

# PRAIRIE WATER DIRECTIVE

## *Executive Summary*

A Collective Call to Action for Water Security in the Prairie Provinces



## A 21st Century Challenge

Vast river basins – and the waters flowing through them – connect the people and places, livelihoods and landscapes of the Prairie Provinces. As it travels our raging streams and broad rivers, serene lakes and unseen aquifers, fresh water intersects nearly every part of our culture and society.

But all is not well with our Prairie waters. Shrinking glaciers and over-allocated rivers, drought and flood, pollution problems and rising tensions over shared waters pose real and growing challenges for our communities, economies and environment.



As residents of the Prairie Provinces, we expect our governments to make sustainable water management a priority. We expect them to engage us, to listen to us and to lead us in creating comprehensive strategies that commit to action and progress toward a healthy, prosperous and ecologically sustainable future.

# A Collective Call to Action for Water Security

## Our concern is fresh water.

The Prairie Water Directive is a statement of expectations. In the best traditions of democracy, residents call on governments to address concerns that are critical to society's health and well-being.

More specifically, we are concerned with ensuring that human use and management of fresh water protects the water in quality and in quantity for future generations.

Our goal has been to work with citizen groups, communities and organizations to collectively and democratically create a platform to advocate for change, participate in decision-making and hold governments accountable for the decisions they take regarding our precious water.

As signatories to this statement of expectations, organizations throughout the region have joined together across diverse interests to build a collective call for government leadership and action on sustainable water management. We believe that for real progress to be made – to public policy, planning processes and in day-to-day management – **our expectations must become shared expectations, our vision must become a shared vision.**



## Ensuring equal access to safe and sufficient water for all Prairie residents

1. Recognize that, in order to satisfy basic human needs, water is a fundamental human right.
2. Address critical water quality issues on First Nations reserves, Métis settlements and in small communities.
3. Fully implement multi-barrier approaches to safe drinking water.
4. Create stringent and enforceable water quality standards.
5. Develop and implement source water protection plans.

## Protecting and restoring aquatic and riparian ecosystems

1. Explicitly recognize ecosystems as legitimate water users and fully account for ecosystem needs in water allocation systems.
2. Respect, protect and restore natural water flows by legislating environmental flow needs and establishing strict limitations for on-stream storage and for interbasin and intrabasin diversions.
3. Prevent pollution of aquatic ecosystems and aquifers.
4. Ensure integration of environmental flow management into every aspect of land use, economic development and water management.
5. Recognize the connection between ground and surface waters.
6. Complete a recreation management strategy for major water bodies across the Prairie Provinces to ensure safe, accessible and educational-based recreation and tourism opportunities compliment, rather than hinder environmental protection and reclamation initiatives.





## Managing “our” water demands

1. Embark on a full review of water allocation with the goal of identifying a hierarchy of priority uses.
2. Facilitate comprehensive full-cost water efficiency planning.
3. Establish rising block rate structures that secure sufficient and accessible water for priority uses and that target excessive use of water, water contamination and removal from hydrological cycle as key cost factors.
4. Direct public resources toward managing demand.
5. Legislate best practices for water-use and prevent misuse of the region’s water.

## Responding and adapting to climate change

1. Prairie governments (municipal, provincial and federal) need to immediately implement aggressive plans of action to mitigate climate change and avoid dangerous levels of average global warming.
2. Enact an aggressive water policy framework that proactively prepares the southern reaches of the Prairie Provinces for drought.
3. Mainstream climate change into water policy.
4. Build resilience for climate change adaptation.

*In the near future, climate warming, via its effects on glaciers, snow packs and evaporation, will combine with cyclic drought and rapidly increasing human activity in the western Prairie Provinces to cause a crisis in water quantity and quality with far-reaching implications.*  
 ~Schindler and Donahue

## Strengthening governance over shared waters

1. Strengthen inter-jurisdictional and transboundary arrangements.
2. Respect Indigenous Peoples’ rights to, and in, water.
3. Improve the scientific basis for planning and management.
4. Identify and enact a clear and transparent process for development and enforcement of water legislation that includes municipal empowerment.
5. Prevent Public/Private Partnerships and retain water ownership in the public interest

*Our water is polluted. Even though we have running water, we were told not to drink it unless we boil it thoroughly.*

*Our rivers ... barely flow anymore ... we used to drink that water. Now they are stagnant and not fit for drinking.*

*Lillian Lathlin of Shoal Lake  
 ~From Isi Askiwan—The State of the Land*

## Sustainable water management

Sustainable water management requires using and managing water in ways and for purposes that support the needs and aspirations of all residents, while safeguarding the ecosystems that underpin our society and economies. It is holistic, encompassing water quality and quantity, surface and groundwater and the role water plays in community and economic development. Progress toward sustainable water management requires a commitment to protecting ecosystem integrity and biological diversity, recognizing the value of water to all species, developing a dynamic economy and ensuring social equity for this and future generations.

