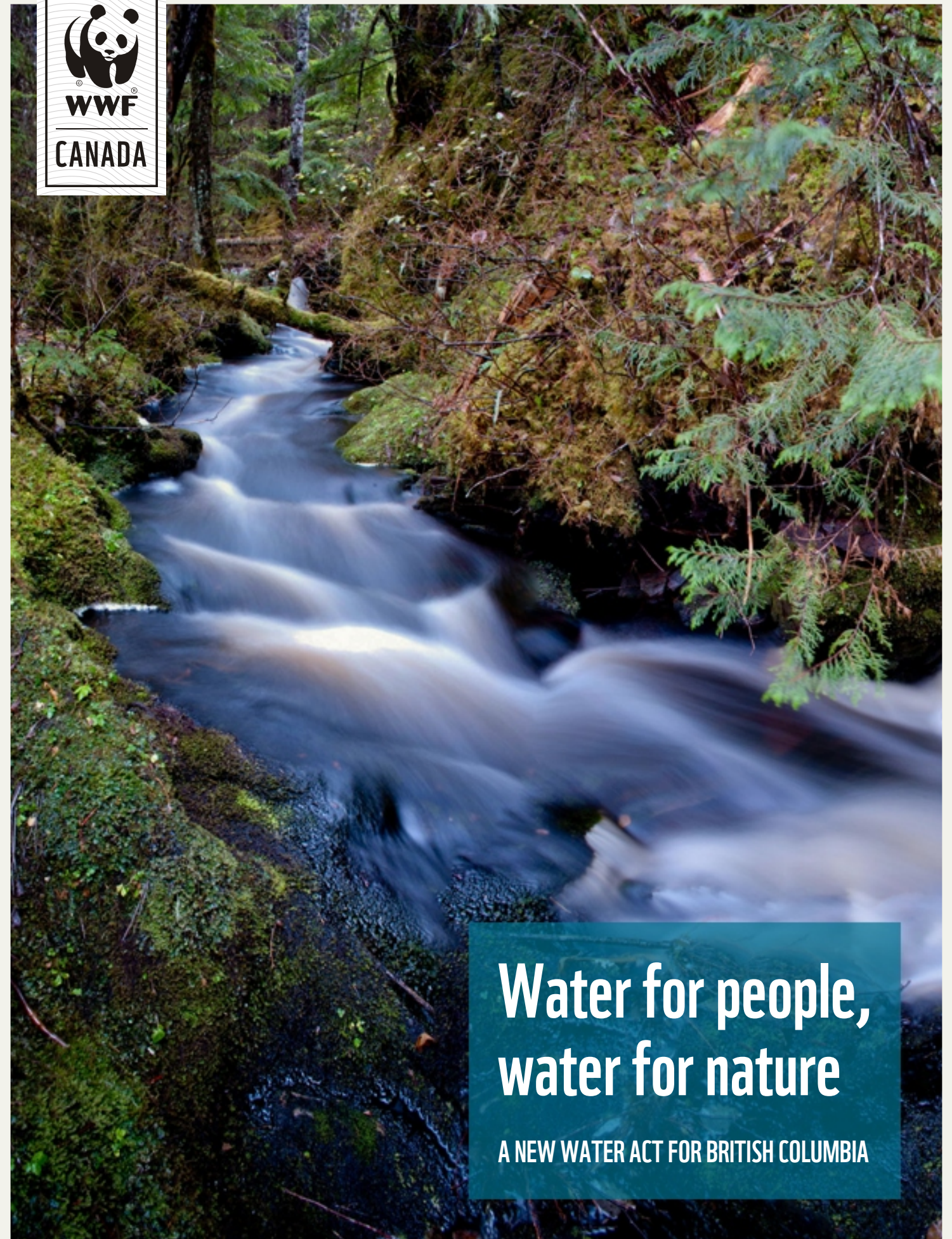


front cover



Water for people, water for nature

A NEW WATER ACT FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

PEOPLE NEED WATER. NATURE NEEDS WATER.

BC has some of the last large, free-flowing rivers on Earth.

The main stem of the Fraser River has never been dammed.

People need water. Nature needs water. Rivers — the water lifeline for communities and ecosystems — are often the place where these needs conflict. As water demands escalate for agriculture, industry, and energy production, nature is increasingly on the losing end. These competing demands are creating significant changes to the flow of our rivers, resulting in huge declines in freshwater biodiversity. As ecosystems degrade, our rivers decline in value to us. They become less dependable and productive. And provide less ‘natural capital’.

Our future promises more people, more development and a warmer climate. This means urgent measures are needed to better manage our freshwater resources and ecosystems. We can no longer afford to choose between the water needs of nature and people. It’s time to support both.

WWF is spearheading work in British Columbia and across Canada to change the conversation about water needs — from a debate over competing demands to a perspective that includes water for people and for nature. That means protecting the master variable that underpins the health of our rivers and everything they connect: environmental flow.

ENVIRONMENTAL FLOW: THE MASTER VARIABLE

Defined as the quality, quantity, and timing of water that flows through our rivers, lakes, and wetlands — environmental flow is like blood pressure in our bodies. It’s an indicator of the overall health of our systems. Freshwater systems require the right amount of water moving at the right speed at the right time to keep webs of life functioning. The complex and interdependent ecosystems which help salmon spawn and cedar trees grow have evolved in tune with the seasonal waxing and waning of water that moves through our freshwater circulatory system. The arteries of that system: our rivers.



Former NHL star and 2010 Olympic gold medal Team Canada captain, Scott Niedermayer, champions freshwater conservation in his new role as WWF’s Freshwater Ambassador.

