

Photo: Living Lakes Canada

In October 2018, Living Lakes Canada spent a couple of days in Smithers, B.C. delivering a Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network (CABIN) field practicum to representatives from Gitksan Environmental Services, Gitanyow Fisheries Authority, Wetsuweten Fisheries, Skeena Fisheries, Lake Babine Fisheries, and Eclipse Geomatics.



Living Lakes Canada is trained by Environment and Climate Change Canada to train community groups, professionals, industry, and First Nation communities in the CABIN methodology, the established national protocol in Canada that collects benthic macroinvertebrates and uses their counts as an indicator of a water body's health.



Living Lakes Canada is continuing to coordinate a Groundwater Monitoring Program to help effectively manage and protect groundwater resources in the Upper Columbia Basin. Through engagement of citizens, the program works with landowners, community groups, and governments to identify groundwater wells and monitor water levels in priority aquifers.



Kat Hartwig and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at the WWF-Canada Healthy Waters Summit.

# Water Steward

**Kat Hartwig** discusses her 2017 Water's Next Award, her legacy, and advice for the next generation.

BY SIMRAN CHATTHA

**KAT HARTWIG** brings her passion for environmental protection to her role as the executive director of Living Lakes Canada, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to protecting, restoring, and rehabilitating water bodies and watersheds.

Under Hartwig's leadership, the organization has been working on a number of projects and initiatives to help individuals understand the impacts of climate change.

Community-based monitoring is one of the approaches that Living Lakes Canada uses to engage with groups and individuals at the local level. Since 2005, the organization has been involved in Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network (CABIN)—the only national standardized water monitoring program in Canada.



This program tracks benthics, which provide an indication of the health of freshwater ecosystems, and was developed by Environment and Climate Change Canada. Living Lakes Canada was one of the first organizations in Canada trained to train-the-trainer and it continues to build its capacity to train other groups to use the environmental DNA protocol.

For her tireless efforts and commitment, Hartwig received the Water Steward of the Year award at the Water's Next Awards Dinner Gala in June 2017. Water Canada recently had an opportunity to catch up with Hartwig and ask her a few questions about what it was like to win the award, what projects and initiatives she has been working on since receiving it, and what the future potentially holds.

**What was it like winning the Water's Next Award in 2017?**

It was a privilege and honour to be recognized. Often when you win those kinds of awards, you get lots of notes of congratulations from your colleagues. It is just nice to have the recognition of because often this work is unrecognized. I think Water Canada is doing a good thing by recognizing the hard work of people who have been involved and dedicated over the decades.

**What are some projects you have been working on since winning the award?**

There have been quite a few projects at different scales so I will go through some of them starting at the largest scale.

Living Lakes Canada is a part of Global Nature Fund's Living Lakes international [network]. We are connecting with not-for-profit organizations that are doing water stewardship work around the world to compare and contrast

best practices in terms of community-based water monitoring, increasing water literacy in communities, building climate-resilient communities, and engaging people into water monitoring and the health of their watersheds. We have our 20th year anniversary coming up this year and we are going to be taking our whole team over to Valencia, Spain to do a lot of information sharing on the stewardship of wetlands.

On the national scale, Living Lakes Canada has been leading a national dialogue in partnership with WWF Canada and the Gordon Foundation [...] to assess community-based monitoring groups—who they are, where they are, and what they are monitoring and why across Canada. It is really interesting because now we are able to compare and contrast best practices for community-based monitoring in Canada. We are also able to see how we can support community decision-makers and First Nations in their decision-

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making around watershed health and water allocation and building climate resiliency.

Regionally, what we are doing in the Columbia Basin is building a water monitoring framework and open source data hub. A gap analysis was done to assess the water data that is missing for decision-makers. Mostly it is hydrology but there's some water quality. What we are doing is building a water monitoring framework to help direct the monitoring groups in the basin so that they monitor priority areas that have been determined by First Nations and non-First Nations decision-makers.

The drive for all of this has been climate change because for us, water has always been the most tangible way for us to help people understand the pending impacts that we can anticipate from climate change.

**What is your hope for your water legacy?**

My hope for my water legacy is to provide an energetic, proactive, and optimistic space within Living Lakes Canada for young people to feel empowered by engaging in what they feel is meaningful. This is so that they can help to shape and direct their own climate-resilient futures in a positive way.

**What advice do you have for young professionals entering the water sector? Is there something you wish you had known when starting out in the industry? Or is there something you wish you had done differently?**

I think field work is really important. I think armchair work is probably not as meaningful, like to work out of an office and not get into the field to see what is happening on the ground.

I feel there is a lot of that missing so people do not understand as the land changes or as the water systems change, the nuances of that if they are not out in the land. That would be some strong advice—to get out there. wc



Simran Chattha is Water Canada's associate editor.

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