

Establishing a Canada Water Agency

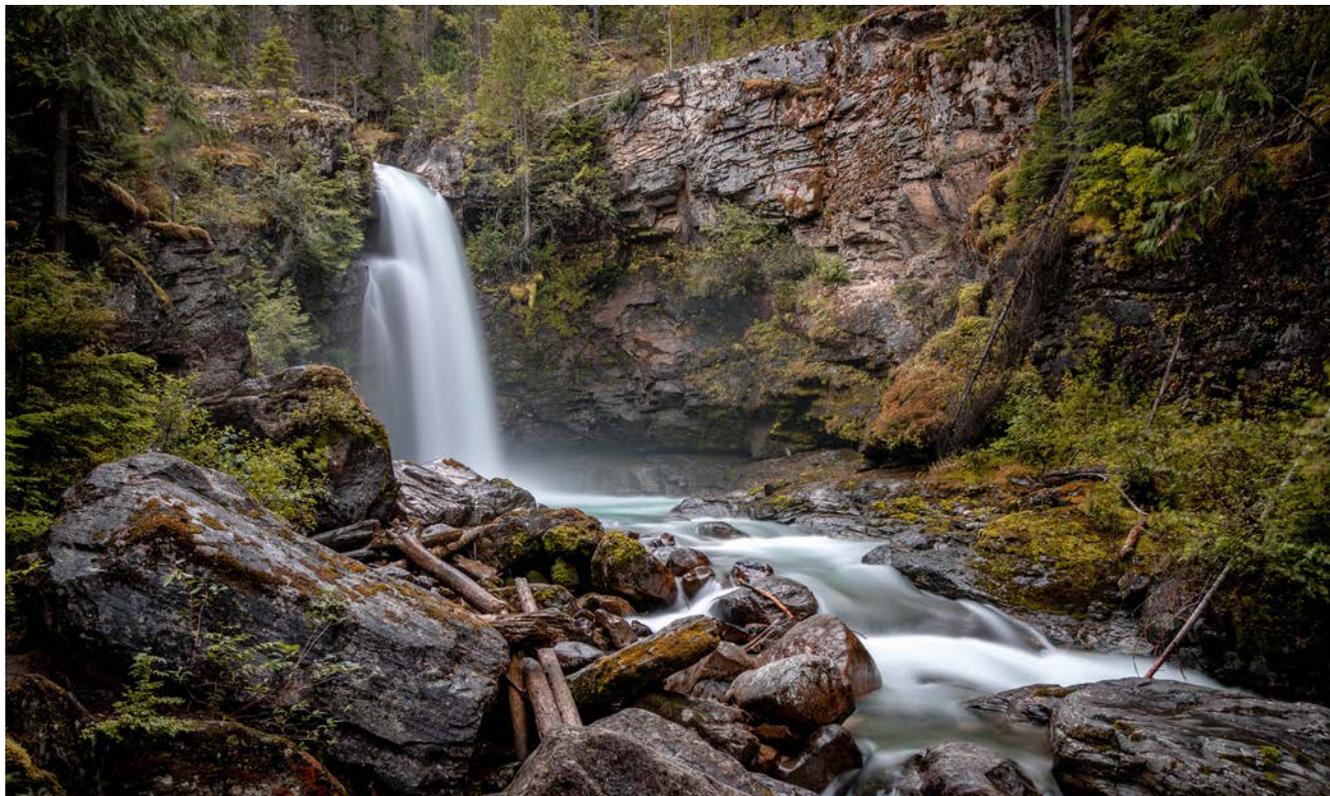


Photo: Louis Paulin

The science and rising costs of water-related climate change impacts are telling us that Canada is facing an emerging water crisis for which we are largely unprepared. The federal government's commitment to establish a Canada Water Agency is an important step towards building the collaborative watershed management and governance systems we need to achieve a more resilient and secure freshwater future for Canada. While aspects of water management in Canada are provincial jurisdiction, each jurisdiction acting individually does not provide us with the information and systems needed to ensure that water is being managed and governed effectively and proactively at a national level. We currently lack the ability to coordinate water management decisions and policies across provincial/territorial borders and continue to operate without comprehensive information about our lakes, rivers, streams, groundwater and wetlands. Many of the associated

risks remain unknown, fragmented and go unmitigated across jurisdictions. In order to create a better and more cohesive water management regime, a national, single window agency is needed. The mandate of this agency would be to:

- 1) Coordinate and modernize freshwater management systems and legislation;
- 2) Expand and enhance water monitoring to address current gaps and standardize data reporting related to water quantity and water quality across Canada.
 - a. **Water quantity:** The agency needs dedicated resources to establish a national flood forecasting system and provide coordinating capacity across governments to anticipate climate threats to water security. The agency should use a collaborative watershed approach and



maintain basin integrity against mounting pressure for ecologically damaging water diversions and continued wetland drainage in some jurisdictions that makes watersheds less resilient to flooding. Through an expanded, standardized and coordinated water monitoring network the agency can anticipate climate threats to at-risk watersheds and support freshwater projects that promote flood and climate resilience. In the long term, the Agency should prioritize investments and action to protect and build resiliency among shoreline communities from the threat of flooding and climate change impacts.

b. Water quality: Systematic and standardized water monitoring data on contaminants, such as pesticides and agricultural nutrient run-off, manufacturing and wastewater effluents is needed for ECCC and Health Canada to assess risks to environmental and human health. ECCC and several provinces currently conduct water monitoring, but there is a need to expand capacity to provide the standardized data needed by agencies to fulfill their mandates particularly under the *Pest Control Products Act* and the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*. Water quality data is also needed to identify priorities for long term watershed health, and wastewater infrastructure investments. (See also, later in this document, the related recommendation regarding the immediate need for a two-year water monitoring pilot within the PMRA).

- 3) Expand, enhance and standardize publicly available water monitoring data and create a central, credible repository for information related to water in Canada for governments and the public;
- 4) Better identify and anticipate climate threats to water security as well as ways to mitigate threats;
- 5) Improve water governance, including

providing a meaningful forum in which to integrate water priorities and needs of Indigenous communities into the national dialogue on water;

- 6) Align long-term actions and investments with the recommendations of the *Great Lakes St. Lawrence 2020-2030 Action Plan* to reduce human and environmental exposure to toxics, and the threat of flooding;
- 7) Work collaboratively with partners to identify priorities for research and action; and
- 8) Enhance public trust in resource governance by reporting to Parliament annually on the state of freshwater in Canada.

To be effective, this agency must have the resources necessary to coordinate within and among 20 federal departments with water-related responsibilities - as well as provincial, municipal, territorial and Indigenous governments, researchers, and an external advisory committee. Federal leadership through this agency is essential in making Canada climate-ready and presents a vehicle by which to advance commitments to reconciliation.

Recommended Investment [ECCC]:

\$200 million over five years to establish and operationalize the Canada Water Agency, including capacity to support water monitoring

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