of Alberta and British Columbia. These Foundations receive revenue from the interest earned on public money deposited in real estate brokers' trust accounts. The Ontario Trillium Foundation, the largest funder of the not-for-profit environmental sector in Canada, receives annual funding (currently \$120 million per year) from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

In the nonprofit grantmaker category, Albert EcoTrust operates as a unique partnership between the corporate sector and the environmental community, and Freshwater Future works with larger Foundations and funders to provide funding and capacity support to smaller grassroots organizations.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board is another unique organization. Established by provincial mandate, it has a Board comprised of local government representatives, and operates a grants program that supports a wide variety of initiatives as well as large infrastructure projects specifically within the Okanagan watershed.

In short, there is not a standard profile for a 'water funder' and no one funder organization is the same as the next.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities is another municipally directed organization that operates the Green Municipal Fund. This fund supports innovative environmental projects and practices in Canadian municipalities, including water conservation, storm water management and green infrastructure initiatives.

In short, there is not a standard profile for a 'water funder' and no one funder organization is the same as the next.

## Different Geographies and Scales

Reflecting the centres of Canadian philanthropic giving more generally, water funders are predominantly located in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Montreal. None of the funders that completed the water survey were located in Atlantic Canada, Saskatchewan or Northern Canada (see Figure 6 – Location of Funders).

Funding regions and scales are more diverse (see Figure 7 – Regions of Focus). Less than one-third of funders provide funding Canada-wide (meaning they fund projects across the country or support national level work). The majority of funders support water initiatives at a regional or local scale. The two regions with the largest number of funders are British Columbia and Ontario (with a focus on the Great Lakes). A smaller number of funders support water-related projects in Alberta, Manitoba (with a focus on Lake Winnipeg), Quebec and Atlantic Canada. Three funders (all community foundations) reported a specific local focus – Calgary, Essex County and Temagami.



**Figure 6. Location of Funders**

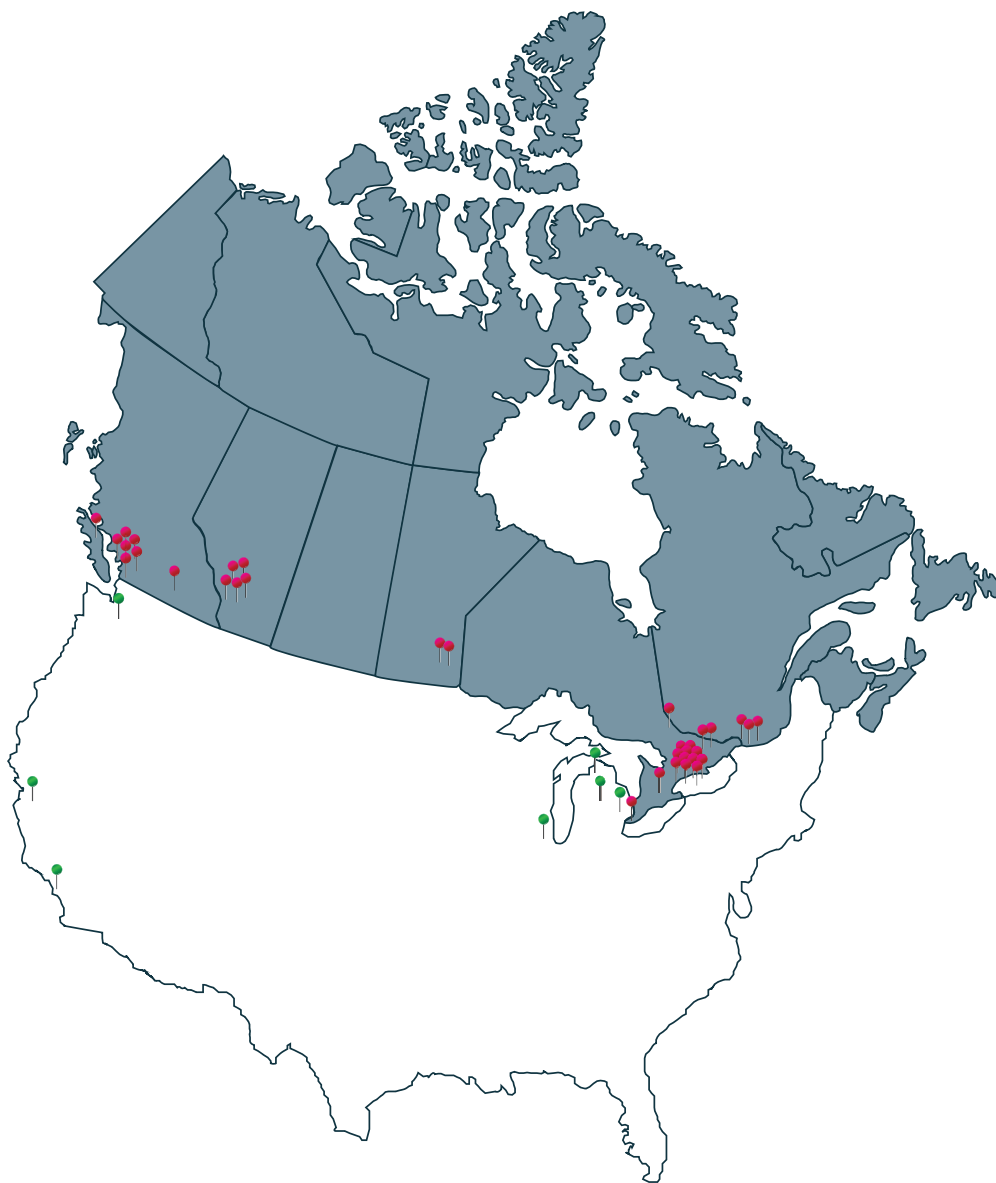
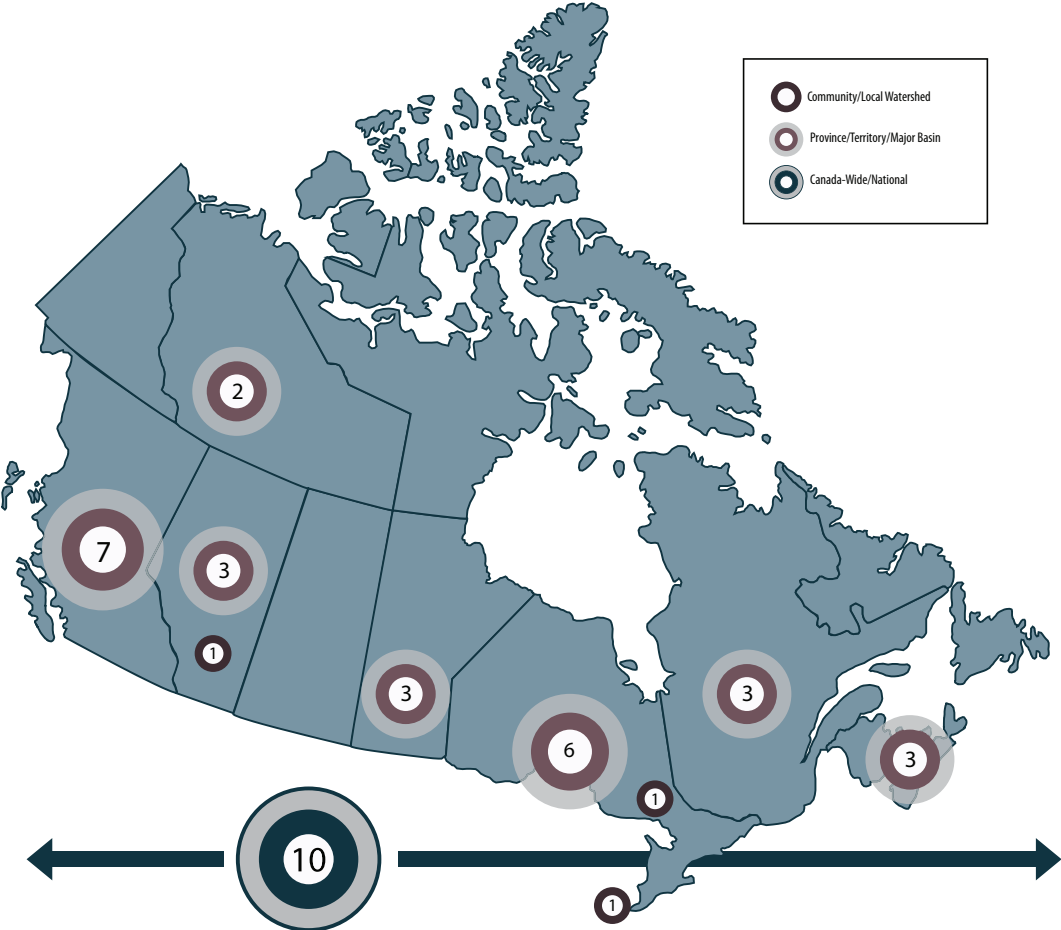


