

B. C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE

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

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ALLIANCE URGES CAMPBELL GOV'T TO HONOUR SUNSHINE COAST REFERENDUM AND PETITION FOR COMMUNITY CONTROL OF DRINKING WATER SOURCES

Vancouver – Since 1973, the provincial government has repeatedly denied the Sunshine Coast Regional District's (SCRD's) requests for legislated community control of its drinking water sources, the Chapman and Gray Creek Watershed Reserves. Instead, the government has permitted the SCRD's watershed forests to be roaded and then liquidated. The resulting destruction of the watersheds' soils and stream channels is directly responsible for the poor quality water currently coming out of resident's taps. Despite a 1992 Supreme Court challenge by the SCRD to end the logging, and despite a May 2, 1998 SCRD referendum, wherein 87.6% of the voters rejected future logging and mining proposals, the government has refused to acknowledge the SCRD's wishes. Most recently, citizens delivered a petition to the SCRD containing over 5,000 signatures, collected during a one-month period, opposed to industrial uses, such as logging and mining, in the watersheds. In turn, on Wednesday morning, May 29th, the SCRD, the Sishalh First Nation, and members of a community watershed coalition will present the petition to MLA Harold Long at his office in Victoria, and will ask him to present the petition to the provincial legislature, which will be sitting for the remainder of this week. Local newspapers, however, cite Long as being opposed to community control and in support of logging, despite his pre-election promise to honour the community on this subject.

“Why are British Columbians consistently denied the right to clean water? Intact ecosystems are known to reliably deliver the highest quality drinking water. Community watersheds are critical public assets worthy of the highest respect from local, regional, and provincial governments. What these watersheds need are repairs to collapsing road networks, long term healing, and protection, not more logging!” stated Will Koop, Coordinator of the B.C. Tap Water Alliance. “Associate Chief Justice Dennis O'Connor's recent report on the tragedy in Walkerton warns that water must be properly protected from its source to the tap if it is to be kept safe.”

Many other communities and Regional Districts have also requested independent control of their watersheds, but to date, all have been denied. These communities have all pointed to the Greater Vancouver Regional District, which obtained control of its watersheds through long-term lease provisions under the provincial Land Act. The provisions prohibit logging, mining, and cattle grazing in the watersheds. Greater Victoria's watersheds are privately held lands that are now protected, and Nelson's watershed was recently protected under Park status. In the United States, President George Bush recently protected Portland's Little Sandy watershed from logging, the watershed adjacent to Portland's Bull Run watershed, protected in 1996 by President Clinton.

-30-

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