

B. C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE

Caring for, Monitoring, and Protecting
British Columbia's Community Water
Supply Sources

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The B.C. Tap Water Alliance and the Society Promoting Environmental Conservation (SPEC) Press Release

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Environmentalists Give Thumbs Down on Dosanjh's Drinking Water Protection Plan

Vancouver - SPEC and the B.C. Tap Water Alliance are disappointed that Premier Dosanjh's proposed *Drinking Water Protection Plan* fails to protect watersheds that supply drinking water to the majority of BC residents. "A Sierra Legal Defence Fund report card just gave the BC government a "D" for its protection of drinking water," said Will Koop, SPEC's provincial watershed campaigner. "Based on this proposed *Plan*, we give Dosanjh's government an F."

On January 19, the day after Sierra Legal issued its report card, the government released its *Plan* just a week before the start of province-wide public information meetings, the first scheduled for Jan. 26 in Nanaimo. The *Plan* assumes that current "multiple use" activities such as roadbuilding, logging, mining and cattle grazing on Crown lands will continue. The *Plan* also forces 3500 local communities to pay consultants for years of costly watershed assessments.

"The solution that Dosanjh is proposing in his *Drinking Water Protection Plan* assumes continuation of potentially harmful activities in domestic drinking water supplies," said Koop. "What Dosanjh is calling "protection" is just a euphemism for business as usual. His *Plan* also forces communities like Creston and Erickson to log their own watersheds; a practice long-recognized as harmful to water quality." Columbia Brewing Company currently uses Creston's water to make Kokanee Beer.

The BC government, moreover, is refusing to implement a 1999 BC Auditor General recommendation to create a lead government agency to oversee issues on drinking water. This agency would independently oversee the Forests, Mines, Agriculture, and Environment ministries which permit industrial activities in community watersheds. Health experts have for many decades criticized the provincial government for implementing policies on logging, mining, and cattle grazing that negatively impact drinking watersheds.

At the January 26 Nanaimo public information meeting, Environment Ministry and other government officials will face a barrage of concerns about logging on drinking watersheds on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. Nanaimo residents are trying to stop forest giant Weyerhaeuser from dumping toxic chemicals which leach into the community water supply from the company's tree farm operations. In recent years Weyerhaeuser has poured at least 44 tonnes of toxic chemicals in the Nanaimo watershed.

“Premier Dosanjh has an opportunity to implement legislation to protect the sources of BC’s drinking water by removing these watersheds from the Provincial Forest land base, by creating Crown Land Watershed Reserves, and by reintroducing legislation that gives communities control of their watersheds,” said Koop. “The provincial government gave Greater Vancouver just those kind of powers to protect the GVRD watersheds in 1927. The legislation must also address privately held lands.”

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