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CWRA BC Branch 2013 Conference

**WATERSHED DIVIDES &
POLITICAL BOUNDARIES:**

Working Together or Flowing Apart?

PL7: Swimming Against the Current: A Comparison of Canadian and International Flood Management Strategies

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Flooding is a river system's natural response to occasional large precipitation events. When people use highly productive land on natural floodplains for socio-economic activities, protection from inundation becomes necessary. A traditional engineering-focused approach to flood control considers physical, technical, economic, and political limitations, but fails to adequately consider social, cultural, ecological and morphological constraints. This requires a better Integrated Flood Management (IFM) approach, that adopts a basin and multidisciplinary approach to flood management to maximise the net benefits from floodplains while reducing the vulnerability and risks due to flooding, and promoting community involvement and preserving ecosystems. IFM combines traditional flood management tools with land use planning tools, and integrates environmental and cultural data with modern engineering tools at a watershed scale.

IFM is widely accepted around the world as the best means to manage floods by balancing risk against the many diverse values associated with riparian areas and floodplains. However, this approach has for the most part been ignored in Canada, where traditional engineering solutions are more common. Have we got it wrong? Do we need to change our approach? A paradigm shift in Canadian flood management is proposed in light of successful flood strategies from around the world.