

British Columbia

Why Vancouverites need to stop treating their water supply like a 'buffet'



The Early Edition's About Here columnist Uytae Lee says climate change means reservoirs won't always be full

[Bridgette Watson](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jun 06, 2019 1:56 PM PT | Last Updated: June 6



A child sits in front of the fountains at Vancouver's Queen Elizabeth Park, which is situated on top of one of the city's water reservoirs. (David Horemans/CBC)

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Vancouver is known for rain and snow-capped mountains, both of which supply the city's water reservoirs. But as climate change continues to alter weather patterns and reduce rainfall, the

supply will dwindle and Uytae Lee is thirsty for action to be taken now.

Lee, a columnist with CBC's [The Early Edition](#) with a background in urban design, told host [Stephen Quinn](#) that [research from Metro Vancouver](#) shows the snowpack on the mountains surrounding the city is predicted to shrink by 56 per cent by 2050, and the region can expect 13 per cent less rainfall in the summer by the end of the century.

Metro Vancouver is also predicting another one million people will arrive in the region by 2050 and predicts a water "supply gap" by 2030.

For these reasons, said Lee, Vancouverites must be more conservative with their water usage.

"A key part of our water problem in Vancouver is we treat our water supply like a buffet," said Lee.

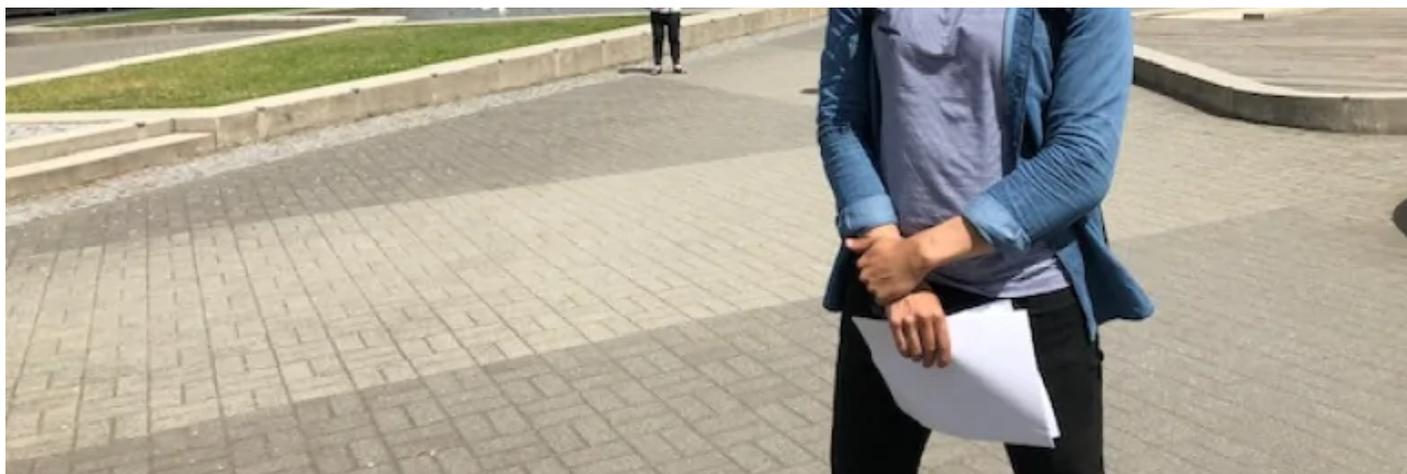
Watch Lee's short film on climate change and Metro Vancouver's water supply

He said one solution is to install water meters on Vancouver homes — similar to hydro meters — that can record residential water usage. According to Lee, only six per cent of homes in the city currently have a meter installed.

Other suggestions Lee put forward to help residents conserve water include installing low-flush toilets, not washing your car and not purchasing a sprinkler, which Lee said is often left on too long.

In addition to the three main source reservoirs — Capilano, Seymour and Coquitlam — Metro Vancouver has 22 in-system reservoirs throughout the region, including the Little Mountain Reservoir, which holds approximately 177 million litres of water.





CBC's The Early Edition columnist Uytae Lee at Queen Elizabeth Park, which sits atop the Little Mountain reservoir. He says reservoir levels will dwindle due to climate change. (Stephen Quinn/CBC)

Lee said raising the height of Metro Vancouver dams to increase the amount of water that reservoirs can hold or getting water from other sources, like the Fraser River, are options to consider in the long term but will cost "billions of dollars".

