

From: CWRA SYP Vancouver [cwra.syp.van@gmail.com]
Sent: April-30-10 3:27 PM
To: Living Water Smart ENV:EX
Subject: Submission for Water Act Modernization
Attachments: WAM Submission-Vancouver CWRA SYP.pdf

Hi,

Please find enclosed a submission for the Water Act Modernization process on behalf of the Vancouver CWRA SYP. We are grateful to have the opportunity to comment on the modernization process and to have our voices heard. We would also like to thank the Ministry for their participation in our Water Act Modernization seminar on April 21.

Going through the goals and objectives of the process has been invaluable for helping us see the complexity of the modernization process.

If you have any comments or question about this submission, we may be reached at cwra.syp.van@gmail.com.

Cheers,
Cindy Starzyk
Vancouver CWRA SYP Chair



Comment on the Water Act Modernization - CWRA SYP Submission

April 30, 2010

To: BC Ministry of Environment

Prepared by: Vancouver Student and Young Professionals Chapter of the Canadian Water Resources Association (Vancouver CWRA SYP)

Please find enclosed our comments discussing the Water Act Modernization principles, goals and objectives.

The Student and Young Professionals (SYP) group of the Canadian Water Resources Association (CWRA) is a non-profit group of students and professionals early in their career that are interested in effective water management. Our Vancouver chapter hosted a Water Act Modernization seminar on April 21, 2010 which was attended by young consulting professionals as well as Masters and PhD students from diverse backgrounds of policy, law, science and engineering. Representatives from the BC Ministry of Environment attended the seminar and presented an outline of the modernization process to the attendees. We wish to thank the BC Ministry for their participation in our Water Act Modernization seminar and for providing us the opportunity to answer our questions and engage our members.

Comments herein have been compiled based on seminar dialogue and follow-up meetings held to create this document. While we recognize it is impossible to capture all voices at the seminar within this document, the intent is that key points which resonated from discussion and dialogue have been included.

Important Viewpoints:

- *The first step to successful water governance is acceptance by the government.* Upon acceptance we can build a successful governance structure, develop policy, support agencies to work together and educate society to adopt water conservation habits. We need the political will from the top to establish sustainable integrated watershed management. The attitude that provincial government does not have the financial ability to establish successful governance indicates we do not have full political acceptance.
- Ecosystem protection (including provision for human life) should be priority #1.
- *We believe that all users should pay for water.* Water is a public resource and a right, but money is required for the governance and management to maintain it as a clean and sustainable resource. What good is “free water” if the aquifer is contaminated and threatened with annual water shortages? Revenue generated from fees or taxes should be sent directly (and transparently) to the watershed level partner institution to re-invest in maintaining a healthy watershed. Revenues provide support to monitor, manage and protect the watershed from being exploited, similar to insurance for maintaining a healthy watershed.

- Water should be managed using an integrated water resource management framework, accounting for environmental flow needs, surface water and groundwater within the same management framework. Water(shed) allocation plans should first determine environmental flow needs then determine the amount of water available for allocation from surface flow and from groundwater. This plan should also require determination of a buffer distance around the river or stream within which a pumping well may be in direct communication with that surface water body.
- In order to implement watershed allocation plans we need to develop baseline mapping and groundwater monitoring systems that are documented and reviewed on an ongoing basis. Collected data should be stored in a centralized database.
- Water allocation policy needs to insure that loopholes do not exist which allow for detrimental exploitation of the resource. While it is crucial to respect and accommodate all social, cultural and economic water needs it is equally important that users uphold the intended use of the licence.
- We acknowledge that the Water Protection Act oversees regulation for bulk-water export, however, we believe the BC Water Act should also ensure bulk export of water is prevented.
- After the first draft recommendations are established we believe there should be opportunity for public and stakeholder input.

Regarding the Principles:

- Add as a principle: *Political will is the most important criteria for establishing a successful water policy.*
- On Principle 3: Science informs and guides water resource management and decision making and government will provide support (financial) for science. We strongly support this principle, funding scientific research for water allocation plans will ensure the plans are based on sound scientific principles that improve with our expanding knowledge of ecosystems and surface water/groundwater flow.
- On Principle 4: Water resource legislation, policy and decision making processes as well as management tools are integrated across all levels of government and departments (to address current lack of integration within each government level).

Our Comments on Goal Objectives (this section addresses and is meant to be read alongside the questions posed for each goal within the Discussion Paper)

Goal 1 (Stream health and aquatic environments):

- Objective #1:
 - Prefer Option A: *Well defined* environmental flow guidelines. Deviation from guideline could be permissible with an environmental study by a qualified professional. Similarly, provision should allow the Regional District Manager to have the discretion to impose more conservative limits than guideline.
- Objective #2:
 - Prefer Option B and D: The Comptroller should provide objective criteria to identify critical watersheds which require a mandatory water allocation plan.

A Regional Water Manager should have the option to require a regional water allocation plan for any additional watersheds. Compliance should be mandatory.

