

B. C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE

**Caring for, Monitoring, and Protecting
British Columbia's Community Water
Supply Sources**

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SLOAN COMMISSION TEMPLATE FOR PROTECTING BC's DRINKING WATER: BROKEN BY GOVERNMENT

Vancouver - 60 years ago the provincial Forest Resources Commission, Chaired by Commissioner Gordon Sloan, recommended that BC forestland located in public drinking water sources be protected. The recommendation was based not only on the numerous submissions and legal testimony that advised full protection of these sources, but was based also on the province's existing legislation. During the Hearings held for 77 days in Vancouver and Victoria, underhanded forest industry tactics were employed in an attempt to discredit those policies.

In general, the "conservation" of water runoff was a strong, central theme during the Commission's proceedings, where evidence supporting the protection of forestland for salmon habitat, hydroelectric dams, drinking water, irrigation water, and the integrity of provincial stream and riverbeds was given. In his final report recommendations, Sloan characterized BC's forestland as "the Mother of Waters", because forests act as a "vast sponge, which holds and controls the water run-off". Specifically regarding drinking watersheds he summarized how: "The perpetuation of the forest-cover for purposes other than the production of timber fall into a special category. I refer for instance to watershed protection... it must be kept in mind that a tree may be of more value in place in the forest than when converted into lumber". Sloan's advice for the future of BC's forests was summarized in a single visionary sentence: "A sustained yield policy, perpetuating our forest stands, will not only provide a continuity of wood supply essential to maintain our forest industries, primary and secondary, with consequent regional stability of employment, but will also ensure a continued forest cover adequate to perform the invaluable functions of watershed protection, stream flow and run-off control, the prevention of soil erosion, and of providing recreational and scenic areas, and a home for our wild bird and animal life."

In a recent address to the BC Community Forest Association in April 2004, David Haley, UBC professor of forestry economics and policy, and Chairman of Forest Minister De Jong's special Community Forest Advisory Committee, elaborated about how the Sloan Commission had originally proposed "community" control of forestry as "a means of acquainting the public with the benefits to be secured from the practice of sustained yield forestry." However, Haley, a forest policy historian, skipped Sloan's vision for the protection of BC's drinking watersheds in his address to the Association. Members of the Association are currently logging in controversial community drinking watersheds, and there are numerous other community forest tenure proposals to do likewise.

"The significance of the Sloan Commission was its particularly strong visionary template for protecting key aspects of BC's forestland besides logging," said Will Koop, Coordinator of the BC Tap Water Alliance. "The Commission laid out the cornerstone and fundamental building blocks for the conversion of BC's vast, virtually unmanaged forestlands to sustained yield logging. Unfortunately, Sloan's edifice has been systematically ransacked and dismantled, and all of Sloan's protection measures have subsequently been sidelined or compromised. Our current government continues to ignore the basic principles laid out by the Commission, which were intended to guide the decisions of what lands should or should not be included in the operable timber harvesting land base."

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For more information, contact Will Koop in Vancouver, bctwa@alternatives.com. For more information on the community forest licence tenures, see our latest newsletter, press release, and letter to the Minister.