

SFU study calls for coordinated water conservation policies

Surface and groundwater should be managed together

BY LARRY PYNN, VANCOUVER SUN OCTOBER 5, 2011

Canadians are wasteful users of their most valuable natural resource - water - and need to act in unison now to become sustainable in the face of climate change, a report released Tuesday by Simon Fraser University warned.

The report's lead author, Bob Sandford, with SFU's Adaptation to Climate Change Team, urged all levels of government to put jurisdictional issues aside and adopt a national water-conservation strategy.

"Climate change impacts on water are real and substantial," he said in an interview. "Managing water more carefully is the means of addressing this."

B.C. is in the process of modernizing its Water Act, which dates back to 1909. Stated objectives include the protection of stream health and aquatic environments, improvement of water governance arrangements, the introduction of more flexibility and efficiency in water allocation, and regulation of groundwater use in priority areas and for large withdrawals.

Sandford, who is also Canadian chairman of the United Nations Water for Life Decade, said B.C. is "very far behind" other jurisdictions both within and outside Canada when it comes to management of water resources.

"You manage groundwater like a country would in the 18th century," he argued, noting the B.C. government seems ready to put groundwater resources at risk through industrial processes such as coal-bed methane extraction "without really knowing what's going on down there. "

He noted that groundwater and surface water must be managed together, saying it is inappropriate to simply drill into the ground for more water once surface water runs out.

Sandford said he supports water metering as a way to reduce per-capita water usage, provided that no one is prevented from adequate access to water due to issues of poverty.

Environment Canada has reported that between 1972 and 1996, Canada's rate of water withdrawals increased by almost 90 per cent, from 24 billion cubic metres per year to 45 billion. During that same time, the nation's population increased by 33.6 per cent.

For the full report, visit www.sfu.ca/act.

lpynn@vancouversun.com

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun