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# New analysis raises concern about water shortages in British Columbia

*Action is needed to protect salmon and B.C.'s communities*

COQUITLAM — A new report on water stress in B.C. by Watershed Watch Salmon Society calls for increased efforts to safeguard our water for people and for the survival of wild salmon.

Tapped Out analyzes provincial data in a new way to describe the scale of water stress across British Columbia. It includes maps that estimate where water shortages are most likely to be, and how many people could be affected.

“There is a myth that B.C. has limitless water supplies,” says lead author Tanis Gower. “However, 2.9 million British Columbians live in areas where water shortages are likely to be a serious problem in the coming years.”

“Almost all the areas highlighted in Tapped Out are home to wild salmon populations, many of which are in poor health,” says Dr. Craig Orr, Watershed Watch’s conservation advisor. “In freshwater, the many stresses on wild salmon are exacerbated by inadequate stream flows. If we don’t address this situation, we may cross a tipping point where water extraction and the effects of climate change wipe out entire salmon populations.”

“For this report, we used a novel approach to estimate water stress and water scarcity, but we really need better data to effectively manage B.C.’s water supplies,” says hydrogeologist and report co-author Antonio Barroso. “The government has to allocate sufficient resources to not only better collect water related information but also to better understand it.”

“The report demonstrates the many challenges ahead for fresh water and the opportunity for action,” says Rosie Simms of the University of Victoria’s POLIS Water Sustainability Project. “An important recommendation is to establish an environmental flows regulation for B.C., so that we can plan ahead and avoid crisis situations. This is becoming more urgent with intensifying droughts and increased demands on our water.”

“Water insecurity isn’t just bad for wild salmon; it’s bad for all of us, and the economy, too,” says Gower. “The provincial government has been working hard to introduce new water laws and policies but they need to put more resources into this effort. They don’t have a lot of time to get it right.”

### **Facts from *Tapped Out*:**

Approximately 63% of B.C.’s population (2.9 million people) live in water-stressed areas, as defined by the Province’s

designations used to support water licensing decisions.

The areas with the highest levels of water stress cover only 3.7% of the province, but 23% of B.C.'s population lives in these places.

B.C.'s population has doubled since the 1970s, and some water-stressed areas have higher-than-average growth rates.

### ***Tapped Out Recommendations:***

1. British Columbia must dedicate significant resources towards improved monitoring and measuring.
2. Groundwater for non-domestic uses was included in B.C.'s water licensing scheme in 2016, but most existing users do not yet have water licenses. More resources and a renewed strategy are needed to implement groundwater licensing by the 2022 deadline for license applications. An effective licensing scheme is the only way the province can manage surface water and groundwater as one connected resource.
3. Minimum flow levels need to be set for streams across the province by establishing an environmental flows regulation under the Water Sustainability Act (WSA). This will be the primary precautionary approach for managing the effects of drought on salmon, and for maintaining healthy watersheds.
4. Adequate, stable funding for water management and water governance should be provided. In addition to increasing internal resources to implement the WSA, the province should implement the 2020 budget recommendation made by the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services to: "Advance water sustainability in British Columbia by providing a dedicated, sustainable, annual funding source for First Nations, local government, local watershed protection agencies and community partnerships." This new funding would include support for local development of and participation in water governance forums and water planning.

Read [Tapped Out](#).

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