



WATER FOR LIFE, NOT PROFIT PEOPLE'S WATER CAMPAIGN DISCUSSION PAPER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WWW invites grass roots environmental and social justice groups in Ontario to consider forming a People's Water Campaign, to define short term water protection goals for the provincial and municipal elections scheduled for 2022. Premier Ford's removal of critical environmental protections under the 'Open for Business' regime makes more urgent the need to ensure water is for life, not profit.

Wellington Water Watchers believe it is also important that the People's Water Campaign establish a long-term vision and declare concrete goals for water justice based on the historic need to effect reconciliation with Indigenous peoples on treaty rights to land and water, and a full reckoning of the future impact of the climate emergency. These require that Canadians imagine new relationships and authorities in governing water in order to ensure water justice for all.

This Discussion Paper outlines the context for proposing this campaign now. Multiple emergencies – climate, health and political – frame this call for a People's Water Campaign. This Discussion Paper proposes large scale water extraction by corporations in Ontario as a strategic focus for the next two years as it illustrates how the allocation of permits for water taking brings into sharp focus the conflict between corporate profits and water justice.

The Discussion Paper articulates how working on short- and long-term goals as how to work within, against and beyond current water governance structures. This Discussion Paper invites us to imagine that groups involved in water protection are all connected as a 'watershed' of advocates and describes how the metaphor and imagery of a river describes our connectedness and potential collective power.

The Discussion Paper concludes with a brief description of the first phase of the People's Water Campaign, how it will map the interests of water protection groups while at the same time setting out short term demands that emerge from the work of local campaigns Wellington Water Watchers supports.

Information on how to participate in the Peoples Water Campaign, and more details on goals, initial demands and schedule of activities can be found at wellingtonwaterwatchers.ca.

BACKGROUND

Water is life – People live in relationship with water - the source of life. Water is sacred to people of all faiths. Water is a common good and a public trust. All people have a human right to water. Indigenous communities' in Canada have traditional and treaty rights to water. Water is the foundation of entire ecosystems and the basis for the web of life itself.

Water justice is an encompassing term that includes restoring a 'right relationship' with water and 'right relationship' between communities in relation to access to safe, clean water. Water justice is the condition where all communities are able to access and manage sufficient water for their physiological and health needs, such as drinking, hygiene and waste removal, and the sustenance of the crops and wildlife upon which the community depends, and for socially beneficial uses, including cultural and spiritual practices, and enjoyment for recreational purposes. Water justice exists where adequate supply and quality of water exists to meet not just human, but whole ecosystem needs.

Achieving water justice means addressing multiple threats to water quality and water security (see below). These threats are challenges to water justice and have a disproportionate impact on people who are poor and/or live in racialized or Indigenous communities. The People's Water Campaign therefore must view its goals and practices through the lens of environmental justice.

Threats to Water Quality and Supply – Extractive industries pollute water and disrupt ecosystems. Plastic production pollutes waters, and affects reproductive health. Storm and sewer bypasses kill waterbodies and create drinking water advisories. Agricultural runoff creates algal blooms that can make water toxic to fish, wildlife, and people. The climate emergency, with melting ice caps and changing weather patterns, reduces the availability and security of clean, fresh water now and for future generations. As industrialization and commerce intensify, the demand for clean water around the world increases as its availability declines. Corporations privatize water through bottling, buying water management and delivery systems, and claiming rights to water ownership through land assembly. Goldman Sachs says 'water is the new oil'. Climate change intensifies conflicts over access to clean water.

Water Governance - the definition and exercise of authority and accountability – is the political practice that determines whether access to adequate clean water is just.

Water justice requires governance that is public (no privatization), accessible, responsive and accountable to local communities, consistent with treaty obligations, and effective in ensuring that access and adequate supply for human and ecosystem needs comes before profit.

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Working Towards Water Justice: Within, Against and Beyond –There are three ways in which to work towards water justice - within the current governance structures, against current governance, and beyond the dominant, established system of governance. The issue of demands about bottled water illustrate these differences.