Figure 7. Regions of Focus (by Number of Funders)



Note: Some funders reported funding in more than one region.

There are some clear regional gaps in terms of water funding. Saskatchewan is one of Canada's driest provinces with major stresses on its water systems, but none of the respondents stated they funded in this region. Atlantic Canada and Northern Canada are two huge areas with major water concerns, such as downstream pollution from the oil sands in the Mackenzie River Basin, industrial development in the Peel Watershed, fracking in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and the impacts of extreme weather and climate change. However, there were only two funders supporting water work in the North and three in the Atlantic region.

## A Wide Range of Strategies, Capacities and Decision-Making Structures

Through interviews with water funders, it is clear that there is substantial diversity in strategic approaches, capacities within funding organizations, and also decision-making structures.

### i) Reactive vs. Proactive

In terms of strategy, most water funders employ a more traditional *reactive* grant-making approach. They have an open application process, whereby they receive project proposals and make a determination of successful applicants based on their fit with a set of publically available criteria.

However, there are also a smaller number of funders that are either using or are moving toward a more *proactive* model. These funders typically accept applications by invite only and seek to proactively develop projects in pursuit of specific strategies as opposed to more general criteria. They do this by funding

partner organizations, hiring consultants for specific services, or creating the in-house capacity to lead or support these projects. Funders in this category include the de Gaspé Beaubien Family Foundation, Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, and Tides Canada Foundation.

There are also funders that are a hybrid of both models, operating both a reactive grant-making program and generating proactive projects, such as the Real Estate Foundation of B.C., Mountain Equipment Co-op, and the Joyce Foundation.

## ii) Decision-Making Processes

There is a huge variety of decision-making processes, which vary according to the timing, flexibility and structure of decision-making. For many funders, decision-making power lies at the Board level, but this is not always the case and senior

For funders that have moved to more of a proactive model, there is typically greater flexibility provided to staff to implement in-house projects or hire consultants without requiring approval at a formal Board meeting.

management or even staff may be delegated significant discretion to make grant decisions. And for funders that have moved to more of a proactive model, there is typically greater flexibility provided to staff to implement in-house projects or hire consultants without requiring approval at a formal Board meeting.

In terms of when grant decisions get made, many funders have specific grant cycles, which can range from once a year to every quarter. However, some funders (often smaller organizations) are more nimble and can make grant decisions at almost any time during a year. Some funders will receive hundreds of applications, others just a handful.

Many funders utilize advisory panels or committees to provide input and advice to staff on grant proposals. For community foundations, such as the Vancouver Foundation, the advisory committee is responsible for making grant recommendations to the Board. As well, funders that offer donor-advised funds will work directly with those donors to determine how grants are allocated. Funders in this category include Tides Canada Foundation and most community foundations.

### iii) Staff Capacity

For most of the funders that were surveyed, program officers/managers are generalists that are responsible for managing more than one program and they receive and review grant proposals on a wide variety of issues. A smaller number of foundations employ specialist staff with expertise in one or more programmatic area. As a result, most foundations do not have staff capacity that is focused exclusively on fresh water.

### iv) Theory of Change

As part of the interview process, funders were asked to describe their organizational or programmatic theory of change.<sup>vi</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, few funders have developed an explicit theory of change that helps guide their water funding. This is not to say that funders are not applying a theory of change. It is just that their change theory is implicit and not articulated. As a result, beyond more generally worded mission statements and program descriptions, it is not easy to identify an impact framework or strategic roadmap for most funders.

vi Theory of Change is defined by the Centre for Theory of Change as a “specific and measurable description of a social change initiative that forms the basis for strategic planning, on-going decision-making and evaluation.” ActKnowledge <http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>



## Most Funders Focus on Multiple Water Issues

In the survey, funders were presented with a range of issue areas and asked to select the ones on which their organization focuses. Most funders selected multiple issue areas. This likely reflects the multi-faceted nature of the water issue. It is worth noting that some funders do have a very clear focus, such as the Max Bell Foundation, which is focused on public policy. However, it is difficult to determine from the responses to this question whether other funders are less focused and apply a more broad-based strategy or simply found it difficult to choose because of the inter-relationship between many of the issues. Based on the aggregate of responses, water law and policy reform was the most popular area of focus, while the issue of indigenous water rights was the least popular.

**Figure 8. Specific Areas of Fresh Water Funding**



# A Lack of 'Functional' Diversity

There is both strength and weakness in diversity. In the natural world, it is understood that diverse ecosystems are more resilient and therefore have a greater capacity to respond and adapt to changes or threats to the system. But it is not merely the presence of different species that creates the resilience. It is the strength of the interactions and flows between these species that supports 'functional' bio-diversity.

In the human world, we have tended to adopt approaches that separate and simplify complex systems, preferring to compartmentalize and manage individual elements as though they were independent from one another.

Interestingly, when one steps back and looks at the water funders landscape, it is apparent that this is the current approach that philanthropy is taking to efforts to protect and restore fresh water.

Some funders are focused on policy, others on science, some are supporting grassroots and civil society, while others prefer on-the-ground restoration projects. There are funders that make large grants but are fairly rigid in process, other funders that make smaller grants but are flexible in their grant-making.

It is a rich ecosystem and the individual pieces line up well with the jigsaw pieces outlined on page 12. However, insights from the survey and interviews suggest that water funders are generally acting in isolation from one another, meaning there is limited communication or coordination between them, and even between those that share similar strategies or focus areas. So while the water funding community is diverse, in biological terms, it is yet to reach a stage that it could be called 'functional.'

[I]nsights from the survey and interviews suggest that water funders are generally acting in isolation from one another, meaning there is limited communication and coordination between them...

# Foundations for a Social Ecosystem

Although there is limited collaboration currently occurring among water funders, there are a number of emerging efforts to create the social infrastructure to support stronger connections, networking and collaboration. All of these efforts are fairly new or still developing but they indicate a growing interest and appetite amongst water funders to support and invest in creating the social ecosystem to capitalize on the diversity of organizations and approaches outlined above.