## Moving from Vision to Action

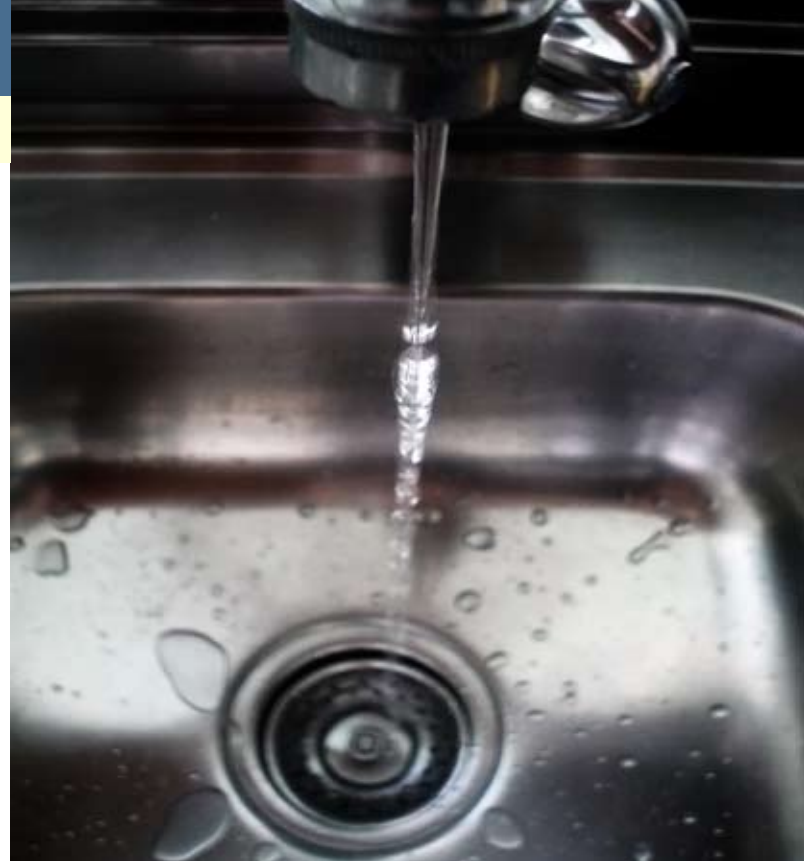
Sustainable water management is among the most significant challenges of the 21st century. In moving forward we will face many challenging decisions on the many aspects of fresh water policy. But we must also contemplate where it is we want to go – the “bigger picture.” *In essence, two options lie before us: re-plumb Prairie rivers and watersheds, or rethink human activities and economies.*

Should we dam and divert rivers, drill and pump aquifers, destroy wetlands and pollute lakes to meet the insatiable demands of a business-as-usual economy?

Or should *we rethink what it means to live and prosper in the Prairie Provinces*, working to optimize our water use and shaping our actions to respect natural limits?

*Do we transform our watershed ecosystems or do we transform ourselves?*

Deciding which option we pursue ultimately comes down to value questions. Good science can help, but it alone cannot set thresholds for acceptable impacts of pollution or water taking on human and ecosystem health or establish acceptable tradeoffs between economic development and ecosystem protection. For that, we must **democratize water management** and governance. We must bring these decisions into the public realm through high level debate and through local level planning.



## Want More Information?

Do you support the vision and direction of the Prairie Water Directive? Join with organizations, groups and individuals across diverse interests to advance this collective call for government and community-based leadership and action for sustainable water management across the Prairie Provinces.

[www.prairiewaterwatch.ca](http://www.prairiewaterwatch.ca)

## Water and Indigenous culture

“The traditional economy of Indigenous Peoples is closely intertwined with water and when water is degraded, polluted or unavailable, all aspects of our physical, social, cultural and economic well being are affected. Indigenous Peoples are often the first to feel these impacts and often feel these impacts more severely than others. The traditional foods which sustain Indigenous Peoples require healthy and pure water, including salmon, trout, wild rice, moose, deer, geese, berries, roots, ducks, deer, clams, whales, caribou, corn, beans, squash, ptarmigan, lobster, herring, eel, seaweed, as well as all other fish, plants and animals. When water becomes polluted, the traditional food sources that our peoples have relied upon for centuries become polluted and the survival of our cultures and societies is endangered.”

~A. Walkem and N. Schabus.

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