



NEWS RELEASE

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Western Premiers' Conference

WESTERN PREMIERS ACT ON WATER CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

VANCOUVER – Western Premiers are taking the first step to a new strategy to conserve and manage Canada's valuable fresh water supplies.

“Decreasing glaciers and snowpack, flood threats, and manageable water supplies do not stop at provincial and territorial borders,” said British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell, chair of the 2010 Western Premiers' Conference. “This work will help us make better decisions and develop comprehensive, long-term water management plans to secure our fresh water supply for future generations.”

Canada currently accounts for approximately seven to nine per cent of the world's renewable fresh water supply. This supply faces increasing threat due to climate change and water consumption habits of industry, agriculture, citizens, and communities.

- Canada is ranked 29th out of 30 OECD countries for per capita water consumption.
- Between 1985 and 2005, B.C. and Alberta glaciers show a 11.3 per cent decrease in area.

Western Premiers also agreed to promote action on water quality and water efficiency to lower water consumption. They supported establishing a national public awareness campaign through product labelling that helps Canadians choose low water use appliances such as dishwashers and washing machines for use in their homes.

Premiers encouraged the federal government to conclude a memorandum of understanding with the United States to implement the WaterSense water efficiency labelling program in Canada.

The Western Water Stewardship Council, created by Premiers in 2008, will be tasked with:

- 1) Identifying existing water and climate science and information activities, including how accessible this information is and how it can support decision making.
- 2) Identifying agencies and others currently engaged in these activities, and how their priorities can align with policy and decision making needs.
- 3) Establishing, as appropriate, improved mechanisms to better link these agencies and others, their activities and the policy and decision makers.

The western jurisdictions will also work with the public and private sectors to make the next World Water Day, set for March 22, 2011, a national event to promote water conservation.

Premiers agreed to a Water Charter to underscore the need for immediate action on water priorities. Western Premiers will ask all provinces to join the Charter at the upcoming Council of the Federation meeting.

“Water is essential to agriculture, forestry, industry, communities, recreation, health and ecosystems,” said Premier Dennis Fentie. “Impacts of climate change and our growing population mean that we need a different approach to the use of our water – at home and in our businesses and industries.”

Western Premiers also discussed how severe wet weather this spring has become a major concern for prairie farmers.

Flooding has prevented seeding and is expected to result in the largest abandoned acreage in Western Canada since the early 1970s. According to the Canadian Wheat Board, between 8.25 million and 12.5 million acres of Prairie farmland will go unseeded this year.

Western Premiers today called on federal and provincial agriculture ministers to immediately discuss supports for our hard hit farming communities.

“Our farmers are once again facing a difficult situation,” said Premier Greg Selinger. “Although we have programs in place, governments need to work together to make sure our farmers get the help they need under these challenging conditions.”

“At this time, 30 per cent of Saskatchewan cropland remains unseeded and a significant number of seeded areas have been flooded,” said Premier Brad Wall. “I toured just a small area of northeastern Saskatchewan yesterday and the damage is significant. Farm families are looking to their governments for support.”

“While flooding in Alberta is not as widespread, input costs and commodity prices are always a risk,” said Premier Ed Stelmach. “This year many of our farmers and rural communities face the additional challenge of getting a crop in.”

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A backgrounder is attached.

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