



The Connecting Water Resources 2013 student poster session.



Bernadette Conant on the podium at CWR 2013.



Elizabeth Dowdeswell, the current Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, addresses the crowd at CWR 2013.

From Knowledge to Action

The 2015 Connecting Water Resources conference hopes to inspire change and action in all sectors of Canada's water industry. BY CLARK KINGSBURY

IN THE CANADIAN WATER INDUSTRY, the new year means a new round of national and international conferences that offer industry professionals the chance to learn, collaborate, and pursue action in a constantly changing sector.

One of Canada's premier water industry conferences, Connecting Water Resources (CWR) 2015, will take place March 10 to 12 in Ottawa. Organized by the Canadian Water Network (CWN), the 2015 edition of the conference will be the third in its current format, with prior editions taking place in 2011 and 2013. The conference's theme, From Knowledge to Action, highlights the organizers' emphasis on high-level networking and strategic planning in order to pursue action, as opposed to an education- or training-oriented conference directed at the operational level.

"Our whole ethos is really about providing the best and most effective opportunity for people that want to get somewhere, as opposed to trying

to educate or change minds," said Bernadette Conant, executive director of the CWN. "We're very committed to the idea that you have to do something that leads people to actionable results, not just spark a dialogue. That's not enough for us."

This year's conference will be split into three days, broken down into plenary discussions, concurrent breakout sessions, and networking receptions. Morning plenary discussions on days one and two will be succeeded by concurrent breakout sessions following the three conference tracks.

The first track, Blue Cities: Moving to the Systems We Need, will investigate what drives municipalities to adopt innovative water management practices as sustainability, resiliency, and livability become increasingly sought after aspects of planning and policy-making in Canada. This shift is especially important in the face of climate change, accelerating urbanization, and a steadily

growing population.

The second track, Resource Development and Agriculture: Securing Our Future, will look into water risks affecting the agriculture sector, as well resource development sectors such as oil, gas, and mining.

The final track is Small and Aboriginal Communities: Solutions that Fit. This track will explore how to confront the water management needs of smaller or First Nations communities while addressing the realities of politics, finance, economics, and governance structures that don't match up with Canada's larger cities.

"There will be concurrent sessions in each of the conference tracks in the afternoon, and what we've done is established teams in each of those tracks made up of lead mentors, academic and end-user mentors, and a team of students and new professionals," Conant explained.

The teams will be tasked with identifying what they think are the best

opportunities to translate knowledge into action. To do so, they will begin work before the conference, participate in discussions during the conference, and report their findings based on research and conversation during Thursday morning's plenary sessions.

CWR 2015 will have both domestic and international speakers, including representatives from South Africa, Singapore, and the United States. The speakers will focus on tangible lessons learned from past experiences.

"Whether it's a start-up in Silicon Valley or a project here in Canada, people want to know 'How did you get there? How did that work? How did it actually happen?'" Conant said. "There is of course a Canadian focus, but we try to bring perspectives from all over the place. I think the community here needs to hear from [these speakers]."

The international flavour of the featured speakers serves to underscore the diversity of attendees the Connecting

Water Resources conference attracts.

In both 2011 and 2013, the conference welcomed approximately 300 attendees, and the CWN is expecting about 400 for the 2015 edition, from all corners of the water sector. In particular, attracting students and ameliorating the student and new professional experience at the conference was an improvement the CWN wanted to make.

"We've thought about how to incorporate [students and new professionals] when a lot of the design of the conference is around wisdom, and insights, and understanding how things are done," Conant said. "We have people with a significant amount of experience on the podium, so how do you combine those two things?"

The CWN also made it an explicit goal to achieve a 50 per cent podium presence for women at Connecting Water Resources 2015, and is working with the Canadian chapter of the International Women's Forum, which will have a

presence at the conference on Thursday.

But the CWR 2015 organizers don't want to just attract attendees from all corners of the water industry.

"So many issues important to people outside of water are actually water issues," Conant said. "Are you a councilor worried about sustainable city management? Well, a big part of that is water. Water management decisions often reflect priorities like public health, economic prosperity, and political autonomy."

Conant's vision for CWR 2015 is simple: "Our hope is that people will leave the conference with new collaborations in development, or with larger ideas which are brought forward to Canadian Water Network who might say 'We'll take this one on and help it move forward.'" WC

Clark Kingsbury is Water Canada's assistant editor.



water's next 2015

Celebrating Canada's Water Champions

People

BUSINESS / GOVERNMENT / YOUNG
PROFESSIONALS / ACADEMIA

Technology

CONVEYANCE / DRINKING WATER /
WASTEWATER / WATER RESOURCES

Who has made
a difference?
Let us know!

Nominate people & technologies at watersnext.ca