

Alberta Water Act

FACTS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

UNDERSTANDING THE WATER ACT

Alberta Environment is responsible for water policy and legislation to ensure the quality and quantity of our water resources and to ensure thriving ecosystems now and in the future.

Alberta's current water management legislation, the *Water Act (Act)*, came into force on January 1, 1999. It focuses on the planning, use and enforcement needed to manage and protect Alberta's water. The *Act* emphasizes the wise use and allocation of our water – including the protection of Alberta's rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands.

THREE TYPES OF WATER USE

Household Use

Under the *Act*, a person who owns or occupies land above groundwater, or adjacent to a river, stream, lake or other natural water body qualifies as a "household user" (*section 21*). A household user does not include persons who receive water from a municipal or other licensed water supply. The *Act* allows for the diversion of up to 1,250 cubic metres of water (275,000 Canadian gallons) annually per household. Household users are protected under the *Act* and have the highest priority of water rights among water users (*section 27*).

Licensable Use

Under the *Act*, a licence is required to divert water for all purposes except household, traditional agriculture or where use is exempt under the Water (Ministerial) Regulation, for example the diversion of water for firefighting.

Traditional Agriculture Use

Until December 31, 2001, this provision of the *Act* allowed a "traditional agriculture water user" to register the amount of water used for raising animals or for applying pesticides to land-based on the date water use first started.

ACTIVITIES REQUIRING AN APPROVAL

The *Act* also regulates activities conducted in and around surface water and groundwater. A person planning to undertake an activity that may affect the land or vegetation under or around a water body or affect the location, flow or quality of the water or aquatic environment, requires prior authorization from Alberta Environment.

For example, a dam or ditch must not be constructed without an approval and a water well must be constructed according to specific requirements.

Some exemptions exist, so contact Alberta Environment to inquire about whether a specific activity requires authorization. Dial 310-0000 to find the Alberta Environment office nearest you.

MANAGING ALBERTA'S WATER

Innovative planning is needed to effectively manage and conserve water for our existing and future water needs.

The department encourages the use of the *Act's* flexible water management tools such as water allocation transfers. Currently authorized in the South Saskatchewan River Basin, these transfers help to ensure community water demands can be met. The *Act* also recognizes the importance of planning. The *Act* encourages water management plans to be developed to address local and regional issues. Public consultation is a key component of the development of these plans and includes opportunities for local and regional involvement.

ALBERTA'S WATER FOR LIFE STRATEGY

Water for Life – Alberta's Strategy for Sustainability is the Government of Alberta's comprehensive water management plan.

Water for Life builds upon the principles of the *Water Act* to ensure Alberta's water resources are managed in a sustainable and responsible way.

This fact sheet provides a summary of the *Water Act*. The official Statutes and Regulations must be consulted for all purposes of interpreting and applying the law.