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Salish Sea Good Life ~ Peter Judd

## **Fresh Water: Making The Most of It**

*We are the earth, in our nourishment*

*We are the rains and oceans, in our veins*

*We are the breath of the forests of the land and sea*

Thus opens a song inspired by the Declaration of Interdependence written in 1992 for the United Nations' Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro by five members of the David Suzuki Foundation. These lines express the reverence with which I approach the topic of water, that element which comprises a good 70% of our bodies.

From its size, its weather and the of innumerable lakes and rivers, in which our very history resides, I gather the impression that Canada's fresh water is its most abundant resource.

On the Islands, as a small producer supplying our local farmers' market I am keenly aware of the amount of water storage required for cultivating crops during our very dry summers, even though we are blessed with nearly a meter's worth of precipitation annually.

In planning a fine future for ourselves we must become expert shepherds of this liquid treasure from heaven. This requires skill in legal, trade, and political arenas to craft equitable contracts with neighbours near and far; plus diligent scrutiny of regulation and the actions of all levels of government.

### **Reducing Run-Off, Keeping Water in The Ground**

On the ground, landscaping determines the ability to recharge aquifers. Consider the lowly curb in your street; it functions to prevent the land beneath your community from receiving its annual allotment of moisture.

We need building codes that ensure solid foundations for

roads and buildings but these aims need not be in conflict with aquifer recharge. For example, porous driveway and parking surfaces, natural and constructed wetlands can support wildlife, filter water, process sewage, cool buildings, and nourish urban green spaces. The optimal place for water is in the ground or wetlands as they give order of magnitude greater storage and usefulness than reservoirs—though both have their advantages.

On bare sloping terrain, tiny rivulets on gentle slopes can eventually flow together to form earth-moving torrents as they descend and run-off into rivers and oceans. A vegetated slope allows water to pause at numerous points of human usage along the way. Absorbent, productive soils can then release moisture gradually to lower zones rather than shedding so rapidly that sediment and nutrients are carried away to pollute elsewhere.

At the UN Habitat Forum in 1976, I witnessed Australian, P A Yeomans, describe his Keyline Plan for water management in arid lands. Keyline designs have been developed over these last 40 years to defeat erosion, to provide crops in dry lands with farm-scale equipment and to use the output of urban roofs and roads for more than simply flushing away to a river or ocean.

Rainwater harvesting does not deplete downstream populations. Interestingly, small dams (ponds) yield more water than large dams, usually due to losses in evaporation from the reservoir surface or streams moving water through it.

We can do much in our own run-off areas with multiple, people-scale berms and swales making multiple surface water holdings that put water directly back into the soil for crops, shrubs and trees while feeding the depths as well. ☞

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