

Clean Water Innovation and Green Jobs Only in Ontario?

By Jocelyne Rankin

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On March 2nd, 2010, a bold speech from the throne saw the provincial government commit to establishing a Water Opportunities Act, laying the foundation for North American leadership in the development and sale of new technologies and services for water conservation and treatment, all the while creating new jobs. Fantastic news... for Ontario.

As they did with their Green Energy Act, the McGuinty government has once again capitalized on the enormous potential of investing in the environment to develop Green Jobs in Ontario. That Province has strategically positioned itself to provide innovative solutions to help meet a growing worldwide demand for clean water. Ontario-based companies like Vive Nano, which specializes in water treatment technology and water conservation, employ 22,000 people in high-paying jobs selling water technology around the world.

There's no reason why this couldn't be Nova Scotia's story. We have prestigious academic institutions, an innovative research sector, an educated labour force, and a provincial water strategy which clearly states our commitment to protecting our water resources. Wait a second, we don't actually have a provincial water strategy.

Yet in 2007 through the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act, the provincial government committed to develop a comprehensive water resource management strategy by 2010. Back in 2008, a discussion paper called "Water for Life" was released, followed by a series of public workshops across the province and then a "What we Heard" report was published that fall.

But, almost two years later, a draft strategy has still not been released, meaning that the Department of Environment will have to work extra quickly to meet their 2010 deadline. It seems unlikely that Nova Scotia will be able to reap the type of economic benefits and jobs that Ontario has without the leadership, political will and commitment to the protection of our water resources now and for future generations that comes from having completed and implemented an effective water strategy.

After all, it's not that we don't already have water trouble. Water, especially groundwater, has recently been making headlines. Tucked below the surface it is often unseen, and forgotten. It's a different story in the Monarch Estates and Rivendale areas of BeaverBank where dropping water tables in the past years have led residents to ration water at home, take showers at their gym, ferry dirty laundry to laundromats and pay for trucked in water. These water woes are not unique to the suburbs of Halifax; People living in coastal communities like Chezzetcook along the Eastern shore are finding increasing levels of dissolved salts in their wells as sea levels rise. Extreme weather events like the storm surge on January 2nd 2010 are also contributing to salt water intrusion into freshwater aquifers.

Watershed and river organizations around Nova Scotia are not just treading water while the provincial water strategy is stalled. Many organizations have joined forces to develop the Blueprint for Water Management in Nova Scotia. The Blueprint contains 12 recommendations for the provincial government as it develops its long anticipated water strategy. The Blueprint, which was developed through consultation with the Water Caucus of the Nova Scotia Environment Network, is a cost-effective way to protect Nova Scotia's water resources. The recommendations, which have been endorsed by 30 organizations around the province, include investing in water conservation to foster new innovative opportunities and help municipalities save money. Demonstrating a commitment to clean water by completing and implementing a water strategy with clear policy and regulation will help establish the right conditions to stimulate research, innovation and job creation.

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