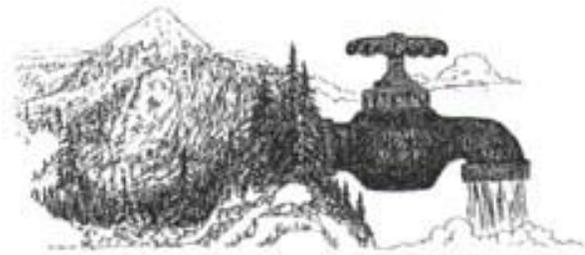


B. C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE

**Caring for, Monitoring, and Protecting
British Columbia's Community Water
Supply Sources**

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SAVE THE ARROW - WATER FOR THE MILLENNIUM

Vancouver - At a time when the threat to drinking water quality is paramount, and with recent controversial headlines about water treatment for the Erickson Improvement District (EID), the NDP government may be granting a request by the recently created Creston Valley Forest Corporation (CVFC) to replace its 15 year non-renewable forest license for a long term, 99-year renewable license to log and road the 7,900 hectare Arrow Creek Watershed Reserve.

The Arrow is the community water supply for greater Creston, and has been a source of pristine water supply for 86 years. The recent announcements by the regional health inspector, Dr. Andrew Larder, over his insistence that the EID must apply chlorine as a disinfection treatment for its 2,000 residents is likely linked to the threat of future logging and its repercussions on water quality in Arrow Creek, an issue completely overlooked in recent media headlines.

About 30 years ago, when the Social Credit government announced its intentions to log the Arrow, local residents strongly opposed the plans, and were successful in protecting their water supply from industrial development until the mid-1990s, when the logging moratorium was lifted. Despite ongoing protests, Forests Minister David Zirnelt later approved a volume-based “community” forest license to the CVFC in 1997, of which the Arrow comprises about 70% of its operating area. The CVFC intends to access the highly merchantable old-growth forest in the headwaters of Arrow Creek, a condition partially related to its current debts to both the Royal Bank and the provincial government.

The current Forests Minister, Gordon Wilson, MLA for Powell-River/Sunshine Coast, may himself have to make a decision on the long term forest license. Coincidentally, most of Wilson's constituents within the Sunshine Coast Regional District, whose water supplies in Chapman and Grey Creeks were decimated by logging practices, are asking the provincial government for control and public ownership of their watershed lands. A public referendum was held on May 2, 1998, where 88% of the Regional District voters requested that there be an end to logging and mining in their water supplies, which the government has been reluctant to implement. 30 years ago the EID, which distributes water to greater Creston, applied to the government for a long term lease of Crown lands to gain control over resource development, but was denied. In 1927, the Greater Vancouver Water District obtained a 1000 year lease of Crown lands for its water supply, and then implemented policies against logging, mining, and public access.

Last October 27, at the annual meeting of the Union of B.C. Municipalities in Victoria, Premier Dosanjh promised B.C. residents that he is committed to protect drinking water: “I want to work with you to ensure every one of our citizens has access to safe, good quality drinking water.”

“What does the Premier mean, and what is the government's definition of safe, good quality drinking water?,” questions Will Koop, coordinator of the B.C. Tap Water Alliance, and researcher for the Society Promoting Environmental Conservation (SPEC). “This sounds just like another promise, in a series of broken and ill-defined promises cast by politicians over the last 35 years.”

In May 1989, during a three day conference in Creston, the NDP opposition leader, Mike Harcourt, addressed the conflict about the community watershed logging controversy in Arrow Creek and in the Kootenays. He promised that if his party formed the next government, he would institute a “Forest Products Act, which would stop logging on lands, especially in [water supply] watersheds, used by communities”. The NDP government, like previous governments, is responsible for continuing to undermine community drinking water sources by allowing industrial development, like logging and road access. These resource use policies have impacted water supplies, divided communities, and forced the ordinary citizen to demonstrate and even serve jail sentences. “If the Premier is truly committed to the people of greater Creston, he will deny the request for a 99-year forest license and immediately halt any future logging plans in Arrow Creek,” Koop says.

The B.C. Tap Water Alliance is declaring 2001 the turnaround year for B.C. community drinking water. About one and half percent of the provincial land base is home to people’s drinking water supplies, and for more than thirty years B.C. residents have fought and failed to protect their source of drinking water.

“It is time for the people of B.C. to make a dramatic change for new government legislation which will make mandatory complete community water supply watershed protection. It is incumbent upon the leaders of this province to protect the health and future of all citizens, and to stop industrial development in drinking water supplies, by ensuring the public’s right to clean, pure water,” Koop added.

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