



Salt Spring Island Water Preservation Society

JANUARY 2020 NEWSLETTER

Report to Our Membership: 2019 Activities

by Maxine Leichter

It's renewal time again! We really appreciate your past support and hope you will renew your membership, as maintaining our membership numbers is important when speaking up on issues. And if you are able to give us an extra donation, that also is very much appreciated as those donations are an important part of balancing our budget each year. Please do keep them coming!

In 2019, we were active on many fronts to protect Salt Spring drinking water and our environment and to represent our members. Following are some of the main accomplishments of the year:

WPS at the SSIWPA Table: Board member Maxine Leichter represented the Water Preservation Society (WPS) members on the Salt Spring Island Watershed Protection Alliance (SSIWPA pronounced swī-pā), an intergovernmental coordinating committee. Board members John Millson and Ian Peace served on SSIWPA working groups. We thank CRD Director Gary Holman and Island Trustee Laura Patrick for allowing NGOs (such as WPS) to participate more fully in SSIWPA discussions.

Managing the WPS St. Mary Lake Watershed Reserve: This summer, we again investigated illegal campers along Tripp Rd. Although the fencing we recently installed has reduced the problem, help is needed to monitor this location next summer. We printed 13 new metal signs to replace old faded signs and added more at the boundary points where Channel Ridge footpaths become WPS footpaths and stricter rules apply. The signs will be installed in early 2020. Board members also checked that WPS footpaths were clear of fallen and dangerous overhanging branches from last winter's windstorm. A special thank you to volunteers who cleared trees and debris from the WPS footpaths. In the fall, additional native plants—including oaks, red currant, and fescues—were planted on the benchland restoration area, and invasive grasses, daisies, broom, and tansy plants were removed.

Protecting Forests and Watersheds: Throughout 2019, WPS supported efforts to stop clear-cut logging on SSI. WPS wrote to all of our local elected officials and several ministries asking for legislation to stop clear-cut logging in the Islands Trust area. Protecting our forests is important for protecting our ground and surface water sources. WPS also helped keep those working on this issue updated on LTC actions and other relevant information.

SSI Freshwater Catalogue: The purpose of this 18-month-old project, led by John Millson, is to gather data on island water resources. Educational outreach and field events have reached over 250 islanders. Volunteers can use a smartphone app to send data over the Internet to a website with a WebMap. John has been working with students at the Stowell Lake Yurt School and the Fernwood Elementary School. Volunteers have collected data at more than 1600 field locations in 35



island watersheds, including 20 regular sampling sites in 15 watersheds. WPS received a grant from the Salt Spring Foundation to support buying equipment and materials for the project. During the latter half of the year, this group has been participating in a Water Rangers/World Wildlife Fund "Canadian watersheds data deficit" project. A photo submitted to the Canadian Water Rangers organization won a prize! More volunteers are welcome. To participate, contact John at jamssi-water@gmail.com.

Public Events: WPS had booths at the Film Festival, the Climate Plan Launch event, and, for the first time in local memory, also at the Fall Fair. The latter was so successful that we'd like to do it again. If you could help staff the booth this year, please let us know.

Collaborations: WPS worked with several other organizations, sharing our expertise and contacts. These groups include the SSI Conservancy, Transition Salt Spring Climate Change Plan Update, and those working to stop clear-cut logging.

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**“2019 Activities”** *cont'd from page 1*

To improve our effectiveness, in 2019 WPS has joined two water protection alliances: the Canadian Freshwater Alliance BC Chapter and the Vancouver Island Waterwatch Coalition.

Lawsuit Update: In November, WPS received notice that the latest owner of Channel Ridge Properties has changed its lawyer and sent a legal notice to the court to keep the case active. Nothing further has been heard. We are advised that no action is needed on our part at this time.

Protecting Salt Spring Island Water Resources: This year, WPS continued to inform local trustees of the risks of passing a bylaw to allow full-time occupancy of seasonal cottages in areas where the supply of groundwater is not known. Regardless, this bylaw received second reading and is likely to come into force in 2020. WPS also sent a letter to the *Driftwood* supporting the North Salt Spring Water District moratorium on new connections due to limited water supplies. We pointed out that a helpful step would be to investigate changing provincial regulations to allow water districts to set limits on consumption.

Interested in becoming more actively involved?

Occasionally we have work parties to maintain and restore areas of St. Mary Lake Watershed Reserve.

If you'd like special notification of these, please contact Maxine mleichte@telus.net.

