

# Time for N.S. to take the plunge on protecting water

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It is evident to anyone who has been out on the water lately that this year's warm and dry spring has brought about low water levels in lakes throughout Nova Scotia. While not immediately alarming, it could be a harbinger of conditions to come as our climate changes.

There are a number of other water issues that can be observed in our lakes, streams, wetlands and groundwater. Blue-green algae blooms in the Carleton River watershed in Yarmouth County have persisted for the last five summers as a result of intensive mink farming. Residents in some areas of Nova Scotia have been burdened with insufficient groundwater to supply their wells on an ongoing basis. Indeed, wells in the Monarch Estates and Rivendale subdivisions in Beaver Bank have been drying up, leaving residents without clean potable water for extended periods of time.

Without a well-implemented plan that sets a clear direction for managing surface water and groundwater, it will be very challenging for the provincial government to take action to protect this life-sustaining resource.

The Environment Department, in collaboration with 12 other government departments, has been working on such a plan. In April, they released a draft water strategy entitled Options for a Water Resource Management Strategy for Nova Scotia. The Environment Department conducted targeted stakeholder consultations until June 7 and has until the end of this year to present a Water Resource Management Strategy to cabinet.

The deadline of 2010 stems from a piece of legislation called the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act (EGSPA) that was adopted into law in 2007 and which commits to meeting 21 environmental goals between 2008 and 2020.

Watershed and river organizations that are members of the Water Caucus of the Nova Scotia Environment Network are pleased to see a draft water strategy, yet they have a number of concerns.

The strategy lacks an underlying philosophy; rather, it is a list of options without any clear direction for turning policy into action. The strategy should manage water on a watershed level and develop synergies with other provincial policies that impact water, such as the wetland and coastal policies. The strategy should also address water governance to facilitate and support greater long-term participation from community-based watershed groups.

The Ecology Action Centre has recently released a report entitled Headwaters to Coasts: Getting to Watershed Management in Nova Scotia. This report, available on the EAC website, identifies the best practices for watershed management and governance that will lead to healthier and more prosperous communities for all Nova Scotians.

It is now up to the Environment Department and the inter-departmental committee to review the feedback received during stakeholder consultations and rework the draft water strategy so this province can move

toward our goal of having one of the cleanest and most sustainable environments in the world by 2020. They've set the bar high; now the public would like to see them reach it.

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