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Water Sustainability Act

INFORMATION ABOUT BRITISH COLUMBIA'S
WATER MANAGEMENT LEGISLATION



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Water Sustainability Act

The *Water Sustainability Act* (WSA) has been in force since February 29, 2016 and benefits all British Columbians — our communities and families, our environment and our economy.

Important Changes for Water Users

The WSA updated and replaced the previous *Water Act* and brought in a number of important changes for surface water and groundwater users.

Key changes in effect under the WSA and associated regulations include:

- » Water rights and licensing requirements for non-domestic groundwater users (e.g., industrial, agricultural, commercial...)
- » Stronger protection for aquatic ecosystems
- » Fees and rentals for water use from surface water and groundwater sources
- » Expanded protection of groundwater including new requirements for well construction and maintenance
- » Increased dam safety and awareness, and compliance and enforcement

Much of the previous *Water Act* was carried forward to the WSA and existing surface water rights granted under the *Water Act* will continue. In some circumstances, the WSA may change how these rights may be exercised, such as during times of drought or water scarcity.

Licensing Groundwater Use

Managing groundwater and surface water together better protects the security and safety of this resource. If you are using or planning to use water from a well (groundwater) for more than just your home (domestic) use, you must apply for a licence for that non-domestic use. If you were using non-domestic groundwater on and before February 29, 2016, you do not need to pay the application fee and can continue to use the water and receive a licence date of precedence that reflects actual use, provided you apply before March 1, 2022.

Domestic well owners — i.e., homeowners with a well that provides water for household use, lawn and garden watering and water for domestic animals — are exempt from licensing requirements and do not pay provincial water fees and rentals. Domestic well owners are strongly encouraged to register their well so that the water use can be considered in licensing decisions. Please contact FrontCounterBC to make your use known so it can be protected.

For more information visit **Register your Well** at www.frontcounterbc.gov.bc.ca/start/ground-water

Water fees and rentals

Updates to provincial fee and rentals were announced February 2015 and took effect February 29, 2016. Fees and rentals help recover the costs of implementation and administration of government's programs including the WSA, and provide tools to sustainably manage B.C.'s water resources, including regulating groundwater use. All rates are the same for surface water and groundwater use. Fees and rentals are generally not applied to provincial or federal governments, or First Nations use on reserve or Treaty lands.

Annual water rentals for existing non-domestic groundwater users accrue starting February 29, 2016, regardless of when an application for a licence is submitted within the transition period. Applications for existing non-domestic groundwater use filed on or before March 1, 2022 are exempt from the application fee.

If you already have a water licence for surface water, the change in your water bill will depend on the water use purpose(s) specified in your water licence. Use the Water Rent Estimator (www.gov.bc.ca/waterrentestimator) to estimate application fees and water rentals for a water licence or use approval.

Other WSA features

The WSA includes a requirement to consider environmental flow needs in decisions, and expanded prohibitions on dumping debris into streams and aquifers provides stronger protection for aquatic ecosystems.

The WSA also provides tools for managing water during shortages, including temporarily restricting surface water and groundwater use to protect essential household needs and critical environmental flows.

The Groundwater Protection Regulation (GWPR) applies to all well owners regardless of how the water is used. The GWPR includes requirements that ensure water wells are properly constructed, maintained, and at the end of their service, deactivated and decommissioned to protect the quality and safety of our groundwater.

The Dam Safety Regulation sets requirements for dam owners related to emergency planning, contact information and placement of signage.

For more information:

For more on applying for licences and approvals contact **FrontCounterBC** at 1-877-855-3222 or visit www.frontcounterbc.gov.bc.ca

For more on the provincial water program visit: www.gov.bc.ca/water

For more on the development of the legislation and implementation visit: <http://engage.gov.bc.ca/watersustainabilityact>

Questions on these changes? Email: Livingwatersmart@gov.bc.ca