

Water for Alberta's Rivers
October 13, 2011

Dear Albertans:

We believe you understand the value of water and the need to use water wisely. That is why so many of you have participated in Alberta's *Water for Life Strategy*, providing guidance to decision-makers about how we use and manage our water resources.

The goals of the *Water for Life Strategy* are:

- Safe, secure drinking water
- Healthy aquatic ecosystems
- Reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy

A key to achieving these goals is the development of provincial Conservation, Efficiency and Productivity Plans (CEP Plans). These plans are to be completed by major water users, including municipalities, irrigators and the oil and gas and hydropower industries, to improve their water-use efficiency by 30 per cent by 2015. In 2008, major water users agreed to draft plans with information about stressed water sources in the areas where they operate, and to provide creative ideas for environmental improvement. Unfortunately, these plans are coming up short in addressing important environmental needs.

As you strive to use less water in your home, you do so in good faith that the water you're saving (*conserved water*) will go back into our rivers to benefit river health. Yet, the plans being created by many major water users focus on directing conserved water to new uses, leaving little or no extra water to return to rivers. However, it is crucial to return some of the conserved water back to rivers, in order to augment low flows, ensure groundwater recharging, help to stabilize stream banks, and support the plant and animal life that depend on healthy rivers. Alberta's CEP Plans should reduce the risk to the most sensitive aspects of aquatic ecosystems in Alberta.

Some major water users receive provincial funding to conserve water, but intend to use this conserved water for purposes other than river health. We are concerned that the CEP Plans have become industry growth plans, rather than meeting the *Water for Life* goals that provide broader benefits to all Albertans. We are also concerned that the Government of Alberta is passing off its responsibility for healthy rivers by failing to act on the CEP Plans. Furthermore, Albertans deserve to be involved in decisions about the future of conserved water.

We believe that all Albertans have a responsibility to be stewards of our water. As a citizen, you can take a stand for the return of conserved water to our rivers, especially in water-stressed areas. You can urge major water users to implement clear CEP Plans that meet the *Water for Life* goals. Find out who supports the return of conserved water to our rivers. Ask your MLA, and other individuals seeking to be elected to the legislature in the future what they are going to do to ensure the health of our rivers for all Albertans. Let them know what you expect.

Sincerely yours,

Alberta Wilderness Association
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - Southern Alberta Chapter
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Northern Alberta Chapter
Central Athabasca Stewardship Society
Keepers of the Athabasca Watershed Council
Southern Alberta Group for the Environment
Water Matters