## CEGN National Water Funders Group

The National Water Funders Group was established by the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Network (CEGN) in the Fall of 2009. Its evolution to date has been fairly organic and somewhat ad hoc. It is national in scope and open to grantmakers who are providing support or are exploring the provision of support for water initiatives in Canada. Over the past five years, the group has hosted a number of webinar information sessions on topics such as capacity building for the grassroots, effective communications, and implications of changes to the Fisheries Act. It has also hosted in-person workshops to bring water funders together to discuss opportunities to collaborate, including:

- **Inaugural Water Funders Workshop (Toronto, May 2010)** – a one-day gathering of water funders from across Canada held on Toronto Island prior to CEGN's annual conference.
- **Environmental Commissioner's Report (Toronto, December, 2010)** – organized in collaboration with the Munk School at the University of Toronto, Scott Vaughan (then federal environmental commissioner) presented on the freshwater sections of his environmental audit with responses from panel of water experts.

- **Restoring the Lifeblood (Toronto, October, 2011)** – organized in collaboration with the Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples, this one-day workshop focused on strengthening the relationship between philanthropy and First Nations around water issues.
- **Water Funders Workshop (Winnipeg, June 2013)** – a half-day workshop of funders from across the country organized as part of CEGN’s annual conference.

A steering committee has been established for the National Water Funders Group and it is planning a full day gathering and field trip for May 2014 prior to the annual CEGN conference in Calgary.

## Water Funders Retreat (Vancouver, 2012)

In April 2012, the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation and Tides Canada Foundation hosted a water funders retreat in Vancouver. This retreat brought together 20 foundations from across the country with 12 freshwater leaders and experts. At this meeting, funders expressed a desire to better understand the impediments to closer collaboration among water funders. One of the explicit needs and action items coming out of this retreat was a landscape report to more clearly map out water funder interests and priorities, and to help reveal these impediments. This identified need was the genesis of this report.

## Emerging Regional Funder Groups

- **B.C. Water Funders Group** – between 2009 and 2011, water funders that included the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the Bullitt Foundation, and Vancouver Foundation, informally coordinated their water funding efforts around a common focus – modernization of the B.C. Water Act. Collaborative activity slowed in 2012 but funder discussions were sparked again in May 2013 by a meeting hosted by the B.C. Real Estate Foundation. At this meeting, a B.C. Water Funders Group was established and it has since expanded to a dozen funders, has held three informational webinars and met in-person on two more occasions. The group has now established a formal steering committee and terms of reference. It has also approved an annual plan and budget for 2013-2014 that will guide its activities and provide coordination infrastructure. At the time of writing, a new BC Water Sustainability Act has been introduced and is set to be passed. The BC Water Funders Group has committed to support efforts to help ensure the Act is effectively implemented.
- **Great Lakes Funder Collaboration** – this group was established in 2011. The Collaboration is a binational network that is co-chaired by a U.S. and Canadian funder and has hired consultants to help provide coordination support. The group hosts at least one in-person gathering per year and meets semi-regularly by conference call. To date, the focus has been predominantly on information exchange but the group has established working groups to facilitate greater collaboration. At this time, the membership is heavily weighted towards American funders. There is an emerging effort to increase Canadian representation and the group has established a specific binational working group that has identified strengthening freshwater philanthropy on the Canadian side as a focus for 2014.



## Our Living Waters

Our Living Waters is a new strategic initiative designed to amplify the impact of Canada's growing national water movement by bringing the energies, capacities and reach of local and grassroots, regional and national NGOs, funders and other actors together under a common agenda for change. Currently in development, it is envisioned as a decade-long, Canada-wide initiative built around a central goal: "All waters in Canada in good health or better by 2025. The initiative has been developed with an explicit objective of bringing together funders and a diverse group of water leaders to establish collective priorities. As well as participating in this process from the outset, Mountain Equipment Co-op and Tides Canada Foundation have played a leadership role in convening and funding the early stages of the initiative and have hired an independent consultant to support its development. The next stage for the initiative will be translating the central goal and a series of 'winning conditions' (Box 3) into tangible outcomes and a plan for collective action. The group has discussed a public launch for the initiative for Fall 2014.

The initiative has been developed with an explicit objective of bringing together funders and a diverse group of water leaders to establish collective priorities.

### Box 3. Our Living Waters – Winning Conditions

Winning conditions	Description	Strategic themes
A shared water stewardship ethic	A diverse population of individuals and organizations with a shared water stewardship ethic ensuring the health of our waters	Capacity and constituency building
Common water narrative	A shared story connects regions and winning conditions	
Engaged People	Constituencies with influence engaging in effective collective decision making and exercising authority	
Sound water knowledge base	Accessible scientific, traditional and local knowledge that is used to monitor, assess, and report on freshwater health and to anticipate and understand emerging issues	Pooling water knowledge
Effective public policy	A public policy framework supported by financial and institutional capacity for sustained, effective implementation	Revitalizing water policy and governance
Enforced legal systems	Legal systems are accessible and establish standards and processes that are enforced and ensure accountability	
Sustainable built environments	Human-made surroundings and their supporting infrastructure function in harmony with watershed ecosystems	Living in harmony with water
Supportive economies	Economic systems support healthy watershed	

### Summary

The current waterscape of freshwater funders is extremely diverse. This diversity could be a major asset in meeting the challenges facing fresh water in Canada, but water funders are not currently connected enough to capitalize on this latent strength. However, the foundations for greater collaboration are beginning to emerge. Whether these efforts to create collaborative infrastructure will inspire the development of a vibrant new social ecosystem will depend on the perceived benefits of collaboration, overcoming the barriers that impede funders working more closely, and having the right ingredients in place. The next chapter shares some key insights from water funders on these three important topics.

# INSIGHTS: BUILDING A COLLABORATIVE CULTURE



Insights on benefits, barriers and ingredients were provided in interviews with 20 water funding organizations.

“A big benefit of collaboration occurs when there’s something that needs to be done in the region and we don’t have enough money to do it ourselves.”

Molly Flanagan, Joyce Foundation

“I often contact colleagues to get their feedback on organizations that we are looking to fund. This collaboration not only provides us with valuable insight but also significantly reduces our due diligence time.”

Peter Kendall, Schad Foundation

“We all have our pattern of how we are engaged and I love to hear other stories from other foundations. Each time, it brings me some other ways of thinking and ideas.”

Dominique Monchamp, de Gaspé  
Beaubien Foundation



## Benefits: 5 Reasons to Collaborate

Most funders deal in the currency of ‘impact’ and a core reason for working with other funders is the potential to exponentially increase the impact that you can achieve as a single organization. Leveraging one’s own efforts to support or motivate others with common purpose manifests itself in a number of ways:

### 1 Increased resources

The most obvious effect of leveraging is increasing the level of financial resources that can be focused on a common priority. This is also achieved by reducing the amount of overlap or redundancy in grant-making (Note: this is not to say that some redundancy isn’t useful and a necessary part of philanthropy).

### 2 Due diligence

Working more closely with other funders can be very helpful when undertaking due diligence on potential grantees or projects as funder colleagues may have valuable knowledge or experience related to that grantee or project. When supporting something collaboratively, it allows the due diligence to be spread amongst different funding partners.

### 3 Mutual learning

Freshwater protection is a complex issue and different funders have different levels of expertise and experience with funding freshwater work. For example, some may focus on local level initiatives, others on high level policy. There is a significant opportunity for learning about the issue, the players, and funding strategies in collaborative discussions that will help improve and advance one’s own strategy and approach.

