

# Water for Life: Nova Scotia's Water Resources Management Strategy

## An Executive Summary

### HISTORY

The Province of Nova Scotia committed to developing a comprehensive water resources management strategy by 2010 under the *Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act*. The water strategy development was overseen by an Interdepartmental Water Management Committee and led by Nova Scotia Environment (NSE). It has been a three year process which has involved research, analysis and consultation with all levels of government, business and the public.

- The process began in 2007, and included expert advice and a broad public consultation in 2008 on a discussion paper outlining possible goals for a water strategy.
- The results from this consultation were published in the, "What we Heard " public feedback report. These comments were combined with input from members of the Interdepartmental Committee and NSE to form a Draft Water Strategy.
- A Draft Water Strategy was shared with key organizations for additional input during a second, targeted phase of consultation from April to June 2010. The results from the targeted consultations was analyzed and further contributed to the content of the strategy.

### VISION AND GOALS

**"Water is essential for life and will be valued, kept safe, and shared"** – the Nova Scotia government's vision for provincial water resources.

*Water for Life* will enable governments and other stakeholders to address important issues in water management. It is based on the following five goals for the province:

#### Human Health

- ensure safe, secure water for consumption, recreation, and livelihoods

#### Economic Prosperity

- ensure sustainable and beneficial use of water resources

#### Ecosystem Integrity

- protect, conserve, and enhance water resources and dependent ecosystems

#### Emergency and Hazards Preparedness

- minimize the effect of water-related emergencies and hazards

#### Water Monitoring and Knowledge

- strengthen our understanding of provincial water resources



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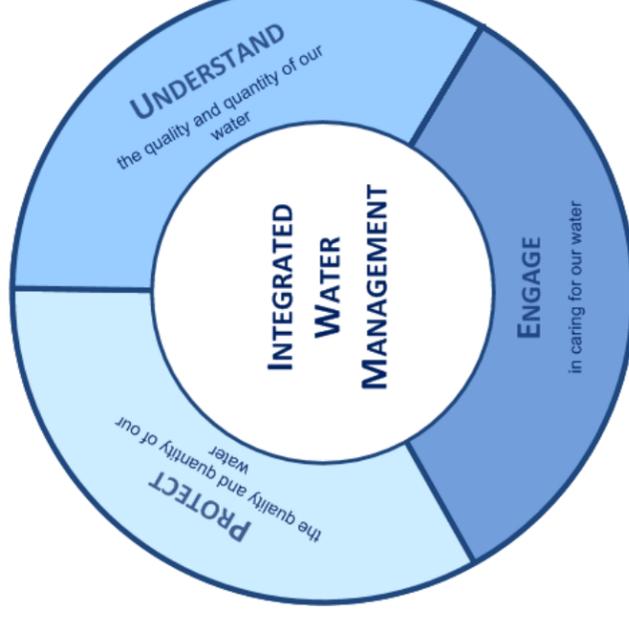
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### INTEGRATED WATER MANAGEMENT (IWM)

IWM is a comprehensive approach to managing water resources, including human activities and their effects on watersheds and ecosystems. It aims to ensure sustainability of water resources and their functions today and into the future. The central role of IWM is shown below surrounded and supported by the areas of action including **understand**, **protect**, and **engage**.

The government plans to integrate water resource management by:

- building capacity within its water programs to support a provincial commitment to integrated water management
- sharing resources and information while working with partners to manage water
- establishing a Nova Scotia Water Advisory Group (NSWAG) to work in partnership with government and advise it on the implementation of Integrated Water Management and the strategy
- considering the economic, social, and environmental value of water in government decision making
- renewing its policies as appropriate to enhance capacity for integrated water management



## STRATEGY ACTIONS

### *Understand the Quality and Quantity of our Water*

#### **Actions for today:**

- Enhance the system for receiving and sharing water quality and quantity information with government and the public.
- Continue to build, support, and integrate existing water-monitoring networks to bolster baseline data and assessment tools, and to identify stresses on quality and quantity.
- Identify ecologically significant water resources, such as wetlands and critical groundwater recharge areas.
- Assess surface and groundwater in watersheds to develop water budgets on a priority basis.
- Engage with post-secondary institutions, industry, and communities in order to improve knowledge about water-related issues across the province.
- Undertake work to determine what impacts climate change will have on Nova Scotia's water cycle.

#### **Directions for the future:**

Watersheds and ecosystems are constantly evolving. This can be from natural environmental processes or from constant human activities. Because of this, we will need to support and invest in science and research to understand future changes. This can include enhancing tools and systems for sharing and analysing data, such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

### *Protect the Quality and Quantity of our Water*

#### **Actions for Today**

- Require water conservation plans from large water users.
- Develop guidance for allocating water in times of emergency, such as a drought, contamination, or where aquifer and stream health is at risk.
- Assist municipalities, First Nations, and communities with source water-protection planning.
- Continue to implement and update municipal and public drinking water standards, and municipal wastewater effluent standards.
- Assess the current and future use of setbacks from fresh and coastal water resources.
- Integrate water values in the selection, planning, and management of parks and protected areas.
- Apply Canadian Council of the Ministers of the Environment (CCME)-based water quality standards and objectives as water-use targets for fresh and coastal waters.

#### **Actions for Tomorrow**

- Update current guidance for storm water management and sediment control to improve protection of water quality from land development activities.
- Continue to update the Nova Scotia Building Code to include water conservation and encourage efficiency and reuse.
- Develop tools to promote conservation and restoration of sensitive ecosystems and watershed features, such as wetlands.
- Evaluate and improve the regulatory framework for private wastewater treatment systems, including on-site sewage disposal.
- Enhance the protection of drinking water for rural communities with our community partners.
- Work with First Nations, municipalities, and communities to pursue innovative solutions to improve wastewater and drinking water treatment.

#### **Directions for the future**

Conservation and the efficient use of water plays an important role in this strategy. Not only do we need to protect the amount of water that is available, we must also ensure that high quality water is available when and where it's needed. For example, in rural areas people depend on wells for their drinking water and can't afford for them to run dry.

### *Engage in Caring for our Water*

#### **Actions for Today**

- Build capacity for community water monitoring in watersheds across the province.
- Work to engage youth in water stewardship and management activities.
- Support the establishment of national water efficiency and labelling standards program.
- Engage in outreach and partnership activities to promote water stewardship practices for residents to maintain and protect their health and property.
- Confirm support for the Canadian Heritage Rivers System, and increase the knowledge and profile of Canadian Heritage Rivers in Nova Scotia.

#### **Actions for Tomorrow**

- Facilitate the sharing of information and ideas between water users at a regional level through the establishment of a forum on water management.
- Recognize and encourage water stewardship efforts by establishing a program to recognize exemplary instances of water stewardship.
- Provide assistance to develop, implement, and promote projects that maintain or improve the stewardship of our fresh and coastal waters.
- Evaluate and update water-related educational tools for a range of water-related topics including conservation, property management, septic systems, and drinking water.
- Partner with business to develop and promote water-wise best practices such as conservation and efficiency.

#### **Directions for the future**

Many Nova Scotians are already engaged in caring for our water. But we understand that many watershed stewardship groups, non-governmental organizations, Aboriginal communities and organizations, businesses, and individuals require additional support. Because of this, we will continue to develop new ways of funding, and developing outreach and educational materials, and other tools for these groups.