



Our Water Is Not For Sale

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Backgrounder on government documents on the South Saskatchewan River Basin Water Management Plan

Internal government communications on the South Saskatchewan River Basin (SSRB) Water Management Plan (WMP) confirm the government's awareness of the substantial damage ecosystems would face under that plan. This reinforces concerns that applying a similar system involving water markets to river basins province-wide would facilitate serious damage to ecosystems, despite their claims that this "clearly demonstrates this government's commitment to protecting our watersheds..."ⁱ

The 1999 *Water Act* introduced "water transfers" to allow the reallocation of water between users. On August 30, 2006, the government approved the SSRB WMP and stopped accepting water applications for new water allocations in the Bow, Oldman and South Saskatchewan River sub-basins, effectively creating Canada's first water market.

In November 2009, three government mandated reports—from the Alberta Water Research Institute, the Water Allocation Transfer System Upgrade Project and a Minister's Advisory Group—were released, proposing expanding the system on the SSRB to the entire province and removing regulations. One of the primary justifications for establishing water markets across the province has been that such plans would protect ecosystems by encouraging efficiency. However, in establishing the SSRB WMP, internal discussions highlighted the many problems in achieving water conservation objectives (WCOs). Released documents from those discussions reveal that:

- ❖ The Department of Fisheries and Oceans disassociated from the plan "due to concerns that the WCOs are insufficient to protect the aquatic environment."ⁱⁱ
- ❖ The Alberta government set WCOs at levels below the in-stream flow needs of the river, despite their awareness that this would have serious impacts on fisheries, that it would degrade and deteriorate aquatic ecosystems, and despite warnings that the proposed WCO would be "facilitating the degradation of the river aquatic environment and this is not allowed under the Water Act." This applies even for the Red Deer River, which was "the least allocated of the SSRB rivers and its aquatic environment the healthiest."
- ❖ The government is aware that the WCOs are ineffective, and is aware that "90% of licenses won't be affected by WCOs."
- ❖ The WMP included accepting new applications on the Red Deer River sub-basin despite warnings that "The proposed water allocation limit is too high. It does not encourage conservation or efficiency; instead it is set to satisfy all 'existing licenses, pending applications, and future projects.' The river is simply left with what remains."

ⁱ Quote from then Environment Minister Guy Boutilier in the Government Alberta press release of August 30, 2006.

ⁱⁱ This quote and subsequent quotes are all available in the government documents in PDF at:
<http://www.pialberta.org/sites/default/files/Documents/SSRB-WMP-Documents.pdf>