



Recommendations Made In Hullcar Water Review

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Pete McIntyre

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An independent review has recommended a series of improvements to the way the province oversees agricultural waste management in order to protect drinking water in Spallumcheen's Hullcar Valley.

Since 2014, the area has been under a water-quality advisory because of elevated nitrate levels, which can be harmful to human health.

About 250 residents get their drinking water from the Hullcar Valley aquifer.

The Province ordered a review of the situation this summer, led by Oliver Brandes, co-director of the POLIS project on ecological governance at the University of Victoria's Centre for Global Studies.

The final report makes nine recommendations with the goals of improving the soil nitrate balance and restoring the aquifer to acceptable nitrate levels; and regulatory mechanisms to help prevent a similar situation from occurring in other drinking water aquifers in BC.

"Our government's goal is to ensure agricultural practices are consistent with the provision and protection of clean, safe drinking water," said George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy. "The report shows the way forward with a set of clear, thoughtful actions based on the best available information. The government is listening and we have already begun to implement the report's recommendations."

The report's recommendations include a mix of activities including: area-based and water sustainability plans, independently verified monitoring and reporting of aquifer and soil nutrient status, incentives for beneficial management practices and innovative technology, and governance and regulatory updates.

The report also recommends, as a long-term reform, reviewing sustainable governance structures for water utilities in the area in partnership with the Splotsin people and the Township of Spallumcheen.

"Splatsin acknowledges Minister Heyman's commitment to the protection of safe drinking water," said Splatsin Chief Wayne Christian.

The report outlines a number of recommendations that will lay the groundwork for a robust government-to-government process that will create solutions to the ongoing contamination of the Hullcar Valley aquifers. Splatsin looks forward to the implementation of the recommendations."

"We are very interested in responding to the report and in having the opportunity to suggest amendments to regulations," said Brian Upper of Steele Springs Waterworks District. "We are hopeful that this process will lead the government to help remediate the nitrate-contaminated aquifer and to finally proactively protect all of B.C.'s surface and groundwater for future generations."

The government today also released an intentions paper for amending the agricultural waste control regulation. The amended regulation will address some of the most pressing concerns outlined in the Hullcar report that are specific to regulatory improvements.

The report, titled From Crisis to Solutions: Toward Better Source Water Protection and Nutrient Management in the Hullcar Valley, proposes numerous actions under nine broad categories. Some examples of the recommendations are:

* Responding with crisis intervention as needed

Actions include a targeted and temporary moratorium on liquid manure spreading in areas of concern, including providing a safety buffer in nutrient application (immediate) and a review of appeals of pollution abatement orders to inform the development of future orders (long term).

* Robust, independently verified monitoring and reporting

Actions include testing more wells and improving field investigations (short term) and providing a regular State of the Hullcar Aquifer public report (long term).

* Update the regulatory framework

Actions include ensuring First Nations are consulted and offered an opportunity to provide input (short term) and an improved agricultural waste control regulatory regime (long term).

* Develop better planning

Actions include developing an Area Based Management Plan (ABMP) under the Environmental Management Act (short term) and supporting the plan with appropriate legislation under local supervision (long term).

* Incentives for better practices

Actions include providing incentives for on-farm best practices (short term) and to assess the implications of septic and other sources of nitrates (long term).

* Deploy innovative technology

Actions include exploring the feasibility of a biogas facility in the Hullcar Valley (short term), and exploring ownership models that would support new technologies (long term).

* Increased accountability

Actions include creating a Hullcar water board that is co-chaired by the First Nation (short term) and to review sustainable governance structures for water utilities in the area (long term).

* Consider alternative drinking water sources

Actions include determining if an alternative water source is needed for local residents (short term) and rehabilitating the existing aquifer (long term).

* Apply lessons learned to other at-risk aquifers

Actions include support for alternative manure processing (short term) and establish a provincial state-of-the-water report for all drinking water sources (long term).

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