- A water allocation plan should be developed for priority watersheds and watersheds viewed to have the potential to become priority. The Water Act should state what professionals can develop allocation plans and under what conditions they can be updated and/or challenged.
- Objective 3:
 - Prefer Option B: The Water Act has to include a prohibition against dumping of debris into streams. The wording of the act will only be effective if monitoring and enforcement are included.

Goal 2 (Governance):

- On Objective 1:
 - Prefer a Shared Approach in which the provincial government retains control of developing guidelines and sets rules of the water framework. Planning and implementation should reside with local-level partner institutions. Decisions made by the local level partner institutions (such as a watershed agency or council) would be supported and enforced by Regional Districts.
- On Objective 2:
 - The local level partner institutions should oversee the water allocation plan through an annual or multi-annual State of the Watershed study. The study would evaluate health based indicators of the watershed to assess the performance the current allocations. Criteria evaluated as part of the study would be updated concurrently with improvement to science based knowledge.
- Objective #3:
 - Decision making should be at the scale of a watershed and should take into account the full length of the stream (ie. source to mouth even at the basin level). Where possible, minor adjustment to Regional District boundaries should be made to better align with watershed boundaries. In areas where watershed boundaries span Regional Districts, delegates from each district should be present on the watershed level partner institutions.
- Funding solutions: We envision water governance as a self-funded program. Taxes or fees along with fines for violation of guidelines generate revenues which are directed back into funding the water program at both the local and provincial level. Revenues need to be provided on a continual and guaranteed basis in order to maintain regulations and enforcement and to establish monitoring systems.

Goal #3 (Allocation):

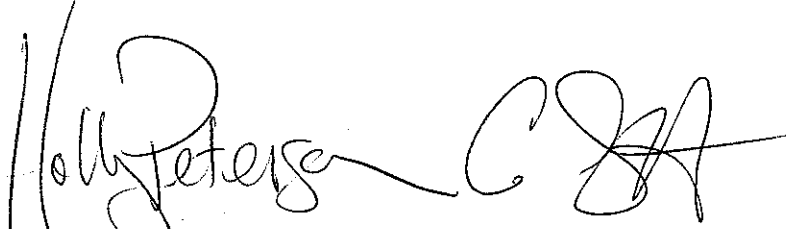
- Water Use Efficiency Objective:
 - (Prefer Option B) All stakeholders should be at the table when determining efficiency standards – First Nations, industry, general public and NGOs.
 - (Prefer Option C) Support economic tools for creating incentives and penalties to promote efficiency.

- Encourage Administrative Efficiency:
 - (Do not Prefer E or F): Industrial and commercial water users should not fall under the permitted use category. We recommend domestic water users fall under the permitted category but give discretion to the watershed agency to require permitting of domestic users based on a water allocation plan.
 - Prefer Option H: Be proactive, please require self-registration of permitted use withdrawal.
- Overall:
 - An approach will assigns allocation of water based on percentage of aquifer yield and annual stream flow (not on hard-set values) should be considered. This approach would allow flexibility to be incorporated into the management plan. Annual or multi-annual (eg. every five years) State of the Watershed studies would serve to reassess annual extractions from the watershed. If the State of the Watershed study indicates the aquifer is underperforming or annual stream flows are decreasing with regard to previous studies/anticipated performance, extraction volumes should be reassessed.
 - We are in support of all users paying for water. Fees could be assessed based on a base-line tax or a water metering system. A base-line tax is less invasive of domestic users, however lacks the incentive to promote efficient water use.
 - We support metering every user. The requirement to meter all users however should be assessed by the watershed partner institution. Water metering would promote conservation and increase awareness within the community. Monitoring individual meters may sound overwhelming, but BC Hydro currently reads meters on a property-by-property basis.
 - Province (or nation)-wide water education programs to raise public awareness on the value of water and the need for its conservation should be launched. How many people consider it a major offensive to leave the water tap running while brushing your teeth or the hose running while washing your car? Not as many as would consider it an offense in Australia or locations in Canada already experiencing water restrictions. As a society we need more consideration on how we value water and therefore the price associated with it.
 - If we don't put money and effort into water as a resource now, we will encounter serious consequences later. For example, nitrate concentrations in groundwater have contaminated multiple aquifers provincially and nationally beyond drinking water standards. If regulations on better management practices had been implemented earlier, surface aquifers may not have experienced such degradation.
- **Goal #4 (Groundwater):**
 - Water withdrawals by all commercial and industrial users should be regulated regardless of location. In high priority areas, groundwater use by domestic users could be regulated if deemed in the best interest of the watershed partner institution. Regulation within a watershed should be consistent.
 - Regulating all groundwater extractions in critical areas would allow consideration for cumulative effects of small withdrawals.

- There should be mandatory self-reporting or mandatory reporting for all regulated withdrawals. The resulting database would be instrumental for assessing and adjusting water allocation plans.

If you have any questions or comments of the above document, we can be reached at cwra.syp.van@gmail.com.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Holly Peterson" followed by a stylized monogram "CS".

Emily Huxter, Holly Peterson and Cindy Starzyk,
on behalf of the Vancouver CWRA SYP

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