

CAPITAL REGION

UVic Project to examine water use

Times Colonist Staff

Water, water everywhere—all of it to drink.

And that's the problem, says the head of Victoria's POLIS project, Michael M'Gonigle, who argues it's time to re-examine how we use water in our society.

The result is a two-year project to study water use and to create a regulatory and pricing model to move municipalities to water demand-management.

"In the capital region, we have issues with water quantity, not quality, but the two are inextricably linked," M'Gonigle said. "All of the water we use in the region is treated to drinking-water quality, whether it's used to wash the car or flush the toilet, and there's a tremendous cost to that.

"What we want to find are some alternatives that allow us to make better use of the water we treat and perhaps use untreated or less-treated water for many of the things we do.

"The current system is expensive and, I think, ultimately not sustainable.

M'Gonigle said the project will examine how other regions deal with water use and what could be implemented here.

"We have to approach water like a precious commodity," he said.

He said the study will focus on three main areas:

- Pricing and regulation: "We under price water dramatically and pricing is one way to promote conservation. And we need to look at different regulatory models."

- Networking: "There are lots of pockets of people working on water-demand management, both in Canada and around the world, but their not necessarily talking to one another. If we can open up the lines of communication, we may find some solutions there."

- Public Participation: "By educating people, we can establish some best practices for general water use."

M'Gonigle said the idea of providing water for drinking separately from water for general use faces a huge hurdle in municipal delivery systems.

Those systems are not set up to deliver water of varying quality, and to change that would be very expensive,

Instead, he said, areas or regions could look at setting up smaller water-processing plants to meet local demand.

"What would be wrong with the university, for instance, getting off the sewer system and setting up a system to recover waste water and using it to water their flower gardens? M'Gonigle asked.

"It's certainly technically feasible, but we would have to determine the amount of regulatory and community opposition.

"But it's one solution"

He said the project will take a year of fairly intense research and networking, with another year to compile the data. The project is funded with \$200,000 from the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation.

POLIS was launched in the fall of 2001 as the new face of the Eco-Research Chair of Environmental Law and Policy at UVic. A lawyer and



Michael M'Gonigle: Intense Research

political economist, M'Gonigle investigates new sustainability strategies, focusing on Forestry and urban Sustainability.

M'Gonigle holds graduate degrees from the London School of Economics and Yale University. A longtime environmental activist, he is co-founder of Greenpeace International, a founding director of the Sierra Legal Defence Fund, a former Chairman of Greenpeace Canada, and, most recently, a co-founder of SmartGrowth B.C., Forest Futures, and of the International Network of Forests and Communities.