

# The Water Chronicles

## ■ OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW BIG CHANGES IN STORE FOR BC'S 100-YEAR-OLD WATER ACT

New changes are coming to British Columbia's 100-year-old Water Act. The Water Sustainability act replaces the existing Water Act, which has been in place since 1909. The act intends to protect natural water systems in ways which meet modern standards of population growth and expanding development.

The new proposed Water Sustainability Act seeks to more effectively protect stream health and aquatic environments, consider water in land-use decisions, improve security, water use efficiency and conservation, measure and report large scale water use, and provide for a range of governance approaches. While some changes are more subtle than others, perhaps one of the biggest improvements is groundwater regulation.

"They are putting in a requirement for groundwater licensing for large groundwater users," explained Anna Warwick Sears, Executive Director of the Okanagan Basin Water Board. "BC is the only province that doesn't have that yet and there has been a lot of controversy and conflicts over groundwater, particularly in the last decade or two."

Under the old act, groundwater, unlike surface water, can be used without government authorization or annual fee. This includes even large-scale users and industries. The new act recognizes that groundwater and surface water are interconnected and equally important and will place restrictions on groundwater use, including licensing requirements and new usage fees.

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