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NEWS RELEASE

COUNTDOWN CLOCK RELEASED TO HIGHLIGHT FAST-APPROACHING DEADLINE FOR GROUNDWATER LICENCE APPLICATIONS

Vancouver, B.C. – The deadline for non-domestic groundwater users to apply for a licence is fast approaching, and a group of associations from the B.C. water community has created a countdown clock to raise awareness of the serious implications for non-compliance. The clock uses a water theme with fading water bubbles to illustrate that time is running out.

In accordance with the Water Sustainability Act (WSA), individuals and businesses that used groundwater for non-domestic purposes before March 1, 2016, are considered “existing users” and must apply for a licence by March 1, 2022. Unless a licence application is submitted, continued water use by existing users after this date will be illegal and subject to fines and possible shut down of water withdrawal. In addition, failure to comply means existing users are forfeiting their historical water rights and will have to apply for a licence as a new user.

“The implications to existing groundwater users are quite significant,” explains BC Groundwater Association General Manager Dave Mercer.

“Historical water rights are extremely important because government prioritizes existing users over newer users when water restrictions are put in place. As demands on B.C.’s water supply continue to grow and water use restrictions become more commonplace, a licence becomes critical. Existing users who haven’t applied for a licence before the deadline will be considered new users and go to the back of the line. And, in areas where water resources are already scarce, applications from new users aren’t guaranteed to be approved. This means some long-term water users, such as farmers, could lose access to water, putting their livelihoods at risk.”

The Countdown Clock is located here <https://www.bcgwa.org/countdown/>, and is supported by the following associations:

- BC Groundwater Association
- Okanagan Basin Water Board
- The Partnership for Water Sustainability in BC
- BC Water & Waste Association
- Water Supply Association of BC
- Groundwater Science + Sustainability Research Group (University of Victoria)

The associations have partnered together with the Countdown Clock to emphasize their collective support for water management in B.C. and concern for water users.

The Water Sustainability Act (WSA) was brought into force on February 29, 2016, to ensure a sustainable supply of fresh, clean water that meets the needs of B.C. residents today and in the future. The WSA is the principal law for managing the diversion and use of water resources, and this includes groundwater. Prior to 2016, groundwater use under 75 L/s was not part of water management in B.C.

“It’s impossible to manage our water resources in B.C. without including groundwater, particularly during times and in regions of water scarcity.” says Mercer. “Groundwater licensing provides government with the necessary data to make sound decisions about water allocations.”

“Groundwater licensing is nothing new. B.C. is the last province in Canada to implement some form of groundwater management. For example, Alberta has licensed groundwater since 1962. We’re really just catching up, and adding a “made in BC” approach, including consultation with First Nations and consideration for impacts to fish in regions where aquifers are connected to high value streams.”

To apply for a groundwater licence, visit <https://portal.nrs.gov.bc.ca/web/client/-/secure-your-water-rights-today> or apply in-person at a Front Counter BC (FCBC) office (1-877-855-3222).

Media contact:

Dave Mercer

General Manager

BC Groundwater Association

General-manager@bcgwa.org