

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS on the CVRD DRINKING WATER & WATERSHED PROTECTION REFERENDUM

**Q: I don't own property. Can I vote on the Water Protection Referendum?**

**A:** Voting on the referendum is open to all eligible voters and not restricted to property owners. All eligible voters in the four municipalities and nine CVRD electoral areas can vote. If you are a renter, your landlord will be contributing to water protection in our region and a small amount of your rent will be part of that.

**Q: Can I vote if I have a First Nations status card or live on reserve?**

**A:** Residents living on reserve lands are entitled to vote in Local Government Elections for Electoral Area Director and School Trustees. Find out more [here](#)

**Q : Don't we already take care of our water ? Why do we need this water service?**

**A :** All of our region's water sources are showing signs of stress. Increasingly significant climate impacts are expected in the 17 watersheds and 58 aquifers throughout our region. The number of summer days above 25°C is expected to double, while summer rainfall is expected to drop by 17%. In seven of the past ten years the Cowichan River has experienced summer drought conditions and reduced water flows that put salmon populations at risk. This water service will provide the tools and resources to collect data, track local climate trends and make smarter decisions in preparation for future impacts in response to hotter, drier summers like this year's stage-four drought.

**Q : If I already pay for water, won't I be paying twice?**

**A:** No, if you currently pay one of the region's 44 water utilities for the treatment and distribution of water to your property, protection of water sources is not included in that fee. Local water purveyors have limited responsibility for protecting water sources. The proposed regional service is focused on monitoring and protecting water sources and supply across the whole region.

**Q: Why isn't the Regional District doing this already?**

**A:** Regional Districts have very limited authority to protect water without a water service approved by local voters like the one proposed in this referendum. Right now the CVRD is engaged in water protection activities to the limited extent they are allowed, and in a few key areas. This service would enable the CVRD to expand water protection, be more proactive and comprehensive in that protection and include all parts of our region.

**Q : How will the proposed water service deal with private wells ? Does the CVRD want to take over my well ?**

**A :** No, the CVRD doesn't want to take over your well. 50% of homes in our region have a well as their primary source of water. This water protection service will support monitoring the groundwater aquifers that recharge those wells. It will also provide important information on local water resources to households currently dependent on wells, and allow the region to integrate groundwater information into development planning and decision-making into the future.

**Q :** **If I have a well with a water licence, will I be paying twice ?**

**A :** Whether you get your water from a well or a municipal service with its own water licence, where the licensing cost is included in your water service fees, everyone pays for their water supply. The proposed water service will create additional capacity to monitor ground and surface water sources and prevent problems before they turn into a water crisis affecting your water supply or quality.

**Q:** **How will this service deal with low flows, water shortages and the weir on Cowichan Lake?**

**A:** While service funds will not be used to construct infrastructure like a new weir to address water storage at Cowichan Lake or in other parts of the region, this service will enable the CVRD to enter into partnerships and obtain federal and provincial funding for larger, watershed-level projects such as replacing the weir – something that will be harder to do without the water service function.

**Q:** **Will this water protection service address sewage and storm water?**

**A:** Not at this time, and these areas could be integrated into the water service function later. For now sewage treatment, septic fields and storm water will remain within the environmental service and continue to be addressed by Liquid Waste Management Plans.

**Q:** **How much will this cost me?**

**A:** The cost is based on the assessed value of your property. For example, if your home is assessed at a \$500,000 value you will pay less than \$20 per year- that's less than the cost of one cup of coffee per month - to support water protection and sustainability in your area. Businesses and industries will pay a little more than twice the residential rate.

**Q :** **Will the cost go up over time ?**

**A :** While the property levy is allowed to be increased by as much as 5% per year (or 25% over 5 years), this increase must be tied to a specific need. The rate doesn't go up automatically, and the bylaw limit on the overall requisition will keep the cost for individual households down. That limit also means that if all assessment values go up across the region, the overall rate will come down. There are lots of checks and balances.

**Q:** **What are the benefits of a successful referendum?**

**A:** If passed, the new service will enable our region to develop specific watershed management plans that address local risks to water supply and water quality and take action on them. This service will also allow water availability, sustainability and quality to be included in decision-making about land use planning and growth patterns. If a majority of voters support the service it will also increase our chances of getting significant funding from senior levels of government for needed water infrastructure projects, like the weir. (For other benefits, see our "12 Benefits to Vote Yes for Water" at [http://www.onecowichan.ca/yes\\_on\\_water](http://www.onecowichan.ca/yes_on_water))

**Q:** **Will there be results indicators built into this proposed service?**

**A:** Yes, targets will be set and outcomes will be measured by both the CVRD and through any agreements supporting non-profits or conservation groups working on drinking water and watershed protection initiatives.

**Q: Will this service bring in enough money to address the issues and challenges in our watersheds?**

**A:** The property tax levy will not be enough on its own, and it will demonstrate our commitment as a community to water quality and sustainability and to the health of our regional watersheds. This commitment will allow us to leverage additional funds from senior levels of government because they want to know we have “skin in the game”. Without a water service like this one proposed in our October 20 referendum, those Federal and Provincial funds will go elsewhere. The Nanaimo Regional District’s water service function – similar to the one now proposed for the Cowichan – is bringing in significant financial resources from federal and provincial governments to protect water and watersheds in that region.

**Q: How will decisions be made about which communities in the region get resources first?**

**A:** The intention of the service is to address water issues across the whole region equitably, including bringing monitoring of water temperatures and flows to watersheds where data has not yet been collected. At the same time, to be most effective, the service will also need to consider risk assessments – looking at the whole region and prioritizing work on the most critical areas and issues.

**Q: Will this service affect my everyday water use?**

**A:** No, the new water service will not affect your everyday water use, although it may give you useful information that helps you to conserve water and save money. The service’s main focus is providing the local data needed to make smarter decisions locally and regionally, make the most effective investments and take effective action on water protection and water supply protection.

**Q: What is One Cowichan?**

**A:** One Cowichan began in the fall of 2012 when the Cowichan River was running dangerously low and the Province was refusing to increase water storage behind the weir at Lake Cowichan to address the serious threat to critical populations of spawning salmon. We began holding meetings to engage local citizens that fall, and we have continued to take our direction from the hundreds of local citizens who care about water, sustainability, equality and justice and who regularly come out to our strategy sessions and tell us what matters to them. Water and watershed protection have continued to be a key focus of our work as an active citizens’ group and local non-profit society ever since. Our supporters are people who want to help make the Cowichan Valley a great place to live, work and play. We believe in holding decision-makers accountable to the strong social and environmental values that join us together as a community, and in celebrating this beautiful place - our home.

Our purposes include:

- To engage the citizens of the Cowichan Valley in issues of equality, sustainability and justice;
- To increase public awareness and appreciation of the Cowichan Valley’s watersheds, lands and ecosystems, as places to celebrate, conserve and protect;
- To increase awareness of and encourage citizen engagement in democracy in the Cowichan Valley; and
- To increase the public’s appreciation of Aboriginal culture in the Cowichan Valley and support reconciliation with First Nations.