Working Within: A campaign to get a 10-cent deposit return on plastic water bottles to raise extra money for recycling and stewardship and to slightly deter excessive bottle use through higher prices. A push for more water fountains in public spaces that reduces the need for bottled water. A shift in policy to restrict the amount of water taken for bottling, to slow water taking for bottling during drought, or to add new monitoring requirements.

Working Against: Building power to push back against a government that seeks to deregulate industry, remove environmental protections and put business before communities and the environment, by demanding increased regulation, the honouring of Indigenous and treaty rights, and, ultimately, the complete phase-out of bottled water.

Working Beyond: Seeding a new water permit authority that abides by Indigenous peoples' consent, treats water as a commons, and provides for direct democratic participation by all communities in a watershed

Naming the Moment – Multiple Emergencies

Climate Emergency - We live in a deepening climate emergency. Ecosystems are collapsing at an alarming rate. Greta Thunberg says “Our house is on fire”. The potential impacts on humanity and other species from ecosystem collapse could be catastrophic. The scale of the climate emergency is global and threatens the conditions that make life possible.

Pandemic Emergency – The coronavirus pandemic is a global emergency that threatens the lives, health and livelihoods of populations and disrupts everyday life and economic activity. The pandemic foreshadows one of the many profound possible disruptions as the climate emergency deepens.

Political Emergency - While proving capable (at least in some places) in regards to the pandemic emergency, governments continue to fail to implement solutions to the climate emergency – many of which are already in existence, that reduce carbon emissions and conserve and restore the environment. Corporate interests fund climate change denial, and driven by greed and profit, influence governments to win massive private benefits even as the climate crisis deepens. Legislation and regulations fail to adequately protect the public interest, and instead support ‘water profiteering’ by corporations. The deepening climate emergency creates opportunities for ‘disaster capitalism’ and even greater risk of corporate control of access to water.

The gap between the rich and everyone else is at historic levels. Nationalism, racism and prejudice against people from other countries are designed to distract attention from the disparities of wealth and power in societies. Inequities in water justice follow these same patterns.

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REASONS FOR HOPE: OPPORTUNITIES

Public awareness of the climate emergency and the demand for action around the world increases every day despite and because of the overwhelming nature of the emergency. The history of social movements tells us that public crises can be 'trigger events' that stimulate collective action in support of broad demands for justice.

The political response to the current coronavirus pandemic reveals that governments can act quickly, invest large sums of funding in the public interest, and make science-based decisions when they must. The pandemic also shows us that people are willing to act in solidarity, make sacrifices and care for each other. In this instance the commitment of health care workers inspires people and demonstrates the importance of adequately funded public services.

Successive environmental and economic crises in the last decades reveal growing income disparity and the disproportionate impacts of both forms of crisis on peoples who are poor and whose lives are precarious.

One of the triggers of successful social movements is rising public expectations. Recent polling reports a sizeable majority of Canadians believe the pandemic has revealed hidden injuries of social class. The same majority expect a broad transformation of society after the pandemic with major social reforms that put a priority on health and well-being, and that the crisis underlines the need to shift to a greener economy.

FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL

Wellington Water Watchers supports local water protection campaigns in several Ontario communities. These include:

- Preventing Xinyi Glass from receiving municipal approval to open a glass float production facility that planned to extract more than 1.6 million litres of groundwater/day from aquifer.
- Supporting resident groups in Rockwood, Milton, Ramara Township and Wilmot Township to oppose applications to extract aggregate that will impact water quality and supply.
- Supporting Tottenham resident group to have clean drinking water.
- Supporting residents of South Bruce to oppose siting of a nuclear waste dump in their community.
- Opposing Nestlé water extraction and bottling in Wellington County, and demanding the phase out of permits to bottle water in Ontario.

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All of these campaigns begin by working within the existing system of water governance to effect decisions to deny corporate applications that extract, use or threaten water quality and security. People may be drawn into water protection issues by the announcement of a an application for water-taking permit in their community, and quickly discover a system that is designed to manage public dissent, rather than to engage with and respond to it, and to give social license to extractive industry rather than to challenge or restrain it.

