

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

March 12, 2001 – *For Immediate Release*

Old Socred Scandal Still Drives BC Drinking Water Protection Policy

Vancouver - The proposed new *Water Protection Act* will have little effect on protecting drinking watersheds from logging, cattle grazing, mining and other commercial activities. In his submission to the BC Environment Ministry's consultation process on the draft *Drinking Water Protection Plan*, SPEC watershed campaigner Will Koop released information about how a previous Social Credit government tampered with the *Forest Act* in 1960 and allowed forest companies to construct roads and clearcut Forest Reserves which had been set aside for the single purpose of supplying high-quality drinking water.

Koop's submission profiles a century of BC drinking watershed legislation and controversies about logging and cattle grazing. In response to renewed calls for water protection, the provincial government is proposing a new Act during the upcoming Legislative session.

"The old Social Credit government was involved in a scandal for granting forest corporations access to Watershed Reserves which had been secured for the public's long term benefit. Why was the legislation altered, and who was responsible?" asks Koop. "That was the government whose forest minister was jailed in 1958 for conspiracy and accepting bribes for granting a Tree Farm License to a forest corporation. The *Forest Act* amendment circumvented the Watershed Reserve designation and allowed the wholesale degradation of our drinking watersheds, so that companies could profit at the public's expense. This is a significant issue that merits a public inquiry."

When the government created the 1912 *Forest Act*, it created simple and powerful legislation under a section called Forest Reserves. This section provided the Minister of Lands with a mechanism for protecting watersheds from development, commercial activities and human trespass. These Watershed Reserves provided communities with premium protection and high quality water. Like those who passed the legislation almost 100 years ago, forest ecologists today recognize that intact old forests and undisturbed soils provide the highest quality drinking water and the best-regulated water flows.

"The original *Forest Act* and accompanying legislation was sufficient to protect drinking water sources," says Koop. "Environment Minister Ian Waddell doesn't need to reinvent the wheel. His

proposed *Water Protection Act* does little to protect drinking water. Government has no success stories to tell about the multiple-use of community watersheds. All Waddell needs to do is reaffirm the fact that fully protected watersheds produce the highest quality water, and then re-legislate Watershed Reserves. That way, all drinking watersheds will have the same standards of protection, and our judiciary will no longer find itself in the untenable position of fining and imprisoning its citizens, as those in the Kootenays, for simply trying to protect their drinking water, a basic necessity of life.”

SPEC is sponsoring a province-wide petition for legislated Provincial Watershed Reserves. Approximately 50 organizations have already signed the petition.

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