

Cross-Canada Tour Reveals National Concern About Water

Canadians are beginning to see their most precious resource threatened by increased demand and climate change

Winnipeg, May 23, 2012: Canadians use more water than almost anyone on earth, a whopping 329 litres a day. We use so much water that in the summer, 50 per cent goes on the lawn or the garden.

Our attitude towards our most precious resource highlighted a 16-city cross-Canada tour last October and November conducted by Canmore-based Bob Sandford, co-chair of the Forum for Leadership on Water (FLOW) and one of Canada's foremost water experts. Over a two-month period, Sandford talked to hundreds of Canadians, getting a first-hand account of the state of fresh water across the country – the first time since the 1980s that anyone has taken the national pulse on water.

The 42-page report on the tour documents the growing need for solutions that transcend chronic jurisdictional challenges. Sandford will release the report today at noon CDT at the 2012 Living Lakes Canada Gathering held at the Radisson Hotel in downtown Winnipeg at 288 Portage Avenue. The report, [Cross-Canada Checkup: A Canadian Perspective on our Water Future](#), is co-authored by Jesse Baltutis of the University of Victoria's POLIS Project on Ecological Governance, and Timothy Shah of Simon Fraser University's Adaptation to Climate Change Team (ACT), with guidance from Sandford. Both POLIS and ACT were partners with FLOW for the tour and the report.

The way Canadians use water, it appears we think we have an endless supply, noted Sandford. Yet, as revealed in the national tour conducted last fall, some of us, at least, are growing concerned about water – a concern fuelled by climate change – and an urgent call for a national water strategy is emerging.

Everywhere he went, Sandford discovered Canadians face pressing issues driven jointly by climate change and increasing demands on a finite resource.

“It's clear that surface and groundwater contamination is widespread in every province and availability issues are intensifying,” says Sandford of his experiences. “Yet, there's still a prevailing attitude in this country that our water is limitless, clean, and that there is little need for concern regarding pollutants.”

At the same time as he gathered information, Sandford presented a possible model for a national strategy, a new water stewardship plan from the Northwest Territories (NWT) that he had a hand in creating.

“The NWT achievement illustrates that governments, despite the challenges, can protect the long-term interests of the citizens without damaging the environment,” says Sandford. “It's a real model that any government can follow, and demonstrates that it is possible to work with a multitude of partners with a variety of agendas to put through comprehensive water management plans.”

The tour experience has left Sandford with a profound conviction that Canadians see water as our most precious resource, more important than oil or gas. “Unlike any other issue in Canada, water has the power to unite us,” he says. “These threats need to be addressed now so we can continue to supply clean water for our families and communities into the future.”

The Cross-Canada Checkup report captures the importance of Sandford’s 16-city tour, says co-author Jesse Baltutis. “It provides a sweeping picture of Canadian water priorities and allows us to draw out the themes that stretch across the jurisdictions,” he says. “Hopefully, it will give politicians the means to start making decisions.”

Sandford and FLOW, POLIS and ACT will be presenting Cross-Canada Checkup: A Canadian Perspective on Our Water Future to Ottawa in hopes that it will launch a discussion on a national water strategy at the highest level.

The report will be available online at 12 noon CDT today, May 23, at www.poliswaterproject.org and www.act-adapt.org

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About Bob Sandford:

Bob Sandford is the EPCOR Chair of the Canadian Partnership Initiative in support of United Nations “Water for Life” Decade an initiative aiming to translate scientific research outcomes into language decision-makers can use to craft timely and meaningful public policy. Bob also sits on the Advisory Committee for the prestigious Rosenberg International Forum on Water Policy where he works to bring broad international examples to bear on Canadian water issues. He sits on the Advisory Board of Living Lakes Canada, the Canadian chapter of Living Lakes International, and is co-chair of the Forum for Leadership on Water (FLOW), a national water policy research group centered in Toronto. He is also a member of the Advisory Panel for the RBC Blue Water Project.

About ACT:

Simon Fraser University's Adaptation to Climate Change Team (ACT) brings leading experts from around the world together with industry, community, and government decision-makers to explore the risks posed by top-of-mind climate change issues and identify opportunities for sustainable adaptation.

About POLIS:

The POLIS Project on Ecological Governance is an action-based research group at the University of Victoria. It publishes leading research and works with industry, government, civil society, environmental not-for-profits, and individuals to develop innovative legal, institutional, and practical approaches to issues of ecological governance. The POLIS Water Sustainability Project is an initiative of the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance.

Cross Canada Checkup: Highlights of a National Tour on the State of Our Water

- Ninety-one per cent of British Columbians agree that water is the province's most precious resource. However, BC's 100-year-old Water Act is woefully out of date. It's in the process of being revised, but will it be passed into law before the next election or will it die on the order paper?
- Alberta is sitting on vast wealth in its oil sands. It also shares one of the world's great freshwater rivers, the Mackenzie. Does Canada's wealthiest province have the ability – or the will – to develop its resources in a sustainable manner, not just for its own people but for all Canadians?
- Manitoba and Saskatchewan are experiencing an agricultural renaissance as prices for commodities have never been stronger. But if the future is to remain bright, the impact of agricultural chemicals on the province's water supply needs to be addressed. Natural treasures such as Lake Winnipeg and Lake Manitoba are slowly being choked by large algae blooms, which are strongly linked to agricultural runoff.
- Ontario is still responding to the Walkerton crisis in Ontario in 2000, when seven people died and more than 2000 became ill from contaminated water. Some good news has emerged from the tragedy: Ontario's 2010 *Water Opportunities and Water Conservation Act* is an innovative model for how jurisdictions can approach water conservation. Ontario has also passed the *Safe Drinking Act* and the *Clean Water Act* in the wake of Walkerton.
- In Quebec, the infrastructure problems plaguing the province extend to the water infrastructure, resulting in serious water and energy loss. The cost of replacing the infrastructure – including rotting wooden storm water pipes – is enormous.
- Nova Scotians are worried about how climate change will affect their own aging water infrastructure. And there's another concern. Climate change models predict a 90-centimetre rise in sea level by 2100 – and some projections suggest that 40 per cent of Cape Breton Island will be under water at that time.