## 4 Gaps identification

When funders work together, especially when they work closely with advisors and grantees, it is easier to identify some of the gaps in strategy or activity. It's also easier to fill those gaps when the resources required to do so can be shared amongst the group. Additionally, in the situation where some funders change priorities and are no longer able to fund water projects, it is easier for other funders to anticipate the gap left by that funder and attempt to fill it or minimize disruption to grantees and efforts on the ground.

## 5 Easier for grantees and advisors

It can make it a lot easier and less time consuming for grantees if they know that funders are working together. Rather than making several different pitches to suit different funders' priorities, they may be able to make a consistent pitch to those funders or even a single pitch to the collaborative. Reporting can also become much more efficient, especially if some funders agree to accept the same report from the grantee. In grantee world, time saved in fundraising equates to more time getting the real work done and having a greater impact. A collaborative can also be a more efficient experience for advisors as they can come and speak to the entire group as opposed to each funder individually.

*"I think there's a possibility of joint applications and reporting for common grantees or applicants."*

Andre Vallillee, Ontario Trillium Foundation (currently Environment Project Director at the Metcalf Foundation)

## Barriers: 5 Reasons NOT to Collaborate

When it comes to water, it is evident that there is a stronger culture of collaboration in the grantee community than in the funder community. Freshwater groups are increasingly working together to capitalize on different strengths and create collaborative initiatives. This is despite the real concern that they are competing for limited resources. In addition, funders frequently encourage or require evidence of collaboration in their grant processes. Meanwhile, funders themselves are only just starting to explore meaningful collaboration with each other. The interviews provided some insights into some of the reasons behind the lack of collaboration amongst funders.

“I think strategic collaboration is part of our jobs. But it often doesn’t get recognized or acknowledged, partly because it’s taking a longer term approach, and you might not see the quick impact. But if we are really concerned about deepening our impact, we have to see the forest from the trees and devote part of each and every day to collaborating.”

David Hendrickson, Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia

“The biggest barrier is just knowing who the other funders are and then finding the right point to work together towards a shared vision or goal.”

Kim Hardy, Tides Canada Foundation

### 1 Lack of time

Funders face multiple competing priorities for their time from meeting with current or potential grantees to reviewing applications, to assessing grantee reports, to preparing for Board or committee meetings. Most funders are not purely focused on fresh water and also have demands related to other areas they fund. Amongst these competing priorities, collaboration has typically been viewed as an “off the side of the desk” activity and not a core strategy for achieving desired impact.

### 2 Unaware of other funders

Given the diversity of the water funding community, it can be challenging for funders to figure out who else is out there funding water in their region or in the areas in which they are focused. While water funders all have extensive networks, these networks do not necessarily intersect and when they do they are typically with other similar types of funders. Size can also be a factor. Smaller funders often believe that larger funders will be less interested in working with them or that they are less able to contribute to collaborative efforts. Culture and language can also be a barrier.





### 3 Path dependence

In theory, funders have the freedom to take more risks than most other sectors and institutions. However, over time, most funders develop structures, practices and organizational culture that produce institutional norms. These norms can be surprisingly hard to change even if they are no longer serving the mission of the organization. For funders, path dependence can be a powerful force and a barrier to exploring new and more collaborative approaches to achieving impact.

### 4 Loss of control and accountability

Most funders spend a lot of time and effort thinking through the strategies they want to employ to achieve their missions. In true collaboration there is a need for compromise that may require organizations to alter a specific approach or strategy. Some organizations (or people) find it challenging to give up full control and direction over strategy and approach. There is also a perception that collaboration can make it more difficult to differentiate the outcomes of one funder's efforts from another. This may be a problem for some organizations that feel a responsibility to their Boards or other stakeholders to demonstrate the direct impact of their efforts. At a more practical level, when collaboration gets to the stage of co-funding or pooling resources, the mechanics are more complex and ensuring there are strong lines of accountability for how money is spent can become more challenging.

### 5 Lack of decision-making power

Another barrier identified in interviews was the decision-making structures of many funder organizations. Often, participants in funder conversations are unable to make decisions or commit to specific actions during those conversations because of the requirement to seek Board approval or sign-off from senior management. This increases the transaction costs of collaboration for that participant. Since Board meetings tend to be once a quarter at most, it can also cause substantial delays in activity, sapping momentum and energy from a collaborative effort.

"It's momentum, it's inertia, it's path dependence, whatever you want to call it. Our institutional structures are such that these are the rules of the game, and changing that is a culture shift. It's extremely difficult."

Andrew Stegemann, Mountain Equipment Co-op

"It's hard to give up that control. We don't have the same level of accountability if we put money in a pooled fund and then distribute from there. It feels too many steps removed."

Molly Flanagan, Joyce Foundation

"When you get a lot of funders to the table, a lot of the people that show up can't actually say 'I can make the decision.' They'll say 'I can take this back to my board who will make the decision.' So, how do you get people there at the end of the day who can make the decision?"

Cheryl de Paoli, Alberta Real Estate Foundation



“It’s important to really clearly articulate the intention of collaboration from the outset. I think that really helps people understand why they’re there and what they might get out of it.”

Kim Hardy, Tides Canada Foundation

“If there’s a clearly defined need and a compelling reason to collaborate, such as a specific policy lever or a specific opportunity, then it continues. But if we collaborate around the water issue because it’s generally important, I don’t think it works very well.”

Steve Whitney, Bullitt Foundation

“Fun is a big part of the relationship building. I’ve definitely seen more work get done in my career over drinks after a meeting or other informal situations than when you’re sitting seriously around a table grilling each other, so I think it’s really important.”

Molly Flanagan, Joyce Foundation

## Key Ingredients: 5 Elements for Successful Collaboration

During the funder interviews, there were a number of common themes mentioned that related to key ingredients for funders being successful in working together. These themes are summarized below as five essential elements for effective collaboration.

### 1 Shared vision or purpose

A number of interviewees commented that it is not enough to simply share a general interest in fresh water and expect collaboration to happen. Funders need to identify a shared vision, goal or purpose in order to build and maintain a collaborative effort. Some funders suggested that there also needs to be a pressing issue or specific opportunity to help create the impetus for collaboration to occur.

### 2 Funder champions/leaders

The presence of funder champions who take on a leadership role tends to be a common ingredient for funder collaboration. Most collaborative efforts seem to be spurred by one or two funders who take the initiative in bringing a group of funders together and who help drive the collaborative process. While this is a common ingredient, it can also be a vulnerability if these funders (or specific individuals within those funding organizations) move on and there is no one ready to take up that leadership role.

### 3 Social alchemy

Building trust and a comfort level amongst a group of funders is a major ingredient for successful collaboration. Much of this comes down to human factors such as the balance of personalities, the openness of the people involved,

and the individual respect shown in conversations. All of these things are hard to predict and control. However, it is possible to create the conditions for alchemy by ensuring there are both formal and informal opportunities for funders to establish and build relationships. This includes social opportunities such as relaxed dinners as well as opportunities for shared experiences, such as field trips and getting on the water.

## 4 Infrastructure and coordination

One area that was highlighted was the benefit of having someone in a coordinating role to set up meetings or conference calls, follow up on action items, share key information and facilitate a shared understanding of the interests of members. Technological infrastructure, such as listservs, websites or online fora plays an important role in supporting knowledge exchange. As well, funders may require shared funding infrastructure such as pooled funds, joint reporting and accountability protocols. Another aspect is having a governance framework that clarifies the purpose, how decisions are made and the parameters for participation, but it is important that this framework not be overly rigid. Building flexibility into the design of the collaborative will ensure it does not get bogged down in process.

