



WATER SUPPLY ASSOCIATION OF B.C.
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A Position Statement of the Water Supply Association of B.C. Regarding the Proposed Sale of Crown Leases on Drinking Water Reservoirs

June 12, 2002

At a meeting of the Board of Directors held at the offices of the Black Mountain Irrigation District in Kelowna, BC at 2:30 PM June 12, 2002 the following position statement was passed unanimously by the Board of Directors.

Present:

Jack Allingham
Kevin Huey
Mike Mercer
Andre Miller
Toby Pike

Phil Ruskowsky
Mike Stamhuis
Karen Walker
Bruce Wilson

The Water Supply Association of B.C. opposes the proposed sale of crown leases located adjacent to drinking water reservoirs. Further, in the interests of source water protection, the Board of Directors request that Land and Water British Columbia Inc. not renew these leases past the current tenure.

Rationale:

- **Source water protection:** Water quality is inextricably linked to land use. Rainfall can pick up contaminants from the atmosphere, from natural sources, and from a whole range of human land uses before entering streams and lakes or seeping underground into aquifers.

The impact of recreation on water quality has been very difficult to quantify until quite recently. Two recent reports sponsored by the Water Quality Branch (WQB) of the former Ministry of Environment have demonstrated quite dramatically the impact that human and domestic animals can have in community watersheds.

The following table has been adapted from the WQB sponsored report: *The Effects of Recreation on Drinking Water Quality within the Lambly, Kelowna and Mission*



Creek Watersheds, Kelowna, British Columbia 2000, Burke Phippen, RPBio – BWP Consulting. May 2001.p28.

Frequency distribution of the ribosomal RNA results for *E. coli* samples collected at the SEKID, GEID and LID intakes¹:

	SEKID		GEID		LID	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Cattle	46	27.7	57	34.1	3	12.0
Humans and Domestic An	47	28.3	43	25.7	8	32.0
Wildlife	53	31.9	54	32.3	11	44.0
Unknown	20	12.0	13	7.8	3	12.0
Total	166	100.0	167	100.0	25	100.0

As the above study shows, the presence of humans, domestic animals and cattle in the watershed clearly has a detrimental impact on water quality. The opportunity to develop provincial crown land use policy to directly benefit and protect public health is obvious. This applies not only to the regulation of recreation, but to the regulation of all land use (agriculture/forestry/mining) within community watersheds.

A number of recent reports have cited the need for water purveyors to develop a multi-barrier approach as the key to providing safe, potable water to the residents of B.C. These reports include: Office of the Auditor General. (1999). 1998/1999 Report 5. *Protecting drinking water sources*. Victoria, BC Office of the Auditor General; Ministry of Health Planning. *Provincial Health Officer's Annual Report 2000. Drinking Water Quality in British Columbia: The Public Health Perspective*. Victoria. Queen's Printer. 2001.; Ministry of Water, Lands and Air Protection. *Drinking Water Review Panel Interim Report*. Fraser Basin Council. December 14, 2001., and; Ministry of Water, Lands and Air Protection. *Final Report: Panel Review of British Columbia's Drinking Water Protection Act*. Fraser Basin Council. February 13, 2002.

The multi-barrier approach to safe drinking water is one that applies a “best practices” method to each aspect of drinking water delivery. Source water protection, water treatment, water distribution and operator training each present an opportunity to enhance the safety of the drinking water supply. An effective multi-barrier approach will make sure each of these fundamentals are managed to maximize public health and safety. Clearly, land use decisions in community watersheds that minimize

¹ SEKID: South East Kelowna Irrigation District; GEID: Glenmore Ellison Improvement District; LID: Lakeview Irrigation District.



the potential for pathogen contamination of the water supply are at the core of source water protection.

- **Pending legislation:** Provincial authority governing water resources consists of a matrix of ministries and regulations. There is no lead agency responsible for potable water from source to tap in the province. A number of ministries and agencies with overlapping jurisdictions and mandates regulate the local water purveyor. Current legislation and provincial government responsibility for drinking water is piecemeal and haphazard and the time has come for thoughtful review of public policy and the regulations pertaining to the protection and safety of the public water supply in B.C.

In the wake of a highly critical report on source water protection by the Auditor General in 1999 and the more recent Walkerton Tragedy in May of 2000, the former Minister of Environment, Lands and Parks presented the *Drinking Water Protection Act* to the legislature in the spring of 2001. The act received third reading in the legislature before the spring election, at which time the newly elected government chose to subject the act to a thorough review by an impartial panel of experts. The Drinking Water Review Panel issued an interim report on December 14, 2001 and a final report in February of this year.

The WSABC is highly supportive of the DWRP final report. The association feels the panel has managed to identify the key challenges facing water purveyors throughout this province and suggest bold and innovative ways for government and industry to meet these challenges. Key among the panel's recommendations is the creation of a lead provincial agency for drinking water and the implementation of a number of measures and procedures to protect source water quality.

The association had hoped the government would announce its decision on the panel's recommendations this past spring. The decision has been delayed, however, and it is hoped an announcement will be coming this fall. Given the WSABC's opposition to the sale of crown leases and the pending decision regarding the Drinking Water Protection Act, it would be premature for Lands and Water BC Inc. to move forward with the proposed sale of crown leases at this time.

- **Crown lease sales would promote development:** A change in tenure from lease to fee simple ownership would likely result in a higher level of investment in the properties. Landscaping, paving, fuel storage, the use of pesticides and more frequent visits all pose additional threats to water quality. The increased silt and phosphorous resulting from these activities, among other contaminants, would result in added algal growth – a primary water quality concern for both taste and odour.
- **Increased use:** Increased investment in these properties would almost certainly result in increased year round use. This would not only result in an incremental increase in the degradation of water quality due to the factors already mentioned, but increased winter use would require additional fuel storage for heating with the attendant risks to water quality.



- 4 -

- **Low volume Reservoirs:** Many of the reservoirs in question are small in volume and have a limited ability to tolerate these types of human impact.
- **Road Access:** Private ownership has implications on the right of access to the properties. Road access would be permanent with no possibility for deactivation. Roads have been demonstrated to have a negative impact on water quality in direct relation to the proximity to the drinking water source.
- **Fee simple rights:** Private ownership provides limited control over land use. Properties can be logged, graded or farmed. Fewer controls are typically in place for foreshore development. These activities can lead to excessive runoff and attendant water quality problems.
- **Reservoir level control:** Additional investment resulting from ownership of these properties would result in more piers, docks and other foreshore structures being built. These types of structures rely on consistent water levels and water purveyors would be under increasing pressure to maintain water levels for recreational purposes. This could result in regulations to protect private property from flooding and limiting the drawdown on water reserves.
- **Lease sales would set a precedent:** The sale of crown leases in community watersheds would set a dangerous and likely irreversible precedent. The ever increasing demands for recreational properties will not abate and the temptation for the provincial government to raise revenue through these types of offerings is not likely to subside for some time.
- **Lease sales could hinder future reservoir development:** Private ownership of these waterfront properties could hinder further reservoir expansion projects. Raising reservoir levels could require costly expropriations and the requisite compensation to the owners of these properties.

The majority of leases proposed for sale under this program are located next to drinking water reservoirs. The value of this land is derived from its waterfront location. These waterfront properties would not exist if not for the water purveyor who developed the reservoirs in the first place. The funding for the reservoirs comes from the taxes and tolls of the residents benefiting from the water supply. These same residents and taxpayers will be faced with the increased risk to public health and safety that would result from the sale of these crown leases.