

Watershed Security

Thanks to strong co-governance, communities, fish, and ecosystems across BC are ensured a resilient and sustainable water future

HOW WE'RE THINKING ABOUT THIS

Water will be the defining issue of the coming decades, shaping our future in ways we cannot afford to overlook. Water is more than just a resource—it is the foundation of our health, the backbone of our local economies, and a lifeline for our communities, forests, fish, and wildlife.

Recognizing the vital role water plays, we are committed to prioritizing the health and security of our watersheds. This means fostering collaborative governance models that allow for equitable access, thoughtful management and shared decision-making. By doing so, we can ensure that communities across the province have both the voice and the tools necessary to protect this invaluable resource.

Water is, at its core, a shared responsibility. Effective stewardship cannot happen in isolation. It requires the direct involvement of First Nations and local communities, whose deep connections to the land and water must guide our collective efforts. Only through an inclusive and sustainable approach can we secure the future of our water resources for future generations.

PROBLEM DEFINITION

British Columbia is facing increasingly severe climate challenges—droughts, landslides, flooding, and water quality issues—putting immense strain on our water management systems. Farmers, in particular, are struggling with water shortages that threaten food security and their livelihoods.

Without intervention, our way of life, economy, and food supply are at serious risk. The situation is worsened by past mismanagement, such as logging in vital watersheds and inadequate regulation of large water users, compounded by the province's continued expansion of water-intensive fracking.

To safeguard our water security, we must empower local communities to take the lead and invest in natural infrastructure, such as protecting aquifers and restoring wetlands. These actions will not only improve flood protection and maintain clean water supplies but also create sustainable jobs and long-lasting solutions.

POLICIES FOR ANNOUNCEMENT

Create Watershed Boards

- Create and support watershed boards in every community. These boards will be granted authority over decisions that affect watershed security and will serve as collaborative platforms where First Nations and local stakeholders - farmers, industry representatives, commercial users, and environmental stewards - can collaboratively manage and conserve their local water sources.
- We will commit \$100 million to fund the establishment and ongoing support of watershed boards across the province, ensuring their sustainability and effectiveness.

Streamline the *Water Sustainability Act*

- Set clear environmental and critical flow thresholds to safeguard water ecosystems and ensure sustainable water use across the province.
- Safeguard drinking water sources by implementing stronger protections and monitoring to prevent contamination and overuse.
- Require industries to accurately report their water use and provide state-of-the-watershed reporting, improving transparency and resource management.
- Grant an amnesty to farmers and long-standing water users who missed previous deadlines, allowing them to apply for water licenses before new users.
- Update the “first-in-time, first-in-right” principle to reflect modern realities, ensuring allocations are adaptable and durable.
- Empower local watershed boards to have a role in critical water-use decisions.
- Improve the Ministry of Environment’s ability to administer penalties, enhancing compliance with water use regulations and protecting water resources.

Invest in Watershed Security

- Leverage federal funding to create a \$1 billion endowment for the BC Watershed Security Fund. The fund will support community planning, decision-making functions, and natural defenses against floods, fires, droughts, and contamination.
- Provide \$75 million annually to the BC Watershed Security Fund to ensure sustainable, long-term investment in watershed management.
- Mandate that municipalities install water meters to track water usage, ensuring accountability and promoting conservation.
- Fund and implement the BC Flood Strategy by 2027 to protect floodplain communities and agricultural land from climate-related flooding risks.
- Invest in building more water storage reservoirs and bolster wetlands to enhance water retention and resilience against drought.

Reform Water Use

- Protect the province's water resources to ensure long-term water security.
- Increase water rental rates to reflect the true ecological costs of water extraction in BC.
- Commit to an ongoing, comprehensive review of water rental rates to ensure they remain fair and reflective of ecological values.
- Suspend all non-essential industrial water uses, including fracking and water bottling, during periods of severe drought to prioritize essential water needs.
- Mandate the treatment and increased reuse of fracking wastewater to minimize the use of fresh water in fracking operations.
- Implement stricter standards for disposal wells and require baseline and ongoing testing of water systems affected by oil and gas operations.
- Transfer water licensing and permitting authority back to the Water Stewardship Branch, ending preferential treatment for oil and gas companies and ensuring stricter oversight.