## 5 Breaking out of the funder bubble

Another key ingredient is finding ways to engage outside knowledge and expertise to inform funders' efforts and decisions. A failure to seek ongoing input from those closest to the issue or doing the actual work can result in one of two problems. One is that collaborative conversations between funders can stall at a high level because they lack specific and relevant content to take them into specific strategies or actions. The second is that funders can make decisions that are disconnected from the current needs and opportunities on the ground, resulting in wasted resources and minimal impact.

"I think infrastructure for collaboration is always about the space in between... the communications and facilitation between folks, following up after meetings with information or the action items that people had committed to."

Andre Vallillee, formerly Ontario Trillium Foundation

"You can spend a lot of time figuring out how to collaborate and then that becomes the discussion instead of doing the work. Keeping flexibility is really important so that you don't drown in process."

Pegi Dover, Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Network

"It's useful for funders to talk to funders – whether about strategy, partnership or considerations of timing and alignment of resources. That said, it needs to go hand in hand with an ongoing conversation with those working in the field and actually doing the work."

Mark Gifford, Vancouver Foundation

## Summary

The insights provided in interviews with water funders show an encouraging enthusiasm and interest in collaboration. However, there are several key institutional, informational, and cultural barriers that will continue to inhibit collaboration unless funders can find a way to address them. As well, successful collaboration depends on a number of key elements being in place, some of which are quite intangible. Nevertheless, there are efforts that water funders can undertake to facilitate the right ingredients for working together and reduce the barriers that block the path to a more collaborative future. What this future might look like and how funders can get there is the focus of the final chapter.



# **TOMORROW'S WATERSCAPE: A DYNAMIC ECOSYSTEM**



# Vision 2025: Imagining the Future for Freshwater Funders

Below is a hypothetical vision of the impact that freshwater funders could achieve over the next decade and what a dynamic social ecosystem of water funders might look like.

## A Measurable Impact on the Health of Canada's Fresh Water

In 2025, the freshwater funding community is able to reflect on its critical contribution to some remarkable successes (see Box 4).

There are still considerable challenges, not least the very noticeable effects of a changing climate, but it is clear that Canadian society is much more resilient in the face of these and other changes as a result of the actions of freshwater funders.

## Working Together Has Become a Top Priority

Water funders are working with NGOs, First Nations, governments, experts and other sectors to co-design and support ambitious collaborative initiatives that align with the scale of the challenges facing fresh water in Canada. Rather than a 'side of the desk' activity, collaboration has been identified in funders' theories of change as fundamental to achieving impact. As a result, 90% of water funders are now actively participating in strategic collaboration through a regional water funder group, an issue focus working group, a collective impact initiative or some other mechanism.





#### **Box 4. Remarkable Successes**

- Major lakes such as Lake Erie and Lake Winnipeg are now safe for swimming thanks to historic accords signed with the agricultural sector.
- 80% of Canada's freshwater systems are now rated as being in good or excellent health by the Canadian River Health Assessment Initiative, a collaborative project between the federal government, First Nations, NGOs, and philanthropy.
- There is a Canada-Wide Water Policy Framework, which establishes common standards and performance measures in areas such as water quality, drinking water, sewage treatment, fish protection and interjurisdictional management.
- Three-quarters of Canada's provinces and territories are now supporting local watershed governance, with real powers delegated to watershed entities that are sustainably funded through a blend of water licence fees, social financing, and public donations. Many of these entities involve co-governance partnerships with First Nations.

### **There is a Culture of Collaboration**

The concepts of strategic collaboration and collective impact are recognized and adopted by many Boards that now require staff to dedicate a significant portion of their time to working with other funders through formal and informal means. In fact, a key metric for Board evaluation of staff and organizational performance has become the active engagement in strategic collaboration and collective impact initiatives. This core objective is supported by the fact that collaborative initiatives have established sophisticated frameworks for shared impact measurement.

## Strategies are Inter-Connected

Every water funder sees a role and niche for themselves in the broader water funder community. Larger funders are offering stable multi-year support, while small funders are providing quick response grants to capitalize on strategic opportunities as they arise. Funders have aligned their strategic approaches, which have allowed them to become more focused. For example, funders that are focusing their funds exclusively on citizen and grassroots engagement are actively working with funders focused on public policy to ensure that policy reforms have citizen support and that those reforms will help support citizen involvement in local watershed governance.

## Coordination is Occurring Across Multiple Scales

Funders are no longer supporting balkanized local and regional efforts across the country. Wherever possible these efforts are connected to each other and

Funders are no longer supporting balkanized local and regional efforts across the country. Wherever possible these efforts are connected to each other and at multiple scales.

National and provincial initiatives have been designed to support and empower local solutions while at the same time ensuring there are holistic basin-wide outcomes being achieved and common standards established where necessary. Funders are actively supporting the sharing of innovations and best practices at the local level and in different regions, helping to scale up solutions more quickly.



## Emergent Solutions are Encouraged

While hard to plan for, freshwater funders have created the networks and infrastructure that increase the likelihood of emergent thinking and solutions. Funders can identify numerous examples and case studies of these emergent solutions where regular interaction, shared learning, and effective feedback loops have resulted in unanticipated opportunities and new approaches to addressing complex water problems. Emergence has been particularly prevalent and effective when connected with collective impact initiatives.

## Over Ten Years, Canada Has Seen a Ten-Fold Increase in Freshwater Funding

One very concrete result of this culture of collaboration is that freshwater funding has increased ten-fold since 2014. Some funders have increased their investments in freshwater funding but more significant has been the attraction of new funders to the community. This can be attributed to an active campaign by freshwater funders to engage and recruit new funding organizations including large individual donors, community foundations, corporate funders, and other foundations. These dollars have been used to further leverage public and private sector investments with social finance now playing a major role in support freshwater sustainability.

## Investing in a New Funder Ecology

So how do freshwater funders get from where they are today to the vision of tomorrow? The findings of the survey and interviews indicate that there are three key areas that need strengthening in order to support the vision of a more connected and effective freshwater funding community:

1. **Social Infrastructure** – funders need collaborative infrastructure that makes it easier to create trusting human relationships to achieve collective outcomes.
2. **Data and Intelligence** – funders need timely and accessible information to identify other funding organizations that share their priorities and measure the impact of their collective efforts.
3. **Cultural Change** – while funders talk a lot about collaboration, there is not yet a truly collaborative culture in the funder community. This suggests the need for a cultural shift.

While these areas do not fit the standard priorities or criteria of most funders, making progress in each of them should be viewed as a valuable investment in a new social ecosystem. As in the natural world, this ecosystem should be recognized as a critical factor in the success of each individual actor. Moreover, the cumulative impact of the freshwater funding community will be a direct reflection of the overall health and vitality of this ecosystem. Outlined below are recommendations on strategies that could help address these three needs and set water funders on their way to creating this new ecology.

# 1. From Network to Ecosystem: A Social Infrastructure Plan

There are a number of opportunities to create the social infrastructure that can assist in the formation and ongoing implementation of collaborative initiatives. When considering these opportunities, it is important to recognize that there is a continuum of collaboration (see Figure 9 – Ladder of Collaboration) and that collaborative forums will vary in the functions they can perform on this continuum depending on their scale and design.

