

This federal election, vote to PROTECT CANADIAN WATER



Environmentalists and business leaders don't agree on much, but both have called water "the oil of the 21st century." Americans now depend on groundwater for 50 per cent of their water supplies and are mining it far faster than nature can replace it. California's aquifers are drying up, and the Colorado River is strained to the limit. A growing U.S. population coupled with increased water scarcity means that Canada is under pressure to sell its water riches to the U.S., through diversions and bulk water exports. This leaves Canada's water vulnerable to depletion and to international trade challenges that could permanently open the floodgates to parched U.S. states.

The lack of a clear federal water policy means that Canada has little recourse when the U.S. ignores international agreements designed to settle water conflicts. By refusing to wade into the debate, the federal government has left Canadian provinces to fight the U.S. government on their own, compromising Canada's stewardship over its shared waters.

Water vulnerable

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) defines water as a "service" and an "investment," leaving Canadian water vulnerable to thirsty foreign investors. Once Canada allows water to be withdrawn for large-scale industrial purposes, foreign investors must be given the same "national treatment" as Canadian companies.

The International Joint Commission (IJC) is responsible for overseeing and resolving conflicts over water between Canada and the U.S. The IJC acts as the referee on all transboundary water issues, and is made up of an equal number of representatives from Canada and the U.S. In the following three cases, the lack of a national water policy has weakened Canada's role at the IJC, and left Canadian water exposed to unilateral U.S. action:

1. The Great Lakes

The Great Lakes Charter Annex Agreement was signed on December 13, 2005, by Ontario, Quebec and eight U.S. states. While the Annex's supposed goal is to control diversions out of the Great Lakes, the agreement makes

permissive exceptions, weakens Canadian governance over the lakes and was developed with inadequate public consultation.

2. Devils Lake, North Dakota

North Dakota is diverting water out of Devils Lake to combat flooding. In August 2005, despite opposition from the federal government and Manitoba, polluted Devils Lake water flowed into Lake Winnipeg, threatening its fragile ecosystem. North Dakota refused to refer the matter to the IJC, and the water will flow again, as early as spring 2006. The Devils Lake diversion demonstrates the need for a strong federal policy that stands up for Canadian water in the face of unilateral U.S. decisions.

3. Red River Valley, North Dakota

North Dakota is facing drought and has proposed several water diversions in the Red River Valley, including one directly from Lake of the Woods, Ontario, and other inter-basin transfers that would impact water systems in Manitoba. Once again, North Dakota is acting without consulting or negotiating with the Canadian government, despite the potential impact of these diversions on Canadian water. The federal government must step in – before it's too late.

Take action for Canada's water

Canada's federal water policy has not been updated in almost 20 years. It's time for the federal government to develop a national water policy that declares water as a human right and protects Canadian water from commodification, diversion, bulk exports and privatization. The government of Canada should also exclude water from any current or future trade agreements. The future of Canada's water depends on it.

This federal election, demand that candidates support a national water policy that protects Canadian water from commercialization and bulk exports.

Visit www.canadians.org to download the Council of Canadians' Voter's Guide, and see where the parties stand on protecting Canadian water. Or call 1-800-387-7177 for more information.