



In 2016, the provincial government announced it would develop a water strategy that would update N.B.'s outdated way of protecting water. The draft water protection strategy has now been released, and it is up to us to ensure decision makers are aware that a comprehensive water strategy with strong legislation and effective implementation and enforcement, is a priority for New Brunswickers.

The Conservation Council of New Brunswick has developed the following key messages and gathered resources into this booklet to help citizens and supporting groups respond to the government's call for public comments on its draft water protection strategy, released on October 6, 2017.

[A Water Strategy for New Brunswick 2018-2028](#) is open for public comment until Nov. 20, 2017. You can send your comments via email to [waterstrategy-strategiedeleau@gnb.ca](mailto:waterstrategy-strategiedeleau@gnb.ca) or by mail to Department of Environment and Local Government, Policy and Planning Division, P.O. Box 6000, Fredericton, N.B., E3B 5H1. (We'd love to see your comments, too, please send them to [kaleigh.holder@conservationcouncil.ca](mailto:kaleigh.holder@conservationcouncil.ca)). Or, [click here to send your comments right away using our pre-written letter](#) (it takes 30 seconds)!

### What's a water protection strategy about?

A strong water protection strategy should detail the steps that will lay out the *why*, *what*, *how*, and *when*, of the actions the provincial government intends to take to protect water, including bringing into force modern water protection laws.

A good water strategy is grounded in a strong vision to protect all water, while objectives, actions and laws in the strategy work together to keep all water as healthy and pollution free as possible, and restore water systems that are currently degraded.



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## What's the problem? Why do we need a water protection strategy?

If left untended, New Brunswick's waters will face ongoing and increasing threats from pollution, wetland and coastal estuary loss, loss of adequate environmental flow to sustain aquatic life, and increasing climate change impacts such as floods, droughts, and high temperatures.

### Pollution

Pollution decreases the quality of freshwater and can be caused by a combination of runoff from industry, municipal sewage treatment plants, and from large-scale forestry and agricultural practices. Pollution can also be attributed to individual landowners (for example, houses or cottages built too close to shorelines, leaky septic tanks, streams or wetlands drained for building lots, or deliberate or accidental spills of toxic materials such as oil). These types of pollution can lead to an immediate decline in the health of ecosystems, impacting drinking water quality, recreational activities, fish and aquatic habitat, and people's' livelihoods.

### Wetland and estuary loss

Wetlands, along with marshes, estuaries, swamps, bogs, and the like, play a vital role in the health of natural ecosystems, including our own human health. These highly saturated areas act like sponges that soak up water and slowly filter out pollutants, chemicals, and harmful bacteria. The increasing destruction of wetlands in the province is concerning because we benefit directly from their ability to filter water, control flooding, and reduce the effects of storms, all the more important now as we see the impact of the changing climate and the increased frequency of heavy rains and ice storms.<sup>3,4</sup>



### Climate change

Extreme climate events such as heavy rains and ice storms add extra stress on freshwater and our coastal areas.<sup>5</sup> As these events become more frequent and unpredictable, there will often be times when water is too plentiful, and flooding occurs, or it will be in short supply and we experience drought.<sup>6</sup> These extremes are becoming more common and we must ensure that the quality and quantity of our rivers, lakes, streams, and wetlands are not reduced.<sup>7</sup>

## Why we need your support

The water strategy won't be implemented to its fullest potential without the public support it needs to truly make it a priority for decision makers. In the draft of the water strategy, there are indications that it will not go far enough to protect freshwater.<sup>8</sup>

We have the know-how to modernize our water laws; we just need the will to make sure they are the strongest and the most protective they can be.



## What does the water strategy need?

We studied water protection best practices from across Canada to help all of us prepare for the comment round in the government's development of a comprehensive water protection strategy for N.B. Based on that review and the Conservation Council's own 45+ years of water policy and scientific expertise, we have determined that a comprehensive water protection strategy for New Brunswick should:

1. be science-based
  - a. involving using baseline data to set out the water system's current state, (for example, using data to help set a classification for the systems, like an A, B, C or D rating, where A is very good and D means degraded, as is required by law all over Europe, and in much of the United States)
  - b. including the assessment of cumulative impacts to inform decision-making,
  - c. make protecting environmental flows a priority,<sup>9</sup>
  - d. and be tailored to meet the overall water quality requirements of each of our 13 primary watersheds and major rivers that feed them (recognizing that a flexible

area-based approach is necessary to ensure meaningful participation from multiple water users but also ensures province-wide standards are met)

2. set water quality standards in law, as opposed to using unenforceable guidelines or objectives, as is the current practice;
3. Use conservation and precaution in all watersheds including surface waters (lakes, streams, rivers) and groundwater, which means developing good conservation plans, policies and practices, and uses the precautionary principle as a guiding, legally enforceable tool;<sup>10</sup>
4. protect our marine coastal areas; (move the Coastal Areas Protection Policy from being a paper document to a regulation under the Clean Water Act)
5. formal co-governance agreements with First Nations, including full recognition of their rights and title, which is critical for moving forward with a collaborative approach;<sup>11</sup>
6. be transparent, involving consultations with businesses, farmers, municipal officials and citizens;
7. be accountable, involving monitoring, data collection and regular, annual reporting to the public and our Legislators on both the status of our water and the progress made on meeting the goals and objectives outlined in the water protection strategy;
8. finally, incorporating the previously mentioned requirements into a water protection strategy will be ineffective unless all 7 are explicitly written into an enforceable and functioning modern legal framework.