The experience of contesting corporate applications and government authorities demonstrates to Wellington Water Watchers that these groups have a common need to elevate their issues to provincial and federal levels to demand changes in regulations and legislation that govern water.

WWW's recent experiences, confirmed by a large body of research literature, tell us that effective policy advocacy -- such as the effort to fix Ontario's Permit to Take Water System -- requires both a 'within the system' and an 'against the system approach'. The history of social change demonstrates that achieving authentic and enduring water justice will require both of these approaches, and considerable 'beyond the system' thinking as well.

STRATEGIC FOCUS: FIGHTING LARGE SCALE WATER TAKING BY EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES IN ONTARIO

20 years of decisions in favour of aggregate applications proves the failure of the process to protect the public interest, and to favour private interests. There is a network of people in communities across Ontario who have had the same experience and provide a critical source of leadership for a campaign on this issue. New applications for pits and quarries occur regularly and most of them are in rural communities that are ridings currently held by MPPs who are members of Ford's government. Linking local opposition into a provincial campaign presents an opportunity to bring pressure on many members of the government - which can translate into pressure on the government to meet demands.

The corporations that extract water on a large scale are predominantly multi-nationals, causing environmental damage here while extracting profits from Canada. Ontario's allocation of permits for large scale water taking brings into sharp focus this conflict between corporate profits and water justice.

Nestlé's water bottling has been a lightning rod for these issues in Ontario for more than a decade. **The demand for a permanent extension of the moratorium on new permits to take water for bottling, and to phase out existing permits to bottle water, is a central demand Wellington Water Watchers brings to the People's Water Campaign as it highlights the conflict between private and public interests.**

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Premier Ford's removal of critical environmental protections under the 'Open for Business' regime has made more urgent the need to ensure water is for life, not profit. Ford's agenda creates the conditions for even more large-scale water extraction. Contesting these applications, the legislation and regulations that govern them, and the ways of thinking about authority and power that frame them is a front line in the fight for water justice in Ontario.

TOWARDS A PEOPLE'S WATER CAMPAIGN

WWW invites grass roots environmental and social justice groups in Ontario to consider forming a People's Water Campaign, which will define short term goals for the provincial and municipal elections scheduled for 2022 – and to develop a joint declaration setting out long term water justice goals.

Wellington Water Watchers believes it is important to develop a water protection action agenda for the next two years while also building support for a broad agenda for water justice. The historic need to effect reconciliation with Indigenous peoples on traditional and treaty rights to land and water, and a full reckoning of the future impact of the climate emergency requires that Canadians imagine new relationships and authorities in governing water in order to ensure water justice for all.

'Political will' originates with organized demands by people on their governments. Successful movements translate demands into policies that governments implement in response to public pressure.

Grassroots networks of people lead social progress. In Bolivia, in 2000, grassroots networks led by Indigenous people rose up to chase the water profiteers out of their country and assert an inalienable right to water for life. Across Canada, the US, and elsewhere in the world, the demands of the people working through networks of solidarity in the context of social movements forced governments to enact the environmental protections that Premier Ford now cuts. While the battle is far from over, it is grassroots momentum that has forced political parties and governments to put climate change on the political agenda. In Ontario, it is organized, grassroots momentum that forced the Ontario government to impose and then extend the moratorium on new permits to take water for bottling.

ORGANIZING THE PEOPLE'S WATER CAMPAIGN - A RIVER METAPHOR

The metaphor of a river may help describe the process of how the campaign can unfold.

Rivers flow, they have a past and a future. As the (modified) saying goes "No person ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and it's not the same person." The People's Water Campaign is not the first effort to bring groups together around a water justice agenda in Ontario and it will draw on 'currents' of past efforts.