Also contact her if you're interested in becoming a Board member.

**Two Provincial Water Reports
Urge Action to Protect BC Water**

by Maxine Leichter

This article summarizes two recent reports, both of which decry the dire conditions facing BC with respect to water and both suggest solutions. Direct quotes from the reports are included where possible. The reports are available on line.

First some background: As reported in the WPS newsletter last spring, the *Water Sustainability Act* (active as of February 2016) was to begin licensing groundwater withdrawals for non-domestic users over a certain size in February 2019. In that month nearly a year ago, BC water advocates were disappointed when the Ministry of Forests Lands and National Resource Operations announced that the licensing for non-domestic uses would be extended until a *potential* deadline of March 1, 2022. The reason given was that “recognizing the value of a license to secure water rights represents a significant cultural shift ... especially true for people who have used the groundwater for decades for free and without government oversight.” In other words, those to be regulated didn't like it.

Later last year, coincidentally, two very damning reports came out highlighting the need for funding and regulation to address water scarcity and water-related public health.

**Tapped Out: A Special Report on Water Scarcity and Water Solutions
in BC Commissioned by the Water Watch Salmon Society September, 2019**

Available at the watershedwatch.ca website

This report provides enlightening maps of where water scarcity is most severe in BC and urges the implementation of provincial-scale solutions. The maps are based on where water restrictions have occurred and population density, showing that “approximately 63% of BC's population (2.9 million people) live in water-stressed areas. The areas with the highest levels of water stress cover only 3.7% of the province, but 23% of BC's population lives in these places. This is likely only to get worse since BC's population is growing significantly, and some water-stressed areas have higher-than-average growth rates.”

“Climate change affects precipitation and water flow patterns, and the resulting seasonal water shortages will cause increasing competition between various water users. In British Columbia, the annual amount of precipitation is forecasted to increase, but summers will be (and have been) drier and longer, with more frequent and severe droughts. In the fall and winter, heavy rainfall will cause floods and damage to infrastructure.”

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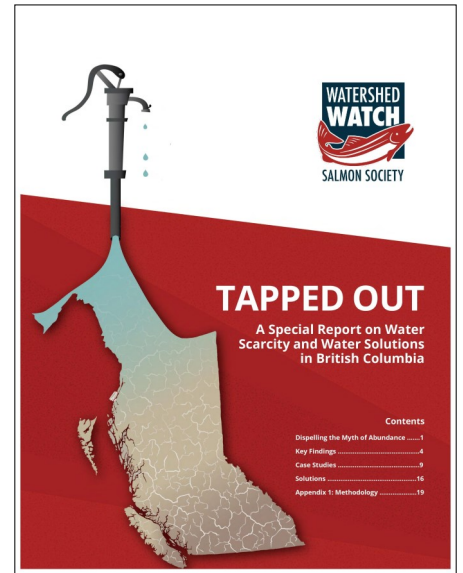


“Two Provincial Water Reports” cont’d from page 2

The report concludes: “We propose that improved water management include the following measures to minimize the economic, social and ecological upheaval caused by water shortages:

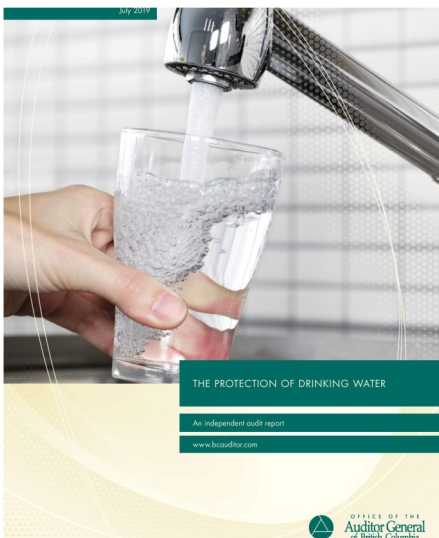
1. monitoring, measuring and reporting on the state of our waters;
2. implementation of groundwater licensing
3. development of an Environmental Flow Needs Regulation; and,
4. provision of adequate, stable funding for water management and water governance.”

The report includes details under each recommendation, such as: “mandatory water use measuring and reporting by all licensed users, integration of data collected by community-based organizations, and appropriate and respectful bridging with Indigenous knowledge, a systematic approach to checking compliance with authorized water uses, including estimating the extent of unauthorized water use ... bringing all users into compliance by 2022 and establishing province-wide legally enforceable environmental flows to maintain healthy watersheds and protect salmon.” The report emphasizes the need to provide adequate funding to accomplish these, stating that “the Province should implement the 2020 budget recommendation made by the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.”



