

November 20, 2017

Hon. Serge Rousselle
Minister of Environment and Local Government
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Voices for Sustainable Environments and Communities
Input into the Draft Water Strategy

Voices for Sustainable Environments and Communities is a regional Queens and Kings County-based group of concerned citizens who live along the Lower St. John River. We are writing to express our support for a strong Water Strategy in New Brunswick.

There are 55 people associated with VOICES, who have signed up to receive notices of our events and activities. Recently we held a forum on threats to our waterways, which was attended by about 30 people voicing concerns about their water. We gathered these concerns and present them below:

1. Lack of water classification
2. Lack of adequate and meaningful enforcement of our existing regulations
3. Lack of government will to invest in and study its waterways
4. Lack of rigorous monitoring of our waterways (monitoring has been off-loaded by government to volunteer groups)
5. Chemical spraying and its impact on human and ecosystem health
6. Climate change and its impact on waterways, e.g., water levels, water temperatures, shoreline vegetation and wildlife, including waterfowl populations
7. The impact of clear-cuts and other forestry practices on our waterways
8. The sustainability of our forests into the future, given the large percentage of monoculture plantations, and the management of public crown land forests by private corporations.
9. The public's misuse and lack of respect for water (for dumping, running offshore racing boats, etc.)
10. Lack of public education and awareness (e.g., shoreline stewardship)
11. The handling of waste water and run-off
12. Regulations under the Wellfield Designation process only apply to municipal water supplies

Clean, healthy waterways and potable water should be a basic right of our entire population. We all need to be able to drink unpolluted water, eat fish that are free of mercury, cadmium and other pollutants, and eat uncontaminated fiddleheads in the spring. Our children deserve to drink clean water and eat food that does not leave them with ongoing health and developmental issues.

Clean water is the foundation of a strong local economy here on the Lower St. John. Farmers depend on it, tourists expect it (especially when using the few remaining river ferries), woods workers and small woodlot owners rely on it to nourish healthy forests, sports fishermen insist on it, and boaters, paddlers, and sailors want to enjoy waterways that are clean and pristine.

Poor water quality in our lakes, rivers and streams has a direct effect on the local economy. The sedimentation in the Washademoak Lake in 2016 prompted many cottagers to avoid swimming in the water, and to question whether their property values would drop.

If our water protection regulations are not more rigorously enforced, and if monitoring and surveillance of our waters are left to volunteers, there is no guarantee that we will enjoy clean and pristine waterways in the future. We have already seen significant erosion along the shorelines due to land use choices made by landowners, loss of wetlands and the increasing impacts of climate change such as droughts, flooding and increases in the water temperature.

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

We need a water protection strategy that:

- is science-based; (involving baseline data, tracking and taking into consideration cumulative impacts, environmental flows)
- sets water quality standards within a working, legal mechanism;
- sets meaningful penalties for land-use infractions;
- 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;
- protects our marine coastal areas in law;
- has a meaningful form of co-governance with First Nations;
- 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;
- 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,
- is enforceable through a modern legal framework

Please protect our watershed by implementing a strong water protection strategy with modern legislation to ensure the health of our water and our people.

Thank you,

Planning Group, Voices for Sustainable Environments and Communities

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cc. 55 members of the VOICES Distribution List