

Water, Water Everywhere.....or is it?

Until recently most Canadians have understood that we have one-fifth of the world's freshwater supplies. Until recently Canadians have thought we had more than enough water. Until recently, Canadians thought we had a right to clean water.

Canadians have been brought up to believe that we have lots of water and so we are one of the biggest wasters of it. The amount recommended for basic levels of drinking, cooking and cleaning is 50 litres/day. The average Canadian consumes 343 litres per day (L/day). Locally we are some of the worst water conservers in the country. The average person in the RDN uses 459 L/day, in Nanaimo 600 L/day, and in Parksville 529 L/day.

Contrary to the popular belief, we don't have twenty percent of the world's water supply. Brazil and Russia have most of the world's renewable water sources. We actually rank third for water supply, equal with the US, Indonesia and China. When we look closer at where the easily accessible water is, we have less than 3% of the world's water supply.

The twenty percent figures we are all familiar with may refer to the volume of water in all of the world's lakes. Water sitting in a lake however, is not a renewable supply. The supply consists of water that falls from the sky and runs off in rivers, or goes underground, refilling aquifers.

The water in lakes and underground aquifers is actually limited. This is the "capital" in our "bank account" of stored water. If we draw down that bank account, eventually we go broke. So how do we maintain that capital? We live off the interest. In this region this becomes difficult as we are not sure about the capital that we have. We don't know how much groundwater we have. We also don't know where it flows. We don't know how many people we can supply water to, or for how long.

"Water Limited" will be examining these and other myths and realities, and how they relate to the future of our local water supply. As part of this new water education program, regular columns will explore issues one step at a time. Information ads will inspire questions and reactions. We hope we can all learn together about how much water we really do have for the future.

Water Limited explores what we know and don't know about our water supply. It is funded by the Georgia Basin Living Rivers Program and Mid Vancouver Island Habitat Enhancement Society (MVIHES). Articles are written by Michele Deakin. MVIHES coordinates the Englishman River Watershed Recovery Plan, and conducts education, restoration and monitoring projects throughout the mid island area. MVIHES also work to support healthy watersheds and shorelines, and continuity of our biodiversity as a way to contribute to protection and conservation of salmon habitat.

Resources:

1. Hamlyn, Chris, *Water waste war*, Nanaimo News Bulletin, front page, Saturday October 20, 2007
2. Parksville City Councilor, October 2007
3. RDN Sustainability Report
4. Sprague, John B., *Great Wet North?*, Eau Canada, editor Karen Bakker, UBC Press, 2007