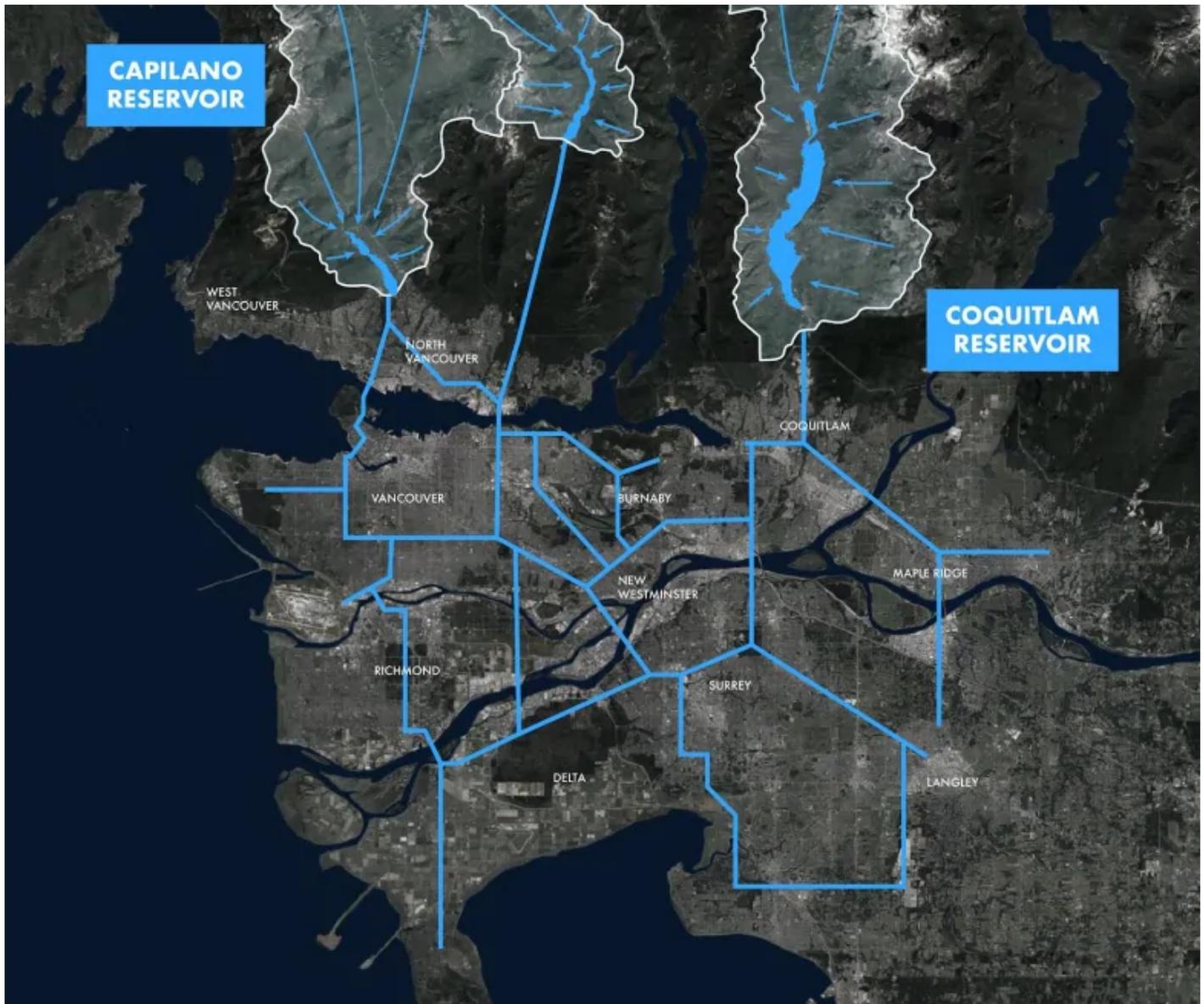
Water usage in Vancouver has "stayed flat" for almost the past 20 years, Lee says, crediting public awareness campaigns and energy-efficient building designs. But he says the "key issue" is still that individuals are not aware of how much water they are using because they pay a flat rate and "then use as much as they want."

"We hear all the time, Vancouver is rainy, why does a place like this need water restrictions?," said Lee.

It's because rainy summer days are becoming rarer and the reservoirs will be emptier and it's no longer enough "to cross our fingers and hope it lasts through fall," he said.

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Metro Vancouver's three main reservoirs. (Uytae Lee)

To hear the complete interview with Stephen Quinn and Uytae Lee click on the audio link below.

Uytae Lee joins Stephen Quinn at Queen Elizabeth Park to talk climate change and its impact on Metro Vancouver's water supply. 6:47

The Early Edition, Uytae Lee

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