Building on emerging efforts, the infographic (Figure 10 – Social Infrastructure Model for Canadian Freshwater Funders) outlines a potential model of social infrastructure for Canadian freshwater funders. The model would allow flexibility for deeper collaboration around specific regions or issues, while ensuring there is an overarching framework that facilitates shared learning between water funders and water funder collaboratives across the country. It also builds on the foundations already in place with the National Water Funders Group, regional water funder groups in B.C. and Great Lakes, and the emerging Our Living Waters initiative.

**Figure 9. Ladder of Collaboration**



(Figure 9 continued)

**The following describes in more detail the different stages of collaboration outlined in the ladder diagram on the previous page:**

**Information sharing** – this might be sharing information on specific water issues, on interesting projects or the credibility and effectiveness of potential grantees. It may happen informally through funder conversations or more formally through organized webinars, workshops or online forums. Many existing efforts that are described as ‘collaboration’ are at this stage.

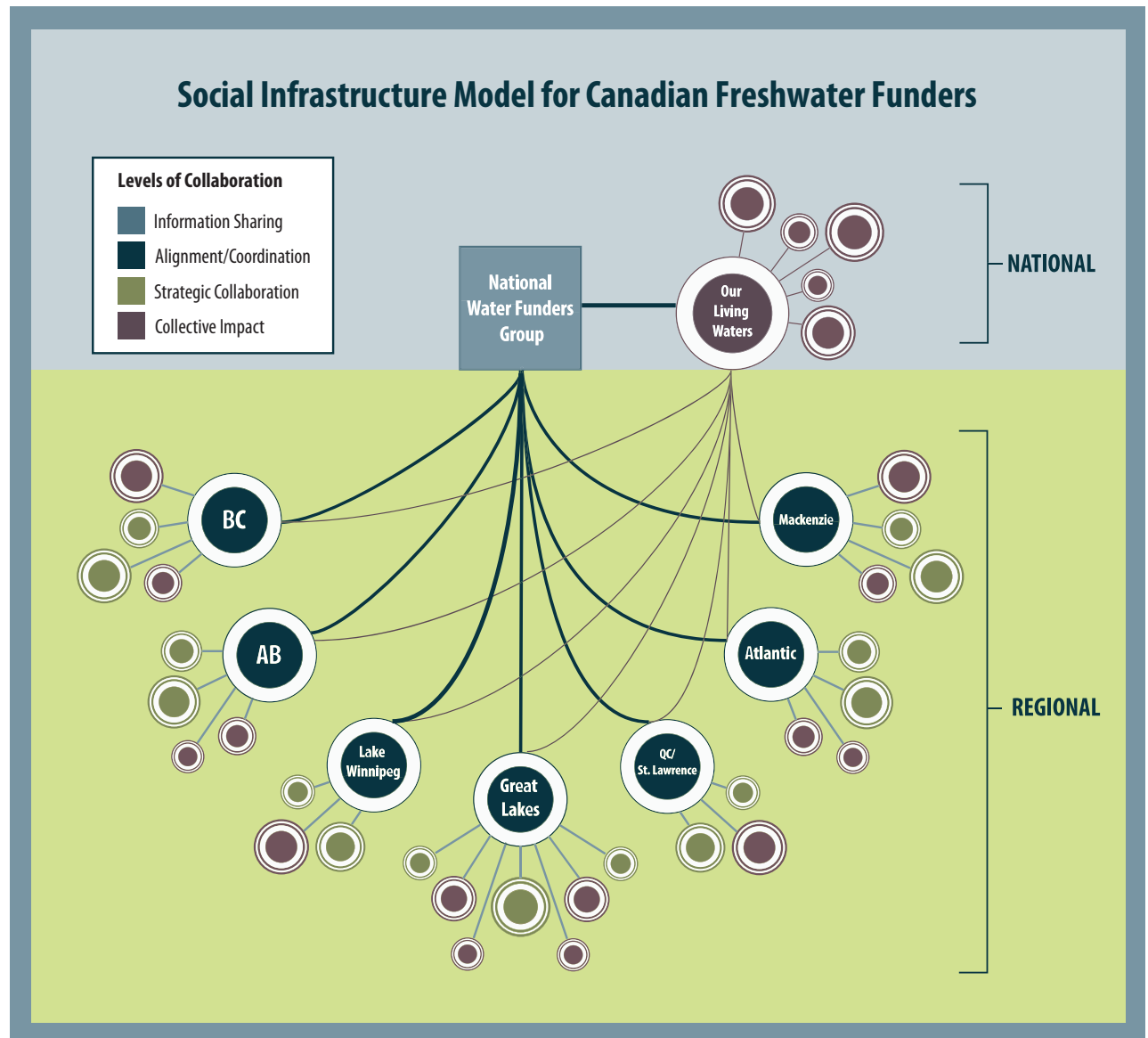
**Alignment** – at an informal level, this may be as simple as one funder picking up the phone and calling another funder and asking if they would be interested in providing complementary funding for a particular project. Alignment can also be more formal where two to three funders agree to share the due diligence, devise a common reporting structure and meet with grantees together. This is less common.

**Coordination** – involves multiple funders working together to support complementary elements of a multi-part project or initiative. For example, there may be a coalition effort where funders agree to fund different partners of that coalition. As with alignment, this coordination can still happen relatively informally.

**Strategic collaboration** – involves a more intentional and proactive approach than coordination. Funders actively work together to develop an explicit joint funding strategy. It involves a clear alignment of resources for different elements of a strategic initiative, regular communication between funders, and shared accountability and evaluation measures. There is limited evidence of this type of collaboration occurring amongst water funders to date.

**Collective Impact** – involves funders and water leaders co-designing multi-faceted strategies to achieve systemic or long-term change. To date, there has been very limited experience with collective impact in environmental philanthropy Canada.

Figure 10. Social Infrastructure Model for Canadian Freshwater Funders



The following describes in more detail how this social infrastructure could be developed and how the different elements could operate.

## Create a Central Hub (Information Sharing)

At the core of this model is a central hub, envisaged as the National Water Funders Group, which is hosted by the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Network (CEGN). This hub would play a key role in information sharing and facilitating relationship-building. In particular, it would be responsible for:

1. **Maintaining a sense of the big picture** – keeping track of the various interests and priorities of water funders, where funder groups exist, and identifying opportunities for collaboration.
2. **Tracking the funding pool and measuring sector-wide impact** – monitoring whether funding support for water is increasing or decreasing, and keeping track of key metrics and examples of impact.
3. **Information exchange and shared learning** – sharing relevant information and hosting webinars to facilitate peer exchange across regions and issues.
4. **Encouraging and supporting the regional funder groups** – to begin with, the hub may need to play an active role in encouraging groups to formalize; once up and running, the role would be mostly a support function.
5. **Hosting an annual national water funders gathering** – potentially held in conjunction with CEGN's annual conference, this would provide an opportunity for in-person relationship building and peer learning between different regions and funder groups.





### **Box 5. Communications Infrastructure**

Having effective communications infrastructure in place is an important complement to any social infrastructure strategy. These tools include technologies such as listservs and webinars that allow funders to keep up to date on latest news and developments and hear directly from water leaders. Member-access websites can be useful for making key documents easily accessible to members of funder groups, such as governance, strategy and important reference materials. Conference calls or group video calls are also essential communications tools for keeping momentum going in between in-person funder meetings.

Ideally, the central hub is able to share these tools and technologies with regional funder groups to keep costs down and minimize the time spent in setting them up. Currently, the B.C. Water Funders Group is working with CEGN to establish a member-access web portal for its members. It also uses a listserv established by CEGN to provide monthly news updates to members.

