

B. C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE

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

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For Immediate Release

BC LIBERALS CAUGHT DEMOTING PROTECTED STATUS OF COMMUNITY DRINKING WATER SOURCES

Vancouver – In February 2013, the BC Tap Water Alliance began investigating logging proposals by B.C. Timber Sales in South Pender Harbour's water supply, McNeill Lake, now under the authority of the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD). The Alliance was shocked to discover that the B.C. Liberals altered the status of the McNeill Watershed Reserve four years ago in March, 2009. It had been demoted to a Section 17 *Land Act* Reserve status that now gives the Ministry of Environment discretionary power to permit resource uses such as timber sales.

As summarized in the Alliance's February 27th four page letter of complaint to Doug Konkin, the Deputy Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (see backgrounder web link), the small community watershed was protected by way of powerful Crown land legislation since at least 1974. Designation as a Section 16 Watershed Reserve under the *Land Act* prohibits Crown land dispositions, such as timber sales. The Alliance asked that Konkin intervene by preventing the proposed timber sales, and has yet to receive a reply from the Deputy Minister. Although the timber sale agreement was recently awarded, it has not yet been signed.

Upon further inquiries, the Alliance was astounded to discover that just two months before the last provincial election in 2009, the BC Liberals had actually altered ALL the Section 16 Community Watershed Reserves within the administrative boundary of the Ministry of Environment's Lower Mainland or Region, including Chapman and Gray Creeks, the SCRD's main source of water supply, where "thinning" was recently permitted in Chapman Creek with no prior notice to the SCRD. Apparently, the demotions were done without formally notifying dozens of water purveyors to whom the Reserves, and the water supplied, were dedicated.

These completely unpublicized, wholesale demotions appear to have been in response to allegations contained in our book, *From Wisdom to Tyranny*, the history of BC's community Watershed Reserves, sent to three Liberal Party Ministers, Forests Minister Rich Coleman, Environment Minister Barry Penner, and Lands Minister Pat Bell (see backgrounder). The book strongly recommended that government conduct a provincial inquiry into the administrative history and mismanagement of the Community Watershed Reserves. A year later on July 23, 2007, during the SCRD's Board of Health Hearings on logging in Chapman Creek, which received wide media attention, the Alliance presented detailed information about the SCRD's Chapman Creek Watershed Reserve (see backgrounder). In July 2007, when SCRD residents filed a Court Injunction against

Western Forest Products logging in the Chapman Reserve, the Alliance's book was entered into Court evidence.

The BC Liberal government's initial response was to repeal *Health Act* legislation in May 2008 (*Bill 23, The Public Health Act*) in order to prevent third order governments from convening any further Board of Health Inquiries (see backgrounder). In March 2009, the government also quietly removed the protection afforded by the Section 16 *Land Act* Watershed Reserves, following nearly two decades of successive governments publicly denying their existence and intent.

"The public has no idea what this government secretly did four years ago. It is absolutely disgraceful," notes Will Koop, B.C. Tap Water Alliance Coordinator. "No other administration over the last forty years has dared to do what the BC Liberals have done."

"This government should immediately reinstate all of BC's affected Community Watershed Reserves as Section 16 Reserves under the *Land Act* and delete all industrial tenures as intended, including Community Forests, BC Timber Sales and other forest tenures that have been wrongfully permitted within them. Then the Reserves should be designated as Section 15 Order-in-Council Reserves in favour of water purveyors and the communities they serve. It is only fair that the "other" 40 percent of British Columbians have what Greater Victoria and Metro Vancouver citizens reclaimed and now enjoy – protected watersheds that reliably produce clean water. That's BC's protection legacy."

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For Press Release Backgrounders: <http://www.bctwa.org/PrRel-Mar21-2013-Backgrounder.html>