Rivers are complex — they may have a unique beginning – a spring or a headwater – but in their full length they are made up of many parts including creeks, springs, tributaries, wetlands, swamps, and backwaters. Rivers are surface waters but have a relationship to groundwater and to deep aquifers. Rivers are the 'spine' of watersheds – themselves

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complex ecosystems. Deep shared values, (like aquifers), underpin water justice work. Many groups are working on water protection issues in Ontario. There are benefits to strengthening the connections between their efforts – as they belong to a similar ‘watershed’ advocating for water justice.

Rivers have seasons and a natural life. Rivers flood, and dry up. Rivers rush and meander, reverse directions, narrow and broaden, and comprise different currents. At times rivers are shallow and other times deep. One way or another, rivers always flow to the sea. In our metaphor – water justice is the ‘sea’ to which collective efforts flow.

The natural life of a river can be disrupted. Rivers can be diverted, dammed and buried. The power of a river can be harnessed, and it can be made to disappear. Progress on our issues is not natural or guaranteed. Powerful interests oppose our collective efforts towards water justice.

The experience of Wellington Water Watchers journey to date has strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and limits, success and mistakes. We welcome opportunities to expand our analysis and our understanding beyond the horizon of what we can see now.

Moving towards a People’s Water Campaign will bring its share of conflict – internal and external. One of the potential areas of conflict that may surface is around the question of ‘which people, whose campaign’ is meant by a People’s Water Campaign? We approach these questions from the belief that conflict is the oxygen of change and an opportunity to expand our collective knowledge and power.

Wellington Water Watchers proposes that this initiative begin as a campaign rather than a formal coalition or an independent organization. The structure of a campaign provides a way to engage, build trust among participants and explore these questions.

WWWS ROLE IN THE PEOPLE’S WATER CAMPAIGN

WWWs water justice work ‘springs’ from a local fight against Nestle in Wellington County – a decade long fight that continues, makes progress, and is not over. Wellington Water Watchers views its campaigns to oppose large scale water taking by extractive industries as one ‘tributary’ in a ‘watershed’ of water justice work. The focus of our part of this phase of the People’s Water Campaign is to connect the dots between large scale water taking by extractive industries in Ontario and its impact on communities and the environment.

Wellington Water Watchers invites interested groups to move towards a Peoples Water Campaign. Wellington Water Watchers will lead in the way that tributaries lead, from the place where we are currently located and by flowing towards other tributaries in the hopes of joining with others in a movement towards water justice. We intend to move forward with resolve and with humility.

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PHASE ONE - MAPPING INTEREST(S)

Wellington Water Watchers has two major sets of demands in relationship to permits to take water for bottling, and applications for aggregate extraction. (See Overview: People's Water Campaign). While these demands are rooted in specific struggles in a number of Ontario communities, they share the overarching goal of water justice - ensuring water is for life, not profit.

Wellington Water Watchers will seek allies for these demands, while seeking to understand the intersection with demands of other water protection groups.

- The first phase of our plan involves focused outreach to
- Consolidate support for Wellington Water Watcher's demands
- Map the 'demands' for which water protection groups in Ontario advocate
- Identify interest in forming a People's Water Campaign

While physical distancing requirements are in place this will mean organizing online events, and doing email and telephone outreach. It is uncertain how long physical distancing will be required – although it seems likely to be many months. The online organizing will be supplemented by in-person meetings as conditions allow. In the outreach phase Wellington Water Watchers will organize several activities including:

- Outreach to potential allies
- Webinars on specific issues
- A teach-in to examine the 'playbook' that corporations and governments use to manage public dissent
- People's Water Convention

The People's Water Convention is currently planned for the fall of 2020.

The purpose of the Convention is to consolidate support for the People's Water Campaign and define the next phase of the campaign.

**JOIN THE PEOPLE'S
WATER CAMPAIGN
AND HELP CREATE
AN ONTARIO ACTION
AGENDA TO ENSURE
WATER IS FOR LIFE,
NOT PROFIT!**

- Sign up to receive People's Water Campaign action alerts
- Send an Email to your MPP
- Join an upcoming water webinar
- Create a meme in our Blue Memes campaign to 'Maintain the Moratorium'

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