



Vernon

Steps for tainted water

Kate Bouey - Mar 21, 2016 / 8:04 pm



UPDATE: 8:01 P.M.

Provincial officials are expected to hold a public meeting for Spallumcheen residents about steps to be taken to try to solve the problem of the tainted Hullcar aquifer. Details of the April 11 meeting are still being worked out, but it may be held at the Hullcar community centre, said Ministry of Environment spokesperson Christine Zacharias-Homer.

Officials, who met with members of the local farming community Monday afternoon, are hoping to convince agriculture producers to voluntarily adopt "sustainable ways to do agriculture planning," including the development of nutrient management plans.

Local residents point the finger at effluent spraying on farmland as a main cause of the high nitrate level found in the drinking water.

A "valley-wide solution" is being sought, said Zacharias-Homer, adding that external parties may be brought in to help including UBCO and the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

The provincial government has promised to take immediate steps to ensure safe drinking water for approximately 200 Spallumcheen residents on a nitrate-tainted source, but local people have yet to be convinced they will work.

Residents within Steel Springs Water District have been under a water quality advisory for two years over elevated nitrate levels in the Hullcar aquifer.

Officials from Interior Health and three provincial ministries, Health, Environment and Agriculture, met with members of the Save the Hullcar Aquifer group and Splitsin Chief Wayne Christian Monday morning. A similar meeting with local farmers was planned for Monday afternoon.

During the two-hour meeting, residents were promised a working group from the ministries of Environment, Agriculture and Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations as well as IH would work to find a solution to the water problem while supporting a sustainable agriculture sector.

A government press release stated initial actions would cover five areas:

- A review of all available water-quality data as well as relevant legislation is already underway.
- The cross-ministry working group will work with the agriculture industry and local producers to promote best farming practices including best practices for nutrient management.
- An enhanced monitoring program will be implemented, along with continued compliance and enforcement actions.
- The Province will work with local, external agencies with expertise, including UBC Okanagan and the Okanagan Basin Water Board, toward long-term water-quality solutions.
- Community information meetings will be scheduled within the coming weeks. All information concerning sampling and testing, permitting, compliance and enforcement that can be legally shared will be available and regularly updated on the Ministry of Environment [website](#).

"To me, I would say what can we get done in the next six months to a year?" said Christian, who joined the battle over clean drinking water last month. The Splitsin have two reserve properties with private wells that draw water from the same aquifer.

He said no promises were made during the meeting and no decisions appear to have been taken at a more senior level of government.

"Residents from the Hullcar area are very frustrated (over the lack of action)," said Christian. "We're talking about an aquifer that's been impacted now and will be impacted for probably another decade if we don't start doing something right to correct it."

"There could be good things happening or this could be another attempt to just deflect us in another direction," said Al Price of the Save the Hullcar Aquifer Team. "I sense the people here today are a little more serious about at least aiming for a resolution and one that's tangible."

The government believes a combination of factors is likely affecting the Hullcar aquifer while local residents blame a large dairy farm operation that sprays effluent onto its fields.

Price is concerned local farmers will be asked to voluntarily end such spraying which he doesn't believe will work.



Photo: Kate Bouey