

Field of Interest: Environment

Case Study: Landscaping for Water Conservation



Photo by Flickr user: [Kyle Pearce](#)

Organization: Friends of Summerland Gardens

The Friends of Summerland Ornamental Gardens is a community-based, non-profit organization formed in 1991 to maintain, enhance and conserve the landscape features of the Summerland Gardens.

Problem or issue: Freshwater conservation

Freshwater conservation is an environmental priority in the Okanagan basin due to increasing pressure on water supply as a result of growing agricultural and residential demand. Hard policy approaches such as water metering will soon be implemented for communities living in the region. However, there is demand from residential users to increase local understanding of the problem and decrease household usage. One recognized action that will have a significant impact on increasing water conservation in the Okanagan Basin is reducing discretionary water use for landscaping.

Project: Innovative Landscaping for Water Conservation

Building on the success of a pilot project, Friends of Summerland Ornamental Garden initiated a number of new conservation program activities designed to show local residential landscapers how changing their approach to water use could support high quality landscaping while reducing demand for scarce freshwater.

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Community outreach and education were delivered through a series of practical workshops, while the water conservation survey included exposing respondents to principals of water conservation and modeling techniques. These activities were designed to shift attitudes and practices, informing people about the issues and supplying them with the tools and information needed to change.

Permanent demonstration sites provided another new way to showcase the latest solutions to measuring and reducing water use. In addition, the sites extended the concept of water conservation beyond just water, and introduced habitat and biodiversity as related support systems.

Why this is a social innovation

Vancouver Foundation supported this project because it:

- Adopts a community directed approach to a problem that hard policy tools alone may struggle to address.
- Uses outreach and education components to change the relationship between water users and resources
- Connects the freshwater system to other supporting ecosystem functions such as habitat and biodiversity
- Creates a lasting legacy through permanent demonstration sites that both work towards addressing the issue directly, and educating others on how to do so
- Creates valuable tools that can be scaled up and out to other communities
- Demonstrates support from a broad range of partners across government, academic, education (primary), agricultural, and community sectors
- Shows potential for Regional and Provincial governments to adopt in the future

Questions for your project

- What problem or issue are you addressing?
- How are you addressing the problem or opportunity in a way that is different to how it's been addressed previously?
- How will your project affect the rest of the social system that the problem or opportunity is located in?
- Will your approach involve groups that may have been previously excluded from participating or benefiting?
- How will your project adapt in the future to become sustainable?