

Hello

On behalf of the board directors, I would like to submit ARMS' submission to the current public engagement process for the proposed changes to the Water Act.

We would like to again thank the province for taking on this process and look forward to continuing to work with all BC residents and the province on this most important legislative change.

Please feel free to contact us should you have any questions.

Regards,
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12 November, 2013

Ministry of Environment
Water Protection and Sustainability Branch
PO Box 9362 Stn Prov Gov
Victoria BC V8W 9M2.

Re: Water Sustainability Act

The Alouette River Management Society (ARMS) acknowledges and commends the Province for undertaking a review of the BC Water Act originally proclaimed in 1909. In spite of the occasional amendments, the current Act fails to provide adequate protection for British Columbia's precious water resources, especially ground water that is currently afforded no protection.

The release in October 2013 of the Water Sustainability Act paper was greeted with much expectation especially with the combined announcement that the legislation would be introduced in the spring of 2014. However our anticipation quickly turned to disappointment when we learned how little detail and substance the 128 page discussion document contains. The concepts proposed are generally positive but without the details it is impossible to know what the new act might actually mean for British Columbians.

Some examples, the act speaks to large users having to record and report water use/consumption. A good concept but the proposal is completely silent on acquiring the baseline inventory that is essential for recording consumption. The consumption numbers will mean little if there is no baseline upon which to assess the effect of the withdrawals. Even more important without knowing the original flow volumes how can withdrawal amounts be determined much less the effect of the consumption.

The proposed Environmental Flow Needs and Critical Environmental Flows are good concepts but without the knowing stream-flow baseline neither of these control mechanisms can be applied. This leaves the door open for water licence holders to easily dispute any control or regulator action. Further, neither of these concepts are defined in the document.

The lack of definition around the term "beneficial use" is also of great concern given that there is no clear reference to the protection of stream health as a responsibility which should be given priority ahead of private interests. We fully support the West Coast Environmental Law's statement on their website that "the new definition of 'beneficial use' must not be narrowly

focused on private interests and must allow British Columbia's proposed Water Sustainability Act to be flexible in addressing social changing social and environmental needs".

It is promising that the Province is finally considering charging for the consumptive use of water. However the value assigned to the water is far short of its true value. Not only does the proposed value fail to even approach the real or market value it fails to cover the administrative costs for government. Failing to properly value the natural resources and to collect those fees is a betrayal of the residents of British Columbia. It is corporate welfare when companies like Nestle can extract and sell millions of litres of fresh water without contributing anything to the Provincial coffers. This is especially egregious when there are so many critical services that are suffering from a shortage of funding.

We are concerned with the proposal to proclaim the legislation in the spring session of 2014. While there is an urgent need to update the Water Act, we strongly urge the government to provide the people of British Columbia with a substantive package of material that will indicate the spirit and substance of the proposed legislation and then to allow the time necessary for proper review and assessment. As is correctly stated in the current paper, water is the most precious and important resource. The proposed act that is to ensure its protection and management must be afforded the appropriate consideration.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Greta Borick-Cunningham', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Greta Borick-Cunningham
Executive Director
Alouette River Management Society