©XXX / WWF-CANADA

BRITISH COLUMBIA: LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITY

WWF’s freshwater program has protection of environmental flows at its core. In 2008, we applauded the province of British Columbia when it promised new legislation recognizing water flow requirements for ecosystems and species.

Our rivers need our protection. They’re becoming increasingly overworked, their waters dammed, diverted and overdrawn. Fish are suffering in streams across the province. In the parched Nicola Valley, 2010 low water levels blocked Kokanee salmon from reaching their spawning beds on the Nicola River.

Canada lags significantly behind global leaders in the growing trend for environmental protection in water law. Parched countries such as South Africa and Australia have some of the strongest environmental flow laws. Protection is in place across the European Union and many parts of the United States. Here in Canada, while some steps have been taken, no province has yet given priority to environmental flow protection.

There is, however, a hopeful side to this story. Canada still boasts some of the earth’s last large, free-flowing rivers. And with reform of its century-old water act underway, B.C. can now pass rules to safeguard our river systems on a precedent-setting scale. Environmental flows must be protected by B.C.’s proposed new Water Sustainability Act.

In December 2009, the B.C. auditor general recommended the Ministry of the Environment act quickly to protect groundwater from depletion.

4 REQUIREMENTS FOR A NEW ACT

- 1 Embed environmental flow protection at the core of a new act to protect freshwater resources for future generations.
- 2 Ensure that surface water & groundwater management are integrated across B.C., by providing a province-wide licensing system for groundwater extraction.
- 3 Improve collaborative governance, allowing British Columbians a greater voice in water decisions that affect them.
- 4 Manage water licensing in a watershed to limit the accumulated impact of multiple users.

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

Protecting Biodiversity

An alarmingly large proportion — 33 per cent — of B.C.’s freshwater fish species is already red-listed by the province as endangered, including our white sturgeon found only in the Fraser and Columbia rivers.

Avoiding Costly Conflict

Setting uniform standards in advance of water crises can prevent conflicts and avoid costly mediation and mitigation processes.

Increasing Value

Laws to protect freshwater are good for the environment and good for the economy — ensuring water security for productive fisheries, recreational opportunities and other aquatic ecosystem goods and services.

POLL RESULTS*

94% of British Columbians say they want protection of nature, wildlife and species made a top priority in new provincial water rules

9 out of 10 British Columbians consider fresh water to be B.C.'s most precious resource.

87% of British Columbians are most concerned about the impact of water shortages in the next 10 years on habitats for aquatic life like salmon and trout.

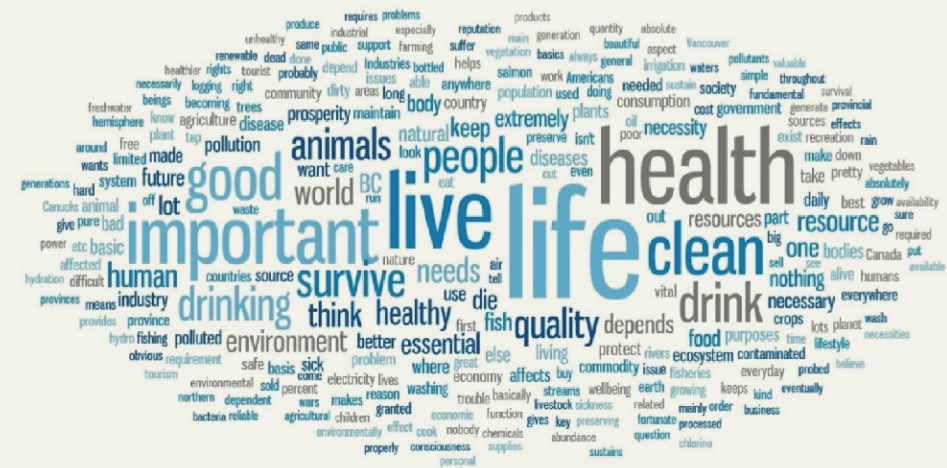
62% of British Columbians believe the current rules governing water use in B.C. are not enough to ensure the future sustainability of B.C.'s freshwater resources.

64% A majority of those polled in both rural and urban regions of the province say stricter rules to protect fresh water would not harm the B.C. economy.

Top priorities for water management in times of scarcity (after drinking water) are the protection of fish and wildlife first (45 per cent) followed by agriculture (38 per cent), industry (9 per cent), hydro (2 per cent) and tourism (1 per cent).

BRITISH COLUMBIANS OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORT FRESHWATER PROTECTION

An overwhelming majority of British Columbians care deeply about the province's freshwater resources and want their government to do more to protect them. A poll commissioned by WWF and the Vancouver Foundation released these findings in November 2010.



The vast majority - 94 per cent - of rural and urban residents of diverse ages agree that the protection of water for nature should be a provincial priority. To help make this happen, WWF is taking a lead role with partners in government, NGOs and others to advance the legal protection of environmental flows.

In partnership with the B.C. Ministry of Environment, WWF is coordinating a workshop to consider how to best implement environmental flow protection across the province. WWF is also working with the Fraser Basin Council's new Watersheds and Water Resources Committee to improve management of B.C.'s most important river basin. In the Skeena watershed, WWF is working with stakeholders on climate change adaptation tools for healthy watershed management.

*The McAllister Research Opinion poll conducted in October 2010 represented a random sample of 835 British Columbians aged 18+ and had a margin of error of $\pm 3.4\%$ 19 times out of 20

back cover