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Report on Source Water Protection, Nutrient Management in Hullcar Valley

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A team led by Oliver M. Brandes, co-director of the POLIS project on ecological governance at the University of Victoria’s Centre for Global Studies, has presented a report to the Government of British Columbia on improving source water protection and nutrient management in the 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. The province ordered a review of the Hullcar Valley aquifer situation in summer 2017, led by Brandes with three other core team members.

The final report lists nine sets of recommendations with the goals of improving the soil nitrate balance and restoring the aquifer to acceptable nitrate levels in the Hullcar Valley, and regulatory mechanisms to help prevent a similar situation from occurring in other drinking water aquifers in British Columbia.

“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 encompass 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.

Crucial to the researchers' conclusions is the management of stakeholders expectations. "Nitrate levels in the Hullcar Aquifer are unlikely to drop significantly in the near future, and communities must be patient and prepare to seek alternatives while techniques for better land management and aquifer rehabilitation take effect," wrote Brandes et al. The recommendations also underscore the imperative need for change: "Landscape practices and activities that result in significant social and ecological impacts, including farming, can and must change."

Another long-term reform recommended by the report is reviewing sustainable governance structures for water utilities in the area in partnership with the Splotsin people and the Township of Spallumcheen.

"Splotsin acknowledges Minister Heyman's commitment to the protection of safe drinking water," said Kukpi7 Wayne Christian of Splotsin. "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.”



Credit: Splatsin First Nation

(<https://www.facebook.com/128526907226411/photos/a.131type=3&theater>).

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

“Clean water is critical for farmers and ranchers to provide healthy food for British Columbians. As stewards of the land, they also want to make sure water sources are protected,” said BC Agricultural Council (BCAC) board chair Stan Vander Waal.

“Government and farmers have already dedicated a great deal of effort into updating regulations to manage agriculture byproducts to protect the environment and BCAC looks forward to reviewing this latest report and additional recommendations.”

Approximately 250 residents depend on the Hullcar Valley aquifer for their drinking water.

Read the full report

(<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/air-land-water/site-permitting-and-compliance/hullcar/review-docs/polis-hullcar.pdf>) online.

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