

Rules governing wells and groundwater come into effect across the province

By John McDonald

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The Thompson River in Kamloops.

(JENNIFER STAHN /InfoTel Multimedia)

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THOMPSON-OKANAGAN - British Columbia's water sustainability act quietly came into effect this week, finally giving the province the groundwater protection most other jurisdictions have had for decades.

"We're one of the last holdouts in North America not to require groundwater licenses," Okanagan Basin Water Board head Anna Warwick Sears says. "For the first time, commercial users will have to get a water license for ground water in B.C."

While most people in B.C. will notice nothing — even domestic well users — as result of the new regulations, Warwick Sears says the rules for the first time link groundwater to surface water and will require increased study of the local aquifers that are being tapped by wells.

"To us, this is great news. We've been advocating for this for years. We're finally integrating with surface water, which of course requires a license for non-domestic purposes," she says.

Along with the act comes the new groundwater protection regulation governing the construction, maintainance and decommissioning of water wells.

Well-owners will help themselves by registering, Warwick Sears says, and getting their flow rate and usage on record.

“If someone comes in and drills a big well beside you and you’re water drops off, then something can be done.”

The province has set commercial use rates at \$2.25 per million litres and is facing pressure to raise the rate. It estimates there are at least 20,000 existing commercial wells with more coming on line all the time.

Warwick Sears says the new regulations aren’t going to be adhered to or enforced overnight.

“It’s going to take a few years to get everybody licensed and into the system,” she says. “From what I understand, the fees will be waived or a portion, for the first year at least and the government is using that as a way of getting everybody onboard.”

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