Protecting Drinking Water and Public Health

Available at www.bcauditor.com/pubs



In July of 2019, the BC Auditor General released a report entitled “The Protection of Drinking Water.” It is a discouraging read. The report reviewed the two agencies primarily responsible for drinking water protection, the Ministry of Health and the Provincial Health Officer. Both agencies were found not to be taking actions needed to protect BC drinking water. On the other hand, the report also found that agency roles and responsibilities are not clear, and in some cases, the agencies do not have the resources or power to take action or require other responsible agencies to do so.

The report states that BC has over 4,400 known small drinking water systems that serve approximately 480,000 British Columbians. It cautions that risks to drinking water are increasing due to population growth, mining, gas extraction, impacts of agriculture, livestock, recreation in watersheds, and shortages within the water treatment workforce. It also warns that “climate change will result in more wildfires, more intense rainfall, flooding, frequent and severe droughts all of which impact the quality and quantity of drinking water sources. In BC, most of the water infrastructure is over 50 years old, and aging equipment can fail during climatic events.”

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Want to volunteer from home?

We are looking for a volunteer to help us tally Country Grocer receipts for the store donation program. Last year, WPS received over \$450 from Country Grocer through this program. This is the task: once a week, pick up the receipts from our box at Country Grocer. Once a month, you would tally up the receipts, fill out a simple form, and drop it all off in the designated basket at Country Grocer. WPS then receives a cheque for 1% of the total receipts. These funds are a major part of our income each year. Huge thanks to Rodney Polden and Usha Rautenbach who have done this task for many years.





“Two Provincial Water Reports” cont’d from page 3

The Ministry of Health (Health) is supposed to coordinate the many other ministries and agencies that have some oversight over water quality, but it is failing to do so. In cases where Health has sent recommendations to other agencies, they have not been followed. The report found that legislation “does not support Health in assuming ultimate responsibility ... it has no authority to compel the other ministries to act.” Yet, “Health had not developed a strategic plan to provide clear direction on the actions needed by the ministries and regional health authorities to improve the protection of drinking water.”

Upon review, the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) didn’t fare much better. The report states, “We found that the PHO had not demonstrated adequate oversight over drinking water officers, nor had the Office of the PHO been able to show the tracking and resolution of significant impediments to drinking water protection.”

“The Act also requires the PHO to monitor drinking water officers’ compliance with the guidelines and directives established by Health. We found that the PHO tracks drinking water officers’ actions in its report on drinking water; however, there is no formal monitoring of compliance with specific requirements associated with each guideline.”

The report found that the PHO has had challenges in getting timely information from other ministries and health authorities. Despite limited staff and resources, it has made recommendations, but various ministries and agencies have made limited or no progress in implementing these and there is no legislative requirement that they do so. The Minister of Health can enact a drinking water protection plan to ensure that watersheds are protected. However, the report stated “We found that no drinking water protection plans have been established in the 16 years since the Act was amended” even after PHO made requests to the minister [of Health] on behalf of Comox Valley on four separate occasions. This point is of particular interest to Salt Spring since at one time an unsuccessful request was made to implement such a plan for Cusheon Lake.

These reports make important recommendations that should be taken up by our provincial government. WPS hopes to report back to our membership in 2020 if there has been any progress on implementation of the recommendations in these two reports.

MEMBERSHIP

\$15 for individuals or \$30 for a family/couple.

Additional donations are very gratefully received and help to keep WPS active, effective, and working hard to protect our island waters. Tax Receipts are issued.

Current Members: Mail membership fee to:

Ganges PO Box 555
SSI, BC V8K 2W3

New members: Request an application form to fill out and return.

When you become a member, you become part of a supportive group of people who collectively care for and about Salt Spring's freshwater and groundwater sources.

We'll keep you updated on local water-related programs, projects and events.

OUR EXECUTIVE

President	Maxine Leichter
Treasurer	Judy McLennan
Directors-at-Large	Chris Drake
	Ian Peace
	Jean Wilkinson
	John Millson

CONTACT US

E-mail: ssiwps@gmail.com
Online: ssiwaterpreservationsociety.ca

COUNTRY GROCER TAPES

Please put your tapes in box #73

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Request a Smile Card to donate when making purchases