

PREFACE, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For years I have wanted to write an historical account of British Columbia's drinking and domestic Watershed Reserves, and to provide a context for their often scandalous administration. From late September 2004 to May 2006 the opportunity became available to bring this self-funded report and labor of love to fruition. It is, undoubtedly, the most important work produced on the subject since the BC Tap Water Alliance was formed in February 1997. To date, no serious investigative reports have been written on this topic by anyone. Why this is so is a mystery—as mysterious, in a sense, as the history of the Reserves themselves.

Given the peculiar, ever-growing inclination of a series of arrogant provincial administrations to ignore the Reserves and make them invisible, I decided to make the effort to report on them. This effort was prompted by my recent discovery of an early-1980s Watershed Reserves scandal, where the Ministry of Forests' top guns secretly transferred public drinking water sources—areas scheduled for legislative protection as Order-in-Council *Land Act* Reserves—to the timber harvesting land base. What was meant to be a quick 30-pager revealing this scandal in September 2004 has, given the complexity of the subject, necessarily become longer and more in depth. As I've discovered in the past, this type of report can often turn into a catalyst for seeing and understanding events that were not understood before—or not completely understood. Good research results in questions as well as answers. One thing leads to another. As the cliché goes, it's like peeling an onion. This particular process, though, truly has brought tears to my eyes.

I remember, some ten years ago now, when I first innocently stumbled across references to provincial Watershed Reserves in early government records. At the time I was investigating the history and administration of the Greater Vancouver and Greater Victoria watersheds. The discovery of the Reserves—and related conspiratorial initiatives designed to eliminate them—catapulted me beyond my narrow research parameters, and I began to examine watershed issues from a larger, North American perspective. Ever since that moment of discovery the Reserves have fascinated me. They have driven me to understand their history, function and fate—and, ultimately, to defend them. At first nobody seemed able to explain what the Reserves were, except for a group of knowledgeable community activists on the Sunshine Coast, who I interviewed in the mid-1990s and who helped steer me in the right direction. Even the lawyers we occasionally deliberated with were unable to fully understand the Reserves or comprehend their significance. Some even pooh-poohed them. And though I had gained a deep sense that something was significantly off balance as far as the Reserves were concerned, I had no inkling that I was flirting with an enormous, multi-tiered government cover-up.

After first applying to review the Ministry of Forests' central policy files on Community Watersheds (on September 17, 1997), the Ministry's freedom of information officer informed me that the files could not be located and were, in fact, missing. I couldn't believe that. When I repeated my inquiry some four months later, a different, temporary FOI officer easily located the “missing” four or five boxes of files after an hour's search, confirming suspicions that I'd been given the runaround. When I was finally provided clearance to review the relevant records in Victoria (on March 30, 1998), I was handed one slim file folder of obscure information. After an angry complaint (I'd just spent \$100 on travel expenses and lost a day's work for nothing), an embarrassed ministry FOI director promised that I could see the complete files in the near future and that all photocopying charges would be waived. The release of those files, though, took another six long months, as they were apparently so sensitive that a team of government bureaucrats had to review and scrutinize them three more times. Fred Miller, manager of the Forest Practices Branch, had never experienced such a delay over the release of government records. No member of the public had ever requested to review the central files before, and I guess I'll never know if I actually obtained **ALL** the records.

This report summarizes a twisted, sobering account of government abuse of authority over the public's drinking water. Much of the report's contents are borrowed from a book I am researching on the history of BC's drinking water—a large undertaking that also includes related accounts of drinking-water abuse in the United States. Critical information in this book is based on two primary sources: files from the former Ministry of Environment on the Community Watersheds Task Force (1972-1980), and the Ministry of Forests' central policy files on community watersheds (mentioned above). This report is, in essence, the culmination of 14 years of investigative research. Readers familiar with our website (www.alternatives.com/bctwa) will note that sections from other reports are also restated here when relevant to this latest research.

The title of the report, *From Wisdom to Tyranny*, is adapted from *Tyranny and Wisdom*, an essay by late Canadian philosopher genius George Grant (one of six essays in *Technology and Empire—Perspectives on North America*, House of Anansi Press, 1969). From first setting eyes on Grant's essay 30 years ago, the title has stood out in my mind as an apt symbolic representation for the state of our world. It is an accurate phrase to describe the themes developed here on the history and administration of BC's public resources. Grant explores how North American governments have shunned the collective wisdom of the public and ignored its critical thinkers in order to favor instead what he refers to as “vested interests.” “Present day tyranny,” he writes in *Tyranny and Wisdom*, is not only “based on the unlimited progress in the ‘conquest of nature’ which is made possible by modern science.” The “homogeneous and universal state” has become that very tyranny (“it's gorgon's face”) and is now “destructive of humanity.” Grant's bottom line is that history is an ongoing “struggle” against such forms of tyranny: “everything seems to be a re-enactment of the age-old drama.” We must all strive to overcome this tyranny and the dangers we presently face.

Special thanks go to Linda Williams for carefully editing this report, providing guidance and putting up with my constant ramblings, and to Paul Hundal for his comments. Thanks to the many archivists and librarians in BC, Ottawa, Seattle and Portland for their kind assistance. Thanks to numerous provincial government staff members for records and verbal information over many years—especially several retired civil servants who have provided critical background. Special thanks to numerous water users interviewed over the years, particularly watershed defenders Lloyd Good and Clay Stacey, former chairs of the Big Eddy Water District, who opened their files to me, and former East Creston Irrigation District chair Elvin Masuch, as well as many others. Thanks to Joe Miller Jr. (Little Sandy area, Oregon) and to Doug Larson (Portland, Oregon) for their insights into the Bull Run watershed, the water supply for Portland, Oregon. Thanks to the Valhalla Wilderness Society for their files on the 1997 Paris *Judgment*, to Marilyn Burgoon, Slocan Valley Watershed Alliance Director, and Perry Ridge Water Users Association president. Many thanks to Vicky Husband, to the Western Canada Wilderness Committee (along with the use of the Committee's printer and copier, and the kind help of staff), and to the Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group for their financial contributions for the printing and distribution of the first edition of this report. Thanks to Nik Cuff (Navigator Communications Inc.) for his consultations and for printing the report.

Many thanks and praises to the hardy unsung heroes throughout BC (both living and passed on) who have dedicated themselves to this subject and stood up, often under the most adverse conditions, to protect their drinking water, one of the most precious fruits of the natural world.

As an old friend perceptively retorted, referring to the title of this report and the history of provincial legislation to protect drinking water, “Was there ever any *wisdom*?” Amidst all of BC's quirky politics, the answer to that deserving question is, amazingly and most undeniably, YES.

Will Koop, May 21, 2006.