B. C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE

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

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CAMPBELL GOVERNMENT CUTS DRINKING WATER "WATCHDOG" WITH BILL 35 - CALLING IT "RED TAPE"

Vancouver – With the final reading of *Bill 35* on May 8, 2002, the provincial government provided exclusive powers to the Ministry of Forests (MoF) by revoking the 17 year-old protocol agreement between it and the Ministry of Land, Water and Air Protection on management of drinking water sources. Government files document how the protocol, approved by the Social Credit government in 1985, resulted from years of internal resistance by senior government officials who advised against the MoF as lead agency for drinking water sources, because it lacked "sufficient public credibility" (February 1982). When the MoF became a separate agency in 1976, it had quickly gained notoriety by ignoring public processes and overriding the "Lands", "Environment" and "Health" ministries' protective policies concerning drinking water sources. Furthermore, a subsequent protocol agreement signed in 1994, prior to the enabling of the *Forest Practices Code Act*, clearly assigned administrative authority of Section 12 Reserves under the *Land Act* to the Ministry of Environment, which included the almost 300 Community Watershed Reserves throughout British Columbia.

"Not only is government discarding what little public accountability remains since these community water sources were invaded in the 1960s, but it is also short circuiting public processes and ignoring its own Drinking Water Review Panel's recommendations about future drinking water protection," observed Will Koop, Coordinator of the B.C. Tap Water Alliance. "We are completely opposed to any measures that provide Ministry of Forest managers with exclusive discretionary powers. The government is abusing its powers by removing watchdog agencies and systematically removing environmental legislation and policy. On a sensitive issue that warrants extreme caution and meaningful public consultation, these changes are completely irresponsible."

Bill 35, repeals Sections 13, 24, 28(2), 32, 40(2), 41(6, 6.1, 7), 42(3), 43(2), 72, and amends parts of Sections 22 (7-c), 96(1), and 143(3) of the *Forest Practices Code Act*, removing all references to, and intercessory powers of, the designated "environment official". These changes were executed through the new Ministry of Deregulation. The April 16th legislative transcripts state that Deregulation Minister Kevin Falcon concluded that the Environment Ministry's role in community watersheds was "nonessential", "red tape", and an "unnecessary requirement". He argued that an environment agency "diminishes the province's economic competitiveness and stands in the way of job creation or wastes taxpayers' time and money" and blamed the 1985 Social Credit protocol agreement on "NDP Socialism". By removing the ministry accountable for environmental protection, Falcon felt the changes would "protect the important values of public health,

safety and the environment." Falcon also promised government would be "consulting with interested stakeholders".

When the Campbell government took office in May 2001, it immediately severed the functions of the former Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks into two ministries. Instead of sanctioning community watersheds under Joyce Murray's new Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, the management of drinking watersheds was quietly transferred to Stan Hagen's new Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, whose mandate is exploitation of Crown land resources. This maneuver, which occurred months before the second public review of the *Drinking Water Protection Act* in September 2001, circumvented the Drinking Water Review Panel's recommendations for the protection of drinking water sources, and led to the final cuts in *Bill 35*. In fact, when the B.C. Tap Water Alliance sought clarification from senior administrators in the late summer of 2001, they were "unable" to tell us to which Ministry the authority for drinking watersheds had been transferred to. By axing the protocol agreements on joint sign-off and authority over public planning processes, the government is evidently censoring internal debate and ministerial dissent about future logging developments and cattle farming in drinking water sources.

"The actions of this government on the issue of drinking water source protection are utterly disgraceful. We now have a clear picture of why the government stalled legislating the *Drinking Water Protection Act*. Forestry activity in drinking watersheds, and who knows what else, can now proceed without interference. With the removal of former legislative provisions by *Bill 35*, this government has made it clear they are not interested in protecting drinking watersheds, and are catering to the special interest lobby associated with the forest industry", says Koop. "Premier Campbell and 16 of his 27 Cabinet ministers represent Greater Vancouver and Victoria residents whose drinking watersheds are now protected. They do not have a mandate in their own ridings to degrade drinking watersheds. So why are they discriminating against the remainder of B.C.'s residents?"

-30-

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