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Opinion poll shows fresh water supply a concern in B.C.

By [Judie Steeves - Kelowna Capital News](#)

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B.C. residents do care about their fresh water, not only for drinking, but also for wildlife and for agriculture—but most are unaware that the province has embarked on a rewrite of the Water Act.

A phone poll of 835 B.C. residents shows that 86 per cent of ordinary people, selected at random, feel fresh water is extremely important to prosperity and quality of life, with another 12 per cent rating it at fairly important; and 91 per cent agreed that it is B.C.'s most precious resource.

The poll was conducted by McAllister Opinion Research and commissioned by the World Wildlife Fund and the Vancouver Foundation, to assess public support for Water Act modernization in B.C.

The poll's results reinforce the work being done by the Okanagan Basin Water Board, concludes its executive-director, Anna Warwick Sears.

Governments at all levels should be aware of the support amongst people in the community for changes to infrastructure to improve water quality and quantity; protection of water and water conservation projects, she noted.

Obviously, she said, investment in human resources in the area of water management is the right thing to do; particularly a combination of smart people and smart equipment.

Diagnostics such as water monitoring equipment are just as important in watersheds as diagnostic equipment is in hospitals, she added.

The survey results indicated that even in times of water scarcity, people believe the top priority (after drinking water) should be water for survival of natural species and aquatic life such as salmon, at 45 per cent; and agricultural production, at 38 per cent.

Nature came out on top in a question about people's concern about the impact of water shortages in the next decade, with 54 per cent very concerned about habitat for aquatic life like salmon and trout, 38 per cent very concerned about groundwater levels, 31 per cent very concerned about conflicts over access to water and 29 per cent about food and agricultural production.

In fact, nature should be a priority in managing water use, according to 72 per cent, while jobs and the economy should be tops according to 20 per cent.

Of the four geographic areas of the province, those of us in the southern interior were the most concerned about the impact of water shortages in the coming decade, particularly for fish, in groundwater levels and for outdoor recreation.

The majority of respondents, about two-thirds, feel that current rules governing water use in B.C. are not enough to ensure the future sustainability of the resource, while about a quarter feel the current rules are adequate.

A whopping 84 per cent did not realize that the province is in the middle of a Water Act modernization process

Tony Maas, director, freshwater program for WWF Canada, said he hopes the survey results encourage the government to carry on with the Water Act reforms it is working on, with priorities for the environment and agriculture, as the survey indicated people want.

The survey shows government what's on the minds of people in B.C., but the message is not only for the province, but also its citizens. They should understand the issues, he commented.

The question of whether water should be supplied based on a system of First in Time, First in Right (FITFIR) should be discussed more, as should be legal protection, such as in a reserve, for water for the environment and for agriculture, he said.

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