



FEDERAL LEADERSHIP FOR OUR LIVING WATERS

A CALL TO ACTION FOR THE NEXT GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

AUGUST 2015



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We are in the midst of an era of unprecedented change when it comes to the future of Canada's fresh water – an era marked by new and persistent challenges, significant emerging opportunities and increasingly heightened citizen awareness and concern. This document is a call to action for federal leadership on setting a national agenda to address the challenges, seize the opportunities and respond to growing public awareness – and to lead Canada to a sustainable water future.

Water challenges: Mounting pressures on rivers, lakes and streams are closing beaches, compromising drinking water supplies, impacting fisheries and undermining the health of aquatic ecosystems. Climate change is introducing more complex challenges and uncertainties, with floods and droughts causing billions of dollars in damage, impacting people and their homes, communities, infrastructure and economies.

Water opportunities: How we manage water is an important part of creating healthy communities and sustainable prosperity. Shifting perspectives on urban water management are transforming neighbourhoods and communities through green infrastructure and water conservation and efficiency. Reliability of water supply is an increasingly important consideration for business and industry in deciding where to make investments, establish operations and create jobs. And the burgeoning global market for clean water technology and services presents significant opportunity to showcase Canadian innovation and expertise in sustainable economic development.

Water awareness: Water is deeply embedded in Canadian identity and culture. Public opinion surveys show that, regardless of political preference, where we live, or the state of the economy, water is overwhelmingly considered to be the country's most important natural resource. At the same time, Canadians are becoming increasingly anxious about threats to freshwater health, with three-quarters indicating that they believe water degradation will become an ever more serious problem in the next 10 years unless we apply our substantial expertise and skills to improving its management.¹

Our Living Waters is an emerging national initiative that aims to amplify the voice and impact of Canada's water community by collaborating, coordinating action and tracking progress under a common strategic framework. Our Living Waters is administered by Tides Canada and coordinated through the Canadian Freshwater Alliance. To learn more visit: <https://www.freshwateralliance.ca/en/programs/ourlivingwaters>.

This call to action was produced by Tony Maas, Our Living Waters project lead, with support from Merrell-Ann Phare and Oliver Brandes, Our Living Waters steering committee members, and input from a range of local and regional freshwater organizations from across Canada.

1. RBC Water Attitudes Study 2013. Available at <http://www.rbc.com/community-sustainability/environment/rbc-blue-water/water-attitude-study.html>; Freshwater Insights Canada 2013: A National Survey of Canadian Attitudes on Fresh Water conducted by Fathom6 Strategies for the Canadian Freshwater Alliance.

SETTING A NATIONAL AGENDA FOR A SUSTAINABLE FRESHWATER FUTURE

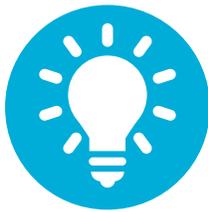
The groups endorsing this document call on our next federal government to take a leadership role in establishing a national agenda to secure a sustainable freshwater future for Canada.

To anchor this agenda, we urge our next federal government to set a national target of all waters in Canada in good health by 2025.²

We believe that the key to achieving this target lies in harnessing and applying the collective experience and expertise of the various orders of government that share responsibility for water in Canada, and of the diverse group of business, academic, community groups and non-governmental organizations that make up Canada’s water community.

To do so, we call on the next federal government to build consensus among aboriginal, federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments, and others in Canada’s water community, on a shared action agenda to achieve the national target of all waters in good health by 2025.

Specific actions outlined in the following pages are organized under four themes that we believe can establish a coordinating framework for a national water agenda:



1.
MOBILIZING WATER
KNOWLEDGE



2.
MODERNIZING AND
IMPLEMENTING WATER LAW
AND POLICY



3.
BUILDING WATER-
SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND ECONOMIES



4.
SUPPORTING A
COLLABORATIVE
FRESHWATER COMMUNITY

Making the federation work for water

Canada has a long history of visionary national projects that are a direct product of the many governments that make up our federation – and the diverse cultures and communities that form the fabric of the country – coming together with common cause. By mobilizing our collective capacity, we confronted the challenge of acid rain, created one of the world’s most successful and envied public health care systems, and, very recently, built consensus on a Canadian Energy Strategy.

We have all the ingredients needed to make a sustainable water future Canada’s next visionary national project. We have vast knowledge, experience and expertise; we have precedent-setting regional water policy and management initiatives; and, we know how to innovate and collaborate to drive progress without reinventing the wheel. What we need now is national leadership to bring all of these pieces together to make the Canadian federation work for water.

2. A number of approaches exist to assess the health of freshwater ecosystems. In the European Union, countries report on progress toward a shared goal of achieving good status for all waters by 2015 using a common set of **ecological and chemical criteria**. Through its **Watershed Reports**, WWF-Canada is completing a nationwide watershed assessment focusing on four indicators of river health and seven key threats.

THEME 1: MOBILIZING WATER KNOWLEDGE

Science is the foundation of smart decision-making. It is fundamental to addressing critical issues such as outbreaks of toxic algae and increasingly common floods and droughts, to capitalizing on emerging economic opportunities, and to understanding the overall health of Canada's waters.

Canada is home to world-leading water scientists, academic institutions and expert networks, and a legacy of globally renowned collaborative research institutes like the Experimental Lakes Area (ELA). Across the country, watershed agencies, NGOs, community groups and stewardship organizations are doing what they can to collect data, share knowledge and report to the public on the health of our waters. This expertise, effort and energy will be critical to advancing a national water agenda; harnessing it will require national leadership.