## Establish Regional Funder Groups (Alignment/Coordination)

The waterscape scan shows that most funders support water initiatives at a regional or local scale. Based on this fact and also the physical size of the country, it will likely be easier and more efficient for funders to move up the collaboration ladder at the regional scale. Regional funder groups could be established based on provincial boundaries (as in the case of the B.C. Water Funders Group), or aligned with one of Canada's major watersheds (as in the case of the Great Lakes Funder Collaboration).

Each regional funder group will be its own ecosystem of funders, requiring unique structures and processes. Some group members will be interested in information sharing and peer learning, others will be keen to align their efforts and avoid duplications, while some will be keen to drive a shared agenda and coordinate strategies. Regional funder groups should seek to accommodate these different interests and help support funders in moving from information sharing to actively aligning resources and coordinating strategies. Depending on the size and make-up of the group, it may be feasible for a regional funder group to facilitate strategic collaboration or even evolve into a collective impact initiative. However, it seems more likely that regional funder groups will help spark working groups that can engage in this deeper level of collaboration.

## Launch Working Groups (Strategic Collaboration)

Strategic collaboration is most likely to occur where funders share specific goals or interests that make the benefits of working together in a more intensive and strategic way clearly evident. For example, funders may share the goal of a specific policy reform, or seek protection of a particular watershed, or perhaps have a shared interest in an approach, such as engagement organizing. Working groups of funders with shared objectives typically emerge over time following relationship-building that may have occurred informally, or more formally through a regional funder group. There is limited experience with working groups in the Canadian water funding community, but Box 6 describes how both the B.C. Water Funders Group and the Great Lakes Funder Collaboration are establishing working groups to take collaboration in their regions to the next level.

It is also at the working group level where it is easiest and most appropriate to work more collaboratively with grantees and other sectors. As such, working groups also provide a potential forum to move another rung up the collaboration ladder to collective impact.



### **Box 6. B.C. and Great Lakes Funders Collaboratives: Evolving to Working Groups**

The Great Lakes Funder Collaboration has established a number of working groups to support more strategic collaboration between members. These include working groups on: Funder Mapping; Sustainability and Green Infrastructure; a Binational Working Group; and Capacity Building. The Collaboration involves funders that vary in terms of where they would like to be situated on the collaboration ladder. Some members are most interested in networking and information sharing while others are very keen to find ways to work together strategically. So the working groups were established to provide a forum for subsets of funders that are specifically seeking to work together on collaborative strategies to tackle areas of common interest.

Similarly, the B.C. Water Funders Group has approved an annual plan that will establish working groups to bring together subsets of funders and water leaders around issues such as the B.C. Water Sustainability Act and sustainable funding for watershed governance.

## Cultivate CI Initiatives (Collective Impact)

Collective impact initiatives are at the top of the collaboration ladder because they require funders to actively engage with other sectors and be participants in designing and implementing strategies for systemic change. Successful CI initiatives have been defined by five elements that they share in common:

1. **Common Agenda:** All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.
2. **Shared Measurement:** Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
3. **Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
4. **Continuous Communication:** Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and appreciate common motivation.
5. **Backbone Organization:** Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies.<sup>11</sup>

FSG, a consulting group that has worked with funders on a number of collective impact projects, describes the move to collective impact as a paradigm shift for funders. FSG outlines the change in approach in Figure 11 – Collective Impact: A New Mindset for Funders.<sup>12</sup>

## Figure 11. Collective Impact: A New Mindset for Funders

**The current approach of many funders is less conducive to solving complex problems:**

Funders develop internal foundation strategy

Funders pick and fund individual grantees, who work separately and compete to produce results

Funders pre-determine approaches to get to the desired outcome

Funders build capacity of individual organizations

Funders evaluate individual grants and determine attribution

Funders are held accountable to internal stakeholders (eg. Board)

Funders work independently and don't always coordinate their actions with other funders

**In collective impact context, funders shift their mindset to an “adaptive” approach more aligned with complex issues:**

Funders co-create strategy with other key stakeholders

Funders fund a long-term process of change around a specific problem in active collaboration with many organizations within a larger system

Funders must be flexible and adaptive to get to the intended outcome with stakeholders

Funders build the capacity of multiple organizations to work together

Funders evaluate progress towards a social goal and degree of contribution to its solution

Funders are held jointly accountable for achievement of goals developed as part of the effort

Funders actively coordinate their action and share lessons learned

Box 7 (next page) outlines examples of collective impact initiatives that have been established, as well as an emerging opportunity in fresh water.



## Box 7. Collective Impact: Examples & Opportunity

The collective impact approach is rapidly growing in recognition and application across the world. It has been applied to diverse social problems from healthcare reform, to poverty alleviation, to community economic growth.

### **RE-AMP Energy Network**

Although there are fewer examples in the environmental sector, one prominent case study is the RE-AMP Energy Network, which comprises 125 nonprofits and funders across eight states in the U.S.'s upper Midwest. This network has already had significant success in moving towards its ambitious goal of reducing regional global warming emissions by 80% (from 2005) by 2050. These successes include halting the development of 28 new coal plants, passing energy efficiency policies in six states, and promoting one of the most rigorous cap-and-trade programs in the U.S. It has also increased funding for its cause, created shared resources and developed stronger relationships between funders and nonprofits.<sup>13</sup>

### **Vibrant Communities Canada**

In Canada, there has been limited experience with collective impact. However, one initiative that has been employing the principles of collective impact is Vibrant Communities Canada. This initiative shares an overarching goal of connecting 100 communities across Canada to reduce poverty for one million Canadians. Since its founding in 2002, Vibrant Communities has grown to include 13 linked regional collective impact initiatives and the effort has scaled to more than 50 communities across Canada. Participating communities have locally-designed initiatives, each with a multi-sector leadership team. The initiative has four lead sponsors: The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, Human Resources and Social Development Canada and Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement.<sup>14</sup>



(Box 7 continued)

### **Our Living Waters**

Our Living Waters is an emerging collective impact initiative that has established the goal that all waters in Canada will be in good health or better by 2025. The initiative is co-sponsored by MEC and Tides Canada and has brought together leaders from 10 national and regional organizations including the Waterkeepers Network, the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources, Living Lakes Canada, the Canadian Freshwater Alliance, WWF-Canada, the Forum for Leadership on Water, the POLIS Project (University of Victoria), the Ecology Action Centre, MEC and Tides Canada. With strategic leadership and coordination from Tony Maas of Maas Strategies, this initiative seeks to connect, support and enhance existing efforts around eight winning conditions for achieving the goal (see page 33). Our Living Waters is still in a development phase, but is emerging as a promising opportunity for applying a collective impact approach to the complex problem of freshwater protection.



## 2. Reduce the Data Deficit: An Intelligence Sharing Strategy

This report is just a snapshot of a constantly evolving waterscape. To support collaboration, water funders need regularly updated information at their fingertips and the ability to track whether their collective efforts are making a difference. Outlined below are some ideas on how to improve the intelligence gathering and information sharing process to reduce this data deficit.