There is considerable evidence that supports the need for these particular eight recommendations found in water policy and law across Canada. While you as a citizen, or on behalf of your organization, may have unique challenges to speak to, and individual stories to tell, coming together and recommending these key elements will help us achieve a better, more protective, water strategy.

## How to get your message out there

### Submit Your Comments

The draft water strategy is currently available online for comment and comments will be received until November 20. Submit your comments by email to: [waterstrategy-strategiedeleau@gnb.ca](mailto:waterstrategy-strategiedeleau@gnb.ca) or by mail to Department of Environment and Local Government, Policy and Planning Division, P.O. Box 6000, Fredericton, N.B., E3B 5H1. Please feel free to send us a copy too! Email us at [water@conservationcouncil.ca](mailto:water@conservationcouncil.ca).

Your comments will have the most impact when you add a personal note explaining why a strong water protection strategy is important to you or your organization, while also mentioning the 8 key elements that are relevant to your concerns.

Here is a sample comment submission to help you out with yours:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am writing to express my support for a strong water protection strategy for New Brunswick.

I live near \_\_\_\_\_ OR I live in \_\_\_\_\_ watershed.

*Describe your favourite spot to fish/swim/paddle etc.*

*Share your favourite water memory.*

Clean, healthy water is important to me because \_\_\_\_\_.

*Have you recently experienced a boil water order? Blue-green algae? Extreme weather? Pollution? Describe what is of concern to you.*

I applaud the provincial government for moving forward on its commitment to protecting our water, however I believe the draft strategy does not go far enough to ensure healthy water for my watershed.

We need a water protection strategy that *[insert one or multiple key elements]*.

I am afraid that if left untended, my watershed will face ongoing and increasing threats from *[pollution, wetland and coastal estuary loss, loss of adequate environmental flow to sustain aquatic life, and increasing climate change impacts such as floods, droughts, and high temperatures]*.

Please protect my watershed by implementing a strong water protection strategy with modern legislation that *[note key element(s)]* to ensure the health of our water and people.

Thank you

*Your name*

**Have your say now — we've made it easy for you!**

We've written a letter calling for what we believe should be in a strong water protection strategy based on our research. You can add your own comments to the letter, or simply sign and send it to support strong water protection in New Brunswick. [Submit your comments now \(it only takes 30 seconds\)!](#)

## Social Media

Don't be afraid to tap into social media. Facebook, Twitter, blogs and other online outlets are one of the quickest and most efficient means of communicating and sharing information. Using the hashtag #nbwater when posting to social media will help spread your message! Tag us at @conservationcouncil (on Facebook) and @cc\_nb (on Twitter) and we'll help spread your message. [Click here to download some sample graphics we designed for use on your social media.](#)



## Write an Op-ed

Newspapers, as well as some broadcast media, welcome submissions in the form of op-eds. This can be a great way to get your message out; in addition to having more control over the content, the opinion pages tend to be the most-read sections of a paper. Find a list of newspapers in the province [here](#).

## Write a Letter to the Editor

A very efficient way to get your opinion and issue into the public discourse is to write a letter to the editor. The opinion pages of newspapers are widely read and politicians and government officials track letters to find out what's important to community members. Letters to the editor can also influence subsequent media coverage. Find your local community paper and the email address to submit your letter [here](#).

## Summary of 8 Key Elements of a Strong Water Protection Strategy

New Brunswick deserves a water protection strategy that:

1. is science-based; (involving baseline data, tracking and taking into consideration cumulative impacts, environmental flows)
2. sets water quality standards within a working, legal mechanism;
3. conserves all water within watersheds including surface waters (lakes, streams, rivers) and groundwater, by developing good conservation plans, policies and practices, and uses the precautionary principle as a guiding, legally enforceable tool;
4. protects our marine coastal areas in law;
5. has a meaningful form of co-governance with First Nations;
6. includes the development, implementation and enforcement of watershed protection plans, developed in a transparent manner, involving government, businesses, watershed organizations, farmers, municipal officials, and citizens;
7. is accountable, which includes ongoing monitoring and annual reporting to the public on the progress of goals and objectives outlined in the water protection strategy; and,
8. is enforceable through a modern legal framework.

## Resources

1. British Columbia Ministry of Environment, "[British Columbia Water Sustainability Act](#)," February, 2016.
2. Department of Communities, Land and Environment, "[Prince Edward Island Watershed Strategy](#)," June, 2015.
3. Department of Environment and Local Government, "[New Brunswick Wetlands Conservation Policy](#)," July, 2002.
4. Department of Environment and Local Government, "[A Coastal Areas Protection Policy for New Brunswick](#)," February, 2002.
5. Peter Armstrong, "[Houston was warned it was a 'sitting duck' for major flood](#)," CBC News, September 2, 2017.
6. Government of New Brunswick, "[Ice Storm Review 2017](#)," January, 2017.
7. Jordan Gill, "[Dry summer causing river levels to drop and stressing out fish](#)," CBC News, October 10, 2017.
8. WWF-Canada, "[WWF-Canada disappointed by Government of New Brunswick's newly drafted water strategy](#)," October 6, 2017.
9. Conservation Gateway, "[Brisbane Declaration](#)," September, 2007.
10. Government of New Brunswick, "[Species at Risk Act](#)," April, 2012.
11. POLIS Water Sustainability Project and the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources, "[Collaborative Consent and British Columbia's Water: Towards Watershed Co-governance](#)," September, 2017