

## **The Water Watch Summit Declaration**

*In 1998, the Council of Canadians, the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Canadian Environmental Law Association joined forces to stop the bulk export and privatization of Canada's fresh water. Their work includes forming local Water Watch groups across the country. On September 17, 18 and 19, 1999, 225 representatives from over 40 citizen groups met at the Water Watch Summit in Ottawa to adopt a common position on growing threats to our fresh water. The result was the following declaration.*

### **The Water Watch Summit Declaration**

*September 19th, 1999*

*Ottawa, Ontario*

Water is essential to all life. Water has become a critical issue in Canada and around the world. As the availability of abundant quantities of clean water becomes rarer, the health of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems and the species that inhabit them - including humans - is threatened. The appearance of water scarcity has caused some to conclude that water is best treated as a commodity, to be bought, sold and traded in accordance with market principles. The idea of water as part of the global commons and as an essential part of our natural heritage is under threat. Also threatened are the collective means by which generations of Canadians have sought to provide water and sanitation services to people living in towns and cities.

Canadians are at an historic crossroads in the way we think about and manage water. This declaration is an expression of our resolve that all Canadians should be involved in making these decisions and that the environment and the public interest should not be sacrificed to market principles and private gain.

1. People must respect and protect the integrity of the water cycle. Water belongs not to people but to the earth and all its species. The cardinal rules for human use of water should be: remove as little as possible; prevent pollution; to the greatest extent possible, leave water to run its natural course.
2. Because water is continually cycling in the environment, it can not be "owned" in the traditional sense. For purposes of allocating and protecting it, water should be considered a public trust rather than an economic commodity.
3. People are made mostly of water and are part of the natural water cycle. People therefore have an inalienable right to water for basic needs. In order to ensure this right for all, water services should remain in the public sector.

### **We call on the federal and provincial governments to:**

1. Immediately adopt a comprehensive sustainable water strategy to conserve and protect water ecosystems and human health.
2. Pass binding legislation to ban the bulk removal and export of water.
3. Work with municipalities to prevent the privatization of water and wastewater services and provide funding to upgrade and expand municipal water and wastewater infrastructure.

