

(Note: The following contents are taken from a brochure distributed at the 99th Annual Convention of the Union of B.C. Municipalities in Whistler, B.C., Sept. 23-27, 2002)

B.C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE
Caring for, Monitoring, and Protecting
British Columbia's Community Water Supply Sources

Email: info@bctwa.org
Website: www.bctwa.org

**WHAT ARE THE
CRITICAL ISSUES
FOR BRITISH COLUMBIANS
ABOUT THEIR DRINKING WATER?**

PROTECTION OF DRINKING WATER SOURCES

- The efforts of citizens, communities, and politicians have resulted in the restoration of legislated protections for a number of drinking watershed sources in B.C. These include the Greater Vancouver (1999), Greater Victoria (1994), and the City of Nelson's (1994) watersheds. These protections have also been implemented for Seattle, Washington (2000), and Portland, Oregon (1996).
- The Sunshine Coast Regional District, through a May 1998 referendum (87.6% of voters), and a 2002 public signature petition, is demanding protection for its drinking watersheds.
- A June 2002 poll for the Slocan Valley, being Area "H" of the Regional District of Central Kootenay, showed that 94% of respondents want protection of their drinking watersheds.

COSTS TO COMMUNITIES

- Government has relaxed its former policies of protection in order to permit controversial resource use activities, such as road construction, logging, livestock grazing, and mining in community/domestic watersheds. Communities are now forced to spend tax revenues on alternative sources and treatment systems directly related to policies that have degraded water quality.
- The Auditor General's report on Drinking Water Sources (1999) identified that community water resources were being degraded from industrial and agricultural activities, and conservatively estimated \$700 million in costs to 100 communities for treatment plants.

DRINKING WATER PROTECTION ACT

- Bill 20 was passed by the Legislature in Spring 2001 after a series of public and stakeholder meetings. The Bill was held in check by the Liberal government, which later set up the Drinking Water Review Panel who brought recommendations back to government in February 2002. The government intends to bring an amended Act to the Fall 2002 session of Parliament.
- The BCTWA provided submissions to both processes, expressing concerns about government's decades-long refusal to enforce the legislated protection of drinking water sources established by Land Act Watershed Reserves.
- The Ministry of Health intends to act as the Lead Agency in overseeing the new Act, a position the BCTWA is very concerned about, detailed in its May 2002 report, *Doctoring Our Water*. The Ministry of Health's former role as advocate and guardian for the protection of drinking water sources has been weakened.

THE GOVERNMENT'S TAKEOVER OF THE ERICKSON IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

The recent controversy about the government's wrongful dismissal and then takeover of the Erickson Improvement District, the June 2002 Order-in-Council and transfer of its assets and water licences to the Regional District of Central Kootenay, and the unreasonable expenditure of public tax dollars for an unnecessary \$11 million membrane filtration plant in anticipation of logging in the community's drinking water source, are critical issues that need to be addressed and rectified. The manner in which it was done, the repercussions for community control over watershed administrative decisions, is a bad precedent for British Columbians. This issue is presented on our website.

PRIVATIZATION OF WATER UTILITIES

Public concerns are mounting about emergent measures and rumours about private corporate control of water utilities throughout the world. The takeover of public water utilities is a real threat to "community control" regarding administration, costs, delivery, maintenance, and public information access issues. Lobbyists are pressing governments to initiate the introduction of legislative measures to achieve this questionable end.

For example, a September 13, 2002 article posted on the Centre for Responsive Policy website www.capitaleye.org (reproduced on our website), details the measures of the National Association of Water Companies, and its national affiliate, the H2O Coalition, to introduce clauses to United States Federal Bill H.R. 3930 (March 2002) that would necessitate public water utilities seeking funding through private corporations. These controversial clauses indicate that such initiatives are at our collective doorsteps. Communities, towns, villages, regional districts, and the provincial government should inform British Columbians of these issues, and protect the public's water utilities from this threat.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

British Columbians must have meaningful participation and shared decision-making powers over Crown Land planning processes related to drinking water sources. Unfortunately, government ignored public involvement through a provincial-wide Task Force on community watersheds (1972-

1980), a process that established Land Act Watershed Reserves throughout the province, which government promptly ignored.

A new process, with teeth, needs to be established. British Columbians must engage their public representatives, at local, regional and provincial levels to activate such a process. You can remain informed and active on many of these issues by visiting the BCTWA website and by contacting us.

ABOUT THE B.C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE

The B.C. Tap Water Alliance (BCTWA) was formed in 1996 by organizations concerned about protection of their drinking water sources. The reason for its formation was primarily linked to the common and seemingly insurmountable difficulties that local citizens, community organizations, and local governments have experienced in their long struggles to protect their watershed surface and sub-surface water sources. The need for a common voice was recognized.

Since that time, the organization has presented many extensively researched submissions to provincial, regional, local governments, and community groups strongly advocating protection of drinking water sources on behalf of all British Columbians. As a result of largely internal controversial changes to provincial legislation and policies that enabled the protection of drinking water sources, communities became the unfortunate victims of the government's new agenda under the buzz words of "multiple use" and "integrated resource management". That agenda excluded citizens and community representatives from meaningful participation in resource management decisions ("public involvement") on Crown Lands.

The BCTWA's submissions, reports, correspondence, press releases, etc., are all posted on its website, which is updated frequently.