- **Develop an Online Water Funders Directory** - Building on the data collected from this current study and the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Database, the National Water Funders Group (through CEGN) could create a web-based searchable directory that allows funders to easily identify and contact other funders that share common interests, such as the region they operate in, priority issues, or strategic approaches. The directory could also house data on the specific grants made by each funder and information on decision-making processes to help support coordinated grant-making.
- **State of the Sector Report** - The National Water Funders Group could prepare an annual or biennial report on the 'State of the Water Funding Community.' This would involve a comprehensive survey, similar to the one that was done for this report that would reveal and track key trends, such as whether the amount of funding going towards water is increasing or declining, and if there is increased collaboration occurring between funders.
- **Water Funders Impact Evaluation** - Evaluating impact should be a key function of regional funder groups, working groups and collective impact initiatives. The National Water Funders Group could support peer learning around the best evaluation methods, and ensure that key indicators of impact are rolled up in a national impact study.



### **Box 8. Great Lakes Funder Mapping Project**

The Great Lakes Funders Mapping Project is an initiative of the Great Lakes Funder Collaboration and is supported by a dedicated working group. To date, 25 foundations have contributed data to the project. Using this data, the project will create an online resource that will serve three core purposes: 1) A directory and inventory of Great Lakes funding organizations with information on funders' priorities, strategies, what lakes they are focused on and how much funding goes towards each region or strategy. 2) Present data on the grants being made in the Great Lakes, including information on grantees and detailed project descriptions. 3) Using aggregate data, the committee will analyze key trends and themes and present these back to the Great Lakes Funders Group. These trends and themes will help tell a broader story of funder impact and collaboration in the region and identify opportunities where funders can move collectively.<sup>15</sup>

## **3. Inspire a Cultural Evolution: A Leadership Education Campaign**

One key barrier that was identified by this study is a lack of priority placed on collaboration by funding organizations. Creating the strong social ecosystem required to address Canada's growing freshwater challenges will require a culture shift. Changing this culture in a meaningful way will need to start at the top with an education campaign directed at the leaders of funding organizations (senior management and Boards of Directors) around the role that collaboration can play in achieving their organization's desired impact.

An effective education campaign will require both an external and internal effort. Internally, staff of funding organizations should actively advocate for time and resources to engage and take leadership in collaboration. Wherever possible, they should also seek to educate their Boards and senior management on ways that collaboration could support their organization in better achieving impact.

Externally, funder groups and organizations, such as the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers Network, should seek to actively engage and recruit senior leaders and Board members to attend funder meetings and conferences, such as regional group meetings, the national water gathering and CEGN's annual conference. Field trips organized by funder groups also present a good opportunity to engage with Board members, who will likely be more interested in learning in informal settings in the watershed than attending more formal meetings. Creating effective evaluation metrics for collaborative efforts and sharing success stories with organizational leaders will also be essential for making the case for more strategic collaboration.

# CONCLUSION

Water funders come in all shapes and sizes. This study has revealed substantial variation in funder type, approaches to grant-making, scale of support, decision-making processes, and issue focus. This diversity has the potential to be a great strength if funders can find ways to connect and integrate their efforts. The water challenges facing Canada are growing and becoming increasingly complex. Solving them will require complementary and coordinated actions at multiple scales. While there is currently a mismatch between the scale and complexity of these challenges and the isolated approaches of water funders, the waterscape scan suggests many of the pieces required to address these challenges are present or emerging.

Although the prescription of greater collaboration sounds straightforward, there are a number of barriers that will need to be overcome in order to build a social ecosystem of freshwater funders over the next decade. Some of these require a culture shift in the water funder community so that a higher priority is placed on collaboration to support systemic change as opposed to isolated project-based grant-making. Other barriers can be reduced or removed with the creation of social infrastructure that clears the path to collaboration, and the availability of information that makes it easier to identify collaborative opportunities and demonstrate the value of working together.

It is clear that philanthropy has a critical role to play in freshwater protection, particularly in providing the disruptive capital to unlock new solutions through innovation, risk-taking and experimentation. In ten years, the health of Canada's rivers, lakes and aquifers will be the strongest indicator of the impact of freshwater funders. The findings of this report suggest that funders have a tremendous opportunity to mobilize their resources to ensure that Canada's waters remain swimmable, drinkable and fishable.

Water funders have taken the first steps on the journey towards this ten-year vision. The emergence of regional water funder groups in B.C. and the Great Lakes, the National Water Funders Group and the Our Living Waters initiative, are positive signs that funders are open to new ways of working together. It is time for freshwater funders to build on these foundations and make a collective investment in our freshwater future.

# APPENDIX

## List of Survey and Interview Respondents

Alberta Ecotrust Foundation	McLean Foundation
Alberta Real Estate Foundation	Mountain Equipment Co-Op
Bullitt Foundation	North Growth Foundation
Canadian Environmental Grantmakers Network	Okanagan Basin Water Board
C.S. Mott Foundation	Ontario Trillium Foundation
Calgary Foundation	Patagonia
Canadian Water Network	RBC Foundation
Carthy Foundation	Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia
de Gaspé Beaubien Foundation	Salamander Foundation
Echo Foundation	Schad Foundation
Environment Canada	Sitka Foundation
Federation of Canadian Municipalities	Small Change Fund
Fondation Hydro-Quebec pour l'environnement	Temagami Community Foundation
Freshwater Future	Thomas Sill Foundation
Glasswaters Foundation	Tides Canada
Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation	Toronto Community Foundation
John and Pat McCutcheon Charitable Foundation	Urban Systems Ltd
Joyce Foundation	Vancouver Foundation
Kresge Foundation	Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation
Max Bell Foundation	Windsor Essex Community Foundation
	Winnipeg Foundation



# ENDNOTES

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- 5 Cowichan Watershed Board: <http://www.cowichanwatershedboard.ca/>
- 6 Background on Lake Windermere Project: <http://www.wildsight.ca/windermere/background> ; Water Canada article: <https://watercanada.net/2013/living-lakes-canada/>
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# Why Water?

Below is a sample of quotes from interviews with funders that illustrate the diverse connections that funders have with fresh water:

“I’ve always been a water person. I would throw myself into water before I could actually swim. I think it’s a preexisting condition and Canada is a water country.”

– **Joyce Jennings, Darkhorse Fund at Tides Canada**

“The line I always like to use is: ‘If you don’t have fresh, clean running water in a community, you don’t have real estate value.’”

– **Cheryl de Paoli, Alberta Real Estate Foundation**

“Our focus on water stemmed from all the place-based work that we’ve been supporting, which has usually revolved around water in some way, such as the Peel Watershed, the Sacred Headwaters and the Mackenzie Basin.”

– **Kim Hardy, Tides Canada**

“About 5 years ago, the co-chairs of our Board of Directors, decided that it was time for the next generation to get involved in the foundation. They met with the 4 grandchildren, between 13 and 17. At the beginning, we suggested some other topics that we thought would be much easier to start with. They came back to us and said, ‘With all respect, we have no passion for the subjects you suggested. The subject that really lights up every one of us is water.’”

– **Dominique Monchamp, de Gaspé Beaubien Foundation**

“Patagonia’s grants program was born , in part, due to the mismanagement of the Ventura River, which flows just past our company’s headquarters. No natural resource is more precious than usable freshwater. None is shrinking faster as humans consume more and more. A large portion of our grants giving goes to grassroots environmental groups working to protect our freshwater resources.”

– **Lisa Myers, Patagonia**

“In 2011, we did an exercise where we went out and did a series of focus groups and interviews with stakeholders and individuals aware of the issues surrounding land use in the province... One of the top three issues was fresh water sustainability.”

– **Jack Wong, Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia**

“Fresh water is directly linked to almost every activity MEC members pursue. It’s directly relevant to watersports, and also to any multi-day trip where people usually camp close to water.”

– **Andrew Stegemann, MEC**