National leadership is needed to mobilize the knowledge required to make smart decisions and track progress toward a national target of all waters in good health. By reversing the trend of cuts to government agencies and funding for water science, removing constraints on scientists' ability to share their knowledge, and by creating partnerships and driving collaboration across governments and non-governmental groups, our next federal government can return Canada to our former status as a world leader in water science, technology and management.

ACTIONS

1. Develop and implement a common national approach to assessing and publicly reporting on the health of Canada's waters against the national target of "all waters in good health by 2025" by bringing together the knowledge, information and expertise housed in all orders of government, academic and research institutes, watershed agencies, NGOs and communities.
2. Ensure sound science and evidence-based policy-making by building and restoring capacity within federal agencies, supporting external collaborative institutions (e.g. ELA), and ensuring that publicly funded science is freely available and broadly accessible to those who want it, need it, and have the skills and desire to use it.

THEME 2: MODERNIZING AND IMPLEMENTING WATER LAW AND POLICY

Implementation of the 100+ commitments included in Canada’s federal water policy – tabled almost three decades ago – represents a significant, unrealized leadership opportunity. In recent decades, provinces and territories have been leading on water policy in Canada, introducing new strategies and passing new laws to respond to 21st century challenges and opportunities.

Despite the existence of critically important and widely supported laws and policies, modernization and implementation at the federal level has not kept pace with provinces and territories. We have missed the opportunity to implement legislation, such as the *Canada Water Act*, which is designed to improve and enhance water management across the federation through collaboration and coordination. Major changes to critical federal laws Canadians have long relied on to protect our water — *the Fisheries Act*, the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, and the *Navigable Waters Protection Act* — have eroded our national legislative framework for water. Further, critical and long-ignored questions regarding treaty and aboriginal rights, title and authority over water need to be addressed through nation-to-nation dialogue as we chart the course to reconciliation.³

ACTIONS

1. Modernize and implement the federal legislative and policy framework for freshwater protection and management, focusing on:
 - a. standards for ecosystem health, water quality, and sustainable water use that preserve the long-term viability of freshwater ecosystems and resources in the public interest;
 - b. recognition of aboriginal and treaty rights, title and authority with reconciliation as the underpinning goal;
 - c. coordination of the laws, policies and responsibilities of aboriginal, provincial, territorial and federal governments;
 - d. application of the polluter pays principle to identify and enforce prices on pollution; and,
 - e. mechanisms for independent oversight, meaningful public participation, and for citizens to hold governments accountable for decisions.

3. The Supreme Court of Canada decision *Tsilhqot'in Nation v B.C.* declared aboriginal title for a large area of land in B.C. Title was defined as a territorial ownership right to land that includes proactive management and control of the land. It is not confined to traditional uses of the land and includes the right to benefit from the resources of the land (land and resource management). It is not yet clear if or how such decisions may influence aboriginal title over water.

THEME 3: BUILDING WATER SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND ECONOMIES

Safe, reliable supplies of fresh water and healthy rivers and lakes are foundations of sustainable communities and sustainable economies. Given its vital role in urban and economic development, getting water management right will be critical to creating healthy, vibrant cities and towns and building a prosperous, 21st century Canadian economy.

Significant progress is being made on urban water sustainability in Canada – on water conservation and efficiency, wastewater treatment, and on the shift to innovative, green infrastructure that is revitalizing neighbourhoods and communities while building resilience to increasingly common extreme weather events. With national leadership, the innovation and expertise that is driving this progress can be mobilized to address Canada’s \$88 billion water infrastructure deficit and ensure communities across the country are prepared to deal with the challenges of a changing climate.

Canadian water expertise and innovation extends beyond the urban context. A growing group of research institutes, innovators and entrepreneurs are advancing the technologies and expertise needed to sustainably manage the impacts of growing cities, intensive agriculture and expanding natural resource development. By building up our clean water sector, Canada can tap into the economic opportunity presented by the \$500 billion global water technology and services market while also addressing national and global water challenges.

ACTIONS

1. Eliminate Canada’s water infrastructure deficit by developing and implementing a 10-year strategic plan that emphasizes innovative green infrastructure, rainwater management and water conservation and efficiency.
2. Position Canada’s water technology, management and services clusters as world leaders by developing and implementing a coordinated strategy, focused on solving national and global challenges, in partnership with the private sector, financial investors, academic institutes and business accelerators.

THEME 4: SUPPORTING A COLLABORATIVE WATER COMMUNITY

The pool of energy, experience and expertise that makes up Canada's water community is broad and deep. Thousands of organizations – including national and regional NGOs, community and aboriginal citizens groups, watershed agencies and stewardship organizations – are working every day to protect and restore the health of Canada's waters.

Projects and programs ranging from community-based monitoring and ecosystem restoration to public outreach and education are an important, but often underutilized, resource in the collective capacity of those working to realize a sustainable water future for Canada. Over the past decade, changing mandates, cuts to funding, and staff reductions in government agencies have eroded the relationships needed to mobilize this important capacity. Despite significant investments by corporations and private foundations, and donations from caring and concerned Canadians, limited capacity remains a core challenge for the water community. With leadership and support by the federal government, Canada's water community can be harnessed through new and existing partnerships and collaborations to advance progress under a national water agenda.

ACTIONS

1. Elevate fresh water as a priority of the federal cabinet (e.g., mandate a minister of a key department), establishing a federal focal point charged with coordinating the various federal agencies responsible for water; bringing together aboriginal, provincial-territorial and municipal government leaders; and engaging the non-governmental community to collaborate on meeting the national target of all waters in good health by 2025.
2. Create a Living Waters Canada Fund, providing sustainable financial resources to support partnerships, programs and projects of community, aboriginal and stewardship organizations working to protect and restore the health of Canada's waters.