

Ecology Action Centre

Info Sheet #1 * Help Shape Nova Scotia's water future

* an information sheet in preparation for consultation about Nova Scotia's provincial water strategy

The Nova Scotia Department of Environment is collecting input on how to protect, preserve, and use Nova Scotia's water resources. To get involved:

- read the discussion paper at www.gov.ns.ca/nse/water;
- attend a public workshop; and/or
- make a written submission before June 1, 2008.

The Ecology Action Centre's Top Priorities for Water Management in Nova Scotia

Take Action on Existing Programs & Regulations

- EAC believes it is important to complete and implement a water management strategy for Nova Scotia, but that it is equally important to not wait for the strategy to be completed before acting to improve water quality and ecosystem integrity. Advancing the goals and implementing the programs detailed in Part 10 of the *Environment Act* and enforcing existing regulations related to water resources will go a long way toward solving many water issues in the province.

Show Leadership

- EAC expects the provincial government to take a leadership role in implementing a provincial water strategy. It is government's responsibility to make decisions for the broader public good, including developing and implementing new legislation, regulations, and user fees as appropriate to ensure the protection of Nova Scotia's water resources.

Prepare for Climate Change

- Nova Scotia can expect increased water insecurity due to climate change. Some climate change impacts, such as increased intensity of precipitation and storm events, more frequent and extensive coastal and inland flooding, sedimentation of watercourses, and accelerated erosion, will have an impact on water quality, quantity and ecosystem health. The Water Strategy should reduce the impacts of climate change on Nova Scotia's water resources by taking action to reduce our vulnerability and minimize risks to public health and safety.

Manage Resources by Watershed

- Watersheds are the appropriate size and scale for many water resources management decisions. Nova Scotia's watersheds include coastal and marine waters directly affected by land-based activities on our coasts and uplands.

Incorporate Land Use Planning Best Practices into Policies/Regulations

- Land use planning is a key determinant of water quality and ecosystem integrity. Baseline land use regulations, such as requirements for vegetated buffer zones and setbacks should be required next to all water bodies. More specific land-use

guidelines based on critical thresholds identified for various land-use mixes and aquatic ecosystem types also should be implemented.

Assess Ecosystem Integrity not just Water Quality

- Water quality data alone is not sufficient to make informed decisions about ecosystem integrity. Ecosystem integrity must be assessed through monitoring programs that include biological, chemical and contaminants, and physical measurements to provide a baseline assessment of current ecological conditions in all of the province's freshwater and coastal ecosystems.

Set and Enforce Regulations

- Setting and enforcing strict regulations based on water quality, aquatic life and human health guidelines should be the starting point for assessing industrial, agricultural, pharmaceutical and household contaminants in our waters. This will protect aquatic life and the health of Nova Scotians.

Link Government Efforts with Community-Based Efforts

- Community-based organizations play an important role in protecting and managing water resources in Nova Scotia. This role, the relationship of these organizations to government-led initiatives, and level of government support should be articulated in the Water Strategy.

Develop Monitoring Protocols & Link with Community Involvement

- Regular ongoing monitoring is essential to understand trends and ensure compliance with regulations. Developing monitoring protocols will make it easier for regional authorities, community-based groups, and other levels of government to gather accurate data that is comparable across time periods and jurisdictions. It also will encourage broader participation in water monitoring and reduce demands on the province to collect data.

Conduct/Facilitate More Research to Close Knowledge Gaps

- Research is essential to filling knowledge gaps, such as the extent and location of groundwater resources and river discharges around the province, more precise estimates of wetland cover and the linkages between the various freshwater, and coastal resource pools (e.g., flows from groundwater aquifers to wetlands and streams). The Water Strategy should articulate research goals and priorities and an action plan to achieve these.

Develop a Self-Contained Provincial Wetlands Policy

- A self-contained provincial wetland policy combining all the various pieces of wetland legislation, regulation and implementing guidelines into a single document will send a strong message about government commitment to wetland conservation; as well reduce current confusion and inconsistency in implementation. We believe our best option is to not allow wetland development, alternation, or infilling and to work with landowners to find alternatives.