

# Water Sustainability Act

NEW RULES NOW IN EFFECT

*February 29, 2016*



BRITISH  
COLUMBIA

## ***Water Sustainability Act now in force***

The *Water Sustainability Act* (WSA) and the first phase of regulations were brought into force on February 29, 2016. The WSA will benefit all British Columbians — our communities and families, our environment and our economy.

## ***Important Changes for Water Users***

The WSA updates and replaces the previous *Water Act*, bringing in a number of important changes for existing and new surface water and groundwater users.

Key changes that are now in effect under the WSA and new regulations include:

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

Much of the *Water Act* has been brought into 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 will better protect the security and safety of this resource. As of February 29, 2016, all non-domestic groundwater users including existing users are required to apply for a water licence, and pay an application fee and annual water rentals. There is a three-year transition period for existing groundwater users to submit this application.

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 and paying provincial water fees and rentals. Domestic well owners are strongly encouraged to register their well by contacting FrontCounterBC to make their use known so it can be protected.

Visit [www.frontcounterbc.gov.bc.ca](http://www.frontcounterbc.gov.bc.ca) for information on how to apply for a groundwater licence or to register your domestic well.

### ***New water fees and rentals***

New fees and rentals, announced in February 2015, are intended to recover the costs of implementing the new WSA, and provide more tools to sustainably manage B.C.'s water resources, including regulating groundwater use for the first time. 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 three-year transition period. Applications for existing non-domestic groundwater use filed within 12 months from when the WSA came into force (on or before March 1, 2017) 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](http://www.gov.bc.ca/waterrentestimator)) to estimate your application fees and water rentals for a water licence or use approval.

### ***Other changes under the WSA***

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

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

An updated and expanded Groundwater Protection Regulation (GWPR) applies to all well owners regardless of how the water is used. The new GWPR includes more requirements to ensure that 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.

An updated Dam Safety Regulation introduces new requirements for dam owners related to emergency planning, contact information and placement of signage.

### ***What happens next?***

With the regulations related to essential water management activities, e.g., authorizing water use, now in effect, work on other regulations to fully implement the *Water Sustainability Act* will be initiated. Priority regulations to be started in the coming years include livestock watering, measuring and reporting, and water objectives, among others.

### ***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](http://www.frontcounterbc.gov.bc.ca)

For more on the provincial water program visit: [www.gov.bc.ca/water](http://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?

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