

a. Water Sustainability Act (Bill 18, 2014)

A decade in the making, the new Water Sustainability Act is an historic achievement. The Act is the signature piece in a policy and legislative framework that establishes expectations and direction for adapting to a changing climate. The Act recognizes the connection between land use actions and the implications for the both the water cycle and watershed sustainability.

The Act will have widespread impacts on how water and land practitioners conduct their work.

Seven Policy Areas

The Act addresses seven policy areas (Figure 13). These policy areas bring together 19 of the 45 Living Water Smart commitments that are ultimately implemented through the Act, build on the current merits of the Water Act and bring in new policy tools which will help manage BC's water more sustainably into the future.

One policy area - **consider water in land use decisions** - helps to address the potential impacts of land use actions on water. To do this, the Water Sustainability Act enables a number of tools which will help decision makers better manage the impacts of land use on water.

The development of Water Objectives and Water Sustainability Plans are two tools for managing the impacts of land use on water.

Connecting Land and Water

Under the *Water Sustainability Act*, Water Objectives promoting protection of water quality, water quantity and aquatic ecosystem health will be established in regulation and further defined in policy.

Strategic Water Lens for Making Decisions:

Establishing the Water Objectives will also build on the provincial government's current initiatives related to cumulative effects management and environmental mitigation. Having Water Objectives will help support decision-making across a number of natural resource statutes, and in particular support a more consistent approach for the consideration of the impacts that land-based activities can have on water.

By establishing broad province-wide objectives and an evaluation framework that can be customized by region, decision makers will have a strategic water lens that can be used in decision making so the decisions they make will better *integrate objectives for water quantity, water quality, and aquatic ecosystem health.*

Integration with Local Government Planning:

The *Water Sustainability Act* also allows for the development of Water Sustainability Plans. These collaboratively developed plans can integrate water and land use planning and can be combined with other local, regional or provincial planning processes to address water-related issues focused on addressing or preventing conflict, mitigating risk to water quality, water quantity and aquatic ecosystem health or restoring watershed function.

Process for Water Sustainability Action Plans:

"The scale and scope of each plan – and the process used to develop it – would be unique, and would reflect the needs and interests of the watersheds affected. Planning will be an effective tool where the need is great, and where other area-based management tools are not able to address the links between land use and watershed impacts," explains Jennifer Vigano, Water Policy, BC Ministry of Environment. Jennifer helped to write the new Act.



The new **Water Sustainability Act** addresses seven policy areas



Water Sustainability Act

Seven Policy Areas

Protect stream health and aquatic environments
Regulate and protect groundwater use

Consider water in land use decisions

Regulate during scarcity
Improve security, water use efficiency, and conservation
Measure and report
Enable a range of governance approaches

Water Objectives

Protection of water quality, water quantity and aquatic ecosystem health through provincial and area-based objectives

Water Sustainability Plans

Protection of water quality, water quantity and aquatic ecosystem health through watershed level planning

The **Seven Policy Areas** bring together **19 of the 45 Living Water Smart** commitments

Figure 13